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# *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

SAMPLE

*Shakespeare in Three Steps*

by Sonya Shafer



# *An enjoyable and simple approach to some of the greatest literature ever written— the plays of William Shakespeare!*

Now you can help your students become familiar with Shakespeare's imaginative stories, memorable characters, and brilliant lines in three simple steps: read the story, hear the script, and watch the play.

*Shakespeare in Three Steps* provides everything you need:

- **A well-written story version of the play** by E. Nesbit or Charles and Mary Lamb—classic narratives that have been providing a wonderful introduction to Shakespeare's plays for decades;
- **The complete script of the play** with helpful notes to explain unusual terms or add to your understanding of Shakespeare's stories, characters, and lines;
- **An outlined plan for walking through the script**, divided into manageable portions with quick recaps, scene introductions, and summaries that will guide you each step of the way;
- **Script highlights**, featuring well-known or just ponder-worthy lines, that will gently introduce the Bard's genius and cultivate an appreciation for his wonderful way with words;
- **Parental advisories** to give you a heads-up on scenes that may contain material inappropriate for children;
- **Helpful lists** of the characters in the scenes and the number of lines each one speaks, so you can assign parts knowledgeably for reading sessions or acting roles;
- **Candid reviews** of several video recordings of the play to save you time previewing and help you select a suitable presentation for your students to watch and enjoy.

*“To become intimate with Shakespeare in this way is a great enrichment of mind and instruction of conscience”—Charlotte Mason*

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*Shakespeare in Three Steps*  
**A Midsummer Night's Dream**

by Sonya Shafer

Recommended for Grades 2–12

Comedy

Summary: This is the story of two young couples crossed in love, a kingdom of fairies, and a bumbling troupe of would-be actors who all have definite plans for one evening in summer. When the king of fairies and his favorite sprite decide to play a trick on his queen, chaos ensues for all and they must scramble to put everything to rights again.

Shakespeare in Three Steps: A Midsummer Night's Dream  
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# Shakespeare in Three Steps

Understand and enjoy Shakespeare's plays by following these three steps.

**Step 1: Read the story.**

Read aloud the story version of the play to get familiar with the main characters and plot.

**Step 2: Hear the script.**

Listen to each scene on the audio dramatization and follow along in the script, or assign students to read aloud the various characters' lines themselves.

**Step 3: Watch the play.**

Enjoy a live or recorded presentation of the play.





## Step 1: Read the story.

Ask students where on the calendar they might expect a festival called Midsummer to fall. Explain that Midsummer is celebrated around the summer solstice in June, the longest day of the year. This Shakespeare play is a mixture of fairies, magic, actors, and couples—a silly imaginative story that reminds us of something that someone might dream on Midsummer’s night.

Read aloud the story version of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* below to get familiar with the main characters and plot. Feel free to divide the story in half, reading half now and the rest later. If desired, help the students create a list of the main characters with a brief description of who each one is to help them keep everybody straight in their minds as you go along.

# A Midsummer Night’s Dream

(from *Beautiful Stories from Shakespeare for Children* by E. Nesbit)

Hermia and Lysander were lovers; but Hermia’s father wished her to marry another man, named Demetrius.

Now, in Athens, where they lived, there was a wicked law, by which any girl who refused to marry according to her father’s wishes, might be put to death. Hermia’s father was so angry with her for refusing to do as he wished, that he actually brought her before the Duke of Athens to ask that she might be killed, if she still refused to obey him. The Duke gave her four days to think about it, and, at the end of that time, if she still refused to marry Demetrius, she would have to die.

Lysander of course was nearly mad with grief, and the best thing to do seemed to him for Hermia to run away to his aunt’s house at a place beyond the reach of that cruel law; and there he would come to her and marry her. But before she started, she told her friend, Helena, what she was going to do.

Helena had been Demetrius’ sweetheart long before his marriage with Hermia had been thought of, and being very silly, like all jealous people, she could not see that it was not poor Hermia’s fault that Demetrius wished to marry her instead of his own lady, Helena. She knew that if she told Demetrius that Hermia was going, as she was, to the wood outside Athens, he would follow her, “and I can follow him, and at least I shall see him,” she said to herself. So she went to him, and betrayed her friend’s secret.

Now this wood where Lysander was to meet Hermia, and where the other two had decided to follow them, was full of fairies, as most woods are, if one only had the eyes to see them, and in this wood on this night were the King and Queen of the fairies, Oberon and Titania. Now fairies are very wise people, but now and then they can be quite as foolish as mortal folk. Oberon and Titania, who might have been as happy as the days were long, had thrown away all their joy in a foolish quarrel. They never met

## Notes

*An alternate idea for younger children would be to read the picture book, A Midsummer Night’s Dream, retold by Bruce Coville, or listen to Jim Weiss’ retelling on his audio recording, Shakespeare for Children, from Greathall Productions.*

without saying disagreeable things to each other, and scolded each other so dreadfully that all their little fairy followers, for fear, would creep into acorn cups and hide them there.

So, instead of keeping one happy Court and dancing all night through in the moonlight, as is fairies' use, the King with his attendants wandered through one part of the wood, while the Queen with hers kept state in another. And the cause of all this trouble was a little Indian boy whom Titania had taken to be one of her followers. Oberon wanted the child to follow him and be one of his fairy knights; but the Queen would not give him up.

On this night, in a mossy moonlit glade, the King and Queen of the fairies met.

"Ill met by moonlight, proud Titania," said the King.

"What! jealous, Oberon?" answered the Queen. "You spoil everything with your quarreling. Come, fairies, let us leave him. I am not friends with him now."

"It rests with you to make up the quarrel," said the King. "Give me that little Indian boy, and I will again be your humble servant and suitor."

"Set your mind at rest," said the Queen. "Your whole fairy kingdom buys not that boy from me. Come, fairies."

And she and her train rode off down the moonbeams.

"Well, go your ways," said Oberon. "But I'll be even with you before you leave this wood."

Then Oberon called his favorite fairy, Puck. Puck was the spirit of mischief. He used to slip into the dairies and take the cream away, and get into the churn so that the butter would not come, and turn the beer sour, and lead people out of their way on dark nights and then laugh at them, and tumble people's stools from under them when they were going to sit down, and upset their hot ale over their chins when they were going to drink.

"Now," said Oberon to this little sprite, "fetch me the flower called Love-in-idleness. The juice of that little purple flower laid on the eyes of those who sleep will make them, when they wake, to love the first thing they see. I will put some of the juice of that flower on my Titania's eyes, and when she wakes she will love the first thing she sees, were it lion, bear, or wolf, or bull, or meddling monkey, or a busy ape."

While Puck was gone, Demetrius passed through the glade followed by poor Helena, and still she told him how she loved him and reminded him of all his promises, and still he told her that he did not and could not love her, and that his promises were nothing. Oberon was sorry for poor Helena, and when Puck returned with the flower, he bade him follow Demetrius and put some of the juice on his eyes, so that he might love Helena when he woke and looked on her, as much as she loved him. So Puck set off, and wandering through the wood found, not Demetrius, but Lysander, on whose eyes he put the juice; but when Lysander woke, he saw not his own Hermia, but Helena, who was walking through the wood looking for the cruel Demetrius; and directly he saw her he loved her and left his own lady, under the spell of the purple flower.

When Hermia woke she found Lysander gone, and wandered about the wood trying to find him. Puck went back and told Oberon what he had done, and Oberon soon found that he had made a mistake, and set about looking for Demetrius, and having found him, put some of the juice on his eyes. And the first thing Demetrius saw when he woke was also Helena. So now Demetrius and Lysander were both following her through the wood, and it was Hermia's turn to follow her lover as Helena had done before. The end of it was that Helena and Hermia began to quarrel, and Demetrius and Lysander went off to fight. Oberon was very sorry to see his kind scheme to help these lovers turn out so badly. So he said to Puck—

“These two young men are going to fight. You must overhang the night with drooping fog, and lead them so astray, that one will never find the other. When they are tired out, they will fall asleep. Then drop this other herb on Lysander's eyes. That will give him his old sight and his old love. Then each man will have the lady who loves him, and they will all think that this has been only a Midsummer Night's Dream. Then when this is done, all will be well with them.”

So Puck went and did as he was told, and when the two had fallen asleep without meeting each other, Puck poured the juice on Lysander's eyes, and said:—

“When thou wakest,  
Thou takest  
True delight  
In the sight  
Of thy former lady's eye:  
Jack shall have Jill;  
Nought shall go ill.”

Meanwhile Oberon found Titania asleep on a bank where grew wild thyme, oxlips, and violets, and woodbine, musk-roses and eglantine. There Titania always slept a part of the night, wrapped in the enameled skin of a snake. Oberon stooped over her and laid the juice on her eyes, saying:—

“What thou seest when thou wake,  
Do it for thy true love take.”

Now, it happened that when Titania woke the first thing she saw was a stupid clown, one of a party of players who had come out into the wood to rehearse their play. This clown had met with Puck, who had clapped an ass's head on his shoulders so that it looked as if it grew there. Directly Titania woke and saw this dreadful monster, she said, “What angel is this? Are you as wise as you are beautiful?”

“If I am wise enough to find my way out of this wood, that's enough for me,” said the foolish clown.

“Do not desire to go out of the wood,” said Titania. The spell of the love-juice was on her, and to her the clown seemed the most beautiful and delightful creature on all the earth. “I love you,” she went on. “Come with me, and I will give you fairies to attend on you.”

So she called four fairies, whose names were Peaseblossom, Cobweb, Moth, and Mustardseed.

"You must attend this gentleman," said the Queen. "Feed him with apricots and dewberries, purple grapes, green figs, and mulberries. Steal honey-bags for him from the humble-bees, and with the wings of painted butterflies fan the moonbeams from his sleeping eyes."

"I will," said one of the fairies, and all the others said, "I will."

"Now, sit down with me," said the Queen to the clown, "and let me stroke your dear cheeks, and stick musk-roses in your smooth, sleek head, and kiss your fair large ears, my gentle joy."

"Where's Peaseblossom?" asked the clown with the ass's head. He did not care much about the Queen's affection, but he was very proud of having fairies to wait on him. "Ready," said Peaseblossom.

"Scratch my head, Peaseblossom," said the clown. "Where's Cobweb?" "Ready," said Cobweb.

"Kill me," said the clown, "the red humble-bee on the top of the thistle yonder, and bring me the honey-bag. Where's Mustardseed?"

"Ready," said Mustardseed.

"Oh, I want nothing," said the clown. "Only just help Cobweb to scratch. I must go to the barber's, for methinks I am marvelous hairy about the face."

"Would you like anything to eat?" said the fairy Queen.

"I should like some good dry oats," said the clown—for his donkey's head made him desire donkey's food—"and some hay to follow."

"Shall some of my fairies fetch you new nuts from the squirrel's house?" asked the Queen.

"I'd rather have a handful or two of good dried peas," said the clown. "But please don't let any of your people disturb me; I am going to sleep."

Then said the Queen, "And I will wind thee in my arms."

And so when Oberon came along he found his beautiful Queen lavishing kisses and endearments on a clown with a donkey's head.

And before he released her from the enchantment, he persuaded her to give him the little Indian boy he so much desired to have. Then he took pity on her, and threw some juice of the disenchanting flower on her pretty eyes; and then in a moment she saw plainly the donkey-headed clown she had been loving, and knew how foolish she had been.

Oberon took off the ass's head from the clown, and left him to finish his sleep with his own silly head lying on the thyme and violets.

Thus all was made plain and straight again. Oberon and Titania loved each other more than ever. Demetrius thought of no one but Helena, and Helena had never had any thought of anyone but Demetrius.

As for Hermia and Lysander, they were as loving a couple as you could meet in a

day's march, even through a fairy wood.

So the four mortal lovers went back to Athens and were married; and the fairy King and Queen live happily together in that very wood at this very day.

*Notes*

## Notes

*We recommend  
The Arkangel  
Shakespeare audio  
dramatizations.*

## Step 2: Hear the script.

Make a copy of the script on pages 35–110 for each student who can read. Work your way through the script over several sittings, as outlined on the following pages. Each session will follow a sequence similar to the one below:

- Use the notes to introduce each scene. Highlight the featured lines if desired.
- Listen to the scene(s) on the audio dramatization and follow along in the script, or assign students to read aloud the various characters' lines themselves.
- Invite any questions or comments, then set it aside until next time.



## Act I, Scene 1

## Notes

- ❑ Ask students what they recall from last time's reading of the story of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Explain that the play divides the story into five parts, called Acts. Some of the acts are divided into smaller portions, called Scenes. Today they will listen to Act I, Scene 1. Read the scene summary to give students the context for the lines they will be hearing.

*Scene Summary:* The play begins in the palace of the Duke, Theseus, who is looking forward to marrying his love, Hippolyta, in just four days. As you can imagine, it is hard for him to wait. He sends his servant to round up some entertainment for the festivities.

Into his court enter Hermia, her father, Egeus, and two young men, Lysander and Demetrius. Egeus has brought them all to explain their predicament to the Duke and to ask him to talk some sense into Hermia. Egeus wants her to marry Demetrius, but she wishes to marry Lysander. According to the law there in Athens, Hermia must marry as her father has decreed; if she does not, she may be executed or sent to live in seclusion as a nun the rest of her life. Theseus gives her four days to make her decision.

Lysander and Hermia secretly determine to make their way through the woods to Lysander's aunt's house and marry there, outside the boundaries of Athens and its laws. They confide their plans to Hermia's friend, Helena, who happens to be Demetrius' former sweetheart. Helena decides to inform Demetrius of their escape, hoping he will be grateful for the tip and grow to love her again.

- ❑ Distribute a copy of the script to each student who can read.
- ❑ (Optional) Take a sneak peek at these lines from the script and enjoy Shakespeare's wording.
  - » Lines 93–94: Lysander knows that Egeus prefers Demetrius for a son-in-law, so he wryly makes this suggestion to his rival:

You have her father's love, Demetrius;  
Let me have Hermia's: do you marry him.
  - » Line 134: Upon having their hopes dashed, Lysander declares to Hermia that such is usually the case:

The course of true love never did run smooth.

*Shakespeare wrote the lines of his plays in both prose (conversational speaking) and poetry.*

*PERSON: Prose lines will look like this.*

*PERSON: Poetry lines will look like this.*

## Notes

- » Lines 192–201 highlight the contrast between Hermia, Demetrius, and Helena as Hermia tries to discourage Demetrius from loving her and Helena tries to win his love.

HELENA

O, teach me how you look, and with what art  
You sway the motion of Demetrius' heart.

HERMIA

I frown upon him, yet he loves me still.

HELENA

O that your frowns would teach my smiles such skill!

HERMIA

I give him curses, yet he gives me love.

HELENA

O that my prayers could such affection move!

HERMIA

The more I hate, the more he follows me.

HELENA

The more I love, the more he hateth me.

HERMIA

His folly, Helena, is no fault of mine.

HELENA

None, but your beauty: would that fault were mine!

- » Lines 232–239 summarize what this play will demonstrate, that “Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind.”

Things base and vile, folding no quantity,  
Love can transpose to form and dignity:  
Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind;  
And therefore is wing'd Cupid painted blind:  
Nor hath Love's mind of any judgement taste;  
Wings and no eyes figure unheedy haste:  
And therefore is Love said to be a child,  
Because in choice he is so oft beguiled.

- ❑ Listen to Act I, Scene 1, on the audio dramatization (approx. 15 minutes) and follow along in the script, or assign students to read aloud the various characters' lines themselves. If you are assigning students to read aloud, the following list might be helpful; it details the characters who speak and the approximate number of lines each one has in this scene.

- Theseus, the Duke (64 lines)
- Hippolyta, the Duke's fiancé (5 lines)
- Egeus, the father (30 lines)
- Hermia, Egeus' daughter (56 lines)
- Lysander, Hermia's true love (53 lines)
- Demetrius, young man who wants to marry Hermia (2 lines)
- Helena, young woman who loves Demetrius (43 lines)

## Notes

*Be sure to do your research to avoid any unpleasant surprises when watching Shakespeare productions. Unfortunately, some directors feel compelled to add unnecessary visual elaborations on the text. Preview any video presentation and check with someone who is directly involved with any live production to find out how it aligns with the original script and how appropriate it is for children.*

## Step 3: Watch the play.

Now that you and your students are familiar with the story line and the script, you are ready for the best part of this study: watch a presentation of the play! Check for any local live performances that you could attend, or watch a video recording. (See video reviews below.)

### Video Recording Reviews

- The 1935 adaptation produced by Warner Brothers Pictures is very suitable for children. It features James Cagney, Olivia de Havilland, and Mickey Rooney among others. Note that it is an adaptation; not all lines are spoken, not all scenes are exact. But it highlights the comedy and the fantasy elements with plenty of fairies, sprites, nymphs, elves, and gnomes. It also features many musical pieces. Felix Mendelssohn composed music for a production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* during his lifetime, including his famous "Wedding March." Some of Mendelssohn's music has been re-orchestrated and woven into this 1935 adaptation. (*Approx. 143 minutes*)
- The 1981 BBC version directed by Elijah Moshinsky is more faithful to the original script, but the performance has a serious tone to it—at times almost bordering on sinister—that doesn't give it the feel of a comedy. It does introduce the idea that lines do not have to be spoken in solo fashion; some of the dialogue in the forest is delivered with two, three, or even four of the young lovers all talking at once. (*Approx. 112 minutes*)
- The 1969 Royal Shakespeare Company version by Peter Hall is adapted and has a definite '60s feel. One example is that it features girls in mini skirts. (*Approx. 124 minutes*)
- The 1999 version directed by Michael Hoffman, starring Kevin Kline and Michelle Pfeiffer, is rated PG-13. Parental advisories include sexual innuendos and nudity. The fairies appear drunk in the first scene. (*Approx. 116 minutes*)
- In the 1996 version, directed and written by Adrian Noble, a modern-day boy dreams the play. The DVD release of this performance is rated PG-13. Parental advisories include sexual content, particularly in the scene between Titania and Bottom. (*Approx. 105 minutes*)

# A Midsummer Night's Dream

## Notes

### Act I, Scene 1

*Setting: Athens, the palace of Theseus.*

*Enter Theseus, Hippolyta, Philostrate, with Attendants.*

THESEUS

Now, fair Hippolyta, our nuptial hour  
Draws on apace; four happy days bring in  
Another moon: but, O, methinks, how slow  
This old moon wanes! She lingers my desires,  
Like to a step-dame or a dowager  
Long withering out a young man's revenue.

5

HIPPOLYTA

Four days will quickly steep themselves in night;  
Four nights will quickly dream away the time;  
And then the moon, like to a silver bow  
New-bent in heaven, shall behold the night  
Of our solemnities.

10

THESEUS

Go, Philostrate,

Stir up the Athenian youth to merriments;  
Awake the pert and nimble spirit of mirth;  
Turn melancholy forth to funerals;  
The pale companion is not for our pomp.

15

*Exit Philostrate.*

Hippolyta, I woo'd thee with my sword,  
And won thy love, doing thee injuries;  
But I will wed thee in another key,  
With pomp, with triumph and with revelling.

*Enter Egeus, Hermia, Lysander, and Demetrius.*

EGEUS

Happy be Theseus, our renowned duke!

20

THESEUS

Thanks, good Egeus: what's the news with thee?

EGEUS

Full of vexation come I, with complaint  
Against my child, my daughter Hermia.

*This is the Theseus who fought the mythical Minotaur.*

*Sometimes Shakespeare would split a line of poetry between two characters. Theseus' first line here finishes Hippolyta's previous line, so it is moved to the right to visually show that completion.*