



A Midsummer Night's Dream

by William Shakespeare

What these Tales shall have been to the young readers, that and much more it is the writer's wish that the true Plays of Shakespeare may prove to them in older year—enrichers of fancy, strengtheners of virtue, a withdrawing from all selfish and mercenary thoughts, a lesson of all sweet and honorable thoughts and actions to teach courtesy, benignity, generosity, humanity: for of examples, teaching these virtues, his pages are full.

-Charles Lamb, *Tales from Shakespeare*

Resources for *Simply Shakespeare*:

Carroll, Aileen M. *The Complete Guide to Shakespeare's Best Plays*. Portland: J. Weston Walch Publisher, 2000

Lamb, Charles and Mary. *Tales from Shakespeare*. New York: Penguin Group, Puffin Classics, 1994 *Having this exact copy allows for use of page numbers referenced in the material.

Weiss, Jim. *Shakespeare for Children*. Charlottesville: Greathall Productions Inc., 1995
ISBN: 5953-41115-2 1

A Few Thoughts for *A Midsummer Night's Dream* Note for Families and Only Children

As an only child and former home-schooled student, I am keenly aware that the idea of performing selections from a Shakespearean play can seem daunting and intimidating. However, no matter the size or age of your family, you can all fully participate in *Simply Shakespeare!* Invite fellow homeschoolers in your area, cousins, or friends (whether far away or in your church) to come and help you; visiting family and friends will also be able to reap the benefits of a time well spent in this kid-friendly project.

If you cannot find other people to help, **Barbie dolls** are an excellent resource! Dress them in whatever costumes you choose, construct backdrops and scenery pieces from cardboard and construction paper, and experiment with different voices for your characters in the play. **Lego®** people can also be recruited as additional support! Your imagination is the limit.

In these lessons, you and your family will enjoy one of Shakespeare's greatest and most popular comedies, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Specifically selected for springtime, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* offers something for everyone in your home. *Simply Shakespeare* will be featuring the grand finale for this semester with the melodrama, *The Merchant of Venice*, but a lighthearted comedy seemed most fitting for welcoming spring and spending more time out of doors!

This month, our *Performer's Corner* will feature a fun and easy method for memorizing lines and also a basic stage design that you and your family can construct in your own backyard! Sharla Orren will bring the language of Shakespeare alive in a newly updated vocabulary section, showcasing art, words, and geography in an interactive activity sheet. The rest of the material will feature our classic format to easily fit your academic schedule.

But why *A Midsummer Night's Dream*? This comedy presents a plot rich in symbolism, humor, conflict resolution, and, of course, mistaken identities! One of the threads is the strong influence of English folklore. Fairies and other woodland creatures observe the conflict which the human characters are trying to solve and want to help. In our world of mass media and fantasy films, imaginary creatures often look sinister and unkind, but Shakespeare's fairies are different. As they solve their own dilemmas, they lend a helping hand to the confused humans; one of the fairies is a mischievous hobgoblin (or sprite) called Robin Goodfellow, or Puck.

Hobgoblins are similar to the old English version of hobbits, which are friendly creatures who come into people's houses at night to do good deeds such as cleaning, mending shoes, and leaving food. English country folk called these imaginary people *good fellows*. They might play practical jokes from time to time, but they are good-natured creatures at heart. This unique element of English folklore offers a wonderful opportunity for family discussion and fun for younger students!

Simply Shakespeare is designed for any family anywhere and uniquely formatted for an extracurricular fine arts activity; the activities can be completed in a week or comfortably spaced over several weeks' time. With continued opportunities for improving communication skills, you and your family will have every tool and resource to ensure an enjoyable time with the works of William Shakespeare. By reading and acting together, your entire family will benefit artistically, educationally, and spiritually.

Daily Devotions:

1. Read one chapter of Proverbs daily; many of the principles in Shakespeare's plays are found in Proverbs.
2. Make a list of specific proverbs that apply to each play.

Special Feature for this Month:

From Greathall Productions, storyteller Mr. Jim Weiss tells two classic Shakespearean tales: *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Taming of the Shrew*. He tells the stories in his own words, augmenting the dialogue with actual lines from the plays and adding different voices for each character. A truly delightful CD available on Amazon.com!

SAMPLE

A Midsummer Night's Dream

“Meet me all by break of day.”

Script Reading: Read *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in story form from *Tales from Shakespeare* by Charles and Mary Lamb (pages 17-30). Then listen to the story on the *Shakespeare for Children* CD. This is a wonderful way to expose young children to the play!

Overall Theme: Written in the winter of 1594 or possibly the spring of 1595, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was one of Shakespeare's first comedies. Young Mr. Shakespeare allowed his love for words and rhyme to shine through in his play, as well as his natural talent for telling a good story. William grew up in England's countryside and never forgot the May Day and other summer celebrations he enjoyed as a boy. Perhaps he gave us more than a good play; perhaps he gave us a little taste of his own childhood. Shakespeare makes many parallels (comparing and contrasting) between cities and forests, wisdom and foolishness, and light and darkness. With this in mind, let's take a closer look at the three main themes in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

Theme One: Natural vs. Imaginary

The *Dream* takes natural things like forests and hidden glens (open places in the center of a wooded area) and compares them to human reasoning, i.e., people can become so absorbed in their own issues that they get lost in their minds like travelers in the woods without a map or compass to guide them. Duke Theseus must uphold Athenian law and Egeus' right to choose a husband for his only daughter, Hermia, but he clearly sympathizes with the young people's plight. Theseus, a brave warrior and strong ruler, cannot find a solution to Hermia and Lysander's problem. All he can give is more time for Egeus and Hermia to reconcile as father and daughter. But young Lysander refuses to wait, and so he persuades Hermia to run away with him into the Duke's forest where they will hide and be married secretly. In a way, they are like Romeo and Juliet, acting without thought or consideration for others in their lives.

Egeus wants to give his fortune to an Athenian noble named Demetrius, no matter what his daughter says or what might happen to her because she refuses to marry Demetrius. His pride takes over his judgment and fatherly concern, even though Egeus is an advisor to Duke Theseus!

Demetrius never seems to make a final decision about anything! He is young and rich and a close friend of the Duke, but he uses his position only to gain more wealth and power. Demetrius said he once cared for the young noblewoman Helena, but he casually courts Hermia for her money.

Is it surprising that four young people find themselves confused and running through a wild forest at night, trying to find each other? Shakespeare wisely shows us the consequences of younger and older characters who choose not to listen.

Theme Two: Honesty vs. Deception

Have you ever heard someone say, “Honesty is the best policy”? In reality, honesty should be our only policy! Trying to hide our mistakes or the mistakes of another is not wise or right. Queen Titania learns her lesson well after Robin Goodfellow (Puck) pours a special potion on her eyes and she finds herself forgetting Oberon and wanting to marry a man with the head of a donkey! She saw herself as wise and always knowing what was best for her court of fairies. Of course, King Oberon did not allow matters to go too far, but his point made perfect sense as the sun rose over his forest kingdom and the shadows of night and confusion melted away as the morning mist.

Robin (Puck), after realizing he made a mistake in confusing Lysander for Demetrius, apologizes to King Oberon and immediately amends his error, unlike the other characters who wander around the woods. Even though Robin enjoys a good joke, he sees how constantly playing tricks on people can lead to trouble for everyone involved.

Theme Three: Orderliness vs. Chaos

What kind of home would you like to live in? One where clothes are piled on the floor, unwashed dishes are stacked all over the kitchen, and everyone is too busy to listen to what you have to say? Or would you prefer a home where everyone puts things away neatly, helps to clean up after meals, and takes the time to talk to you and listen?

Chaos happens when a family, church, or town does not follow the rules given to them for their own safety and happiness; when no one is listening or obeying, there is confusion. *Orderliness* occurs when everyone lives in harmony, listening and helping one another with love and respect. Egeus and Hermia do not respect or listen to each other at all when we first meet them, and Lysander tries to fix the problem but only makes matters worse and even more complicated. Helena runs after Demetrius, and they argue before going their separate ways in the forest and getting lost. Orderliness is not a priority for the four young friends or Egeus!

In the fairy kingdom, Oberon and Titania are arguing over a young boy she adopted; Titania wants to honor her friend’s memory by caring for her son, while Oberon wants to give the boy a job in his court. Both of them refuse to budge on the issue until Oberon decides to play a little trick on his wife to teach her a lesson. In the beginning, this may not sound like a kind thing to do, but Oberon cannot afford to let chaos reign in his kingdom or in his home. Harmony is restored when Titania realizes her mistake and Oberon softens, ending the joke he is playing.

A Midsummer Night’s Dream is more than a funny story. It is a tale full of lessons and morals that make us smile and laugh along the way. By understanding the three themes in the *Dream*, we are able to better understand ourselves and compare our actions and attitudes to what the Bible says. Nick Bottom, a weaver and actor in the play, quotes part of I Corinthians 2:7-9 which speaks of the unknown depths of Christ’s love for us—God’s love and patience are “bottomless” as we learn to trust and obey Him.

Discussion Prompters:

1. What do you think about the play? Was it confusing to you at first? Why or why not?
2. Do you think Duke Theseus could have helped Hermia, Lysander, and Egeus more than he did?
3. If you were Lysander, how would you feel about the situation? If you were Helena, would you have felt torn between helping your best friend, Hermia, and Demetrius?
4. How does Puck help and make things harder for the young friends lost in the forest? Does he truly live up to his name, *good fellow*?
5. Do Lysander and Hermia remind you of Romeo and Juliet in any way? Why or why not? Is there a time when you should not obey your parents?
6. Do you think Queen Titania and King Oberon follow what the Apostle Paul teaches us in Ephesians 5:22 and 25?
7. Apply Proverbs 7:1-3, 3:27, 15:1-2, 17:22, and 18:24 to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and to your life today!

The Geography of Shakespeare: Explore the city of Athens and the Fairies' Bower in our newly updated vocabulary section, written by Sharla Orren!

The Vocabulary of Shakespeare: Welcome to our improved vocabulary section! Continue with Sharla Orren, our newest addition to the *Simply Shakespeare* team, in her wonderful contribution as she takes us behind the scenes with Shakespeare's words and characters.

Click to download [Vocabulary](#).

Play Lingo: Have you ever wondered what and what not to do when you attend a play or a concert? Even if you are wearing casual clothes and the concert or play is performed outside, there are still a few things you need to remember. With these simple tips you will be able to relax and enjoy yourself while keeping a good testimony to others around you.

1. *To clap or not to clap:* Ever since the first theatergoers attended the first plays and concerts, the puzzling question of when and when not to clap has stumped grown-ups and young people alike. The good news is that the rule is uncomplicated and straightforward: (1) at a concert, it's good manners for ladies and gentlemen to applaud (clap) after the first musical selection, like a march or a solo. If a piece of music has two parts, please do not clap during the brief pause while the musicians are turning pages or the soloist is catching her breath; (2) at a play, applause is appropriate at the end of the performance. You can easily tell when the end has come by reading your program. At any performance, your program is your best friend! Before the conclusion of a play, there is usually an intermission (a brief break between acts). Clapping as the curtain comes down or the actors leave the stage is appropriate in most settings. Check your program to see if they ask you to not to applaud.

2. *What should I wear?* Most people still enjoy dressing up for a play or a concert, but be careful not to overdress. If the concert or play is being held in a park, the gentlemen in your family will look sharp in a nice collared shirt and a pair of khakis or jeans (not the ones you just played baseball in, though). Ladies, a carefully chosen blouse or pastel-colored polo shirt would look lovely with a skirt. If the event is indoors, it is appropriate for ladies to wear dressier clothing and for gentlemen to don an ironed dress shirt and even a tie. The point is not so much what you wear but the attitude behind what you wear.

3. *Etiquette:* There you sit in an outfit you feel good about and you have remembered not to clap at the wrong time, but suddenly you feel the urge to chew a piece of gum. Ladies and gentlemen, you could be wearing your best dress or a tuxedo, but chewing gum or a piece of candy is not appropriate at all! If you have a slight cough, place a mint in your mouth before the performance starts, not during. It is rude if you chew gum or loudly suck on a mint. Also, please turn off any beeping watches and cell phones. You are helping your fellow audience members have a better time by taking the time to be courteous!

Like everything worthwhile in life, proper etiquette takes time and practice to learn. The more relaxed and comfortable you are with yourself, the more comfortable and at ease you will appear to others, showing them the light of Christ in your courtesy and kindness. Anyone can wear a tie or a dress but not be a lady or gentleman—the point is your attitude. Going to special events can be fun! They do not have to be terrifying or awkward as long as you know what to do—and you might be surprised by how much you enjoy yourself.

Performer's Corner: For *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, you and your family can take the wonders of Shakespeare out of doors by constructing your own theater in your own backyard! Tips and a simple guide to memorizing lines are included along with basic construction instructions. By using materials you have in your home, you can enjoy your special (and economical) place all spring and summer long. The following activities can be completed in three days or over a week according to your family's schedule:

Scenes to Spotlight:

Shakespeare, William. *The Complete Works*. Baltimore: Penguin Books Inc., 1969.

*Having this exact copy is not necessary, however line numbers will vary.

Narration: Lambs' page 16 to the end of the second paragraph on the top of page 18.

Perform: Act II, Scene I, lines 1-9, resume with Puck's "The King doth keep his revels here to-night," and end with line 20. Pick up at line 29 and end with "called Robin Goodfellow." At this point have Oberon and Titania enter and begin with line 118-123, resume with line 135 and end with line 147. Oberon exits. This is a great scene for extras as fairies in the royal fairy court!

Narration: Lambs' page 19, the last paragraph to the end of the first full paragraph on page 20. Have your Demetrius and Helena pantomime the scene as your narrator reads. Resume narrating with the third paragraph and end with Oberon's speech. Have your Oberon and Puck pantomime the scene.

Perform: In your own words (as Puck), explain how Puck does not know that Lysander is also in the woods with Hermia; they fall exhausted on the ground because they are lost (yards away from each other) and cannot find their way. Act II, Scene II, beginning with line 66 to the end of Puck's speech.

Perform: The following scene can be a lot of fun as long as you can keep it moving and let your characters show their natural confusion. Lysander awakes with line 103 and the beginning of line 104 (“Transparent Helena”). He sees Helena looking for Demetrius. Resume with Helena’s response, “Do not say so, Lysander, say not so.” Have Lysander go back to line 106, “Where is Demetrius?” and finish with line 107. Have Helena exit after her line 129-132 and have Lysander follow. Now Hermia awakes (on the opposite side of the stage area) and begins with line 151 and ends the scene with line 155. Hermia exists after her lines.

*If you only have two people for this scene, that is all you need. One person may say multiple parts!

Narration: Lambs’ page 25, the last paragraph at the bottom of the page to the end of the second paragraph on page 26.

Perform: In your own words (as Titania), explain how she dreamed that she never knew King Oberon and found herself wanting to marry a man with the head of donkey. Have Titania sit down and pretend to sleep, while Oberon enters (as if Puck were with him). Act III, Scene II, line 45 and ending with line 45. Resume with line 56 and end with line 62.

Narration: Lambs’ page 28, beginning with the last line at the bottom of the page and ending with the end of the final paragraph on page 29.

*Egeus may also appear in this scene, welcoming his daughter home and shaking Lysander’s hand for your pantomime.

Perform: Act IV, Scene I, line 186 and ending with line 198, “let us recount our dreams.”

*If you only have two people for this scene, that is all you need. One person may say multiple parts!

Perform: Act V, Scene I, line 412, “If we shadows have offended,” and end the scene with line 427.

*Puck can be performed by a young lady if necessary since female hobgoblins are in English folklore.

Producing the Production

Props: Looking for props can be an exciting adventure! You will need artificial trees (or draw them onto large pieces of cardboard and cut them out with scissors), face paint for the fairies, two crowns for King Oberon and Queen Titania, and plastic swords for Lysander and Demetrius. Puck may carry a knife. Find plastic swords at your local toy store or larger discount store.

Costumes: *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* can be in any time period because of its flexible setting in Athens, Greece, but the easiest for costumes can be a traditional Renaissance setting to celebrate the May Day theme or even modern costumes. Long shirts (white, black, or blue) can be tied off at the waist for the young men, as well as black sweatpants or black jeans. Patterns for Renaissance clothing can be found and purchased online or at your local fabric store. If you can find black boots to wear, they would go nicely with the time period. For Titania, fairies of the

court, Hermia, and Helena, find solid color dresses at a thrift store or sew your own. Embellish your costumes with appropriate jewelry and head coverings; lacey shawls or woolen ones may be worn. Oberon, Titania, Puck, and the fairies need face paint and soft colors such as light blue, pink, and green. Plan a budget and visit local thrift stores in your area and see what kind of old clothes you can find, or raid your closets and attic at home!

If you choose a modern setting, have Helena and Hermia wear white blouses (or pastel colors) and peasant-style skirts. Lysander and Demetrius may wear white short-sleeved dress shirts (or light and dark blue) and khaki pants. Oberon and Puck will require black tee-shirts, black pants, and green capes. Titania and her fairies will need light-colored blouses and peasant-style skirts. Have your human characters carry cell phones as if they are trying to find a signal in the woods.

Advertisement: Use Renaissance pictures and themes (or traveling/modern ones) such as swords and graphics on your posters and playbills or take pictures of your cast members posing.

Staging: Consult [Performer's Corner!](#)

Music: *Merry the Dance*, from the British television series *Cadfael*, sets the perfect mood before your production begins. This song is available on iTunes and also from the CD *Cadfael*, which can be rather difficult to find. If you choose to place your production in a modern setting, *The Entertainer* by Joplin will do nicely. Tchaikovsky's *Chocolate, Nutcracker Suite* is a delicious selection for between scenes and narration. You can find this selection from any CD featuring the *Nutcracker* Ballet and on iTunes. *Elegy*, by Bill Douglas, sets the mood perfectly for a peaceful conclusion to the play. This song is available from the CD *Quietude*, performed by Christine Lee and Emily Waggoner, available on CD from Amazon.com and Bob Jones University Campus Store online.

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