

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM KNOWLEDGE ORGANISER

Context

- The most influential writer in all of English literature, William Shakespeare was born in 1564 to a successful middle-class glove-maker in Stratford-upon-Avon, England.
- Shakespeare attended grammar school, but his formal education proceeded no further.
- In 1582 he married an older woman, Anne Hathaway, and had three children with her.
- Around 1590 he left his family behind and travelled to London to work as an actor and playwright.
- Public and critical success quickly followed, and Shakespeare eventually became the most popular playwright in England and part-owner of the *Globe Theatre*.
- His career bridged the reigns of Elizabeth I (ruled 1558-1603) and James I (ruled 1603-1625), and he was a favourite of both monarchs.
- Indeed, James granted Shakespeare's company the greatest possible compliment by bestowing upon its members the title of *King's Men*.
- Wealthy and renowned, Shakespeare retired to Stratford and died in 1616 at the age of fifty-two.



Key Characters

- Puck - Also known as Robin Goodfellow, Puck is Oberon's jester, a mischievous fairy who delights in playing pranks on mortals.
- Lysander - A young man of Athens, in love with Hermia.
- Demetrius - A young man of Athens, initially in love with Hermia and ultimately in love with Helena.
- Hermia - Egeus's daughter, a young woman of Athens. Hermia is in love with Lysander and is a childhood friend of Helena.
- Helena - A young woman of Athens, in love with Demetrius.
- Bottom - The overconfident weaver chosen to play Pyramus in the craftsmen's play for Theseus's marriage celebration.
- Oberon - The king of the fairies.
- Titania - The beautiful queen of the fairies.
- Egeus - Hermia's father, who brings a complaint against his daughter to Theseus.
- Theseus - The heroic duke of Athens, engaged to Hippolyta.
- Hippolyta - The legendary queen of the Amazons, engaged to Theseus.

Key Words

- soliloquy - a speech in a play that the character speaks to himself or herself or to the audience, rather than to the other characters.
- severe - very strict or harsh.
- conflict - a serious disagreement, battle or struggle between two sides or ideas.
- unrequited love - If a person loves someone who doesn't love them back, the person's love is unrequited.
- to mock - To mock someone is to make fun of them.
- chaos - a situation where there is no order and everyone is confused.
- to resolve - to solve a problem or difficulty.

Themes

Love - Shakespeare explores the lighter side of love in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Love makes us behave in strange ways - the lovers fight in a most uncivilised way in the woods. It can bring out the best and bravest qualities in a character - Hermia risks her life for love. Lovers often feel invincible against a world that doesn't understand them, just as Hermia and Lysander stand alone against Athens's law. Love can make us ridiculous - Helena asks a boy to treat her like a dog, whilst Titania falls in love with a donkey. Love can be cruel - Helena and Demetrius fall desperately in love with someone who doesn't love them back. Love also has a powerful magical quality: falling in love can be like being under a spell.

Appearance and Reality - Sometimes things are not quite what they seem. Sometimes we fail to see situations as they really are. People often pretend to be something that they're not, hiding their true selves for one reason or another. Shakespeare was really interested in this idea and explored it in many of his plays. This theme is usually referred to as appearance and reality.

Order and Disorder - Much of the comedy of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* comes from the chaos created when the natural order of things is disrupted. But there's a darker side too. There's not one character that isn't relieved when Oberon finally restores the midnight world to a happier one by day.

Plot Summary

Act 1

Hermia and Lysander love each other but are not allowed to marry so decide to run away to the forest to get married in secret. Demetrius wants to marry Hermia. Helena loves Demetrius. They follow Hermia and Lysander into the forest.

Act 2

In the forest, Oberon and Titania are arguing. Oberon sees Demetrius and Helena arguing and commands Puck to use the potion on the Athenian man to make him fall in love with Helena. However, the first Athenian man Puck sees is Lysander, so he puts the love potion on him. Lysander falls madly in love with Helena.

Act 3

Puck sees Bottom in the forest and transformed his head into a donkey's head. He puts the love potion on Titania, who falls in love with Bottom. Puck puts the love potion on Demetrius so that he falls in love with Helena. As a result, both men love Helena so there is chaos. Puck eventually drops a herb in Lysander's eyes to put him back to normal.

Acts 4 and 5

Oberon finds Titania and Bottom and decides that he has had enough fun. Puck drops a herb in her eyes, she wakes and leaves with Oberon. The lovers return to Athens where Bottom and the other actors perform their play at the wedding of the three happy couples: Theseus and Hippolyta, Lysander and Hermia and Demetrius and Helena.