

Mischief is in the air when the King and Queen of the Fairies quarrel and Puck is left in charge of the love potion.

Four young people are lost in the woods on midsummer's night. Will they find each other and true love, or will Puck's meddling leave them broken-hearted and alone?

A band of players prepares to entertain the Duke of Athens. But now that the fairies have made a donkey out of their leading man, will Quince and the others ever get to play their parts?

Is there time to put everything right before this magical night is over?



Lexile® level: 660L
Word count: 4,450

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ISBN 978-1-912464-28-9



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masterpieces**

- BBC R4, Open Book

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Newbury, Berkshire, UK
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Published by Baker Street Press Ltd. in 2019
First published by Real Reads Ltd. in 2010

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A catalogue record for this book is available
from the British Library

Typeset in Baskerville and Scala
Printed in China by Imago Ltd.

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THE CHARACTERS



Hermia and Helena

Hermia and Helena are best friends so why would Helena betray her best friend's secret?

Lysander and Demetrius

Both are in love with Hermia, or are they? How will fairy magic affect their feelings for the two young women?



Egeus and the Duke of Athens

Egeus is Hermia's father, and can have her put to death if she refuses to marry Demetrius. Will the Duke overrule him so that Hermia can marry the man she loves?



Quince, Snug, Snout, Starveling and Flute

The workmen want to put on a play for the Duke, but they have problems – like what to do when the leading man disappears. Will their play ever be performed?



Nick Bottom

A weaver by trade, but an ass by nature. A fairy spell will make a donkey out of him.



The King and Queen of the Fairies

Oberon and Titania quarrel about a young boy she is caring for. Will Titania forgive her husband when he plays a trick on her?



Puck

Puck is the fairy king's cheeky servant who causes chaos amongst the lovers in the woods. Who will sort out the mess he has made?





A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE HERMIA'S CHOICE

The Duke of Athens is in his palace when Egeus, a local businessman, enters, dragging along his daughter, Hermia. Two young men, Demetrius and Lysander, follow them.

Egeus

Noble duke, a humble servant greets you.

Duke

Welcome, Egeus. What brings you here to court?

Egeus

My daughter, lord, who will not me obey.

Come here, Demetrius. My noble lord,

This man has my consent to marry her.

Step forward, Lysander. My gracious duke,

Yet this one has bewitched my daughter's heart.

Duke

Hermia, what say you? Will you agree

To marry Demetrius? It is your father's wish.

The law is strict on disobedient maids.

Hermia

I must obey my heart – what is the law?

Duke

To die, or ever leave the world of men.

Hermia

Become a nun?

Duke

Aye, maid, that is the choice.

Hermia

Sooner a nun than that man's bride!

Duke

Come, come, sweet Hermia,
A lifetime singing hymns in a lonely cell
Compares not with the joys of married life.
Take time to think, and by the next new moon
Before this court pronounce your choice
To marry, die, or to become a nun.
Gentlemen, a word.

The Duke leaves with Egeus and Demetrius.



Hermia

It is the fate of lovers to be crossed,
Be thought too poor, too rich, too old, too young,
Or else not suited to a father's taste!

Lysander

The course of true love never did run smooth;
Yet even if all are happy with the choice,
War, death or sickness still may ruin all,
Making love momentary as a sound,
Swift as a shadow, short as any dream,
Brief as the lightning in the murky night.
I have a widowed aunt who lives outside
The city walls, some seven leagues at least,
Beyond the city and beyond its laws.
There, gentle Hermia, may I marry thee.
If you love me, creep from your father's house
Tomorrow night and meet me in the wood
Where once we met with Helena, your friend.
I will wait for you there.

Hermia

My good Lysander,
I swear to thee by Cupid's strongest bow
That to that place tomorrow I will go.

became an actor and playwright. He was very popular in his own lifetime. He wrote thirty-seven plays that we know of, and many sonnets.

The very first theatres were built around the time that Shakespeare was growing up. Until then, plays had been performed in rooms at the back of inns, or pubs. The Elizabethans loved going to watch entertainments such as bear-baiting and cock-fighting as well as plays. They also liked to watch public executions, and some of the plays written at this time were quite gruesome.

The Globe, where Shakespeare's company acted, was a round wooden building that was open to the sky in the middle. 'Groundlings' paid a penny to stand around the stage in the central yard. They risked getting wet if it rained. Wealthier people could have a seat in the covered galleries around the edge of the space. Some very important people even had a seat on the stage itself. Unlike today's theatre-goers, Elizabethan audiences were noisy and sometimes fighting broke out.

There were no sets or scene changes in these plays. It was up to the playwright's skill with words to create thunderstorms or forests or Egyptian queens in the imagination of the audience.

Shakespeare wrote mostly in blank verse, in unrhymed lines of ten syllables with a *te-tum te-tum* rhythm. But unlike most writers of his time he tried to make his actors' lines closer to the rhythms of everyday speech, in order to make it sound more naturalistic. He used poetic imagery, and even invented words that we still use today.

His plays are mostly based on stories or old plays that he improved, although we do not know where the idea for *A Midsummer Night's Dream* came from. It may have been written to be performed at a nobleman's wedding at which Queen Elizabeth was present.

Finding out more

We recommend the following books and websites to gain a greater understanding of William Shakespeare and Elizabethan England:

Books

- Marcia Williams, *Mr William Shakespeare's Plays*, Walker Books, 2009.
- Toby Forward and Juan Wijngaard, *Shakespeare's Globe: A Pop-Up Theatre*, Walker Books, 2005.