



educator resource guide



resource guide

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A *Midsummer Night's Dream* at Seattle Shakespeare Company (2011)

A Midsummer Night's Dream is one of Shakespeare's most beloved plays. A comedy, a romance, magical creatures and personal transformation.

When planning this season we determined that transformation was an important theme in our inaugural year. *Midsummer* seemed a natural choice, but for more reasons than just looking at how the characters change after their night in the woods. *Midsummer* keys into deep archetypal themes that we have seen in storytelling from earliest history. Journeying into the forest to find our true selves or accomplish a quest never seems to get old – whether it is Eurydice following nymphs and leading Orpheus into tragedy, Red Riding Hood journeying to visit her grandmother and finding a new life after being eaten by a wolf, or young lovers being temporarily confounded by magic, this journey away from safety and into the dark forests of the unknown represents not just survival and transformation, but the thrill of the eternal journey we are all on throughout our lives, and our desire to push the boundaries and risk what we know for what might be. It ultimately shows our determination to walk through the dark night of the soul to grow into who we may become with the understanding that that path may lead us in directions we never dreamed we'd be brave enough to explore.

Shakespeare makes light of the faerie world our characters wander into, but there is danger ahead and the knowledge that they may exit the forest changed forever. This play challenges the audience to leave the forest as different people than when they enter. Hopefully all theatre can lead us gently into the forest, willing to take the risk that we will come out transformed. As the playwright says, "Are you sure that we are awake? It seems to me that yet we dream."

Thank you for dreaming with us as we walk together into the future of our merged theatre companies.

Elisabeth Farwell Moreland
Interim Artistic Director



Are you sure that we are awake? It seems to me that yet we sleep, we dream.

— Demetrius, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Act 4, Scene 1

Shakespeare often uses the idea of a magic land in his plays. *Twelfth Night* has Illyria; *As You Like It* has the Forest of Arden; *Pericles*, a host of lands. But each offers something in the journey: refuge, retreat, discovery, transformation.

So much of the focus of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is about love and laughter. But, even more so, it's about the power of transformation, real or illusionary. A person becomes a donkey; lovers change partners; a fairy queen is enamored of an ass; "rude mechanicals" become actors (even if not very good ones) and stars at court (even if not for the reasons they believe). All ending happily (there is no Malvolio in *Midsummer*) but changed.



A Midsummer Night's Dream (2004)
at Seattle Shakespeare. Photo by Erik Stuhaug

But aren't we constantly looking for transformation, whether real or make believe? In our individual lives and in our communal world? That person to love us; those new clothes; that next job; the new home; the next election; the winning lottery ticket that will allow everything to be different. ACT and Seattle Shakespeare just went through an extraordinary transformation into Union Arts Center and into something new. But as with the reality of so much change, it's not a sudden donkey's head; it's an ongoing process of planning and work and thought and effort and sweat and, even, tears. To come out as something different. Something...better. Our journey of change, all of us, together. And *Midsummer* seems the perfect play to celebrate that transformation.

I thoroughly hope you enjoy this production. And, perhaps, find yourself a bit changed for the shared experience with us and all those around you. Thank you!

John Bradshaw
Managing Director

In Athens, preparations are underway for the wedding of Duke Theseus and Hippolyta. As the city celebrates, conflict brews beneath the surface. Egeus demands that his daughter Hermia marry Demetrius, the suitor he has chosen for her. Hermia, however, loves Lysander. Faced with a rigid law that prioritizes obedience over love, Hermia and Lysander flee the city and escape into the forest, free from Athenian rules. Meanwhile, Helena, Hermia's closest friend, is in love with Hermia's proposed suitor, Demetrius, who does not return her affection. Hoping to win him over, Helena reveals Hermia's escape plan and follows Demetrius into the woods.

The forest belongs to the Fairies, ruled by King Oberon and Queen Titania. Their relationship is strained, and their quarrel has thrown the natural world out of balance. Seeking control, Titania instructs her mischievous servant Puck to use a magical flower whose juice causes a sleeping person to fall instantly in love with the first being they see upon waking. Titania plans to use the spell to humiliate Oberon, and, in a separate act of mercy, asks Puck to enchant Demetrius so he will return Helena's love. Puck's enthusiasm, however, outpaces his accuracy, and soon the lovers' emotions are scrambled: both Demetrius and Lysander pine for Helena, while Hermia is left confused and alone.



A Midsummer Night's Dream at Seattle Shakespeare (2011)

In another part of the forest, a group of earnest Athenian workers, the mechanicals, rehearse a play they hope to perform in honor of Theseus and Hippolyta's wedding.



A Midsummer Night's Dream at Seattle Shakespeare (2009)

Delighted by their theatricality, Puck decides to amuse himself, transforming the self-appointed star, Bottom, into a donkey-headed spectacle. When the sleeping Oberon (under the influence of the same enchanted flower) awakens, he falls deeply in love with the unsuspecting donkey-headed actor.

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As night deepens, the lovers accuse one another of betrayal and chase each other through the woods. Recognizing the harm she has caused, Titania intervenes to undo the

damage. The spells are lifted—except for Demetrius, who remains enchanted and devoted to Helena. Titania and Oberon are reconciled, and the lovers awaken, unsure whether the night's madness was real or only a dream.



A Midsummer Night's Dream at Seattle Shakespeare (2009)

With morning comes clarity. Authority softens. Egeus, seeing Hermia's genuine affection for Lysander and Demetrius's devotion to Helena, allows love to follow its own course, and the couples return to Athens to celebrate marriage. The play concludes with the mechanicals' heartfelt (and hilariously flawed) performance of Pyramus and Thisbe, and a final reminder from the fairies that what we have witnessed may not have been reality at all, but something a bit stranger, and perhaps more true.

a note for the audience

For those familiar with *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, you may notice some unexpected twists in the characters and their roles within the story. We hope you'll allow yourself to be enchanted by the newly imagined forest at Union Arts Center, and find fresh joy in the magic these adaptations invite.

questions to consider...

- Why do directors choose to adapt or alter Shakespearean text?
- If you were to adapt this story, what are some changes you would like to make?



**And as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.**

— Thesus, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Act 5, Scene 1

Use the following section to get to know the characters before seeing the show. With fairies, lovers, rulers, and would-be actors all colliding in the woods, it's easy to get lost. This guide will help you keep track of who's who—and who might become someone else by morning.

the fairies



titania

played by
anne allgood

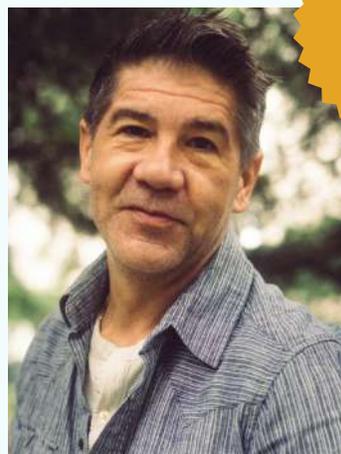
Queen of the Fairies. Fiercely independent, yearning for control, and a purveyor of magical mischief.



oberon

played by
david anthony lewis

King of the Fairies. Has a commanding presence while remaining deeply connected to the natural world.



puck

played by
tim gouran

Titania's mischievous servant. Playful and unpredictable, he delights in transformation and confusion.

plus!

cobweb peaseblossom mustardseed & moth

played by
r. hamilton wright,
josh kenji langager
christopher morson
+ kyle henick

Fairy attendants
to Oberon.

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the athenians

hippolyta

played by
anne allgood

Queen of the Amazons and bride-to-be of Theseus.

theseus

played by
david anthony lewis

Duke of Athens. A ruler who values order and reason, yet ultimately chooses mercy when confronted with love.

philostrate

played by
tim gouran

Theseus's master of revels. Responsible for overseeing entertainment and ceremony.

egeus

played by
r. hamilton wright

Hermia's father. Rigidly devoted to the law of Athens, he prioritizes obedience over affection.

the lovers



hermia

played by
elise cogan

A fiercely loyal and stubborn young woman who refuses to surrender her right to choose whom she loves.



helena

played by
lily davis

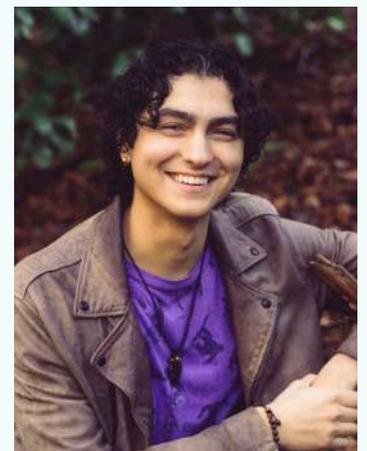
Hermia's closest friend, aching with unrequited love. Sharp, self-aware, and emotionally vulnerable.



lysander

played by
jeremy steckler

Romantic and idealistic, Hermia's beloved believes the heart should matter more than the law.



demetrius

played by
luka cruz

The suitor favored by Hermia's father. He pursues Hermia while dismissing Helena.

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The mechanicals from the 2026 production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at Union Arts Center. Photo by Giao Nguyen.

the mechanicals | top to bottom, left to right

flute

played by
josh kenji langager

A nervous bellows-mender cast as Thisbe in the mechanicals' production.

snug

played by
kyle henick

An exceptionally shy joiner cast as the Lion. He fears frightening the audience more than forgetting his lines.

snout

played by
christopher morson

A tinker cast as the Wall in Pyramus and Thisbe. He commits fully to even the most absurd theatrical task.

peter quince

played by
r. hamilton wright

A carpenter and the organizer of the mechanicals' play. He struggles valiantly to impose order on the chaos.

bottom

played by
nathaniel tenenbaum

A weaver with limitless confidence and theatrical ambition. Earnest yet oblivious, he falls victim to the forest's tricks.

As the story unfolds, keep track of how the characters' choices and relationships shift. Who falls in love quickly? Who gets confused? Who takes control?

questions to consider...

- Which character do you think is the most like you?
- Who would you want to spend more time with—and who would you avoid?



Elise Cogan (Hermia) and Jeremy Steckler (Lysander)
Photo by Giao Nguyen

A *Midsummer Night's Dream* is more than just a comedy about magical mishaps. Shakespeare uses humor, fantasy, and romance to explore big ideas about love and power. These themes give the play its lasting appeal, reminding us that emotions are rarely simple and that growing up often means learning to live with uncertainty.

the challenge of love

"The course of true love never did run smooth."

Love in the play is rarely calm or balanced; instead, it is messy, uneven, and constantly shifting. Hermia loves Lysander, Lysander loves Hermia, Helena loves Demetrius, and Demetrius loves Hermia instead of Helena. This creates a simple but painful imbalance: two people pursuing the same love, while another is left behind entirely.

Imbalance also shapes the magical world of the play. Beauty is paired with absurdity, and passion with disdain, revealing how irrational love can be. Shakespeare suggests that love is powerful not in spite of being illogical, but because of it.

order vs. chaos

The play moves between the structured world of Athens and the wild, unpredictable forest. Athens represents law and structure. The forest, by contrast, is a space where rules fall apart. Fairies interfere, lovers chase the wrong people, and identities blur. Only by passing through disorder can the characters return to Athens with a clearer sense of who they are.

choice and consent

Throughout the play, characters struggle over who gets to decide matters of love. Hermia is expected to marry Demetrius despite loving Lysander. Titania attempts to control Oberon's desires through magic. Even the love potion itself raises questions: if love can be imposed, is it still love?

The world of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* doesn't come to life through words alone—it's built through design. The costumes, set, movement, lighting, and sound all work together to shape how we experience the story. In this section, you'll get a closer look at some of the design elements used in this production and how each choice helps tell the story.

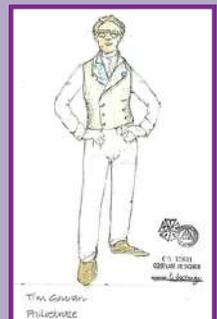
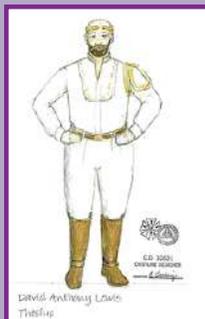
costumes designed by Christine Tschirgi

Costume design helps tell the story before a character ever speaks. In *Midsummer*, costume design is especially important because the story moves between very different worlds—the city and the forest. As characters move between these spaces, their clothing shifts as well, reflecting how the forest's magic transforms them.



the fairies

The fairy costumes are grounded in the earth, making them feel ancient, wild, and connected to the natural world.



the athenians

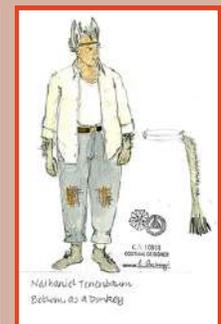
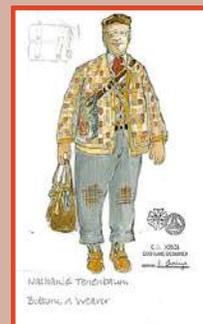
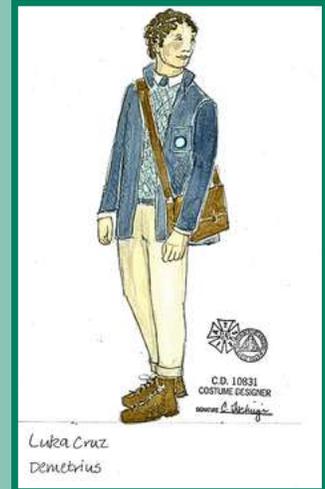
Athens is a world of order, law, and control. The Athenians exist in stark white, creating a clean, rigid visual contrast to the messy, colorful forest. This limited palette suggests rules, hierarchy, and a lack of flexibility.

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the lovers

The lovers open the play in clean Athenian garb that echoes school uniforms. As they enter the forest, layers are stripped away, grounding them in the mud and messiness of the woods. When the lovers return for the wedding, earthy details remain, showing that the forest has left its mark.



the mechanicals

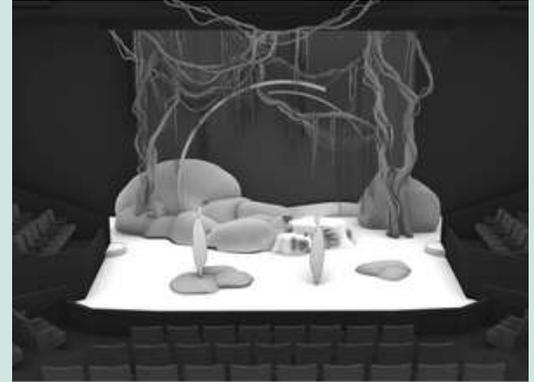
The Mechanicals wear earth-toned costumes that immediately set them apart from the pristine Athenians. Their look is practical and worn-in, reflecting their identities as working-class craftspeople.

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scenic + props designed by Parmida Ziaei

Scenic and prop design shape the physical world of a play. Scenic design creates the environment, while prop design focuses on the objects that characters interact with. Together, they give actors a world that feels real and playable.

According to scenic designer Parmida Ziaei, “one of the biggest elements of the set for *Midsummer* is the transformation and contrast of Athens and the woods—law and order, versus chaos and magic.” Athens is designed as stark and structured. In contrast, the forest embraces disorder.



The forest’s look emerged through deep collaboration. Ziaei describes working closely with the director and design team to land on a shared visual

language. She also collaborated extensively with the shop artisans to experiment with materials. “Many moss and mushroom samples later,” she notes, “the forest has come to life on stage.”

In the forest, elements such as concealed fiber optics, a glowing moon, and bioluminescent mushrooms transform the space into something otherworldly. As the play unfolds, the shift between Athens and the forest mirrors the characters’ journeys—away from rigid expectations and into a world where desire and chaos can take root.

fight direction choreographed by Raya Tuffaha

Fight choreography is a form of storytelling through movement. Just like scenery or costumes, **it helps establish tone, relationships, and power dynamics onstage.** In *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, moments of physical conflict mirror the chaos and confusion of the forest.



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Raya Tuffaha during the first read.
Photo by Giao Nguyen.

Fight Director Raya Tuffaha says she came in with reference images and a choreography outline, but notes that collaboration with the actors and creative team led to “some exciting ideas.” The choreography is closely tied to the production's design—“Keep an eye out for wrestling with the costumes and the set!” Raya notes—as performers interact with the world around them.



lighting designed by Andy Smith

Lighting design shapes how an audience experiences atmosphere and location. In this production lighting plays a major role in creating the forest as a space that is mysterious—but also alive with magic.

Fiber optic lights are woven into the plants and mushrooms onstage to create a bioluminescent effect, giving the forest a soft, otherworldly glow. Rather than relying on brightness, the lighting uses natural and ethereal effects to suggest that the magic of the woods comes from within the environment itself.

sound designed by Evan Mosher

Sound design builds the unseen world of a play. From the earliest conversations, the design for *Midsummer* yearned to move away from the idea of a sparkly fairie world and toward something that designer Evan Mosher described as “ancient, primal, and psychedelic.”

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The forest was imagined as a living, reactive environment. One of the most unusual discoveries in Evan's research process came from field recordings of plant bioelectrical signals, captured using experimental equipment. This (as Evan describes) "strange, squeaky and scratchy material" became the foundation of the forest's sonic identity. After being pushed through stacks of convoluted distortion software, the sounds transform into "a lush, otherworldly tapestry."

Music weaves through this environment as another layer of transformation. Original musical motifs created by Anastasia Workman are treated much like the plant-based sounds, stacked through a variety of layered sound patches.

In this production, the forest is not silent scenery; it hums. Built from living signals and layered music, the design of this world allows the woods to quite literally speak for themselves.



Josh Kenji Langager (Flute), Kyle Henick (Snug), and Nathaniel Tennenbaum (Bottom) in rehearsal.
Photo by Giao Nguyen



Luka Cruz (Demetrius), Jeremy Steckler (Lysander), David Anthony Lewis (Theseus), Anne Allgood (Hippolyta), Lily Davis (Helena), and Elise Cogan (Hermia). Photo by Giao Nguyen.



Director Desdemona Chiang.
Photo by Giao Nguyen.

questions to consider...

- What does collaboration look like when you're creating something? How is that represented in the design process for this production?
- Do you think one design element will have more impact on the show than others? If so, which one, and why?
 - **After the Show:** Reflect on your previous answer, and compare it to your actual experience of the show. Did something unexpected stand out, or were your original predictions correct?

This production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* leans into the play's stranger, darker edges. While Shakespeare's original language remains intact, **the world of the play may feel messier, dirtier, and more eerie than audiences sometimes expect.**

This *Midsummer* imagines the forest as a place where rules loosen, and boundaries are tested away from the eyes of authority. **The tone is closer to a PG-13 supernatural story**—think heightened emotions, mysterious magic, and a forest that feels alive—rather than a light fairy-tale comedy. Characters sneak into the woods, make impulsive choices, and grapple with desire, jealousy, and confusion, all heightened by the strange influence of the fairy world.

lighting + sound

The production uses lighting and sound design to heighten the dreamlike and sometimes unsettling atmosphere of the forest.

For lighting: Expect low lighting, LED effects, sudden shifts, and moments of darkness or heightened sensory intensity that reflect the play's emotional and supernatural stakes.

For sound: The eerie soundscape is created by translating plant bioelectrical activity into an original sound design that allows the forest to "speak for itself".

themes + content

The play explores themes of **young love, desire, and jealousy.** There are moments of heightened physicality, suggestive humor, and emotionally charged interactions typical of stories centered on teenage relationships.

This interpretation is designed to invite conversation about self-discovery, power, and what happens when social rules dissolve. It encourages audiences to think critically about how identity can shift depending on context and circumstance.

If you have questions about whether this production is a good fit for your group, or would like support in framing conversations before or after the performance, please don't hesitate to reach out. We're happy to help.

rehearsals (1.21 - 2.7.2026) Actors work with their director on blocking, character development, and ensemble work. Actors also meet with intimacy, movement, dialect, and music coaches to refine their performances. Scenes are staged, lines are learned, and performance choices are explored.



artistic shareout (1.8.2026) The design team shares their concepts with UAC staff.

stage manager prep (1.13 - 1.17.2026) The SM team begins meeting and preparing.

first read (1.20.2026) Actors, crew, the creative team, and UAC staff gather for design presentations and to hear about the show. The actors also meet and read the script aloud for the first time.

build (1.6 - 2.3.2026) Our technical team begins work well before the first rehearsal to ensure everything is shipshape and ready for installation. In these later stages, once the actors are in the rehearsal room, our scenic team, carpenters, and designers get together in the theatre to make sure the show is built and ready for the actors.

load-in (2.1 - 2.7.2026) Props, set pieces, and scenic elements used in rehearsal are moved into the theatre.



tech (2.10 - 2.19.2026) Lighting, sound, costumes, and props are integrated with the performance. Actors adjust to technical cues, and the production begins to take its final form.

previews (2.14 - 2.18.2026) The show is performed for a limited audience. This provides an opportunity to make final adjustments before opening night.

opening (2.19.2026)

All the hard work has paid off! The production officially opens to the public!



***A Midsummer Night's Dream* is filled with imaginative language.**

Shakespeare shifts between elegant poetry, witty insults, and exaggerated comedy, depending on who is talking and what world they inhabit. As you watch (or read) the play, notice how language reflects the characters' ideas, status, and passions.

puns

Puns are jokes that exploit different meanings of a word or words that sound similar but have different meanings. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, puns are often used to create comedy, highlight misunderstandings, and poke fun at characters' egos—especially among the lovers and the mechanicals.

for example...

HELENA: Call you me fair? that fair again unsay.
Demetrius loves your fair. O happy fair!

Act 1, Scene 1

Here, "fair" means both *beautiful* and *just*, allowing Helena to twist the word into an expression of jealousy and self-pity.

why it matters:

- Puns create humor out of misunderstanding and insecurity.
- They reveal how characters manipulate language to express jealousy, pride, or desire.

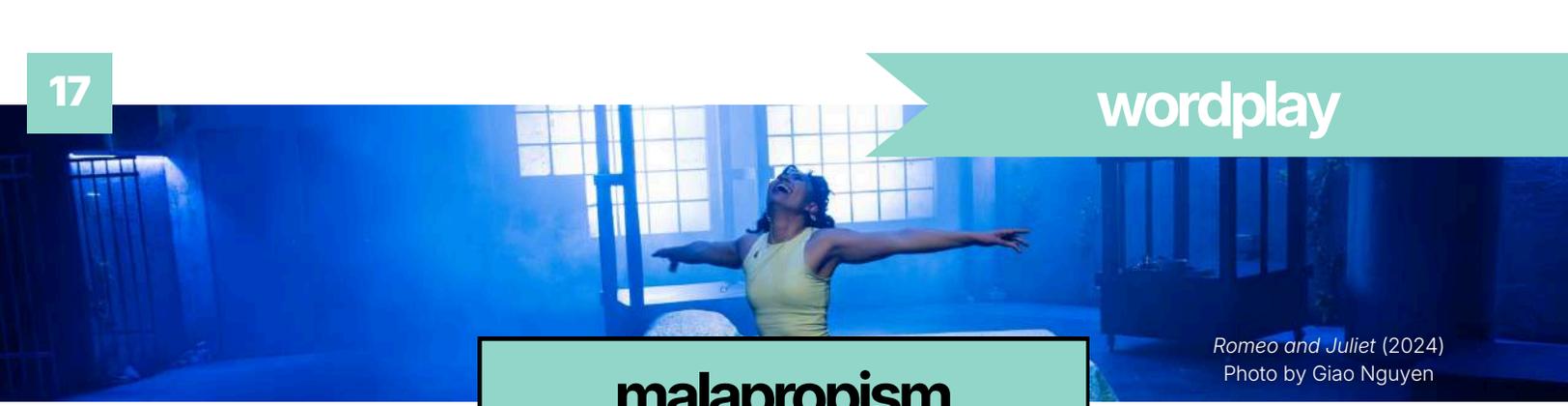


Youth Production of
A Midsummer Night's Dream (2007)



Shrew (2025) at Union Arts Center
Photo by Giao Nguyen

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malapropism

Romeo and Juliet (2024)
Photo by Giao Nguyen

A **malapropism** is the mistaken use of a word in place of a similar-sounding one. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, malapropisms are most commonly used by the mechanicals, especially Bottom, whose confidence often exceeds his understanding.

for example...

BOTTOM: Thisbe, the flowers of odious savours sweet—

Act 3, Scene 1

Bottom means odorous (fragrant), but says odious (unpleasant). The mistake is funny because it reverses the meaning of the line while Bottom remains completely unaware.

why it matters:

- Malapropisms create comedy through language mistakes.
- They highlight self-importance and lack of self-awareness.
- They contrast poetry with everyday speech.

rhymes

A **rhyming couplet** is a pair of consecutive lines that rhyme and often complete a thought. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, rhyming couplets frequently appear, especially at the end of scenes or speeches.

for example...

PUCK: If we shadows have offended,
Think but this, and all is mended.

Act 5, Scene 1

why it matters:

- Rhyming couplets signal endings or reflection.
- They make language musical and memorable.



Kyle Henick (Snug), Josh Kenji Langager (Flute), Christopher Morrison (Snout), and Nathaniel Tenenbaum (Bottom)
Photo by Giao Nguyen

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similes

A **simile** is a comparison between two unlike things using "like" or "as". In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, similes often compare love to animals, madness, or nature, making abstract feelings more concrete.

for example...

THESEUS: This old moon wanes! She lingers my desires,
Like to a stepdame or a dowager
Long withering out a young man's revenue.

Act 1, Scene 1

Here the moon is compared to a stepmother or a widow with rights in her husband's property, and Theseus's desires are compared to the young man who has to wait to claim his inheritance.

why it matters:

- Similes turn emotions into vivid images.
- They reveal how characters see themselves and others.

alliteration

Alliteration is the occurrence of the same letter or sound at the beginning of adjacent or closely connected words.

for example...

PETER Whereat, with blade, with bloody blameful blade,
QUINCE: He bravely broached his boiling bloody breast.

Act 5, Scene 1

why it matters:

- It creates a "musical" or "audible pulse" in poetry and prose.
- Soft, sibilant sounds (like "s") can evoke calmness or secrecy, while harsh, plosive sounds (like "p" or "b") can create tension, urgency, or excitement

can you identify the wordplay?

Below are lines from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Match each one to the correct wordplay technique:

1

HERMIA: Lie further off yet. Do not lie so near.

LYSANDER: ...For lying so, Hermia, I do not lie.

Act 2, Scene 2

A. Pun	B. Malapropism	C. Rhyme	D. Similie	E. Alliteration
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2

LYSANDER: And, which is more than all these boasts can be,
I am beloved of beauteous Hermia.

Act 1, Scene 1

A. Pun	B. Malapropism	C. Rhyme	D. Similie	E. Alliteration
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3

HELENA So we grew together
Like to a double cherry, seeming parted,
But yet an union in partition,
Two lovely berries molded on one stem;

Act 3, Scene 2

A. Pun	B. Malapropism	C. Rhyme	D. Similie	E. Alliteration
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4

BOTTOM O wherefore, Nature, didst thou lions frame,
Since lion vile hath here deflower'd my dear.

Act 5, Scene 1

A. Pun	B. Malapropism	C. Rhyme	D. Similie	E. Alliteration
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5

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

Act 1, Scene 1

A. Pun	B. Malapropism	C. Rhyme	D. Similie	E. Alliteration
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Answers on page 34

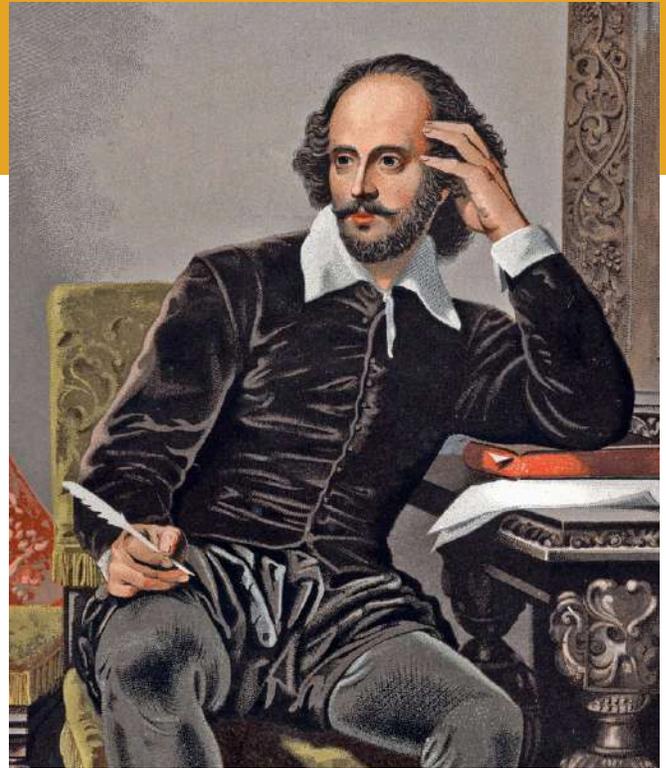
who was william shakespeare?

William Shakespeare, widely regarded as the greatest dramatist in the English language, was born in April 1564 to John Shakespeare, a city councilman and glove maker, and Mary Arden. He was the eldest son in a family of eight.

Not much is known about William's childhood or education. It's likely he attended the local school in his hometown of Stratford, where he would have studied classical Latin authors, as was typical in Elizabethan education.

In 1582 at the age of eighteen William married Anne Hathaway (not the actress from *The Princess Diaries*). The birth of their daughter Susanna was the impetus of their hasty marriage six months prior. Two years later, the couple had twins—Hamnet and Judith. After the birth of the twins records of William's life disappear for several years. These "lost years" have sparked much speculation among historians. Some believe he began his theatrical career by tending horses at the theatres in London, though no one knows for sure.

By 1592 records show that Shakespeare's plays were being performed in London. He joined an acting company called Lord Chamberlain's Men, which he co-owned with several other actors. The company became a favorite of Queen Elizabeth I, and later James I. During this time William often acted in his own plays, typically in minor roles, and also appeared in other productions.



Tragedy struck in 1596 when Shakespeare's son, Hamnet, died of an unknown illness. Just three years later, in 1599, Lord Chamberlain's Men were successful enough to build their own venue—the Globe Theatre. As Shakespeare's career advanced, so did the popularity of the company, and his writing deepened with his great tragedies.

In 1603, after the death of Elizabeth I, James I became the new monarch and the official patron of Lord Chamberlain's Men. Their name was then changed its name to the King's Men. In 1608 they expanded by purchasing the indoor Blackfriars Theatre. Shakespeare became quite wealthy from his career and made several property investments, including the purchase of New Place which was the second-largest house in Stratford. He eventually retired to Stratford to live out his later years. Shakespeare died on April 23, 1616. The cause of his death remains unknown.

While occasionally divided into further subcategories, Shakespeare's plays are typically classified into three main genres: Tragedy, Comedy, and History.



Education Tour: *Macbeth* (2024)
Photo by Giao Nguyen

tragedy

Shakespearean tragedies, though they may contain moments of levity, are defined by their high-stakes storylines, typically leading to the death of key characters. Common features of a tragedy are:

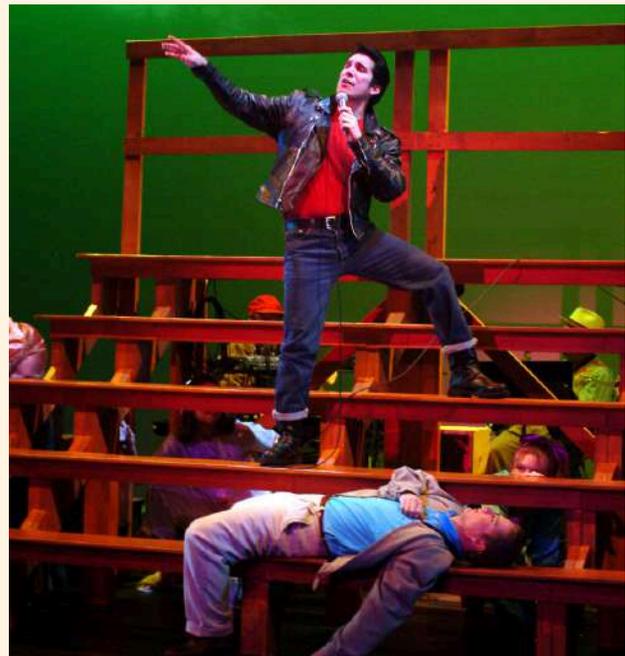
- Characters deeply affected by personal or societal turmoil
- Themes of inescapable doom and fate
- A noble but flawed protagonist who suffers a downfall due to their tragic flaw or circumstances
- A final act that ends in death or catastrophe

Famous tragedies include: *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, and *Macbeth*

comedy

A Shakespearean comedy doesn't always align with modern expectations of humor. Although there may be laugh-out-loud moments, the most recognizable traits of a Shakespearean comedy include:

- Young lovers struggling to overcome obstacles, often posed by strict or disapproving elders
- Mistaken identities, frequently involving disguises
- Complex, interwoven plotlines
- A frequent use of puns and wordplay
- A happy ending, culminating in a wedding or reunion



A Midsummer Night's Dream (2004)
Photo by Erik Stuhau

Famous comedies include: *Much Ado About Nothing*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *Twelfth Night*.

continued on the next page



Drum and Colours: Henry IV (2023)
Photo by Giao Nguyen

history

Shakespeare's history plays focus on English monarchs and the political and social conflicts of their reigns. These plays often served as a vehicle for Elizabethan propaganda, shaping public perceptions of royalty. Though historians have noted various inaccuracies, Shakespeare's histories have had a lasting influence on how we view these historical figures. Key elements include:

- A focus on English royalty and battles for power
- Historical events are intertwined with dramatic embellishment

Famous histories include: *Henry IV, Henry V, King John, Richard II, and Richard III.*

the "problem plays"

In addition to the three major genres, Shakespeare wrote a handful of works that are harder to categorize, often called "problem plays." These plays mix elements of comedy and tragedy and tend to challenge traditional storytelling structures. They frequently explore darker themes and complex moral dilemmas, making them difficult to classify as purely comedic or tragic. Some characteristics of Shakespeare's problem plays include:

- Shifts in tone
- Ambiguous endings that don't provide clear resolutions or typical comedic or tragic conclusions
- Characters dealing with ethical or social complexities that challenge the audience's sense of justice



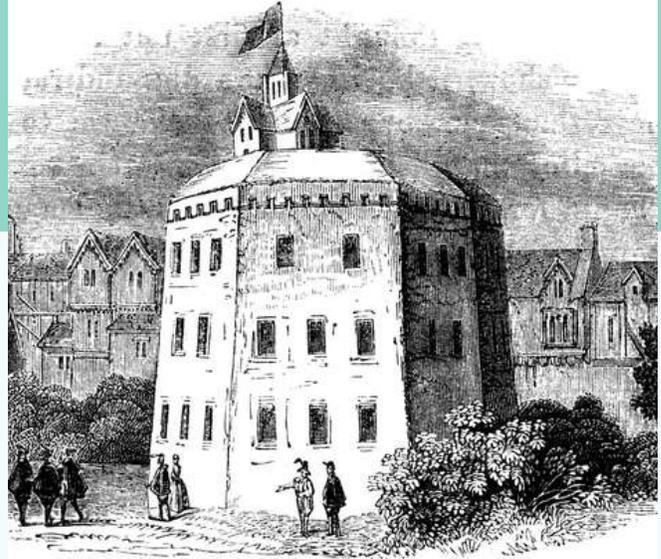
All's Well That Ends Well (2019)
Photo by John Ulman

Examples of "problem plays" include: *Measure for Measure, All's Well That Ends Well, and Troilus and Cressida.*

what were audiences like in shakespeare's time?

Audiences in Shakespeare's time behaved quite differently from what we expect today when attending the theatre. Rather than sitting quietly, Elizabethan audiences were rowdy and directly involved in the show. Shakespeare is often associated with the Globe Theatre in London, a wooden stage constructed in 1599, which hosted many of his world premieres, including *As You Like It*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, and *Macbeth*. On June 29, 1613, the Globe went up in flames during a performance of *Henry VIII*. A modern reconstruction, "Shakespeare's Globe," opened in 1997, located about 750 feet from the site of the original theatre.

London theatres like the Globe could hold up to 3,000 people, with performances running most afternoons. This meant that 10,000 to 20,000 people could see a play each week! Shakespeare's audiences spanned all social classes, from the very rich to the lower-middle class. Theatre was a popular form of affordable entertainment. Admission to the Globe cost as low as a penny—the same price as a loaf of bread or a pint of ale. Those who paid just one penny stood in "the yard," the area closest to the stage, and were known as "groundlings." For an additional penny, audience members could sit on benches behind the yard, or pay another penny for a cushion. Access to the upper galleries, which were covered and seated, started at six pence.



Without electricity, all performances took place in broad daylight, allowing for interaction between actors and the audience. Shakespeare's famous soliloquies were often spoken directly to the crowd, who might even respond! Audiences were highly reactive—they would cheer for the hero, boo the villain, and get excited by special effects. In comedies, the audience might even dance with the actors at the end. If they didn't enjoy the play, they weren't shy about causing a ruckus, sometimes even throwing furniture or damaging the theatre.

Shakespeare employed several strategies to capture and maintain his audience's attention. His plays rarely began with the main characters. Instead, minor characters opened the first scene. Without house lights to dim, performances simply started when actors entered the stage and began speaking, often over the noise of the crowd. These opening scenes usually set the tone, but the dialogue wasn't always crucial, knowing that it might not be heard clearly.

continued on the next page

Another trick was Shakespeare's use of comic relief. Clown or fool characters often appeared throughout his plays, providing humor even in serious or lengthy dramas. This ensured that even during a three-hour history play there was something for everyone.

...so what does this mean for audiences today?

Audiences today can learn from Elizabethan spectators about how to enjoy a Shakespeare play. Here are a few tips:

- **Don't worry if you miss some words at the beginning!** The first scene often sets the mood but doesn't usually contain vital information. It's normal to need a few minutes to adjust to the language, much like getting used to someone speaking with a heavy accent. The actors are trained to help you understand, so give yourself time to catch on.
- **Feel free to express your enjoyment during the performance.** Laugh at the clowns, clap for the heroes, gasp at plot twists, and applaud the actors at the end. This keeps you engaged and shows the performers that you're with them.
- Remember, unlike in a movie, **the actors can see and hear you!** Even though modern theatre lighting dims the audience, the actors are often very close, especially if you're in the front rows. Keep conversations to a minimum, silence your phones, and avoid distractions like bright screens.
- Lastly, **theatre is for everyone.** In Shakespeare's day, it was an affordable form of entertainment that appealed to all kinds of people. Whether you've seen hundreds of plays or none, whether you're rich or poor, young or old, Shakespeare's work has something for you. His plays contain jokes, banter, speeches, and battles—truly something for everyone. That's part of what makes them still relevant and entertaining today.



An image from the reconstructed Globe in London.

engage, respect, enjoy

welcome back to the theatre!

Welcome! Union Arts Center is thrilled to have you here! Here are some helpful tips to get you reacquainted with our theatre and theatre-going in general:

listen

Pay attention to the talented actors sharing their story with you today—they're excited for you to hear it! Also, listen to instructions from our staff. **We're here to ensure everyone has a great experience**, and sometimes we'll guide you on seating or movement to help things run smoothly.

participate

You're part of the experience! Laugh, applaud, and listen closely to make the show even better for everyone. Remember, respect is key. **Playwright Dominique Morrisseau reminds us, "This is live theater, and the actors need you to engage with them, not distract or thwart their performance."**

care

The actors can see and hear you, so **be the kind of audience member you'd enjoy sitting with.** Before you leave, check around to make sure you haven't left anything behind.

bathrooms

Toilets are located down the ramp on the second floor. If you need to use them during the show, **please exit mindfully to avoid disrupting the performance.**

phones

Keep them in your backpack or pocket, preferably on airplane mode. Share your experience after the show, and **enjoy the performance distraction-free.** Reminder that no photos or videos are allowed during the performance.

aisles

For your safety, and the safety of our team, keep all aisles clear of bags and personal belongings.

thank you for being here with us! enjoy the show!

These questions are designed to help students think about some of the big ideas behind the play before watching it.

Several characters in the play try to control who others are allowed to love, whether through laws or magic. Why do you think people feel the need to control others' relationships? Where do you see similar pressures or expectations in your own life?

Shakespeare shows both harmony and conflict between the natural world and human behavior. What responsibility do humans have toward the natural world? How do you see the consequences of imbalance or neglect playing out today?

The forest allows characters to behave in ways they never would in the city. Why do you think people act differently when they believe there are no rules or consequences? Where do you see similar behavior in the modern world?

Love in the play is often influenced by outside forces. To what extent do you think people choose who they love, and to what extent are they shaped by circumstances? How has that balance changed (or stayed the same) in modern society?



Lily Davis (Helena) and Luka Cruz (Demetrius)
Photo by Giao Nguyen

How do imagination and fantasy help people understand real emotions or experiences?



Photo by Giao Nguyen

The following questions are designed to guide a class discussion after seeing the play.

There are many possible answers, and student responses will vary. There is no wrong answer, as long as students support their opinions with examples from the play. Some possible responses are provided as a reference.

Which character changed the most over the course of the play? What moments or experiences contributed to that change?

- I think Demetrius changes the most because he's the only one left enchanted, so his disdain for Helena is permanently, magically, altered.
- I think Titania changes the most because she learns how to be a good partner to Oberon.
- I think Egeus changes the most because he changes his mind and decides to support his daughter and allow her to marry whom she wishes.

continued on the next page

Which relationship in the play felt the most balanced by the end? Which still felt unequal or unresolved? What moments led you to that conclusion?

- Hermia and Lysander felt the most balanced because they consistently chose each other, even when magic interfered. Their reunion at the end felt earned. Titania and Oberon still felt unequal because Oberon never really apologizes.
- Helena and Demetrius felt unresolved because Demetrius is still under the spell at the end. Even though they end up together, it's unclear if his love is truly his choice.

Bottom's experience with the fairies is both ridiculous and profound. What do you think Shakespeare is saying about imagination, performance, or self-importance through Bottom's story?

- Bottom takes himself very seriously as an actor, even when he looks ridiculous. I think Shakespeare is showing how imagination can make ordinary people feel important, but also how self-importance can blind someone to reality.
- Bottom's transformation is funny, but it also puts him in a world where imagination is real. His confidence lets him survive something that would scare other characters, which suggests imagination can be a kind of power.



Did the ending of the play feel satisfying to you? Why or why not? What evidence from the final scenes supports your opinion?

- The ending felt satisfying because the chaos settles, and the couples are allowed to marry who they love. The final scene shows harmony restored.
- The ending didn't fully work for me because serious conflicts are resolved very quickly. Egeus's control over Hermia disappears without much explanation, which made the resolution feel rushed.

In this activity, we'll explore some of the key themes of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, like love and the pressures of authority, through a game of "Cross the Line." The game is a way for you to reflect on your own experiences while connecting them to the struggles faced by the characters in the play. By stepping across the line, you'll show how similar situations might feel in your own life and how they might mirror the events in *Midsummer*. There's no talking allowed, so just focus on the statements and think about how they apply to you.

instructions

- 1. Set up the Space:** Move all the desks to the sides of the room to create an open space. Arrange the students into two rows, facing each other, leaving 7-10 feet between the rows. Make sure everyone understands that there's an imaginary line down the center, between the two rows.
- 2. Explain the Game:** This is a game to be played without talking. The goal is to observe and react to the statements you'll be making.
- 3. Introduce the "Cross the Line" Prompt:** The instructor will read a series of phrases beginning with, "Cross the line if..." (statements listed below). Students should step across the imaginary line if the statement applies to them.

cross the line if...

- 1... you've ever been told to do something you didn't agree with.
- 2... you've ever liked someone you weren't supposed to like.
- 3... you've had friends who fought with each other.
- 4... you've had a sudden change of heart, either for a person, or a cause.
- 5... you've felt unsupported by the adults in your life.
- 6... you've gotten into a situation that seemed like it had no way out.

reflection: After the activity, ask the students to share any surprising moments they had during the game. Encourage them to reflect on how the statements might relate to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, especially in terms of the characters' struggles and conflicts.

Imagine the characters from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are scrolling through social media—what would they post? Would they vent about family drama or throw some poetic shade? In this activity, you'll craft status updates from a character's point of view. Whether it's a passionate declaration or a cryptic thought, this is your chance to give your character a modern social media makeover.

Complete the timeline below with some moments from the play. Feel free to post as one character, or multiple. Don't forget to give them a username and a profile picture! We've got one post already on the feed to get you started!

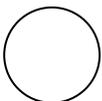
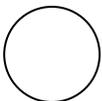
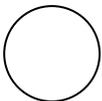
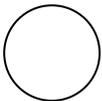
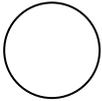
Discover

Feeds ✨



Demetrius 🙌 @demetriusss_

Helena keeps calling me cruel, but I have been nothing but direct. There is a difference. 🙄💬😞 #HonestyMatters #ITryBut #NiceGuysFinishLast



Can you find the following *Midsummer*-themed words in the word search below? For an extra challenge, set a timer and see how long it takes!

Answers on page 34

H	O	F	W	M	P	U	C	K	R	D	S
N	X	L	M	N	C	L	O	E	M	A	R
O	M	O	R	T	A	L	S	A	E	D	W
W	J	W	X	F	A	P	O	A	C	I	A
P	E	E	P	H	E	T	R	W	H	P	N
L	P	R	E	E	E	T	H	E	A	U	B
A	U	R	L	L	H	R	C	D	N	C	A
Y	W	S	S	E	A	W	M	D	I	Y	K
T	R	R	E	N	H	A	P	I	C	C	A
T	P	Y	R	A	M	U	S	N	A	I	S
L	F	C	C	E	M	L	E	G	L	R	N
P	L	U	B	D	F	F	E	E	S	I	T

Hermia

Cupid

Wedding

Sleep

Helena

Pyramus

Flower

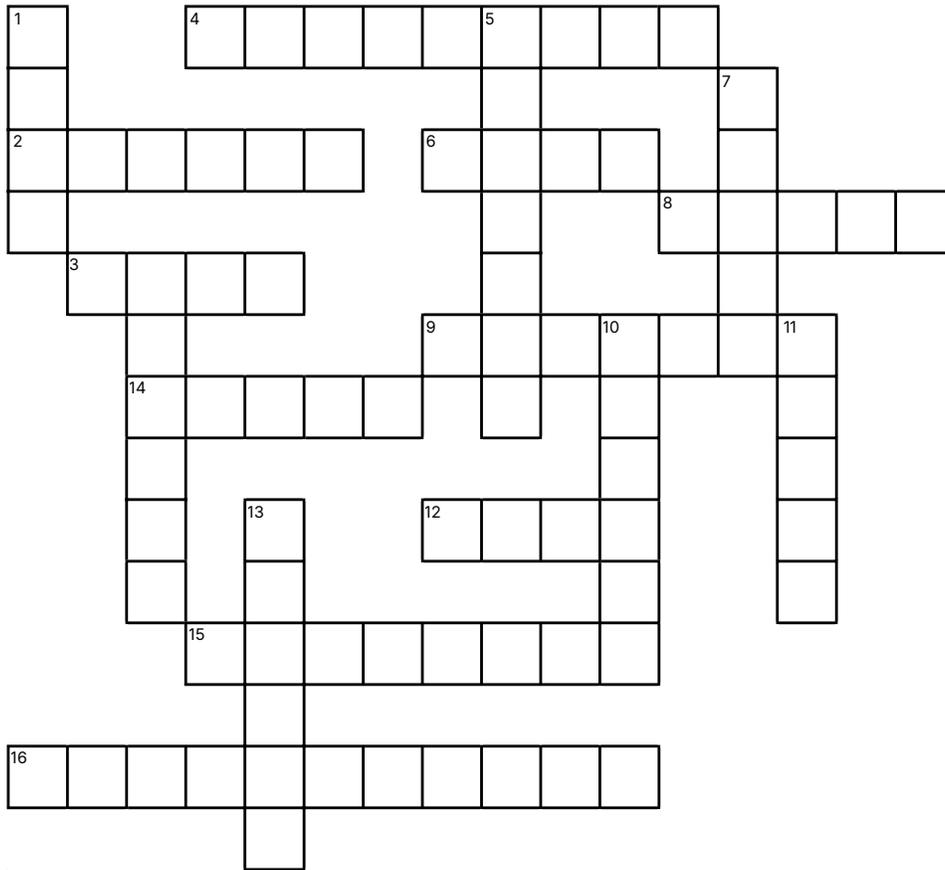
Puck

Mortals

Mechanicals

Earth

Play

**across**

2. The name of Shakespeare's son (who died in 1596)
3. Living prop played by Snout.
4. Shakespeare's hometown.
6. The "fearsome" creature in *Pyramus and Thisbe*, whose presence in the story solicits the use of a prologue.
8. "I'll put a girdle round _____ the Earth in forty minutes." (Puck, Act 2, Scene 1)
9. As is typical in a Shakespearean comedy, Act 5 heavily features a _____.
12. The name of Titania's mischievous servant (or Oberon's, depending on the production).
14. "Give me your _____, if we be friends, / And Robin shall restore amends." (Puck, Act 5, Scene 1)

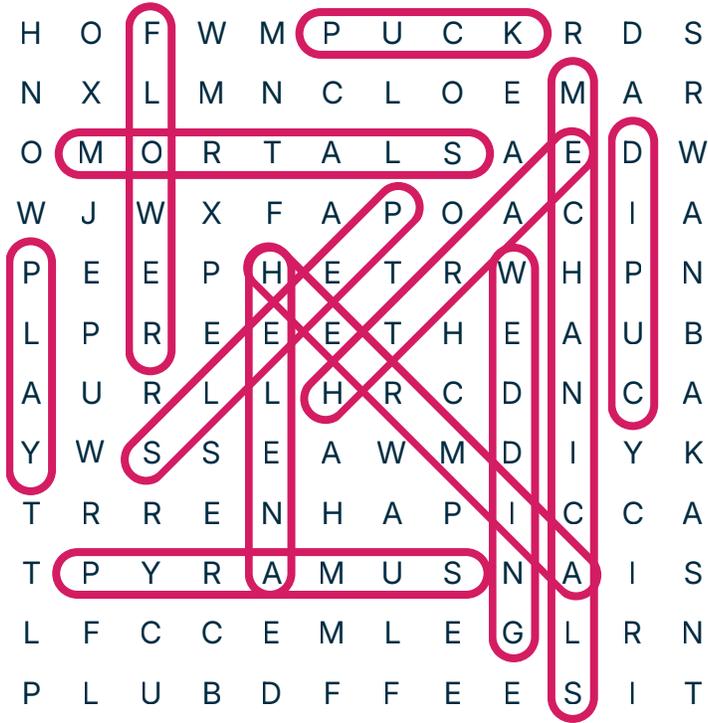
15. The last name of Shakespeare's wife.
16. Theseus's master of revels.

down

1. The first name of William Shakespeare's father.
5. The forest is filled with this type of magical creature (plural). Hint: Oberon and Titania are considered to be some of them.
7. Puck's nickname.
10. Bottom's head is magically turned into that of this barnyard animal.
11. In 1599, Lord Chamberlain's Men were successful enough to build their own venue—the _____ Theatre.
13. Speaking of *Midsummer...* Summer, Winter, Spring, and Fall. Each one is a _____.

Answers on page 34

word search



crossword

across

2. Hamnet
3. Wall
4. Stratford
6. Lion
8. Around
9. Wedding
12. Puck
14. Hands
15. Hathaway
16. Philostrate

down

1. John
5. Fairies
7. Robin
10. Donkey
11. Globe
13. Season

wordplay

- 1.A 2.E 3.D 4.B 5.C



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engagement programs,
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