



presents a
*Teacher & Parent
Guide to . . .*



William Shakespeare's
MIDSUMMER
Night's
dream



Skip rehearsing as Puck. Actors need to work in rehearsal costumes when wearing long skirts or capes to get used to how those feel. After all, the clothes we wear today are very different from the clothes worn in Shakespeare's time. Notice that Skip is wearing a rehearsal cape to help him develop his character's movement.

ABOUT OUR PLAY

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM is one of William Shakespeare's best known and best loved plays. Pollyanna's special production of this classic is designed to be a young person's introduction to the beauty of Shakespeare's language and characters. Our production is 50 minutes in length and focuses on only two of the play's original storylines: The world of Titania and Oberon, the Fairy Queen and King, and the world of the Rude Mechanicals, a group of simple tradespersons who are rehearsing for a play. Our production weaves these two stories together and introduces the Shakespearian practice of revealing several different subplots together in one play, something that Shakespeare did in his dramas and comedies.

400 Years of History — The children attending the play may be fascinated to know that the characters and dialogue they are going to see at A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM have been entertaining audiences of all ages for over 400 years! This play was first published in 1600 in a Quarto edition, probably from Shakespeare's manuscript. It was written and performed several years earlier — about 1595 — and may well have been commissioned for performance at an important wedding. William Shakespeare was 31 years old when MIDSUMMER reached publication. He had been writing plays and directing them — as well as performing in them! — for over ten years when he wrote MIDSUMMER.



William Shakespeare
1564- 1616

THE STORY OF OUR PLAY

Before our story begins, Titania (Queen of the Fairy World) and Oberon (King of the Fairy World) have been arguing. Titania's good friend, a mortal woman who has been her constant companion, has died giving birth to a baby boy. Oberon is very jealous of all the attention Titania gives this youngster. In order to win her affections and devotion back, Oberon has asked Titania to let him raise the child himself and bring up the baby to be a knight of his order. But because Titania refuses to part with the little boy, the Fairy World is at war. And the effect of their battle over this young child has a huge effect upon the Earth! Because the couple is not getting along, the air has gotten foggy, the tides of the oceans are rising and falling at new times, and even the seasons are not changing in the right order!

At the same time, a powerful Duke of the region has announced that he is going to get married. As was the usual custom, the local citizens have



gathered to create musical entertainment and short plays that can be performed to provide the Duke and his new Bride with a pleasant way to spend their wedding day. A group of friends, simple village workers, have gathered in the woods outside of the town to rehearse the brief play that they hope to perform at the upcoming wedding celebration. And it is in the woods that the two storylines of our production collide.

It will help young people who are coming to see our production to have this basic understanding about what has taken place before the play begins. This basic introduction to the play's plots and characters will prepare even the youngest audience members for the comedy that is going to unfold at the theatre.

ABOUT SEEING A PLAY



We urge you to take this opportunity to tell your students about the very special event that they will attend: A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM by William

Shakespeare. Tell the young audience members that this production is a live theatre event and is not like watching television, or a DVD, or going to see a movie. While this difference may seem very obvious to adults, remember that many young people have never been taken to see a play before. This may be some young audience members' first experience at the theatre. Please do not assume that someone has taught them how to sit and watch a live performing arts event. The youngest of our audience members need to be coached on how to best enjoy their audience experience and older youth can always benefit from a reminder.

Begin by asking the students who might know the difference between seeing a live play and watching a DVD or a video. Some of their answers might be that a video or DVD can be stopped and started when the audience wishes. It can be rewound if they miss part of it, the actors cannot hear the audience in a DVD, but the audience can hear the actors, etc. Stress to the students that a live event is very different from those experience that they are familiar with at home.

Explain to the students that when theatre is doing a good job, it makes you think. And as soon as you form a thought, your first instinct is often to turn to your friend next to you and to start to talk. But audiences at a play cannot talk while the play is going on because nothing can be rewound! And the company members of Pollyanna Theatre do not want them to miss a single word or movement.

Stress to the students that audience etiquette calls for them to remain in their seats during the performance, not to talk while the play is in progress, and to closely watch the actors who are presenting the play. You can also tell them that applause is a very appropriate way for the students to show their appreciation at the end of the play. And because Shakespeare's play is a comedy, the company members at Pollyanna Theatre encourage them to laugh when laughter is appropriate. After all, that is the tradition of Shakespeare's audience members from the very first time this play was performed, over 400 years ago.

With a little coaching, you can have a big impact on how much young people enjoy and understand this production.



Jason rehearsing as Oberon, the Fairy King. Notice that Jason is also wearing a cape as he rehearses.

BEFORE GOING TO THE THEATRE

Iambic Pentameter: Shakespeare's Favorite Form of Poetry

Poets organize their words, thoughts, and images into "meter." As most poetry is created to be read aloud, the poet is concerned with how the words sound as well as how the words look when organized on the page. "Meter" refers to how the words are organized into a speech rhythm or pattern of verbal "stress". Poetry is organized by the division of each line of verse into units of meter called "feet" which consists of a stress patterns selected by the poet to form an arrangement of strong and weak stresses.

We use "stress" in our language every day in our ordinary speaking with friends and family. Each of the words we say in a sentence and each syllable inside each word has a varying degree of emphasis placed upon it. This emphasis (or "stress") helps us give meaning to our words. But poets take great pains to

select and order their words to achieve specific stress patterns.

The stress pattern used most by Shakespeare is called IAMBIC PENTAMETER. In this form of poetry, each line of the writing has ten syllables and the stress or emphasis is always placed on every other syllable starting with the second syllable. In this type of poetry, there are five “feet” or meters (a two-syllable pair) and the stress is always placed upon the second syllable found in each pair. The word “iambic” means that the stress is always on the second syllable.

IAMBIC PENTAMETER

One way to understand iambic pentameter is to write the syllables that are not stressed (not emphasized) in lower case letters and syllables that are stressed (emphasized) in capital letters, like this:

ba BOOM

Placing a line after each emphasized syllable divides the line into feet, like this:

ba BOOM / ba BOOM / ba BOOM / ba BOOM / ba BOOM

Here is one of Shakespeare's most famous lines marked in iambic pentameter:

to BE / or NOT / to BE / that IS / the QUESTION

Look at these lines from A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM:

Sweet MOON / i THANK / thee FOR / thy SUN / ny BEAMS
i THANK / thee MOON / for SHIN / ing NOW / so BRIGHT

While all good poets break their “meter” or pattern periodically to give their writing variety, the majority of A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM is written in this pattern of iambic pentameter. This shows how much thought and time Shakespeare took in the selection of every word of his play. Show your students a speech from MIDSUMMER written in iambic pentameter and show them the rhythm of the language that they are about to here at the theatre.

PRE-SHOW DISCUSSION

Your students will gain greater enjoyment of their trip to the theatre to see A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM if you take a few minutes and not only share the plot/story of the play with them, but also discuss a few of the play's themes. This helps them look for meaning in the words and images they will hear and see.

One of these main thoughts or ideas or themes found in the play is that “Love is Blind.” Discuss with the students what this term means and how they might have experienced this in their own lives.

Another theme in the play is that of jealousy and the outcomes of jealous behavior.

Jealousy in the play leads to another of Shakespeare's favorite themes: Mistaken identity. Many of Shakespeare's plays have mistaken identities as a major plot point.

Challenge students to look for examples of these three themes when they see the play.

ABOUT THE FOLLOWING SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

Pollyanna's production of A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM will be enjoyed by students as young as 5 and as old as 15. This timeless story and the group of characters in this play make it the perfect introduction to Shakespeare's language regardless of the exact grade level of the audience. This means that creating grade-level appropriate classroom activities for this printed guide is a bit of a challenge. But, because the Language Arts curriculum is a spiral curriculum, basic skills learned in lower grades are revisited and enriched each school year. Likewise, an activity written for a higher grade level can easily be adjusted down the basic learning spiral for younger students who are addressing those basic skills found in the lesson for the first time. We encourage teachers of all grade levels to use these basic lessons as a starting point to adapt activities for your classroom that meet the exact grade level requirements for your students.

The following activities are based upon TEKS for grades 3 and 5, but can easily be adapted for students of all grade levels.

Our goal is to provide students with opportunities to practice good grammar and improve student use of English Language in both writing and speaking.



Vocabulary Building Activity:

Learning Objectives Taken from TEKS for Grade 3

5) Reading/word identification. The student uses a variety of word identification strategies. The student is expected to:

(D) use root words and other structural cues such as prefixes, suffixes, and derivational endings to recognize words (3);

(E) use knowledge of word order (syntax) and context to support word identification and confirm word meaning (1-3);

8) Reading/vocabulary development. The student develops an extensive vocabulary. The student is expected to:

(C) use resources and references such as beginners' dictionaries, glossaries, available technology, and context to build word meanings and to confirm pronunciations of words (2-3)

- Beg – “I do but beg a little changeling boy to be my henchman.”
- Hither – “My gentle Puck, come hither!”
- Dote – “Will make or man or woman madly dote upon the next live creature that it sees.”
- Vile – “Wake when some vile thing is near.”
- Prologue and Bellows – “Therefore, a prologue must tell that I am not a lion and tell them plainly I am Flute the Bellows Mender.”

Language Arts TEKS for Grade 5

(15) Writing/purposes. The student writes for a variety of audiences and purposes, and in a variety of forms. The student is expected to:

(B) write to influence such as to persuade, argue, and request (4-8)

VOCABULARY BUILDING



Begin by reminding the students that when they are reading something new that there are always ways to detect an unfamiliar word's meaning by looking for clues given by other words in the sentence or surrounding sentences. Give the students the following words and their usages from A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM and ask them to write down

what they think those words might mean. Urge them to base their definitions on what they might know of the word's root as well as the context of the word.

You can easily adjust this activity by looking through the text of the play and finding words and their usages to provide your students with either more challenging words or with simpler concepts.

- Heed – “Take heed the queen come not within his sight!”
- Wanderer – “Mislead night wanderers, laughing at their harm.”
- Jest – “I jest to Oberon and make him smile.”
- Entreat and Con – “I am to entreat you, request you, and desire you to con them by tomorrow night.”

POST-PRODUCTION ACTIVITY

MY FAVORITE CHARACTER AND WHY



After seeing Pollyanna's production of A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM, ask the students to think about the various characters they saw and how the actors used their voices and movements to portray each one. Review the character names. Discuss how the costume designer chose to dress each one and how those costumes may or may not have been what the students were expecting to see.

Ask the students to decide which one character was their favorite. Ask them to think about why this one character seemed most outstanding to them. Challenge them to articulate what they liked about the character beyond simply stating that they were “funny” or “pretty.” Challenge the students to be specific.

Ask the students to write a brief essay or paragraph about their favorite character as if they were trying to get all of their friends to agree with them. Ask them to use their paragraph or essay as a way to persuade other audience member that

their favorite character was by far the very best in the production.

Ask the students to begin their essay or paragraph by completing the following sentence, "In A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM, my favorite character was _____." Then challenge them to write three different reasons why this is true. Perhaps it was something the character said or did. Perhaps it was something about how the character moved or how the actor used their voice to give the character a very particular voice. Perhaps it was something about how this character was costumed and how the actor moved in the costume. After giving several possible reasons to the students to get them started, give them time to write their persuasive answer.

When the students are finished with their writing they can share their persuasive writing with the rest of the class. Older students can be asked to write a paragraph for each of their three reasons while younger students can be asked to simply list their reasons in writing.

ONLINE Resources

Many online resources that can help you teach your students about Shakespeare are readily available. Many of these sites can provide older students with ways to do independent online research using the internet to help prepare them to see the play or to further research the play after seeing the production. A few of these internet resources are:

www.wikipedia.com

www.online-literature.com/Shakespeare/midsummer

www.Shakespeare.mit.edu/midsummer/full
(where you can find a full copy of the text of the play)

www.enotes.com

POLLYANNA THEATRE: A PARTNERSHIP FOR LEARNING

In order to create our play, many people must work together as a team. Although you may only see six actors in A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM, many THEATRE ARTISTS must work together to make the play a success. These include a PRODUCTION DESIGNER who makes the props, set, and costumes, as well as a PLAYWRIGHT who writes the story and dialogue. This production also uses a SOUND DESIGNER and LIGHTING DESIGNER. A DIRECTOR works with all the DESIGNERS and the PLAYWRIGHT to decide how the ACTORS characterize the people and objects in the play. And finally, an ACTOR brings the play to life. All of these THEATRE ARTISTS work closely together to make sure that the play's messages about love and jealousy are clear as well as fun to experience!

This study guide contains some photos of the team as they rehearsed the play and worked to prepare it for the performance.

We would love to hear from you! Use the back of this guide and drop us a line.
Our email address is judy@pollytheatre.org. Our website is www.pollytheatre.org.

OUR SPONSORS



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The
Trull Foundation

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DEAR POLLYANNA

SINCERELY, _____
[your name]

Use to space below for your email address if you'd like updates about Pollyanna Theatre Co. productions.

If you'd rather email us, our email address is judy@pollytheatre.org. Our website is www.pollytheatre.org.