

# Year 7 English - 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' by William Shakespeare



**1**  
Plot Overview

Egeus asks Duke Theseus to uphold an old law that says he can choose his daughter's husband. He chooses Demetrius to marry Hermia.

Lysander and Hermia decide to run away together through the woods so that Hermia does not have to marry Demetrius. Hermia tells Helena their plan and Helena tells Demetrius.

The mechanicals, including a weaver called Nick Bottom, meet in the woods to rehearse a play to celebrate the wedding of Duke Theseus to Hippolyta.

In the woods, Oberon and Titania have an argument about a changeling boy that Oberon wants for himself but Titania refuses to give up.

Oberon decides to get his revenge on Titania. He sends his servant Puck to find a flower which has the power to make someone fall in love with the first living thing they see when they wake up.

**2**

## Characters

<b>Titania:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Independent</li> <li>Magical</li> <li>Powerful</li> <li>Strong-willed</li> </ul>	<b>Oberon:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wilful</li> <li>Demanding</li> <li>Manipulative</li> <li>Magical</li> </ul>	<b>Puck (Robin Goodfellow):</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Faithful</li> <li>Mischievous</li> <li>Magical</li> <li>Unreliable</li> </ul>	<b>Nick Bottom:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Self-important</li> <li>Funny</li> <li>Incompetent</li> <li>Confident</li> </ul>
<b>Hermia:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strong-willed</li> <li>Resentful</li> <li>Disobedient</li> <li>Loyal</li> </ul>	<b>Lysander:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Determined</li> <li>Loyal</li> <li>Courtly</li> <li>Eloquent</li> </ul>	<b>Helena:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wilful</li> <li>Demanding</li> <li>Manipulative</li> <li>Magical</li> </ul>	<b>Demetrius:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Cruel</li> <li>Thoughtless</li> <li>Erratic</li> <li>Argumentative</li> </ul>

**3**

## The Purpose and Function of Dramatic Irony

**What is Dramatic Irony:**  
Dramatic Irony is where one of the characters reveals information to us that they do not tell other characters. This means that sometimes we are able to see things coming before the characters can. Essentially the characters are kept in the dark creating tension for the audience as we can guess what is about to happen, but remain powerless to do anything about it.

**Why writers use Dramatic Irony:**  
Dramatic irony is a structural tool used in both drama and fiction texts to add to the sense of tragedy or humour. For an audience (or reader) dramatic irony adds to the emotional appeal, but it can also lead to a series of humorous misunderstandings. It can make readers feel as though they are in a privileged position of knowledge or understanding compared to the characters.

**Where can we see Dramatic Irony in A Midsummer Night's Dream?**  
In a *Misummer Night's Dream* Puck uses magic to transform Bottom's head into the 'head of an ass'. This joke played on Bottom is dramatic irony because he does not KNOW that he has the head of an ass...which makes his lines: "I see their knavery. This is to make an ass of me, to / fright me, if they could" (3.1.16) ...even funnier. There are several cleverly written lines which build the humour at Bottom's expense.

**4**

## Useful 'translations' from Shakespearean to modern English:

- thee and thou = you
- thy = your
- ('thee', 'thou' and 'thy' were more informal versions of 'you' in Shakespearean times. Characters are more likely to use 'you' and 'your' when they are being respectful or polite, e.g., when speaking to someone with a higher status than them.)
- afear'd = afraid / scared
- art = are
- chide = scold, rebuke, reprove
- false = treacherous, traitorous, perfidious
- forsooth = in truth, certainly, truly, indeed
- gentle = well-born, honourable, noble
- hath = has
- morn = morning / dawn
- o'er = over
- oft = often
- thy = your
- vex'd = angry
- wherefore = why
- tarry = wait

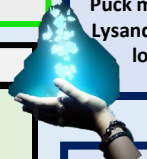


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## KEY QUOTES EXPLAINED

'When thou wakest, it is thy dear:  
Wake when some vile thing is near.'

These lines describe the way the love potion will affect Titania. Whatever she sees when she wakes up will be her "dear": the thing she loves the most. And thus Oberon hopes that what she spies will be "vile," causing her to fall in love with some revolting being. By rhyming "dear" with "near," Shakespeare draws attention to the way that Titania's love will be founded on the closest living thing rather than any real romantic sentiment. Indeed, the rhyme is important to note here, for it presents these lines as rich and echoing rather than sinister and dark-there is no evil intent. This serves only to highlight Puck's mischievous sense of fun.



Theseus finds the lovers in the forest and blesses their marriages. The mechanicals then perform their play for Theseus at his wedding to Hippolyta.

Oberon and Puck use more magic and love potion to reconcile the lovers and remove the donkey's head from Bottom. Oberon then reunites with Titania.

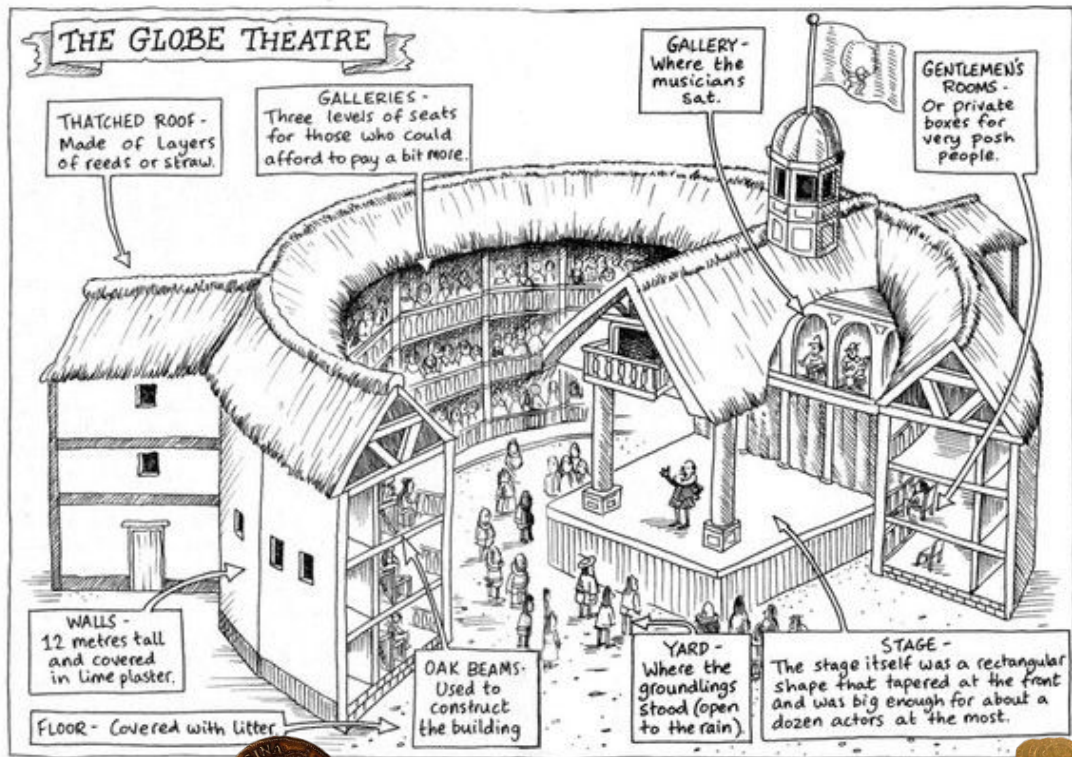
Puck tries to fix his mistake with Lysander and puts some potion in Demetrius' eyes as well. Demetrius then also falls in love with Helena which causes more confusion between the four lovers.

Demetrius chases Hermia into the woods and is followed by Helena. Oberon sees Demetrius and Helena arguing and decides to help her by using the potion on Demetrius. Unfortunately, Puck mistakenly gives it to Lysander who then falls in love with Helena

Puck uses magic to turn Bottom's head into a donkey's head, while he is rehearsing in the forest. Titania sees Bottom when she wakes up and she falls in love with him.



## 7 Themes



**DREAMS:** After their surreal night of magic and mayhem in the forest, both the lovers and Bottom describe what happened to them as a "dream." They use the word "dream" to describe their experiences, because they wouldn't otherwise be able to understand the bizarre and irrational things that they remember happening to them in the forest. The play seems to be suggesting that dreams and imagination are as useful as reason and can sometimes create truths that transcend reason's limits.



**LOVE:** *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a play about love. All of its action—from the escapades of Lysander, Demetrius, Hermia, and Helena in the forest, to the argument between Oberon and Titania—are motivated by love. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* invites the audience to laugh at the way the passion of love can make people blind, foolish, inconstant, and desperate. At various times, the power and passion of love threatens to destroy friendships, turn people against each other, and through the argument between Oberon and Titania throws nature itself into turmoil.

## 4



### Shakespeare's audience and Theatre.



Shakespeare's plays were enjoyed by people from all walks of life, from the royalty and the very wealthy right through to the servants, porters and carters. The Globe often had up to 3000 people in the audience at any one time. Theatres had to compete for audiences with other forms of entertainment such as, cock-fighting and bear-baiting. Many of the performances covered topics which would be of interest to people at the time, such as: foreign travel, magic and witchcraft, religion and regicide. Plays would often include humour, violence, special effects and music to keep audiences interested. The open air theatres would charge 1d (equivalent to 1 penny). For the cheapest ticket, you would get a place amongst the 'groundlings' standing in the yard directly before the stage. For 2d you would be able to have a seat on one of the benches in the lower galleries surrounding the yard. For 3d more you would get a cushioned seat. The most expensive seats with the best viewing would be in the 'Lord's Room' which would be a private box up in the gallery. You could buy food and drink during the performance from the vendors. The floors were often covered with ash or sand and there were no toilets. Visitors often complained that (due to poor hygiene and lack of sanitation in Shakespeare's time) it was often very smelly in the 'groundlings' area in front of the stage. Unlike today, people did not watch the performance in a quiet and respectful way, instead audiences would clap, cheer, boo the villains. Pickpockets often roamed amongst the theatre-goers stealing from them whilst they were distracted by the performance.



**MAGIC AND FAIRIES:** In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Shakespeare has created a fantastical world of fairies and magic. And this world is not just a pretty backdrop for the events of the play. The fairies and their magic are the engine of the plot: Oberon's love juice sets the plot in motion, Puck's mistakes applying the juice and his mischievous transformation of Bottom's head into an ass's head complicates it, and Puck's tricks and illusions to keep the mortals while he fixes his love juice errors bring everything to a resolution. And in the face of this magic, mortal dilemmas such as the laws of Athens fall away.