

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

By William Shakespeare Directed by David Daniel

AMERICAN PLAYERS THEATRE STUDY GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to APT's Study Guide, created to accompany the Student Matinee performances of William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Use it however you see fit - before or after the performance, whatever is most valuable to your visit.

We hope you enjoy APT's production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Find more information on the play and APT's education resources at americanplayers.org.

Find more information on the play and APT's education resources online at <u>americanplayers.org</u>.

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CHARACTER GUIDE

A list of actors and accompanying photos to help your class follow the plot and introduce them to the characters in the play. Fairies, fools and more.



Theseus played by Marcus Truschinski

Theseus is the Duke of Athens and is about to marry Hippolyta, the Queen of the Amazons, when the play begins. He defends Egeus and agrees that Hermia should marry Demetrius.



Hippolyta played by Melisa Pereyra

Hippolyta is the Queen of the Amazons and is getting ready to marry Duke Theseus in a few days when the play begins. She also advises Hermia to think through her options before deciding who to marry.



Philostrate played by **Tim Gittings** (Center)

He is a royal assistant to the court of Duke Theseus and Queen Hippolyta.



Egeus played by David Alan Anderson

Egeus is Hermia's father. He's very strict and wants Hermia to marry Demetrius, not Lysander.



Hermia played by Samantha Newcomb

Hermia is Egeus' daughter. She is in love with Lysander, even though her father prefers she marry Demetrius. Her best friend is Helena.



Lysander played by Xavier Edward King

Lysander is a young man in love with Hermia. He and Hermia run away to the Forest of Arden to be together at the beginning of the play.



Demetrius played by Josh Krause

Demetrius is the suitor that Hermia's father likes best. Hermia's best friend, Helena, is in love with him, but Demetrius does not reciprocate her feelings at the start of the play.



Helena played by Maggie Cramer

Helena is in love with Demetrius, even though he tries to discourage her and is engaged to her best friend, Hermia.



P. Quince played by Sun Mee Chomet

P. Quince is a carpenter from Athens involved in the production of "Pyramus and Thisbe." She acts out the prologue in the play and suggests the cast rehearse in the woods at night to keep their play a surprise.



Nick Bottom played by Sam Luis Massaro

Nick Bottom is a weaver by trade and a very enthusiastic member of the group, directing his fellow cast members while performing the part of Pyramus. When they rehearse in the woods, he ends up interacting with the fairy world after a surprising transformation.



Francis Flute played by James Ridge

Francis Flute is a bellows mender and plays the part of Thisbe in the mechanicals' production. He originally doesn't want to play Thisbe because he has a beard.



Robin Starveling played by Colin Covert

Starveling is a tailor and plays the role of Moonshine in the play.



Tom Snout played by Nate Burger

Snout works as a tinker during the day and plays the part of "The Wall" in the play.



Snug played by Molly Martinez-Collins

Snug is a joiner and is playing the part of "Lion" in the play.



Oberon played by Jim DeVita

Oberon is the king of the fairies and is jealous of Titania, his queen. He and Titania fight and upset the kingdom's natural order. He decides to play a trick on her using his magical powers.



Titania played by Elizabeth Ledo

Titania is the queen of the fairy realm and argues with Oberon over an adopted, changeling child. She eventually is put under a magical spell and falls in love with a transformed Bottom.



Puck played by Casey Hoekstra and Joshua M. Castille

Puck is a fairy trickster known by many names that serves King Oberon. He addresses the audience directly and often plays pranks on other people in the play.

SYNOPSIS

A description of the play, from start to finish.



In the kingdom of Athens, Duke Theseus is preparing for his upcoming wedding to Queen Hippolyta. Egeus, a noble Athenian citizen, visits Theseus in search of his royal help. Egeus demands that Hermia, his daughter, marry Demetrius, his favorite suitor. Hermia refuses Demetrius as she is in love with another suitor named Lysander.

Theseus and Hippoloyta agree with Egeus, and tell Hermia she can either marry Demetrius or never marry at all. Under Athenian law, disobedience of this decree could result in Hermia's execution.





Hermia and Lysander decide to run away from Athens in order to stay together. Before they flee to the forest, Hermia shares the news with Helena, her best friend. Helena wishes Hermia and Lysander luck with their plans to escape and envies their love. Helena, who is in love with Demetrius, decides to tell Demetrius of Hermia's plans in order to turn his affection to her instead. She runs away to go find him and tattle about the impending elopement.





Elsewhere in Athens, a troupe of amateur actors make plans to rehearse a play for the Duke and Queen's upcoming wedding. They plan to act out the ancient story of "Pyramus and Thisbe." The parts are assigned to the performers, and they all make a plan to rehearse later in the forest outside of Athens.

Oberon and Titania, the royal couple of the fairy realm, have been fighting, causing chaos in their kingdom. Titania has adopted a son of one of her followers. Oberon wants this young boy to be his assistant, but Titania will not part with him.





Puck (in our production, represented by two performers) is a fairy who works for Oberon. Oberon informs Puck that he wants to play a trick on Titania, placing her under a love spell to distract her from the boy. Puck goes out to find a magical flower in the forest to help with the spell.

In the same forest, Helena is chasing Demetrius, who is trying to find Hermia and Lysander. Helena showers Demetrius with her affection, but Demetrius tells her to get lost.





Oberon, who has observed this entire scene, takes pity on Helena, and instructs Puck to use the same magical love flower on "the Athenian man," meaning Demetrius.

Titania falls alseep and Oberon drops magic flower dew to her eyes, putting her under a love spell.





Lysander and Hermia, who have fled to the forest, are lost. Exhausted, they stop to rest nearby. Puck sees this and, mistakenly taking Lysander to be the Athenian man Oberon was referring to, puts the flower drops in his eyes.



Demetrius and Helena arrive nearby. Demetrius leaves Helena, who stumbles upon Lysander. When Lysander wakes up, he immediately sees Helena and falls in love with her.

Helena thinks Lysander's professions of love are cruel jokes and leaves him behind. Lysander abandons the sleeping Hermia to chase after Helena. When Hermia wakes up from a bad dream, she realizes she is all alone and goes in search of Lysander.





The troupe of amateur actors, also known as the "rude mechanicals," are rehearsing their play in the forest. Puck observes their rehearsal and magically transforms one of the actors, Bottom, into a beast with the head of a donkey. The rest of the mechanicals flee in terror!

Bottom, now left all alone, sings to himself, waking up the nearby Titania. When she sees the transformed Bottom, she magically falls in love with him and immediately takes him away to her personal chambers.





Puck tells Oberon that he's successfully completed his tasks, but when Demetrius enters in search of Hermia, Puck discovers that he's placed the wrong Athenian man under the love spell. A distraught Demetrius stops to rest. While he sleeps, Oberon anoints his eyes with the love potion.

Helena appears, still being wooed by Lysander. Demetrius wakes up, sees Helena and falls in love with her too. Helena doesn't believe either of the men and scolds them both for mocking her.



Just then, Hermia appears after searching all over the forest for Lysander. While she is thrilled to find Lysander, he insults her, explaining he is now only in love with Helena.

Hermia is shocked and believes her best friend Helena has turned both Lysander and Demetrius against her. Helena believes the Hermia is using the two men to play a trick on her. The two friends prepare to fight.





Lysander and Demetrius, both crazed with love for Helena, prepare to duel in order to win her love. Everyone fights.

Oberon instructs Puck to stop this quarrel. Puck deceives the lovers by impersonating one another and leading them all over the forest to tire out.





When Hermia, Helena, Lysander and Demetrius all fall asleep, Puck lifts the spell off of Lysander, restoring order to the couples.

Titania and her fairies are doting on Bottom, pampering him with whatever he requests.

After laughing at this scene, Oberon instructs Puck to remove the spells from Titania and Bottom.





Titania, no longer under the spell, reunites with Oberon, restoring peace to their fairy kingdom.

Duke Theseus, Queen Hippolyta and Egeus enter the woods, ready to celebrate May Day when they discover the four lovers asleep.





Lysander and Hermia explain how they escaped Athens to be together. When Egeus learns this, he asks Duke Theseus to punish them. Just then, Demetrius explains that he is now in love with Helena. Theseus and Hippolyta decide that the happy couples should all stay together and grants them their approval to marry.

While the lovers and royalty return to Athens, Bottom, no longer half-donkey, wakes up from what he believes to be an extremely odd dream.





The mechanicals attempt to rehearse, but realize they can't perform without Bottom, who they regretfully abandoned in the forest. Just then, Bottom - back in human form - appears and shares the news that their play has been selected for a performance at the royal court that evening.

That evening at the palace, the mechanicals present the story of "Pyramus and Thisbe" to everyone in attendance. The play is comically bad and so ridiculous that the audience enjoy laughing at it.





When it is time for bed, Titania and Oberon enter and bless the three couples - Theseus and Hippolyta, Lysander and Hermia, and Demetrius and Helena - with good luck.

Puck talks to us in the audience and asks us to think of the play we've just experienced to be a dream and wishes the audience a good night.



ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

By Lindsay Welliver, Assistant Director of A Midsummer Night's Dream



Welcome!

If there is one play that captures the American Players Theatre experience, it's A Midsummer Night's Dream." This is the first thing I remember director David Daniel saying to me when I signed on to assistant direct this production about a year ago. It's hard to deny: Midsummer was the first play produced at APT in 1980, and the magical woodsy setting Up the Hill is absolutely perfect for the play's setting of a fairyland forest outside Athens. But a closer look at the story reveals even more deeply how fitting this play is for APT.

In the play, several characters leave the big city of Athens behind and go into the woods, fleeing their restrictive lives in search of something: freedom, love, inspiration, excitement, a new life. They enter a dreamland where magic and chaos reign, are changed by their time in the forest in wildly unexpected ways, and then return to their lives in the city... the same, but also different. They bring back some of the magic of the forest within them. Similarly, you theatre-goers journey from your regular lives to the woods of Spring Green. You come away from the normal rules, stories, and characters of your everyday lives. You wind your way through the trees, up the hill, to your seat... and you are transported into the dream with us. You experience the magic and the mayhem along with the characters, and then you leave... a little changed. The same, but a little different. You bring back within you a piece of the woods, some of that same magic.

That magic is not accidental. Hundreds of hands, brains, and hearts went into the creation of A Midsummer Night's Dream—much more than the cast of 25 amazing actors you will see onstage. I'm so pleased to share with you a little peek into the big, magical world you are about to join. And remember: please keep your arms and legs inside the ride at all times!



"Joy's the Goal... Love's the Theme"

At its very heart, *Midsummer* is a play about love, in all of its many forms... and frustrations. The play even begins with an impending wedding: Theseus, ruler of Athens, and Hippolyta, his warrior bride, are to be married in just a few days. A nobleman named Egeus comes to them with a problem about a different wedding: his daughter, Hermia, is refusing to marry Egeus' choice of husband, Demetrius. Hermia and Lysander are deeply in love, and Hermia chooses Lysander over her daughterly duty to her father. Demetrius dutifully woos Hermia, but we wonder: does he really love her? He was, after all, previously engaged to Helena, who is still hopelessly in love with him. Under threat of death, Hermia and Lysander run away to the forest. They are pursued by Demetrius, who is pursued by Helena. Oh what a tangled web to begin our play!

In the woods these lovers unwittingly find themselves in the middle of a marital feud between yet another couple: Oberon and Titania, the fairy king and queen. The rift between the two is borne out of love and jealousy - Oberon's jealousy of Titania's beloved **changeling child***, who is getting all of her attention and love. That jealousy leads Oberon to cast a spell on Titania that makes her fall in love with a donkey (more on that later...)

Meanwhile, a group of Athenian "mechanicals*" (trade workers) have met each other in the woods to rehearse a play, which they hope to perform at Theseus and Hippolyta's wedding celebration. We watch gleefully as these amateur actors work and rehearse together, and in the process find love in their shared friendship, camaraderie, and found family.

*Changeling Child: In European folklore, a changeling child is a fairy child secretly swapped for a human baby. The human child is taken to the fairy realm to live with the fairies.

*Mechanicals: In the play, Puck refers to the play-makers as "rude mechanicals". This term relates to their status as skilled manual laborers-people who work a craft with their hands. "Rude" in this context is another word for "rough"-it doesn't mean the mechanical characters lack manners!

From there, these three worlds – lovers, fairies, and mechanicals – collide in the woods in unexpected ways, and mayhem ensues (mostly thanks to the mischievous sprite Puck). A case of mistaken identity with an errant love spell ends in Helena going from being wooed by no one to being wooed by both Lysander and Demetrius at the same time. One of the mechanicals, Nick Bottom, is transformed into that same donkey that Titania falls in love with. Love causes all of these characters, mortals and fairies alike, to behave in all sorts of foolish ways. In the end, though, as Puck tells us: "Jack shall have Jill, naught shall go ill... and all shall be well."

"No more yielding but a dream..."

In this production of A Midsummer Night's Dream, director David Daniel aimed to create a storybook world. Even more than that, he envisioned a pop-up storybook: one where the set, the sound, the costumes, and the characters, would reach out into the audience.

The **set design by Nate Stuber** supports that pop-up book feeling with three enormous set pieces that spin, shift, swirl, and interlock, creating a dynamic jungle gym for the actors to play on. The pieces transport us from the city to fairyland and back again. A grand staircase in the palace of Duke Theseus becomes a spinning promontory for Oberon's entrance (and for Puck to climb around on.) The impressive "skate park" set piece is all curves, ledges, and pointy bits that evoke a forest that is both magical and a little dangerous. Finally, Titania's **bower***, a rolling, angled disc covered in lush pillows doubles for the theatre troupe's stage in the final act. These set pieces also help reveal character differences. You'll see them navigated easily by the fairy characters, while at the same time causing all kinds of obstacles for our poor clumsy mortals! See if you can spot how actors use their bodies on the set to tell us more about who they are.

You'll notice that the moving set pieces mostly blend into the natural wood of the stage. This simplicity helps other elements like costumes and props truly POP on the stage. Your eyes are drawn to the beautiful fabrics and textures of the **costumes designed by Daniele Tyler**Mathews. This is where the real storybook feel comes in for me. The lovers and royals in their dashing long white coats and satin white dresses, the mechanicals in warm colors and natural fabrics. Oberon, Titania, and Puck's fanciful costumes are vibrant in color and incorporate elements of the nature around them. The fairy chorus, dressed in gray with shocks of white, almost become the forest itself as they infiltrate every corner of the woods and transform it right in front of your eyes. Also: keep an eye out for how the lovers' white costumes slowly but surely collect pieces of the forest as the play goes on, showing us how the woods are working their way into their lives and transforming them (for better or for worse!)

^{*}Bower: A bower is a place that is closed in or overarched with branches of trees, shrubs, or other plants. In *Midsummer*, a bower refers to Titania's preferred place to take a cozy nap in the woods!



You can't really talk about *Midsummer* costumes without talking about... the ass head. In a moment of pure mischief, Puck decides to bewitch one of the mechanicals (Nick Bottom) and make him look as though he has a donkey's head. Initially, we had hoped we could use the original mask from the first production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at APT in 1980. However, being more than 40 years old, both the condition and the technology of the head were deemed unworkable – it would be too hot and would probably fall apart before the end of the summer. Instead, **APT Crafts Supervisor Becky Hanson** created a brand new donkey head from scratch, based on the original head. She used updated materials and technology that make it comfortable and secure for actor Sam Massaro to wear and also help you to hear him clearly, even with his mouth obscured. It's a truly impressive costume piece – if you look carefully, you'll even see that the donkey's eyes can close!

The nature-filled **sound design by Sartje Pickett** also plays a big role in creating the world of our *Midsummer*, placing the audience right in the wilderness alongside the characters. It can be difficult sometimes to figure out if that birdsong you hear is part of the play or actually happening in the woods around you! In Titania's famous "forgeries of jealousy speech" she explains how the natural world, the weather specifically, is all out of order because of Oberon and Titania's dispute. It's the middle of summer, but storms are raging like it's winter, and the poor humans can't figure out what time of year it is! The sound helps tell the story of that disordered world from the first moments of the play. Audiences have definitely reached for their raincoats at the ominous sound of thunder at the top of the show. Keep your ears open for how characters react to the sounds of the nature, and how nature responds back to the actions of the characters.



"How now, mad spirit?"

The fairy world of our *Midsummer* has an unusual take on the character of Puck by having the role, normally played by one actor, played by TWO: one Deaf (Joshua M. Castille) and one hearing (Casey Hoekstra). They move through the world of *Midsummer* as one entity with almost a shared brain, and use a unique language that combines spoken English, sign language, and physical gestures to create what we call "The Weave". The work of creating Puck began all the way back in spring 2024, when Director David Daniel, Josh, and Casey spent an entire week playing with the text and figuring out if this wild concept could become a reality. Since I have a strong background in both Shakespeare and sign language, one of my biggest roles during the rehearsal process was working with Josh and Casey (as well as our wonderful team of ASL interpreters) to develop Puck's weaving in the scenes. We spent hours and hours together in "Puckland" exploring how all of the elements of speech, sign, and gesture could interact and help support telling the story.

We also had an incredible asset to that work in the form of **Rosie Ward, our voice and text coach.** A voice and text coach works closely with the actors and directors to make sure audiences can hear and understand every word and every thought of the performance. They also make sure actors use healthy vocal practices that ensure they can get through an entire summer without losing or damaging their voices. Rosie spent significant time with each and every actor you will see in this production, but in Puckland she brought an invaluable perspective that helped us ensure our unconventional approach to the text was still clear and vibrant for both the eyes and ears of the audience.

As you watch, see if you can find elements of the weave with Puck and the rest of the fairy world. What does the "physicalization" of the spoken lines do for your understanding of the play? What images and feelings does this gestural element bring up for you?

"Give us your hands if we be friends..."

We hope you enjoy your time in the woods, and come away a little changed by dreaming with us here. The magic and love we've woven together on this stage is a joy to share with you.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES ACTIVITIES TO GET YOUR CLASS CHATTING



Creative Writing Assignments

- Write an alternative ending to the play. What might happen to Lysander and Hermia if they didn't get lost on their way to elope? Would Demetrius and Helena end up together in the end? Would Oberon and Titania?
- **Build a character diary**. Write a letter or note from the perspective of your character to another character in the play. What would they write about? How would they write about it?
- Update the story. If you were adapting A Midsummer Night's Dream for 2025, what
 would you change and what would you keep? Would you represent the relationships
 between the characters differently today than in 1600? Why?

Video and Audio Assignments

- Make your own playlist. Go through the play and add music that reminds you of the
 major plot points to a playlist. What kind of music were you drawn to? What songs
 remind you of which characters?
- Draw a comic of a scene. Put your artistic skills to use! Pick a scene or act from A
 Midsummer Night's Dream and illustrate the action.
- Make a Movie. Get a group of your classmates together and choose a scene to act out
 from the play. Add your own soundtrack, costumes, special effects. OR make a dream
 cast for your movie/production of A Midsummer Night's Dream. Build a pitch deck and
 explain why the cast would work.
- Make a Get Ready with Me from the perspective of one of the characters in A Midsummer Night's Dream. What would they say? How would they get ready?

Learning the Language

- **Dramatize a missing scene** related to the characters and situation in the play. What does Shakespeare decide to show the audience and what does he choose to have us learn through exposition? Wat would happen if he gave a scene to a moment we learn happened off-stage?
- Present a scene from the play in a modern context. Use contemporary settings, words and ideas.
- Present a prepared reading of a speech by a single character, between two characters, or of an entire scene. What do you notice about the words and how they feel from character to character and moment to moment?
- What is lambic Pentameter and why did Shakespeare choose to write in this style for moments of the play? Write a synopsis poem of Midsummer using only lambic Pentameter.
- Shakespeare makes many allusions throughout A Midsummer Night's Dream to heighten his characters' dramatic language. Find an allusion with words you don't recognize and research the phrase's origin and what it means for the character saying it.

Discussion Questions

- 1. When have you, like the lovers, found yourself lost, either literally or emotionally, and did that journey lead to any unexpected clarity, fun, or understanding?
- 2. Do you think love is more magical or more chaotic? How does this play make you feel about love in the forest?
- 3. Have you ever been changed by a dream, a trip, or a wild experience? Did you come back to your "real life" feeling different?
- 4. In the play, people fall in love for strange reasons. What do you think influences who we fall for in real life and how much control do we really have?
- 5. When have you experienced something that felt unreal but taught you something very real?
- 6. If you were directing a version of this play, which character's story would you center and why?
- 7. Do you think the play is about learning to obey society's rules or learning to break them?

FIND MORE DISCUSSION QUESTIONS ON THE VIRTUAL STUDY GUIDE

NEWS & MULTIMEDIA

Videos, Playlists, Interviews and more!



DIRECTOR'S NOTES

Program notes contributed by David Daniel, Director of A Midsummer Night's Dream

Full Circle

Twenty-six years ago, I said my first word on the APT stage: "Relent." And neither I nor APT has relented since then. I was Demetrius in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, with Jim Ridge as Puck, Tracy Michelle Arnold as Titania and the grand leading man himself, Jonathan Smoots, as Oberon.

Jonathan spoke the first word ever uttered at APT: "Now." Today, we get to say them again, in the year of his passing. This very bittersweet symmetry reminds me that theater, like life, moves in cycles of remembrance and renewal.

APT, like *Midsummer*, like any great story, allows us to step out of our routines—our jobs, our habits, our normal lives—and taste some midsummer magic and madness under the stars. Shakespeare's characters come to the woods and are transformed by what they find there. We too are transformed when we come out to our little theater in the woods—and when we return to our jobs, our habits, our lives, a little bit of that magic stays with us. I know that the magic (and madness) that was Jonathan Smoots will stay with me forever—his wisdom, his generosity, his passion for this sacred space of storytelling.

As you watch our production tonight, nestled in this beautiful rural Wisconsin landscape, I hope you feel what I felt when I first performed here—wonder, possibility, and connection to something timeless. These woods have witnessed countless transformations by artists and audiences alike. I hope that a little bit of our magic, our madness, stays with you after you leave tonight. I hope you get to see the world anew, to love more deeply and to carry a spark of enchantment back into your everyday life.

Now. Welcome to the woods. Welcome to the dream.

SEASON SELECT: A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

An APT blog series for more info about current productions

fast facts on A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM **Playing:** Hill Theatre | June 7 - October 5

Featuring: Nate Burger, Joshua M Castille, Maggie Cramer, Jim DeVita, Tim Gittings, Casey Hoekstra, Josh Krause, Elizabeth Ledo, Sam Luis Massaro, Samantha Newcomb, James Ridge, Marcus Truschinski

Genre: Shakespeare Comedy

Last Seen at APT: 2017

Go If you Liked: Much Ado About Nothing (2024), Romeo & Juliet (2023), The Liar (2023)

If our small slice of the woods had a soulmate play, it would be A Midsummer Night's Dream. And though we truthfully adore all the stories we share on our stages, there's a sort of magic to Midsummer that has enchanted us and this beautiful setting for 46 years and counting.

A Midsummer Night's Dream holds the special distinction of being the very first production staged at the brand-new American Players Theatre in 1980. Since then, more than 11 productions and tours of the play have been brought to life by APT's own merry bunch of mechanicals, making it the most produced play in our theatrical repertoire (followed by *The Comedy of Errors* at 10 productions). For many, Midsummer has acted as an introduction to the world of Shakespeare's work, and (to a much more humble extent) APT. Just check out the audience responses we collected this summer. It's a play that holds a special place in the hearts of many who have journeyed up the Hill over the last four decades.

FIND THIS POST ON THE APT WEBSITE AS PART OF OUR SEASON SELECT SERIES!

VIDEO AND MORE!

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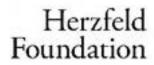




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STUDY GUIDE CREDITS

ABOUT THE PRODUCTION BY LINDSAY WELLIVER
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS PROVIDED BY DAVID DANIEL
STUDY GUIDE BY ERIN MILLEVILLE
PHOTOS BY MICHAEL BROSILOW

