

William Shakespeare's  
**A Midsummer Night's Dream**

*An Abridged Version of the Play Adapted for  
 Readers' Theater or Classroom Performance*

This version of William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* generally uses the original language, with a few words changed and a few lines moved. It has been shortened to make it practical for production in elementary or middle schools. It can also be enjoyed as a readers' theater or classroom performance.

Most of the stage directions [*the notes in brackets, like this*] are not Shakespeare's but have been written for this condensed version of the play. Some of these notes offer suggestions for staging a performance or for the actors' interpretation of dialogue.

This script adds three Speakers to Shakespeare's cast of characters. They serve to guide the audience through the play, to summarize the parts of the action that have been cut or condensed, and occasionally to clarify and comment on the action.

The script is printed on the left-hand pages, with some words underlined. You will find definitions of these underlined words on the right-hand pages.



TITANIA AND HER FAIRIES WITH THE TRANSFORMED BOTTOM



### A Note on Poetry and Prose

As you read through the script, you will notice that Shakespeare wrote some lines as poetry and some as prose. What's the difference?

Prose is everyday language. It is the language we usually speak and write. In Shakespeare's plays, everyday characters—such as the group of workmen in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*—speak in prose. For example, Nick Bottom, a weaver, speaks in prose to his friend, Peter Quince:

First, good Peter Quince, say what the play is about, then read the names of the actors.

Except for the group of workmen in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the other characters speak in poetry. These characters are noble people, such as kings and queens, or people of high social position, or special characters like the inhabitants of the land of fairies. For example, a fairy called Puck speaks in poetry to another fairy:

The king doth keep his revels here tonight.  
Take heed the queen come not within his sight!

Notice that each new line of poetry begins with a capital letter. As you read the lines of poetry aloud, you will feel a rhythm in them—often, it's a regular beat, like this: da DUM / da DUM / da DUM / da DUM / da DUM. In speaking the lines, you should not emphasize the beats—that would make the lines sound "sing-songy." Instead, just feel the rhythm and speak the words naturally.

Puck's two lines rhyme: *tonight/sight*. Sometimes Shakespeare's poetry rhymes, and sometimes it doesn't. For example, here a young woman named Hermia speaks to Duke Theseus:

And I beseech your grace that I may know  
The worst that may befall me in this case,  
If I refuse to wed Demetrius.

Those lines are poetry, even though they don't rhyme. And, even though there is a break between the first two lines, there is no comma or other punctuation mark. So, in speaking these lines, you would not pause between them. Instead, you would just keep going, like this: . . . that I may know the worst that may befall me in this case . . ."

Whether the lines are prose or poetry, just speak them naturally—that's the key.

## CHARACTERS IN THE PLAY

### *At the Duke's court*

**THESEUS** (/thee·see·us/), duke of Athens

**HIPPLOYTA** (/hɪp·pɒl·ih·tuh/), queen of the Amazons,  
about to be wedded to Theseus

**EGEUS** (/ee·gee·us/), father to Hermia

**PHILOSTRATE** (/fill·oh·straet/), a courtier in service of Theseus

### *The four young lovers*

**HERMIA** (/her·mee·uh/), daughter of Egeus, in love  
with Lysander

**HELENA\*** (/hel·en·uh/), in love with Demetrius

**LYSANDER** (/lie·san·der/), in love with Hermia

**DEMETRIUS** (/dih·mee·tree·us/), who wants to marry Hermia

### *The workmen of Athens*

**PETER QUINCE**, a carpenter who directs their play

**NICK BOTTOM**, a weaver who plays Pyramus

**FRANCIS FLUTE**, a bellows-mender who plays Thisbe

**TOM SNOOT**, a tinker who plays the Wall

**SNUG**, a joiner who plays the Lion

**ROBIN STARVELING**, a tailor who plays Moonshine

### *In Fairy Land*

**TITANIA** (/tih·tahn·yuh/), queen of the fairies

**OBERON** (/oh·bur·on/), king of the fairies

**PUCK**, also known as Robin Goodfellow, a mischievous  
hobgoblin in service to Oberon

**PEASEBLOSSOM**, a fairy attending upon Titania

**COBWEB**, a fairy attending upon Titania

**MOTH**, a fairy attending upon Titania

**MUSTARDSEED**, a fairy attending upon Titania

**Amazons:** In Greek mythology, the Amazons were a tribe of women warriors.

**courtier:** an advisor or assistant to a king or queen or other person of royalty

\*In assigning roles, note that in Act 3 Scene 2, Helena is described as taller than Hermia.

**bellows-mender:** one whose job is to repair a bellows, a tool, often made of leather and wood, that blows air when squeezed

**tinker:** one who repairs household items that are made of metal

**joiner:** a kind of carpenter or furniture-maker

**hobgoblin:** a mischievous imp

## ACT 1

### SCENE 1: ATHENS, THE PALACE OF DUKE THESEUS.

[Enter SPEAKERS 1, 2, and 3.]

**SPEAKER 1** [*enthusiastically*]

Ladies and gentlemen, welcome to our play!

**SPEAKER 2**

You'll meet the actors in a minute.

**SPEAKER 3**

We're here to help tell the story—the story of William Shakespeare's . . .

**ALL**

*A Midsummer Night's Dream!*

**SPEAKER 1**

Once upon a time . . .

**SPEAKER 2**

In the city of Athens . . .

**SPEAKER 3**

There was a very strict law.

**SPEAKER 1**

This law said that a daughter must marry the man her father chose for her.

**SPEAKER 2**

And if the daughter refused to marry the man her father had chosen . . .

**SPEAKER 3**

Then she could be put to death!

**SPEAKER 1**

That's terrible!

**SPEAKER 2**

That's wrong!

**SPEAKER 3**

That's crazy!

**SPEAKER 1**

But don't worry—it's not real.

**SPEAKER 2**

It's only make-believe.

**SPEAKER 3**

But it's real in the make-believe world of our play . . .  
if you get what I'm saying.

**SPEAKER 1**

Oh, right, our play! One day, in the city of Athens. . .

**SPEAKER 2**

Duke Theseus was eagerly awaiting his wedding to the warrior queen Hippolyta.

*[Enter THESEUS and HIPPOLYTA, arm in arm.]*

**SPEAKER 3**

The wedding is just a few days away, but for Theseus, time seems to be moving too slowly.

**THESEUS**

Now, fair Hippolyta, our nuptial hour  
Draws on apace. Four happy days bring in  
 Another moon. But, O, methinks how slow  
 This old moon wanes.

**HIPPOLYTA** *[moving away from THESEUS]*

Four days will quickly steep themselves in night;  
 Four nights will quickly dream away the time.

*[He takes her hands. While this is happening, the  
 SPEAKERS comment:]*

**nuptial hour:** the time for a wedding

**draws on apace:** approaches quickly

**methinks:** it seems to me

**wanes:** grows smaller (or appears to)

**steep themselves in:** be absorbed or dissolved into

**SPEAKER 1** [*in the tone used when you see a cute puppy*]  
Awwwww!

**SPEAKER 2**  
That's so sweet!

**SPEAKER 3**  
I love a wedding! [*sniffs, dabs eyes*]

[*Suddenly, EGEUS stomps in, with his daughter, HERMIA, behind him.*]

**EGEUS** [*bowing to THESEUS*]  
Happy be Theseus, our renownèd duke!

**SPEAKER 1**  
Ouch—way to break the mood!

**SPEAKER 2**  
That's old Egeus—and he looks pretty angry.

**SPEAKER 3**  
And his daughter doesn't look too happy either.

**THESEUS** [*annoyed, making an effort to be courteous*]  
Thanks, good Egeus. What's the news with thee?

[*EGEUS signals for DEMETRIUS and LYSANDER, who enter promptly, bow to the duke, and stand aside.*]

**renownèd:** famous, celebrated

**Pronunciation Note:** The grave accent mark indicates that the normally silent vowel is pronounced (to keep the rhythm in the poetic line). So, "renownèd" is spoken as three syllables: re•nown•ed.

**EGEUS**

Full of vexation come I, with complaint  
 Against my child, my daughter Hermia.  
 Stand forth, Demetrius.

*[DEMETRIUS steps forward smugly.]*

My noble lord,

This man hath my consent to marry her.  
 Stand forth, Lysander.

*[Lysander steps forward defiantly.]*

And, my gracious duke,

This man hath bewitched the bosom of my child.  
 Thou, Lysander, hath warped my daughter's heart,  
 Turned her obedience, which is due to me,  
 To stubborn harshness. And, my gracious duke,  
 If my daughter will not here before your grace  
 Consent to marry with Demetrius,  
 I beg the ancient privilege of Athens.  
 As she is mine, I may dispose of her,  
 Which shall be either to this gentleman  
 Or to her death, according to our law!

*[HIPPOLYTA gasps in horror.]*

**THESEUS**

What say you, Hermia?  
 Demetrius is a worthy gentleman.

**vexation:** the state of being worried and annoyed

**hath:** has

**bosom:** heart

**dispose of her:** give her away; deal with her

**HERMIA**

So is Lysander.

I do entreat your grace to pardon me.

And I beseech your grace that I may know

The worst that may befall me in this case,

If I refuse to wed Demetrius.

**THESEUS**

Either to die the death or to give up

Forever the society of men.\*

[HIPPOLYTA, upset, steps away from THESEUS.]

**DEMETRIUS**

Relent, sweet Hermia. And, Lysander, yield.

**LYSANDER**

You have her father's love, Demetrius;

Let me have Hermia's. Do you marry him!\*\*

**EGEUS**

Scornful Lysander!

**LYSANDER**

I am beloved of beautiful Hermia.

[Pointing at DEMETRIUS]

He courted Nedar's daughter, Helena,

And she devoutly dotes upon this man!

**entreat:** ask, plead, beg

**your grace:** a respectful way of referring to a person of royalty, such as Theseus

**beseech:** beg; ask urgently

**befall me:** happen to me

\* Theseus is saying that if Hermia refuses to marry the man her father has chosen, then she must die or live apart from society as a kind of nun.

**relent:** give way, back down, change one's mind

**yield:** give up, admit defeat

\*\* "Do you marry him!" is a command, not a question. Lysander is mocking Demetrius by telling him to marry Egeus.

**scornful:** full of feelings of dislike and disrespect

**courted:** tried to win the affection of (with the intention of marrying)

**devoutly dotes upon:** devotedly shows excessive affection for

*[DEMETRIUS and LYSANDER approach each other threateningly, but are stopped by the Duke's voice.]*

**THESEUS**

Demetrius, come!  
 And come, Egeus. You shall go with me.  
 For you, fair Hermia, look you arm yourself  
 To fit your fancies to your father's will,  
 Or else the law of Athens yields you up  
 To death, or to a vow of single life.  
 Come, my Hippolyta.

*[HIPPOLYTA turns on her heel and exits briskly. THESEUS, flustered, follows her. Behind him follow EGEUS and DEMETRIUS, leaving LYSANDER and HERMIA alone.]*

**LYSANDER**

Ay me!  
 The course of true love never did run smooth.

**HERMIA**

Alas! To choose love by another's eyes!

**LYSANDER** *[excited by a sudden idea]*

Hear me, Hermia.

*[He takes her hand and pulls her aside. They mime\* as the SPEAKERS explain that. . .]*

**arm yourself:** prepare yourself

**fit your fancies:** shape your wishes

**ay** (pronounced "eye"): an expression of sorrow or distress

**alas:** an expression of sadness

\* While the Speakers summarize the action, the actors may silently enact what the Speakers are describing.

**SPEAKER 1**

Lysander has a plan!

**SPEAKER 2**

He tells Hermia that he has an aunt who lives miles away from Athens.

**SPEAKER 3**

He urges her to run away with him to where his aunt lives.

**SPEAKER 1**

Because there, away from the city, the cruel law of Athens does not apply.

**SPEAKER 2**

Which means—they can get married!

**SPEAKER 3**

Lysander tells Hermia to sneak away tomorrow night, and meet him in the wood outside town.

**LYSANDER**

Therefore, hear me, Hermia. If thou lovest me,  
Steal forth thy father's house tomorrow night;  
 And in the wood, a league without the town,  
 Where I did meet thee once with Helena,  
 There will I stay for thee.

**steal forth:** sneak away from

**league:** a distance of a few miles

**stay:** wait

**HERMIA**

My good Lysander!  
I swear to thee, by Cupid's strongest bow,  
Tomorrow truly will I meet with thee.

**LYSANDER**

Keep promise, love. Look, here comes Helena.

*[Enter HELENA. Actors freeze as SPEAKERS explain that. . .]*

**SPEAKER 1**

Helena has been Hermia's best friend since they were little.

**SPEAKER 2**

But now Helena is feeling sad. Because she loves Demetrius. . .

**SPEAKER 3**

But Demetrius doesn't love Helena. He wants to marry Hermia.

**HERMIA**

God speed, fair Helena!

**HELENA**

Call you me "fair"? That fair again unsay.  
Demetrius loves your fair. O happy fair!

**Cupid:** In mythology, Cupid is a god of love who carries a bow and arrows. The arrows fill a person with love for another person.

**God speed:** a greeting expressing good wishes

**unsay:** take back what was said

**HERMIA**

I frown upon him, yet he loves me still.

**HELENA**

O that your frowns would teach my smiles such skill!

**HERMIA**

The more I hate, the more he follows me.

**HELENA**

The more I love, the more he hateth me.

**HERMIA**

Take comfort. He no more shall see my face;  
Lysander and myself will fly this place.

**LYSANDER**

Tomorrow night,  
Through Athens's gates have we devised to steal.

**HERMIA**

And in the wood, where often you and I  
Upon faint primrose beds were wont to lie,  
There my Lysander and myself shall meet.  
Farewell, sweet playfellow. Pray thou for us.  
And good luck grant thee thy Demetrius!

[Exit *HERMIA* and *LYSANDER*.]

**fly:** run away from, flee

**devised to steal:** planned to sneak away

**faint primrose beds:** gently scented beds of pale, yellow flowers

**wont to:** used to, accustomed to

**farewell:** goodbye

**grant thee:** give you

**HELENA**

How happy some o'er other some can be!  
 Through Athens I am thought as fair as she.  
 But what of that? Demetrius thinks not so.  
 Before Demetrius looked on Hermia's eyes,  
 He hailed down oaths that he was only mine.  
 [*She has a sudden idea.*]  
 I will go tell him of fair Hermia's flight!  
 Then to the wood will he tomorrow night.  
 And for this intelligence, I will have thanks!

[*Exit HELENA.*]

**SPEAKER 1**

There goes jealous Helena, rushing to tell Demetrius that Hermia and Lysander are sneaking away to get married.

**SPEAKER 2**

For this, she hopes Demetrius will love her again. Will he? We'll soon find out.

**SPEAKER 3**

But now our scene shifts to a small cottage in Athens, where six workmen have gathered.

[*Enter QUINCE, SNUG, BOTTOM, FLUTE, SNOUT, and STARVELING.*]

**o'er other some:** over (in comparison to) some other person

**hailed down oaths:** made many promises

**flight:** running away

**intelligence:** important information

**SPEAKER 1**

As part of the festivities to celebrate the marriage of the Duke to Hippolyta, these workmen are planning to put on a play.

**SPEAKER 2**

Wait—these guys are *in* our play, but they're also planning to *put on* a play?

**SPEAKER 3**

So—it's a play within a play.

**ALL 3** [*in a tone that says, "Now I get it"*]  
Ohhhhhhh. . .

**SCENE 2: ATHENS, PETER QUINCE'S HOUSE.****QUINCE**

Is all our company here?

**BOTTOM** [*who likes to give advice*]

You were best to call them man by man.

**QUINCE**

Here is the scroll of every man's name thought fit, through all Athens, to play in our interlude before the duke and the duchess, on their wedding day at night.

**scroll:** list

**interlude:** a short play