

NEBRASKA  
SHAKESPEARE

On Tour



# STUDY GUIDE

*“Now the hungry lion roars and  
the wolf howls the moon.”*

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# Letter from the Director of Education

First and foremost, THANK YOU SO MUCH for bringing this production of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to your students this fall. During the past twelve Nebraska Shakespeare touring seasons, I have seen the amazing impact that these touring productions have had on students' lives. I understand how difficult it is to bring an event like ours into your school with schedule and budget constraints, and so again, thank you for supporting this touring program. It is educators like you that continue to make a difference for their students in the world of theatre and education.

The following study guide accompanies our 13<sup>th</sup> annual touring production of ***A Midsummer Night's Dream***. It further explores the text and challenges students to think critically about the show. This production is an abbreviated adaptation of the play and, therefore, this study guide will not address the lines and characters that have been cut for time and clarity. As you peruse the materials, look for the ***A Midsummer Night's Dream*** logo.

This symbol indicates an interactive, fun activity for students to engage with the text and further their understanding of the dramatic literature. Feel free to



adapt any of the exercises to fit your students' experience and comfort level. All activities can be used before or after the production.

Please contact me with any other questions and comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sarah Carlson-Brown".

Sarah Carlson-Brown  
Interim Artistic Director- Nebraska Shakespeare

# Nebraska Shakespeare On Tour

When **Nebraska Shakespeare** puts together it's fall *On Tour* production, we face a couple of challenges. The first is that the performance must be **75 minutes**, to fit easily into a school's schedule. If the complete script of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was to be performed, the play would **last over 3 hours**. So the script for this touring production was trimmed considerably, eliminating side plots, smaller characters, and combining some characters and lines, but all the while keeping the original Shakespeare language intact.

*"I have had a most rare vision. I have had a dream, past the wit of man to say what dream it was..." - Bottom*

*"The course of true love never did run smooth." - Lysandre*

The second challenge faced is that the *On Tour* acting company is made up of eight actors, yet the play calls for 22 named characters, along with fairies, lords, and attendants. That means the audience will get to see some of the actors play more than one character. There will also be cross-gendered casting in this production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Female actors will play the traditionally male characters of Demetrius and Lysander as female characters and male actors will play the traditionally female characters Hermia and Helena as men. This allows us to open up a dialogue about gender restrictions that occurred in Shakespeare's time, while also discussing gender roles in our current society.

**The Production Style: A changeling child. A magical haunt. A dark moon. Transforming love, stolen hearts, and twisted dreams... This is Midsummer.**

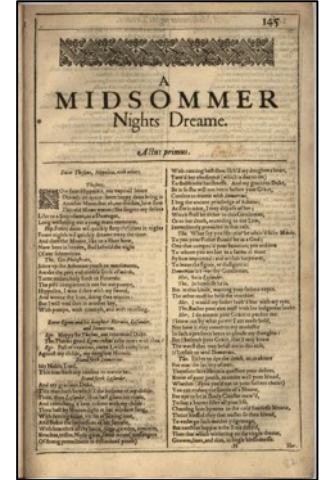
In Athens, a place that thrives in darkness and breeds fear, it is impossible to hold on to love or light. Escape, into a forest of hobgoblins and faeries with upside down magic of their own, is the only chance of liberation. This production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* presents oddities and mischievous lore through which gender-swapped lovers, Lysandre, Demetria, Helenus, and Hermian, must navigate, confronting heartbreak in every shadow to uncover a true love that is precious, delicate, and rare.

## **Gender-switched Lovers.**

Love can be transformative. The pursuit of love can be exhilarating and frustrating. Switching the genders of the four lovers in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* allows us a chance to enjoy and unravel the extremes of these transformative pursuits without being shackled to traditional and/or normative gender roles. We want to explore what the chased and the chaser, the desired and the disregarded feel like in different bodies and with different voices"

# The History of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

*A Midsummer Night's Dream* was written in a highly creative period in Shakespeare's career, when he was discovering his more mature style. Most critics believe the play was written for and performed at an aristocratic wedding, with Queen Elizabeth I in attendance. Scholars estimate the play was written in 1595 or 1596 (when Shakespeare was 31 or 32 years old), at approximately the same time as *Romeo and Juliet* and *Richard II*. Similar to Nebraska Shakespeare's *On Tour* production, very little scenery and minimal props were used in this first production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to allow the action to move swiftly and the audience to focus on the characters and the text.



## Early Productions

*The Merry Conceited Humours of Bottom* was the title of a comic piece taken out from Shakespeare's play and included in Francis Kirkman's *The Wits* in **1673**. The play as a whole did not please the taste of the Restoration theatregoers, most thought the production was the “most ridiculous play” that they had ever seen.

It was in an adapted form that the play found success when, in **1692**, Henry Purcell wrote the music for a spectacular operatic version called *The Fairy Queen*.

David Garrick's own operatic version, *The Fairies* (**1755**), cut all characters except the lovers and the fairies. Fewer than 600 lines from Shakespeare's original remained, but there were an additional 28 songs, some from other plays by Shakespeare and some from other contemporary poets.

Spectacle and music continued to support the success of the play as it appeared on stage in various adaptations. Francis Reynolds, in **1816** at Covent Garden, introduced new music for many of the songs added by Garrick's *The Fairies*. Reynolds also spared no expense in astounding his audiences with lavish pageants of classical figures and a number of other legendary creatures.

More of Shakespeare's text was retained in a successful production in **1840** led by Mme Lucia Vestris. Lucia played the part of Oberon herself and thus began a longstanding custom for a woman to take the role.

Herbert Beerbohm Tree staged a **1911** with outlandish production values, including a dozen live rabbits in the performance.





## Contemporary Productions (theatre and film)

A **1935** film version was directed by Max Reinhardt and William Dieterle. The cast included James Cagney as Bottom, Mickey Rooney as Puck, Olivia de Havilland as Hermia, Joe E. Brown as Francis Flute, Dick Powell as Lysander and Victor Jory as Oberon.



A **1968** film version was directed by Peter Hall. The cast included Paul Rogers as Bottom, Ian Holm as Puck, Diana Rigg as Helena, Helen Mirren as Hermia, Ian Richardson as Oberon, Judi Dench as Titania, and Sebastian Shaw as Quince. This film stars the Royal Shakespeare Company, and is directed by Peter Hall.

In **1970**, Peter Brook staged the play for the Royal Shakespeare Company in a blank white box, in which masculine fairies engaged in circus tricks such as trapeze artistry. Brook also introduced the subsequently popular idea of doubling Theseus/Oberon and Hippolyta/Titania, as if to suggest that the world of the fairies is a mirror version of the world of the mortals. British actors who played various roles in Brook's production included Patrick Stewart, Ben Kingsley, John Kane (Puck) and Frances de la Tour (Helena).

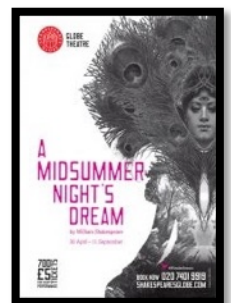
A **1996** adaptation directed by Adrian Noble. The cast included Desmond Barrit as Bottom, Finbar Lynch as Puck, Alex Jennings as Oberon/Theseus, and Lindsay Duncan as Titania/Hippolyta. This film is based on Noble's hugely popular Royal Shakespeare Company production. Its art design is eccentric, featuring a forest of floating light bulbs and a giant umbrella for Titania's bower.



A **1999** film version was written and directed by Michael Hoffman. The cast includes Kevin Kline as Bottom, Rupert Everett as Oberon, Michelle Pfeiffer as Titania, Stanley Tucci as Puck, Sophie Marceau as Hippolyta, Christian Bale as Demetrius, Dominic West as Lysander, and Calista Flockhart as Helena.

In **2015**, LucasFilm produced, *Strange Magic*, which was inspired by *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

In **2016**, the Shakespeare's Globe, carried the play to Indies, with Indian characters. Changing the characters from Athenians to "Hoxton Hipsters" and creating an all-male love triangle between Lysander, Demetrius and Helenus (a male Helena), the play was carried to a more gender fluid era. The last show was broadcast live around the world online.



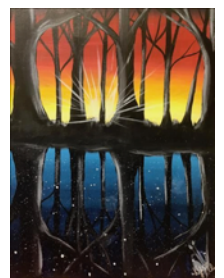
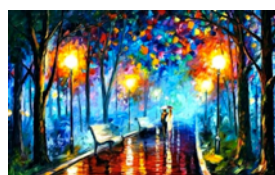
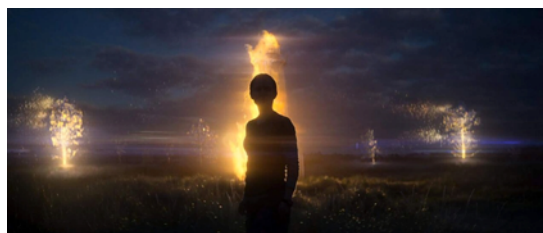
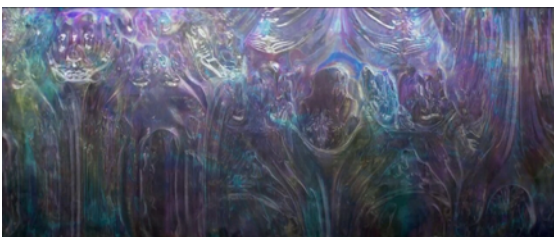
**A MIDSUMMER  
NIGHT'S DREAM**

**A *Midsummer Night's Dream* has been produced numerous times on stage and on film. Mostly these shows have been elaborate and extravagant. Discuss this design trend for *Midsummer* as a class. What are the benefits? Draw-backs? Then break into small groups and brainstorm ideas for small, simple, bare-bones productions. What is really needed for storytelling?**

# *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

## Production Research

The following are just a few of the many images that were researched and studied for our concept of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Images are used to inspire the creation of the set, costumes, and props. Research assists the director in shaping the world of the play. The responsibility of gathering and organizing the research materials for the production team is one of the jobs of a theatre's **dramaturg**. **Dramaturgy** is defined as the art or technique of dramatic composition and theatrical representation. The dramaturg must be well-versed in the text of the play as well as the concept of the director. Some of the images are used for color palette, environment, or practical representation of what is desired for the production.



A MIDSUMMER  
NIGHT'S DREAM

Create and research your own concept for a production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Find research (both textual and visual) to aid in describing and defining your ideas to the design team. Present the concepts to the class, comparing the similarities and differences of each production design.

# *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

## Summary

### IN TEN PLOT POINTS!

1.) Lysandre loves Hermian, and Hermian loves Lysandre. Helenus loves Demetria; Demetria used to love Helenus, but now wants Hermian. Hermian is being forced to marry Demetria. Hermian escapes with Lysandre into the forest.

2.) Oberon and Titania, King and Queen of Fairies, are in a dispute over custody of a child. Titania refuses give in. Oberon instructs Puck to bring him a magic flower that will make a sleeping Titania fall in love with the first creature she sees.

3.) Helenus and Demetria have also fled into the woods following Lysandre and Hermian. Oberon, overhearing Helenus and Demetria quarrel, takes pity upon Helenus and tells Puck to place the love potion on Demetria, so that she will fall in love with Helenus. Puck puts the drops on the eyelids of Lysandre by mistake. Helenus stumbles over Lysandre in the forest. Lysandre now loves Helenus and abandons a sleeping Hermian.

4.) In another part of the forest, a group of labor workers are rehearsing for a production of "Pyramus and Thisbe," to be presented for the Queen. Puck casts a spell on the lead actor, Bottom, making him looking like a donkey. Bottom is the first thing Titania sees when she awakens and she falls in love with him.

5.) Oberon realizes Puck's error with Demetria and Helenus. Oberon himself anoints Demetria so she will fall in love with Helenus. It works!

6.) Abandoned Hermian finds Lysandre. But Lysandre is no longer interested in Hermian. Hermian blames Helenus for joining the women to mock him. The argument gets out of hand.

7.) Oberon instructs Puck to put the lovers to sleep and make things right. Oberon gives Titania the antidote, so she will fall out of love with Bottom. She wakes and realizes the trick he has played on her. She is quite upset, but they ultimately reconcile.

8.) The next morning, Hippolyta and Theseus discover Lysandre, Hermian, Helenus, and Demetria asleep in the forest. Demetria swears her love to Helenus and the three couples depart to be wed.

9.) Bottom wakes. Now without his donkey head he rushes to find his friends. Bottom and his company perform "Pyramus and Thisbe".

10.) Once the play is over. Oberon and Titania perform a fairy blessing and Puck wishes everyone a good night.





# A Midsummer Night's Dream *On Tour* - Actor/Character Breakdown

Eight actors will perform sixteen roles in the play. Listed below are the actor/character pairings. It is challenging for an actor to play multiple roles, and a variety of different costumes, props, character physicalities, and vocal choices are used to assist in the creation of different characters. Actors assist one another with well-choreographed costume changes in between almost every scene. The costume designer has created costumes that are easy to put on and remove; helping the actors with these extremely quick changes.

**Hippolyta:** The Queen. She is not always kind, but she is fair. She respects and enforces the law, but secretly Hippolyta is a romantic and is always rooting for love to prevail.

**Titania:** The Queen of the Fairies. Strong. Powerful. Compassionate. Titania is driven by her heart and she allows for emotions to define her actions. Stubborn. Righteous.



**Sarah Vishnev**



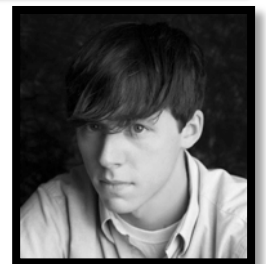
**Katie Becker-Colon**

**Bottom:** A weaver by trade. Has an overwhelming desire to perform. Bottom is confident, bold, and assertive. She loves attention and has a lot of opinions. What she lacks in talent, she makes up for in tenacity.

**Fairy:** A follower and companion of Titania. Whimsical. Powerful. Easy distracted.

**Theseus:** Betrothed to Hippolyta. He has strong principles, but doesn't have the authority to speak them. Very pleased about his upcoming nuptials to the Queen.

**Oberon:** The King of the Fairies. Head-strong. Willful. Vengeful. Does not like to be told no. Truly loves Titania and thoroughly enjoys watching the aftermath of Pucks' mishaps. Ultimately, kind and fair, though these traits are a well-kept secret.



**Josh Ryan**



**Abraham Ntonya**

**Puck:** Oberon's right hand man. A mischievous fairy who loves to play tricks on the humans that wander into his forest. He especially enjoys chaos and disorder.

**Philostrate:** Master of Revels. Works in Hippolyta's court. Takes his job very seriously. People pleaser.

**Helenus:** A gentleman of court. Hopelessly in love with Demetria. Head strong. Passionate. Focused. Will stop at nothing to get what he wants. Relentless and devoted. Also, wounded and heartbroken by Demetria's change of heart.



**Matthew Olsen**

**Flute:** A bellows mender with a big heart and nervous temperament. Not fond of too much attention, but willing to do anything to help his friends.



**Bianca Phipps**

**Lysandra:** A gentlewoman at court. In love with Hermian. Loyal. Faithful. Rebellious. Willing to risk everything for the person she loves. Honest, resourceful, but bit too confident.

**Snug:** A joiner. A bit slow and methodical. Would rather follow than lead. Soft spoken. Lacks confidence.

**Hermian:** A gentleman at court. Loves Lysandre. Rebellious. Fearless. Protective. Defiant in the face of injustice. Full of fury in the face of betrayal.



**Raydell Cordell III**

**Peter Quince:** A carpenter. Leader/Director of the mechanicals. Organized and thorough. Seemingly endless patience, but can be firm when needed. Not a natural storyteller.



**Sarah Brown**

**Demetria:** A gentlewoman at court. Opinionated and curt. Arrogant and rude. Likes control. Scared of being vulnerable. Needs to save face. A bit of a player.

**Starveling:** A tailor. Very detail oriented. A bit of a worrier and a know-it-all. Can always see the problems of a situation, but doesn't offer solutions. Bookworm.



The cast above must play multiple roles throughout the play. Discuss as a class the challenges and opportunities of playing more than one part within a play. Why do you think these roles were paired up? Break into groups and assign *Midsummer* roles with one fewer actor? Then two fewer and so on. How few actors can this play be produced with? What is gained from having small casts and actor doubling?

# Discussion Questions for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

- 1) *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is filled with magic and folklore. Why do you think Shakespeare used this storytelling device for his narrative? How is magic used within the story? Are the characters enhanced by the supernatural elements? Why or why not?
- 2) How do you feel about the relationship between Titania and Oberon? Do you side with one character over the other? What are your thoughts about their reconciliation at the end?
- 3) Take a close look at the lover's fight scene. Pay special attention to all of the violent references in this scene. Why do you think there are so many references to violence in a play about love? Why is violence an easily accessible emotion for these characters?
- 4) This play has three distinct worlds. Why do you think Shakespeare divided this play into three environments instead of just focusing on one? What does it mean when these different worlds connect and overlap?
- 5) This play contains a "play within the play." Think about the play of *Pyramus and Thisbe*. Why do you think that Shakespeare chose this story for the mechanical's production? What parallels can the audience draw between *Pyramus and Thisbe* and *Midsummer*?
- 6) Like most of Shakespeare's comedies, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* has elements of darkness and tragedy. What moments do you feel are the most tragic? How do you feel that affects the overall narrative of the play? Why do you think Shakespeare mixed comedy and tragedy?
- 7) In this touring production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* the lines of Theseus and Hippolyta are swapped. How did that change your understanding of the play? Why do you think the director made that choice? Do you think it altered the story? Why or why not?
- 8) Puck speaks directly to the audience at the end of the play. Shakespeare used this epilogue-device quite often in his plays. Why do you think he did so? How does this affect the end of the story? How do you think it made his audience feel?

# *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

## Vocabulary

Shakespeare invented over 2,500 words, many of which we still use today. His massive vocabulary can make reading his plays a bit difficult at times. But **Early Modern English** is still understandable with a little help. Here are some of the more obscure words in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and their definitions.

**Abide**-put up with something unpleasant

**Abjure**-formally reject a formerly held belief

**Adamant**-very hard native crystalline gem

**Amiable**-diffusing warmth and friendliness

**Amiss**-in a mistaken or unfortunate manner

**Amity**-a state of friendship and cordiality

**Apt**-being of striking pertinence

**Asunder**-into parts or pieces

**Audacious**-invulnerable to fear or intimidation

**Austerity**-refraining from worldly pleasures

**Beguile**-attract; cause to be enamored

**Beseech**-ask for or request earnestly

**Beshrew**-wish harm upon; invoke evil upon

**Concord**-a harmonious state of things

**Confound**-mistake one thing for another

**Derision**-the act of treating with contempt

**Discourse**-talk at length about a topic

**Dissembling**-pretending with intention to deceive

**Dulcet**-extremely pleasant in a gentle way

**Edict**-a formal or authoritative proclamation

**Extenuate**-lessen the seriousness or extent of

**Flout**-laugh at with contempt and derision

**Forswear**-formally reject or disavow

**Harbinger**-indicating the approach of something

**Knavish**-marked by skill in deception

**Languish**-lose vigor, health, or flesh, from grief

**Officious**-intrusive in a meddling manner

**Paragon**-a perfect embodiment of a concept

**Paramour**-a lover, especially a secret or illicit one

**Preposterously**-so as to arouse laughter

**Prodigious**-very impressive

**Provender**-food for domestic livestock

**Quell**-suppress or crush completely

**Rebuke**-censure severely or angrily

**Recreant**-an abject coward

**Solemnity**-a somber and dignified feeling

**Surfeit**-the state of being more than full

**Tawny**-having the color of tanned leather

**Upbraid**-express criticism towards

**Vexation**-anger produced by some irritation

**Visage**-the human face

**Wanton**-a lewd or lascivious person



As a class, study the list above. What do some of these words have in common? Are there patterns or themes that begin to reveal themselves? What can you learn from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* just by studying this list? Can you create a storyboard using these words to recreate the narrative of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*?



# *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

## Notable Quotes:

*"The course of true love never did run smooth."*  
**(Lysandre, Act 1 Scene 1)**

*"Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind,  
And therefore is winged Cupid painted blind."*  
**(Helenus, Act 1 Scene 1)**

*Ill met by moonlight, proud Titania.*  
**(Oberon, Act 2 Scene 1)**

*"I know a bank where the wild thyme blows,  
Where oxlips and the nodding violet grows,  
Quite over-canopied with luscious woodbine,  
With sweet musk-roses and with eglantine:  
There sleeps Titania sometime of the night,  
Lulled in these flowers with dances and delight."*  
**(Oberon, Act 2 Scene 1)**

*"With half that wish the wisher's eyes be  
pressed!"*  
**(Hermian, Act 2 Scene 2)**

*"Bless thee, Bottom! Bless thee! Thou art  
translated."*  
**(Quince, Act 3 Scene 1)**

*"What angel wakes me from my flow'ry bed?"*  
**(Titania, Act 3 Scene 1)**

*"To say the truth, reason and love keep little  
company together nowadays."*  
**(Bottom, Act 3 Scene 1)**

*"Lord, what fools these mortals be."*  
**(Puck, Act 3 Scene 2)**

*O, when she's angry, she is keen and shrewd.  
She was a vixen when she went to school,  
And though she be but little, she is fierce.*  
**(Helenus, Act 3 Scene 2)**

*"Cupid is a knavish lad, Thus to make poor females  
mad".*  
**(Puck, Act 3 Scene 2)**

*"Methought I was enamoured of an ass."*  
**(Titania, Act 4 Scene 1)**

*"I have had a most rare vision. I had a dream, past  
the wit of man to say what dream it was"*  
**(Bottom, Act 4 Scene 1)**

*"Are you sure that we are awake? It seems to me  
that yet we sleep, we dream."*  
**(Demetria, Act 5 Scene 1)**

*"If we offend, it is with our goodwill.  
That you should think we come not to offend,  
But with good will."*  
**(Peter Quince, Act 5 Scene 1)**

*"If we shadows have offended,  
Think but this, and all is mended,  
That you have but slumbered here  
While these visions did appear."*  
**(Puck, Act 5 Scene 1)**

# *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

## Classroom Interactions



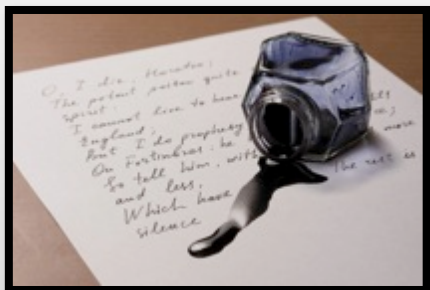
### Character Journal

The characters of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* stumble into a world of magic and mischief. Taking the relationships and actions of the play into account, write some journal entries from the perspective of a character in the play. How would the lovers narrate their journey through the woods? What are the secrets of these characters? How does their writing change if they are affected by magic? Do they always know what they really want?

How do they try to process and understand the chaos around them? How are your journaling choices supported by the text?

### Off-Stage Action

In most plays, there are large amounts of time that characters are not onstage. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is no exception. For time and clarity, Shakespeare could not write every moment for every character in his play. As a class, discuss how you think these characters spend their time “off-stage.” How do Hermian and Lysandre prepare for their trip to the woods? Where does Demetria go when she finally escapes Helenus? What do the mechanicals do after their scare with Bottom as a donkey? In groups, write a scene or monologue for this off-stage action. Read/perform the scenes for the class and discuss what benefits there would be to viewing and hearing these scenes.



### Speaking to the Audience

Shakespeare often uses *direct address*, the device of speaking directly to the audience, in his plays. Shakespeare wanted to include and inform his audience. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, this is done when characters are alone (soliloquies) or when many characters are onstage (asides).

Choose a scene from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and look at the internal struggles and conflicting actions within the scene. Write your own soliloquies and asides for a character in that scene. Your additions should inform the audience of the characters' motivation, frustration, excitement, or confusion in the scene. They should be as if the audience is a best friend or confidant to the character. Perform the scenes with these additions; discuss if the new text helps the audience connect with the character and the story.

# Preparation for Post-Show Discussion



After every performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* On Tour, the cast takes part in a post-show discussion with the audience. The discussion begins with introductions and a guided question from the actors to the audience about the show. Students are then welcomed to ask any questions they had about the show including acting, design, life on tour, the theatre profession, education, etc. Please use the following prompts to help students formulate questions and discussion topics for the conversation.



## Questions about the theater and acting:

Did you go to school to study acting/theatre?

When did you start working in theatre?

Why did you decide to make it your career?

What is some advice for someone interested in this career?

What are the different careers in the theatre?

How did you discover different character choices?

## Questions about touring:

Where do you tour? Locations? Venues?

What is a typical day on the road like?

How does everything (set/costumes) travel with you?

What is the best and worst part of touring a theatrical production?

## Questions about *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the play and this production:

What is your favorite part of this production?

What has been the most challenging part?

How did you create the vocal and physical performance for each character?

What aspect of Shakespeare's text do you find fun? Challenging?

Who designed the set, costumes, and props?

How do they make the decisions of what everything should look like?



**NOTE:** If there are questions that your students have after the company departs, feel free to contact us with any questions. We love to talk about ourselves!! See the **Contact Us** page at the end of the Study Guide.

# LIVE Theatre Etiquette:

Remember, a live theatre performance can be very exciting. All of the people involved in the production, both cast and crew, work very hard to ensure they create a memorable and enjoyable experience. It is the obligation of the audience members to engage with the actors onstage, a responsibility that assists the performers, while at the same time showing respect to the event. This doesn't mean the audience needs to always be still and quiet. Live actors love the responses of an audience. The following is a guideline of "dos and don'ts" to help any audience member be active, respectful, and entertained throughout the show.

- **Turn off your cell phone.** We can still hear "vibrate." Do not speak or text on the phone during the performance. This is distracting to the actors as well as your fellow audience members.
- **Pay attention** to announcements that are made prior to the show about the rules of the theater you are attending and the location of the fire exits.
- **Don't speak during the performance;** whispering is still speaking, so only in an emergency. Remember if you can hear us onstage, we can hear you in the audience.
- **Do not take pictures during the performance.** It can be very distracting to the actors and can cause a mishap. If you'd like to take a picture of the actors or the production in some way, talk to the stage manager or road manager of the show before or after the performance.
- **Remain in your seat for the entire performance.** If you must leave, exit during intermission. In an emergency, wait for an appropriate break in the show. It is rude to get up in the middle of a quiet moment; rude to the actors and your fellow audience members.
- **Do not eat or drink in the theater.**
- If the performance has a "talk-back" discussion after the show, **think critically during the performance** to create some questions or comments to bring to the discussion.
- **Never throw anything** in the theatre, not at a fellow audience member, never and especially not at an actor.
- **Do not put your feet up on the seats** or balcony and do not kick the seat in front of you.
- **Don't touch anyone during the performance.** You can see the actors onstage, and likewise, they can see your actions in the audience.
- **Do laugh when the performance is funny.** When an audience responds positively to created moments onstage, it creates an enjoyable experience for both the actors and the audience.
- **Do applaud** when it is appropriate during the performance. Sometimes applause is given after every scene, but it's not always necessary. Traditionally, the audience is expected to applaud after a song or dance is finished.
- **Do applaud** when the performance is over. This lets the performers and crew know that you appreciate their work.
- **Do not whistle or scream out to the performers after a kiss** or an intimate moment. This is an inappropriate way of engaging the actors.

**OVERALL: Use the golden rule. Treat these actors the way you would like to be treated if you were to find yourself performing before an audience. Simple respect can go a long way.**



# Critical Thinking/Response in Theatre

Shakespeare characters are critical thinkers. They talk aloud. They delve into problems. They discuss different motivations through the text. So in order to truly understand his plays, we need to do a little critical thinking ourselves.

A *Midsummer Night's Dream* is a play about love, loss, and revenge. As you watch Nebraska Shakespeare's performance of this play we ask that you critically think about the play and be prepared to ask questions of the actors after the production. Here are a few hints and strategies to help you focus your thought process and attain thoughtful questions for the post-show discussion.

Think about problem-solving in the play. Where did things go wrong? Is there a different way things could/should have played out? Think beyond the basics questions about plot and story. Ask "why," "how," and "what if" questions when watching the play.

There are different types of questions:

**Application-** requires you to obtain information by asking for solutions to problems in which the student must apply acquired knowledge, fact, techniques, and rules.

**ie: How would you build....? What approach would you have used to...? What would happen if...?**

**Synthesis-** requires you to put information together in a different way to get something new.

**ie: How would you improve...? What changes would you make...?**

**Opinion-** requires you to answer a question with a singular point of view

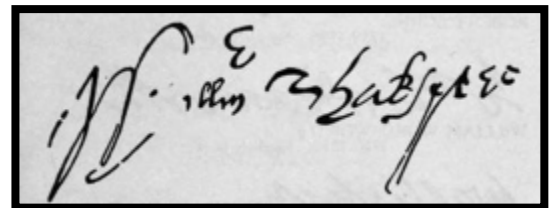
**ie: What was your favorite....? Who did you relate to...?**

- If you had to sketch, map, or write this story down, what would be the main points of focus? Why? Is that where you think your focus should be?
- Do you disagree with a character or part of the show? Why? How would you change it?
- In what way do you think the play was abstract or figurative rather than literal? In what ways could it have been more so?
- Try to describe how you would retell this story in your own words? How does it differ from what you just watched?
- Separate fact from opinion. Look at the facts of the story and not the opinions of the artists. Does that change the story? What are some opinions that you have that differ from the play?
- Compare and contrast: Characters. Plot. Relationships. How are they similar? How do they differ? What strengths and weaknesses do each have and why?
- How did the costumes and set help support the story?

# Who was William Shakespeare?

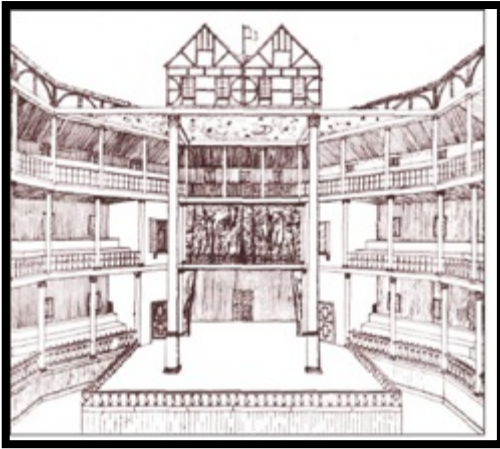
## Shakespeare Timeline

- April 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1564- William Shakespeare was the third child born to John and Mary Shakespeare.
- Shakespeare attended the *King's New Grammar School* and studied mathematics, natural sciences, ethics, and classical language and literature.
- 1582- At the age of 18, William Shakespeare married the 26-year-old Anne Hathaway.
- 1583- First child Susanna is born.
- 1585- Anne had twins, Hamnet and Judith Shakespeare.
- 1586- 1590- Shakespeare moved to London around this time to become a professional playwright. These are considered “the lost years.” Very little is known about Shakespeare’s life at this time.
- 1590- *Henry VI Parts 1, 2, and 3*.
- 1592- First mention of Shakespeare as a playwright, in a theatrical review.
- 1592- *Richard III* and *The Comedy of Errors*.
- 1593- *Titus Andronicus* and *The Taming of the Shrew*. PLAGUE CLOSSES THEATRES.
- 1594- Shakespeare joins the Lord Chamberlain’s men. *Two Gentleman of Verona* and *Love’s Labour’s Lost*.
- 1595- *Richard II* and *A Midsummer Nights Dream*.
- 1596- *King John*, *Edward III* (with Thomas Kyd), and *The Merchant of Venice*. Also, Hamnet dies.
- 1597- *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *Henry IV Part 1*. Sonnets Completed.
- 1598- *Henry IV Part 2* and *As You Like It*.
- 1599- The Globe Theatre opens. *Henry V*, *Julius Caesar*, *Much Ado About Nothing*.
- 1600- *Merry Wives of Windsor* and ***A Midsummer Night’s Dream***. Shakespeare’s father dies.
- 1602- *Twelfth Night* and *Troilus and Cressida*.
- 1603- Elizabeth I dies. James I becomes King. Plague closes London Theatres again. 1 in 5 people dies in London. *All’s Well That Ends Well*, *Othello* and *Measure for Measure*.
- 1604- *King Lear* and *Macbeth*.
- 1606- *Antony and Cleopatra*.
- 1607- *Coriolanus* and *Timon of Athens*.
- 1608- Plague closes London Theatre for the third time. *Pericles*.
- 1609- *Cymbeline*.
- 1610- *The Winter’s Tale*.
- 1611- *The Tempest*.
- 1612- *Henry VIII* and *The Two Noble Kinsman* (with John Fletcher) Shakespeare moves back to Stratford.
- 1616- Shakespeare dies on April 23<sup>rd</sup> in Stratford.
- 1623- First Folio printed.



# Theatre in Shakespeare's Time:

## The Stage



The theatre where audiences watched Shakespeare's company perform many of his plays was called The Globe, situated on the south side of London. It is thought that the stage was several feet above the ground where the people who paid a penny stood, and that it extended into the audience from the backstage wall.

As you can see in the photo above, there was a center section near the back which is somewhat inset from the outer stage; this was called the inner below and was the area of the stage where bedchambers

and intimate scenes with only two people were staged, so that a curtain could be drawn in front of it, while another scene begins on the stage closer to the audience.

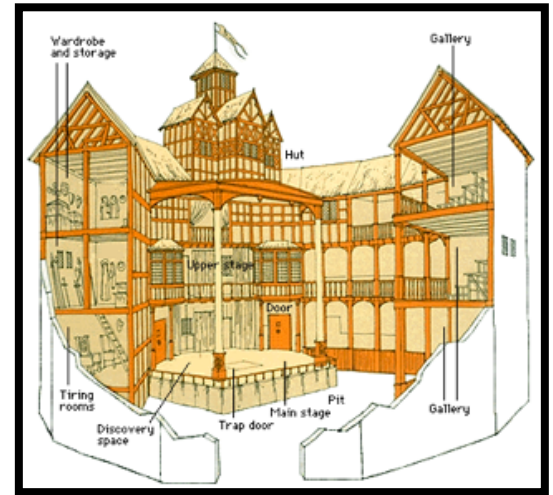
Two columns supported the second story of the inner below, providing a balcony called the outer above. You can see that there was a space behind the balcony where actors can walk, and that was called the inner above. The stage had four possible entrances on the main floor and three entrances on the second floor, so that large groups such as the whole of a King's court could enter and be onstage at the same time.

In the floor of the main stage, there were two trapdoors, where ghosts and apparitions could come from below stage, and which could open to reveal other special effects, like *Macbeth's* witches.

All the main architectural features in the photo were permanent; some plays added various kinds of staircases to get from the first level of the stage to the balcony, and some plays separate the balcony completely from the main floor, so that actors have to go up or down stairs, which are hidden backstage.

What could change were the curtains or doors at the front of the inner below. They could be of several different colors and could be kept open or closed. They could be doors; plain wood, or decorated, or replaced with iron gates. Various kinds of furniture could be brought onto the stage through this entrance.

Before Shakespeare's time and during his boyhood, troupes of actors performed wherever they could: in halls, courts, courtyards, and any other available open spaces. In 1574, however, when Shakespeare was ten years old, the Common Council passed a law requiring plays and theaters in London to be licensed. In 1576, actor and future Lord Chamberlain's Man, James Burbage, built the first permanent theater called simply **The Theatre** outside

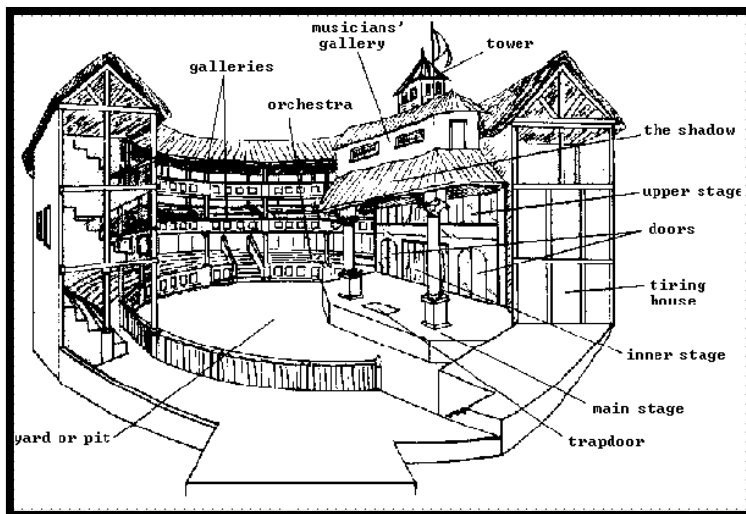


London's city walls. Thereafter, many more theaters sprung up around the city, including **The Globe Theatre** in which most of Shakespeare's plays were premiered.



Most Elizabethan theaters were built after the design of the original Globe. Built of wood, these theaters comprised three tiers of seats in a circular shape, with a stage area on one side of the circle. The audience's seats and part of the stage were roofed, but much of the main stage and the area in front of the stage was open to the elements. About 1,500 audience members could pay an extra fee to sit in the covered seating areas, while about 800 "groundlings" paid less to stand in the open area before the stage. As mentioned above, the stage itself was divided into three levels: a main stage area with doors at the rear and a curtained area in the back for "discovery scenes"; including the inner below. The second area was the upper, canopied area, called "heaven", sometimes used for balcony scenes. The third area was under the stage proper called "hell," accessed by the trap doors in the stage. There were dressing rooms located behind the stage, but no curtain in the front of the stage, which meant that scenes had to flow into each other and "dead bodies" had to be dragged off.

Performances took place during the day, using natural light from the open center of the theater. Since there could be no dramatic lighting and there was very little scenery or props, audiences relied on the actors' lines and stage directions to supply the time of day and year, as well as the weather, location, and mood. Shakespeare's plays convey such information masterfully. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, for example, the audience learns within the first ten lines of dialogue where the scene takes place ("Have you had quiet guard?"), what time of day it is ("Tis now struck twelve"), what the weather is like ("Tis bitter cold"), and what mood the characters are in ("and I am sick at heart").



One important difference between plays written in Shakespeare's time and those written today is that Elizabethan plays were published after their performances and sometimes even after their authors' deaths. The scripts were in many ways a record of what happened on stage during performances, rather than directions for what should happen. Actors were allowed to suggest changes to scenes and dialogue and had much more freedom with their parts than contemporary actors. A scene illustrative of such freedom occurs in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: a



crucial passage revolves around A Midsummer Night's Dream writing his own scene to be added to a play in order to ensnare his murderous uncle.

Shakespeare's plays were published in various forms and with a wide range of accuracy during his time. The discrepancies between versions of his plays from one publication to the next make it difficult for editors to put together authoritative editions of his works. Plays could be published in large anthologies in folio format (the First



Folio of Shakespeare's plays contains 36 plays) or smaller Quartos. Folios were so named because of the way their paper was folded in half to make a large volume. Quartos were smaller, cheaper books containing only one play. Their paper was folded twice, making four pages. In general, the First Folio is considered to be more reliable than the Quartos.

Although Shakespeare's language and classical references seem archaic to many readers today, they were accessible to his contemporary audiences. His viewers came from all classes and his plays appealed to all kinds of sensibilities, from "high-brow" accounts of kings and queens to the "low-brow" blunderings of clowns and servants. Even utterly tragic plays like *King Lear* or *Macbeth* contain a clown or fool to provide comic relief and to comment on the events of the play. Audiences would also have been familiar with his numerous references to classical mythology and literature, since these stories were staples of the Elizabethan knowledge base. And yet, despite such a universal appeal, Shakespeare's plays also expanded on the audience's vocabulary. Many phrases and words that we use today, such as "amazement," "in my mind's eye," and "the milk of human kindness," to name only a few, were coined by Shakespeare. His plays contain a greater variety and number of words than almost any other work in the English language.

### The Costumes:

In Shakespeare's time, acting companies spent almost as much on costumes as they do today for a television series. The costumes for productions in England were so expensive that visitors from France were a little envious. Kings and queens on the stage were almost as well-dressed as kings and queens in real life.

Where did the acting companies get their clothes? Literally "off the rack" and from used clothing sellers.



Wealthy middle class people would often give their servants old clothes that they didn't want to wear any more, or would leave their clothes to the servants when they died. Since clothing was very expensive, people wore it as long as possible and passed in on from one person to another with no one being ashamed to wear hand-me-downs. However, since servants were of a lower class than their employers, they weren't allowed to wear rich fabrics,

and would sell these clothes to acting companies, who were allowed to wear what they wanted in performance.

A rich king like Duncan from *Macbeth* would wear a gown of velvet, with real fur trim; if he wore a doublet, it might have gold embroidery. *Macbeth* was set in a much more barbaric time than most of his plays, so kilts with furs, leather, and earthy fabrics were often used. Similarly, today's audiences want costumes to be more authentic, so that they can believe in the world of the play.



### The Audience:

#### Seating



Shakespeare's audience for his outdoor plays consisted of the very rich, the upper middle class, and the lower middle class. The lower middle class paid a penny for admittance to the yard (like the yard outside a school building), where they stood on the ground, with the stage more or less at eye level; these spectators were called "groundlings." The rich paid two pennies for entrance to the galleries, with covered seating at the sides. The extremely wealthy paid three pennies to sit in the higher galleries, which had a better view. The best seats were in the **Lords' rooms**, private galleries closest to the stage.

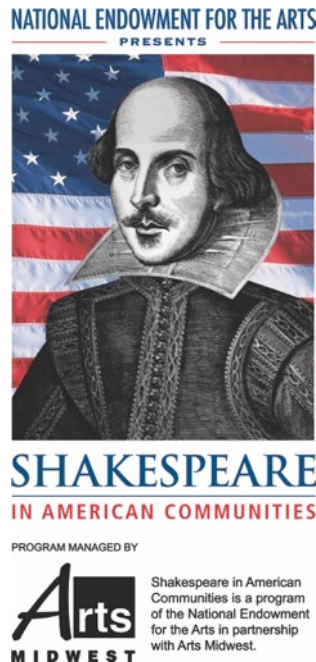
#### Admission

To get an idea of the cost of a ticket in today's terms, consider that the average blue collar worker earned five to six pennies a day; bread for his midday meal cost a penny, ale cost another penny, and if they were lucky enough to have chicken for dinner, it cost two pennies. His rent was often a shilling (twelve pennies) a week, so there wasn't much money left over for play-going, nor would he have been able to take time off from work to go and see a play in the middle of the day, when they were usually performed.

#### Behavior

Shakespeare's audience was perhaps not as well-behaved as you are. Since the play was so long, people would leave their seats and go looking for food to eat and ale to drink during the performance, or perhaps go visit with their friends. Some playgoers, especially those who had saved up money to come and see the play, were extremely annoyed if they were unable to hear the actors and would tell rowdy audience goers to quiet down. Later in Shakespeare's career, his acting company was invited to perform in noble houses and royal courts; the audience there was a good deal more polite, and focused on the play as you do.

Nebraska Shakespeare's  
*A Midsummer Night's Dream On Tour 2018* is a proud  
participant of NEA's **Shakespeare in American  
Communities.**



Please feel free to contact us with further questions about  
*A Midsummer Night's Dream* Tour or Nebraska Shakespeare

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