

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM | FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Shakespeare's language can seem scary, but give it a try! *Go at your own pace, and have fun!*



SHAKESPEARE IN PRISON

DETROIT PUBLIC THEATRE'S
SIGNATURE COMMUNITY PROGRAM

A group of "rude mechanicals" (a.k.a. working men) are putting on a play to celebrate the marriage of King Theseus and Queen Hippolyta. But they are definitely not professional actors... and it shows... Particularly in Bottom's over-the-top performance.

The Shakespeare

THESEUS

Pyramus draws near the wall. Silence!

PYRAMUS (played by BOTTOM)

O grim-look'd night! O night with hue so black!
O night, which ever art when day is not!
O night, O night! alack, alack, alack,
I fear my Thisby's promise is forgot!
And thou, O wall, O sweet and lovely wall,
Show me thy chink, to blink through with mine eyne!

(**WALL** holds up his fingers.)

Thanks, courteous wall; Jove shield thee well for this!
But what see I? No Thisby do I see.
O wicked wall, through whom I see no bliss!
Curs'd be thy stones for thus deceiving me!

THESEUS

The wall methinks, being sensible, should curse again.

PYRAMUS (played by BOTTOM)

No, in truth, sir, he should not. "Deceiving me" is Thisby's cue.
She is to enter now, and I am to spy her through the wall. You
shall see it will fall pat as I told you. Yonder she comes.

This play-within-a-play is based on *Romeo and Juliet*, and Pyramus' speech sort of mirrors the Romeo monologue we sent you a while back. Here's a refresher:

*But, soft! what light through yonder window breaks?
It is the east, and Juliet is the sun.
Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon,
Who is already sick and pale with grief,
That thou her maid art far more fair than she:
Be not her maid, since she is envious;
Her vestal livery is but sick and green
And none but fools do wear it; cast it off.
It is my lady, O, it is my love!
O, that she knew she were!*

What do you notice about these speeches, just looking at them? What's similar and different at first glance?

The Underlined Words

- hue = color
- alack = oh, no!
- chink = crack
- eye = eyes
- Jove = Roman name for Zeus, king of the gods
- sensible = alive/awake
- fall pat = happen exactly

Read them both silently to yourself. They use different words and ideas, but they mean basically the same thing ("I love this woman, but I'm not allowed to see her")—but one is from a drama and the other's from a comedy. One is an actual lovesick teenager and the other is a goofball acting (badly!) like a lovesick teenager.



Try reading them both aloud. How do they feel different? Sound different? (Open vowels! Clipped consonants! Punctuation!)

Can you say the funny one in a serious way? Can you say the serious one in a funny way? (If so, how? What do you have to change in your voice?)



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You can respond to these in any way you choose:

Talk about it

Think about it

Act it out

Write

Draw

... up to you!



How much do you think the artistic quality of a theatrical performance matters?
Does it depend on where it's being performed? Or by whom? Or for whom?

So... yeah. You can probably tell, just from the snippet on the other side of the page, that this performance is really, *really, really*, REALLY bad. Theseus and Co. spend the entire time cracking jokes and making fun of these guys. And Shakespeare wrote this play-within-a-play to be ridiculous.

But... this is Shakespeare in Prison. Let's take a step back from the comedy for a minute and try a more empathetic approach.

This group of people who've never put on a play before — who've probably never even *seen* a play—join together to enthusiastically perform a show for a bunch of upper-class snobs. Doesn't that take a lot of courage, no matter the "quality" of their performance?

Now that we're taking this ensemble more seriously, let's take another step back. Have there been times in SIP when you've felt like...

- The show would never come together?
- The show *didn't* come together? Or that it was just way too messy?
- The audience wasn't taking a performance seriously enough?
- The ensemble wasn't taking a performance seriously enough?
- You weren't taking a performance seriously enough?

Were you able to shake off those feelings? If so, was it challenging or pretty easy? What did it take for you to be able to do it? Or did the feelings stick around, no matter what you did?

Have there been times when an SIP performance "went off the rails"... and the ensemble made it *work*? How did the audience react to those moments? How did you react?

Bottom is not a very good actor—but he sure *thinks* he is! How would you play (or direct) Bottom to show the audience that he's *really trying oh so very hard to be a good actor* and totally failing? How would you do it *the SIP way*—without judging the character?



Bottom jumps out of character to reply to Theseus' comment. If it were you instead of Theseus, how do you think you would respond?