

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



1. Hermia (who loves Lysander) will be executed if she doesn't marry Demetrius (who loves Hermia).
2. Hermia and Lysander (who loves Hermia) run off into the woods.
3. Helena tells Demetrius (whom she loves; but he loves Hermia), and they follow the other two.
4. Lysander and Hermia take a nap. A fairy drops a love potion from a flower onto Lysander's eyes. (Long story.)

5. Lysander wakes up, sees Helena, and falls in love with HER.
6. Demetrius ALSO gets love-potioned and ALSO falls in love with Helena.
7. Neither Helena nor Hermia is cool with this.
8. Actually, no one is cool with this. Not even the fairies. (More about them in a future activity pack!)

A Midsummer Night's Dream Act III, scene ii

LYSANDER

Stay, gentle Helena; hear my excuse.
My love, my life, my soul, fair Helena!

HELENA

O excellent!

HERMIA

Sweet, do not scorn her so.

DEMETRIUS

If she cannot entreat, I can compel.

LYSANDER

Thou canst compel no more than she entreat.
Thy threats have no more strength than her weak prays.
Helen, I love thee, by my life I do!
I swear by that which I will lose for thee,
To prove him false that says I love thee not.

DEMETRIUS

I say I love thee more than he can do.

LYSANDER

If thou say so, withdraw, and prove it too.

DEMETRIUS

Quick, come!

HERMIA

Lysander, whereto tends all this?

LYSANDER

Away, you Ethiopi!

DEMETRIUS

No, no; he'll

Seem to break loose—take on as you would follow.
But yet come not. You are a tame man, go!

LYSANDER

Hang off, thou cat, thou bur! Vile thing, let loose;
Or I will shake thee from me like a serpent!

HERMIA

Why are you grown so rude? What change is this,
Sweet love?

LYSANDER

Thy love? Out, tawny Tartar, out!
Out, loathed med'cine! O hated potion, hence!

HERMIA

Do you not jest?

HELENA

Yes, sooth; and so do you.

LYSANDER

Demetrius, I will keep my word with thee.

DEMETRIUS

I would I had your bond, for I perceive
A weak bond holds you. I'll not trust your word.

LYSANDER

What? should I hurt her, strike her, kill her dead?
Although I hate her, I'll not harm her so.

HERMIA

What? can you do me greater harm than hate?
Hate me, wherefore? O me, what news, my love!
Am not I Hermia? Are not you Lysander?
I am as fair now as I was erewhile.
Since night you lov'd me; yet since night you left me:
Why then, you left me (O, the gods forbid!)
In earnest, shall I say?

LYSANDER

Ay, by my life;
And never did desire to see thee more.
Therefore be out of hope, of question, of doubt:

Be certain! nothing truer; 'tis no jest
That I do hate thee, and love Helena.

HERMIA

O me, you juggler, you canker-blossom.
You thief of love! What, have you come by night
And stol'n my love's heart from me?

HELENA

Fine, i' faith!

Have you no modesty, no maiden shame,
No touch of bashfulness? What, will you tear
Impatient answers from my gentle tongue?
Fie, fie, you counterfeit, you puppet, you!

HERMIA

"Puppet"? Why so? Ay, that way goes the game.
Now I perceive that she hath made compare
Between our statures: she hath urg'd her height,
And with her personage, her tall personage,
Her height, forsooth, she hath prevail'd with him.
And are you grown so high in his esteem,
Because I am so dwarfish and so low?
How low am I, thou painted maypole? Speak!
How low am I? I am not yet so low
But that my nails can reach unto thine eyes.

HELENA

I pray you, though you mock me, gentlemen,
Let her not hurt me. I was never curst;
I have no gift at all in shrewishness.
I am a right maid for my cowardice.
Let her not strike me. You perhaps may think,
Because she is something lower than myself,
That I can match her.

HERMIA

"Lower"? hark again.

HELENA

Good Hermia, do not be so bitter with me.
I evermore did love you, Hermia,
Did ever keep your counsels, never wrong'd you:
Save that, in love unto Demetrius,
I told him of your stealth unto this wood.
He followed you; for love I followed him.
But he hath chid me hence, and threaten'd me
To strike me, spurn me, nay, to kill me, too.
And now, so you will let me quiet go,
You see how simple and how fond I am.

HERMIA

Why, get you gone. Who is't that hinders you?

HELENA

A foolish heart, that I leave here behind.

HERMIA

What, with Lysander?

HELENA

With Demetrius.

LYSANDER

Be not afraid; she shall not harm thee, Helena.

DEMETRIUS

No, sir; she shall not, though you take her part.

HELENA

O, when she is angry, she is keen and shrewd!
She was a vixen when she went to school;
And though she be but little, she is fierce.

HERMIA

"Little" again? Nothing but "low" and "little"?
Why will you suffer her to flout me thus?
Let me come to her.

LYSANDER

Get you gone, you dwarf;
You minimus, of hindering knot-grass made;
You bead, you acorn.

DEMETRIUS

You are too officious
In her behalf that scorns your services.
Let her alone; speak not of Helena,
Take not her part. For if thou dost intend
Never so little show of love to her,
Thou shalt aby it.

LYSANDER

Now she holds me not;
Now follow, if thou dar'st, to try whose right,
Of thine or mine, is most in Helena.

DEMETRIUS

Follow? Nay; I'll go with thee, cheek by jowl.
Exeunt Lysander and Demetrius.

HERMIA

You, mistress, all this coil is long of you.
Nay, go not back.

HELENA

I will not trust you, I,
Nor longer stay in your curst company.
Your hands than mine are quicker for a fray;
My legs are longer, though, to run away. *Exit.*

HERMIA

I am amaz'd, and know not what to say. *Exit.*

The Underlined Words

- excuse = explanation
- prays = kind words
- withdraw = come with me
- whereto tends all this? = what does all this mean?
- Ethiop = a person from Ethiopia. This "insult" is racist, but probably not in the way you're thinking. In Shakespeare's England, having very pale skin was considered attractive. They did not appreciate suntans—or the natural skin color of people from other continents.
- he'll/Seem to break loose—take on as you would follow = pretend to follow me, but then don't actually do it
- tame = weak
- Hang off = let go
- tawny Tartar = someone from Tartary, in central Asia, known for their dark (tawny) complexion.
- sooth = true
- wherefore = why
- juggler = deceiver
- canker-blossom = worm that destroys buds and leaves
- Fie = rhymes with "buy"
- counterfeit = fake
- puppet = a mere doll rather than a woman
- forsooth = in truth
- prevail'd = influenced
- painted maypole = a colorful pole used for traditional celebrations; Hermia probably means that Helena is too skinny and wears too much makeup.
- curst = bad-tempered; sharp-tongued
- shrewishness = having a shrill voice
- keep your counsels = keep your secrets
- save = except
- he hath chid me hence = angrily driven me from him
- spurn = treat with contempt
- simple = sincere
- keen = nasty, hateful
- shrewd = same as "curst"
- vixen = female fox
- Why will you suffer her to flout me thus? = why are you letting her mock me like this?
- minimus = tiniest of creatures
- knot-grass = creeping weed that stunts growth (she's clinging to him)
- aby = pay or suffer for
- coil = turmoil, uproar
- fray = fight

This scene could actually be really sad and dramatic.

Can you try the scene as a tragedy, taking the situation and the words seriously? What changes? Does it still work?

Now try it again as a comedy.

Is it completely different, or are parts of it the same regardless of whether it's tragedy or comedy?

.Did reading it as a tragedy give you ideas for how to make the comedy better (funnier, more complicated, more interesting)?

What makes something funny, even when it's about sad things? What's the difference between comedy and tragedy, anyway?

There are so many great insults here. Read over the scene out loud and really enjoy the language as you say those insults.

Pick your favorite one or two. Say them slowly, then say them quickly. How do they "want" to be said? Are they growled? Spit out? (Remember the questions from our "Insults" pack?)

Come up with a gesture to accompany each one. Not just any gesture—really find the *perfect* body language and hand motion for those words. How does that change the insult as you say it?



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You can respond to these in any way you choose:

Write

ACT IT OUT

Draw

Talk about it

THINK ABOUT IT

... up to you!

WORK WITH THE TEXT, NOT AGAINST IT!



Remember, the main question is always...

WHAT'S THE MOST EFFECTIVE WAY TO TELL THIS STORY?

1 What does the text tell you about the world of the play?

- What happened just before this scene?
- Where is this taking place?
- Who are the characters in the scene?
- Does the text indicate where the characters are in the physical location?
- What other clues can you find in the text?

2 What happens in the scene?

- What is each character's objective? What are their tactics? Do they win or lose?
- Based on what's in the text, how do you imagine the characters interacting with each other? Do they stand still? Do they move? If so, when and where? Whom do they look at, and when?

3 What is the atmosphere (or mood)?

- If you were in the scene, how would you feel?
- How do the characters feel? How does that affect the feeling of the scene overall?
- Are there shifts? When do they happen? For which characters?
- What changes from the beginning to the end?

In our last activity pack, we used a crowd scene to explore different types of stages and the basic questions directors need to consider when staging a play. This time around, we're going to add movement (technically called "blocking") to the mix.

If you're a little stumped, don't worry! Try this:

Read through the scene and see if the dialogue reminds you of anything you can see, touch, or experience that could inspire the way you move your actors around the performance space and have them interact with each other. Look for clues in the text. Maybe the scene reminds you of...

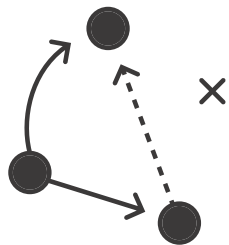
- A see-saw
- A merry-go-round
- A game of ping pong
- A cartoon or puppet show

These are a few ideas—but you are the director. Don't limit yourself! Do your thing!

Now decide on the type of stage you're using. Fear not—you can always change your mind (or try more than one just for the heck of it!) but you've gotta start somewhere.

What are the possibilities for your concept in this space? Where and how could your actors move? You're not making final decisions—it's called a "play" for a reason, so go with your instincts, see what happens, and change things up if they don't quite work.

You can explore this just in your head if you want. Or draw a diagram of the performance space and sketch out your ideas. Or use small objects to represent actors and move them around. Or do something else entirely. Up to you!



You want the scene to have "flow." and a lot of that comes from **cause and effect**. For example: If Helena lunges toward Hermia, how does Hermia physically react? What about Lysander and Demetrius? Think of this like a game plan or chess or dominoes or weather patterns. What works best? How much variety do you want? How much repetition?

It's important to keep each actor's physical "type" in mind.



We know that Helena is taller than Hermia... but how much taller? How tall are the guys? How athletic (or out of shape) is each person? What effect do those (and other!) physical features have on actions like Hermia hanging on Lysander, Demetrius and Lysander defending Helena and threatening each other, any goofy "chase scene" stuff you might want to explore... Things like that?



AND THE MOST COMMON TYPES OF STAGES ARE...

Proscenium



Audience on 1 side.

Thrust



Audience on 3 sides.

In the round



Audience on all sides.

What are your actor's wearing? (Costumes affect movement in a big way.)