



A Midsummer Night's Dream by William Shakespeare

Before reading

- 1 Remind students that they have looked at two Shakespeare plays in previous levels. Elicit the three genres of play that Shakespeare wrote, then ask students to work in pairs to recall some examples and some of the features of each one.

Possible answers

Histories (e.g. *Richard III*, *Henry IV*): based on fact and real people/events.

Tragedies (e.g. *Othello*, *Macbeth*): feature a hero of high social standing with a fatal character flaw that causes his/her downfall.

Comedies (e.g. *Much Ado About Nothing*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*): feature comedic situations such as mistaken identity, often with complex plots.

- 2 If they haven't already mentioned that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a comedy, elicit this information now. Ask if any students know anything about the play.
- 3 Students read *About the playwright* and *About the play*. Ask them to suggest some of the major themes of the play based on the information they read. Accept all reasonable answers, but don't confirm ideas at this stage. (This will be revisited in *After reading 1a*.)

i CULTURAL INFORMATION

In Shakespeare's time, plays were often performed in open air theatres, sometimes to audiences of several thousand people. Theatre-goers did not sit in silence, as is common today, and might express their feelings by clapping or booing. Part of the audience would stand in a central courtyard to watch the play. Standing tickets were cheaper than tickets for the seated areas, and the standing spectators were known as 'groundlings'.

While reading

- 1 Students read the extract and answer the questions. If they need more support, refer them to the part of the extract where they can find the answer.

Answers

- 1 He has had an ass's (donkey's) head put on him by Puck.
- 2 They run away into the forest.
- 3 He starts to sing to show he is not afraid.
- 4 She falls in love with him.
- 5 No, he isn't. He continues to sing.
- 6 To look after Bottom.

- 2 Students now read the extract in more detail. When you check answers, elicit the part of the text (in brackets in *Answers* below) that supported the answer. You could also focus a little more on Shakespeare's play on language in answer 2. Refer students to the two entries for 'ass' in *Vocabulary focus*, then elicit what the double meaning is here (Bottom's head has been replaced with that of an ass; he also mentions that the other actors are making an ass – a fool – of him).

Answers

- 1 Either a monster or a ghost (O monstrous!; We are haunted!).
- 2 Playing a joke on him (I see their knavery: this is to make an ass of me).
- 3 The way he sings (much enamoured of your note); his shape or physical appearance (enthralled to your shape); his character (your fair virtue's force perforce does move me).
- 4 She wants to turn him into a fairy (I will purge your mortal grossness so / That you shall like an airy spirit go).
- 3 Students now focus on the character of Bottom. In pairs or small groups, students discuss Bottom's reactions to Titania and the meaning of his lines.

Suggested answers

- 1 Bottom is telling her that she has no good reason to love him, and that he doesn't agree that he is wise. This is surprising as we would expect him to be flattered, and maybe embarrassed, given that she is the fairy queen.
- 2 He is saying that love and reason do not often go together – that people love for all kinds of reasons.
- 3 His character is down-to-earth, insightful and realistic, which contrasts sharply with the fact that he has the head of a donkey, making the situation a comedic one.
- 4 Students now work in pairs to read Titania's two long speeches. If necessary, refer students to the correct places (the lines starting *I pray you gentle mortal* and *Out of this wood*). Ask them to compare them to Quince and Bottom's lines and see if they can notice any differences. If your class needs extra support, you could write the following prompts up on the board: *syllables*, *stress*, *rhyme*. Discuss ideas as a class and encourage students to say why Titania might speak differently. Her lines are also (mostly) in iambic pentameter, i.e. ten syllables split into five pairs. If students pick up on this, discuss it, but don't go into too much detail as it is covered in the *After reading* section.

**Suggested answers**

- 1 Titania only speaks in rhyme, unlike Bottom or Quince. The reason for this is that she is a magical creature – a fairy – and having her speak in rhyme adds to her magical qualities.
- 2 She is giving Bottom an order – he cannot leave the wood – which is in direct contrast to the way she speaks in her first speech (full of declarations of love for him).
- 3 She is reminding Bottom quite clearly of her status as queen of the fairies. She also mentions her fairy servants in this speech, again reminding him (and the audience) of who she is.

After reading

- 1a Hold a class discussion about how the themes listed here compare with those that students suggested in *Before reading* 3.
- 1b In groups, students discuss how the three main themes are represented in the extract. Discuss their ideas as a class.

Answers

Love and reason: Titania falls in love with Bottom but with no good reason (Bottom even says this) as he has the head of an ass;

Appearance versus reality: the appearance of Bottom (head of an ass) versus the reality of what he really looks like (a normal human being);

Order versus disorder: the fact that the fairy queen has fallen in love with a human with an ass's head is a clear illustration of disorder – an absurd and very unlikely situation.

- 2 In pairs, students read the lines by Titania. Ask what they notice about the number of syllables (there are ten in each line).

- 3 Ask if any students have heard of iambic pentameter – if they have, elicit what they know about it. If they haven't, give them the following explanation: Shakespeare wrote much of his material in iambic pentameter, with the exception of his lower class characters, who speak in prose. Iambic pentameter refers to the rhythm of the words in a sentence, which is measured in iambic feet. An 'iamb' is a word with an unstressed syllable, followed by a stressed syllable. An iambic pentameter therefore consists of five sets of iambs, with the following rhythm: da DUM / da DUM / da DUM / da DUM / da DUM.

If necessary, write the rhythm from the explanation above on the board, then ask students to mark the rhythm in Titania's three lines in 2. Invite three volunteers to each read a line aloud to the class, then get the class to repeat the lines together.

Answers

What **an**/gel **wakes** / me **from** / my **flow**/ery **bed**?
(‘flowery’ is pronounced as two syllables: flow’ry)

I **pray** / you, **gen**/tle **mor**/tal, **sing** / **again**:

That **you** / shall **like** / an **air**/y **spi**/rit **go**.

- 4 Students work in pairs to write a short conversation between Titania's fairies in iambic pentameter, following the instructions. Monitor and help as needed.
- 5 Invite pairs to read their conversations aloud to the class.

Follow-on task

Ask students to research some of the most famous lines or speeches from other Shakespeare plays and see if they are in iambic pentameter. If they are, ask them to mark the stress and bring them to the next class to read aloud.