



A Midsummer Night's Dream by William Shakespeare

ABOUT THE PLAY

A *Midsummer Night's Dream* is a comedy with a number of storylines. A young woman, Hermia, loves Lysander, but her father wants her to marry Demetrius, who her friend Helena is in love with. They all end up in a magical forest where the fairy king, Oberon, has argued with his wife, Titania, and instructed his servant, Puck, to put a magic potion into her eyes to make her fall in love with the first thing she sees.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

William Shakespeare was born in Stratford-upon-Avon in 1564. Although best known for his 37 plays, he also wrote sonnets and poems. As well as working as a writer, he was also an actor and part-owner of a theatre company, for whom he wrote most of his plays. A *Midsummer Night's Dream*, one of his most popular and fantastical comedies, was written in his middle period, between 1594 and 1596.

Act III Scene 1

Character list

Quince, Bottom, Snout: some of the actors

Titania: queen of the fairies

Peaseblossom: the queen's fairy servant

- 5 [The actors have been rehearsing in the forest. One of them, Bottom, has been magically transformed into an ass by Puck, who has also put magic potion in Titania's eyes. Titania is asleep nearby.]

Quince O monstrous! O strange! We are haunted. Pray, masters! Fly, masters! Help!

- 10 **Bottom** Why do they run away? This is a knavery of them to make me afraid.

Snout O Bottom, you are changed! What do I see on you?

Bottom What do you see?

Quince Bless you, Bottom! Bless you! You are translated.

- 15 [They run off into the forest]

Bottom I see their knavery: this is to make an ass of me; to fright me, if they could. But I will not stir from this place, do what they can: I will walk up and down here, and I will sing, that they shall hear I am not afraid.

- 20 [Sings] The ousel cock so black of hue,
With orange-tawny bill,
The throstle with his note so true,
The wren with little quill,—

Titania [Awaking] What angel wakes me from my flowery bed?

- 25 **Bottom** [Sings] The finch, the sparrow and the lark,
The plain-song cuckoo grey,
Whose note full many a man does mark,
And dares not answer 'Nay'.

Titania I pray you, gentle mortal, sing again:

- 30 My ear is much enamoured of your note;



So is my eye enthralled to your shape;
And your fair virtue's force perforce does move me
On the first view to say, to swear, I love thee.

- Bottom** Methinks, mistress, you should have little reason for that:
35 and yet, to say the truth, reason and love keep little company together nowadays.

Titania You are as wise as you are beautiful.

Bottom Not so, neither: but if I had wit enough to get out of this wood, I have enough to serve my own turn.

- 40 **Titania** Out of this wood do not desire to go:
You shall remain here, whether you will or no.
I do love you: therefore, go with me;
I'll give you fairies to attend on thee,
And I will purge your mortal grossness so
45 That you shall like an airy spirit go.

Peaseblossom! Cobweb! Moth! And Mustardseed!

[Enter Titania's fairy servants]

Peaseblossom Ready.

Titania Be kind and courteous to this gentleman.

- 50 **Peaseblossom** [to Bottom] Hail, mortal!

Titania [To the fairies] Come, wait upon him.

VOCABULARY FOCUS

ass (line 6 / line 16): an old word for a donkey / an old word for a stupid or silly person

knavery (line 10): a joke

translated (line 14): changed

ousel cock (line 20): a kind of male bird

hue (line 20): colour

tawny (line 21): a brownish colour

throstle (line 22): songbird

quill (line 23): a bird's feather

mortal (line 29): a human, i.e. not a fairy

enamoured (line 30): in love with

enthralled (line 31): interested in or excited by something

virtue (line 32): a positive quality in a person

perforce (line 32): in a way that cannot be avoided

wit (line 38): intelligence

enough to serve my own turn (line 39): as much as I need

purge (line 44): get rid of

grossness (line 44): something unpleasant

courteous (line 49): polite



A Midsummer Night's Dream by William Shakespeare

Before reading

- 1 You are going to read a scene from a play by Shakespeare. In pairs, recall the three main genres of play that Shakespeare wrote, note down some examples of each, and discuss some of the features of each genre.**
- 2 You are going to read a scene from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Did you include this play in your lists in 1? What kind of play is it? What do you know about it?**
- 3 Now read *About the playwright* and *About the play* and see if any of your ideas from 2 are mentioned. From the summary given, what do you think are the main themes?**

While reading

- 1 Read the extract and answer these questions.**
 - At the start of the extract, what has happened to Bottom?
 - What do the other actors do when they see him?
 - What does Bottom do in response?
 - What happens when Titania wakes up and sees Bottom?
 - Is he surprised by her reaction? How do you know?
 - What does Titania ask her fairies to do?
- 2 Now read the extract in more detail and answer these questions, finding evidence in the text where relevant.**
 - Read Quince's first line. What does he think Bottom might be?
 - What does Bottom think the other actors are doing?
 - What three things about Bottom attract Titania to him?
 - How does Titania want to change Bottom?
- 3 Think about the character of Bottom and answer these questions.**
 - How does Bottom respond when Titania tells him she loves him (line 33)? What about when she tells him he is both wise and beautiful (line 37)? What is surprising about his reaction?
 - In lines 35–36 Bottom says: *to say the truth, reason and love keep little company together nowadays*. What does he mean by this?
 - What can you infer about Bottom's character from this?

4 Answer these questions about Titania.

- Read Titania's two long speeches (lines 29–33 and 40–46). What do you notice about them and how are they different to the way that Bottom and Quince speak? Why do you think this is?
- In lines 40–41 Titania says: *Out of this wood do not desire to go: You shall remain here, whether you will or no*. What is she saying here and how does it contrast with her previous long speech?
- What do you think she is reminding Bottom (and the audience) of when she says this line? What else does she say in her speech to emphasise her point?

After reading

- 1a Three of the main themes of the play are love and reason, appearance versus reality, and order versus disorder. Compare these with the themes you discussed in *Before reading* 3.**
 - 1b In groups, discuss how each of these themes is represented in the extract you have just read.**
- 2 Read three of Titania's lines again aloud. What do you notice about the number of syllables in each line?**

*What angel wakes me from my flowery bed?
I pray you, gentle mortal, sing again:
That you shall like an airy spirit go.*
 - 3 Shakespeare often wrote in iambic pentameter. Listen to your teacher's explanation of what iambic pentameter is. Now mark the pairs of syllables in the lines above and the stressed and unstressed syllables. Practise reading the lines aloud with the correct stress.**
 - 4 You are now going to work in pairs to write a short conversation in iambic pentameter. First, imagine you are Titania's servants, Peaseblossom and Cobweb. You are discussing Titania and her strange behaviour towards Bottom. Write a short conversation, using appropriate words so that each line is ten syllables long.**
 - 5 Practise your conversation with the stress on the correct syllables. Then take turns to read your conversation aloud to the rest of the class.**