



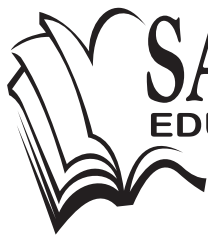
SADDLEBACK
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SHAKESPEARE MADE EASY

A Midsummer Night's Dream



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To the Teacher

As any teacher or student who has read Shakespeare knows, his plays are not easy. They are thought-provoking and complex texts that abound with romance, deceit, tragedy, comedy, revenge, and humanity shown at its very worst as well as its very best. In short, to read Shakespeare is to explore the depths and heights of humanity.

The *Shakespeare Made Easy* Activity Guides are designed by teachers for teachers to help students navigate this journey. Each guide is broken into six sections of four activities and one review. At the end of each guide is a final test, a variety of culminating activities, and an answer key.

The activities are meant to aid textual comprehension, provide creative opportunities

for the reader to make personal connections with the text, and help busy teachers gain quick access to classroom-tested and age-appropriate activities that make the teaching of Shakespeare an easier task.

Each regular activity, as well as each culminating activity, can be modified to be an individual or a group task, and the reviews and test can be used as quick comprehension checks or formally scored assessments. The guides may be used in conjunction with the Barron's *Shakespeare Made Easy* texts or alone. Ultimately, the *Shakespeare Made Easy* Activity Guides are intended to assist teachers and students in gaining an increased understanding of and appreciation for the reading of Shakespeare.

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Introduction to the Play

A Midsummer Night's Dream Background

A Midsummer Night's Dream was unusual for Shakespeare in that he did not base his story on one major source. Instead, this play is a delightful comedy that weaves together many sources and influences. By looking a bit more in depth at the back stories and traditions informing this play, the reader will be able to understand and enjoy the play to a greater degree.

It is first important for the reader to understand that this play is a **comedy**. While the play is very funny in places, humor is not the reason a Shakespeare play is called a comedy. A Shakespearean comedy follows a U-shaped form. It begins with events that descend into potential tragedy, but rise again into a happy ending, usually a marriage. The tragic problems are usually resolved by entrance into a “green world,” where a withdrawal from the pressures of civilized society results in the working out of a happy solution.

This play is thought to have been performed for a noble wedding. The entire play is centered around the idea of marriage, and, in fact, it ends with a triple marriage. The style is that of a **masque**, a show that used humor, magic, and spectacle. In a marriage masque, there would be music and dancing, which is also a part of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

It's helpful for the reader to understand the relationship and role of Theseus and

Hippolyta. Their story is told by Plutarch, the famous historian who wrote *The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*. Theseus was considered the founder of Athens. His life's path was foretold by the oracle of Apollo, consulted by his father, Aegeus. The oracle told Aegeus to abstain from all women until he returned to his home city. Otherwise, he would not be able to father any other children, and the son fathered in this untimely way would be his destruction. However, Aegeus was tricked into sleeping with a woman named Aethra, who hid the resulting child from Aegeus. This child, Theseus, was finally reunited with Aegeus when he was a young man.

To prove his loyalty and value to Athens, Theseus traveled to Crete to free the children of Athens who were to be sacrificed to the Minotaur. The Minotaur was half bull and half man. As a mark of mourning, the ship carrying the Athenian sacrifice to Crete always flew black flags. If Theseus was successful, he was to fly white flags from the ship so that his father would know everyone was safe. Theseus successfully killed the Minotaur and rescued the children. On the voyage back to Greece, Theseus and his soldiers were celebrating so much that they forgot to fly the white flags. When Aegeus saw the black flags on the ship, he assumed that his son was vanquished. In despair, Aegeus jumped off a high cliff into the ocean and drowned. Theseus was very upset at his father's unnecessary death, but was soon crowned king of Athens. As king, Theseus

the stage do not. An aside may also be spoken to one other actor so that the others on stage do not overhear.

Calls within: a voice offstage that calls to a character on the stage

Curtains: Curtains were fabrics draped around a bed that could be opened or closed for privacy.

Draw: Actors pull their swords from their sheathes.

Enter: a direction for a character to enter the stage. This can be from the audience's right (stage right) or the audience's left (stage left).

Enter Chorus: a direction for an actor to come to the center of the stage and offer some introductory comments, usually in blank verse or rhyming couplets. In *Romeo and Juliet*, the Chorus delivers a sonnet, a form of poetry associated with love.

Exeunt: All characters leave the stage, or those characters named leave the stage.

Exit: One character leaves the stage.

Flourish: A group of trumpets or other horn instruments play a brief melody.

Have at: Characters begin to fight, usually with swords.

Pageant: a show or spectacle of actors in unusual costumes, usually without words

Prologue: an introduction spoken by the Chorus that gives an overview to the audience and invites them into the play or scene

Recline: to relax on a bed or pillow

Retires: A character slips away.

Sennet: a series of notes sounded on brass instruments to announce the approach or departure of a procession

Singing: a signal for the actor to sing the following lines as a tune

Wanders about: A character may exit and enter the stage, seeming to be in a kind of daze or distraction.

Within: voices or sounds occurring off stage but heard by the audience

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Introduction to Shakespeare

A Brief Biography of William Shakespeare

William Shakespeare was born in April 1564 to John and Mary Shakespeare in Stratford-upon-Avon, England. His birthday is celebrated on April 23. This is memorable because April 23 is also the day Shakespeare died in 1616.

Shakespeare was the eldest of nine children in his family, six of whom survived to adulthood.

William Shakespeare's father worked with leather and became a successful merchant early in his career. He held some relatively important government offices. However, when William was in his early teens, his father's financial position began to slide due to growing debt. After many years, John Shakespeare's fortunes and respect were restored, but records indicate that the years of debt and lawsuits were very stressful.

Historians assume that young Will went to school and took a rigorous course of study including Latin, history, and biblical study. In 1582, at the age of eighteen, he married Anne Hathaway, who was three months pregnant.

Studies of Elizabethan family life indicate that Anne's situation was not unusual since it was accepted that the engagement period was as legally binding as the marriage. The couple had a daughter, Susanna, followed by twins, Hamnet and Judith. Not much is known about Shakespeare during the next seven years, but his name is listed as an actor in London by 1592. This was a difficult time for the theater

because measures to prevent the spread of the plague regularly closed the theaters.

Between 1594 and 1595, Shakespeare joined the Chamberlain's Men as a playwright and actor. The acting company featured actor Richard Burbage, and they were a favorite of Queen Elizabeth I. During this time, Shakespeare was writing such plays as *Romeo and Juliet* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Even though Shakespeare was enjoying great success by the time he was 32, it was dampened by the death of his son, Hamnet, in 1596. Soon after, Shakespeare refocused on his home in Stratford where he bought an estate called New Place, with gardens, orchards, and barns in addition to the main home. He still maintained a home in London near the theater.

In 1599, Shakespeare wrote *Henry V*, *Julius Caesar*, and *As You Like It*. The Globe Playhouse was up and running, with Shakespeare a 10 percent owner. This means that he was able to earn 10 percent of any show's profits. This business position helped him solidify his wealth.

In 1603, Shakespeare's reputation earned his acting troop the sponsorship of James I, who requested one play performance per month. Their name changed to the King's Men. By this time, Shakespeare had written and performed in almost all of his comedies and histories. He was proclaimed the finest playwright in London.



ACTIVITY 1

Creating a Character Guide

Background Shakespearean romantic comedies often abound with mistaken identities and love gone awry. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is no exception, and it may become difficult to remember who loves whom without a helpful guide.

Directions As you read the play, fill in the following character guide with (1) a description of the character based on your reading and put into your own words and (2) a quotation by the character that reveals who or what is important to that character and your explanation of the quotation. Feel free to revise what you have written as your understanding of the character grows through reading the play. Use another sheet of paper, if necessary. See the example below for guidance.

Hermia

Description: Loves Lysander, though her father wants her to marry Demetrius.

Quotation and explanation: "But I beseech your Grace, that I may know the worst that may befall me in this case, if I refuse to wed Demetrius." Hermia is asking Theseus what will happen to her if she disobeys her father and refuses to marry Demetrius.

Helena

Description:

Quotation and explanation:

Demetrius

Description:

Quotation and explanation:

(continued)



ACTIVITY 2

Hermia Speaks from the Heart

Act one, Scene 1

Background In this scene, Egeus pleads his case with Theseus, the Duke of Athens. He claims that his daughter, Hermia, is going against his wishes for her marriage by desiring to marry Lysander; he wants her to marry Demetrius. He pleads for the Duke to allow him to enforce his parental right: If Hermia will not marry Demetrius, then she should die. The Duke later softens the punishment by saying if she does not marry Demetrius, she will have to become a nun. As a result, Hermia and Lysander decide to run away.

Directions Reread lines 81–84 and Hermia and Lysander’s exchange in lines 130–180 to better understand how Hermia feels about being forced to marry someone whom she does not love. Then, compose a letter from Hermia to her father, Egeus, expressing why she cannot marry Demetrius. Egeus sees her refusal to marry Demetrius as willful disobedience; as Hermia, try to convince him that it really is true love. Also include the young lovers’ plan to run away and explain why that is necessary. If you wish, include your feelings about the consequences of Hermia’s choice to disobey her father. Suggested length: $\frac{3}{4}$ of a page– $1\frac{1}{2}$ pages. You will need to use another sheet of paper.

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ACTIVITY 3

Views of Love

Act one, Scene 1

Background Shakespeare has many characters talking about love in this scene, and they have very different views of it.

Directions After rereading the following lines that each of the characters speak, provide a few sentences detailing what these lines show us about how the character regards love.

Theseus (lines 18–21):

Egeus (lines 97–100):

Lysander (lines 134–137):

Helena (lines 229–254):

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ACTIVITY 4

It Could Happen Today

Act one, Scene 1

Background In lines 229 to 254, Helena is lamenting the fact that Demetrius loves Hermia and not her, despite the fact that she is as beautiful as Hermia. This is all the more painful for Helena because Demetrius did love her at one time. This situation (loving someone who doesn't love you back) rings as true today as it did then.

Directions Invent a modern-day context for Helena's speech and then rewrite the speech for that context.

Context example: Helen (Helena) is a junior in high school and wants to go to the prom with a guy named Damon (Demetrius). They dated all of last year, but then over the summer, Damon broke up with Helen to date Mia (Hermia), a sophomore, whom he is planning on taking to the prom. Helen is upset and trying to figure out a way to get Damon interested in her again.

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ACTIVITY 5

Review

Directions Answer the following. Write the letter of the correct answer in the space provided. For 7 and 10, write true (T) or false (F) in the space provided.

- ___ 1. As the play opens, whom is Theseus about to marry?
- Hermia
 - Titania
 - Hippolyta
 - Helena
- ___ 2. What complaint does Egeus bring to Theseus?
- He loves a woman who doesn't love him.
 - His daughter, Hermia, wants to marry one suitor, but Egeus wants her to marry another.
 - He is angered that the fairies have interfered in his life, and he wants revenge.
 - none of the above
- ___ 3. What is NOT one of the possible punishments for a young woman who doesn't agree to the traditional arranged marriage?
- death
 - She must become a nun.
 - She must join a harem.
 - none of the above
- ___ 4. Theseus is duke of what city?
- Rome
 - Athens
 - Paris
 - Florence
- ___ 5. What is Hermia and Lysander's plan?
- They agree to forget about each other so Hermia doesn't face her father's wrath.
 - They will meet in the woods, and then they will go to his aunt's house and get married.
 - They will ask Helena to help Demetrius forget Hermia, which will make him leave them alone.
 - They will secretly appeal to Theseus to overrule Hermia's father.
- ___ 6. What is Helena's rationale for telling Demetrius of Hermia and Lysander's plan?
- Demetrius might thank her, and she will have a reason to see him.
 - She hopes that Demetrius will give up loving Hermia once he hears about it.
 - She wants to get Hermia in trouble with Theseus.
 - She just likes to gossip.

(continued)