



Study Guide: *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by William Shakespeare

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- 1) The play starts in the city of Athens, moves to the natural world of the forest, and then returns to the city. What is the world of the city like, versus the world of the forest? How do they each look and feel? How are they different from each other, and how are they the same?
- 2) Who stays in the same world in which they started? Who moves between worlds? How does each character change or stay the same from the beginning of the play to the end? In fact, do any of the characters who visit the forest stay the same after their travels?
- 3) Nature and magic are major elements in the play. How are nature and the power of magic represented in the language? How do they influence people's actions, personalities, and emotions? In turn, do any of the characters influence nature?
- 4) The rulers of the Athenian court are Theseus and Hippolyta, while Oberon and Titania rule the Fairy court. Compare Hippolyta to Titania, and Theseus to Oberon—what are the similarities between the characters, and what are the differences? How does the relationship between Theseus and Hippolyta mirror the relationship between Oberon and Titania, and how does it contrast? Why do you think these couples were written this way?
- 5) Likewise, look at Helena and Hermia. What is their relationship to one another? How are they alike, and how are they different? What do they each want, and how do they try to get it? What about Demetrius and Lysander?
- 6) What relationship do the Mechanicals have with one another? How do they interact with each other, compared to how they interact with Nick Bottom or Peter Quince? What relationship do Nick Bottom and Peter Quince have with each other? Who has more power—Bottom or Quince?
- 7) Only four of the characters in the play are written as female, and each is paired with a male partner. How do their partners help or hinder the women from getting what they want? What power does each woman have over the men and her own circumstances? Which of the women has the most power and who has the least?
- 8) What is Puck's status in the world of Fairies? In the world of the play? What does Puck ultimately want? The role of Puck is written as male, but their gender is often presented androgynously or fluidly. Why do you think this is? Would it change anything if the character was presented as decidedly male or female? If so, what would it change, and why?
- 9) Puck and Bottom are the only two characters who truly travel across the two worlds of the play to influence and interact with characters from both the city and the forest. Why do you think this is the case? What does it say about them?
- 10) In the end, all the lovers are restored to their original states, except for Demetrius, who remains under the influence of the love potion. Why do you think this is? How do you feel about this? Does it make Demetrius' love for Helena any less true? Why?



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- 11) In an all-female production, what are some things that surprised you? Why? Were you surprised that you were surprised?
- 12) Which relationships or lines/jokes changed for you when all the actors were the same gender? What stayed the same?
- 13) In our production, though all the actors were women, none of the characters' genders were changed from how they were written in the script. Which characters could have had their genders changed without impacting the storyline? Why (or why not)?
- 14) In our production, the city-dwelling Athenians are in a monochromatic world of greys, black, white, confined within hard-angled geometric lines, while the forest and magical fairies are full of color and organic shapes that curve or tangle. What choices did the designers make for the sets, costumes, and hair/makeup to support the differences between worlds? How did those visual design elements affect your understanding of the world of Athens compared to the natural world of the forest?
- 15) In Shakespeare's time, only men were allowed to perform onstage; it was illegal for women to act. Because of this, there are very few roles written for women in classical theatre of this period—it was simply easier to write for men. Why, then, do you think it's important for modern productions to change the genders of some characters to include more women, or even to mount all-women productions? What are some other ways the arts can include and represent more women artists?