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Perception is Everything:

A Midsummer Night's Dream

10th Grade

Table of Contents

Table of Contents.....	2
Purpose/Rationale.....	3
Sunshine State Standards.....	6
Goals.....	7
Objectives.....	8
Materials.....	9
Grade Breakdown.....	10
Unit Lesson Outlines.....	11
Bibliography.....	21
Appendices.....	22
Appendix A: Unit Calendar.....	22
Appendix B: Critical Essay Assignment Sheet.....	23
Appendix C: Critical Essay Rubric.....	24
Appendix D: Final Assessment Assignment Sheet.....	25
Appendix E: Final Assessment Rubric.....	26
Appendix F: Glencoe Literature Library Packet.....	27

Purpose/rationale:

In adolescent years, students often find it difficult to see situations from different perspectives. This unit is about opening our students' minds up to the idea that different people have different perceptions of what is reality and what is illusion. Multiple texts will “provide the stimulus for student inquiry into the unit topic” (Smagorinsky, 2008). The different texts that students will encounter include a short story, a Shakespearean play, a song from pop culture and a film. Each text is connected by the theme of conflicting perceptions of illusion and reality.

Andre Dubus's short story “The Intruder” is relatable to our students because it tells the story of an adolescent boy and his struggles to be what he perceives he should be. Dubus's “disclosure of the young man's personality from his own point of view—but not in his own words—helps remind the reader that events can always be judged from more than one perspective” (*American Short Stories*: 2003).

A Midsummer Night's Dream delves into the theme of illusion versus reality among many others. This text is the central text of the unit because of its canonical status and Shakespeare's ensconced position in high school curriculum. If “great literature deepens our experience, heightens our sensibilities, and matures our

judgement,” (Jago, 2004) then Shakespeare should entice our students to think critically about their perceptions of the world around them.

This unit incorporates pop culture with the hopes of gaining our students interest. “Popular culture has an important place in the English classroom—as an object worthy of study and as a means for students to access and study literature successfully” (Evans, 2004). Through the use of Nelly’s song “Just a Dream” and the film *Get Over It* students will have the opportunity to correlate the themes in popular culture to those in classic literature.

Throughout the four weeks, this unit uses many forms of assignments that stand as stepping stones to the accomplishment of the unit goals. At the beginning of each lesson the students do journal entries for bell work. On some occasions students are asked to “write about experiences that are similar to those of the characters they will study. The act of writing can promote reflection about important experiences that will help students relate to the problems confronted by the characters in the literature” (Smagorinsky, 2008). Throughout the reading of the play, students are prompted to participate in classroom discussion. Students also participate in creating concept maps throughout their reading. “Concept maps “help students to think at the conceptual level rather than the literal level required in much classroom discussion” (Smagorinsky, 2008).

Assignments in this unit that stand as alternatives to teacher-led discussion include oral interpretations of literature and the talk show format. Instead of simply reading the play out loud, the students are occasionally asked to act the play out. When putting on a performance, the “reading should elicit the emotions and ideas suggested by the text through such devices as vocal tone and volume, costumes, props, and other elements of the performance” (Smagorinsky, 2008). Most students are familiar with one afternoon talk show or another. In this unit, all the students are asked to think of questions they have for each character. Students volunteer to play the role of a character and respond to their classmates’ questions. Talk shows allow students to “combine their parodic skills with their insights about literature to pose questions, play roles of characters who visit the show, and perhaps invent new roles who can shed light on the literature” (Smagorinsky, 2008).

My assessment choice comes from “some of the most remarkable work I have seen from high school students has come through multimedia productions...” (Smagorinsky, 2008). For this unit’s final assessment, students will be split into groups and assigned an Act from *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. In lieu of the theme, they will be asked to put on a video-taped performance of the Act through a different lens or perspective. This form of assessment enables students to be creative while demonstrating the knowledge they have gained from the unit.

Sunshine State Standards:

LA.910.1.5.1: The student will adjust reading rate based on purpose, text difficulty, form, and style.

LA.910.1.6.2: The student will listen to, read, and discuss familiar and conceptually challenging text;

LA.910.1.7.8: The student will use strategies to repair comprehension of grade-appropriate text when selfmonitoring indicates confusion, including but not limited to rereading, checking context clues, predicting, note making, summarizing, using graphic and semantic organizers, questioning, and clarifying by checking other sources.

LA.910.2.2.2: The student will use information from the text to answer questions or to state the main idea or provide relevant details;

LA.910.5.2.1: The student will select and use appropriate listening strategies according to the intended purpose (e.g., solving problems, interpreting and evaluating the techniques and intent of a presentation);

LA.910.5.2.2: The student will research and organize information for oral communication appropriate for the occasion, audience, and purpose (e.g., class discussions, entertaining, informative, persuasive, or technical presentations);

LA.910.5.2.3: The student will use appropriate eye contact, body movements, voice register and oral language choices for audience engagement in formal and informal speaking situations;

LA.910.6.3.2: The student will ethically use mass media and digital technology in assignments and presentations, citing sources according to standardized citation styles; and

LA.910.6.4.1: The student will use appropriate available technologies to enhance communication and achieve a purpose (e.g., video, digital technology); and

Goals:

- Students will gain a greater appreciation of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*
- Students will gain knowledge of how life can be seen from different perspectives
- Students will gain skills on how to read for context

Objectives:

Students Will Be Able To...

- Read the American short story “The Intruder” By Andre Dubus
- Participate in a class discussion of the definition of Illusion and Reality
- Read *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*
- Use Glencoe Library materials throughout the reading of the play
- Watch *Get Over It*
- Write a critical essay
- Recreate an Act from *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* through a lens

Materials:

- *American Short Stories 1920 to the Present* (Perfection Learning)
- *The Norton Shakespeare*
- *Get Over It*
- Journals
- Laptops
- Clapperboards
- Boom Poles, Microphones, Suspensions and Blimps
- Arri SR3A Kit
- Windows Movie Maker
- Props for Movie (clothing/decorations)
- Pianos
- Guitars
- Drums

Grading Breakdown for the Unit

5% “The Intruder” Response Questions

10% Attendance/ Participation

10% Daily Journals

15% *Get Over It* Critical Essay

15% Paper Active Reading Worksheets

20% Responding Worksheets

25% Culminating Project/Final Assessment

A: 90-100

B: 80-89

C: 70-79

D: 60-69

F: Below 59

Introductory Lesson

Anticipatory Set: Bell work: In your journal write down your best definition of illusion and reality.

Time	Teacher is...	Students are...
5 Minutes	Walking around the classroom to make sure each student is doing the bell work. Handing out class calendar for the Unit (Appendix A).	Doing the bell work. Receiving Unit calendar.
15 Minutes	Calling on students to share their definitions. Giving feedback. Writing the best combination of the definitions on the board. Can someone's illusion be someone else's reality? What makes our perception correct?	Sharing their definitions. Listening. Polishing own definitions. Participating in discussion.
30 Minutes	Asking students to take out their copy of <i>American Short Stories</i> and to silently read Andre Dubus's "The Intruder." Explaining the theme of illusion verses reality is present in the short story. Telling them to do the response questions at the end and to turn them in tomorrow if they don't have time to finish in class.	Listening and reading. Answering the 5 response questions at the end of the story.

Homework: Finish the response questions.

Day 2

Anticipatory Set: Bell work: Ask students to take out a sheet of paper and write down what they know about Shakespeare. What do they want to know? Do they enjoy Shakespeare? Why or why not?

Time	Teacher is...	Students are...
5 Minutes	Asking students to take out a sheet of paper for a quick write. Answer: What do you know about Shakespeare? What do you want to know? What do you like or not like? Experiences with Shakespeare?	Asking questions if they have any. Participating in the free write.
5 Minutes	Asking if anyone would like to share their thoughts. Prompting discussion with questions about their fears or feelings on Shakespeare. Pointing out the differences in the perceptions of Shakespeare.	Sharing their views on Shakespeare. Past experiences good or bad.
15 Minutes	Passing out Glencoe Literature Library	Reading over Meet

	(GLL) packet (Appendix F). Going over the Meet William Shakespeare.	William Shakespeare.
10 Minutes	Handing out 60 Second Shakespeare. Reading and going over it. Focus: "The course of true love never did run smooth." Pucks magic alters the characters concepts of reality and creates illusions of feelings.	Reading and going over 60 second Shakespeare
15 Minutes	Making a character list on the board. Asking students to use their laptops to go on Sparknotes.com to help create the character chart on the board. Discuss the themes of love and magic/fantasy.	Participating in creating the character list on the board. Making their own copy in their notebook.

Homework: None.

Day 3

Anticipatory Set: Bell work: Students will turn to page 5 in their Glencoe Literature Library packet.

Time	Teacher is...	Students are...
5 Minutes	Asking students to write a journal entry on "Why do young people in love sometimes experience conflict with their parents?"	Writing journal entry.
20 Minutes	Discussing with students what the best ways to resolve conflicts are. Creating a graphic organizer to show the six steps of conflict resolution.	Listening and participating. Creating a graphic organizer.
25 Minutes	Playing Act 1 Scene 1 on Librivox. Telling students to follow along in their books and to fill out the active reading worksheet as they listen. Take note as to how the characters decide to solve their problems.	Listening and reading along. Filling out the active reading worksheet.

Homework: Read Act 1 Scene 2 at home. Tomorrow students will volunteer to act is out.

Day 4

Anticipatory Set: Bell work: Nick Bottom believes he is the best candidate for every part in the play. Do you have any friends who have had misconceptions (illusions) of their true talents (reality)? Explain.

Time	Teacher is...	Students are...
5 Minutes	Walking around the classroom to make sure each student is doing the bell work.	Doing bell work.
5 Minutes	Asking for a student volunteer for Quince, Snug, Bottom, Flute, Snout and Starveling. Selecting students. Asking students to come to the front of the class. Explain that they are to read their parts and have fun with it.	Volunteering to read/act a part. Coming to the front of the class or watching.
40 Minutes	Watching students act out the play and commenting on their acting/reading. Encouraging them to be creative. Interjecting when needed. Hand out responding worksheets.	Listening and watching. Acting.

Homework: Do responding worksheets. Due next class

Day 5

Anticipatory Set: Bell work: How would you feel if someone you liked suddenly stopped liking you? Write in you journal.

Time	Teacher is...	Students are...
5 Minutes	Walking around the classroom to make sure each student is doing the bell work.	Doing bell work. Listening.
40 Minutes	Asking students to open their GLLP and turn to page 17: Active Reading worksheet. Telling the class that today we will be reading Act 2 Scene 1 out loud. Asking students to volunteer to read.	Listening, reading, filling out active reading worksheet.
5 Minutes	Telling students to read Act 2 Scene 2 for homework and fill out the response worksheet in the GLLP pages 18 and 19.	Listening, asking questions.

Homework: Read Act 2 Scene 2 and fill out worksheet.

Day 6

Anticipatory Set: Bell work: How was reading the play at home and not in class? Which do you like better any why?

Time	Teacher is...	Students are...
5 Minutes	Walking around the classroom to make sure each student is doing the bell work. Checking to see that each student has completed the worksheets	Doing bell work. Presenting worksheets.
25-30 Minutes	Going over the worksheet questions asking students to read share their answers and discussing.	Sharing their answers, listening, adding ideas to their worksheets that they may not have had.
15- 20 Minutes	Going over the Literature and Writing Cause and Effect exercise on the worksheet. Telling students that they have the remainder of the class to work on it.	Listening, asking questions. Writing.

Homework: Students will finish their Literature and Writing activity if they didn't finish in class.

Day 7

Anticipatory Set: Bell work: Turn in papers. Journal entry: Think of a time when you got so involved in a play or a movie that you temporarily forgot that it was not real.

Time	Teacher is...	Students are...
5 Minutes	Walking around the classroom to make sure each student is doing the bell work. Collecting papers.	Doing bell work. Turning in papers.
5 Minutes	Asking students to share. Telling them to pay attention to the games Shakespeare plays with illusion and reality in Act 3.	Sharing, listening, and asking questions.
40 Minutes	Telling the class that today we will begin acting out Act 3 Scene 1 out loud while filling out the active reading worksheet on pg. 21 of GLLP. Asking students to volunteer to play characters.	Acting out the play, following along and filling out the Active Reading worksheet.

Homework: Finish reading Act 3 Scene 1 if we didn't have time in class.

Day 8

Anticipatory Set: Bell work: Imagine you are Titania and you find that Oberon has altered your perception of reality. Write him a letter telling him how you feel.

Time	Teacher is...	Students are...
5 Minutes	Walking around the classroom to make sure each student is doing the bell work. Collecting papers.	Doing bell work.
45 Minutes	Telling the class that today we will begin reading Act 3 Scene 2 out loud. Asking students to volunteer to read.	Reading, listening and filling out Active Reading worksheet.

Homework: None. Happy Hump Day!

Day 9

Anticipatory Set: Bell work: Free write. Write anything you want pertaining to the play or what we have done thus far.

Time	Teacher is...	Students are...
5 Minutes	Walking around the classroom to make sure each student is doing the bell work.	Doing bell work.
10 Minutes	Telling the class that today we will finish Act 3 on Librivox. Playing Librivox recording.	Reading, listening and filling out Active Reading worksheet.
10 Minutes	Splitting students up into 5 groups of 6. Asking students to turn to page 22 in GLLP: responding worksheet. Assigning each group a different question. Explain that they will then present the question and answer to the class. Circling the class to help.	Getting into groups and working on their question.
25 Minutes	Calling on each group to present their question and answer to the class. Telling students to fill in the answers on their own worksheet. Discussing elements of the question.	Presenting, listening, writing.

Homework: Do the Literature and Writing Exercise: Police Report on the Responding worksheet.

Day 10

Anticipatory Set: Bell work: Have Nelly's song "Just a Dream" playing when students enter the classroom. Students brainstorm songs with the word dream in it and make a list in their journals. Share.

Time	Teacher is...	Students are...
5 Minutes	Walking around the classroom to make sure each student is doing the bell work. Collecting homework.	Doing bell work.
5 Minutes	Asking students to volunteer their songs. Making a list on the board.	Participating.
40 Minutes	Telling students to turn to page 25: Active Reading worksheet. Telling students that we will be reading Act 4 today. Calling on students to read.	Listening, reading, following along, filling out active reading worksheet.

Homework: Finish Act 4 at home if we didn't finish in class.

Day 11

Anticipatory Set: Bell work: Write a letter from Bottom to his friends telling them of his transformation into an ass, his meeting with the fairies and his love affair with Titania. Try to write like Bottom would.

Time	Teacher is...	Students are...
5 Minutes	Walking around the classroom to make sure each student is doing the bell work.	Doing bell work.
30 Minutes	Splitting the class up into 6 groups of 5. Telling them to do the Responding worksheet (g 26 and 27). Telling them to work on it as a group and to do the Music Connection activity: Write a ballad called "Bottoms Dream." They can use their list of songs from the previous class as examples of how dreams are presented in songs. Providing students with musical instruments.	Doing worksheet. Making a ballad. Asking teacher for help.
15 Minutes	Calling on groups to present their ballads.	Presenting their ballads. Watching and listening.

Homework: None!

Day 12

Anticipatory Set: Bell work: Have you ever seen a live performance that was so badly presented it was entertaining? (any of your classmates' ballads?) Explain.

Time	Teacher is...	Students are...
5 Minutes	Walking around the classroom to make sure each student is doing the bell work.	Doing bell work.
25 Minutes	Telling students that today we will listen to Act 5 on Librivox. Telling them to fill out the active reading worksheet (pg 29 of GLLP). Playing the audio.	Listening, following along, filling out the worksheet.
20 Minutes	Telling students to work on Responding Worksheet. Circling the class to help students.	Working on the worksheet. Asking questions.

Homework: Finish the responding worksheet if you didn't have time in class. Tomorrow we will be playing a Maury style game. Come to class with a question for each character.

Day 13

Anticipatory Set: Bell work: After reading and studying *A Midsummer Night's Dream* would you watch a performance of it? Why or why not?

Time	Teacher is...	Students are...
5 Minutes	Walking around the classroom to make sure each student is doing the bell work.	Doing bell work.
20 Minutes	Going over the worksheet with students. Asking how they liked the play.	Listening, asking questions, participating in class discussion.
20 Minutes	Asking students who wants to be each character. Having them sit in front of the class. Calling on students to ask the characters their questions.	Role playing, watching, listening, asking questions.
5 Minutes	Passing out instructions for essay (Appendix B) while informing students that next class we will be watching an adaptation of <i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i> called <i>Get Over It</i> . Go over the essay assignment	Listening and asking questions.

Homework: None!

Day 14

Anticipatory Set: Introduce Assessment.

Time	Teacher is...	Students are...
10 Minutes	Telling students that for the final assessment of the Unit they will be making an adaptation of the film. (Appendix D) Going over it. Explaining that we are going to watch <i>Get Over It</i> so they can see an example of how adaptations are done. They are to write a one page paper on how the adaptation presents the theme of illusion verse reality (Appendix B.)	Listening and asking questions.
40 Minutes	Playing the movie.	Watching the movie.

Homework: Think about the assessment. Start getting creative.

Day 15

Anticipatory Set: None. Start movie immediately

Time	Teacher is...	Students are...
50 Minutes	Playing the movie.	Watching the movie.

Homework: Finish you critical essay. Due on Monday.

Day 16

Anticipatory Set: None.

Time	Teacher is...	Students are...
10 Minutes	Splitting students up into 5 groups of 6. Assigning each group an act from the play. Giving them their props and filming equipment. Answering questions.	Forming their groups. Asking questions.
40 Minutes	Monitoring students. Giving them advice and answering questions.	Working on their videos.

Homework: The final product of the video is due Thursday day 24. Students may work out of class if they feel they need more time.

Day 17

Anticipatory Set: Class discussion on how the videos are coming along.

Time	Teacher is...	Students are...
5 Minutes	Asking students how they are doing with creating the videos.	Participating in class discussion.
45 Minutes	Monitoring students. Giving them advice and answering questions.	Working on their videos.

Homework: The final product of the video is due Thursday day 24. Students may work out of class if they feel they need more time.

Day 18

Anticipatory Set: None

Time	Teacher is...	Students are...
50 Minutes	Monitoring students. Giving them advice and answering questions.	Working on their videos. Finishing up on Moviemaker.

Homework: The final product of the video is due Thursday day 24. Students may work out of class if they feel they need more time.

Day 19

Anticipatory Set: None

Time	Teacher is...	Students are...
50 Minutes	Playing student created video. Assessing.	Watching their own adaptation of <i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i> .

Homework: None.

Day 20

Anticipatory Set: None

Time	Teacher is...	Students are...
50 Minutes	Playing student created video. Assessing.	Watching their own adaptation of <i>A Midsummer Night's Dream</i> .

Homework: None.

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Appendix of Materials

Appendix A

	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
1	CW: “The Intruder” by Andre Dubus	CW: Introduction to Shakespeare	CW: Act 1 Scene 1 HW: Act 1 Scene 2	CW: Acting out Act 1 Scene 2 HW: Responding Worksheet	CW: Reading Act 2 Scene 1 HW: Act 2 Scene 2 and responding worksheet
2	CW: Going over responding worksheet and Literature and Writing Cause and Effect exercise HW: Literature and Writing Cause and Effect Exercise	CW: Act 3 Scene 1 HW: Finish reading Act 3 Scene 1	CW: Act 3 Scene 2	CW: Act 3 and Responding Worksheet HW: Literature and Writing Exercise: Police Report	CW: Act 4 HW: Finish Act 4
3	CW: Responding Worksheet and “Bottoms Dream”	CW: Act 5 HW: Finishing Responding Worksheet and bring a question for each character for the “Maury” game	CW: Go over Worksheet and play Maury game	CW: <i>Get Over It</i>	CW: <i>Get Over It</i> HW: Essay
4	CW: Work on Assessment	CW: Work on Assessment	CW: Work on Assessment	CW: Watching own adaptation of <i>A Midsummer Night’s Dream</i> .	CW: Watching own adaptation of <i>A Midsummer Night’s Dream</i> .

Appendix B

Critical Essay**Expectations:**

Each student will critique how well *Get Over It* incorporates the theme of Illusion verse Reality while comparing it to *A Midsummer Night's Dream's* incorporation of the theme. Which work does a better job of representing the theme? Make sure to include specific details to support your argument.

Requirements:

This paper must be 3 pages long, typed, double spaced, 12 pt Times New Roman, in MLA format.

Due date: Day 16

Critical Essay:

A critical essay is a critique or review of another work, usually one which is arts related (i.e. book, play, movie, painting). However, the critical essay is more than just a summary of the contents of the other work or your opinion of its value. The critical essay is an objective analysis of the work, examining both its positive and negative aspects. The critical essay is informative and stresses the work rather than your opinion. You need to support any observations or claims you make with evidence. For this reason, in writing a critical essay, you don't use the first person. **If you have any further questions please ask me or go to**

<http://www.essaywritinghelp.com/critical.htm>

Appendix C

Rubric for Critical Essay

Criteria	Possible Points	Earned Points
<p>Ideas and Content</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thesis • Evidence from Literature 	25	
<p>Organization</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arguments are presented logically • Appropriate transitions 	25	
<p>Voice</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate to audience • Appropriate to purpose 	20	
<p>Sentence Fluency</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Variety in structure and length • Flows naturally 	10	
<p>Conventions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follows MLA format • Proper punctuation, spelling and usage • Evidence of editing for accuracy 	20	

Appendix D

Final Assessment**Expectations:**

Each student will be placed into one of five groups and each group will be assigned a specific Act of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. All groups will have three class periods, along with optional time before and after school, to recreate their assigned Act through a specific lens. The students will be asked to use their imaginations to create an original depiction of their Act under the influence/illusion of their lens. They should produce a clear script and film a performance that represents their specific Act through the perception of how someone in that lens would behave or react.

Act 1	The Sopranos/Gangster Lens
Act 2	Rave/Dance Party Lens
Act 3	Jersey Shore
Act 4	CSI (Crime Scene Investigation)
Act 5	Fashion Police

Requirements: Each groups' reenactment of the Acts should be 15 minutes with a 3 minute explanation at the end of how and why they did what they did to incorporate their illusion of a lens.

Due date: End of class Day

Appendix E

Rubric for Final Assessment

Act: _____

CATEGORY	4	3	2	1	Score
Teamwork	All students contribute to the creative aspect of the production and are listened to respectfully. All team members contribute a fair share of the work.	Most students contribute to the creative aspect of the production and are listened to respectfully. All team members contribute a fair share of the work.	A select few students contribute to the creative aspect of the production and are listened to respectfully. All team members contribute a fair share of the work..	Some team members do not contribute a fair share of the work..	
Concept	Team has a clear picture of what they are trying to achieve. Each member can describe what they are trying to do and generally how his/her work will contribute to the final product.	Team has a fairly clear picture of what they are trying to achieve. Each member can describe what they are trying to do overall but has trouble describing how his/her work will contribute to the final product.	Team has brainstormed their concept, but no clear focus has emerged for the team. Team members may describe the goals/final product differently.	Team has spent little effort on brainstorming and refining a concept. Team members are unclear on the goals and how their contributions will help them reach the goal.	
Script	Script is complete and it is clear what each actor will say and do. Entries and exits are scripted as are important movements. Script is quite professional.	Script is mostly complete. It is clear what each actor will say and do. Script is shows planning.	Script has a few major flaws. It is not always clear what the actors are to say and do. Script shows an attempt at planning, but seems incomplete.	There is no script. Actors are expected to invent what they say and do as they go along.	

Sound Setup	Microphones are positioned optimally to ensure that important sounds and dialogue are captured. The team has made every attempt to anticipate and filter out unwanted ambient noise in the recording.	Microphones are positioned optimally to ensure that important sounds and dialogue are captured.	At least one microphone (in addition to that on the camera) is used to ensure that dialogue is captured.	Little attention was paid to ensuring quality sound during the shoot.	
Videography-Clarity	Video did not rock/shake and the focus was excellent throughout.	Video did not rock/shake and the focus was excellent for the majority of the video.	Video had a little rocking/shaking, but the focus was excellent throughout.	Problems with rocking/shaking AND focus.	
Costume and Props	All students wore costumes and the group used some props.	Some students wore costumes and the group used some props.	Students wore no costumes, but the group used some props.	No costumes and no props were used	

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THE GLENCOE LITERATURE LIBRARY

Study Guide

for

**A Midsummer
Night's Dream**

by William Shakespeare



New York, New York Columbus, Ohio Woodland Hills, California Peoria, Illinois

Meet William Shakespeare



He was not of an age, but for all time.

—Ben Jonson, poet and contemporary
of Shakespeare

Little is known about William Shakespeare, generally acknowledged as the greatest playwright of all time. In some ways, the lack of information is ironically fitting. Whereas we can draw on personal history to understand and explain the work of most writers, in the case of Shakespeare, we must rely primarily on his work. His command of comedy and tragedy, his ability to depict the range of human character, and his profound insights into human nature add clues to the few facts that are known about his life.

William Shakespeare was born in April 1564 in the English town of Stratford-upon-Avon. The son of John Shakespeare, a successful glovemaker and public official, and Mary Arden, the daughter of a gentleman, William was the oldest surviving sibling of eight children.

Shakespeare probably attended the local grammar school and studied Latin. His writings indicate that he was familiar with classical

writers such as Ovid (the source for the story of *Pyramus and Thisbe*, the play-within-a-play in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*). Throughout Shakespeare's childhood, companies of touring actors visited Stratford. Although there is no evidence to prove that Shakespeare ever saw these actors perform, most scholars agree that he probably did.

In 1582, at the age of 18, Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway, the daughter of a farmer. The couple had become parents of two daughters and a son by 1585. Sometime in the next eight years, Shakespeare left his family in Stratford and moved to London to pursue a career in the theater. Records show that by 1592, he had become a successful actor and playwright in that city.

Although an outbreak of plague forced the London theaters to close in 1592, Shakespeare continued to write, producing the long narrative poem *Venus and Adonis* and a number of comedies. By 1594 the plague was less of a threat, and theaters reopened. Shakespeare had joined a famous acting group called the Lord Chamberlain's Men, so named for their patron, or supporter, a high official in the court of Queen Elizabeth I. One of the first plays Shakespeare wrote for this company was *Romeo and Juliet*. In 1598 Shakespeare became part owner of a major new theater, the Globe.

For more than a decade, Shakespeare produced a steady stream of works, both tragedies and comedies, which were performed at the Globe, the royal court, and other London theaters. However, shortly after the Globe was destroyed by fire in 1613, he retired and returned to Stratford.

Fairly wealthy from the sales of his plays and from his shares in both the acting company and the Globe, Shakespeare was able to buy a large house and an impressive amount of property. He died in Stratford in 1616. Seven years later the first collection of his plays was published.

Introducing the Play

The opening scene of A Midsummer Night's Dream leads the audience to expect an ordinary comedy plot.

—René Girard, “Myth and Ritual in Shakespeare: A *Midsummer Night's Dream*”

But A Midsummer Night's Dream does not always do exactly what we might expect, and in this way it keeps its audience guessing . . .

—Catherine Belsey, “A *Midsummer Night's Dream*: A Modern Perspective”

Shakespeare wrote *A Midsummer Night's Dream* toward the beginning of his career. The play describes the comic misadventures of two pairs of lovers who become lost in a dark wood and fall under the power of sprites.

To Shakespeare's audiences, the play's title was a clue that the play might be about romance, magic, and madness. *Midsummer Night* was thought to be one of the nights of the year when sprites were especially powerful. People also believed that flowers gathered on *Midsummer Night* could work magic and that *Midsummer Night* was a time when people dreamed of their true loves and sometimes went insane.

Shakespeare and other Elizabethan dramatists based their comedy plots on Classical (ancient Greek and Roman) models. Often a grumpy old father blocks the love affair between a young man and a young woman. Complications and confusions follow, until finally, after some dramatic reversal, the lovers are united. Setting his first act in Athens, the birthplace of Western classical literature, Shakespeare follows just such a plot. It is not long, however, before the play moves to the woods outside Athens, and into the English concept of *Midsummer Night*.

This tale of frustrated love and mistaken identity makes audiences laugh at the ridiculous ease with which lovers change the object of their affection, while still believing that their feelings are completely sincere. However, although it is a comedy, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* also poses some profound and difficult questions: What is

love? How and why do people fall in and out of love? How is love related to questions of identity—both of the lover and the beloved? Are lovers in control of themselves and their destinies? Which is more real, the “daylight” world of reason and law or the “nighttime” world of passion and chaos? Shakespeare leaves these questions for the audience to answer.

THE TIME AND PLACE

Drama was tremendously popular during Shakespeare's lifetime. The queen herself, Elizabeth I, loved to watch plays—including many by Shakespeare—in her court. Companies of actors traveled throughout England, performing for eager audiences. Over a short period of time, dramatic literature developed rapidly, from the slapstick plays popular during Shakespeare's youth to the complex dramas written by Shakespeare and his contemporaries.

Yet not everyone in late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century England loved plays and acting. Theater owners tried to avoid city authorities, many of whom disapproved of the theater because it drew large crowds, creating the potential for crime, the possible spread of disease, and the introduction of controversial ideas. Many local authorities mistrusted and persecuted visiting actors, which forced the actors to seek the protection of powerful nobles. Religious factions such as the Puritans decried acting as wicked and tried to outlaw it. In fact, the Puritans succeeded in closing down the theaters in 1642.

Many of Shakespeare's plays seem to address the issue of whether drama is mere entertainment or a vehicle for showing the truth of human experience. In the eyes of contemporary critic Alvin B. Kernan:

*Shakespeare seems to have constructed in *Dream* the “worst case” for theater, voicing all the attacks on drama being made in his time and deliberately showing plays, actors, and audiences at their worst.*

A Midsummer Night's Dream contains a play-within-a-play, which features comically clumsy writing, poor staging, cheap costumes, and awful acting. Furthermore, Oberon, the fairy king, can be seen as a kind of mad director, stage managing the passions of others for his own amusement or pleasure.

Yet *A Midsummer Night's Dream* allows us to laugh at human nature and observe the interaction

between actors and audience. *Pyramus and Thisbe*—the play-within-a-play—may be silly, but it is funny. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* can also be seen as a tribute to the magic of illusion. After waking from their dream parts in Oberon's "play," Bottom, Lysander, Demetrius, Helena, and Hermia all express a sense of wonder and bewilderment at their recent experience.

Did You Know?

Shakespeare wrote much of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and most of his plays, in a style called blank verse. This style was fairly new in the 1500s. Blank verse was first used in English drama in a play four years before Shakespeare was born. It follows a flexible rhythmic pattern consisting of an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed syllable.

Look, for example, at the lines that Hippolyta speaks to Theseus in act 1, scene 1:

*Four days will quickly steep
themselves in night;
Four nights will quickly dream
away the time;*

Most English verse, or poetry, falls naturally into this pattern. Prose, or ordinary, everyday language, was also becoming a popular dramatic writing style, frequently mixed with blank verse.

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Shakespeare uses different writing styles to suit different characters. For example, Bottom and his friends generally speak in prose, which gives them a simple, rustic quality. For the speeches of Oberon and Titania, Shakespeare uses a much more complex form of poetry, implying the exquisite beauty and magic of the fairy kingdom.

Before You Read

A Midsummer Night's Dream Act 1

FOCUS ACTIVITY

Why do young people in love sometimes experience conflict with their parents?

Map It

What is the best way to resolve a conflict? Create a graphic organizer to show the six steps of problem solving listed below. Include ideas on how these steps might be applied to the first part of the **Focus Activity**.

1. identify the problem
2. determine the importance of the problem
3. identify and discuss options
4. agree on an option
5. act on your decision
6. evaluate your decision

Setting a Purpose

As you read act 1, note what dilemmas Theseus, Hermia, Lysander, and Helena face and how they decide to solve them.

BACKGROUND

Time and Place

Shakespeare borrowed the characters of Theseus and Hippolyta from Greek mythology. Theseus was the national hero of Athens. He was a friend of Heracles (Hercules) and the survivor of many adventures, including his slaying of the Minotaur, a creature half man and half bull. Hippolyta was Queen of the Amazons, a group of female warriors. Theseus took her prisoner and then married her.

Did You Know?

The Renaissance is the period of European history that began in Italy in the 1300s and spread throughout Europe over the next two centuries. The word *renaissance* means “rebirth,” and during the Renaissance there was a rebirth of interest in art, architecture, and learning based on Classical (ancient Greek and Roman) sources. Shakespearean scholars believe that Shakespeare read many English translations of works by Homer, Ovid, Horace, Apuleius, and other classical writers and was deeply influenced by some of them.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

austerity [ôs ter'ə tē] *n.* condition of lacking pleasure or luxury

beguile [bi gīl'] *v.* to trick

cloister [klois'tər] *n.* place where members of a religious community live

dote [dōt] *v.* to love with foolish fondness

extenuate [iks ten'ū āt'] *v.* to lessen the seriousness of

feign [fān] *v.* to pretend

idolatry [ī dol'ə trē] *n.* false worship

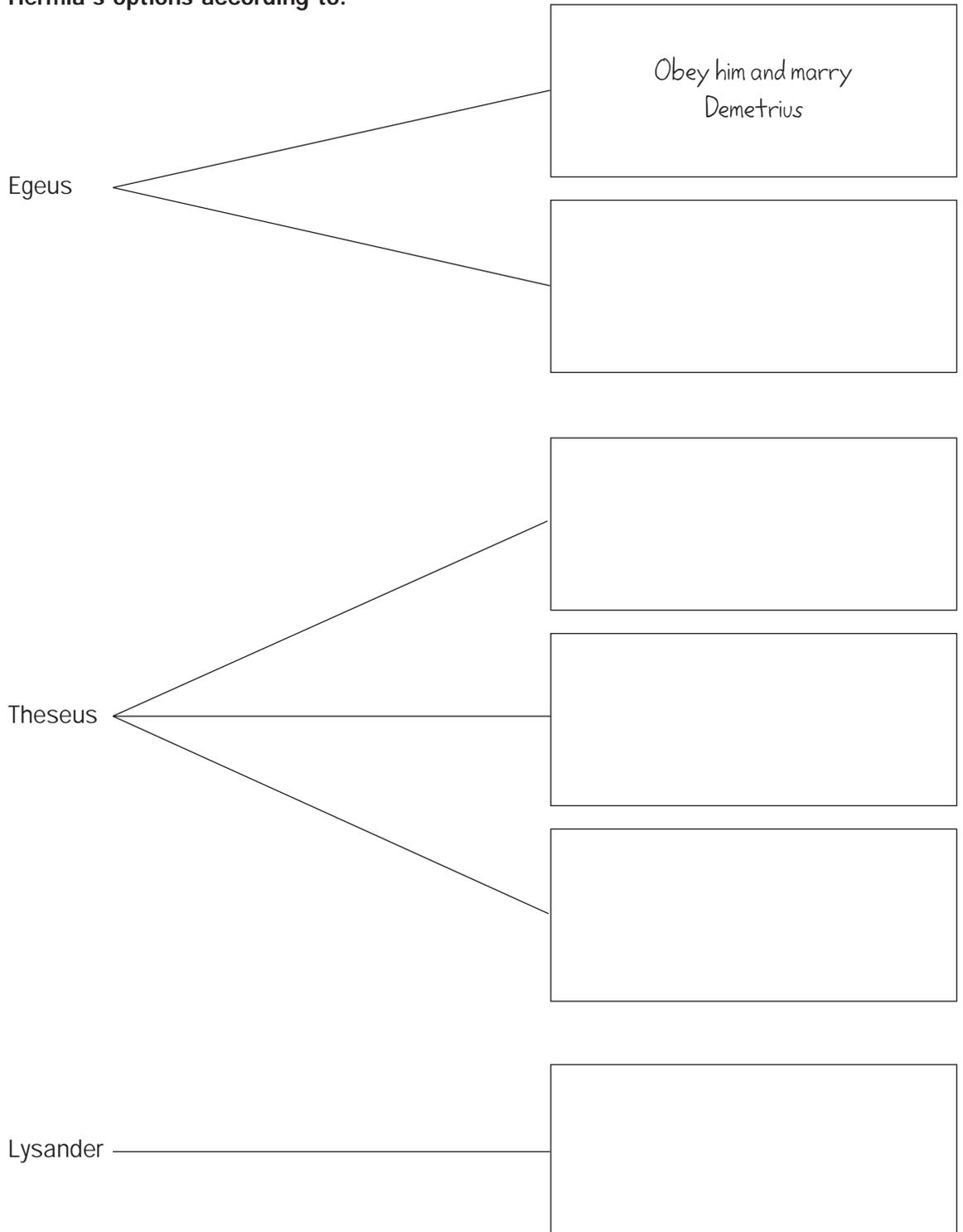
reveling [rev'əl ɪŋ] *n.* enjoying festivities

Active Reading

A Midsummer Night's Dream Act 1

Identify Hermia's basic dilemma. What are the choices outlined for her by Theseus and her father? What other choice does Lysander suggest? Outline each option in the flowchart below.

Hermia's options according to:



Responding

A Midsummer Night's Dream Act 1

Personal Response

How did you feel when you read Helena's decision to tell Demetrius about Hermia and Lysander's plan? Why did you feel this way?

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. Why is Egeus angry with his daughter?

2. Why is Helena envious of Hermia?

3. How would you describe Bottom's acting ability? What is Bottom's own opinion of his acting ability?

Responding

A Midsummer Night's Dream Act 1

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

4. Describe Theseus's character. What sort of leader does he seem to be?

5. Do you think Egeus is justified in being angry with his daughter? Why or why not?

Literature and Writing

Moon Images

Act 1 of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* takes place in the daytime, but it contains many images of the moon that foreshadow the night to come. On a separate sheet of paper, identify the examples of moon imagery in act 1. Then, in a paragraph or two, analyze and explain the moods that the images suggest.

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

The Athenian tradesmen who appear in scene 2 are broadly comic figures. Divide into small groups, and make a list of comic actors in the television or movie business today who could best play each part. Include the characteristics or qualities that make each actor perfect for each part. Share your cast list with the other groups, and take a class vote to decide which actor would be best cast in each part.

Learning for Life

How do you go about solving your problems or conflicts? Think of a conflict you have experienced in the past week or so. Review the graphic organizer you created in the **Focus Activity** on page 12. Then develop a plan for solving your problem by following the steps described in the graphic organizer. Make a brief outline of your plan on a separate sheet of paper.

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Before You Read

A Midsummer Night's Dream Act 2

FOCUS ACTIVITY

How would you feel if someone you liked suddenly stopped liking you?

Journal

On a separate sheet of paper, jot down some of the feelings and reactions you might have toward someone whom you felt had stopped liking you.

Setting a Purpose

As you read act 2, follow the ins and outs of the relationships among the various characters.

BACKGROUND

Did You Know?

Shakespeare did not create the character of Puck. Puck appears in many earlier works about magic and witchcraft. In some cases, he is presented as an evil goblin; in others he is merely naughty. Author Robert Burton (who lived a little later than Shakespeare) describes fire spirits who purposely mislead travelers: "We commonly call them pucks." Generally the character of Puck is not malicious, but rather intent on amusing himself at the expense of others.

Doubling

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Shakespeare makes use of a literary technique called **doubling** to explore different sides of reality. For example, in act 1 he introduces the "daylight" queen and king, Hippolyta and Theseus. In act 2 he introduces the nighttime queen and king, Titania and Oberon, who can be seen as doubles of the first pair. Hermia and Helena are doubles in many ways—best friends who have been brought up together, and who are both frustrated in love. Even their names sound alike. As characters there is very little difference between Demetrius and Lysander. Both are simply young men in love. As you read, pay attention to elements or characters in one part of the play that repeat or reflect elements in another part.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

dissemble [di sem' bəl] *v.* to pretend

flout [flout] *v.* to mock

progeny [proj' ə nē] *n.* offspring

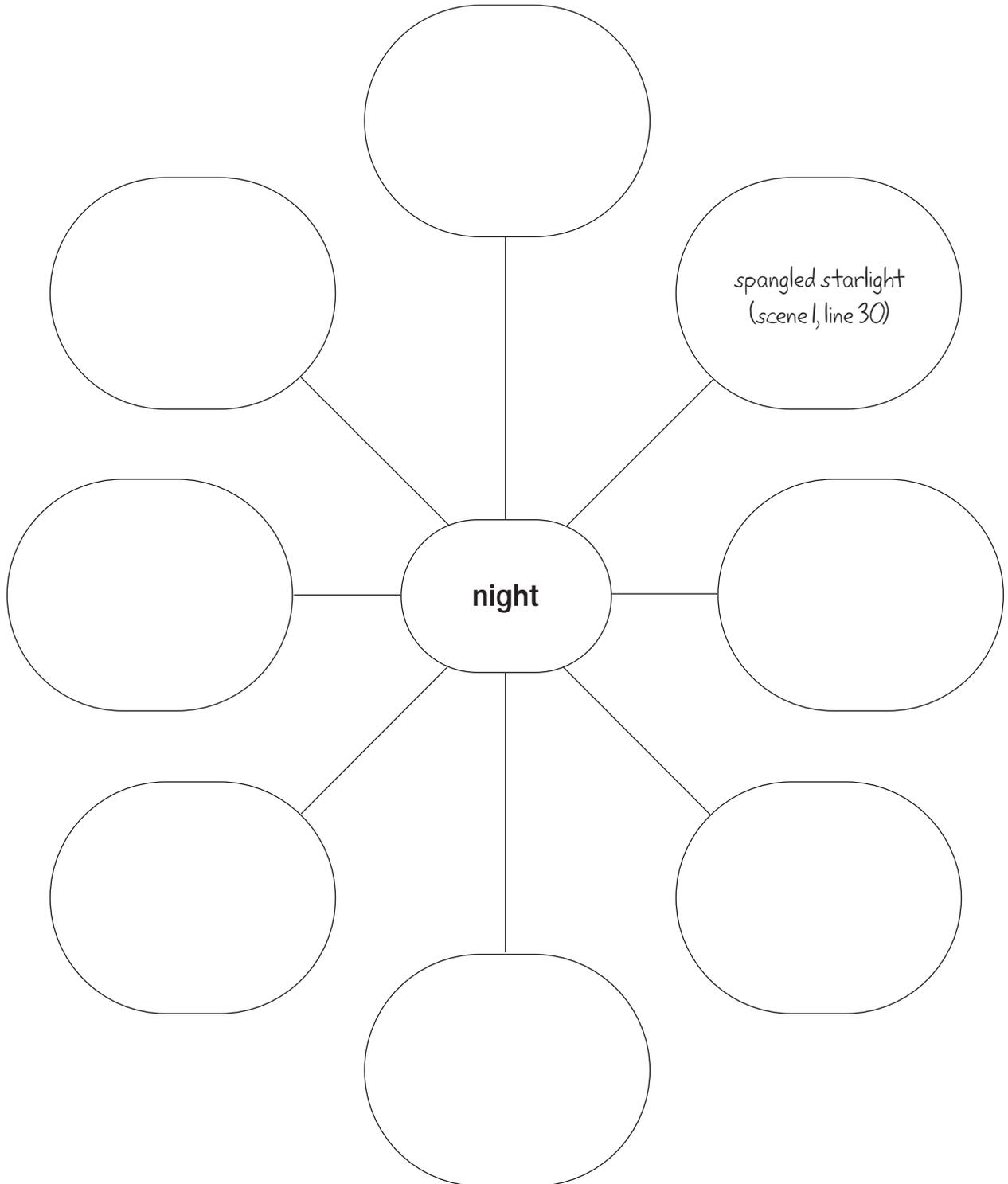
promontory [prom' ən tōr ē] *n.* peak of land that juts out

wanton [wont' ən] *adj.* shameless

Active Reading

A Midsummer Night's Dream Act 2

As you read act 2, identify images related to night. Write them down on the web below. Add more circles if you need to.



Responding

A Midsummer Night's Dream Act 2

Personal Response

The sprites speak very poetically. Which image or images presented by the sprites do you remember the best? What makes the images memorable?

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. Why are Oberon and Titania fighting?

2. How does Oberon intend to blackmail Titania into giving him what he wants?

3. By the end of act 2, what is similar about the following pairs: Lysander and Hermia, Demetrius and Helena, and Oberon and Titania?

Responding

A Midsummer Night's Dream Act 2

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

4. How would you describe the character of Puck? What kind of mood does he create?

5. How might the magical herb described by Oberon act as a metaphor for the way infatuation operates in real life? Explain.

Literature and Writing

Cause and Effect

Write a supernatural weather report. In your own words, describe one or more of the disastrous weather conditions around the world, such as a recent hurricane or earthquake. Then explain the cause in detail: the quarrel between Oberon and Titania. Review your **Focus Activity** on page 16 for thoughts on lovers' quarrels. Look into the future, and explain what has to change between Oberon and Titania for weather conditions to improve.

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

In act 2, Shakespeare sets up a number of unresolved situations. Identify these situations, and discuss various possible outcomes for each. Then take turns with other students predicting what will happen and why. Record your predictions. After finishing the play, return to your predictions and see how close you were to predicting the actual outcomes.

Sound Performance

In Shakespeare's time, the staging of plays was fairly simple, because theaters had few of the technological resources we have today. Productions of Shakespeare have constantly evolved to reflect the concerns and capabilities of modern producers. In small groups, imagine that you are in charge of putting together background sound (music, sound effects) for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Create a tape of music, electronic noises, or other sounds that you think would create the appropriate magical effect for act 2. Be as inventive as possible with your sounds. Play your tape for the rest of the class. Have students critique the tape, discussing what sounds are most effective in creating a magical mood.

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Before You Read

A Midsummer Night's Dream Act 3

FOCUS ACTIVITY

Think of a time when you got so involved in a play or movie that you temporarily forgot that it was not real.

Share Experiences

Talk to other classmates and share examples of experiences when a play or movie made you forget the division between illusion and reality.

Setting a Purpose

As you read, pay attention to the games Shakespeare plays with illusion and reality.

BACKGROUND

Comedy or Tragedy?

One of the many lines Shakespeare blurs in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is the one between comedy and tragedy. Bottom's actors rehearse a play about the legendary lovers Pyramus and Thisbe. The script and the performances by the mechanics are so silly that the play becomes a sort of slapstick comedy. Yet it is based on a tragic and rather gruesome story that the Latin poet Ovid retold in his poem *The Metamorphoses*.

Perception versus Sight

Seeing is the act of using the eyes to gain physical knowledge about the world. Perceiving is the psychological act of interpreting information received through the eyes and other senses. In act 3, Shakespeare plays with ideas of vision, of blindness, and of different ways of interpreting what one sees. One of the things that love, or infatuation, does is to make the lover see the beloved as perfect, no matter what the actual circumstances. As you read this act, pay special attention to imagery of eyes and seeing. Analyze what Shakespeare is saying about the nature of perception.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

bequeath [bi kwēth'] v. to leave to or pass on to, as in a will

chide [chīd] v. to scold

derision [di rizh'ən] n. scorn

entreat [en trēt'] v. to beg

rebuke [ri būk'] v. to scold

recompense [rek'əm pens'] n. payment

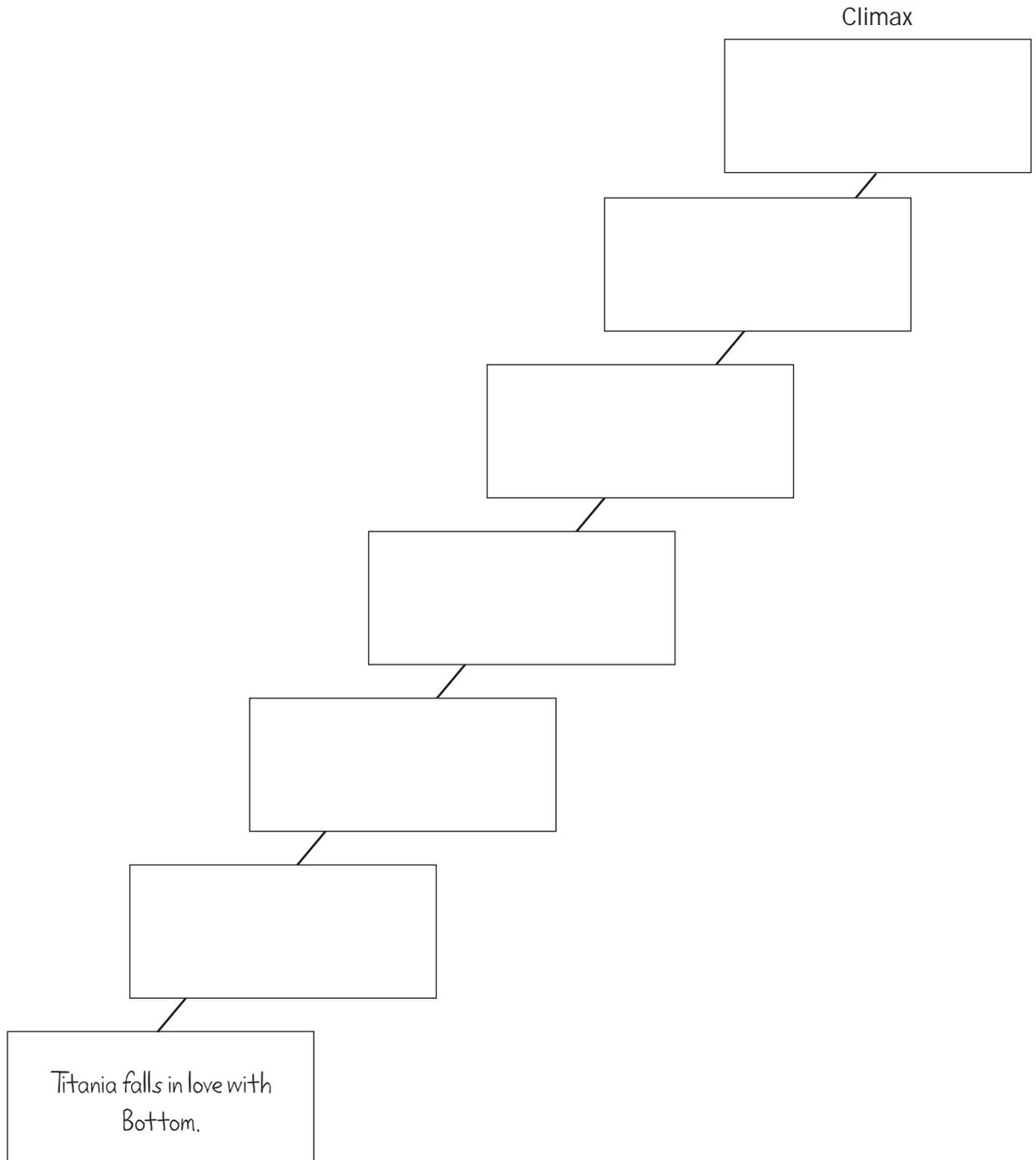
sojourn [sō'jurn] v. to stay somewhere for a while

spurn [spurn] v. to reject

Active Reading

A Midsummer Night's Dream Act 3

The climax, or turning point, of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* comes at the end of act 3. Describe the climax in the box at the top of the diagram below. In the other boxes, write the major events leading up to the climax. Write the events in the correct chronological order. You may add more boxes if you wish.



Responding

A Midsummer Night's Dream Act 3

Personal Response

Some critics see Bottom as a fool. Others think he is wiser than he appears. What is your opinion of Bottom?

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. How does Bottom become an ass? What is the reason for this strange event?

2. What does Oberon realize when he sees Demetrius following Hermia?

3. What causes Helena to become angry with Hermia? In your opinion, why does Helena refuse to believe her friend and her would-be lovers?

Responding

A Midsummer Night's Dream Act 3

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

4. In act 3, what emotion does Oberon show he is capable of? How does he show this?

5. Think of characters from television or the movies who are tricksters like Puck. Why might audiences enjoy watching the antics of such characters?

Literature and Writing

Police Report

Imagine that you are a police officer investigating reports of strange occurrences in the woods outside Athens. You have interviewed all of the participants and are going to write a report which summarizes the various comings and goings and activities of the persons involved. Review your notes from the **Focus Activity** on page 20 on the topics of illusion and reality. Then write your police report. As a police officer, you are not interested in illusion, poetic details, or complex symbolic explanations. You need to focus on reality. In your report, address *who, what, when, where, and why*.

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

Some of the characters in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are **round** characters. In other words, they undergo psychological growth as a result of their experiences. Other characters move the plot forward but do not undergo any real, inner change. These are **flat** characters. With your classmates, categorize the characters in the play as either round or flat. For each character, identify at least two examples from the text that support your analysis of the characterization. Then discuss the role of flat characters in a comedy.

Science Connection

Imagine that you, like the Athenian tradesmen in act 3, need to know when the next full moon will be. Check the newspaper, an almanac, or the Internet for information on the phases of the moon. Then create a chart showing what the moon will look like for each night of the coming month. Display your chart in class.

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Before You Read

A Midsummer Night's Dream Act 4

FOCUS ACTIVITY

Think of a movie or book in which characters have an unusual experience that makes them shake their heads and ask, "Did that really happen?"

Dream List

Working in a small group, list stories, novels, movies, and television shows in which a character has an amazing experience and then wakes up to realize it was just a dream. Then compare your lists with the ones compiled by other groups.

Setting a Purpose

As you read, note the characters who explain their behavior by saying they were dreaming or under a spell.

BACKGROUND

Did You Know?

A curious feature of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is the casual way in which Shakespeare mixes his settings. Whereas some of his fairies are beings from Celtic and Anglo-Saxon folklore, and the flowers and seasons he describes belong to the English countryside, Theseus and Hippolyta inhabit the world of ancient Greece. In this act, the royal lovers refer to Sparta, an ancient Greek city; Thessaly, a region of Greece; and Crete, a Greek island. Then, amusingly, Theseus mentions St. Valentine, a Christian martyr who lived and died long after the era in which Theseus would have lived.

Falling Action

After the **climax**, or turning point, of a drama has been reached, most of the suspense is over. The highest emotional peak has been reached, and the major conflict has been encountered. Still, the audience likes to see all of the loose ends tied up. That occurs during the part of the plot known as the **falling action**. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the falling action mostly takes place in act 4.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

discourse [dis'kôrs] *n.* conversation

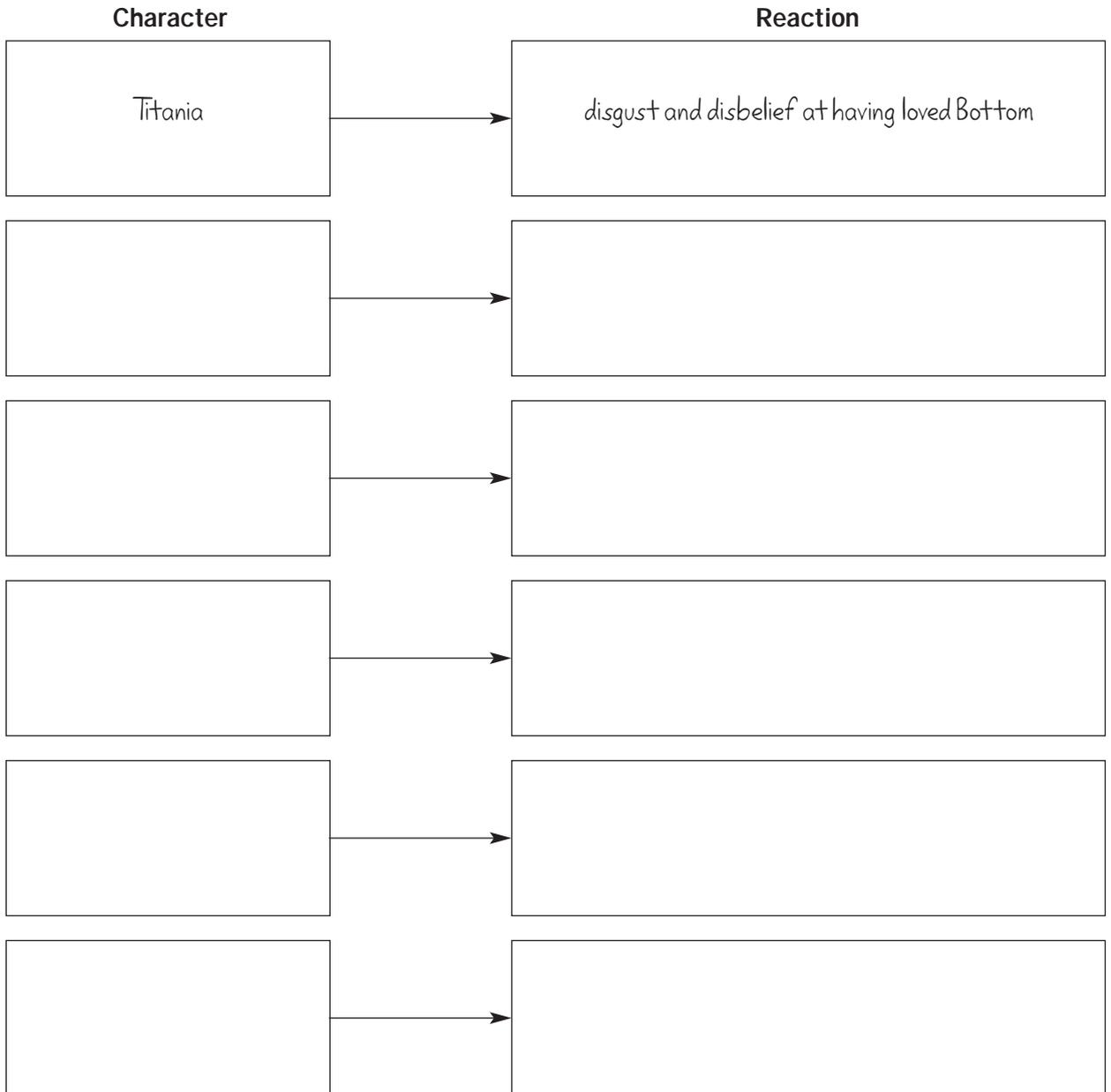
enmity [en'mə tē] *n.* hostility

paragon [par'ə gon'] *n.* model of perfection

Active Reading

A Midsummer Night's Dream Act 4

In this act, a number of characters wake up. Complete the diagram below. In each box, write the name of a character who wakes up in act 4. Then, in the space beside the box, summarize that character's reaction to what happened during the night.



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Responding

A Midsummer Night's Dream Act 4

Personal Response

Compare this act to the previous one. In which act did the majority of the characters enjoy themselves most? Which act did you enjoy more? Explain.

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. How does Titania respond when Oberon asks for the fairy child this time? What does this reveal about the strength of the love potion?

2. How do most of the dreamers respond to the dream experience upon waking? Which character is changed permanently by the dream experience?

3. How does Theseus's current decision regarding Hermia and Lysander contradict his earlier statement?

Responding

A Midsummer Night's Dream Act 4

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

4. The fourth act opens and ends with Bottom at center stage. What is your opinion of Bottom's character? How might he be the antithesis, or opposite, of Theseus's character?

5. In this act, several characters look back at prior infatuations with disbelief. What do you think Shakespeare is saying about love and infatuation?

Literature and Writing

Writing a Letter

When Bottom is reunited with his friends, they press him for details of what happened, but he is unable to tell them much. Imagine that later Bottom calms down enough to relate his amazing experiences. Write a letter from Bottom to his friends telling about his transformation into an ass, his meeting with the fairies, and his love affair with Titania. Try to write as Bottom would (misusing long words, for example).

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

Discuss Bottom's reaction when he rejoins his friends. Why does he tell them so little about his experience? Do you think he is simply unwilling to do so, or is he simply unable to express himself clearly? Give reasons for your answer. Review the **Focus Activity** on page 24 about dream experiences. Then describe times when you or others have had an experience that others couldn't or wouldn't understand.

Music Connection

Bottom decides to commission Peter Quince to write a ballad called "Bottom's Dream." In small groups, imagine that you have been asked to compose the musical accompaniment. Remember that at the beginning of act 4, Bottom told the fairies that he likes to listen to the "tongs and bones" (act 4, scene 1, line 30). Tongs were pieces of metal struck against each other and bones were actual bones. These instruments were used in comical or in less sophisticated musical performances. In your performance, use silly-sounding instruments such as musical saws, kazoos, pots and pans, and anything else you can make out of ordinary household or classroom items.



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Before You Read

A Midsummer Night's Dream Act 5

FOCUS ACTIVITY

Have you ever seen a live performance that was so badly presented it was entertaining?

Two-way Traffic

A live theatrical performance is a two-way relationship between the performers and the audience. Make a list of ways in which the performers affect the audience. Then, next to that list, jot down typical audience reactions to the performance.

Setting a Purpose

Pay attention to how Theseus, Hippolyta, and the other members of the audience react to the performance of *Pyramus and Thisbe*.

BACKGROUND

Did You Know?

For wealthy Elizabethans, entertainment was something quite different from today's CD/video/television center. Elizabethans, poor and rich, watched live entertainment. Nobles and members of the royalty could afford to have performers come to their homes. Sometimes they watched knights jousting in courtyards or tennis players competing in special indoor rooms. Often they watched theater. Every year, one of England's great theater companies would be chosen to appear at the court of Queen Elizabeth I. The Queen's Master of the Revels (like Theseus's Master of the Revels, Philostrate) would watch a number of performances and pick the best. Then no expense was spared for the final production. Workers painted elaborate sets and made costumes out of silk and velvet.

Shakespeare's Relevance

Shakespeare writes about kings and queens, fairies, magic spells, and ancient Athens. Yet he is such a keen observer of human psychology that his characters and themes still speak to today's audiences. For example, in the characters of the star-crossed lovers, Shakespeare skillfully illustrates the feelings and actions experienced by two people who are infatuated with each other. At the same time, he shows how silly and ridiculous those actions may seem to someone who does not share these feelings. He sums up the attitude of the outside observer in the often-quoted words of Puck, "what fools these mortals be!" (act 3, scene 2, line 115). These are all feelings that we can relate to today.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

amends [ə mends'] *n.* something done to make up for a fault or mistake

audacious [ô dā'shəs] *adj.* bold

gait [gāt] *n.* manner of walking

premeditated [prē med'i tāt əd] *adj.* planned

reprehend [rep'ri hend'] *v.* to find fault with

satire [sat'īr] *n.* literary work exposing human vices and shortcomings to ridicule and scorn

transfigure [trans fig'yər] *v.* to change

Active Reading

A Midsummer Night's Dream Act 5

Shakespeare uses a number of different techniques to create humor in the play-within-a-play. Use the graphic organizer below to indicate examples of some of his comic devices.

ridiculous metaphor	lily lips (line 347)
excessive alliteration	
breaking the play's illusion of reality	
using the wrong word or name	
repeating a word excessively	

Responding

A Midsummer Night's Dream Act 5

Personal Response

Did the play-within-a-play make you laugh? Look back at your response to the **Focus Activity** on page 28 to help you explain your answer. Make a list of some of the more humorous lines in the play performed by Bottom and his actors.

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. What does Theseus think of the lovers' adventure? Is this a reaction you would expect from Theseus?

2. Why does Hippolyta initially seem hesitant to watch the play?

3. Why does Snug, who plays the Lion, make a fuss about proclaiming his true identity?

Responding

A Midsummer Night's Dream Act 5

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

4. In reading the play-within-a-play, we become the audience for the drama played out by Theseus, Hippolyta, and the others. These performers, in turn, form the audience for the reenactment of *Pyramus and Thisbe*. How does observing another audience help you understand the relationship between audience and performers?

5. Modern television shows often create comic effects by having a silly, innocent, or “clueless” character and a sarcastic, knowing, clever character play off of each other. What examples can you think of?

Literature and Writing

Hippolyta's Response

Hippolyta is rather embarrassed at times by how the audience makes fun of the players. At other times she joins in the fun. Imagine yourself as Hippolyta. Write a brief explanation of why the show was so ridiculous and why you eventually came to enjoy yourself.

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

In your group, identify ways in which *Pyramus and Thisbe* might be unsuitable for a wedding celebration. Are there any ways in which the play might be appropriate? In what ways is the play-within-a-play an ironic commentary on what the two pairs of young lovers (Demetrius and Helena, Lysander and Hermia) have gone through earlier?

Performing

Cast the play-within-a-play and perform it in the classroom. Costumes and sets are not necessary, but make sure you follow the stage directions, both stated and implied. If possible, videotape the performance.

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Comedy

Christopher Fry

Before You Read

Focus Question

What are some things that make you laugh? Do you ever wonder why sometimes things that were not intended to be humorous seem funny?

Background

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Shakespeare turns what might have been a tragedy into a comedy. Christopher Fry's article, which appeared in *Vogue* magazine, reflects on the nature of comedy and laughter and their relation to the big picture of life.

Responding to the Reading

1. What do you suppose Fry means when he says that "Comedy is an escape, not from truth but from despair"?

2. Do you think that laughter is a way to deal with the tragedies we experience in life? Explain.

3. **Making Connections** In creating characters for a comedy, Fry says, "If the characters were not qualified for tragedy there would be no comedy." How might this statement apply to the characters of Helena, Lysander, Hermia, and Demetrius in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*?

Literature Groups

Within your group, have each person identify some lines or scenes in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* that seem funny. Discuss why you think they are funny. What characteristics or events seem to make people laugh the most? Do your opinions seem to fit in with Fry's description of comedy?

Forget the Footnotes! And Other Advice

Norrie Epstein

Before You Read

Focus Question

Have you ever listened to a language you don't speak and yet felt that you understood?

Background

Norrie Epstein teaches literature at the University of California. In an effort to make Shakespeare more accessible, she wrote a book called *The Friendly Shakespeare: A Thoroughly Painless Guide to the Best of the Bard*. The following selection draws on advice from different experts on how to understand and enjoy Shakespeare.

Responding to the Reading

1. What do the experts have to say about understanding Shakespeare?

2. Whose advice makes the most sense to you? Explain your choice.

3. **Making Connections** In your opinion, would it be better to see or read *A Midsummer Night's Dream*? Justify your answer.

Expert Advice

Having read one of Shakespeare's comedies, imagine that you are a Shakespearean expert and Norrie Epstein has asked you to contribute to her book. Write a few lines of advice to a Shakespearean novice on what you think is the best way to approach Shakespeare's plays.

Based on an Original Idea by William Shakespeare

Victoria McKee

Before You Read

Focus Question

Do you like remakes of movies and songs? Or is it best to stick with originals, in your opinion?

Background

This newspaper article was written by Victoria McKee. McKee covers a range of modern film adaptations of Shakespeare's plays.

Responding to the Reading

1. Why do you suppose actors are willing to accept a lower fee for the opportunity to play a Shakespearean role?

2. How do big-name actors attract people who would otherwise not read or see any of Shakespeare's plays?

3. **Making Connections** In terms of modernizing Shakespeare, with whose approach do you agree, Branagh's or McKellen's?

Create Your Own Production

Working with others in your literature group, choose a scene from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to perform in front of the class. You may choose either to keep the original scene, or to update it, using language and scenarios you and your friends encounter everyday. Before performing, present to the class your reason for keeping the original or for updating the scene. Have the other groups in the class rate your performance.

Allow Puck to Introduce Kids to Will

Lynne Heffley

Before You Read

Focus Question

What is the most impressive costume you've ever seen?

Background

Lynne Heffley interviews artistic director Lisa Wolpe about the adaptation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by the Los Angeles Women's Shakespeare Company.

Responding to the Reading

1. How might a contemporary setting, as Wolfe says, make the play more accessible?

2. What elements of the adaptation make it contemporary?

3. **Making Connections** Do you agree with Lisa Wolpe that New York City makes a good setting for a modern *Midsummer Night's Dream*? Why or why not?

Costume Design

With a partner, create costume representations for at least two of the characters in the play. Leaf through fashion magazines for inspiration, or look in the fine arts section of your library. You may even draw ideas from other cultural traditions to create your designs. The main idea is to keep the costume true to the character.

How the Bard Won the West

Jennifer Lee Carrell

Before You Read

Focus Question

Why are some people comfortable in front of an audience while others are not?

Background

Jennifer Lee Carrell, a Shakespearean scholar from Harvard, takes a trip out West and discovers just how popular the playwright was among cowboys and miners.

Responding to the Reading

1. What might a man like Jim Bridger have in common with Shakespeare?

2. How would you describe the Western approach to Shakespeare?

3. How important was the audience to Western theater in the nineteenth century?

4. What do you suppose Lawrence Levine means when he suggests that “When Shakespeare stopped being story and began to be art, it began to seem distant”?

5. **Making Connections** How do you think Shakespeare would have reacted to a nineteenth-century Western audience?

Speaking and Listening

With a partner, choose a favorite scene from the play and read it silently to yourselves. Then take turns reading it aloud to your partner, ad-libbing if you want, and adding gestures and different voice intonations. Discuss with your partner the differences between reading it silently and reading it aloud. Which action involves more people? Which requires more participation?