



Shakespeare

A Magazine for Teachers and Enthusiasts



A MIDSUMMER DREAM FOR END-OF-THE-TERM TEACHERS

Fox Searchlight Pictures has done Shakespeare teachers a great favor by releasing *A Midsummer Night's Dream* near the end of the school term, a time when teachers are deep into exhaustion and reliable but ready-made teaching activities seem more appealing. For those who can mobilize their

students and get them to the cinema during the current run, *Shakespeare Magazine* offers a few activities for the day after seeing Michael Hoffman's *Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream*. To participate, your students will need a copy of the activities and a copy of the script as Shakespeare wrote it. The line references we cite are from the Riverside Shakespeare edition.

ACTIVITY ONE: CHOICES

To state the obvious, during the course of making a film actors and directors make choices: where to set the film, whether to go on location, how each character should behave, what scenes to cut, what scenes to give more time to, and so on.

While *Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream*

is still fresh in your mind, think about some of the choices that director Michael Hoffman and the actors made. To make the decisions, actors and directors often look in the script for a line or group of lines to guide them. In a group of 3-5 (or acting alone if you prefer), consider the choices listed below. Speculate about why that particular choice might have been made, and look back at Shakespeare's script to find a line or two that would justify the choice. To save you time, we have given you a section of the play where you might start your search for lines. If you think that a line from the play cannot support a choice, say so.

CHOICE	MY GUESS AS TO WHY THIS CHOICE WAS MADE	LINES FROM THE PLAY TO SUPPORT THE CHOICE
OPENING SHOTS (1.1)		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The film opens with food preparation—we see people chopping tomatoes, kneading dough, 		

etc.		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In the midst of the food preparation we see dwarfs making off with various items. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We see Egeus on a balcony overlooking the preparation of the grounds. 		
THE DISPUTE (1.1)		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> During the argument someone gets out a law book and opens it to a certain passage. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> At one point in the dispute, Theseus takes Hermia aside and gives her some private counsel (1.1.83 ff) 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hippolyta turns 		

away from the proceedings in disgust.		
THE MECHANICALS' REHEARSAL (1.2)		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The rehearsal is conducted in public, in full view of passersby. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peter Quince announces that for the next rehearsal they will meet in the woods rather than the city. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A new character is added—Bottom's wife. 		
THE FAIRIES (2.1)		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When we first see the fairies, they are enjoying a bacchanal—a 		

<p>party where the liquor flows freely and the guests are rambunctious.</p>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some of the fairies are shaped like figures from Greek and Egyptian mythology—the two-headed Janus, the sphinx, a medusa, etc. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One fairy delivers her report of going over hill and dale for her mistress (2.1.1-16) in the same tone as "take this job and shove it." 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The fairies are capable of turning to miniatures of themselves and into lights. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Before Titania and Bottom mate they go through a ritual 		

not unlike a marriage ceremony. (3.2)		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Puck is afraid of the bicycle, and Titania's fairies think that records are trays. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Puck picks a red poppy for the "purple flower." (23.1.146-87) 		
THE DISCOVERY OF THE LOVERS (4.1.103-219)		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Theseus, Egeus, Hippolyta, and their train arrive on horseback. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> They find the lovers asleep and unclothed. 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Theseus rides away for a short 		

conference with Hippolyta before he makes his decision about the fate of the lovers.		
WEDDING FESTIVITIES (5.1)		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • With a haughty sneer, Philostrate tries to steer Theseus away from hearing the Mechanicals' scene. (5.1.17-107) 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Between the banquet and the entertainment, the party moves indoors (5.1.105-107) 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The actor playing wall wears a capital on his head (See also 3.1) 		

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When the casement window admits no moonlight, an actor improvises Moonshine with a lantern and a stick. (See also 3.1) 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The actor playing Thisby shifts from a very amateur rendering of the lines to the fervor of one that is carried away by the part. (5.1.324-47) 		
<p>CLOSING SCENES</p>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Puck appears as a street sweeper. (5.1.371-438) 		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bottom is left as the odd man out —the Jack without the Jill. 		

ACTIVITY TWO: PREPARATION

For this activity, a teacher needs copies of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* 3.2.137-344 and at least two videotape versions of *Dream*. Famous productions from the past include:

- The 1935 Warner Brother USA production directed by Max Reinhart and starring James Cagney as Bottom, Olivia de Haviland as Hermia, Mickey Rooney as Robin, and Dick Powell as Lysander.
- The 1964 Rediffusion Network production starring Benny Hill.
- The 1968 Royal Shakespeare Company production directed by Peter Hall and starring Diana Rigg as Helena, David Warner as Lysander, and Judi Dench as Titania.
- The 1982 Joseph Papp's New York Shakespeare Festival production directed by James Lapine and starring William Hurt as Oberon.
- The 1982 BBC production directed by Elijah Moshinsky.

To prepare for the lesson, cue both the tapes to the point where Demetrius wakes up and declares his love for Helena. (3.2.137 ff)

ACTIVITY TWO: LOVERS AND MADMEN

A central plot element of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a reversal involving Helena. Whereas in Act 1 she was miffed because both Lysander and Demetrius loved Hermia and nobody loved her, in Act 3, thanks to Puck's love juice, suddenly both men are wild for Helena. Helena's reaction is anger and suspicion. She thinks it is all a trick, that the two men are faking their adoration and that Hermia is going along with it.

1. In groups of four, assign the parts and read 3.2.137-344.
2. You have just seen Michael Hoffman's production of *Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Recall as much as you can of this section of the movie. What were the male lovers doing to show their devotion to Helena? How did Helena treat them? How did she treat Hermia? How did Hermia react? What did the four lovers look like at the end of the scene?
3. Relying on your memory of Hoffman's production, answer these questions:
 - How believable was Demetrius's newfound love for Helena?
 - How believable was Lysander's newfound love for Helena?
 - Besides speaking lines, how did Demetrius express his love for Helena?
 - Besides speaking lines, how did Lysander express his love for

Helena?

- How certain was Helena that she was duped?
 - How angry was Helena that she was duped?
 - Besides speaking lines, what did Helena do to show her feelings?
 - Did she show her anger with each person in the same way?
 - At whom was Helena the angriest—Demetrius, Lysander, or Hermia?
4. Now view two more versions of this scene and answer the same questions above for each production.
5. If you were to direct this scene, how would you have the lovers play it?

ACTIVITY THREE: BETTING ON A LONGSHOT

Most of the events in Michael *Hoffman's Shakespeare's A Midsummer Night's Dream* are viewed from a short distance away. Every now and then there is a close-up, and once there is a far long shot (an aerial view of Monte Athena), but most of the time the camera remains about eight feet away from the action. Obviously, this camera work is the choice of the director, and who are we to argue with his choices, but it is interesting to imagine long shots that would lead to a clearer understanding of the setting and the action. Can you think of some? Make a list and be prepared to defend your choices. ▶

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