



TEACHER TOOLKIT

Table of CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

- How to use this Guide.....3
- Who are the National Players?.....4
- Offstage Roles.....5
- Life on the Road.....6

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

- Early Modern Theatre9
- Shakespeare’s Language12

WORLD OF THE PLAY

- Elizabethan Fairies15
- Dreams and the Woods.....12
- Gender and Marriage.....22
- Metatheatre.....27
- Afrofuturism.....31
- Get to Know Puck33

ABOUT THE SHOW

- Synopsis.....38
- Character Descriptions.....39
- An Actor’s Perspective.....40
- A Designer’s Perspective.....42
- Classroom Activity.....44

How to use this Guide

This Toolkit includes:

- Historical context, with insight into the political, social, and cultural atmosphere of the world of the play. This section prepares students to thematically engage with the play and make connections between Shakespeare's world and their own.
- Selected excerpts from the play that relate to its primary sources and historical context.
- An in-depth character study, integrating theatre-making, text analysis, and historical context to help students actively engage with the play.
- Post-show questions and activities used in conjunction with or separate from National Player workshops.
- Additional resources referencing production of the show and the creation of this guide.
- Photos, illustrations, and other images providing nuanced, visual insight into different interpretations of the play.

Engage with the Players

National Players has a 72-year legacy of making the classics relevant and exciting for new audiences; we are always looking for the latest ways to engage with students and audiences. We make our educational and artistic work as accessible and relevant as possible, from the thematic underpinnings of our texts to the creation of each year's national tour. We invite you to engage with us in any way.

Your students are welcome to contact the Players before or after their visits: **track** the Players' travels, **share** classroom materials, **post** questions and comments. Also, chat with the Players about their performances and life on the road! To engage with the Players via Facebook, Twitter, video and more, contact Community Engagement and Touring Coordinator Rebecca Dzida at info@nationalplayers.org.

www.NationalPlayers.org



Who are the National Players?

HISTORY

Celebrating its 72nd season, National Players is a unique ensemble that brings innovative theatre to communities large and small across the United States. Founded in 1949, National Players stimulates youthful imagination and critical thinking by presenting classic plays in contemporary and accessible ways.

National Players is the hallmark outreach program of Olney Theatre Center in Olney, Maryland. A model for artistic collaboration and national education outreach, National Players embodies the Olney Theatre Center educational pedagogy: to unleash the creative potential in our audiences and artists, and to stimulate individual empowerment. National Players exemplifies these goals by presenting self-sustained productions of Shakespeare and other classics to learners of all age in all environments. Through performances and integrated educational programs, National Players empowers these learners to build stronger communities through artistic collaboration.

National Players has performed in 43 states; in the White House; and for American military in Europe, Asia, and the Arctic Circle. Committed to artistic excellence and community engagement, National Players has utilized theatre and education to build community for more than 3 million people.

National Players offers an exemplary lesson in **collaboration** and **teamwork-in-action**: the actors not only play multiple roles onstage, they also serve as teaching artists and technicians. This year, the Players consist of nine actors and one stage manager/audio technician, traveling across the country and visiting schools and art centers.

A self-contained company, National Players carries its own sets, lights, costumes, and sound, meaning that the actors rebuild the set and hang lights for more than 100 performances a year.

They also memorize lines for multiple plays—this year, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *A Raisin in the Sun*—often performing more than one each day. It is a lot of work, but the Players are dedicated to celebrating and teaching literature and performance to as many audiences as possible.

MISSION

National Players performs extraordinary theatre for diverse populations across the United States and builds stronger communities via outreach and education.

VISION

We strive everyday to live out Olney Theatre Center's vision by unleashing the creative potential of individuals across the United States and to provide performance and educational opportunities to communities without access.

VALUES

- We tell **great stories** and celebrate the great stories of the folks we connect with across the country.
- Through a highly skilled and trained **ensemble**, we exemplify a style of collaborative work that is unprecedented in American theater. The Ensemble is at the center of everything we do.
- Through theatre we enliven people's **empathic awareness**. Through education we inspire a deeper understanding of the work on stage and how it intersects with today's world.
- We are generous with each other on stage and off, and we are generous with the communities we serve. We celebrate the **generosity** of others.
- As individuals and as a company, we insist on continuing to grow into the best versions of ourselves. We celebrate intellectual, creative, geographic, and institutional **growth**.

Offstage Roles

Company Manager/Set Crew

Schedules regular company meetings, handles emergencies on the road, serves as the point of contact for venues, relays information to National Players Headquarters, helps build the set for each performance.

Tour 72: Ariya Hawkins

Finance Manager/Set Crew

Manages the company's expenses on the road and keeps the company on budget, helps build the set for each performance.

Tour 72: Sabrina Sawyer

Stage Manager/Audio Technician

Runs rehearsals, maintains the script and blocking notes, and mixes the actors' body microphones during performances to make sure they can be heard.

Tour 72: Phillip Snyder

Technical Director/Vehicles Coordinator

Supervises load-in of scenery at each venue and performs upkeep of the set while on the road, responsible for vehicle maintenance and coordination on tour.

Tour 72: Walter C.A. Riddle

Costumes Manager/ Public Relations Coordinator

Builds and maintains the costume inventory, creates a laundry and maintenance schedule, oversees repair, manages National Players social media accounts, coordinates opportunities to share National Players' stories with communities across the country.

Tour 72: Savannah Gomez

Master Electrician

Installs and maintains all lighting equipment, determines position for lighting equipment and cables, executes focusing.

Tour 72: Taylor Ryan Rivers

Sound Team Member (A2)

Ensures proper placement, upkeep, and maintenance of sound and video equipment, Helps company members get into their body mics, sets and checks sound levels.

Tour 72: Tamir Cousins-Ali

Education Coordinator/Props Master

Organizes education efforts, including assigning workshops to Players and altering lesson plans for specific venues and workshops, maintains the prop inventory, oversees repairs.

Tour 72: Melanie A. Lawrence

Accommodations Coordinator/Lighting Crew

Secures hotel rooms in advance of players' arrival, helps install lighting and electrics for performances.

Tour 72: Lorenzo Miguel

Life on the Road



Melanie A. Lawrence. Photo: DJ Corey Photography

Melanie A. Lawrence (*Ruth Younger, Peter Quince*) is thrilled to be working on her first tour with *National Players*. As a proud Washington, D.C. native, actor, writer, and all around creative, recent credits include *Love's Labor's Lost* (u/s Folger Theatre), *The Quadrant Series* (Theater Alliance), *The Laughing Club* (Klexography: Rorschach Theatre), *Soul Redeemer* (2019 Capital Fringe Festival), *One-Act Festivals*, *The Crucible* (Tituba), *Anton in Show Business* (Costume Designer) (Silver Spring Stage), and *Milk Like Sugar* (Adrienne Theater). Training: Temple University BFA, Studio Acting Conservatory. She thanks her friends and family for their love and unyielding support, and is grateful to be able to share these stories with communities around the country. Pronouns: she/her/shers

AUDITIONS

Auditions for National Players were held January through March. More than 1,000 young actors vied for a place in the company, auditioning in Maryland, Washington DC, Los Angeles, Boston, Georgia, Chicago, Memphis, and New York City. How did you hear about National Players? Can you describe your audition experience?

I think I heard about National Players on a DC Actors Facebook post and I was really wanting some kind of educational acting program. When I heard about National Players I thought it was a really cool concept and the fact that they were doing *A Raisin in the Sun* really caught my eye. Plus, I saw they were doing *A Midsummer Night's Dream* I thought that it would be great to get more Shakespeare experience. As far as my audition, I remember that it was New Years Eve of 2019 and I was racing to get my audition video done last minute. There was a video component of the audition about why we wanted to be a National Player. It included talking about what our connection to the material is and why we would want to be teaching artists. I remember having so much to say and thinking my video was too long and that they would be annoyed about how much detail I went into. But when Associate Artistic & Casting Director, Jenna Duncan, emailed me for a call back, she said she really appreciated how much detail I went into and hearing about my background. So it worked out!

MEETING THE GROUP

For the first half of their contract, all ten players live in residency at the Olney Theatre Center, where they rehearse, learn about each other, and prepare for life on the road. Can you describe your experience?

It's been really nice! Coming into this, I hadn't lived with people for over seven years and I didn't know how I felt about dorm living and communal spaces, but it's been great. Everyone is clean and respectful and we all get along so well, better than I could've imagined. We have too much fun together. It's nice to have other actors living with you because they can help you with projects you're working on. It's amazing to have that community here.

REHEARSALS

Players spend approximately three to four weeks with each director, analyzing the text, staging scenes, and incorporating design elements on the Olney stage. Can you describe the rehearsal process?

For *Midsummer* my role is a little smaller and I hadn't really worked on Shakespeare before, so it was a lot of me listening and trying to understand the language and the story. It was like a masterclass for me and I learned a lot even from the scenes that I'm not in and the characters I'm not playing. *A Raisin in the Sun* for me was the most transformative process, because Ruth was a character that I didn't feel like I identified with and I think director Christopher Michael Richardson did a great job of helping me navigate in the rehearsal process and finding what about that character makes her human. He made a safe space for us all to dive into the text. The whole process was amazing, my first lead role and I'm so proud of it and the work we've all been doing on the play.

OFFSTAGE ROLES

In addition to acting roles, each Player takes on at least one offstage job in support of the company, based on his or her skill sets and interests. Can you describe this experience?

So, I am the Props Master for National Players which is really fun. I like designing things so getting to see what our props team put together was really nice and I'm in charge of making sure that I protect them and keep them safe. I'm also the Education Coordinator, so I schedule with our different venues and help figure out which National Player pairs will do our different workshops at the venues. We have a lot of those scheduled and my job is picking up and becoming a lot larger than what it was in the summer.

BACK TO LIVE THEATRE

The National Player's process has shifted and changed this year in response to the pandemic in order to ensure the safety of the Players and those working alongside them. Can you talk a little bit about how the rehearsal process was adjusted to keep everyone safe? And how was that first live performance in front of an audience?

We were all wearing masks throughout the rehearsal process. It was a good thing for our safety, but it made it difficult to see what our scene partners were doing. We had a few COVID scares that made us cancel some rehearsals, so we lost a few days here and there, but it all worked out in the end because we were a team. Our first live performance in front of an audience was *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and that show was outside! I remember when Artistic Director Jason King Jones was doing the curtain speech and I was getting really emotional backstage about our first show back in front of an audience after a year and a half. I was just reflecting on the fact that I didn't know if we would be able to do this; I didn't know if I was going to be able to return to this career. Being onstage again was just amazing and a breath of fresh air and it felt so great to return and to see the audience enjoying themselves.

TRAVELING

The Players take turns driving the company's three vehicles: a truck for their stage equipment, a van, and a car. Last year, they visited 23 states and 64 cities. Once, they performed five shows in four days in three different states. Can you describe the experience of traveling?

It's fun travelling with this group because we naturally have so much fun together. It's so much laughter and foolishness in the car. That's been the most fun part. We ate lunch out both days we recently travelled, so I've been thinking about how much money we'll be spending on the road and how to feed ourselves between load ins and load outs. We've been having discussions about who is prepared to drive the big truck that carries our set, because we don't want to put that on the same 4 people. We have to coordinate to share the load. But I just imagine us on the road having too much fun and getting a little stir crazy, but mostly just having fun and travelling with this amazing group.

BEING A TEAM

Working together for an entire year means that, despite the long hours and challenging load-ins, all ten Players need to work as a cohesive team. Can you describe the experience of having to work as a team with the rest of the National Players?

I think that we all have an idea of our fuses and are able to respect each other and take breaks when we need them. We all have strengths and weaknesses and we are able to figure out what we're good at and how we're most helpful. If one of us gets tired, we can lean on each other and someone will jump in and handle it. We will need to find a balance between who needs to do what. But we have a great group of people who all respect each other and can work together with communication. I'm glad we had the time to build that at Olney before getting on the road.

KEEPING IT FRESH

After presenting two plays dozens of times for dozens of audiences, the Players work hard to keep their performances exciting and authentic. Can you describe how you keep performances fresh after so much time, performances, and travel?

I think we just try new things onstage and make new jokes and choices. We just try to have as much fun as we can. Before performing *Raisin*, we check in with each other about how we're feeling for the day. That show takes a lot of personal vulnerability and we'll spend time to gauge where we're at for the day. For two-show days, we'll try to preserve our energy so we can perform both shows well. Our intimacy director gave us games to play to check in as our characters so that we can build intimacy before a show. I think that helps us stay fresh and prepared to do the heavy lifting every night.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

EARLY MODERN THEATRE

SHAKESPEARE'S LANGUAGE



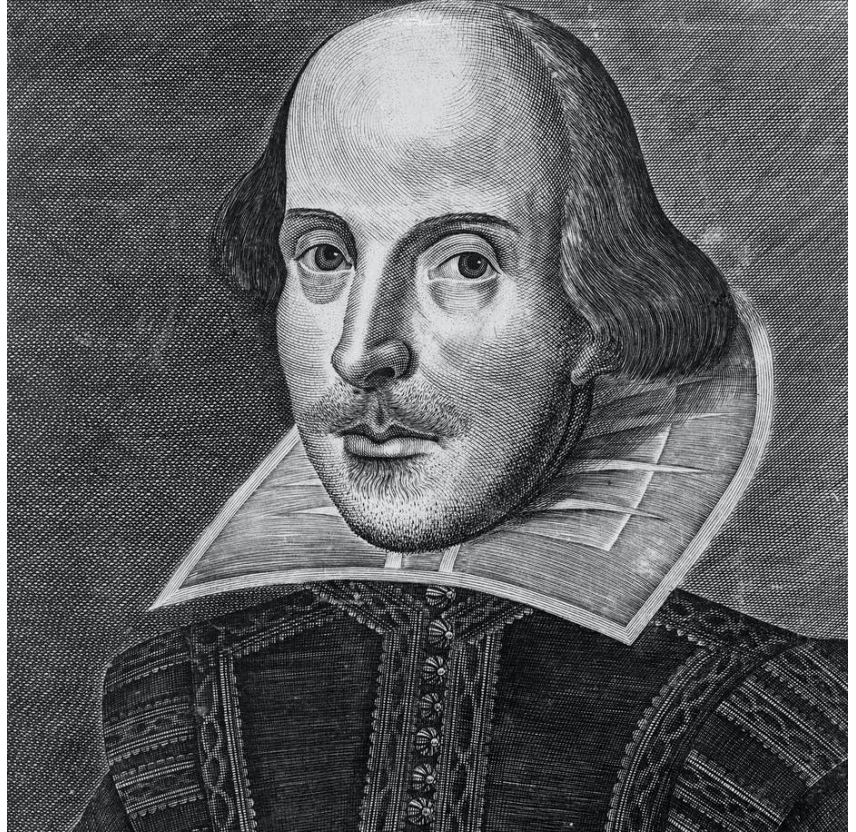
Pictured (left to right): Taylor Ryan Rivers (Puck), Melanie A. Lawrence (Peaseblossom). Photo: DJ Corey Photography.

EARLY MODERN THEATRE

SHAKESPEARE'S LIFE

Despite being history's most produced and studied English playwright, little is known of William Shakespeare's life. One of six siblings, Shakespeare was born in Stratford-upon-Avon on or about April 23, 1564. He married Anne Hathaway in 1582 and had three children. For the seven years after, Shakespeare fell off all record. Eventually, he arose in London and joined The Lord Chamberlain's Men acting troupe. When King James I took over the throne following Queen Elizabeth's death in 1604, the troupe officially became The King's Men.

Shakespeare's professional days are a mixture of fact and legend. He and his business partners purchased property on the south bank of London's Thames River, where they established The Globe Theatre. There, the acting company performed many of Shakespeare's 37 plays. Famed for using the iambic pentameter writing style, Shakespeare's works are deep in metaphor, illusion, and character; sometimes even taking precedence over plot. He began his career writing historical plays, bawdy comedies, and the occasional tragedy. Later in life, his plays became more structurally complex, featuring his iconic *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* and the curious tragicomedies *Cymbeline* and *The Tempest*.

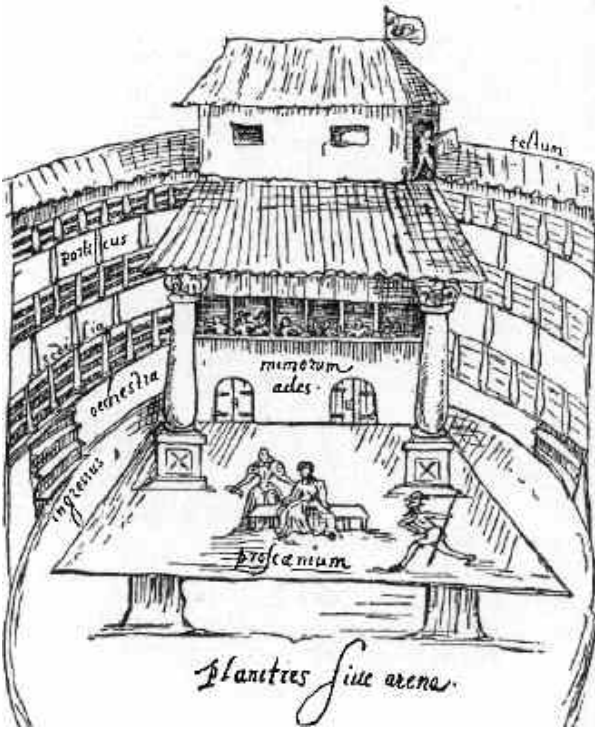


A copper engraving of Shakespeare by Martin Droeshout, published on the title page of the First Folio in 1623.

William Shakespeare died on or about April 23, 1616, and is interred at a chapel in Stratford-upon-Avon. Most early modern playwrights did not publish their work, but 18 of Shakespeare's plays were printed before he died. Luckily, nearly his full collection of plays survived because friends and colleagues commemorated his life in a publication known as the First Folio.

A century after his death, questions began to arise: his birthdate, deathdate, and even the spelling of his name are in question. No definitive portrait exists of the man, and no government record lists his theatric profession. Many scholars have questioned the ability of a minimally-educated man to create such challenging writing. Some theorists have long held that "Shakespeare" was a nom de plume for another playwright, nobleman, or even collection of writers. However, the vast majority of scholars believe that unofficial documentation provides proof of Shakespeare's existence and prolific abilities. Regardless, Shakespeare's plays have been translated to 118 languages and are in constant production around the world.

THE GLOBE THEATRE



Although there are no surviving illustrations of the original Globe Theatre, historians think it looked something like this description of the Swan Theatre, located down the road from the Globe.

the theatre to be prominently seen. Sometimes, wealthy patrons were even allowed to sit on or above the stage itself. These seats, known as the “Lord’s Rooms,” were considered the best in the house despite the poor view of the back of the actors. The lower-class spectators stood in the open courtyard and watched the play on their feet. These audience members were known as groundlings and gained admission to the playhouse for prices as low as one penny. The groundlings were often very loud and rambunctious during the performances and would eat, drink, shout at the actors, and socialize during the performance. To keep the audience’s attention, playwrights incorporated lots of action and bawdy humor in their plays.

Live theatre was an integral part of popular culture in 16th- and 17th-century England, drawing citizens from every social and economic level together in an otherwise strictly hierarchal world. The Globe Theatre, where Shakespeare's company produced many of their famous plays, was constructed around 1599 alongside the Thames River on the Bankside of London. The Bankside provided an escape from the strict, regulated life by which so many Londoners abided; along with patronizing theatres, Londoners could participate in bear-baiting, cock fighting, bowling, and many other forms of entertainment.

The Globe Theatre was a circular wooden structure constructed of three stories of galleries (seats) surrounding an open courtyard. It was an open-air building, and a rectangular stage projected into the courtyard. The performance space was backed by a large wall with doors out of which actors entered and exited. In front of the wall stood a roofed structure supported by two large pillars, providing a backstage for when not in a scene. The roof of this structure was referred to as the “Heavens” and could be used for actor entrances.

The theatre housed up to 3,000 spectators, mainly because a great number had to stand. The seats in the galleries were reserved for the upper social classes who primarily attended

PERFORMANCE PRACTICES

In Early Modern England, new plays were written and performed continuously. Each week, a company of actors might receive, prepare, and perform a new play. Each actor had a specific type of role he played which he could perform with little rehearsal. This role was known as a “stock character.” Such characters included romantic lovers, soldiers, clowns, and women characters. Because women were not allowed to perform, young boys whose voices had yet to change played the female characters.

Other than a few pieces of stock scenery, set pieces were minimal. Artificial lighting could not convey time and place, so it was the audience’s responsibility to imagine. Because of this, the playwright described the setting in great detail. For example, in order to establish weather in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, Titania describes what her fighting with Oberon has done to the world around them:

“Therefore the winds, piping to us in vain,
As in revenge, have suck’d up from the sea
Contagious fogs; which falling in the land
Have every pelting river made so proud
That they have overborne their continents...
Therefore the moon, the governess of floods,
Pale in her anger, washes all the air,
That rheumatic diseases do abound:
And through this distemperature we see
The seasons alter...”

The costumes of this period, by contrast, were far from minimal. Rich and luxurious, Elizabethan costumes were a source of great pride for the performers. However, they were rarely historically accurate, which again forced the audience to use its imagination to envision the play’s time and place.



Pictured: Savannah Gomez (Titania). Photo: DJ Corey Photography.

Shakespeare's LANGUAGE

PROSE AND VERSE

A poet and storyteller, Shakespeare had an astute grasp of language and sound, and along with writing 154 sonnets, he moved interchangeably between verse and prose in each of his plays. Prose, the unmetered language of everyday speech, is employed more heavily in Shakespeare's comedies; it is often used to distinguish class, indicate a character's disconnect from reality, or identify moments of comedic relief. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, by contrast, many of the romantic scenes and interactions among noblemen are spoken in blank verse; indicating members of the higher class and moments of deep emotion or wisdom.

Pronouns were also used to distinguish class and status. "Thou" and "thee" indicated a closeness among characters. "You," on the other hand, was more formal or distant. It was used to address superiors—children to parents, servants to masters. Shakespeare uses these words to establish character, status, and sometimes physical proximity. When a form of address shifts in dialogue, it conveys an altered relationship.

SCANSION

Blank verse is Shakespeare's standard poetic form, also known as unrhymed iambic pentameter—a line of poetry containing five iambic "feet;" a foot, in turn, is comprised of two syllables, unstressed and stressed, making each line ten syllables long. The most common meter in English poetry, iambic pentameter follows the same pattern as the human heartbeat. A complete line can be written as the following:

de DUM | de DUM | de DUM | de DUM | de DUM

The following is an example of Titania from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* using iambic pentameter in Act III, scene i:

I'll give the fairies to attend on thee

Scanned, it looks like this:

I'll GIVE | thee FAIR- | ies TO | a - TTEND | on THEE

However, Shakespeare often breaks from iambic pentameter, changing rhythmic patterns and marking variations in tone and structure. Actors use scansion to trace these metrical patterns throughout the text as they search for clues about meaning and character.

Some of the most common pattern rhythmic and metrical variations include:

SHARED LINES

Shakespeare sometimes splits a line of verse, so that two characters share the ten syllables. This is called a shared line, and it marks quick thinking or strong emotion, and also creates a sense of movement and speed. Have a look at these lines, shared by Oberon and Titania in Act II, scene i:

OBERON: I do but beg a changeling boy,
to be my henchman.

TITANIA: Set your heart at rest.

Together, the shared line scans as:

to BE| my HENCH-| man SET| your HEART| at REST

FEMININE ENDINGS

A feminine ending is a line of verse that ends with an extra syllable. The result is that the rhythm of the verse is thrown off just enough to indicate that the characters feel unsettled about something. The following is an example, spoken by Hermia in Act II, scene ii, of an iambic pentameter line with an additional feminine ending:

Since night you loved me. Yet since night you left me.

Scanned, it looks like this:

since NIGHT | you LOVED | me YET | since NIGHT | you LEFT | me

TROCHAIC VERSE

A trochee is another type of poetic foot. Its pattern of a stressed syllable followed by an unstressed syllable is the exact opposite of an iamb: DUM da. Compared to an iamb, this feels surprisingly unnatural to speakers of the English language, so Shakespeare often uses trochees for his supernatural characters. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Puck uses trochees to address the audience in his epilogue:

If we shadows have offended,
Think but this, and all is mended.

Scanned, it looks like this:

IF we | SHAD - ows | HAVE off - | END - ded,
THINK but | THIS and | ALL is | MEN - ded

SHAKESPEARE'S NAMES

Shakespeare was deliberate when he named his characters; in many cases, names reveal clues about characters' personalities or histories. A few notable examples of hidden meanings behind names in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* include:

Titania: Descendant of Titans, used to refer to the Roman moon goddess Diana.

Bottom: In addition to the obvious, it also refers to a piece of wood around which weavers wrap thread.

Quince: “Quoins” are wooden wedges used by carpenters like himself.

Snug the Joiner: The goal in crafting wooden joints is for them to be snug.

WORLD OF THE PLAY

ELIZABETHAN FAIRIES

DREAMS AND THE WOODS

GENDER AND MARRIAGE

METATHEATRE

AFROFUTURISM

GETTING TO KNOW PUCK

Elizabethan FAIRIES

FAERIE FOLKLORE



Collier, John Payne. *The Mad Pranks and Merry Jests of Robin Goodfellow*. 1628.

Fairies exist in the folklore of many cultures, and by Shakespeare's era, their existence fell into the realm of popular superstition. Robin Goodfellow (Puck) has been found in a few sources before *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as a mischievous hobgoblin, but those references allude to him as a widely-known folk character. Of those who believed fairies once inhabited the British countryside, some theorized that they had been driven out by the spread of Christianity.

In Shakespeare's depiction of fairies, he combined the fairies of folklore with allusions to classic and chivalric literature. The fairies of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* shape many characteristics that we associate with fairies today; for example, Shakespeare's fairies are not just the size of small humans, but are small enough to hide in acorn caps. Shakespeare drew on known fairy motifs, including changelings and the blessing of christenings, and applied them to a wedding in *Midsummer*.

Prior to *Midsummer*, the rural folklore fairies were grouped with demons as creatures whose interactions centered around black magic and trickery. In Joan of Arc's trial, her prosecutors questioned her about interaction with fairies, in the hopes of strengthening their case that she was a witch. Geoffrey Chaucer, author of *The Canterbury Tales*, connected fairies with the spirits of the dead, equating the king and queen of the fairies with Pluto and Proserpina, the Roman gods of the Underworld. In *Midsummer*, Shakespeare also alludes to witches and the Underworld, but only vaguely; Puck calls Oberon "king of shadows," like Pluto, and refers to Titania as Hecate, the goddess of witchcraft. While Shakespeare's fairies remain tricksters, they also divert from black magic, towards the benevolence we attribute to them today.

COURTLY SPRITES

Shakespeare was also influenced by chivalric literature, and by the court structures of his time. The quintessential chivalric hero King Arthur is associated with the fairies' fantastical court, attributing his strength to fairy gifts at his christening. Oberon is structured as a chivalric contemporary model. Puck, traditionally a free agent, owes allegiance to his master King Oberon. The role of Titania's offstage changeling boy, too, is described in medieval terms, as "page," "squire," and, in Oberon's hopes, "knight."

Shakespeare was also influenced by royalty, including Queen Elizabeth I. Puck's magical ointment, love-in-idleness, exists because "a fair vestal throned by the west" is immune to Cupid's arrow, which falls on a flower instead; the fair vestal refers to the virgin queen and gives her a place inside *Midsummer's* fairy mythos. About the

same time that Shakespeare was writing *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the first installment of Edmund Spenser's epic poem *The Faerie Queene* was published. Spenser's poem is a layered allegory, commonly read as praise for Elizabeth I as the faerie queen of the title. The name "Titania," not a part of pre-Shakespearean folklore, is a rare epithet Ovid uses for Diana, the Greek mythic figure for Artemis; Diana, in turn, was commonly used in poetry of the time to refer to Queen Elizabeth.

Like many writers of his time, Shakespeare drew on Classical mythology, and blended folklore and chivalric influences with stories of Greco-Roman gods and goddess to create his Oberon and Titania. Titania alludes to being an Indian goddess, but the petty quarreling of Oberon and Titania resembles that of Jupiter and Juno. When Titania and Oberon discuss their affairs, they combine their mythos with Theseus' and Hippolyta's; they are part of the same web of heroes, Amazons, gods and goddesses, reaching back thousands of years.

METAMORPHOSES

The fairy magic seen in *Midsummer* mostly centers on transformation, drawing from Ovid's collection of myths. *Metamorphoses*—which Shakespeare apparently read both in the Latin and in Arthur Golding's 1567 translation—is the best known of many Classical sources for tales of transformation. Echoes of Ovid are evident in the metamorphosis of Bottom's head into a donkey's; the ears of a donkey are also a punishment that King Midas receives in *Metamorphoses*. Shakespeare makes this allusion not only by giving Bottom the head of a donkey, but also by placing Titania in Midas' position, praising a crude song to excess.

Metamorphoses' influence goes past the magic of the fairies and into the life of *Midsummer's* common people in the mechanicals' performance of "Pyramus and Thisbe." Ovid tells the story much as the mechanicals intend to, as a tragedy of doomed love that gives bloody color to the mulberries. For his "lamentable comedy," however Shakespeare expands on the over-the-top aspects of Ovid and Golding's versions, which was considered antiquated even in Shakespeare's time.



Pictured (left to right): Walter C.A. Riddle (Demetrius), Lorenzo Miguel (Oberon). Photo: DJ Corey Photography.

FURTHER READING

From *The Faerie Queene* by Edmund Spenser, 1590

Edmund Spenser (1552–99) wrote the most famous poem associating Queen Elizabeth I with a faerie queen, whom he called Gloriana. The epic poem is firmly rooted in chivalric and religious traditions, featuring Merlin, King Arthur, saints, and angels as well as fairies.

Till now, said then the knight, I [knew] well,
That great Cleopolis, where I have been,
In which that fairest Faerie Queene doth dwell,
The fairest City was, that might be seen;
And that bright tower all built of crystal clean,
Panthea, seemed the brightest thing, that was:
But now by proof all otherwise I [know];
For this great City that does far surpass,
And this bright Angel's tower quite dims that tower of glass.

Most true, then said the holy aged man;
Yet is Cleopolis for earthly frame,
The fairest piece, that eye beholden can:
And well beseems all knights of noble name,
That covet in the immortal book of fame
To be eternized, that same to haunt,
And do their service to that sovereign Dame,
That glory does to them for guerdon [reward] grant:
For she is heavenly born, and heaven may justly vaunt [boast].

And thou fair imp, sprung out from English race,
How ever now accounted Elfin's son,
Well worthy doest thy service for her grace,
To aide a virgin desolate, foredone.

***The Discoverie of Witchcraft* by Reginald Scot, 1584**

Reginald Scot (1538–99) published the first strong argument against the existence of all magic, including fairies and witchcraft. His unpopular position forced him to publish independently.

... certainly, some one knave in a white sheet hath cou-
ened and abused many thousands that way, especially
when Robin Good-fellow kept such a coile in the coun-
try. But you shall understand, that these bugs especial-
ly are spied and feared of sick folk, children, women,
and cowards, which through weakness of mind and
body, are shaken with vain dreams and continual fear.
The Scythians, being a stout and a warlike nation (as
diverse writers report) never see any vain sights or
spirits. It is a common saying; a lion fears no bugs. But
in our childhood our mother's maids have so terrified
us with an ugly devil having horns on his head, fire in
his mouth, and a tail in his breeches, eyes like a bason,

fangs like a dog, claws like a bear, ... and a voice roaring
like a lion, whereby we start and are afraid when we
hear one cry Boo: and they have so fraied us with bull
beggars, spirits, witches, urchins, elves, hags, fairies,
satyrs, pans, fauns, sylens, kit with the cansticke, tri-
tons, centaurs, dwarfs, giants, imps, calcars, conjurors,
nymphs, changelings, incubus, Robin Good-fellow, the
spoorne, the mare, the man in the oak, the hell waine,
the firedrake, the puckle, Tom Thumb, hobgoblin, Tom
tumbler, boneles, and such other bugs, that we are
afraid of our own shadows: in so much as some never
fear the devil, but in a dark night; and then a polled
sheep is a perilous beast, and of witchcraft.

**From *Daemonologie*
by King James I, 1597**

*King James I composed his treatise against magic of all kinds before his ascension to the English throne. A self-proclaimed scholar and writer, James led a widespread persecution against witchcraft while Scotland's monarch. *Daemonologie* includes dialogues about James' beliefs about the association between fairies and the devil.*

EPI. That fourth kind of spirits, which by the Gentiles was called Diana, and her wandering court, and amongst us was called the Fairy (as I told you) or our good neighbours, was one of the sorts of illusions that was rifest in the time of Papistry: for although it was holden odious to Prophecy by the devil, yet whom these kind of Spirits carried away, and informed, they were thought to be sonsiest [most good-natured] and of best life. To speak of the many vain trattles founded upon that illusion: How there was a King and Queen of Fairy, of such a jolly court & train as they had, how they had a tend, & duty, as it were, of all goods: how they naturally rode and went, ate and drank, and did all other actions like natural men and women: I think it liker VIRGIL'S Campi Elysii, nor any thing that ought to be believed by Christians, except in general, that as I spoke sundry times before, the devil deluded the senses of sundry simple creatures, in making them believe that they saw and heard such things as were nothing so indeed.

PHI. But how can it be then, that sundry Witches have gone to death with that confession, that they have been transported with the Fairy to such a hill, which opening, they went in, and there saw a fair Queen, who being now lighter, gave them a stone that had sundry virtues, which at sundry times hath been produced in judgment?

EPI. I say that, even as I said before of that imaginary ravishing of the spirit forth of the body. For may not the devil object to their fantasy, their senses being dulled, and as it were a sleep, such hills & houses within them, such glistening courts and trains, and whatsoever such like wherewith he pleaseth to delude them. And in the meantime their bodies being senseless, to convey in their hand any stone or such like thing, which he makes them to imagine to have received in such a place.



Pictured (left to right): Melanie A Lawrence (Peter Quince), Walter C.A. Riddle (Starveling), Sabrina Sawyer (Snug), Ariya Hawkins (Snout), Lorenzo Miguel (Theseus), Savannah Gomez (Hippolyta). Photo: DJ Corey Photography.

Romeo and Juliet

Act I, scene iv

When Romeo tries to tell his best friend, Mercutio, about a dream he had, Mercutio cuts him off to tease him about the focus of dreams on wish-fulfillment. He predicts that Romeo's dream was about his current obsession, Rosaline.

MERCUTIO.

O, then I see Queen Mab hath been with you.
She is the fairies' midwife, and she comes
In shape no bigger than an agate stone
On the forefinger of an alderman,
Drawn with a team of little atomies
Over men's noses as they lie asleep;
Her wagon spokes made of long spinners' legs,
The cover, of the wings of grasshoppers;
Her traces, of the smallest spider web;
Her collars, of the moonshine's wat'ry beams;
Her whip, of cricket's bone; the lash, of film;
Her wagoner, a small grey-coated gnat,
Not half so big as a round little worm
Pricked from the lazy finger of a maid;
Her chariot is an empty hazelnut,
Made by the joiner squirrel or old grub,
Time out o' mind the fairies' coachmakers.
And in this state she gallops night by night
Through lovers' brains, and then they dream of love;
O'er courtiers' knees, that dream on curtsies straight;
O'er lawyers' fingers, who straight dream on fees;
O'er ladies' lips, who straight on kisses dream,
Which oft the angry Mab with blisters plagues,
Because their breaths with sweetmeats tainted are.
Sometimes she gallops o'er a courtier's nose,
And then dreams he of smelling out a suit;
And sometimes comes she with a tithe-pig's tail
Tickling a parson's nose as 'a lies asleep,
Then dreams he of another benefice.
Sometimes she driveth o'er a soldier's neck,
And then dreams he of cutting foreign throats,
Of breaches, ambuscadoes, Spanish blades,
Of healths five fathom deep; and then anon
Drums in his ear, at which he starts and wakes,
And being thus frightened, swears a prayer or two
And sleeps again. This is that very Mab
That plats the manes of horses in the night
And bakes the elflocks in foul sluttish hairs,
Which once untangled much misfortune bodes.
This is the hag, when maids lie on their backs,
That presses them and learns them first to bear,
Making them women of good carriage.
This is she! ***Romeo and Juliet***

A Midsummer Night's Dream

Act V, scene i

After hearing the lovers' story, Theseus tells Hippolyta that lunatics, lovers, and poets are governed by their imaginations. Their vivid imaginations can determine their perception. For example, if someone perceives he is loved, regardless of whether it is true, he believes it and acts accordingly.

THESEUS.

More strange than true. I never may believe
These antique fables nor these fairy toys.
Lovers and madmen have such seething brains,
Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend
More than cool reason ever comprehends.
The lunatic, the lover, and the poet
Are of imagination all compact.
One sees more devils than vast hell can hold—
That is the madman. The lover, all as frantic,
Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt.
The poet's eye, in fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to Earth, from Earth to
heaven.
And as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.
Such tricks hath strong imagination,
That if it would but apprehend some joy,
It comprehends some bringer of that joy.
Or in the night, imagining some fear,
How easy is a bush supposed a bear!

A Midsummer Night's Dream

Act II, scene i

In this scene, a fairy of Titania's court discusses with Puck her duties, as well as the conflict between Titania and Oberon over a changeling boy.

FAIRY. Over hill, over dale,
Thorough bush, thorough brier,
Over park, over pale,
Thorough flood, thorough fire,
I do wander everywhere,
Swifter than the moon's sphere;
And I serve the fairy queen,
To dew her orbs upon the green.
The cowslips tall her pensioners be:
In their gold coats spots you see;
Those be rubies, fairy favours,
In those freckles live their savours:
I must go seek some dewdrops here
And hang a pearl in every cowslip's ear.
Farewell, thou lob of spirits; I'll be gone:
Our queen and all our elves come here anon.

PUCK. The king doth keep his revels here to-night:
Take heed the queen come not within his sight;
For Oberon is passing fell and wrath,
Because that she as her attendant hath
A lovely boy, stolen from an Indian king;
She never had so sweet a changeling;
And jealous Oberon would have the child
Knight of his train, to trace the forests wild;
But she perforce withholds the loved boy,
Crowns him with flowers and makes him all her joy:
And now they never meet in grove or green,
By fountain clear, or spangled starlight sheen,
But, they do square, that all their elves for fear
Creep into acorn-cups and hide them there.

FAIRY. Either I mistake your shape and making quite,
Or else you are that shrewd and knavish sprite
Call'd Robin Goodfellow: are not you he?

PUCK. Thou speak'st aright;
I am that merry wanderer of the night.

DREAMS and the Woods

SUBCONSCIOUS WILDERNESS

Throughout literature, from *The Epic of Gilgamesh* to *The Bacchae* to *Little Red Riding Hood*, the woods have provided a space outside the reach of rigid social structures. Forests are wild, governed by nature rather than by humans. They exist on the edge of society, allowing a place for escape and playfulness, on the outskirts of civilization.

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the woods defy not only convention, but also logic. They are beyond reality, where magic exists, but can be explained away as dreams. Both the title and Shakespeare's choice of imagery highlight to the role of dreams and the subconscious. The woods serve as a place of metamorphosis, where snakes shed their skins and identities shift and get lost in illusions. In the woods, the lovers face their dreams and their nightmares, and Oberon and Titania face the physical manifestations of their internal conflict. The internal heart and imagination comes out to play.

In the play's epilogue, Puck layers more exploration to dreams and reality. He offers that the audience, like the characters, can view the events of the play as a dream. Like dreams, plays are works of imagination, but can emerge to reflect and touch our lives. Puck asks us to question not the distinction between reality and imagination, but the meaning of that border, and where truth might live in each.

A Midsummer Night's Dream

Act V, scene i

In this scene, Titania describes to Oberon what their conflict over a changeling boy has done to the world around them.

TITANIA. These are the forgeries of jealousy;
And never, since the middle summer's spring,
Met we on hill, in dale, forest or mead,
By paved fountain or by rushy brook,
Or in the beached margent of the sea,
To dance our ringlets to the whistling wind,
But with thy brawls thou hast disturb'd our sport.
Therefore the winds, piping to us in vain,
As in revenge, have suck'd up from the sea
Contagious fogs; which falling in the land
Have every pelting river made so proud
That they have overborne their continents:
The ox hath therefore stretch'd his yoke in vain,
The ploughman lost his sweat, and the green corn
Hath rotted ere his youth attain'd a beard;

[... Even] the moon, the governess of floods,
Pale in her anger, washes all the air,
That rheumatic diseases do abound:
And thorough this distemperature we see
The seasons alter: hoary-headed frosts
Far in the fresh lap of the crimson rose,
And on old Hiems' thin and icy crown
An odorous chaplet of sweet summer buds
Is, as in mockery, set: the spring, the summer,
The chiding autumn, angry winter, change
Their wonted liveries, and the mazed world,
By their increase, now knows not which is which:
And this same progeny of evils comes
From our debate, from our dissension;
We are their parents and original.

Gender and MARRIAGE

Although Shakespeare's plays feature a variety of strong female characters, Elizabethan England was a patriarchal society. Women were considered lesser than their husbands and fathers in all capacities: morally, spiritually, mentally, even physically. At the time, biological differences between the sexes were used to defend the notion that women were meant to be dominated by men. Elizabethans believed that physical appearance was a reflection of inner condition, leading to the maxim that "a woman in the temperature of her body is tender, soft, and beautiful, so doth her disposition in mind correspond accordingly; she is mild, yielding, and virtuous."

Being virtuous, was a trait to which women were expected to adhere. Before marriage, a woman's most important asset was her virginity; after marriage, it was her fidelity. Popular handbooks for women, virtually always written by men, spelled out the ideals of femininity and marriage, to be "chaste, silent, and obedient."

Before marriage, a woman obeyed her father or the family patriarch. After her wedding, she was considered the property of her new husband. Inheritances passed solely from father to son, and the family was considered a miniature commonwealth, with the father as king and his family as his subjects. To that end, marrying a daughter to a suitable husband was the equivalent of making a new political ally.

Marriage, therefore, was the focal point of a noblewoman's world. Women's access to education increased significantly during this era—those from wealthier families were often tutored in the classics and languages—but schooling was still mostly limited to preparing for domestic married life. When women were educated beyond their station, they were compared to men rather than praised for their intelligence, like one successful noblewoman who was remembered after her death as "a woman of most masculine understanding."

COURTSHIP AND LOVE

The tradition of "Courtly Love" began in early medieval literature among 11th-century French poets writing about love-struck knights. In these early stories, the central lovers are always of royal lineage, and the woman is worshiped as the paragon of female perfection. Her and the knight's love, while pristine, is unattainable: the woman is usually married or betrothed to another, and the



16th century woodcut of a lord wooing a gentlewoman

impossibility of the knight's affections make his love all the more pure. Although he displays gentlemanly courtesy, humility, and service, his desire includes an element of desperation or despair. These themes reflected the medieval, secular view of marriage as an economic, social contract between families.

These conventions found their way into English literature through the influence of Italian poetry. Petrarch, a renowned Italian poet, was acclaimed for his love sonnets; he famously wrote 366 poems about his unrequited love for an exquisite yet unattainable woman named Laura. Although Renaissance English poets emulated Petrarch's work through sonnets of their own, shifting notions of love and marriage altered the focus of these later sonnets. Marriage in Elizabethan England remained heavily contingent on parental influence, particularly among the higher social classes, but the church emphasized the binding power of two consenting individuals. Sonnets, therefore, evolved into more nuanced narratives about a variety of love-related themes and reflected the timely conflict between romantic love and familial obligation. In Shakespeare's 154 sonnets, he explores the emotional and social intricacies of love, diverging from Petrarch's fatalistic, often melodramatic format.



Princess Elizabeth, c. 1546, by William Scrots

THE VIRGIN QUEEN

Over the course of her 44-year reign, Queen Elizabeth I (1533–1603) defied various societal conventions of gender. A lifetime of hardships prepared her for the political and social challenges specific to a woman governing a patriarchal society. The youngest daughter of King Henry VIII, Elizabeth was declared illegitimate after her mother's beheading in 1533. During her half-sister Queen Mary's five-year reign, Elizabeth was forced to convert to Catholicism, and because her popularity with the public was deemed a threat to the monarchy, she was imprisoned in the Tower of London briefly.

After Mary's death and her coronation, Elizabeth was constantly bombarded with advice from noblemen hoping to impart their own ideas on this member of the "weaker sex." Most notably, members of Parliament were determined to marry the Queen and secure an heir to the throne. Parliament even threatened to cut government funds until she agreed to wed. Elizabeth, in response, declared, "In my end, this shall be for me sufficient, that a marble stone shall declare that a queen, having reigned such a time, lived and died a virgin."

Although her gender certainly presented challenges, Elizabeth also recognized the power that such a unique

situation offered. Crowned at the age of 25, the young queen had a variety of suitors during her monarchy—a position that she used to her full advantage. She regularly dangled the prospect of marriage in the face of domestic and foreign nobles, never committing to an agreement, but often using these relationships to foster and break political alliances.

By the second half of her reign, when she was beyond the age of childbearing, Elizabeth fostered the image of herself as the Virgin Queen. In contrast to this pristine, feminine representation, Elizabeth was often compared to an Amazon warrior by her subjects. While Hippolyta spends *A Midsummer Night's Dream* conquered and bound to Theseus, the Amazons generally represented the opposite situation. As a society of warrior women from Greek mythology who used men solely for procreation, they completely refuted societal notions of femininity and were regarded with a mixture of fascination and disdain. These two contradictory images of Elizabeth I—the delicate, maternal virgin and the brutish, masculine warrior—exemplify the careful balance that Elizabeth struck between conforming to and diverging from patriarchal gender norms.

FURTHER READING

“The Duties of Children Before Marriage”

by Thomas Becon, 1564

Thomas Becon (1512–67), a Protestant minister, wrote one of the earliest influential guide books for women after the Reformation. His advice remained relevant into the 17th century. In this excerpt, he emphasizes the popular Renaissance view that women were to be chaste, silent, and obedient. He also expresses his view on marriage, strongly recommending that young men and women ensure that they have approval of their parents or others in authority before committing themselves to one another.

From Silence in a Maid is Greatly Commendable

This also must maids provide, that they be not full of tongue, and of much babbling, nor use many words, but as few as they may, yea, and those wisely and discreetly, soberly and modestly spoken, ever remembering this common proverb: A maid should be seen and not heard. Except that the gravity of some matter do require, that she should speak: or else an answer is to be made to such things as are demanded of her: let her keep silence. For there is nothing that doth so much commend, advance, set forth, adorn, deck, trim, and garnish a maid as silence. And this noble virtue may the virgins learn of that most holy, pure, and glorious virgin Mary: which when she either heard or saw any worthy and notable thing, blabbed it not straightaways to her gossips, as the manner of women is at this present day, but being silent, she kept all those sayings secret and pondered them in her heart, saith blessed Luke.

From Children Ought Not to Contract Matrimony Without Consent of their Parents

Finally, when the time cometh, that they feel themselves apt unto marriage, that they may avoid all uncleanness and bring forth fruit according to God's ordinance, as their parents have done before them: they must diligently take heed, that they presume not to take in hand so grave, weighty and earnest matter, not entangle themselves with the love of any person, before they have made their parents, tutors, friends, or such have governance of them privy to their intent, yea and also require their both counsel and consent in the matter, and by no means to establish or appoint any thing in this behalf without the determination of their rulers. For this part of the honor that the children owe to their parents and tutors by the commandment of God, even to be bestowed in marriage, as it pleased the godly, prudent, and honest parents or tutors to appoint: with this persuassion, that they for their age, wisdom, and experience, yea and for the tender love, singular benevolence, and hearty good will that they bear toward the children, both know and will better provide for them, than they be able to provide for themselves. The children which presume to marry without the counsel of their parents, do greatly offend God, and are fallen away from the obedience, which they owe their parents or tutors in this behalf, by the commandment of God. Let all godly maids take heed therefore, that they snarl not themselves with the love of any other, nor marry with any person before they have the good will of their parents.



A Godly Form of Household Government
by John Dod and Robert Cleaver, 1598

One of the many popular conduct books written after the Reformation, John Dod and Robert Cleaver's book is typical in its stance on marriage contracts. It differs from others, however, in that it takes into consideration the desires of the couple as well as the views of the parents.

A Contract is a voluntary promise of marriage, mutually made between one man and one woman, both being meet and free to marry one another, and therefore allowed to do so by their Parents.

...We call this promise of marriage, voluntary, because it must not come from the lips alone, but from the well-liking and consent of the heart: for if it be only a verbal promise, without any will at all, (and so mere hypocritical and dissembled) though it bindeth the party that promiseth, to the performance of his promise, made before God and man: yet if the Parents afterwards shall certainly know this, and that there was no will, nor unfeigned meaning at all in the party, neither yet is, but rather a loathing and abhorring of his spouse betrothed, though he be not able to render just and sufficient cause thereof, they may upon this occasion, either defer the day of marriage the longer, to see if God will happily change the mind of the party, or utterly break and frustrate the promise...Wherefore this promise must be in this respect, at least, willing and voluntary. For...if it be voluntary and unfeigned, it is enough, and fully sufficient, to make a true contract in the Lord...Secondly, we call it voluntary, in respect of constraint and compulsion, contrary to a free consent: for if either party be urged, constrained, or compelled, by great fear of their Parents, or others, by threatening of loss or preferment, of health, of limb, of life, or of any such other like, by any other violent manner of dealing whatsoever, to yield their promise clean contrary to the motion of good liking of their hearts. This kind of promise, as it doth not bind the party to keep it: so it ought to be frustrated and broken by the Parents themselves, or by such masters as may and ought, to command and rule them in such cases.

But if a marriage contract be mutual, then it doth mutually and inviolably bind both: so that in this regard, neither Parent, Magistrate, nor any other, can or ought to break it. For this being fully performed and accomplished, is one principal cause of making two one flesh.

It is a calamity infernal to be in company with those that a man would not be withall, and yet cannot be separated nor depart from them. Hereof cometh, as we do see in some marriages, so great ruins, so wicked and vile deed, as mains, & murders committed by such desperate persons, as are loath to keep, and yet cannot lawfully refuse, nor leave them: Therefore young folks ought not to be too rash and hasty in their choice, but to have the good advice and direction of their parents and trusty friends in this behalf, who have better judgment, and are more free from the motions of all affections, than they are. And they must take heed, lest following the light and corrupt judgment of their own affections and minds, they change not a short delectation and pleasure, into a continual sorrow and repentance. For we do learn, by great and continual use and experience of things, that the secret contracts made between those that be young do seldom prosper, whereas contrariwise, those marriages that are made and established by the advice of wise and religious parents, do prosper well.

A Midsummer Night's Dream

Act I, scene i

In this excerpt, Egeus comes to Duke Theseus to invoke his right to force his daughter to marry the man of his choosing, Demetrius, or be killed.

EGEUS. Full of vexation come I, with complaint
Against my child, my daughter Hermia.
Stand forth, Demetrius. My noble lord,
This man hath my consent to marry her.
Stand forth, Lysander: and my gracious duke,
This man hath bewitch'd the bosom of my child;
Thou, thou, Lysander, thou hast given her rhymes,
And interchanged love-tokens with my child:
Thou hast by moonlight at her window sung,
With feigning voice verses of feigning love,
And stolen the impression of her fantasy
With bracelets of thy hair, rings, gawds, conceits,
Knacks, trifles, nosegays, sweetmeats, messengers
Of strong prevailment in unhardened youth:
With cunning hast thou filch'd my daughter's heart,
Turn'd her obedience, which is due to me,
To stubborn harshness: and, my gracious duke,
Be it so she; will not here before your grace
Consent to marry with Demetrius,
I beg the ancient privilege of Athens,
As she is mine, I may dispose of her:
Which shall be either to this gentleman
Or to her death, according to our law
Immediately provided in that case.

THESEUS. What say you, Hermia? be advised fair maid:
To you your father should be as a god;
One that composed your beauties, yea, and one
To whom you are but as a form in wax
By him imprinted and within his power
To leave the figure or disfigure it.
Demetrius is a worthy gentleman.

HERMIA. So is Lysander.

THESEUS. In himself he is;

But in this kind, wanting your father's voice,
The other must be held the worthier.

HERMIA. I would my father look'd but with my eyes.

THESEUS. Rather your eyes must with his judgment look.

HERMIA. I do entreat your grace to pardon me.
I know not by what power I am made bold,
Nor how it may concern my modesty,
In such a presence here to plead my thoughts;
But I beseech your grace that I may know
The worst that may befall me in this case,
If I refuse to wed Demetrius.

THESEUS. Either to die the death or to abjure
For ever the society of men.
Therefore, fair Hermia, question your desires;
Know of your youth, examine well your blood,
Whether, if you yield not to your father's choice,
You can endure the livery of a nun,
For aye to be in shady cloister mew'd,
To live a barren sister all your life,

Chanting faint hymns to the cold fruitless moon.
Thrice-blessed they that master so their blood,
To undergo such maiden pilgrimage;
But earthlier happy is the rose distill'd,
Than that which withering on the virgin thorn
Grows, lives and dies in single blessedness.

HERMIA. So will I grow, so live, so die, my lord,
Ere I will my virgin patent up
Unto his lordship, whose unwished yoke
My soul consents not to give sovereignty.

THESEUS. Take time to pause; and, by the next new moon—
The sealing-day betwixt my love and me,
For everlasting bond of fellowship—
Upon that day either prepare to die
For disobedience to your father's will,
Or else to wed Demetrius, as he would;
Or on Diana's altar to protest
For aye austerity and single life.

DEMETRIUS. Relent, sweet Hermia: and, Lysander, yield
Thy crazed title to my certain right.

LYSANDER. You have her father's love, Demetrius;
Let me have Hermia's: do you marry him.

EGEUS. Scornful Lysander! true, he hath my love,
And what is mine my love shall render him.
And she is mine, and all my right of her
I do estate unto Demetrius.

LYSANDER. I am, my lord, as well derived as he,
As well possess'd; my love is more than his;
My fortunes every way as fairly rank'd,
If not with vantage, as Demetrius';
And, which is more than all these boasts can be,
I am beloved of beauteous Hermia:
Why should not I then prosecute my right?
Demetrius, I'll avouch it to his head,
Made love to Nedar's daughter, Helena,
And won her soul; and she, sweet lady, dotes,
Devoutly dotes, dotes in idolatry,
Upon this spotted and inconstant man.

THESEUS. I must confess that I have heard so much,
And with Demetrius thought to have spoke thereof;
But, being over-full of self-affairs,
My mind did lose it. But, Demetrius, come;
And come, Egeus; you shall go with me,
I have some private schooling for you both.
For you, fair Hermia, look you arm yourself
To fit your fancies to your father's will;
Or else the law of Athens yields you up—
Which by no means we may extenuate—

METATHEATRE



“Metatheatre” refers to the parts of a play or musical that draw attention to the fact that it is theatre and not reality. In *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, perhaps the most obvious way that Shakespeare reminds us that we are watching a play is by having Bottom and the rude mechanicals rehearse and perform their own play. The play-within-a-play of “Pyramus and Thisbe” has parallels to the lovers’ own foolishness, but by layering theatre within theatre, the implications extend to us. In his essay “What Is The Dream in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*?” Robert Crosman writes that the mechanicals’ play “offers [the characters] the opportunity to see what fools they are, but they entirely miss the point.” Simultaneously, by placing Theseus, Hippolyta, and the lovers in the audience, the connection is drawn to the real audience. Will we have the realization that the fictional audience misses? Are we fools in a play we can’t understand or control, too?

Another form of metatheatre that Shakespeare often uses is direct address to the audience, or “breaking the fourth wall.” As scripted, *Midsummer’s* play-within-a-play never breaks the fourth wall to address us, but within the world of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, the mechanicals do use metatheatre by addressing their audience directly. The mechanicals’ breakage of the fourth wall is comical in part because it is redundant; their performance is so inelegant that they never manage to establish a theatrical illusion.

Shakespeare does break the fourth wall in the epilogue, spoken by Puck, transitioning the audience from the world of the play to reality. He uses an epilogue to end not just the story, but the play as a performance. Puck invites any disapproving audience members to dismiss the play as a dream, as the characters do. In his layered approach, Shakespeare might suggest that if we dismiss the play as a dream, we are as foolish as the characters we watched, but how can we accept the play as something more real when he reminds us throughout of its unreality? As Alvin Kernan writes in *The Playwright As Magician*, the metatheatrical techniques suggest that “If all the world is a play, then one play may be as true as another.”

FURTHER READING

Shakespeare wrote A Midsummer Night's Dream and Romeo & Juliet in the same period, and the parallels between the plots of Romeo & Juliet and the "Pyramus and Thisbe" story, which he adapts from Ovid, are notable. Shakespeare uses the same elements to dramatically different effect, using the play-within-a-play's metatheatricality to highlight the comic absurdity of the story.

A Midsummer Night's Dream

Act V, scene i

By moonshine did these lovers think no scorn
To meet at Ninus' tomb, there, there to woo.
This grisly beast, which Lion hight by name,
The trusty Thisby, coming first by night,
Did scare away, or rather did affright;
And, as she fled, her mantle she did fall,
Which Lion vile with bloody mouth did stain.
Anon comes Pyramus, sweet youth and tall,
And finds his trusty Thisby's mantle slain:
Whereat, with blade, with bloody blameful blade,
He bravely broach'd his boiling bloody breast;
And Thisby, tarrying in mulberry shade,
His dagger drew, and died. For all the rest,
Let Lion, Moonshine, Wall, and lovers twain
At large discourse, while here they do remain.

Romeo & Juliet

Act I, Prologue

Two households, both alike in dignity,
In fair Verona, where we lay our scene,
From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,
Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean.
From forth the fatal loins of these two foes
A pair of star-cross'd lovers take their life;
Whose misadventured piteous overthrows
Doth with their death bury their parents' strife.
The fearful passage of their death-mark'd love,
And the continuance of their parents' rage,
Which, but their children's end, nought could remove,
Is now the two hours' traffic of our stage;
The which if you with patient ears attend,
What here shall miss, our toil shall strive to mend.

Excerpt from Arthur Golding's translation of "Pyramus & Thisbe"

They did agree at Ninus' tomb to meet without the town,
And tarry underneath a tree that by the same did grow;
Which was a fair high mulberry with fruit as white as snow,
Hard by a cool and trickling spring. This bargain pleased them both,
And so daylight (which to their thought away but slowly go'th)
Did in the Ocean fall to rest, and night from thence doth rise.
As soon as darkness once was come, straight Thisbe did devise
A shift to wind her out of doors, that none that were within
Perceiv'd her; and muffling her with clothes about her chin,
That no man might discern her face, to Ninus' tomb she came
Unto the tree, and set her down there underneath the same.
Love made her bold. But see the chance, there comes besmeared with blood
About the chaps, a lioness all foaming from the wood,
From slaughter lately made of kine to staunch her bloody thirst
With water of the foresaid spring. Whom Thisbe, spying first
Afar by moonlight, thereupon with fearful steps gan fly
And in a dark and irksome cave did hide herself thereby.

The Audience's Presence

As You Like It

Act II, scene vii

The Duke Senior, exiled to the Forest of Arden by his usurping brother, has just met Orlando and thus discovered that he and his men are not the only ones who have fled to the woods. Without breaking the fourth wall, Shakespeare not only reminds us that we are watching a play, but points out the theatricality of life offstage.

DUKE SENIOR.

Thou seest we are not all alone unhappy:
This wide and universal theatre
Present more woeful pageants than the scene
Wherein we play in.

JACQUES.

All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players:
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages. At first the infant,
Mewling and puking in the nurse's arms.
And then the whining school-boy, with his satchel
And shining morning face, creeping like snail
Unwillingly to school. And then the lover,
Sighing like furnace, with a woeful ballad
Made to his mistress' eyebrow. Then a soldier,
Full of strange oaths and bearded like the pard,
Jealous in honour, sudden and quick in quarrel,
Seeking the bubble reputation
Even in the cannon's mouth. And then the justice,
In fair round belly with good capon lined,
With eyes severe and beard of formal cut,
Full of wise saws and modern instances;
And so he plays his part. The sixth age shifts
Into the lean and slipper'd pantaloone,
With spectacles on nose and pouch on side,
His youthful hose, well saved, a world too wide
For his shrunk shank; and his big manly voice,
Turning again toward childish treble, pipes
And whistles in his sound. Last scene of all,
That ends this strange eventful history,
Is second childishness and mere oblivion,
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.
Which once untangled much misfortune bodes.
This is the hag, when maids lie on their backs,
That presses them and learns them first to bear,
Making them women of good carriage.

Othello

Act II, scene iii

Cassio, out of favor with his general, Othello, receives advice from Iago to speak with Desdemona, Othello's wife, on how to get back into favor. However, Iago has actually insinuated that Cassio is having an affair with Desdemona, hoping that Othello's jealousy is eventually stoked into homicidal rage. Shakespeare breaks the fourth wall and has Iago speak his thoughts directly to the audience, helping us forget we are watching a play and inviting us to insert ourselves to the world of the play.

CASSIO. You advise me well.

IAGO. I protest, in the sincerity of love and honest kindness.

CASSIO. I think it freely, and betimes in the morning I will beseech the virtuous Desdemona to undertake for me. I am desperate of my fortunes if they check me.

IAGO. You are in the right. Good night, lieutenant, I must to the watch.

CASSIO. Good night, honest Iago.

CASSIO EXITS

IAGO. And what's he then that says I play the villain?
When this advice is free I give and honest,
Probal to thinking and indeed the course
To win the Moor again? For 'tis most easy
The inclining Desdemona to subdue
In any honest suit: she's framed as fruitful
As the free elements. And then for her
To win the Moor—were't to renounce his baptism,
All seals and symbols of redeemed sin,
His soul is so enfetter'd to her love,
That she may make, unmake, do what she list,
Even as her appetite shall play the god
With his weak function. How am I then a villain
To counsel Cassio to this parallel course,
Directly to his good? Divinity of hell!
When devils will the blackest sins put on,
They do suggest at first with heavenly shows,
As I do now: for whiles this honest fool
Plies Desdemona to repair his fortunes
And she for him pleads strongly to the Moor,
I'll pour this pestilence into his ear,
That she repeals him for her body's lust;
And by how much she strives to do him good,
She shall undo her credit with the Moor.
So will I turn her virtue into pitch,
And out of her own goodness make the net
That shall enmesh them all.

Ovid's *Metamorphoses*
translated by Arthur Golding, 1567
Preface

I would not wish the simple sort offended for to be,
When in this book the heathen names of feigned Gods they see.
The true and everliving God the Paynims did not know:
Which caused them the name of Gods on creatures to bestow...

A Midsummer Night's Dream
Epilogue

If we shadows have offended,
Think but this, and all is mended,
That you have but slumber'd here
While these visions did appear.
And this weak and idle theme,
No more yielding but a dream,
Gentles, do not reprehend:
If you pardon, we will mend:
And, as I am an honest Puck,
If we have unearned luck
Now to 'scape the serpent's tongue,
We will make amends ere long;
Else the Puck a liar call;
So, good night unto you all.
Give me your hands, if we be friends,
And Robin shall restore amends.

A Midsummer Night's Dream
Act V, scene i
Mechanicals' Prologue

If we offend, it is with our good will.
That you should think, we come not to offend,
But with good will. To show our simple skill,
That is the true beginning of our end.
Consider then we come but in despite.
We do not come as minding to contest you,
Our true intent is. All for your delight
We are not here. That you should here repent you,
The actors are at hand and by their show
You shall know all that you are like to know.

AFROFUTURISM

Afrofuturism is a cultural aesthetic created by African American, African, and Black diasporic artists who use science fiction and futuristic imagery to explore Black identity and race issues of the past, present, and future. According to Tewodross Melchishua Williams, Associate Professor of Visual Communications and Digital Arts Media at Bowie State University, Afrofuturism is “a matter of people of African descent seeing themselves as a part of the future while also turning back or reflecting back to African diasporic traditions in music and art.” In addition to futuristic aesthetics, Afrofuturism frequently involves African—largely Egyptian—mythologies, imagery, and mysticism. Afrofuturism is not just sci-fi but an infusion of futuristic ideas, themes, and aesthetics with a celebration of ancient African traditions and Black culture.

In 1994, cultural critic Mark Dery coined the term “Afrofuturism,” but the genre has a long history. In the United States, themes and imagery of Afrofuturism first emerged in 19th and 20th-century literature. As early as the mid-19th century when authors such as Martin Delany (1812-1885) and Sutton Griggs (1872-1933) began writing speculative fiction about alternate histories in the United States focused on Black liberation. In 1920, W.E.B. DuBois’s short story “The Comet” explored what would happen if a comet hit New York and killed everyone in the city except a Black man and a white woman.

In the mid-20th century, Afrofuturism began to thrive in the United States, and three artists—Sun Ra, Octavia Butler, and George Clinton—became the major voices of the movement. Sun Ra (1914-1993) was an avant-garde jazz musician who claimed to have been born on Saturn. Beginning in the 1950s he led a band that created a cosmic sound through innovative instrumentation. His band was the first jazz group to incorporate electronic instruments. Sun Ra conducted while dressed in costumes inspired by both ancient Egyptian and outer space imagery.



Octavia Butler put African American women at the forefront of her science fiction novels. She began her writing career in the 1970s and her science fiction novels were about future societies and superhumans, but they included a unique blend of mysticism, mythology, and African-American spiritualism as well. Her first novel, *Patternmaster* (1976) was about a group of telepaths ruled by Doro, a 4,000-year-old immortal African. Her most popular novel *Kindred* (1979), tells the story of a 1970’s Black woman who is sent back in time to a pre-Civil War plantation.



George Clinton (born 1941) was the musician who founded the funk collective Parliament-Funkadelic in the early 1970s. The bands were known for the infusion of sci-fi imagery in their music, cover art, performances, and fashion. In Huston 1976 during their Mothership Connection tour, Parliament performed a live version of “Swing Down Sweet Chariot” which ended with a spaceship landing on stage. When asked about his connection to space imagery, George Clinton said “We had put black people in situations nobody ever thought they would be in. I figured another place you wouldn't think black people would be was in outer space.”

Afrofuturism has experienced a recent resurgence in the United States. Perhaps the most visible example of contemporary Afrofuturism is found in the 2018 Marvel movie *Black Panther*. Musicians like Rihanna, Beyoncé, and Janelle Monáe frequently draw on Afrofuturistic imagery by combining cyborgs, metallics, and tribal imagery. *The New York Times* writes about Lina Iris, who “paints queenly self-portraits with a futuristic edge.”

Images: Right - *Black Panther* (2018) ; Left - Rihanna, *W* magazine, September 2016 ; Bottom - Self-Portrait by Lina Iris Viktor



Ytasha Womack, author of *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture* writes that Afrofuturism “emphasizes the intersection of Black cultures and imagination, liberation, and technology.” Afrofuturism is highly imaginative and expansive, but the main themes of reclamation, Black liberation, revisioning the past, and predictions of the future are core to the genre. In his 2020 article, “How Afrofuturism Can Help the World Mend,” C. Brandon Ogbunu pulls Afrofuturism into the Covid-19 crisis and Black Lives Matter movement by saying “The Afrofuturist cannot tell you about the trajectory of an epidemic, predict the future of policing, or an election’s outcome. But it can say that, whatever our plights, a better world is possible. And more specifically, that an interaction with technology offers us a route to resistance.”

Getting to Know **PUCK**

EARLY PRODUCTIONS AND DROLLS (1600-1840)

The first recorded performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is suspected to have been in 1604, but little is known about it. Another suspected performance was in 1631 at the home of the Bishop of Lincoln, John Williams. It was the source of scandal when the Puritans, growing in power, made the actor playing Bottom sit in costume for 12 hours in public, with a sign shaming him for playing the role.



Puck by Joshua Reynolds, 1789

During the Puritan Interregnum in which Puritan ideology reigned over England (1642–60), theatres were closed, but the subplot of Bottom and the rude mechanicals was performed as a comic playlet called a droll. Drolls were part of performances including acrobats and jugglers to avoid the ban on theatre productions. In 1660, when the theatres reopened, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was performed in an adapted form, which was common for Shakespeare plays at the time. It was adapted many other times, but not performed in anything close to its original form until 1840. In 1853, Douglas Jerrold wrote about the common perception that the comedy was “especially unactable ... It was a fairy creation which could only be acted by fairies, it was a dream of the imagination that admitted of no other play than that of one’s imagination.”

This perception started to shift with the success of Madame Lucia Vestris’ 1840 production at Covent Garden. It was the first to put the pieces back together and present the play as a cohesive whole. It also set the trend for the next 70 years of casting Puck—as well as Oberon—as a woman. Puck entered sitting on a mushroom and, in keeping with the production’s emphasis on spectacle, flew on and offstage throughout the show. The production continued the approach to the play as almost an opera with ballet, but based its spectacle around the script, influencing later productions to return to Shakespeare’s words.

MUSICAL SPECTACLE (1840-1895)



Ellen Terry, age 9, 1856

The 1856 production directed by Charles Kean similarly used flying effects—including a flying dummy—with Puck, played by nine-year-old Ellen Terry. This production is also notable for establishing Mendelssohn’s music as the conventional choice for music-focused productions, with fairies played by women and/or children. Augustin Daly’s 1895 production in London used special effects by Martinka Magic Company, with portable lights on each of the fairies. In a review, George Bernard Shaw was especially harsh on Lillian Swain as Puck. He wrote that Daly trained her “until it is safe to say that she does not take one step, strike one attitude, or modify her voice by a single inflexion that is not violently, wantonly and ridiculously wrong and absurd.” Shaw found her too elegant and solemn for Puck, in the misguided service of “what Mr. Daly no doubt calls ‘the legitimate.’”

REJECTING CONVENTIONS (20th century - Present)



*Douglas Calthrop
The Savoy, 1914*

In his 1914 production, Harley Granville-Barker returned to casting a male actor as Puck. The production was revolutionary for its return to the full text and its abandonment of realism. Granville-Barker's Puck, played by Donald Calthrop, wore a wild wig decorated with scarlet berries, a contrast to the painted gold of the other fairies. Puck and the other fairies were given stylized movements, distinct from the mortals. Then, in Act III, Granville-Barker used Puck in a way considered daring in his time—to break the traditional theatrical illusion and highlight the play's metatheatre, by giving Puck the role of an onstage stage manager, gesturing for changes in lighting and set to happen.



*David O'Brien
RSC, 1954*

Even after Granville-Barker's production, traditional balletic approaches to the play continued for the most part. For the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1954, George Devine eschewed the "conventional prettinesses" and created fairies that were feathered and birdlike, while Puck's movements were inspired by chimpanzees. This production was notable for its sinister undertones, which were increasingly popular from Devine's production into the 1960s, moving the show away from its perception as a spectacle appropriate for children.

In a sense, the heir to Granville-Barker's 1914 production was Peter Brook's for the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1970. This production was radically original and not only exposed, but celebrated, the mechanisms of theatre. Brook's production reconceptualized much of the show, emphasizing the fairies as masculine and threatening. This was a huge departure from the small, feminine casting of fairies stemming from the 1800s. John Kane wore a yellow

jumpsuit from a Chinese circus as Brook's Puck. Kane bridged the gap between the audience and cast, leading the actors to shake hands with audience members at the epilogue.

This production was pivotal in freeing *Midsummer* from the preconceived notions that artists and audiences had about it. Productions since 1970 have increasingly explored sexuality in the script, highlighting the contrast between the rigid hierarchies of Athens and the unrestrained woods, both liberating and terrifying. In 1992, Robert Lepage threw his fairies into the mud, focusing on movement and the increasing power of the earth. Puck was played by an acrobat and contortionist, Angela Laurier. Although some critics found her French accent difficult to understand, her agile physicality created an androgynous non-human creature, an appropriate Puck for the bold production.

Just as its lovers reject their society's conventions in their flight to the woods, recent interpretations of Puck often reject whatever trends they perceive. Michael Grandage's 2013 West End production chose a rather human Puck, a hippie weaving hallucinations more than dreams.



*Ricahrd McCabe
RSC, 1989*



*Gavin Fowler
West End, 2013*

FURTHER READING

Critical Response to Puck Various Writers, 1957-2005

“... Puck, who provides the polar zenith of fantasy to balance the blunt nadir of Bottom and Peter Quince. The activity of Puck represents both a unifying and transforming power which changes the wood into the depths of a Midsummer-night’s dream. ... Puck’s part has been that of the old trickster of folklore and mythology who spreads strife that he may evoke understanding. The wisdom of Puck surpasses any man-made values, and discloses to the indignation of the moralist the cult of strife inherent in elemental nature.” ... His next task, however, is to evoke out of his dialectic of deceit and discord a new realization and harmony.”

—Peter F. Fisher, 1957

“Puck, himself, is less ogreish in disposition—despite his bloodcurdling descriptions of the summer night—than mischievous. His sense of superiority over his human victims is human in its pettiness.”

—Michael Taylor, 1969

“It seems to me that Shakespeare’s Puck is deeply imbued with dark conceptions of devilish sprites. Shakespeare knowingly plays on and against the older tradition when he has his character affirm in a somewhat intricate conditional sentence ‘as I am an honest Puck ...’ (V.i.341). With the implied supposition that there may be dishonest pucks, poukes, encoded in a linguistic form ... Shakespeare invokes traditional modes of thought still common among Elizabethans.”

—Winifred Schleiner, 1985

“I suggest that Puck’s sacred sweeping links good housewifery with dramatic closure and political authority and, for the brief moment that it does so, allows a glimpse of an Englishness founded on principles that the play has not generally endorsed—the vernacular broadly defined. As Puck assumes the part of the very English Robin Goodfellow, the exotic mythological realm to which he is attached expands to include local and domestic associations that reverberate oddly with the flexible civic monarchy that founds social order in *Dream*.”

—Wendy Wall, 2001

“At the threshold of his ambiguous kingdom stands a ‘puck,’ Robin Goodfellow, a figure with long folkloric associations and thought of by many in his original audience as a large, rough hairy devil with a delight in disorder. ... Brought to our stage at adult human size, and sometimes smaller, Puck’s main pleasure in life seems to be discomforting the vulnerable, booby-trapping old ladies and confusing weary travelers. The inspirational ass’s head is his initiative, not Oberon’s, and he would regard it as the best service he does his difficult master.”

—Michael Pennington, 2005

A Midsummer Night's Dream
Act III, scene ii

Oberon has sent his henchman Puck to place the love-in-idleness flower on Demetrius' eyes so he falls in love with Helena. However, Puck mistakenly places it on Lysander's eyes, who falls out of love with Hermia and into love with Helena. After the ensuing lovers' fight, Oberon must direct Puck on how to rectify the wrong.

OBERON. What hast thou done? thou hast mistaken quite
And laid the love-juice on some true-love's sight:
Of thy misprision must perforce ensue
Some true love turn'd and not a false turn'd true.

PUCK. Then fate o'er-rules, that, one man holding troth,
A million fail, confounding oath on oath.

OBERON. About the wood go swifter than the wind,
And Helena of Athens look thou find:
All fancy-sick she is and pale of cheer,
With sighs of love, that costs the fresh blood dear:
By some illusion see thou bring her here:
I'll charm his eyes against she do appear.

PUCK. I go, I go; look how I go,
Swifter than arrow from the Tartar's bow.

PUCK Exits.

OBERON places the juice in DEMETRIUS' eyes.

OBERON. Flower of this purple dye,
Hit with Cupid's archery,
Sink in apple of his eye.
When his love he doth espy,
Let her shine as gloriously
As the Venus of the sky.
When thou wakest, if she be by,
Beg of her for remedy.

Re-enter PUCK.

PUCK. Captain of our fairy band,
Helena is here at hand;
And the youth, mistook by me,
Pleading for a lover's fee.
Shall we their fond pageant see?
Lord, what fools these mortals be!

OBERON. Stand aside: the noise they make
Will cause Demetrius to awake.

PUCK. Then will two at once woo one;
That must needs be sport alone;
And those things do best please me
That befall preposterously.

ABOUT THE SHOW

Synopsis

Character Descriptions

An Actor's Perspective

A Designer's Perspective

Classroom Activities



Pictured (left to right): Sabrina Sawyer (Hermia), Ariya Hawkins (Hermia). Photo: DJ Corey Photography.

A Brief SYNOPSIS

As the play begins, Hermia refuses to marry her father Egeus' chosen suitor, Demetrius, because she is in love with Lysander. Egeus' brings the matter before Duke Theseus, invoking an ancient law that a daughter must marry as her father wishes or die. Theseus tells Hermia that she could also devote herself to the goddess Diana and live as a chaste nun. Hermia and Lysander plan to run away together, meeting in the woods at night. They share the plan with Hermia's friend Helena, who also loves Demetrius, but he doesn't love her back.

Meanwhile, a group of working-class men—the “rude mechanicals”—led by Peter Quince prepare to perform a play for the wedding of Duke Theseus to the Amazon queen Hippolyta. Their play is the “lamentable comedy” of “Pyramus and Thisbe,” with the enthusiastic and arrogant Nick Bottom as Pyramus.

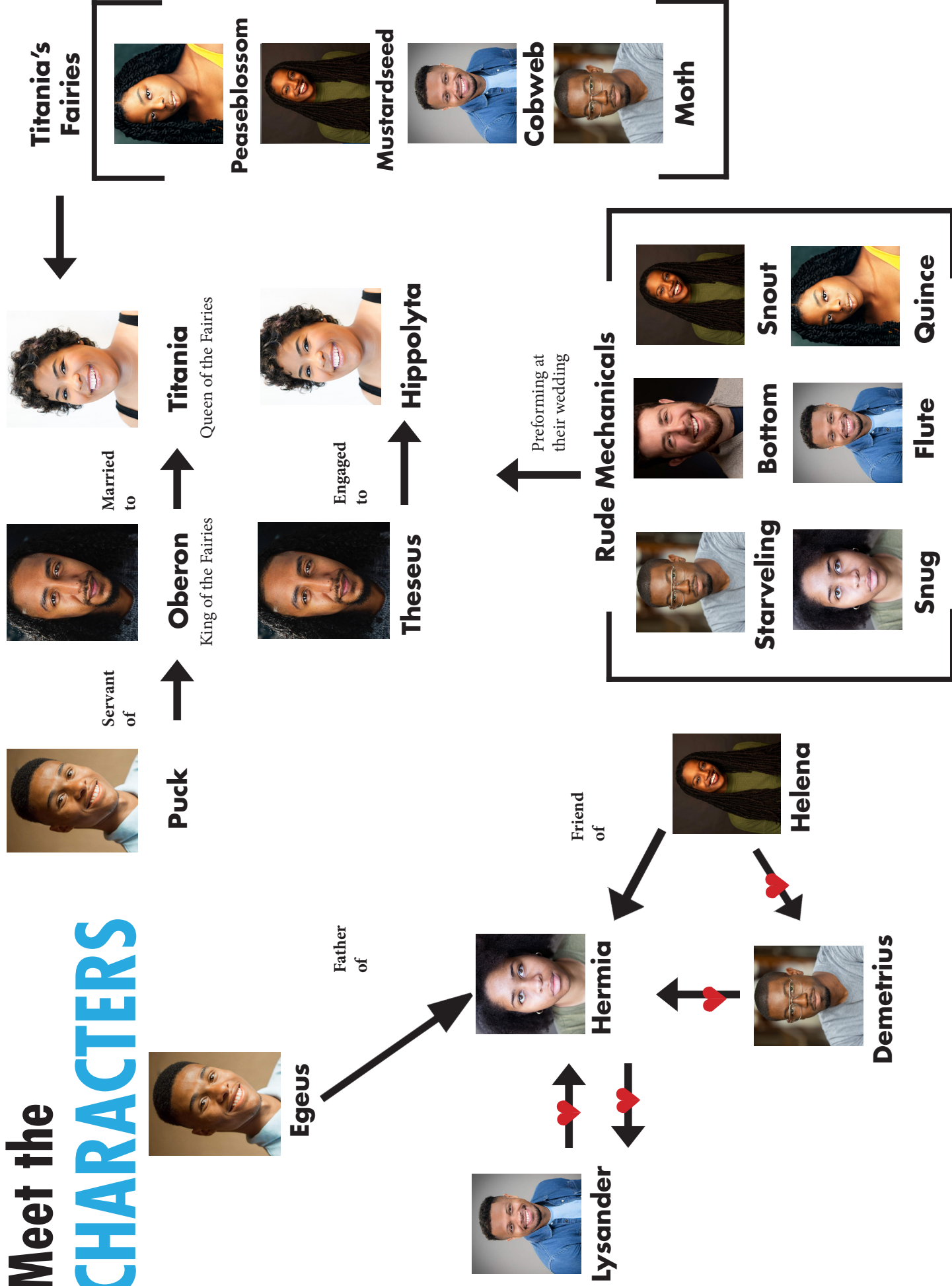
In the forest, the king and queen of the fairies, Oberon and Titania, have come near Athens for Theseus' and Hippolyta's wedding. They are at odds over the fate of an Indian changeling child, the son of one of Titania's worshippers, whom Oberon wanted to be his knight. Upset that Titania will not yield by giving the child to him, Oberon calls upon his servant Puck to use the magical love-in-idleness juice on Titania's eyes to make her fall in love with a creature in the woods and shame her into giving up the changeling.

Hermia and Lysander flee to the forest, hoping to elope. Helena tells Demetrius, hoping to gain his favor, and they follow, with Demetrius continually rejecting Helena's advances. Oberon sees this and tells Puck to apply the love-in-idleness to Demetrius so that he will love Helena. However, Puck mistakes Lysander for Demetrius, and when Lysander wakes and sees Helena, he falls in love with her instead of Hermia, his secret betrothed. Oberon is angry to see Demetrius still following Hermia, and sends Puck to get Helena while he enchants Demetrius' eyes. As a result, both men start pursuing Helena, who thinks they are mocking her. Hermia, confused by Lysander's rejection, blames Helena for stealing him. Their arguments lead toward a duel between Lysander and Demetrius before Oberon and Puck intervene. Puck removes the charm from Lysander, so he loves Hermia again, but Demetrius continues his pursuit of Helena.

While this is happening, the rude mechanicals rehearse in the forest, and when Puck spots Bottom, he transforms his head into that of a donkey's. His appearance scares away the other men, and he sings, awakening Titania—who is under the influence of love-in-idleness spell. She falls in love with Bottom, instructing her fairies to pamper him. Oberon takes advantage of the opportunity to take the changeling from her. He then removes the magic from Bottom and Titania and enchants the lovers to believe that they dreamed the events of the night.

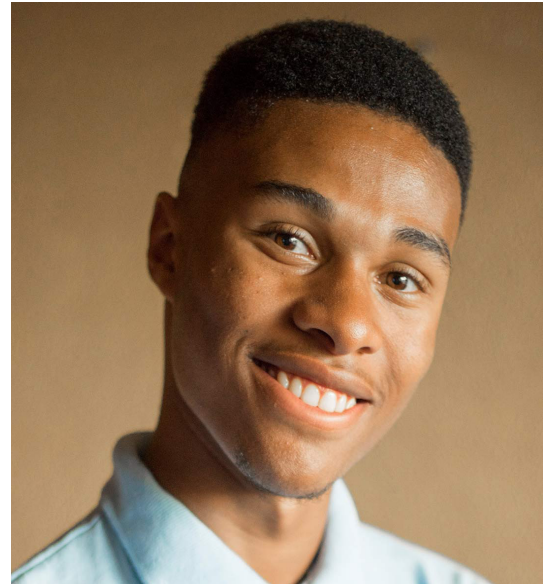
Returning to Athens, Theseus overrules Egeus now that Demetrius does not want to marry Hermia. They arrange a group wedding. Along with the lovers, Bottom imagines that he must have been dreaming. The mechanicals present their “Pyramus and Thisbe” play for Theseus and Hippolyta and their guests, who offer snarky commentary on it. Afterwards, the fairies bless the home and Puck addresses the audience, offering to make amends for any offense and suggesting that the whole play could have been a dream.

Meet the CHARACTERS



An Actor's Perspective

Taylor Ryan Rivers (*Puck*, *Travis Younger*) is a multi-hyphenate artist hailing from the San Francisco Bay Area. He recently graduated from the University of Southern California where he honed his skills in acting, producing, lighting design, and poetry writing. His ultimate goal is to entertain the world then plant a garden back in the Bay. Pronouns: he/him/his



Taylor Ryan Rivers. Photo: Martin Wood

When did you first read or see *A Midsummer Night's Dream*? What were your impressions of the play and of the character Puck?

The first time that I read *Midsummer* was sophomore year of high school. We did a production where I actually played Oberon, cause I was the kid with the deepest voice, so it made sense at the time when everyone was 15. So, it was really interesting playing Puck this time around coming from being the king before -- and the differences between how to play them. It led to some tricky things in my head because I was still trying to do what I saw as a kid. So I had to grow out of that and figure out how to make my own Puck. A funny thing that I was getting director's notes about was: "your Puck seems really small, but you are a tall man Taylor. Maybe make him tall." When I first read *Midsummer* and first saw the character Puck, I thought he was a fun time. I liked the hijinx of a simple rom-com with different people doing things that all collide at the end. Very classic structure and I'm a fan of rom coms!

Did you do any specific research before jumping into the role?

Fortunately for Puck it was pretty straightforward. He is here to serve king Oberon, to get into hijinx, and to help save the day. Everything related to him he either says in his monologues, that he's a trickster, he gets into shenanigans. Fortunately I was able to just read and learn what he was about. Sabrina, who plays Hermia in the cast, thought that Puck should be based of 90s rom coms, so we watched a movie called *Love, Jones* for inspiration. Another thing my director asked me to keep in mind was the lost boys in the movie *Hook* because of how rowdy and rough they can be. So a lot of 90s inspiration.

What have you discovered about this character that you found most surprising?

The thing I discovered about the character is the fact that he can fit my body movements and move more sporadically. I found that I could marry my own weird movement with Puck -- I made him a lot more jumpy. There's nothing like playing a character where you can just be like: "that's me! I can just play me out there and we can all have a good laugh together."

What is your favorite part about playing Puck?

This is an ongoing part -- but the discovery. Everytime we do the show I discover new things. I discovered recently during a show to keep screaming during a moment when everyone was frozen. So I love that when I play this character I can think in the moment, that would be funny to do, people would enjoy that. It's trial and error, some things will work, some things won't, but that's the joy of being Puck.

If Puck existed in contemporary times, what do you think he would be doing?

If he's still a magical fairy, not much would change for him because I think for the fairies, they live in a world where they are immortal. So I think Puck would be up to his old tricks: causing mischief, running errands, living his best life between the natural world and the immortal world. I think he would have a fun time with all the new technologies. All kinds of new ways to prank people! Open elevators and no one's there, or something like that.



Pictured): Taylor Ryan Rivers (Puck). Photo: DJ Corey Photography.

What about *A Midsummer Night's Dream* still resonates with performers and audiences today?

I think because it's a romantic comedy, that genre has never lost its shape. Modern audiences know what a rom com is and *Midsummer* is a very classic one. Hijinx over here, hijinx over there, lovers are fighting, lovers are getting back together. So the core of it, we all understand. A lot of the jokes are still so common. The more things change the more they stay the same. And I think *Midsummer* is relatable for that reason. Once you get past that language barrier of Middle English and Modern English, you realize, oh wait a minute I know what these types of jokes are.

What do you hope students get from our production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*? What message do you hope they receive?

I hope they are entertained and that they have a good time! A lot of people's only interaction with Shakespeare is reading text in class which can be boring -- so I hope they realize that you can have fun with Shakespeare, that's the first and foremost thing. The message we are trying to get across is that joy in community. National Players, we are our own small community, and *Midsummer* is about different communities and how they get together, so I hope the kids can see that community is a huge part of theatre. You can build friends and family, you can have good times and bad, but it can all work out in the end -- just like in *Midsummer*!

A Designer's Perspective: Jen Gillette Costume Designer

Jen Gillette's (she/her) costume design credits include Olney National Players Tour 71; Digging Up Dessa and Bud, Not Buddy at the Kennedy Center; Menagerie at the Washington Ballet; Trojan Women, Don Juan, and Antigonick at Taffety Punk; Gypsy and Into the Woods at McLeod Summer Playhouse; Puccini Plus at the Rudi E. Scheidt School of Music; Cymbeline and A Midsummer Night's Dream at New Orleans Shakespeare Festival; Crimes of the Heart at Triad Stage; Or, Intimate Apparel, and Anything Goes at University of Memphis; costume and throw design for Krewe du Resistance of the Mardi Gras Krewe Chewbacchus. Credits as an installation artist include Night Garden for Columbus Museum of Art; We'll Meet You There for The Front Gallery, New Orleans; Town + Country Kitchen Document for Domestic Integrities at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. Jen holds an MFA from University of North Carolina School of the Arts and is Assistant Professor of Costume Design at University of Memphis.

What are a costume designer's main responsibilities?

A costume designer is responsible for working with the director, the other designers, and the performers to create clothing that supports the story. The costume designer begins by reading the play and doing visual research into the play's setting, including the location, time period, and social status of its characters. Once the research is complete, a costume designer will create sketches to show what each of the characters looks like in their costume, including their hair, makeup, shoes, and accessories. The costume designer helps to purchase the fabric and clothing pieces necessary for the production, fit all of the pieces on the performers, and look at the production in technical rehearsals to make final adjustments to the design.

How would you describe the National Players' aesthetic?

There are a lot of special conditions for National Players' costumes that aren't true in every theatrical production. National Players need durable clothes that will survive for one year of performances with minimal maintenance. Thin, delicate pieces that could be crushed during travel or torn during use won't survive! The Players' costumes can be a little minimalist; often the Players are playing multiple roles and don't have a lot of time to change, so we need to say a lot with as few pieces as possible. I also think of the National Players aesthetic as being very authentic to the performers. Because we know our performers can't use elaborate wigs or makeup on the road, the clothes have to tell even more of the story. The costumes should look a little lived-in, like they are a part of the performer who wears them.

How is the collaborative nature of National Players unique?

In many productions, the performers have a staff to help maintain the clothes, help with quick changes, and apply makeup and hairstyles. National Players all have their jobs to do as actors, but they also have backstage jobs. This unique circumstance creates new opportunities for collaboration, as the performers usually have a lot of questions about wearing and maintaining their clothes. Because the Players are so involved in the work usually handled by a wardrobe team, they often have valuable insights and ideas for how to make their costumes work better for them. I love working with performers to make the costumes both manageable for them and a strong part of the visual storytelling on stage.

Can you walk us through a brief timeline of your design process?

The timeline for this tour was a little unusual because of COVID-19. We started work on these shows back in the winter of 2020. Usually, we start with design meetings, wherein the director and the designers all share ideas for what the production could look like. I bring in successively more detailed research, sketches, and color renderings until we've all agreed on a vision for the piece. Usually, we move from the finished design on paper to purchasing, sourcing, and fitting a show, but this time we went on a year-long hiatus due to safety. We were delayed through the late spring of 2021, when we all started getting vaccinated in preparation to return to fittings and rehearsals. In May, I started purchasing items (with the help of the Olney Theatre Center's amazing costume shop staff) and doing some of the build myself. I traveled to Maryland for fittings, then returned to see the shows through their respective technical rehearsals in July and August. Usually, the entire process lasts from about February to August for a National Players Tour, but this time it took us from February 2020 - August 2021!

What is the research process like for costume design?

My research process is always a mix of visual and textual research. For instance, on *Raisin*, I decided to look for very specific photos: I wanted candid photos of Black families in Chicago in the 1950s. Candid photos are special because they're not posed, and they're not usually of people looking their most pristine; I wanted to see the most honest, unvarnished view of our period. I wanted to make sure to capture not only the period, but the Younger's specific social experience and regional flavor. I found some great photos, and found out there were photographers known for documenting The Great Migration. That led me to doing some reading about The Great Migration, which really helped me to see deeper into the family's legacy, especially for Mama. This also got me thinking about the legacy of those photographers, and of all Black artists documenting their own experiences in different time periods. I found my way to contemporary African-American artists working specifically in the midwest, and I found a lot of inspiration in the work of painter Kerry James Marshall (Chicago) and multimedia artist Aminah Robinson (Columbus). The contemporary lens of these artists helped us find the warm palette, diverse textures, and special finishings for the work. It led us to the idea of visible mending, which became the key connective thread (no pun intended!) for the clothes worn by the Younger family. Inspired by the language of hand-craft in the work of these midwestern artists, we decided to hand-embroider mending and motifs in the clothes worn by the family. I love visible mending for the Youngers because it celebrates the ways in which things that are trying to fall apart can be held together by love and attention. I love poring over research and thinking about all of the different ways the ideas might manifest in the costumes.

If I want to be a costume designer, what skills should I work to cultivate?

Costume design requires a lot of diverse technical skills, like drawing, organization, historical research, sewing, and dramatic analysis. These are skills that you can learn at any time in your life, either by doing your own research or by working with a mentor. The most important skills for a costume designer are a little more nebulous: curiosity, collaboration, communication. Having open communication, being excited to work with a team, and being genuinely interested in all kinds of stories are the most important qualities for a costume designer.

What is one of your favorite aspects of the *Midsummer* costumes this year?

I loved creating the futuristic world for our production of *Midsummer*! It was so much fun to think through the stratification of Shakespeare's world: the austere Athenian court, the utilitarian mechanicals, and the ultra-tactile world of the Fairies. These worlds need to be visually distinct from one another and still make sense on stage, and that's the sort of design puzzle I love working to solve. For a show like *Midsummer*, you get to imagine a world that helps support the text by going slightly outside it. We decided our Athenians were severe with enforced physical distancing that is reinforced by their stark white clothing, their gloves, and their mesh eye masks. The fairies are the opposite of this: they're playful, silly, and covered in touchable textures like feathers, fur, and flower petals. The mechanicals are the blue-collar workers of the Athenian world, but they've all brought their own special flair to their beat-up uniforms.



Pictured (left to right): Melanie A. Lawrence (Peaseblossom), Walter C.A. Riddle (Moth), Sean Patrick Ryan (Bottom), Savannah Gomez (Titania), Ariya Hawkins (Mustardseed). Photo: DJ Corey Photography.

ACTIVITY: Identifying Your Own Speech Patterns

OBJECTIVE: Students will be able to identify patterns in Shakespeare's verse. Students will be able to recognize formal versus informal writing styles. Students will be able to connect Shakespearian dialogue to their own style of speech.

SUGGESTED GRADE LEVEL: 7 - 12

SUPPLIES NEEDED: "Identifying Your Own Speech Patterns" questions (next page), writing utensils, sound recorder (optional)

1. Explain the difference between stressed and unstressed when it comes to Shakespearean language, identifying the different patterns of speech, emphasizing that Shakespeare's verse was meant to imitate real speech patterns.
2. One of the tools many actors use when preparing to perform Shakespeare scansion, or analyzing the text using symbols to identify stressed and unstressed syllables. One pair of symbols that can be used are a slash (\) for stressed and a u (U) for unstressed. Demonstrate these marks on a simple two-syllable word, like "Hello," "Skylight," or "Complete," and indicate what that word would sound like if the markings were reversed.
3. Distribute the "ID-ing Your Own Speech Patterns" worksheet to students. Read the sentence at the top of the page naturally, and have students mark the syllable-divided version with which are stressed and which are unstressed.
4. Either distribute recording devices to students or divide them into pairs. Have them answer one of the four suggested questions (or another one of your choosing), either into the recording device or with the partner transcribing their answer.
5. Have students mark up the transcript with their pattern of speech, noting where they stress syllables and where they do not.
6. Students can trade transcriptions and attempt to mimic each other's speech patterns, noting where individual idiosyncrasies differ from what comes naturally to them.
7. Repeat with other questions, if desired. Introduce other elements, such as speaking with an accent, whispering, or speaking to someone far away or over the phone, or in a whisper. Identify where the stresses fall throughout these speeches.

8. Ask if any student's speech is falling into more formalized patterns. Do any of them have a lot of iambs or trochees? Who is the most rhythmic in their speaking? Who is the most erratic?
9. Ask students what effect they think writing in a formal style with rules for stressed and unstressed would do to the style of dialogue. What does that do to the sound of the lines? How would it affect the actors' process?

ID-ing Speech Patterns Questions

Good Morning, everybody! Please take a seat and take out a pen or pencil.

Good Morn ing, eve ry bo dy! Please take a seat and take
out a pen or pen cil.

Question A: What is your ideal morning ritual?

Question B: How do you get to the nearest McDonalds from here?

Question C: Where does your name come from?

Question D: Describe the plot of the most recent movie or book that you consumed.

ACTIVITY: Discovering *Midsummer* through Language

Objective: Students will examine a speech from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to gain a further understanding of the play and Shakespeare's language.

SUGGESTED GRADE LEVEL: 7 - 12

Materials: Students will work with Helena's speech from Act 3, Scene 2.

HELENA

O spite! O hell! I see you all are bent
To set against me for your merriment:
If you were civil and knew courtesy,
You would not do me thus much injury.
Can you not hate me, as I know you do,
But you must join in souls to mock me too?
If you were men, as men you are in show,
You would not use a gentle lady so;
To vow, and swear, and superpraise my parts,
When I am sure you hate me with your hearts.
You both are rivals, and love Hermia;
And now both rivals, to mock Helena:
A trim exploit, a manly enterprise,
To conjure tears up in a poor maid's eyes
With your derision! none of noble sort
Would so offend a virgin, and extort
A poor soul's patience, all to make you sport.

Set the Scene

1. Establish students' previous knowledge of Shakespeare's language.
 - a. What do you know about Shakespeare?
 - b. What do you know about Shakespeare's language?
 - c. What are some different ways that Shakespeare structures his language?

Activity

1. Ask students to stand in a circle.
2. Read the speech as a class, taking turns reading line by line.
 - a. What did you notice? Did you naturally emphasize certain words?
 - b. What do you think Helena's objective is in this speech?
 - c. What are some tactics you think Helena could use to achieve her objective?
3. Translating the speech
 - a. In groups of 3-4 have students translate the speech into modern english line by line.

4. Exploring Iambic Pentameter

- a. Break down the meaning of iambic pentameter, an “iamb” being a stressed and unstressed syllable, and “pent” meaning 10. So iambic Pentameter is 10 groups of stressed and unstressed syllables?
- b. Why do you think Shakespeare chose to write in iambic pentameter in certain parts of *Midsummer*?
- c. Why do you think Shakespeare chose not to write in iambic pentameter in certain parts of *Midsummer*?

5. Physicalizing Shakespeare

a. Physicalizing Iambic Pentameter: For this activity you will need a room with a clear floor. Students will stand and say the speech out loud while galloping across the room to the rhythm of iambic pentameter. This is not an activity to be done as a group, but individually. Ask students to note where in the speech the iambic pentameter is maintained and where in the speech the structure diverges.

- Why do you think Shakespeare chose to diverge from or maintain the structure of iambic pentameter in the places that he did?
- Did you notice anything new about the speech from that exercise?

b. Physicalizing Punctuation-This exercise is meant to be performed individually rather than in a group. Below is a list of different types of punctuation. For each type of punctuation there is a corresponding action. Ask students to go into their own space and read Helena’s speech. When they encounter punctuation in the speech, do the action as listed below. Make sure that what you are saying and the action for the punctuation do not overlap.

1. Comma , = Snap
2. Period . = Stomp
3. Dash - = Clap and draw out
4. Colon ; = pat on chest twice
5. Semi-Colon ; = pat on chest, snap
6. Exclamation Point ! = Clap
7. Question Mark ? = stomp, snap

- Is there anything new about the speech that you noticed from that exercise?
- How do you think punctuation can serve storytelling in Shakespeare?
- What can punctuation tell us about what Helena is experiencing internally during this monologue?

Debrief and Discuss

1. What are some ways that the structures of Shakespeare’s writing can inform how an actor might approach their part?
2. How are the technical elements of Shakespeare and the emotions a character experiences related?