Study Guide

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PROGRAMMES FOR STUDENT AUDIENCES
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About this Guide
This Study Guide contains a large amount of varied resource material to accommodate different classes and levels. Teachers need not use all the material found here but should choose appropriate activities from pages 25 through 27, then select the corresponding backup material. This Study Guide is formatted in easy-to-copy single pages ready to distribute to classes. Topics may be used separately or in any combination that works for your situation.

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About the Play (page 1 of 8) (see Activities #1 and #11)

Characters
There are three distinct groups of characters in the play whose lives become intertwined as a result of the madness of this midsummer night.

Athenian Upper class group
- Theseus – Duke of Athens
- Hippolyta – his fiancé, Queen of the Amazons
- Philostrate – Theseus’ Master of Revels
- Egeus – an elderly member of the Duke’s court
- Hermia – Egeus’ daughter
- Demetrius – young man Egeus wants Hermia to marry
- Lysander – young man Hermia has chosen to marry
- Helena – Hermia’s best friend who was supposed to marry Demetrius before he fell for Hermia

Athenian Working class group
- Peter Quince – a carpenter and director of a short play to be presented at Theseus’ wedding.
- Nick Bottom – a weaver chosen to play the lead character of Pyramus in the play
- Francis Flute – a young bellows mender cast reluctantly in the part of Thisby, a girl
- Tom Snout – a tinker (fixer of pots and pans) who will play a Wall
- Snug – a joiner (cabinet maker) who will play Lion
- Robin Starveling – a tailor who will portray Moonshine

The Fairies of the Forest
- Oberon – King of the fairies
- Titania – Queen of the fairies
- Puck (also called Robin Goodfellow) – Oberon’s impish sidekick
- A group of Titania’s fairy attendants called Mustardseed, Peaseblossom, Cobweb and Moth.

Background of the Characters

Theseus is the name of the legendary founder and king of Athens who was supposed to have lived about 1230 B.C.E. One of the many exploits attributed to him was an expedition to the land of the Amazons, a race of warrior women, where he captured their queen and married her. Shakespeare probably was inspired by Chaucer’s The Knight’s Tale in Canterbury Tales where Theseus and Hippolyta appear at the beginning and get married at the end of the story.

Lysander, Demetrius, Hermia and Helena, Shakespeare’s four tormented lovers, have classical Greek names which Shakespeare uses for atmosphere. In The Knight’s Tale there is a story about two best friends who quarrel when they both fall in love with the same lady. (Shakespeare uses this same story later in his play, The Two Gentlemen of Verona.) Shakespeare changes the friends into girls and adds another lover which not only sets up the symmetry but also provides the multiple combinations and varying relationships that make up the “comedy of errors” in the forest that night.

Quince, Bottom and the other tradesmen would have been familiar figures to Shakespeare from his youth in Stratford-upon-Avon. William’s father, the son of a farmer, had been a glovemaker who rose to become the bailiff (similar to a mayor) and as such would have had intimate dealings with all the (continued on next page)
About the Play (page 2 of 8)

Background of the Characters (continued)

tradesmen of the town. As the eldest son, William would have accompanied his father in his work when not in school. The amateur theatrics the tradesmen are engaged in would have also been very familiar to Shakespeare since putting on plays was a hugely popular form of entertainment on feast days. The names Shakespeare gives to the “rude mechanicals”, as Puck calls them, are apt: a carpenter uses blocks of wood called quines, hence Quince; one of the many meanings of bottom is a skein of thread, therefore a good name for a weaver as Bottom is, but we mustn’t neglect the pun when he is transformed into an ass; bellows, which are used to supply air to a furnace or forge have flutes or folds on the side, but Flute’s name may also refer to the whining and whistling sounds made when a bellows has a hole in it; Snout is a tinker who repairs kettles which have a snout or spout; and Snug’s occupation is a joiner or furniture maker whose joints are hopefully snug.

The story of Pyramus and Thisby was familiar to Elizabethan in a number of poetic and often overly sentimental versions. It is possible that Shakespeare uses this play within a play to create a silly parody of his own Romeo and Juliet which was written at about the same time.

Oberon is identified as the king of the fairies in a French medieval romance. His name is an adaptation of the earlier German king of the dwarfs called Alberich. Shakespeare may have decided upon the name of Titania for the queen of the fairies by reading Ovid’s Metamorphosis where the name refers to the moon. In later times the names Oberon and Titania were given to two moons of the planet Uranus.

Puck was the name of the evil king of the elves in Scottish mythology. Shakespeare makes him merely an impish mischief-maker, the jester of Oberon. His alternate name, Robin Goodfellow, refers to a supernatural being very familiar to rural people a generation or more before Shakespeare. In fact, in the old-fashioned and traditional areas around Stratford-upon-Avon, belief in this legendary trickster still existed. People who didn’t set out small bowls of milk at night for Robin, the Hobgoblin, would find all kinds of pranks played on them by morning.

“Puck” aka “Robin Goodfellow” (Ajay Kumar, front), and “Oberon” (P.R. Jijoy) photo: Tristram Kenton
About the Play (page 3 of 8)

A Really Brief Plot Outline of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (see Activity #2)

- Theseus has just returned to Athens with Hippolyta and is planning their wedding.
- Egeus interrupts to demand that his daughter, Hermia, marries Demetrius - or else.
- Hermia elopes with her boyfriend Lysander into the forest.
- Meanwhile, a group of no-talent wanna-be actors, including Bottom, decide to put on a play for the wedding feast. They decide to secretly rehearse in the same forest.
- The fairies who live in the forest are planning a midnight ritual for their queen Titania.
- Titania and her husband, fairy king Oberon, have been having a major disagreement.
- Oberon plans to teach her a lesson and tells his sidekick hobgoblin, Puck, to put a love-potion spell on her to make her fall in love with something ugly.
- When Hermia and Lysander enter the forest they get lost and decide to have a nap.
- Demetrius has followed Hermia to get her back and is, in turn, followed by Hermia’s best friend Helena who was Demetrius’ former girlfriend and still madly in love with him. He tells her to get lost.
- Oberon overhears this and tells Puck to put the love spell on Demetrius too so he will fall back in love with Helena.
- Puck puts the spell on Lysander by mistake.
- Lysander falls instantly in love with Helena and abandons Hermia.
- Puck realizes his mistake and puts the spell on Demetrius who falls madly in love with Helena.
- Helena thinks the two men are making fun of her and tells them both off.
- Hermia arrives on the scene upset that Lysander left her and Helena thinks that she is in on the scheme to mock her too. Hermia thinks Helena seduced Lysander. They fight.
- The men fight over Helena.
- Meanwhile Puck interrupts the goofs’ rehearsal of their play, scares them half to death, and disguises Bottom as an ass (aka donkey) with whom Titania falls madly in love.
- Oberon makes Puck sort the young lovers out so that each is in love with the proper person.
- Oberon takes the spell off Titania and they make up.
- Theseus and Egeus find the lost young lovers and forgive them.
- All three couples get married.
- Bottom (no longer in the guise of an ass) and his friends put on their disastrous play for the wedding. The play is about Pyramus and Thisby whose parents are fighting and won’t let them marry so they elope into the forest where Thisby is frightened by a lion but Pyramus thinks the lion killed Thisby so he commits suicide. When Thisby discovers this, she too commits suicide – something like Romeo and Juliet but with laughs.
- Oberon, Titania and Puck bless the wedding couples and all ends happily.
A Detailed Plot Synopsis of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (page 1 of 5)
(see Activity #2)

This detailed synopsis is ideal for a young audience which is unfamiliar with *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, especially since so much of the dialogue in this production is in various South Asian languages.

Photographs included in this Study Guide are from the Dash Arts production presented at the National Arts Centre. As is common for a production which tours over a long period, there have been some changes to the cast since these photographs were taken.

- Theseus, Duke of Athens, has just returned in triumph from a successful war with the race of Amazon women and brought back their queen, Hippolyta, as a captive.
- Theseus promises to wed Hippolyta in an elaborate and joyful ceremony four days from now and make her a happy wife.
- He sends out his Master of Revelries, Philostrate, to encourage Athenians to prepare merry entertainments for the wedding.
- He is interrupted by a courtier, Egeus, who is angry with his daughter Hermia, saying that she refuses to marry Demetrius, the man he has chosen, and that she insists on marrying a young man, Lysander, who Egeus thinks has won her heart by singing silly love songs.
- Egeus rants that unless Hermia obeys him she should be put to death; Theseus lightens the sentence by telling her she must become a nun if she doesn’t marry Demetrius.
- Lysander claims that Demetrius has been making love to Hermia’s best friend Helena and should go back to her, but Demetrius sides with his potential father-in-law.
- Theseus gives Hermia until the royal wedding day to make up her mind or suffer the consequences.
- When the royal court departs, Lysander and Hermia bemoan the cruel fate of true lovers and then decide to escape from Athens and visit an elderly aunt where they can be secretly married. When Helena arrives, Hermia breaks the news to her that they are eloping and then rushes off to prepare to leave.
- Helena, feeling sorry for herself that she can’t have Demetrius back, decides to let him in on the news with the faint hope that he will at least thank her for the warning.

“Lysander” (Chandan Roy Sanyal) and “Hermia” (Yuki Ellias) weep over their cruel fate.
photo: Tristram Kenton
**About the Play** (page 5 of 8)

**A Detailed Plot Synopsis of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*** (page 2 of 5)

- Meanwhile a group of common workmen have heard about the call for entertainment and decide to prepare a play. Their intentions are good but their knowledge of theatre is painfully slim.
- While the director, Quince, is trying to cast the play, the loud-mouthed Bottom insists that he can heroically play all the parts and proceeds to show his dubious talents.
- Bottom is convinced to play the part of the lead, a young hero, Pyramus. Flute is most upset because he has to play a girl, the role of Thisby.
- The amateur thespians plan to rehearse secretly in the forest – unintentionally the same one the lovers are escaping to.
- Meanwhile also, in the same forest, a group of fairies is planning a midnight ritual to honour their queen, Titania.
- The preparation is interrupted by Puck, also known as Robin Goodfellow, who is the impish attendant to Oberon, king of the fairies and Titania’s husband.
- It seems that Titania and Oberon have had a fierce disagreement about a young Indian boy that Titania has taken as an attendant; Oberon wants him as his own attendant. The fairies fear that if the two quarrelling partners arrive in the forest clearing at the same time, sparks will fly.
- Sure enough, Titania and Oberon arrive and continue their argument. Each blames the other for continuing their unwise disharmony which has disrupted the entire world causing calamities and hardships for all. They heat up the argument by accusing each other of being unfaithful with Theseus and with Hippolyta respectively.
- When Titania sweeps off, still in a snit, Oberon plans to get even by means of a magic trick. He commands Puck to find a particular flower whose juice will cause a person to fall instantly in love with the first thing he or she sees.
- When Titania takes a nap, Puck will squeeze the juice on her eyes and then present an ugly creature for her to fall in love with. Puck, ever ready for a prank, whizzes off to find the flower.
- Suddenly Demetrius followed closely by Helena arrive in the forest clearing. Demetrius is furious with Helena for chasing after him when he no longer loves her. They rush off.
- Oberon decides that Puck should squeeze a little of the juice in Demetrius’ eyes to make him fall back in love with Helena and fix that relationship.
- When Puck returns with the flower Oberon tells him that he himself will look after the spell on Titania and that Puck should find the young Athenian lovers and work his magic on them.
About the Play (page 6 of 8)

**A Detailed Plot Synopsis of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*** (page 3 of 5)

- When Titania and her fairy attendants settle down in her favourite bower for a nap Oberon casts the spell on her and silently departs.
- By chance, Lysander and Hermia stumble into the same clearing and are quite lost. They are exhausted and decide to bed down until the morning light. Hermia demurely insists that Lysander sleep at a distance so that he can’t get fresh in the night.
- Puck happens upon them and, thinking that these are the Athenians Oberon was referring to, puts the love potion on Lysander’s eyes.
- As luck would have it, Demetrius, chased by Helena, arrives in the same clearing too; Demetrius fights Helena off and escapes. Helena, not noticing Hermia, discovers Lysander on the ground and wakes him up. Of course, Lysander, under the spell, falls instantly and madly in love with her. Thinking that he is mocking her, Helena runs away with Lysander in hot pursuit.
- Hermia awakes from a bad dream and, finding that Lysander has deserted her, wanders off to find him.
- Again as luck would have it, the inept troupe of wanna-be actors arrive here also to rehearse their excuse of a play. They are still quibbling about casting and props when Puck spies them and decides that he can play a trick on them.
- While Bottom is rehearsing the part of Pyramus, Puck transforms his head into that of an ass. When the others see their magically altered friend they run screaming in all directions.
- The commotion wakes up Titania who, under the spell, naturally falls instantly and madly in love with Bottom.
- Telling her attendants to look after Bottom’s every need, she takes him to her bed to make passionate love with him. Bottom is quite confused but goes along with it.
- Puck reports back to Oberon of the ridiculous situation Titania is in, and also that he succeeded in putting the spell on the Athenian so he would fall back in love with his former girlfriend.
About the Play (page 7 of 8)

A Detailed Plot Synopsis of A Midsummer Night’s Dream (page 4 of 5)

- Demetrius arrives followed by Hermia who is convinced that Demetrius has taken
  vengeance on his rival Lysander. In her mind there seems no other explanation for his
  absence. When Demetrius denies harming Lysander, Hermia rushes off to find him.
  Demetrius, thoroughly lost and confused decides to take a nap.

- Oberon and Puck have been invisibly watching this and Oberon crossly points out to Puck
  that he has been mistaken and put the love potion on the wrong Athenian. Puck flies off to
  find Helena while Oberon puts the spell on Demetrius’ eyes.

- The two fairies then watch as Helena arrives. However, Lysander is crazily trying to make
  love to her. Demetrius suddenly wakes up and - you guessed it - falls instantly and madly in
  love with Helena.

- Helena is furious that the two men are making fun of her and tries to fight them off. But
  Hermia arrives and Helena accuses her of devising the scheme to pit the three of them
  against her. Hermia accuses Helena of seducing Lysander away from her and decides to
  pick a fight with her former friend. Demetrius and Lysander decide to have a fight to see
  who gets Helena as the prize. All four run off in fury.

- Oberon and Puck realizing that dawn will come

- soon resolve to put things right and end
  everyone’s confusion and mistaken love affairs.
  Puck pursues the lovers to tire them out and
  make them fall asleep so he can put an antidote
  potion on Lysander’s eyes. Oberon leaves to

  find Titania in her bower.

- Meanwhile Titania is still flirting with the
  transformed ass-Bottom but falls asleep when
  Oberon approaches.

- And when she wakes she is repulsed by the sight of the
  creature she was making love to. They both laugh and dance away, Oberon in possession of
  the little Indian boy he sought in the first place.

- Puck takes the ass head off the sleeping Bottom.

- It is now morning and Theseus, Hippolyta, Egeus and the rest of a royal hunting party
  stumble upon the four sleeping lovers. When they wake in amazement Lysander is back in
  love with Hermia and Demetrius, still under the (hopefully permanent) love spell, dotes on
  Helena.
About the Play (page 8 of 8)

A Detailed Plot Synopsis of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (page 4 of 5)

- Theseus commands that since the young people have spent the night together they must get married immediately. This suits the lovers just fine. There will be a triple wedding along with Theseus and Hippolyta.
- After they depart, Bottom wakes and thinks he has had a wonderful dream. Since this is the day he and the other bumpkins plan to put on their play, he hurries home.
- Meanwhile Quince and the other lads are sad because they will miss the chance to put on their play, but Bottom arrives in the nick of time and they rush off to the palace with their props and costumes.
- The wedding vows for the three couples have taken place and they are settling down for some entertainment. Philostrate, the Master of Ceremonies, announces the list of acts. He includes the play *Pyramus and Thisby* but does not recommend it. Theseus overrides him and the play begins.
- The script is a mess and the acting leaves a lot to be desired but the audience nevertheless finds the “tragedy” hilarious.
- In the play the lovers Pyramus and Thisby are being separated by their parents who have built a “Wall” between their properties. They decide to escape to the forest and meet there. Thisby, arriving first by “Moonlight”, is frightened off by a fierce “Lion”, who chews on her discarded headscarf.
- Pyramus finding the scarf and thinking that Thisby has been eaten by the Lion, pulls out his dagger and stabs himself dramatically.
- Thisby finds her dead lover and stabs herself also, ending the unintentionally funny tragedy. The players finish off with a merry little dance.
- Theseus and the others are pleased with the performance and pay the actors off.
- After a stately dance to finish off the wedding festivities, the newly married couples go off to bed as all the fairies bless them and any future children they will have.
- Puck reminds us in the audience that if this play we have just seen is too silly and unbelievable, then we must have simply dreamed it all on this midsummer night.
About the Production (page 1 of 2)

The production of Shakespeare’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream playing at the National Arts Centre during October/November 2008 was commissioned by the British Council and created by Dash Arts, a theatre company based in London, England. Dash Arts has featured contemporary and classical work from the Middle and Far East, North Africa, Europe and South America. The British Council office in India invited Dash Arts and director Tim Supple to produce this “Indian Dream” for a tour to four cities in India. It was considered so innovative and received such praise that it was then invited to perform with the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) back in England at Stratford-upon-Avon. From there it moved to Verona, Italy, then to London, England, again to India, on to Australia, the U.S. and now Canada before moving on to Europe.

A Midsummer Night’s Dream is one of the most performed Shakespeare plays in India. Supple notes that many conditions there, in contrast to the West, create an affinity and understanding for the Dream - a tradition of arranged marriages, for example, along with its extremes of class in society and a belief in the presence of the spirit world. "On many levels," says Supple, "the play of A Midsummer Night’s Dream is very alive to the truth of life in India, more so than it is in Western Europe at this time."

Two years in the making, and seven weeks in rehearsal, A Midsummer Night’s Dream, is performed in eight languages: approximately half the text is in English, with the other half translated into seven South Asian languages. With the exception of director Tim Supple, the design and production team and the entire cast of 23 performers are either Indian or Sri Lankan. The cast combines actors trained in classical and folk traditions, and the production includes live traditional music, folk performers, traditional dancers, martial arts experts and street acrobats from across India and Sri Lanka.

This production of A Midsummer Night’s Dream presents its audience with a number of challenges. Firstly, almost 50% of the dialogue is in a foreign language and will be unintelligible to most people in the theatre. Often in a conversation between two or more people, the characters are all speaking a different Indian language. Secondly the abstract nature of the set does little to suggest the actual locations intended by Shakespeare – a palace, a humble cottage, a forest. What appears at first to be a white patchwork sail for a background, is literally torn to shreds by the troupe of fairies to reveal a bamboo scaffolding fit for a jungle-gym. Thirdly, many will find that the sex and violence of this production perhaps overwhelms the airy poetry they are seeking in this most whimsical of Shakespeare’s comedies. The writhing and wrestling on the ground of the various couples almost suggests rape at times, and the disguise created for Bottom includes an oversized penis. However, audiences universally find the excitement of the acrobatics, the Indian music, the panorama of vibrantly coloured costumes and the genuine passion for the message of the play most appealing.
About the Production (page 2 of 2) (see Activity #9)

Devised Theatre (also called collaborative creation or collective theatre), is a form of theatre where the script originates not from one or more writers, but from the collaborative work of a group of people (usually, but not necessarily, the performers). In this way it is somewhat similar to commedia dell’arte and some street theatre. The term is also applied to a production of an existing script which is reinterpreted or deconstructed and then expressed in a new way, such as this production of A Midsummer Night’s Dream.

Devised theatre is not always distinguishable from improvisational theatre but by the time a devised piece is presented to the public, it usually has a fixed form: the improvisation is confined to the creation process, and either a writer, a director, or the performers themselves, will have decided exactly what is to be included and the running sequence.

Introduced by Edward Gordon Craig in the early 20th century in his book The Art of the Theatre, the concept is that the stage director is not just an interpreter of a literary piece but also, along with the actors, a creator. Craig argues that this is the way theatre used to be created. “The dramatist made his first piece by using action, words, line, colour, and rhythm, and making his appeal to our eyes and ears by a dexterous use of these five factors”. He states that these five essential tools are the basis of true theatrical creation. The original dramatist took inspiration from the world around him before theatrically and visually expanding that impulse for the stage.

In his book The Empty Space, Peter Brook divides the theatrical landscape into four different types: the “Deadly Theater” (the conventional theatre, formulaic and unsatisfying), the “Holy Theater” (which seeks to rediscover ritual and drama's spiritual dimension, best expressed by the work of writer Antonin Artaud and director Jerzy Grotowski), the “Rough Theater” (a theatre of the people, against pretension and full of noise and action, best typified by the Elizabethan theatre), and the “Immediate Theater”, with which Brook identifies his own career, an attempt to discover a fluid and ever-changing style that emphasizes the joy of the theatrical experience. It is to this “Immediate Theater” that devised theatre fits in.

Some Devising Methods:

- Focus on the form initially and then extract the thematic ideas
- Games, including improvisation, are often used as a starting point for devising
- Build characters and then develop narrative strands out of character-based improvs
- Contact improvisation, a form of improvised dance based on exploring physical contact
- Inspiration from news articles, poems, photographs, architecture, paintings
- Research, “automatic writing”, journal recording of dreams, etc.

Resource Material on Devising Theatre:

http://perspicacity.goose24.org/20033152323.shtml - an article on Craig’s thoughts on theatre.
http://blogs.guardian.co.uk/theatre/2007/03/is_devised_theatre_always_a_ca.html - a blog entry on the effectiveness of devising theatre.
http://www.britishtheatreguide.info/articles/230504.htm - a short article defending the technique of the devising process.

http://www.kentaylor.co.uk/die/materials/docs/lessons/yr10/paulslater/devising.html - lesson activities on devising theatre.
Things to Watch for in the Production (see Activity #7)

- **Watch what happens to the costumes of the lovers as the play progresses.** Does this reflect the emotions or thought processes of the characters?

- **Watch for the first entry of the “rude mechanicals” or workers.** How do we know they are a different class from the noblemen of the first scene? How can we tell the jobs of each character from his/her costume or props?

- **Watch for the first entry of the fairies.** How do we know that they are a different type of character?

- **Watch how the set is transformed from the “palace” to the “forest”**. What does this new look say about the order of the world of the forest compared to the world of the mortals and their palace?

- **Watch for the acrobatic ribbon work of the fairies.** Why do you think this type of movement is appropriate for this group of characters?

- **Watch for the transformation of Theseus and Hippolyta into the fairy king and queen.** Do you think the director’s idea to double-cast these roles is appropriate? Does the choice make any statement of theme? What are the similarities between Titania and Hippolyta and between Theseus and Oberon? **Watch for their transformation back again near the end of the play.** Was it wise to make this transformation in full view of the audience?

- **Watch for the double casting of Puck and Theseus’ Master of Revels.** Are there any similarities between these two characters?

- **Watch for how beds are created in the forest.** What else could these symbolize and how do their images transform in other scenes?

- **Watch for the use of poles and ribbons in the fight scene between the lovers.** What effect did this choice have on the mood and action of the scene? Shakespeare did not include Puck and the fairies in this scene. Do you think it was a good directorial choice to have them teasing and impeding the lovers?

- **Watch for the props and costumes the mechanicals use to represent their characters/parts when they are performing the play for the royalty – e.g. the Moon.** Do you agree with the designer’s choices or should they have been more elaborate? **Watch for Flute in drag as Thisby.**

- **Watch for Bottom’s transformation into the ass – the ears, the artificial penis.**

- **Watch for the way Puck finishes the play, similar to the way he started it.** What comment does this make about how the director conceives of this character’s place in the play?

- **Watch how Shakespeare uses spirits and the supernatural in a play based on romantic/love relationships.** What do you think his commentary is? Is it different from the director’s?

- **Watch for the use of live musicians on stage.** Do you find this appropriate to the style of the production or distracting?
Famous Quotations to Listen For (page 1 of 2) (see Activity #7)

“Ay me, for aught that I could ever read,
Could ever hear by tale or history,
The course of true love never did run smooth...”
Lysander says this to his true love, Hermia, when she is depressed about her father’s demands that she marry another man, and that he’ll have her put to death if she doesn’t obey him. Lysander says that as long as there has been true love there have been seemingly insurmountable difficulties to challenge it. These lines begin the play’s exploration of the theme of love’s difficulties and foretells what Lysander and Hermia will very soon face when they escape into the forest.

“Things base and vile, holding no quantity,
Love can transpose to form and dignity.
Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind,
And therefore is winged Cupid painted blind.”
Helena says this when she moans over the fact that Demetrius doesn’t love her but loves Hermia instead. She believes that to someone in love even ugliness and bad behaviour can seem attractive because love doesn’t depend on the appearance of a person but on the perception of the person in love. This is another way of stating one of the themes of the play as demonstrated later when Titania falls for the ass-headed Bottom.

“I have had a most rare vision. I have had a dream
past the wit of man to say what dream it was. The
eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath
not seen, man’s hand is not able to taste, his
tongue to conceive, nor his heart to report what
my dream was.”
Bottom makes this ridiculous speech after his adventure with Titania, the queen of the fairies. In his typically bombastic way he makes melodramatic rhetorical mistakes by suggesting that eyes can hear, ears see, hands taste, tongues think and hearts speak. This speech furthers the dream theme of the play in that things are not as they are seen or stated.

“Lord, what fools these mortals be!”
Puck makes this observation after watching the ludicrous behaviour of the young Athenians fighting over each other in the forest. It points out the difference between the human lovers who are completely absorbed in their emotions and the impish fairies who are never too serious. This is still another statement on the unfathomable state of love.
Famous Quotations to Listen For (page 2 of 2)

“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.

*** *** ***

The poet’s eye, in a 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.“

Theseus is commenting on the strange reports made by the lovers after returning from their crazy night in the forest. He says that, like madmen, lovers fearfully anticipate more imaginary terrors than sensible people could possibly understand. Poets use their crazy imagination and write the thoughts down so others can experience them. This continues the statement that people in love act a little crazy. By including poets, Shakespeare is perhaps saying that by writing it down, he is as crazy as them.

“If we shadows have offended,
Think but this, and all is mended:
That you have but slumbered here,
While these visions did appear;
And this weak and idle theme,
No more yielding but a dream,
Gentles, do not reprend.
If you pardon, we will mend.”

Puck speaks these lines to the audience at the end of the play suggesting that if they didn’t believe the magical events in the play or didn’t like the play at all, the whole thing was just a dream they had anyway, a neat way of apologizing to the lovers in the audience who don’t think it’s crazy to be in love.
South Asian History, Languages and Art Forms (page 1 of 4) (see Activity #6) section written & compiled by nisha ahuja

A brief historical introduction

South Asia is composed of a multi-cultural and multi-lingual population held together by its diverse rural and urban landscapes. This 5000-year-old civilization has taken many shapes through eras of invasion from the Persian, Greco, and Mughal/Arab Empires, expansion into East Asia and South-East Asia, trade with European and Asian regions, as well as Colonization from European regions (including Portugal, and the Netherlands), most extensively and recently by Great Britain. It was not until 1947 that the South Asian subcontinent regained Independence from Great Britain, and subsequently partitioned into India, and Pakistan; later, in 1971, Pakistan’s Eastern region partitioned into Bangladesh. Although many South Asian regions share similarities, these invasions and integrations influenced the rich vastness of India’s languages, religions, culture, architecture, and art.
South Asian History, Languages and Art Forms (page 2 of 4)

Languages
In South Asia, and specifically India, there are over 200 hundred languages and regional dialects. Eighteen of these languages are official languages in the states of India, while Hindi and English are the languages used by the Federal Government. Most of these languages can be categorized into two main families:
- *Indo-Aryan* derived languages are dominant in north Indian states (e.g. Hindi/Urdu, Gujurati, Marathi, Punjabi, Sindhi, Bengali, Oriya);
- *Dravidian* derived languages are dominant in south Indian states (e.g. Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam)

In Tim Supple’s production of *A Midsummer’s Night’s Dream* the following languages are used:
- Hindi (Official Language of Federal Government, and many Northern States)
- English (Another Official language of India)
- Bengali (Official Language of Tripura and West Bengal, lying east of Bangladesh)
- Malayalam (Official Language of Kerela and Lakshadweep)
- Marathi (Official Language of Maharastra)
- Sanskrit (Classical language, language of Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism)
- Tamil (Official Language of Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry)

Religions
The major religions of South Asia are *Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism, Sikhism, Jainism, and Christianity*. There are varying sects and practices within these religions, which are often regionally based. Other minority religions include *Judaism and Zoroastrianism*.

Social Class in India
Much of our ancient and modern global community is ripe with social and political power inequalities between and within nations. Throughout history the Indian Subcontinent has had a visible difference between the wealthy and the poor; similar to many parts of the world this has most often been determined by occupation. In ancient India the Caste system played a dominant role in the creation of social stratification. In Modern India, however, international economic structures propel the upper and middle classes to grow wealthier, while the poorer often remain disenfranchised or are mobilizing on grassroots levels.

Caste Systems in India
There is much debate over how the Caste system in India developed into one that determined social status and hierarchies. In Hindu scriptures there is mention of four equal interdependent “Varnas” defining people’s individual roles in society:
- *Brahmins* (teachers, scholars and priests; later the highest-ranking Caste)
- *Kshatriyas* (warriors and kings; later a high-level Caste)
(continued on next page)
South Asian History, Languages and Art Forms  
Caste Systems in India (continued)

- **Vaishyas** (traders; later a mid-level Caste)
- **Shudras** (labourers; farmers, service providers, some artisans; later a low-level Caste)
- **Parjanya or Antyaja** (role/occupation outside the four Varnas such as leatherworkers, butchers, and lavatory cleaners; later considered lower than the Shudras and outside the Caste system, formerly known as Untouchables, now known as Dalits.)

In many periods of Hinduism there was little emphasis on Caste. Each person’s actions determined where they “fit” into these equal co-dependent categories, and were not necessarily concrete or determined by one’s familial lineage. Over time through interactions with other world regions, however, the Caste system solidified, determining rank through family social status creating social, economic, and political hierarchies. Although Caste-based discrimination is outlawed by the Indian Constitution, and Caste-based social barriers are diminishing in India’s urban centres, this system still has a stronghold on many rural areas, and personal aspects (such as marriage) of city life.

**Classical Dance, Drama and Martial Arts of India**

Many of the Classical forms of dance and drama in India stem from Natya; a sacred dance-drama performed in temples and royal courts which has its roots in Natya Shastra developed by the ancient sage Bharata Muni. The combination of facial expression, hand positioning and gestures (Mudras), rhythm, and movement are combined to create these varying forms of devotional dance-dramas, which were often used to teach aspects of religion and culture. In a modern context these forms often still tell stories, emote a “state-of-being”, or are often just dance for art’s sake.

There are ten widely recognized forms of Classical Indian Dance-Drama (in addition to other lesser known forms)

- Bharatanatyam
- Kathakali
- Odissi
- Kathak
- Kuchupudi
- Manipuri
- Sattriya
- Chau
- Mohiniattam
- Yakshagana

In Tim Supple’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* the following physical art forms influence the movement:

**Bharatanatyam**, now one of India’s most popular classical dance forms, originated 2000 years ago in the southern state of Tamil Nadu. From 1798 to 1832, it reached its peak and was more solidified by four brothers in the royal city of Tanjavur. It was redefined as a performing art in the mid-19th-century. In a Modern India Bharatanatyam has been widely popularized as a dance form and its influences can be (continued on next page)
South Asian History, Languages and Art Forms (page 4 of 4)

Classical Dance, Drama and Martial Arts of India (continued)
seen in Bollywood movies, music videos, and even political and advertisement campaigns. The root meaning of Bharatanatyam’s name comes blending several Sanskrit words: Bha (Bhava or facial expression); Ra (Raga or melody); Ta (Tala or Rhythm); Natyam (Nataya or Dance-Drama).

To learn more about Bharatanatyama and other dance forms visit http://www.artindia.net/bharata.html.

Kathakali, is a dance-drama that originated in the southern state of Kerala during the 16th and 17th centuries. Based on the Hindu stories of Ramayana and Krishna, this art popularized because of its combination of using the local language (Malayalam), as well as local folk dance and martial art (Kalarippayattu). The renowned artist Kapplingattu Nampoothiri, refined Kathakali, combining live instrumental and vocal music, dance, elaborate make-up and costumes, mudras (hand gestures), and intricate eye-movement and facial expressions (based on Natya Shastra). The traditional 101 plays were created as night-long devotional performances, but in a modern context they are known more as entertainment and are condensed into two to five-hour shows. The actors require eight to ten years of training as the performance is highly physically demanding and requires in-depth skill and concentration. The word Kathakali derives from the Malayalam words Katha (Story) and Kali (Play).

Kalarippayattu is a martial art that originated in Kerala between the 9th and 12th centuries, which some say might make it the oldest martial art. In the 18th and 19th centuries the form declined because of the British Rule in India, but resurfed in the 1920s with a reclaiming of South Indian art and culture, and continued to grow after the nation’s Independence. With its roots in Dravidian warrior traditions, and Vedic and Ayurvedic knowledge, the form blends armed combat (e.g. flexible long sword, sword and shield, dagger, knife, long stick and short stick); unarmed combat (e.g. locks, grappling, hand combat, marmam/pressure point, strikes, and kicks); martial dance (e.g. body positioning, rhythm, and mudras/gestures); and healing techniques (derived from Ayurvedic massage). Training is a lifelong process and begins during childhood. This martial art has had a strong influence on the movement of Kerala’s dance-dramas, and is often used as a rigorous part of actor training.

To learn more about Kalarippayattu as a martial art visit http://www.lifepositive.com/Body/martial-arts/marmadhi/kalarippayat-martialart.asp
Scene Excerpt from *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (page 1 of 4)
(see Activity #5)
The following comic scene for two males and two females is from about the middle of Act III, Scene 2 and is considerably shortened from the original. A complete version of the scene can be found on line at [http://www.online-literature.com/shakespeare/midsummer/6/](http://www.online-literature.com/shakespeare/midsummer/6/).

[Lysander and Hermia have eloped into the forest to escape Hermia’s father’s plan to marry her to Demetrius who claims to love her. Demetrius follows them to get her back and Helena, who has an unrequited crush on Demetrius, follows him. When Lysander and Hermia go to asleep, Puck puts a spell on Lysander to make him fall in love with Helena when he wakes up. Demetrius, having fallen asleep in another part of the forest, has the same spell placed on him. Lysander, upon waking, deserts Hermia and chases after Helena who thinks he’s just trying to make fun of her.]

Lysander: Why should you think that I should woo in scorn? Scorn and derision never come in tears: Look, when I vow, I weep; and vows so born, In their nativity all truth appears 1.

Helena: You do advance 2 your cunning more and more. When truth kills truth 3, O devilish-holy fray! These vows are Hermia’s: will you give her o’er? Weigh oath with oath, and you will nothing weigh.

Lysander: I had no judgment when to her I swore.

Helena: Nor none, in my mind, now you give her o’er.

Lysander: Demetrius loves her, and he loves not you.

Demetrius: [Awakening under the influence of Puck’s love potion] O Helen, goddess, nymph, perfect, divine! To what, my love, shall I compare thine eyne? Crystal is muddy. O, how ripe in show 4 Thy lips, those kissing cherries, tempting grow!

Helena: O spite! O hell! I see you all are bent 5 To set against 6 me for your merriment. If you were men, as men you are in show, You would not use a gentle 7 lady so; To vow, and swear, and superpraise my parts 8, When I am sure you hate me with your hearts. You are both rivals, and love Hermia; And now both rivals to mock Helena.
Scene Excerpt from *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (page 2 of 4)

Lysander: You are unkind, Demetrius. Be not so;
For you love Hermia; this you know I know.
Your love of Helena to me bequeath,
Whom I do love, and will do till my death.

Helena: Never did mockers waste more idle\(^9\) breath. \(^9\) idle = useless

Demetrius: Lysander, keep thy Hermia; I will none.
If e’er I loved her, all that love is gone.
Look, where thy love comes; yonder is thy dear.

Hermia: *[Entering]* But why unkindly didst thou leave me so?

Lysander: Why should he stay, whom love doth press\(^{10}\) to go? \(^10\) press = urge

Hermia: What love could press Lysander from my side?

Lysander: Lysander’s love, that would not let him bide\(^{11}\).
Why seek’st thou me? Could not this\(^{12}\) make thee know,
The hate I bare thee made me leave thee so? \(^11\) bide = stay  \(^12\) this = my deserting you

Hermia: You speak not as you think: it cannot be.

Helena: Lo, she is one of this confederacy!
Now I perceive they have conjoined all three
To fashion this false sport\(^{13}\), in spite of me.
Injurious Hermia! Most ungrateful maid!
Have you conspired, have you with these contrived
To bait me with this foul derision?
And will you rent\(^{14}\) our ancient love\(^{15}\) asunder,
To join with men in scorning your poor friend?

Hermia: I am amazèd at your passionate words.
I scorn you not. It seems that you scorn me.

Helena: Have you not set Lysander, as in scorn,
To follow me and praise my eyes and face?
And made your other love, Demetrius
To call me goddess, nymph, divine and rare,
Precious, celestial? Wherefore\(^{16}\) speaks he this
To her he hates? And wherefore doth Lysander
Deny your love, and tender me affection,
But by your setting on\(^{17}\), by your consent?

Hermia: I understand not what you mean by this.

\(^{13}\) false sport = dirty game  \(^{14}\) rent ...asunder = tear apart  \(^{15}\) ancient love = age-old friendship  \(^{16}\) wherefore = why  \(^{17}\) setting on = urging
Scene Excerpt from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (page 3 of 4)

Helena: Ay, do! Persever¹⁸, counterfeit sad looks,
Make mouths upon me when I turn my back.
But fare ye well. 'Tis partly my own fault,
Which death or absence soon shall remedy.

Lysander: Stay, gentle Helena; hear my excuse:
My love, my life, my soul, fair Helena!

Helena: O excellent!

Hermia: Sweet, do not scorn her so.

Lysander: Helen, I love thee; by my life, I do!

Demetrius: I say I love thee more than he can do.

Lysander: [Challenging Demetrius to fight] If thou say so, withdraw and prove it too.

Demetrius: Quick, come!

Hermia: [Holding on to Lys.] Lysander, whereto tends all this¹⁹?

Lysander: Hang off, thou cat, thou burr! Vile thing!

Hermia: Why are you grown so rude! What change is this?

Lysander: Out, loathèd med’cine! O hated potion hence!

Hermia: Do you not jest?

Helena: Yes, sooth²⁰; and so do you.

Hermia: Hate me! Wherefore? O me!

Lysander: 'Tis no jest
That I do hate thee, and love Helena.

Hermia: [Turning on Helena] O me! You juggler! You canker blossom²¹!
You thief of love! What, have you come by night
And stol’n my love’s heart from him?

Helena: Fine, i’ faith!
Have you no modesty, no maiden shame?
Fie, fie! You counterfeit²², you puppet, you!

Hermia: Puppet? Why so? Ay, that way goes the game.
And are you grown so high in his esteem,
Because I am so dwarfish and so low?

¹⁸ persever = keep it up
¹⁹ whereto tends all this? = where’s this leading to?
²⁰ sooth = truly
²¹ canker blossom = worm that hides in a rose
²² counterfeit = phoney
Scene Excerpt from *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (page 4 of 4)

Hermia (cont.) How low am I, thou painted maypole23? Speak! How low am I? I am not yet so low But that my nails can reach unto thine eyes

Helena: I pray you, though you mock me, gentlemen, Let her not hurt me. You perhaps may think, Because she is something lower than myself, That I can match her.

Hermia: Lower! Hark, again!

Lysander: *[Holding Hermia back]* Be not afraid. She shall not harm thee, Helena.

Demetrius: *[Also holding Hermia back]* No, sir, she shall not, though you take her part.

Helena: O, when she’s angry, she is keen and shrewd24! She was a vixen25 when she went to school And though she be but little, she is fierce.

Hermia: “Little” again! Nothing but “low” and “little”! Let me come to her.

Lysander: *[Tossing Hermia aside]* Get you gone, you dwarf; You bead, you acorn!

Demetrius: You are too officious In her behalf that scorns your services. Let her alone. Speak not of Helena; Take not her part; for, if thou dost intend Thou shalt aby it26.

Lysander: Now she holds me not. Now follow, if thou dar’st, to try whose right, Of thine or mine, is most in Helena27.

Demetrius: Follow! Nay, I’ll go with thee, cheek by jowl. *[Lysander and Demetrius exit fighting.]*

Hermia: You, mistress, all this coil is ’long of you28: Nay, go not back.

Helena: I will not trust you, I, Nor longer stay in your curst company. Your hands than mine are quicker for a fray, My legs are longer though, to run away. *[Helena runs off.]*

Hermia: I am amaz’d, and know not what to say. *[Hermia runs after Helena.]
Tips to Acting Shakespeare (page 1 of 2) (see Activity #5)

When working on a Shakespearean text, such as the excerpt from *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* included in this Study Guide involving the four lovers, a few tips to handling the language and verse can increase that enjoyment.

1. **Using the rhythm.** Most of the play is written in a rhythmic pattern of lines sounding: da DAH da DAH da DAH da DAH da DAH. There are five recurring “da DAH”s (or verse feet) to make a line of ten syllables called iambic pentameter. For example, Helena’s first line sounds like:

   You DO ad-VANCE your CUN-ning MORE and MORE.

When saying the lines out loud try first to emphasize this rhythm a few times until it becomes an integral part of the line and then let it fade into the background. This will give it a faint “heartbeat” sound and catch the audience up into the rhythm without hitting them over the head with it. Using the iambic rhythm often gives us a more effective meaning to the line. For example in Lysander’s second speech we might say it as follows:

   I HAD no judgment when to her I swore.

Lysander now sounds more whiney as if he is making excuses for his previous love for Hermia.

2. **Watch for lines with 9 or 11 syllables.** In order to achieve the standard ten syllable line we sometimes have to cut out a syllable or pronounce a word with an extra syllable. For example:

   When TRUTH kills TRUTH, o DEV’lish HO-ly FRAY.

Sometimes these so-called “elisions” are made clear by Shakespeare, such as “o’er” for “over” or “e’er” for “ever”, but sometimes we need to make the decision. Sometimes, also, we need to add a syllable in order to get the ten syllables, such as, pronouncing the “ed” in the past tense of verbs as was originally done. An example: Hermia’s speech on page 2 of the excerpt:

   I AM a-MAZE-ed AT your PASS’- nate WORDS.

Notice that here we had to add a syllable to “amazed” and take one away from “passionate” in order to keep the rhythm.

Sometimes a line just naturally has 11 syllables and ends with an unstressed syllable such as Helena’s line on page 2:

   And WILL you RENT our AN-ci ent LOVE a-SUND-er?

These weak endings often are used by Shakespeare to indicate a character is faltering and is unsure of his/her argument, or is possibly playing coy.

3. **Strengthen the argument or point in the text by emphasizing or punching the final syllable.** In standard North American English we tend to emphasize a word about half way through a sentence. Try hitting the last word (or syllable) in the following speech by Helena:

   You do advance your cunning more and MORE.

   When truth kills truth, o devilish-holy FRAY!

A fun exercise: Kick a small cardboard box as you say the last syllable of each line of your speeches. Notice your lines becoming much more powerful.
Tips to Acting Shakespeare (page 2 of 2)

4. **Use the shared lines.** In a “shared line” one character speaks half a line, and another character follows with half a line. The second speech must follow quickly after the first to keep the rhythm. Here is Hermia and Helena’s shared line on page 3:
   Hermia: Do you not jest?
   Helena: Yes, sooth; and so do you.
Shakespeare wants lively pacing in shared lines. Remember that he began as an actor; his writing can often give actors directorial clues.

5. **Find the opposites (or antitheses).** Watch Shakespeare place words with opposite meanings close together. He was a master of this form of rhetoric. Punch both the opposites. Here is Lysander on page 3:
   “Tis no jest
   That I do HATE thee and LOVE Helena.
(Notice that “love” is in the unstressed position in the line. Stressing it against the normal rhythm provides double emphasis.) Try this:
   That I do HATE thee AND LOVE HEL-en-A.
(It slows you down a little to say three stressed syllables in a row, which might help get the point across to Hermia.) Hermia’s line on page 4 gives another opportunity to hit opposites:
   And are you grown so HIGH in his esteem
   Because I am so DWARFISH and so LOW?

6. **Pay attention to the punctuation.** A period means a full stop; take a breath if needed. If the period is at the end of a line you can possibly pause briefly. If the period, however, is in the middle of a verse line, the pause (and breath) is short so as not to break the rhythm. Shakespeare is basically saying: don’t dawdle; get on with it. Commas don’t warrant much of a pause, but there could be a little one for a semi-colon. Don’t pause at the end of a line unless there is a period; move on quickly to the beginning of the next line without dropping the pitch of your voice which would indicate a period was there and the thought ended. Developing good breath control and lung capacity is essential in acting Shakespeare.

7. **Use Shakespeare’s unfamiliar words strongly rather than hide them.** Use one or more editions of the text with good annotations to explain difficult passages. Even familiar words may have changed meaning in over 400 years. Use an Oxford English Dictionary to check them. Often when an unfamiliar word is emphasized slightly or used with a particular tone of voice, a modern audience will figure it out.
Suggested Websites and Movies (see Activities #4 and #6)

Websites of Interest

http://www.artindia.net/ - a very large website devoted to the various dance, drama, and musical arts with a description of each, short audio and video clips, their history, practicing artists and current events.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jctdyc2GqQE - demonstration of Bharatanatyam Dance

- two websites with lessons on gestures of Bharatanatyam Dance.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u_duwNE5seQ&amp;feature=related,
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LTQZNE6J0A&amp;feature=related – two YouTube websites showing performances of the very stylized ancient Kathakali Dance.

http://chandrakantha.com/articles/indian_music/nritya/kathakali.html - a huge website devoted to Indian music and musical instruments as well as Indian dance forms.

http://www.keralacvnkalari.com/index.htm - learn about Kalarippayat, the ancient Indian form of martial arts. We see some examples of moves in “Midsummer” when Demetrius and Lysander are fighting.


http://www.artsalive.ca/en/eth/index.asp - the NAC’s website for students and teachers with interviews, activities and handy glossaries. In particular, visit the pages on Shakespeare found at http://www.artsalive.ca/en/eth/activities/shakespeare.html

Movies and Videos of Interest

*A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (1999)(116 min.), dir. Michael Hoffman; starring Michelle Pfeiffer as Titania, Kevin Klein as Bottom, Rupert Everett as Oberon, Stanley Tucci as Puck, Christian Bale as Demetrius and Calista Flockhart as Helena. An all-star cast, sumptuous costumes and sets, very good sense of humour but lacking in strong direction to clearly tell the story. Mostly easy to follow. Well worth a look. Available in most video stores or on sale very inexpensively at Amazon.com.

*A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (1996) (103 min.), dir. Adrian Noble. A filed adaptation of a British Royal Shakespeare Company production with a cast only familiar to British audiences. Beautifully designed and acted, strong direction; many aspects of a stage play are retained to give the movie a surreal effect. An excellent choice to introduce students to Shakespeare’s play. Less easy to find in video stores but on sale and very well priced at Amazon.com.

*A Midsummer Night’s Rove* (2002), dir. Gil Cates Jr.. A new take on Shakespeare’s play set in modern times with parties and drugs. Quite funny with a very good musical score. Not necessarily suitable for classroom viewing but this video could be suggested for personal rental and will introduce students to the idea of the many ways Shakespeare can be adapted.
Activities (page 1 of 3)

Before Seeing the Play

1. A Reading Assignment

Distribute copies of the section on “The Characters”, pages 1–2. Have the students write down the names of the characters in a kind of chart showing which characters are connected with which. During the course of the play ask them to watch how various characters from the different groups come in contact with each other?

2. A Reading and Discussion Activity.

It is important that the students be familiar with the plot before attending the play because much of the dialogue in this production at the NAC will not be in English. Distribute and have students read copies of the “Detailed Plot Synopsis” (pages 4–8).

Shakespeare created this play by piecing together a number of stories from different sources, so some of the situations may seem familiar. Have the students discuss if any sections of the play remind them of stories they have read or shows they have seen.

The writers for The Simpsons often use plot lines from famous works of literature. How could sections of A Midsummer Night’s Dream be used in an episode of The Simpsons?

Mention A Midsummer Night’s Rave (see page 24) as a movie adaptation of Shakespeare. Students may wish to carry a copy of “A Really Brief Plot Outline” (page 3) with them to the NAC.

3. An Improvisation Activity

Experiencing a variety of improv topics will help students relate to the material of A Midsummer Night’s Dream. Some improv scenarios could be:

- A very strict father is discouraging his daughter from going out with a young man who is into music and the other arts. He thinks she should be dating the neighbour’s son who is a whiz at maths and sciences.
- In a society where there are arranged marriages, a father has decided to marry off his daughter to a wealthy business man, despite her wish to marry a handsome and romantic young man who writes poetry.
- Two young friends are discussing how the boyfriend of one has suddenly fallen for the other girl even though she doesn’t like him and is already involved with another fellow. The jilted girl has self-image problems.
- A group of guys decide to put on a skit for a school assembly but know nothing about theatre and are sure to make a mess of things. One of the group is a loud-mouthed know-it-all who dominates the planning and constantly steers the group in the wrong direction.
- A girl becomes furious when, at a bush party, her boyfriend tries to make out with her best friend. The best friend, who is not all that popular, is sure that the whole thing is a trick on her.
- When she gets just a little bit tipsy at a party, the head girl who is the most popular girl in school, starts to come onto the geekiest guy in the school. The next day when her friends tell her what she did she is mortified.

4. Enrichment Activity.

Screen a film version of Midsummer as mentioned on page 24 of this Study Guide. Visit the websites mentioned on page 24 for more in-depth coverage of the issues. On the NAC’s website ArtsAlive, http://www.artsalive.ca/en/eth/index.asp, there is a wealth of information on Shakespeare and his plays.
Activities (page 2 of 3)

**Before Seeing the Play**

5. **A Scene Study Activity**
   Use the “Scene Excerpt from A Midsummer Night’s Dream” (pages 18 -21) for either a discussion on language and scene structure or for a scene study activity. In this production at the NAC this scene with the lovers is not in English. Familiarity with it will enhance the students’ enjoyment. If the scene is to be used as a scene study, the class could be divided into teams of four actors and a director. After reading the scene aloud a couple of times to become familiar with the language, let them try some of the “Tips to acting Shakespeare” (pages 22- 23). Try playing the scene using modern language instead of Shakespeare’s. Try running it speaking gibberish or silently acting out the main points of the speeches. The director might be able to suggest some fight choreography and blocking to bring out the comedy.

6. **Enrichment Activity**
   Have the students read the section “South Asian History, Languages, and Art forms” (pages 14-17). Although this production of A Midsummer Night’s Dream was originally meant only for a tour of Indian cities, its popularity has taken it around the world. Students’ enjoyment of this production will be enhanced if they learn about the country of origin. Visit some of the websites mentioned on page 24, “Suggested Websites and Movies” concerning Indian dance, music or martial arts. Visit some of the YouTube sites to see authentic Indian dance.

7. **Students should each be given a copy of Things to Watch for in the Production** (page 11). Keeping these events in mind will help them be drawn through the production. Similarly being aware of the material in “Famous Quotations to Listen For” (pages 12-13), will draw them in. For added enjoyment, some of these quotations could be committed to memory.

8. **Be sure to show the class the colour production photos found on pages 29-30 which give a strong idea of the look and style of this production.**

9. **Have students examine the play-within-a-play, Pyramus and Thisby, as performed by Bottom and his friends.** See an on-line copy at: http://www.freeshakespeare.co.uk/A-Midsummer-Night's-Dream/ACT-V/SCENE-I-Athens-The-palace-of- THESEUS.shtml, approximately one third of the way through the scene. Using the elements of the piece: have them improvise the scene; have them create a series of tableaux; a silent contact improvisation of relationships; a series of scenes around the events of the story, such as the first meeting of the lovers, the quarrel between the fathers, the building of the wall, the finding of the bodies by the parents, news report of their deaths, etc. Then have the students rebuild the play using all of their techniques. Have them read page 10 of the Study Guide on Devised Theatre.

10. **Any trip to the theatre should also involve the students learning proper theatre etiquette while at the NAC.** A handout is available on page 28. Please photocopy and distribute this page to students.
Activities (page 3 of 3)

After Seeing the Play

11. **Topics for Class Discussion on the Production** (students may want to review the material “About the Play” (pages 1-8).
   - The mixture of languages used in this production;
   - Style of acting chosen for this play; the use of dance and movement
   - The sex and violence – was it necessary and in keeping with the theme or overdone?
   - Themes explored – what was it about?
   - Production aspects:-
     - **Costumes** – How well did they define time period, character, mood? Did colour play a role? Examine the colour photos of the play in the Study Guide.
     - **Set** – How well did it define location, theme? What mood did it convey? What abstract ideas did it evoke? How well did the actors use the set? How did the changes in appearance as the play progressed work?
     - **Lighting** – What did it add besides making the action visible?
     - **Sound and Music** – How did the music add atmosphere and mood?
   - Relevance of this story set over 3000 years ago in Greece (or in today’s India) to today’s Canadian audiences.

12. **Write a Play Review.** While the production is still fresh in their minds, have students review *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Refer them to play reviews in *The Ottawa Citizen* or *Xpress* to give them an idea of the standard approach to theatrical criticism. You’ll find an outline for writing a review on page 12 of the Study Guide for *The ‘Vaudevilles’ of Chekhov* found in the NAC website [http://www.artsalive.ca/en/eth/activities/](http://www.artsalive.ca/en/eth/activities/). Theatre Ontario has an excellent guide at [http://theatreontario.org/content/play_reviews.htm](http://theatreontario.org/content/play_reviews.htm). Students should refer to their program (if supplied) for correct production information. A review should cover, in general and more specifically when merited: design elements (lighting, sound, set and costumes), performances, direction, text (basic narrative, dialogue and the central themes).
Theatre Etiquette

Please take a moment to prepare the students for their visit to the National Arts Centre to explain what good Theatre Etiquette is and why it will enhance the enjoyment of the play by all audience members:

1. *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* will be performed in the Theatre of the NAC. Matinées at the NAC are for students and the general public. It is important for everyone to be quiet (no talking or rustling of materials) during the performance so others do not lose their immersion in the “world of the play”. Unlike movies, the actors in live theatre can hear disturbances in the audience and will give their best performances when they feel the positive involvement of the audience members. The appropriate way of showing approval for the actors’ performances is through laughter and applause. For the enjoyment of all, people who disturb others during the show may be asked to leave the Theatre.

2. If you plan to make notes on the play for the purposes of writing a review, please do not try to write them during the performance, as this can be distracting for the actors. Wait until intermission or after the performance is finished to write your reflections, please.

3. It is important that there be no electronic devices used in the Theatre so that the atmosphere of the play is not interrupted and others are not disturbed. **Cell phones, pagers and anything that beeps must be turned off.** **Cameras and all other recording devices are not permitted in the Theatre.**

4. Tickets with assigned seats will be distributed by your teacher and to avoid confusion it is important to sit in the designated seat. In the Theatre all even numbered seats are on the left side and all odd numbered seats are on the right. This means that seats 10 and 12, for example, are actually side by side.

5. Programs may or may not be distributed at this student matinée. Some programs can be made available to teachers if desired with names of the artists. The program may also be used as a teaching aid to show how a program is put together.

6. The running time of the production is 2 hours, 40 minutes including one intermission. It is advisable to make a trip to the washroom before the performance starts, as anyone leaving while the play is in progress runs the risk of not being allowed back into the Theatre.
“Titania” (Archana Ramaswamy) and “Bottom” (Joy Fernandes) rest in her bower with a sleeping Fairy on guard.

photo: Tristram Kenton
Theseus and Hippolyta decide to cut short their hunting party and share their wedding day with the two young couples. L-R: “Lysander” (Chandan Roy Sanyal), “Hermia” (Yuki Ellias), “Theseus” (P.R. Jijoy), “Hippolyta” (Archana Ramaswamy), “Helena” (Shanaya Rafaat), and “Demetrius” (Prasana Mahagamage).

photo: Tristram Kenton
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