

# A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM CLASSROOM REFLECTION



## ABOUT THIS STAGE ADAPTATION

Edited by Robin Belfield and Co-Directed by Rachel Bagshaw, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is an adaptation of the classic play by William Shakespeare. We follow young lovers Demetrius, Lysander, Helena and Hermia who flee Athens for the moonlit woods. There – along with a band of amateur actors – they fall under the spell of mischievous fairy Puck and tumble into a dream world where illusion and reality are hilariously confused.

This stage adaptation is a fresh retelling of Shakespeare's classic comedy, exploring unrequited love, self-discovery and seeing the world anew. This short resource for schools offers some creative activities to reflect on this imaginative adaptation in class.

To find out more about approaches to interpreting Shakespeare's text, we interviewed the editor and co-director Robin Belfield, who reflected on his process. You can watch the interview here:



## THIS STORY IS RELEVANT TO THE FOLLOWING KS2 AREAS:

**An Introduction to Shakespeare / Literacy – Reading Comprehension: Becoming familiar with key stories and essential texts; understanding character development and analysing plot structure / Identifying how language, structure, and presentation contribute to meaning / PSHE – Exploring themes of love, misunderstanding, and conflict resolution / ELG – Expressive Arts and Design: Creating set designs and exploring magic.**



A Unicorn Theatre and  
Royal Shakespeare Company production



# ACTIVITY 1

## CONVERSATION STARTERS

**TIME:** 20 minutes

**SUBJECT AREAS:** Drama / English / Speaking & Listening

**OBJECTIVE:** To reflect on the play, adding depth to understanding

**LEARNING OUTCOMES:** By the end of the activity, pupils will be able to:

- Articulate their response to the play
- Consider different responses from their peers
- Begin to think about the purpose of theatre

**We encourage you to reflect on the production with the children together. Choose all or just a few of the following questions to explore with the class:**

- What was your favourite moment in the play?
- Was there anything you did not like or did not understand?
- Choose three words to describe the mischievous fairy Puck (without using the word mischievous)
- How do you think Demetrius, Lysander, Helena and Hermia felt about each other at the beginning of the play? Does this change during the play? Why?
- Dream is made up of 4 different stories: The Court, the Lovers, the Fairies, and the Mechanicals. What was similar, and different, about these stories?
- The fairies in A Midsummer Night's Dream like to trick humans who wander into their realm. Can you think of any magical pranks that you might play if you were one of these fairies?
- What do you remember about the design of the play? This could be what you saw on stage and/or the sound and lights. How did it help to create the world of the story? (You might need to explain that the set is everything on the stage that the actors perform on)
- This play used Creative Captions, the words projected creatively onto the set. How did the Creative Captions help to tell the story? Why might they be useful?
- Would you like to go back to the theatre? What story would you like to see?



Katrice Denton and Scott Worley / Company in rehearsals / Photo: Helen Murray



Josephine-Fransijla Brookman / Company in rehearsals / Photo: Helen Murray

# ACTIVITY 2

## THEATRE DESIGN: MODEL MAKING

**TIME:** 45-50 min

**OBJECTIVES:** To develop artistic expression and group cohesion.  
To explore the qualities of different materials.

**LEARNING OUTCOMES:** By the end of the activity, pupils will be able to:

- Create models boxes of the fairy world stage design made from different materials
- Articulate a response to key themes in the play
- Apply creative learning to an oracy and written task.

**WHAT YOU NEED:** Small boxes; Glue sticks; sellotape; scissors. Different materials such as coloured paper; cardboard; fabric; paper; string; paper straws; natural materials- bark; wood; moss or leaves. You can ask children to bring in materials from home as well.

Divide the class into groups of 3-4. Explain that in groups we are going to use our imaginations to create our own set designs of the magical fairy worlds in the play using all the different materials available to us.

Start by creating a class list of all the items and characters we might find in the magical fairy woods (e.g. the fairies, trees, bushes). Second, add adjectives to the list that can become describing sentences, such as 'the beautiful tree' or 'the bright, glowing fairy'. This becomes a word-bank that is later used in their presentations and/or pieces of writing.



Chris Jared and Amelia Donkor / Company in rehearsals / Photo: Helen Murray



Robin Befield / Company in rehearsals / Photo: Helen Murray

To start the activity, ask each group to take 5-10 minutes to draw up a plan for what their design will look like. Think about:

- What materials will you use for the foundation/sides of your stage design?
- What items and/or characters will you have inside your stage design?  
Draw these items and annotate your drawing with which materials you can use to create them.
- How many different materials can you use? Are there different sections within your fairy woods?  
Are there any elements of fairy magic within your design?
- You may wish to challenge them to think about which materials would be likely to last the longest (linking to sustainability).

Give pupils 30 minutes to select their materials and build their fairy world stage designs. If there is time, each group can present their designs back to the class. Encourage them to use the vocabulary from the word-bank that was created at the start of the activity to describe and present their fairy worlds.

## Extension Activity

Think about how the Creative Captioning might look in your stage design. Ask each pupil to select a favorite line or section of the text below and use a piece of paper to creatively write that text so that it enhances its meaning. Consider the shape, spacing, size and position of individual words. Should any be emphasised? Pupils can add images and colour to help convey the meaning of the text. How does this develop their understanding of the world of the story? Finally, add these captions to your model of the stage design.

## Examples of text from the play:

*"I shall do thee mischief in the wood..."*

*"You spotted snakes with double tongue,  
Thorny hedgehogs, be not seen.  
Newts and blind-worms, do no wrong,  
Come not near our fairy queen."*

*"Lord, what fools these mortals be!"*

*"First, rehearse this song by rote,  
To each word a warbling note.  
Hand in hand, with fairy grace,  
Will we sing and bless this place."*

# ACTIVITY 3

## DRAMA SESSION: WORKING WITH TEXT

The following two activities invite your pupils to explore the text in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. These are the text extracts we will use:

### ACT 2 SCENE 1 (ABRIDGED VERSION)

**Demetrius:** I love thee not: therefore pursue me not.

**Helena:** You draw me, you hard-hearted adamant.

**Demetrius:** I do not, nor I cannot love you.

**Helena:** And even for that do I love you t  
I am your spaniel.

**Demetrius:** I am sick when I do look on thee.

**Helena:** And I am sick when I look not on you.

### PUCK

#### Prologue

Thou speak'st aright;  
I am that merry wanderer of the night.  
I jest to Oberon and make him smile  
When I the human mortals do beguile!

#### Act 5 Scene 1

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 reprehend.  
If you pardon, we will mend.



Amelia Donkor / Company in rehearsals / Photo: Helen Murray



Boni Adeliyi / Company in rehearsals / Photo: Helen Murray

# APPROACH TO A KEY SCENE – ACT 2 SCENE 1: DEMETRIUS & HELENA

**TIME:** 25-30 min

**OBJECTIVES:** To explore how Shakespeare uses pronouns and specific vocabulary to define a relationship. To use movement (stepping, statues, gestures) to interpret the status and power balance between two characters. To build collaborative skills through “paired counting” and shared staging.

**LEARNING OUTCOMES:** By the end of the activity, pupils will be able to:

- Identify the difference between a “self-focused” and “other-focused” character by tracking pronouns
- Demonstrate through a “Step Forward/Back” exercise whether a character is being aggressive or defensive
- Analyze the emotional state of Helena and Demetrius using adjectives (e.g., “determined,” “cruel,” “desperate”) / Perform a short snippet of text using physical “status” (Statue vs. Mobile) to show who holds the power.

## Approach to a key scene – Act 2 Scene 1: Demetrius & Helena. Time: 25 min

- **Paired counting:** Get into pairs. Label each other A and B. Each pair needs to count to 3, a different person starting each time (e.g. A says 1, B says 2, A says 3, then B says 1, A says 2, B says 3 and so on).
- **Next steps:** Then replace number 1 with a clap and try again. Then number 2 with a stomp. Then number 3 with a gesture of their choice. Reflect on what the easiest version of this game was.
- **Feed in text:** Replace 1/clap with ‘I love thee not’ and try again. Then replace 2/stomp with ‘You draw me’, then replace 3/gesture with ‘I do not’. Your pupils can enjoy mistakes – this helps to build paired working.
- **Back-to-back reading:** Pairs sit back-to-back. A’s read Demetrius, B’s read Helena – read only in whispers. Then swap roles.
- **Step Forward/Step Back:** With each line, you can either step forward, or step back. Try this twice, swapping roles again. Reflection: Who moved forward more? Who moved back more? Why?
- **Point on the Pronouns:** Stand up and face each other. Each time you read a ‘me’ pronoun (I/me/my), point to yourself. Each time you read a ‘you’ pronoun (thee/you/your), point to your partner. Reflection: Do they talk more about themselves, or each other? Why do you think this is?
- **Statue/Mobile:** Make a statue that represents each character. Read again – first time, Demetrius is a statue, and Helena must keep moving. Second time, Helena is a statue, and Demetrius must keep moving. Reflection: Which version did you prefer? Why?
- **Staging:** Pupils have free reign to stage this scene using any of your existing exercises, or any other ideas. Share some of these back to the class.
- **What did we learn?** Ask pupils to reflect: What sort of characters are Demetrius & Helena? What is their relationship? What do you think might happen between them next?

# APPROACH TO CHARACTER – PUCK.

**TIME:** 30 min

**OBJECTIVES:** To use “scanning” techniques to identify key themes (mischief vs. apology) in a classical text. To use Choral Speaking (unison, echo, repetition) to create an atmospheric soundscape. To compare and contrast the two “faces” of Puck: the boastful prankster and the humble storyteller.

**LEARNING OUTCOMES:** By the end of the activity, pupils will be able to:

- Select and justify a favorite phrase based on its “sound” or “feeling”
- Create a still image (statue) that communicates a specific Shakespearean emotion
- Translate complex text into physical movement (a “trick” or an “apology”)
- Collaborate in a small group to perform a “Text to Life” sequence using vocal layering.

- **Introducing Puck:** start by asking pupils to think of words to describe a character with the name Puck. What is someone like who has that name?
- **Scanning text:** Distribute copies of the edit of Puck’s speech from the prologue and from Act 5 Scene 1. Put these face down on the floor, one per pupil. Then give pupils 5 seconds to turn the text over quickly and scan for a phrase that catches their eye. Feed these back. Try again for 8 seconds, then 10 seconds.

Ask the group the following questions:

- *What were your favourite words/phrases?*
- *What feelings/emotions did you hear about?*
- *What do you think Puck is like? How is this different between the two scenes?*
- *When pupils feedback their phrases, look for words like “Merry wanderer,” “Beguile,” “Shadows,” and “Mended.”*

If they pick “Beguile,” ask them what it sounds like. Does it sound like a sharp trick or a soft secret? (It means to charm or trick someone).

- **Speech in Statues:** Then ask pupils to work in pairs or threes. Ask them to share their chosen phrases and devise still images/statues to go with each. Share these around the group and discuss briefly.
- **Choral reading:** Read the full speech out loud altogether (possibly as a call-and-response, or in short sections/small groups first). Then read the first word of each line, then the last word. How are these different? What do they tell you, what do you picture when you read them?
- **Identify tricks/apologies:** Now put pupils into small groups and ask them to discuss the two speeches together and identify one of the ‘tricks’, and one of the ‘apologies’ that is described. Ask them to represent their chosen trick and chosen apology with a movement.

- **Share Movements:** Without explaining what they represent, share the movements. The group can guess what ‘tricks’ and ‘apologies’ are represented.

*The Trick (Prologue):* Puck is “merry” and active. He wants to make Oberon smile at the expense of humans.

*The Apology (Act 5):* Puck is gentle. He uses the word “Shadows” and “Dream.” He is trying to make sure no one is “offended.”

Ask the group: “Does Puck seem more powerful when he is tricking people, or when he is casting a spell to make them forget?”

- **Text to Life:** Each group should now put their words back in. Play Puck’s voice, tone, speed of speech. They must use the words from the speech, but words can be repeated, echoed, spoken chorally, etc.
- **Share:** Share back all these mini-scenes, and discuss what has been learned about the character of Puck.



Scout Worsley and Emmy Stonelake / Company in rehearsals / Photo: Helen Murray

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Rehearsal images: Helen Murray



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