

Educator's Resource Guide: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

By William Shakespeare

Adapted by Demetria Thomas

Dramaturgy Packet by Shannon Hill

Grand Valley Shakespeare Festival 2026

How to Use This Guide

This resource guide is designed to help educators prepare students to attend *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, connect the production to Shakespeare's world and to modern performance choices, and reflect after the performance.

Brief Synopsis

As Duke Theseus prepares to marry Hippolyta, Egeus demands that his daughter Hermia obey his choice of husband, Demetrius. Hermia loves Lysander, so she and Lysander decide to flee Athens. Helena, who loves Demetrius, tells him of the plan, and all four lovers end up in the woods. Nearby, a group of working people rehearses a play about Pyramus and Thisbe for the Duke's wedding celebration.

In the forest, fairy rulers Oberon and Titania are arguing over a changeling boy. Oberon sends Puck to use a magical flower that causes people to fall in love with the first creature they see. Mistaken identities, enchanted love, jealousy, and confusion follow. Bottom, one of the actors, is transformed with an ass's head, and Titania falls in love with him under the spell.

By morning, order is restored. The lovers are matched into couples, Bottom returns to perform with his friends, Titania and Oberon have made up, and the workers present their comic version of Pyramus and Thisbe. The play ends with blessings, celebration, and Puck's invitation to the audience to think of the whole adventure as a dream.

Cast List for Grand Valley Shakespeare Festival:

Ahmir Wiggins	Oberon/Theseus	Sophrone Morris	Snout
Paige Clark	Titania/Hippolyta	Johan Calderon	Snug
Evan Bolla	Egeus/Quince	Kylee Coster	Starveling
Juliet Veliz-Figueroa	Puck/Philostrate	Ren Rieman	Mustardseed
Christopher Eastland	Bottom* AEA	Sophia Mizera	Mote
Tehya Maloney	Hermia	William Howard	Peaseblossom
Cameron Mead	Lysander	Claire Crabbe	Kevin
Lorelei Lichtman	Demetria	Suki Wright	Bramble
Angelyna Hendrix	Helena	Mason Medina	Pippin
Rayne Colvin	Flute	Benjamin Fisher	Cobweb

Note: In our production, you'll notice that Demetrius has been changed to Demetria. Demetria will be played as a non-binary.

Production Concept: 1950s Meets 1980s

This production shifts the world of Athens toward 1950s social expectations and the fairy world toward 1980s color, pop spectacle, and self-expression. The contrast helps audiences see the play's tension between conformity and transformation. The 1950s setting emphasizes rules, reputation, family authority, and societal expectations. The 1980s setting introduces neon energy, pop icons, MTV-era visuals, and a sense of rebellion.

You will also notice that some references have been changed. This is because Shakespeare wrote for his audience, using references with a sense of familiarity. Director Demetria Thomas has decided to update those references, granting the audience the gift of relating to the text the same way the audience would have in Shakespeare's time.

Character Inspiration

Character	Production Inspiration
Theseus	Clark Gable-style Hollywood authority
Hippolyta	Ava Gardner-style Golden Age glamour
Hermia	Pink Lady
Lysander	Greaser
Helena	Cheerleader or paper shaker
Demetria	Softball player
Oberon	Prince-inspired 1980s pop royalty
Titania	Madonna-inspired star power
Puck	Cyndi Lauper-inspired quirky energy

KEY DRAMATURGICAL CONCEPTS

WHAT IS MIDSUMMER?

Midsummer marks the summer solstice, the midpoint of the growing season. In early modern celebrations, it was associated with good fortune, healing, fertility, flowers, bonfires, processions, and love magic. This background helps audiences understand why Shakespeare's forest feels festive, unstable, and enchanted. In **A Midsummer Night's Dream**, the woods become a threshold space where ordinary social rules loosen and transformation becomes possible.

LITERARY REFERENCES

Shakespeare draws on classical and medieval sources throughout the play. Theseus and Hippolyta come from mythic traditions, while Oberon appears in medieval romance. Titania and the story of

Pyramus and Thisbe connect the play to Ovid's **Metamorphoses**, a work deeply concerned with love, desire, transformation, and the unpredictable behavior of gods and mortals. These references deepen the play's themes of metamorphosis, irrational love, and theatrical storytelling.

MARRIAGE, LAW, AND CHOICE

The central conflict begins because Hermia's father, Egeus, claims authority over her marriage. In ancient Athenian marriage customs, fathers or guardians arranged marriages, and women had little legal choice in whom they married. In Shakespeare's play, Hermia is threatened with death or a celibate life if she refuses to marry Demetrius. This production adapts that pressure through a 1950s lens, replacing the threat of death with the threat of reform school and social disgrace. The change highlights how family authority, reputation, and social conformity can still restrict personal freedom.

THE CHANGELING BOY

The changeling boy never speaks and does not appear as an active character, yet he causes the central conflict between Oberon and Titania. Titania raises him out of loyalty to his deceased mother, while Oberon wants him as an attendant. Their struggle over the boy raises questions about power, care, possession, gendered authority, and control. Although he remains unseen, the changeling boy drives the fairy plot and reveals the deeper power struggle within Oberon and Titania's relationship.

Before the Performance

Essential Questions

- Who gets to choose whom we love?
- How do rules about family, gender, and reputation shape the choices characters make?
- When does transformation free a character, and when does it control them?
- How can changing a play's time period help a modern audience understand Shakespeare?

Pre-Show Activity: Two Worlds Collide

Divide students into small groups. Assign half the class the 1950s and half the class the 1980s. Each group creates a quick visual chart of clothing, music, technology, family expectations, and social rules. Then ask students to predict which characters might feel most trapped by the 1950s world and which might thrive in the 1980s world.

Pre-Show Activity: Shakespeare's References, Updated

Ask students to choose one mythological or literary reference from the play—Theseus, Hippolyta, Pyramus and Thisbe, Oberon, Titania, or Cupid's flower. Have the students research the reference, and then translate it into a reference a modern audience would recognize. Students should explain what meaning is preserved and what changes when the reference is updated.

During the Performance

Invite students to watch for how design and performance choices tell the story. They might track color, music, costumes, props, status, and how bodies or speak move differently in Athens and in the fairy world. Students can also notice when comedy depends on confusion, exaggeration, repetition, or dramatic irony.

After the Performance

Discussion Questions

1. How did the production's 1950s/1980s concept change your understanding of the play?
2. Which character changed the most throughout the play?
3. How did the actors make Shakespeare's language clear through voice, movement, or physical comedy?
4. What did the fairy world look and sound like? How did those choices affect the mood?
5. If you could set this play in another time and place, which would you choose?

Writing Prompt

Write a response explaining how one production choice—set, costume, music, performance, movement, or comedy—helped you understand a theme in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Use at least two specific moments from the performance as evidence.

Extension Activities

- **Design Board:** Create a visual collage for either Athens or the fairy world using colors, textures, music references, and costume details.
- **Love Potion Debate:** Hold a structured debate about whether magic excuses the characters' behavior.
- **Performance Review:** Write a review that evaluates acting, design, interpretation, and audience impact.