A Midsummer Night's Dream

SPONSORED BY

PROUD CORNERSTONE MEMBER

UPAF
UNITEDPERFORMINGARTSFUND

FIRST STAGE

TRANSFORMING LIVES THROUGH THEATER

DEAR FIRST STAGE FRIENDS,

Follow the misadventures of fairies, nobles, and craftsmen through the forests of Athens over the course of one magical evening. Love triangles, mistaken identities, and alarming transformations abound in Shakespeare's most enchanting comedy.

This is a Young Company Performance Project — an actor-driven presentation using elemental production values. By stripping down to a nearly bare stage, the connection of actor to audience is enhanced, and the words of the play come alive in exciting ways, allowing our award-winning students to showcase their graduate level skills with full length material, from Shakespeare to American classics to pieces commissioned specially for them.

Enjoy the show,

Coltyn Giltner
Education Director
(414) 267-2972
cgiltner@firststage.org

PRE-SHOW QUESTIONS

1. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a love story full of tricks and twists set in Ancient Greece. Many of these twists are caused by or are compared to the characters depicted in Greek mythology. What do you know about Greek mythology? What is your favorite Greek myth and why? What Greek myths do you think are going to be used or referenced in the play?

2. The play starts with the king of Athens ordering Hermia, one of the main characters in the play, to follow her father's expectations or else be forced into a life of solitude in a nunnery. If you had such high expectations placed on you, how would you feel? Would you try to reach their expectations, reason with them to find a middle ground, or refuse to listen to them?

3. The plot of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is set in motion by Robin "Puck" Goodfellow. He spends a lot of his time playing tricks and pulling pranks on the humans. Have you ever played a trick or pulled a prank on a family member or a friend? What did you do? How did they respond?

DREAMING UP A PLAY
ART AND WRITING ACTIVITY

One of the first ways an audience interacts with a play is by seeing its set. Of course the set, or scenery, serves the functional purpose of showing where and when the show takes place, but it also shows the overall tone and mood of the play. While some performances use little to no set at all and rely on the props and actions the actors use to tell the story, some performances use elaborate and fanciful sets to help the audience believe and understand a story.

Let's create our own set design for a production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*! As the scenic designer, it is up to you to decide all of the walls and platforms that you want built for your set and any furniture pieces or set dressings you'd like to use. Follow the steps below to create your set and even build your own 3D scale model of your design!

MATERIALS

- Set Concept Brainstorm Form
- Blank Stage
- Pen or Pencil
- Coloring tools–this can be colored pencils, crayons, markers, or even paint

Optional:

- Shoe Box
- Construction Paper (Colorful or Blank)
- Popsicle Sticks
- Tape or Glue

DIRECTIONS

1. Start by deciding on your concept. This means picking the time period and location of your version. Oftentimes, directors and scenic designers decide to set Shakespeare's plays somewhere else entirely from where the play originally took place. You could set *A Midsummer Night's Dream* anywhere–such as your school, New York City in 1920, Spain in the Medieval Era, or even keep it in the original setting of Ancient Athens. Use the Set Concept Brainstorm Form to help you decide and guide your research.

2. Create a list of what set pieces and furniture this show needs. Do the actors need somewhere to sit? Could the actors use a structure to climb? Does the story need trees, bushes, and other plant life to help show where we are? This list will help you decide what things you'd like to place on your set–or even how you'd design the parts that would need to be built!

3. Now, use the empty stage picture to design your set! This is what a scenic designer would call an elevation sketch–it shows how the set looks from the audience's perspective.

4. *Optional:* Take your set design to the next level by crafting a scale model of your set! A scale model is a small 3D recreation of your set–like a diorama! While an elevation sketch helps to show off the original ideas of what your set looks like, a scale model helps to show off how big or small it is in comparison to the actors and how it might be used by the actors.

   a. Start by taking an empty shoe box and placing it on its side. The bottom of the box will be the **back** of the stage and the side of the box that it's standing on is now its stage floor. If you'd like to extend the stage out further from the back wall, feel free to attach the lid to the stage side of the box. On the back of the stage, draw, paint, or glue colored papers to show how the back wall would look. Do the same with the floor.

   b. Once the floor and back wall are designed, begin to create the set's platforms or walls. You can use any sturdy materials you have–like cardstock or attaching toothpicks or popsicle sticks to paper. You can even use small toy building blocks!

   c. When all of the set pieces are created, attach them to your shoe box stage where you think they would go on your set design. Use your elevation sketch as a reference.

   d. Next, create any furniture pieces or plants. These pieces are called the set dressing: it's everything that helps to show off the tone, setting, or location of the set design that *can't* be painted onto the set. You can do this in the same way you created the set pieces! Once they're finished, place them in your shoe box stage, using your elevation sketch as a reference.

   e. Lastly, create a small paper actor. This paper actor helps to show off how big or small the set is in comparison. It also shows off if a part of the stage is meant for an actor to stand there. You can make as many paper actors as you need. You can also make them look like you and your friends or even like the characters from the play!

5. Once your elevation sketch or even your scale model is complete, share them with your friends, family, classmates, or teacher! Walk them through why you made certain choices about the set and how they help to tell the story of A Midsummer Night's Dream.

SET CONCEPT BRAINSTORM FORM

When do you want your version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to take place?

_____

How does this time period differ from Ancient Greece, the time period in the original play?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Important Facts about This Time Period:

1.) _____

_____

2.) _____

_____

3.) _____

_____

_____

How would you describe the architecture or landscape of this location?

_____

_____

_____

SET CONCEPT BRAINSTORM FORM

When do you want your version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to take place?

_____

How does this time period differ from Ancient Greece, the time period in the original play?
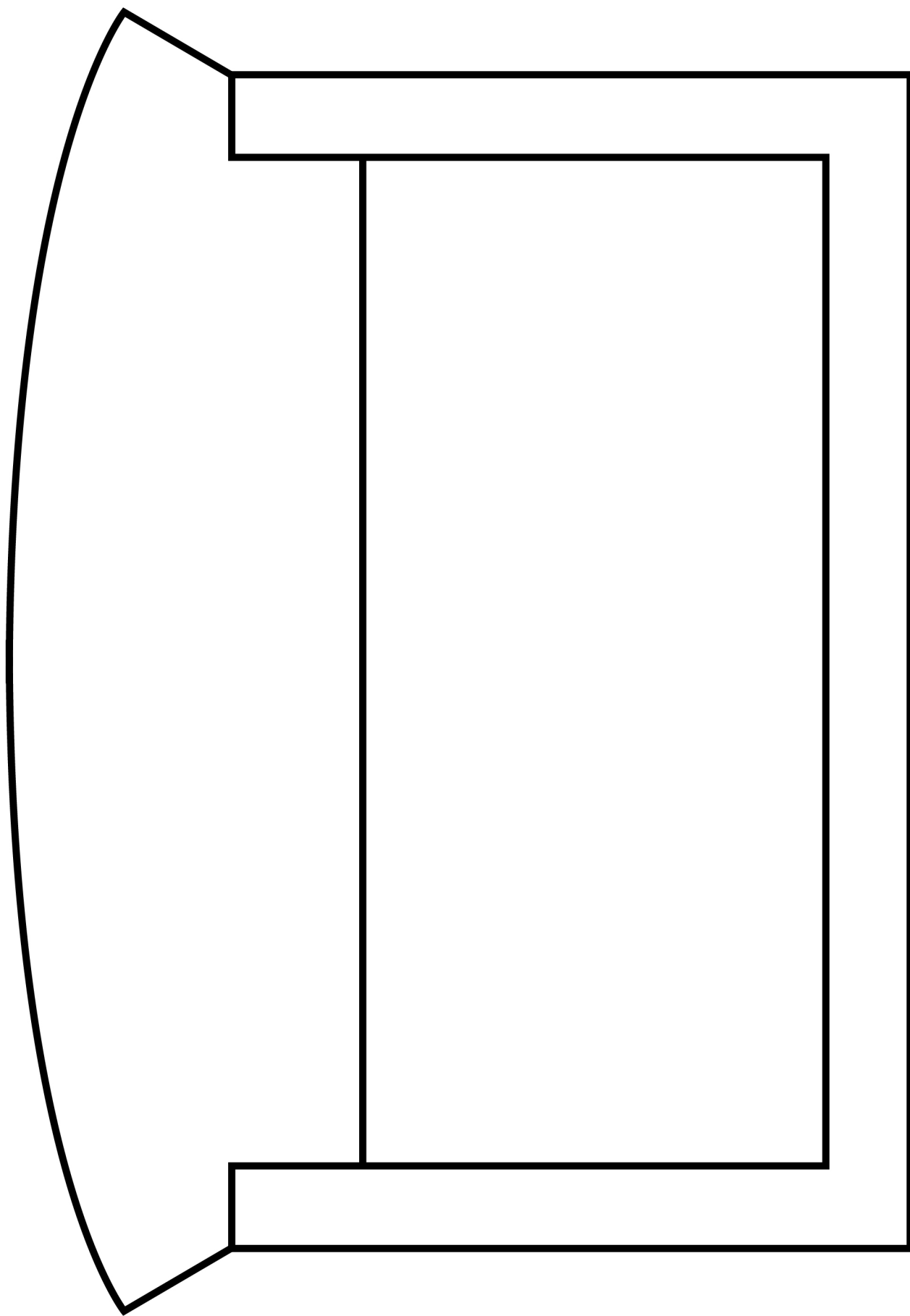
_____

_____

_____

_____

Important Facts about This Time Period:

1.) _____

_____

2.) _____

_____

3.) _____

_____

How would you describe the architecture or landscape of this location?

_____

_____

_____

SET CONCEPT BRAINSTORM FORM

Set a timer for 5 minutes. During that time, brainstorm your ideas for how you would show in the scenic design where and when your version of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* takes place. If you need more time/space to write, feel free to use scrap paper or notebook paper.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

THE LANGUAGE OF LOVE
POETRY ACTIVITY

The language William Shakespeare uses to write his plays is a form of storytelling in itself! Shakespeare uses a few writing tools to show off what a character might be experiencing–from frantic confusion to the absolute certainty that they are in love with another character. Let's consider the central focus of the characters in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*: love. Shakespeare shows whether two characters are in love by having each line of verse they speak be an even number of syllables that follows a heartbeat rhythm–or iambic pentameter–and by following a rhyme scheme. These rhyme schemes can vary from AA BB CC or ABAB CDCD. Take a look at the follow lines from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for an example.

Lysander:

O, take the sense, sweet, of my innocence!

Love takes the meaning in love's conference.

I mean that my heart unto yours is knot,

So that but one heart we can make of it;

Two bosoms interchainéd with an oath–

So then two bosoms and a single troth.

Then by your side no bed-room me deny,

For lying so, Hermia, I do not lie.

Now it's your turn! We can explore Shakespeare's language through a form of poetry that he is well known for called sonnets. Sonnets are a type of poem that uses iambic pentameter verses that contain 10-12 syllables per verse and follow an ABAB CDCD EFEF GG rhyme scheme. Sonnets can be about anything–from people you know, an activity you like (or dislike), or nature. They are most often used, though, as a proclamation of love. Follow the directions below to create your own sonnet!

THE LANGUAGE OF LOVE
POETRY ACTIVITY

DIRECTIONS

1. On the first lined page, set a timer for 5 minutes and free write all of your thoughts on the theme Love. If you need more space, feel free to print another copy of the lined page OR use scrap paper or notebook paper.

2. On the second lined page, mark the rhyme scheme of a Shakespeare sonnet on the lines – abab cdcd efef gg. Number each line, too.

3. Begin by creating two pairs of rhyming words for each quatrain. A quatrain is a set of four lines in a sonnet. An example of the rhyming words in a quatrain could be day/dark and pray/spark. Notice how the first and second word in the first pair rhymes with their respective word in the second pair. Place these words at the end of the first four lines.

4. Using your free write as inspiration, begin to write the first four lines of yoru sonnet with the rhyming words you had created ending each line. Make sure you keep the rhyming words in the abab rhyme scheme order!

   a. For an extra challenge, try to limit each verse to an even number of syllables–just like how Shakespeare wrote his sonnets!

   b. The lines might sound like nonsense at first. That is okay! Once the full sonnet is written, you can edit each quatrain to adjust the flow of your sonnet and help it match the theme of Love.

5. Repeat steps 3 and 4 for the second and third quatrain and the final couplet.

6. Once you have 14 lines written, edit your poem for clarity and to help the quatrains flow together.

7. When you've completed your sonnet, share it with your friends, family, or classmates!

BRAINSTORM!

CREATE YOUR SONNET!

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S PLAYLIST
SOUND DESIGN ACTIVITY

While Shakespeare's language can be confusing, his plays have always relied on a language that transcends the languages we speak: music. Music and sound design helps us understand the mood in a given moment and helps us understand the story on a deeper level than what the text provides. In the theater, it is someone's job *just* to decide what songs and sound effects are used – they are the Sound Designer.

MATERIALS

- Attached worksheet

DIRECTIONS

For this activity, you get to be the sound designer for a production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Using the following form, fill in each line with the name of a song that you would use to help tell the story of that moment, of the setting, and of the characters. Feel free to use music you enjoy listening to OR do research to find the song that *perfectly* matches what you think of each item on the list.

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S PLAYLIST

A song that describes the…

    Beginning of the play: _____

    Rising action of the play: _____

    Climax of the play: _____

    Falling action of the play: _____

    Resolution of the play: _____

A song that feels like the setting of the play:

_____

A song that sounds like it's from the time period of the play:

_____

The theme song for…

    Lysander and Hermia's Love: _____

    Hermia and Helena's Fight: _____

    Helena's Unrequited Love for Demetrius: _____

    Oberon and Titania's Feud: _____

    Robin Goodfellow's Trickery: _____

    The Rude Mechanical's Performance of Pyramus and Thisbe:_____

    Theseus and Hippolyta's Wedding: _____

POST-SHOW QUESTIONS

1. As the rulers of the Fairies, the trials and tribulations of Oberon and Titania's relationship impacts the lives of the fairies. The same could be said about Theseus and Hippolyta's relationship. How else are the two couples similar? How are they different? Think about a relationship in your life–maybe with a friend in class or with a family member at home. How does that relationship affect the others around you?

2. Helena and Hermia both struggle at one point to have their affections for another reciprocated to themselves. This leaves them feeling ostracized and lonely. What did both of them try to do to try and win Demetrius' and Lysander's affection? What would you have done if you were in their position?

3. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, The group of tradesmen who are putting on a play called the Rude Mechanicals. Because of their experience as tradesmen, they don't have all of the knowledge they need to put on a perfect play. Have you ever put on a play–whether it's with friends, at church, or even at school? What problems did you encounter and how did you solve them?

WHO SAID IT?

1. Jack shall have Jill;
   Naught shall go ill;
   The man shall have his mare again, and all shall be well.

2. 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.

3. And though she be but little, she is fierce

4. How low am I, thou painted maypole? Speak!
   How low am I? I am not yet so low
   But that my nails can reach unto thine eyes.

5. Indeed he hath played on this prologue like a child on a recorder—a sound, but not in government

6. "A tedious brief scene of young Pyramus
   And his love Thisbe, very magical mirth"
   "Merry" and "tragical"? "Tedious" and "brief"?
   That is hot ice and wondrous strange snow!

7. Ay me, for pity! What a dream was here!
   Lysander, look how I do quake with fear.
   Methought a serpent ate my heart away,
   And you sat smiling at his cruel prey.

8. I pray thee, gentle mortal, sing again.
   Mine ear is much enamored of thy note,
   So is mine eye enthrallèd of thy shape,
   And thy fair virtue's force perforce doth move me
   On the first view to say, to swear, I love thee.

9. Love looks not with the eyes but with the mind
   And therefore is winged Cupid painted blind.

RECESONEMDED READING

RECOMMENDED READING

GARY BLACKWOOD
The Shakespeare Stealer
He was sent to steal a play from Shakespeare himself!

TUI T. SUTHERLAND
THIS MUST BE ❤ love

JACKIE FRENCH
My Name is NOT Peaseblossom
(I'd rather be known as Pete)

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S
A Midsummer Night's Dream
Retold by Bruce Coville
Pictures by Dennis Nolan

Jane Sutcliffe ✿ Illustrated by John Shelley
Will's Words
How William Shakespeare Changed the Way You Talk

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT #nofilter
Do I look like a 🐴?
No, you're perfect. 😍
by william shakespeare + brett wright