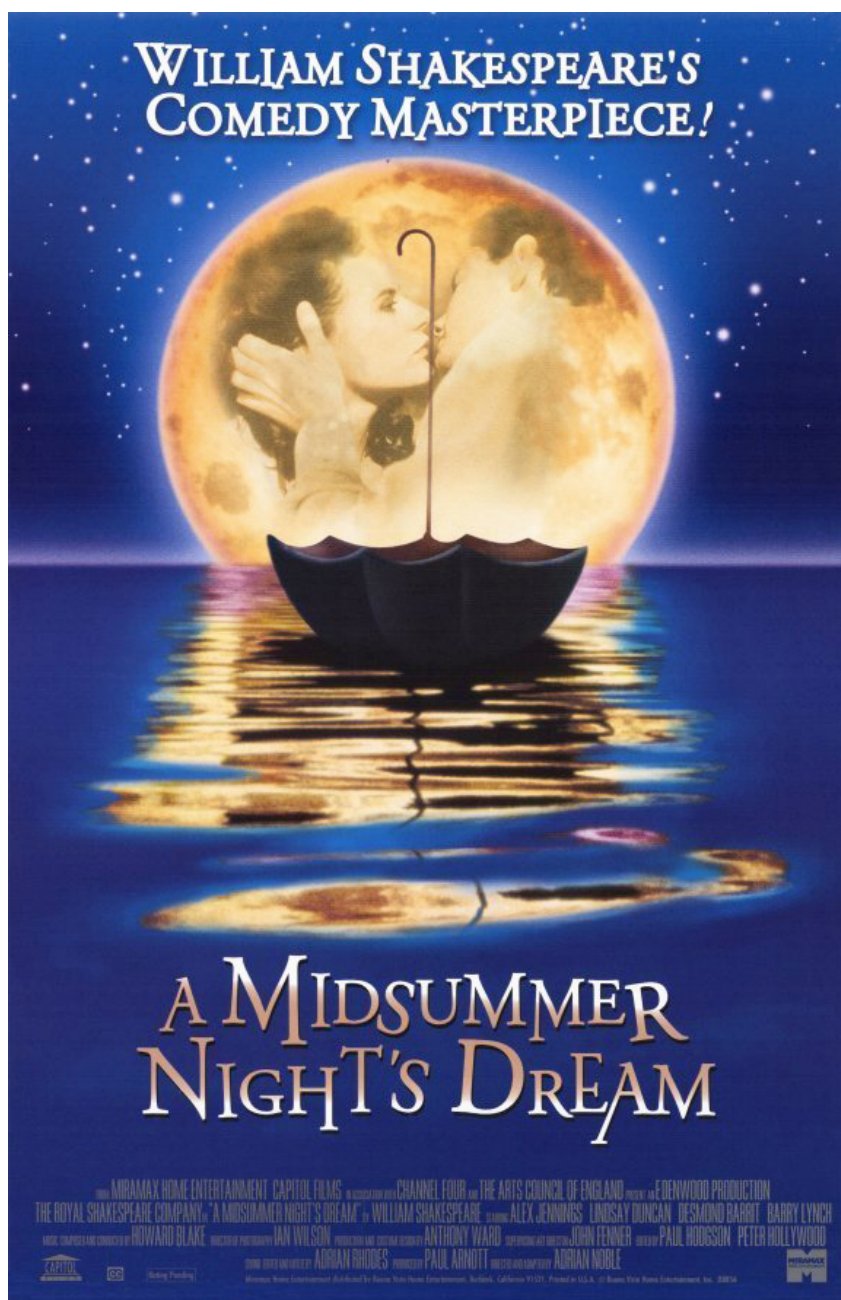


# A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

## Teachers' Notes

The study guide for 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' is one of a series of study guides which is from Film Education's 'Screening Shakespeares' project. It is aimed at students of GCSE Media Studies and English and A' level English, Media, and Film. This series aims to provide teachers with a valuable resource materials for the teaching of Shakespeare throughout the National Curriculum.

Areas covered in this study guide include: comparing Adrian Noble's role as theatre and film director; a cinema audience's expectations; narrative threads and ways of telling a story; the supernatural and the fairy world; an actor's view of playing a role on stage and in film; special effects and the ending of the story.



# A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

## Synopsis

'A Midsummer Night's Dream' was written between 1589-95. In this film adaptation of the stage play Adrian Noble has introduced the character of The Boy whose dream world we enter. In his sleep he spies on and enters into a strange and magical world. At the court of King Theseus and Queen Hippolyta he witnesses four unhappy young lovers and follows them into the forest as they run away to escape their predicament.

The Boy encounters a group of amateur actors, one of whom is Bottom, rehearsing a play and enters the fairy wood peopled by Puck and the other fairies. In this fairyland lives Oberon, King of the Fairies who, in a jealous rage, puts a spell on his Queen Titania, to make her fall in love with Bottom with the first being she sees when she awakes. That being is Bottom, who has also had a spell put on him giving him an ass's head. Puck and Oberon also interfere with the fate of the young lovers by casting spells on them. Chaos ensues before they are finally paired off. The lovers return home and are greeted with a party to celebrate their forthcoming marriages. They are entertained at the feast by Bottom and his group of actors. In fairyland Titania and Oberon are reunited in their love for one another. The Boy, who has followed all the action, runs after the other fairies and Puck into the giant toy theatre.

A Midsummer Night's Dream Dir. Adrian Noble. Release date 29 November 1996. Running time 105 mins.

## Shakespeare and Film

The texts of Shakespeare's works come to us as part of English literature but Shakespeare made his living by working and acting with a group of players who had to be successful in their craft or art in order to survive financially. To be successful they had to bring in large audiences. Elizabethan spectators did not go to see Shakespeare's plays because they were a part of the National Curriculum. They paid their money in order to be entertained.

Elizabethan theatregoers were made up of the whole spectrum of society; nobility who loved pageant and were excited by classical studies, the new ideas and expanding world of the Renaissance and who were steeped in political intrigue; merchants whose craftsmanship, trade and guild membership, gave them effective control of all the business of the city of London; and commoners - the workers, apprentices and masterless men and women who were barely literate.

## TASK

List five priorities you think The Lord Chamberlain's Men (Shakespeare's company) might have had in mind when considering whether to buy a new play script. Compare the two lists of priorities from this task and the previous one. How similar, or different, are they?

# A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

## Theatre Director to Film Director

Adrian Noble, the director of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream', has been the Artistic Director of the Royal Shakespeare Theatre for over five years. This is his debut as a film director. He says of Shakespeare's works: "His texts are not written in stone. To me, they are blue-prints for different stage productions and this one became a blue-print for a film. So I added characters, took lines and changed the ending."

One of the characters Adrian Noble has added to the film is the part of a young boy who is the dreamer of The Dream. Try to remember the toys and possessions in The Boy's bedroom in the opening sequence.

## TASKS

Think about how he has connected the objects in this opening scene with the ending of the film? Can you think of any other moments when The Boy appears in the film? Why is he there at all? He does not appear in the play. What is his function in the story? Does his presence in the story remind you of any other films?

When Paul Arnott, the producer of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream', saw the stage production he decided that it would make a good film for the nineties. Much of the production remains as it was on stage. Why do you think he felt it could be relevant to today's audience?

Make a list of the priorities you think the director Adrian Noble and producer Paul Arnott had in mind in making a commercial film of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' for today's audience. What type of audience do you think the film is aimed at?



# A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

## Shakespeare's Audience

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# A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

## Storytelling

At the heart of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' is the ancient story of 'Pyramus and Thisbe'. This is a story that Shakespeare probably encountered when he was studying Ovid's work 'Metamorphosis' at school.

'Pyramus and Thisbe' were two young people who were very much in love in spite of the fact that their families were feuding. They used to talk with each other through a hole in the wall between their gardens. Their love was so great that they decided to meet each other by an old tomb in the hillside and elope. Thisbe arrived at the tomb but while she was waiting for Pyramus she heard a lion close by and fled, dropping her shawl. The lion, which was gorged with blood from having eaten a deer, tossed the shawl around and wandered off.

When Pyramus arrived at the tomb he found the shawl but no Thisbe. Thinking she had been killed by the lion he despaired of living without his lover. He took out his sword and stabbed himself. Thisbe returned to the tomb and finding Pyramus dead on the ground took his sword and killed herself.

This is the tragic tale which the mechanicals, Bottom the weaver, Peter Quince the carpenter, Tom Snout the tinker, Starveling the tailor, Francis Flute the bellows-mender and Snug the joiner, decide to perform for the wedding celebrations of Theseus the Duke of Athens and his bride Hippolyta. Does it remind you of any other Shakespeare play?

Look at Act I Scene I of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' and list any similarities and differences between Hermia's plight and that of Thisbe. Shakespeare interweaves different social and supernatural contents in this play. Bearing in mind his contemporary audience you might note how he calls his nobility Theseus and Hippolyta and includes their background stories.

Both stage and film versions are telling a long story but it is the characters who tell smaller stories of different events. Both in the sixteenth century theatre and in Adrian Noble's stage production the actors had only their bodies and voices to communicate their meaning to the audience to involve them in an imaginary world. They had to rely on their storytelling skills.

Look at Titania's speech in Act II Scene I 1.81 (Appendix I) She shares a view of a supernatural creature looking down at the havoc wreaked on the earth by her quarrel with Oberon. As a film director Adrian Noble has used close-up shots so she has to convey her feeling through her voice and facial expressions. An image of the sea is overlaid so that we have to imagine the potential disasters and feel her pain at the dangers of the element.

## TASK

What other images might you have introduced during this speech if you had wanted to create a more detailed understanding of her vision?

# A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

## TASKS

Make a list of moments in the film version of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' which would not have been possible to produce on stage.

Think about aspects of filmmaking which emphasise or enhance the emotion and atmosphere of the film. Consider lighting, music, the use of colour, location and camera work.

What images in the film remind you of images or scenes in other films that you have seen?

e.g. Story

E.T.

Image

The moon

## The Supernatural and the Fairy World

Shakespeare probably wrote the tragedy of 'Romeo and Juliet' just before he wrote 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'. One way in which he resolves the potentially tragic situation is to include the worlds of nature and the supernatural. Because Elizabethan society was rural it meant that people were dependant on the natural world and the elements for survival. People used plant and herbal remedies as cures for sickness of mind and body. For their survival through winter they depended upon a bountiful harvest. Kind weather at sea was vital for the merchant traders. If things went wrong people sought hope in not only the Christian god but in many old supernatural faiths and superstitions. Even at the highest levels of society people were steeped in Greek and Roman mythology, with supernatural beings as part of their beliefs.



# A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

Elizabethan vocabulary for creatures with supernatural powers included fairies, witches and hobgoblins among others but the words martian, alien and space creatures are modern terms. Think of Starveling the tailor, representing 'The Man in the Moon' in the mechanical's play and then think of The Boy climbing around the moon in the film. As a group discuss your different perceptions.

## TASK

Look at the two speeches from Act II Scene I (Appendix II) which introduce us to the supernatural world of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'. What do they tell us about Shakespeare's idea of that world and about the roles of the aides of Titania and Oberon?

We can, of course, only imagine a supernatural world and the form which any beings inhabiting it might take.

Until the 1960's/70's, stage productions of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' tended to hang on to a rather Victorian view of the fairy world. Adrian Noble's stage production which inspired the film shows us a very different idea of the supernatural.

## TASK

Make a list of today's cult creatures with supernatural powers. Where do you see stories of these creatures? Name some. How would you describe and define them? Would you put the fairy world of the film into any of these categories?

## Tradition

By the sixteenth century in England the tradition of plays and acting was well established and evolved from different roots. One strand came out of the pagan folk festivals and celebrations tied up with the farming year cycle. England was a rural society and even the overpopulated and sophisticated city of London was just about a mile square with countryside surrounding it. Folk customs and celebrations were therefore always present and although disapproved of by the puritanical City Fathers, days such as May Day, Twelfth Night and Midsummer Night were occasions when people could let their hair down and be their 'natural selves', taking a holiday from work and responsibility.

# A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

Another strand came from the troupes of travelling, professional players who were protected by the patronage of nobility and who earned a living by playing at both their patron's great houses and at fairs.

A third strand came from the mediaeval tradition of the crafts guilds performing cycles of the bible stories around the feast of Corpus Christi every year. This last tradition of ordinary workmen performing serious plays for an important occasion was banned just before Shakespeare's career flourished.

- Can you think of ways in which Shakespeare makes reference to these traditions but also uses them to create humour?



## Working on a Scene

Before a stage production begins the director and designer have certain considerations to bear in mind as they work together on their concept. They have to devise a way in which the action can move smoothly from court to woodland to craftsmen's meeting place so that the audience does not become impatient whilst the scenes are being changed. They also have to work within a budget.

## TASK

Take a scene from the play and design a set and costumes for a school or college production of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'. You can either prepare the scene for the stage or for it to be filmed.

# A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

## TASK

Design a poster which will appeal to your contemporaries for your stage production or filmed sequence. What do you think is important to communicate on a poster, e.g. genre, stars, director?

We have compared Elizabethan terms for the supernatural and current language. There is also quite a different language for stage production and filmmaking. Think of settings, camera work, lighting, editing, flashbacks. What other terms can you think of? What terms can you think of that are associated with stage production?

These terms are used to describe the two very different experiences of staging productions and filming. Some of the differences are fairly obvious e.g. on stage things can go wrong, on film mistakes can be edited out. A stage play happens over and over again in a fixed period of time and the performance is immediate. Film is a finished product and once finished can not be changed. Events which happen off-stage in the theatre are often reported by characters in the play. Events which happen outside the main action in film can actually be shown.

## TASK

Try to add as much to this list as you can. Ask yourself the following questions:

Do you think the two audiences have the same experience? If not, describe the differences.

How does a play and a film direct the attention of the audience?

On stage, how much space do actors have to move compared with on film?

What other comments might you make about space?

Are words and visuals equally important on stage and on film? Is there a different balance of importance?

What are the possibilities for special effects in the two media?

Does one media allow for a more realistic performance than another?

What do you think might be different about the actors' experiences on stage and on film?

# A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

## An Actor's View

Desmond Barrit is an actor and has played the part of Bottom in the stage production and in the new film. Here he discusses and compares his experiences of working on stage and in film and the different techniques used by directors, cast and film crew to tell the story of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream':

### Performance and Audience

'When you are performing Shakespeare on film you are playing to audiences that wouldn't necessarily go to see his plays in the theatre and so you have to make it more accessible to them. You have to take out the more obscure lines and make the plot, or plots, as clear as you can.'

- Do you think all the different plots or narrative threads are clear in 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'? Make a note of at least three of the different stories that are intertwined.

"When I am acting on stage I find a good method is to act almost over the top and then cut it back. Filming is much more problematic for actors. To begin with you don't have to talk so loudly. You also have to use your face more on film. You can't just look into a camera for ten seconds. You must show something in your eye movement or facial expression. You rely much more on your facial expressions than on large physical movements."

- Can you think of any particular moments in the film where a facial expression conveyed a great deal of meaning?

"When you are performing on film you are doing it in a complete vacuum without an audience. This is particularly difficult for a comic actor who needs feedback.

A film directs the attention of the audience whereas in the theatre the spectator can select where they want their attention to go. In the film if the director wants to focus on me talking then he will cut out everyone else in that shot and the audience will just see my head in close-up. The audience is almost taken by the hand and led through the story.

The colours of the sets in the film were very strong and our performances had to be quite strong too otherwise the sets would have dominated. On a bright red set your performance has to be bright red, too, or you disappear. The mechanicals have special costumes in the film which are bright, loud and almost larger than life."

- What do you particularly remember about the mechanicals' costumes and those of the other characters?

# A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

## Camera

“When you are talking to a camera instead of someone’s face it affects your performance because you are playing very intimately but the closeness of the camera makes that intimacy very large.

Your performance is also affected by the position of the camera. There is a shot in the film of all the mechanicals on the motor bike and side car trying to find their way to rehearsal. When we were doing that the action was almost like a pantomime because we had wind machines blowing in our faces and smoke whizzing past us. Our acting almost had to combat that. We also had rain in that scene with huge rain machines, whereas on stage we had to act as if it was raining.

On stage you know where your audience is but when you are filming you have to keep asking questions such as which parts of me are going to be in shot? The camera might be eight feet away but the lens being used may be filming a close-up. In a way, it’s very much out of the actor’s hands because the camera can completely alter the perception of a performance.”

- Can you think of any scenes or action shots in the film which could be dramatically changed by changing camera shots from long shot to close-up or by the camera focussing on one character instead of another?

“On film it is harder for an actor to believe in the character because the story isn’t filmed in sequence. You don’t always know how one scene fits in with another so it’s much harder to be consistent. That is why, of course, the continuity people are so important. You need them to tell you whether you left the last shot with your scarf over your left shoulder rather than your right.”

- Can you think of any other aspects of filming that the continuity department is involved with?



# A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

## Special Effects

“There are things you can do on film to magical effect which you can’t do on the stage, although the effects don’t feel magical when you are actually making the film. On a film you can come in at six o’clock in the morning, not having been there for four or five days, and find yourself sitting around in an enormous studio while people are worrying about sound and creating light and wind. You know that lighting, sound, the camera angle and the shots are what really makes your performance. So although the magic comes across to the audience in the film, in the studio the fairies are not flying through the air and the actor may also be standing on a box wobbling backwards and forwards.”

## The Dream

“If the film is seen through the child’s eyes then we are watching the child’s dream. This is outside Shakespeare’s text but it makes it more accessible to the cinema audience and they can follow the story through the little boy. When you first see the little boy in his pyjamas in his bedroom you see the Lamb’s Tales from Shakespeare and the Pollock Toy Theatre.”

- What do you think is the significance of these items? What are they and why are they there?

“Another way of making the film accessible is to use modern techniques and allusions to other films.”

- What modern techniques and allusions to other films did you find in ‘A Midsummer Night’s Dream’?



# A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

## Special Effects

Adrian Noble, together with designer Anthony Ward, created a surreal landscape in which doors and box-like walls created the entrances and exits to the different contexts. Hundreds of light bulbs signified the forest through which the fairies appear on upturned umbrellas. They also created a world where everything was more colourful than in real life. We might say that their concept was true to the dream of the title where illusion and reality become confused. In the transition from stage to screen the director/designer team together with Paul Arnott the producer were aided by a team of special effects specialists from Cinesite led by Martin Hobbs, digital effects coordinator. This team created both a completely computer generated lake across which the fairies float and the flight through the night sky which takes us into The Boy's bedroom. The Cinesite team also used computer technology to generate the bubbles in which the fairies float through the air.

Obviously, the use of special effects allowed the production team greater scope to realise imaginative ideas. How do you think it affects a film's budget to use computer technology in comparison with filming on location work?



## TASK

Write down images in the film which were created by special effects then list the scenes you would consider realistic. Where does the fantasy or dream begin?

# A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

## TASK

Discuss what effect you think these changes had on the original concepts of the stage play. For example, how many moments do you recall when water played a part and why? Why has the director decided to retain the light bulbs rather than using a computer generated device?

## The Ending

The final words of Shakespeare's play are spoken by Puck:

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.  
And, as I am an honest Puck,  
If we have unearned luck  
Now to 'scape the serpent's tongue  
We will make amends ere long,  
Else the Puck a liar call.  
So, good night unto you all.  
Give me your hands, if we be friends,  
And Robin shall restore amends.

## TASK

Discuss this passage and try to decide what Shakespeare was saying to his audience of nobles, merchants and workmen. Shakespeare used the 'Pyramus and Thisbe' story and introduced a fairy world in his play 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'. As we have already discussed, Adrian Noble has used *The Boy* in his film. Is his ending appropriate for a film audience? How has he kept Shakespeare's theatre players in our minds? Make a list of the moments when he jogs our memory.

# A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

## TITANIA

These are the forgeries of jealousy:  
And never since the middle summer's spring  
Met we on hill, in dale, forest, or mead,  
By paved fountain or by rushy brook,  
Or in the beached margent of the sea  
To dance our ringlets to the whistling wind,  
But with they brawls thou hast disturbed our sport.  
Therefore the winds, piping to us in vain.  
As in revenge have sucked up from the sea  
Contagious fogs; which, falling in the land,  
Hath every pelting river made so proud  
That they have overborne their continents.  
The ox hath therefore stretched his yoke in vain,  
The ploughman lost his sweat, and the green corn  
Hath rotted ere his youth attained a beard.  
The fold stands empty in the drowned field,  
And crows are fatted with the murrion flock;  
The nine-men's-morris is filled up with mud,  
And the quaint mazes in the wanton green  
For lack of tread are undistinguishable.  
The human mortals want their winter cheer;  
No night is now with hymn or carol blessed.  
Therefore the moon, the governess of floods,  
Pale in her anger, washes all the air,  
That rheumatic diseases do abound;  
And thorough this distemperature we see  
The seasons alter; hoary-headed frosts  
Fall in the fresh lap of the crimson rose,  
And on old Heims' thin and icy crown  
An odorous chaplet of sweet summer buds  
Is, as in mockery, set. The spring, the summer,  
The chiding autumn, angry winter change  
Their wonted liveries, and the mazed world  
By their increase now knows not which is which.  
And this same progeny of evils comes  
From our debate, from our dissension.  
We are their parents and original.

Act II Scene I 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'  
The Arden edition of the works of William Shakespeare  
(edited by Harold F. Brooks) published by Routledge (1996)

# A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

Enter a Fairie at one doore, and Robin Good-fellow at another.

Rob. How now spirit, whether wander you?

Fai. Over hil, over dale, through bush, through briar,  
Over parke, over pale, through flood, through fire,  
I do wander everie where, swifter then the Moons speare;  
And I serve the Fairy Queene, to dew her orbs upon the green.  
The Cowslips tall, her pensioners bee,  
In their gold coats, spots you see,  
Those be Rubies, Fairie favors,  
In those freckles, live their savors,  
I must go seeke some dew drops heere,  
And hang a pearle in every cowslips eare.  
Fairewell thou Lob of spirits, Ile be gon,  
Our Queene and all her Elves come heere anon.

Fai. Either I mistake your shape and making quite,  
Or else you are that shrew'd and knavish sprite  
Cal'd Robin Good-fellow. Are you not hee,  
That frights the maidens of the Villagree,  
Skim milke, and sometimes labour in the querne,  
And bootlesse make the breathlesse huswife cherne,  
And sometime make the drinke to beare no barme,  
Misleade night-wanderers, laughing at their harme,  
Those that Hobgoblin call you, and sweet Pucke,  
You do their worke, and they shall have good lucke.  
Are not you he?

Rob. Thou speak'st aright;  
I am that merrie wanderer of the night:  
I jest to *Oberon*, and make him smile,  
When I a fat and beane-fed horse beguile,  
Neighing in likeness of a silly foale,  
And sometime lurke I in a Gossips bole,  
In very likeness of a roasted crab:  
And when she drinkes, against her lips I bob,  
And on her withered dewlop poure the Ale.  
The wisest Aunt telling the saddest tale,  
Sometime for three-foot stoole, mistaketh me,  
Then slip I from her bum, downe topples she,  
And tailour cries, and fals into a coffe.  
And then the whole quire hold their hips, and loffe,  
And waxen in their mirth, and neeze, and sweare,  
A merrier houre was never wasted there.  
But roome Fairy, heere comes *Oberon*.