

Title of Unit: A study of “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” by Shakespeare

Grade Level: Grade 9 English

Length of Unit: 4-6 weeks.

Objectives of the Unit:

- 1) To achieve an understanding and appreciation for Shakespeare and the times in which he lived, including the a study of the building of the Globe Theatre.
- 2) To make the study of Shakespeare exciting for the students.
- 3) To help foster an interest in the art of theatre and acting
- 4) To help the students see the importance and the value of studying literature, namely Shakespeare’s play, “A Midsummer Night’s Dream”
- 5) To learn to draw parallels between Shakespeare’s characters and ourselves.
- 6) To see the relevance in a study of Shakespeare and understand why his works are classics.

Prescribed Learning Outcomes according to the IRP’s presented by the Ministry of Education. These will henceforth be referred to as SWBAT –Students will be able to:

- 1) Understand the time in history that Shakespeare lived and why it was so difficult for playwrights and actors to develop their craft.
- 2) Come to appreciate Shakespeare and his language
- 3) Begin to understand the language of Shakespeare.
- 4) Enjoy Shakespeare by participating in his plays and “bringing the play to life”.
- 5) Realize the great understanding that Shakespeare had for the human condition.

Key Assessment Strategies:

- 1) **GROUP ORAL AND WRITTEN PRESENTATIONS:** Suggested Topics:  
One topic is to be chosen per group.
  - a) The history of Elizabethan Drama, with an emphasis on Shakespeare and the building of the Globe Theatre. Suggested titles: “An actor in Shakespeare’s time”, “The building of the Globe Theatre” Presentation:/25, Written:/25, with a rubric used for assessment;
  - b) Build a miniature replica of the Globe theatre; Model:/25; Written:/25; Describe the structure in detail and write about what it would have been like to have been part of the audience; eg. One of the groundlings.

**INDIVIDUAL ASSIGNMENT FOR EVERYONE:** An in-depth analysis of one of the main characters in the play. Also include the contribution that they made to the play. Plus a presentation of one of their monologues, memorized and performed “in character” Presentation:/25; Analysis: /25: There will be a list circulated, so there are

- d) A presentation of one of the important scenes in the play, include a translation of the lines and a discussion of the scene’s dramatic importance in the play. Presentation:/25; Written Assignment: /25 .

e) A discussion of the importance of mood and atmosphere in the play. Cite 2-3 examples of key scenes in the play that are dependent on mood to help achieve the desired effect. Hint: Think about the dream scenes and why they are important. Include a discussion of the role of music, especially the way in which it serves as a type of “leitmotif”, as certain types of music represent different characters. Refer to the video that we saw in class. Also include the reasons why music is so important in helping to create the appropriate mood in general. Include examples to support your ideas.

f) A study of the importance that superstition played in Shakespeare’s time and the relationship between it and nature. Cite 5-6 examples from the play to support this. Presentation and written assignment are both out of 25.

g) A pictorial representation of the 3 groups of people in the play. Include the court, the fairy world of the magic forest, and the townsmen who put on the play. Include a brief description of each character.

To test comprehension: A series of short quizzes will be given at the beginning of the period. (4-5 quizzes for a total mark of 40-50)

2) Journal Writing: to include personal responses on a study of Shakespeare. /20

3) Participation in class, including scene readings and group discussion./20

Materials needed: 1) a tape recorder, music tapes, books about the Elizabethan Age, complete with pictures of the types of costumes worn, a picture and (if possible) a model of the Globe Theatre.

Background and Preparation Required: The class has been studying a novel about Elizabethan England, so they are familiar with the period. There should be several picture-type books made available to the class. Perhaps they could be placed around the room at different stations.

Week 1 – Overview; the classes are 80 minutes long and they meet 3 times per week. Main Focus: an introduction to the study of Shakespeare that will include a look at the Elizabethan theatre, the building of the Globe and some background on the playwright. The 1<sup>st</sup> 2 or 3 lessons will take the following format:

### Lesson 1 Introduction

Hook: To capture the interest of the class and get them involved. Ask the class to imagine that they are attending an outdoor rock concert that is very crowded and there is standing room only. They are standing directly in front of the stage. They are getting very impatient waiting for the band and some people are getting restless. They start pushing and shoving. An announcer comes onto the stage and says that there has been a delay. Suddenly, someone starts throwing rotten tomatoes, and other types of vegetables and fruit. There is a “rumble”, a preamble to a riot.

ASSIGNMENT: Imagine that you are a newspaper reporter and that you have been sent back in time to the 1500's , to cover this event. In groups of 3-4 describe the scene before you. Present it in the form of a tableau, a still picture. Also describe what you see in a short paragraph to be read to the class.

To create atmosphere, play some Elizabethan style music in the background.

Length of Activity: Preparation time: 10-15 minutes; Presentation time 10-15 minutes

Teacher: What you have just described or experienced is similar to what happened in Shakespeare's day when people attended a play.

Introduction: It is not wise to begin a study of Shakespeare without understanding the times in which he lived. Many of the facts about Shakespeare are not known or proven, but can only be surmised. Present to class on the overhead projector.

- 1) He was born of wealthy parents on April 23rd, 1564.
- 2) He married Anne Hathaway and they had several children.
- 3) In fact, if you go to Stratford on Avon, where he was born and lived, you can visit Anne Hathaway's cottage. ( Show the class a picture). There is also a house on West 9<sup>th</sup> in Point Grey, Vancouver, that has a thatched roof, like the cottage.
- 4) Unfortunately, there is little information about his early days as a playwright.
- 5) In fact, the life of the theatre was "frowned upon" in those days. However, there is reference made to Shakespeare as being an aspiring actor and playwright and referred to as an "upstart crow"(Prefatory Remarks, Signet Classic Edition, p.ix) who struts in borrowed plumage. The latter comment is a reference to the crow in Aesop's Fable. An actor is described as strutting around the stage in "plumage" , or in costume, uttering lines, not his own. The whole idea is that acting is pretentious and phony.
- 6) He wrote 37 plays and 4 poems, including the sonnets between 1588 and 1601
- 7) By 1592, there is evidence that he had acted in and written several plays.
- 8) The life of an actor was not considered a "gentlemanly" profession, unless the actor was prosperous, like Shakespeare.
- 9) The theatrical company in which Shakespeare was a charter member was called "The King's Men" who acted mainly at the Globe Theatre. Show a picture and model. (Suggested assignment: create a miniature replica of the Globe theatre)
- 10) A brief history of Shakespeare's theatre. When Shakespeare was young, the actors performed in great halls, at court (for royalty), and the courtyards of inns.
- 11) There were no formal theatres. In fact, the council of London at the time did not approve of theatres and so they licensed the inns to discourage the innkeepers.
- 12) This caused James Burbage, a carpenter turned actor, to rent a plot of land outside the jurisdiction of the council and build England's first permanent construction designed for plays called "The Theatre", the Globe's predecessor.

Show an enlarged diagram of the Globe theatre on the overhead projector. Explain the use of the entrances, exits, the type of projecting stage etc., by pointing out each part. Explain the use of stage directions. Mention that only young men played all the women's parts, because there were no women actresses. Refer to the movie, "Shakespeare in Love" with Genevieve Paltrow and Fiennes, where Paltrow, a young woman, played a young man's part because she wanted to be in the theatre.

**CREATIVE WRITING ASSIGNMENT-** To be started in class and handed in for the next class. Pretend that you are a groundling, one of the common people, who paid a penny to stand in front of the stage, exposed to the sky. **SITUATION:** You have come to the Globe theatre for the first time and you are watching one of Shakespeare's comedies. Describe the scene before you. You may refer to any of the pictures or notes to help you. Ask for a group of volunteers to read certain parts for Act 1 Scene 2, to present next day.

## Lesson 2 Begin reading the play

**Hook and Introduction:** To set the mood for a study of Shakespeare, borrow or rent an Elizabethan style costume for myself, greet the students at the door, have music playing from The Royal Shakespeare Theatre Company's production of the play, "A Midsummer Night's Dream"(Thereafter referred to as MND)

Have the choral piece, "Benedictus" by Festival Music playing in the background. In the video production, the music added greatly to the mood and atmosphere. **NOTE:** for those interested in music and singing there is an opera version of the play by Benjamin Britten.

Act 1, Scene 1: Read to the class.

Draw a diagram on the board explaining the list of characters, and show their relationships to each other. Also refer to the following hand out.

Hand out to class: "A Midsummer night's Dream: Making sense of the play".

Ask the class to make note of the references to spirits, fairies And nature as they study and watch the play.

Show the video produced in 1968, scene 1. **GROUP DISCUSSION**

**QUESTIONS;** To test comprehension.

- a) What important event is about to take place?
- b) How is the moon perceived?
- c) Explain the couple relationships. Who is with who?
- d) How do Hermia and Helena view love?
- e) What is the purpose of this scene?

Scene 2: Show the video to the class.

Questions: 1) What is your impression of Bottom?

2) What is this group doing?

- 4) Why is the music so comical? Describe its effect.
- 5) This scene is "a play within a play". Discuss.

Ask the group who volunteered from last class to present the scene. Discuss.

Ask the class to think about why it is so important to act out Shakespeare and watch a performance, rather than just to read it silently.

Act 2 Scene 1 Show the video, but beforehand explain that this production of MND by the Royal Shakespeare Company is a bit strange in the way that fairies are represented. Ask them to be open-minded, and to “suspend their disbelief” which is the essence of theatre. However, certain parts have to be cut (43:27-44:07) This is a very good reason why the teacher should preview the video ahead of time.

### Lesson 3 Continue reading the play

Act 2 Scene 1. page 60 line 146: Read to the end of the scene. Ask for some volunteers to read the parts.; page 62, scene between Demetrius and Helena; act out in the class. Scene 2, show the video; Class discussion on the impression. Volunteers to read scene 2. Teacher to work with the students and teach them some blocking techniques.

Weeks 2-4 A continuation of the play study of Acts 3-5.

Act 3 Scene 1 – Show the video. However, omit 44:21-46:46 because of the content. Discuss the characters and the humour of the scene. Shakespeare’s plays did not have intermissions, so it was very important to keep the audience occupied with what was happening on the stage. This applies in particular to the lower class, or groundlings, who enjoyed seeing the more basic side of mankind. Also, this change in scene helps with the variety needed in the theatre, to keep the patrons happy.

Act 3 Scene 2- Show the video but omit 54:24-56:33, the scene with Oberon and Puck, because of the sexual content. However, the class can read this scene.

Act 3 Scenes 2 line 41: Have the class act out this scene. The “cat fight” should be fun for the girls to do. Watch the video. Discuss the use of fantasy.

Act 4 Follow a similar format of study used for Act 3.

Act 5: Read with the class and spend time blocking out this act.

Weeks 5 and 6: Present class work.

**ONGOING HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT:** On the internet go to [www.amidsummernight'sdream.com](http://www.amidsummernight'sdream.com). Look for the heading “Surfing with the Bard”, for an example of a summary of the play, scene by scene. Also scroll down to “A Midsummer Night’s Dream Guide”. For further information. An excellent source.

**ASSIGNMENT:** Scroll down to any information about productions. Eg. Go to “Bard on the Beach” for a discussion of last summer’s production in Kelowna. View any photos available, especially ones of the fairies, to see the director’s interpretation. Compare these photos with the fairies in the video production. Choose 4-5 and write a paragraph on each, describing the characters and the costumes.

**FOR FURTHER STUDY:** Go to “The infinite Book” for information on the use of puns and Shakespeare’s language. Find 4-5 examples used in the play and explain them.

FOR COMPUTER PEOPLE: Go to “News of the Rialto” for the latest information on how technology is being used to study “The Bard”.

FOR PEOPLE INTERESTED IN DOING SCENE WORK AND MONOLOGUES: Go to The InfiniteBook and look for the Actor’s Guide

FOR INTEREST; Go to “The Infinite Book” for more on video productions etc.

For the rest of the play study, it is best to show the video, except for those parts which should be omitted, because of the controversial content. This should be followed by an oral reading of the scene. Where applicable, some discussion may take place, but not for every scene. Depending on the class’ interest and the amount of time available, some of the less important scenes may be eliminated.

However, the scene with Bottom and the ‘PLAYERS’ should definitely be shown to the class. Also, a group of volunteers should practise the scene ahead of time and be given time in class to rehearse. This scene is very comical and worth presenting.

It is hoped that along with a study of the play in class, by reading and seeing the video, the students will also get a deeper understanding and appreciation of Shakespeare through exploring all of the information that is available on the web, as mentioned above.