

'A Midsummer Night's Dream'

By

William Shakespeare

OXFORD SCHOOL SHAKESPEARE

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM



WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

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Shakespeare's Early Life

Shakespeare is the most famous and popular writer in the English language. People have read, studied and enjoyed his plays for over 400 years. You might already know some of them: he wrote 'Romeo and Juliet', 'Hamlet', and 'Othello', as well as many others. His plays are funny, scary, sad and exciting, and many people praise Shakespeare for his original and imaginative stories and characters. But Shakespeare was actually a bit of a thief! He took many of his ideas from the stories he studied when he was at school. Clearly he was paying attention in lessons!

This term, you are going to study one of Shakespeare's funniest plays. It's called *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Before we start to read it and act it out, we are going to learn a bit about Shakespeare's life and education, so we can find out what gave him the idea to write this play.



A scene from 'Romeo and Juliet', one of Shakespeare's most famous plays.



Shakespeare's father made gloves which rich people would pay a lot of money for.

Shakespeare's birth and early childhood

No one knows the exact date Shakespeare was born as birth records weren't kept that long ago. However, we think he was born on 23 April 1564. That's over 450 years ago! It's also nearly 250 years before Charles Dickens was born. William Shakespeare's father was John Shakespeare, a glove maker, and his mother was Mary Arden, who was the daughter of an affluent landowning farmer.

He was born in Stratford-upon-Avon, a town in the middle of England about 22 miles away from Birmingham. When Shakespeare was born in 1564, the ruler in charge of England was Queen Elizabeth I. Because of this, we call this time in history the Elizabethan era.



Elizabeth I who ruled England during the Elizabethan era.

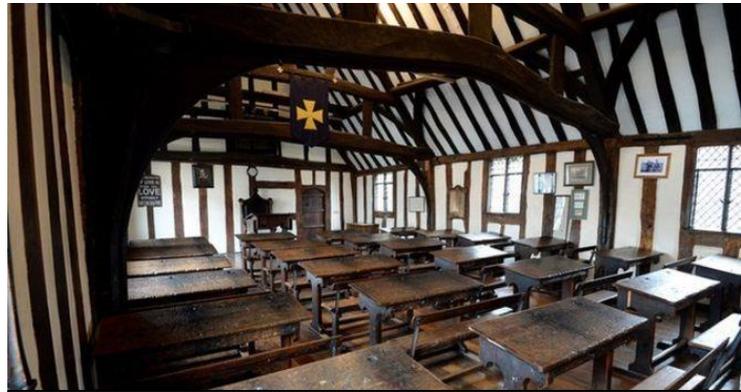
Shakespeare's education

Like his birth, there are no records of exactly where Shakespeare went to school. However, we think he probably went to a grammar school called the King's New School in Stratford-upon-Avon. The school is still open today and continues to call itself 'Shakespeare's School'.

In Elizabethan England, grammar schools were very strict, and students had to work hard. The school day would usually start at six in the morning and continue to five in the evening! During the winter, school days were shorter, but they still ran from seven to four. They had to go to school six days a week, so students spent around 2,000 hours a year at school. That's twice the amount of time students spend at school today! Next lesson we will find out what Shakespeare learnt at school.



Warwickshire, the county Shakespeare grew up in.

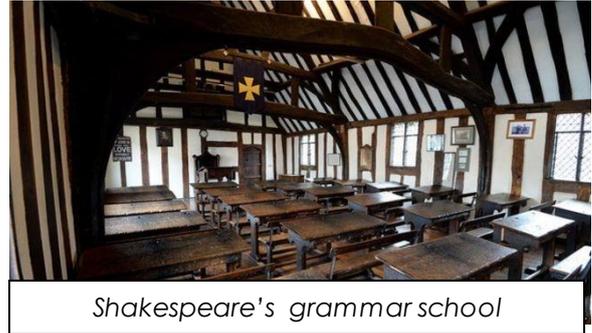


King's New School, the grammar school Shakespeare attended.

Life in Ancient Athens

What did Shakespeare learn at school?

We know that Shakespeare went to a grammar school where students studied for very long hours. They studied a lot of Maths, including arithmetic, algebra and geometry and they had an extensive religious education.



Shakespeare's grammar school

Shakespeare would also have learnt a lot about ancient Greece and Rome when he was at school. The ancient Greeks and Romans lived about two thousand years before Shakespeare was even born. The Elizabethans really admired the ancient Greeks and Romans, even though they lived such a long time ago. The Elizabethans made their children learn about the ancient Greeks and Romans in school.



Theseus battling the minotaur in a famous myth from Ancient Greece.

Who were the ancient Greeks?

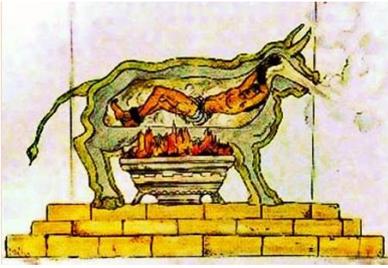
The ancient Greeks and Romans were famous for lots of things. They had lots of great writers who wrote wonderful stories. The stories that they wrote about are not always true. They are myths. Myths are ancient stories about magical and fantastical events. Greek and Roman myths are still popular today. Lots of them have been turned into films. For example, you might have seen the films 'Hercules', 'Troy', '300', 'Clash of the Titans', 'Immortals' or 'Percy Jackson and the Olympians'. All of these films are based on Greek and

Roman myths.

As well as important writers, they had clever mathematicians who made important discoveries. They had amazing artists who made striking pots. These pots often show everyday people creating things as a pastime. They thought that education was very important. In ancient Greece, men would regularly meet in grand buildings to discuss Philosophy.



A part of a painting which shows the famous mathematician, Pythagoras, writing down his theories.



The bronze bull used to burn people to death.

What was life like for people living in ancient Greece?

Women were generally not educated and were expected to obey men. Society was very ordered and there were very harsh punishments for people who broke the rules. They put some criminals in a bronze statue of a bull and lit a fire underneath the statue so that the person burned to death!

How did the ancient Greeks influence Shakespeare?

Shakespeare must have paid attention when he was at school, because he was influenced by the writers of ancient Greece and Rome. Some of Shakespeare's plays are about *real things* that happened in ancient Greece and Rome and some of his plays are about *myths* from Greece and Rome.

His play 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' is set in one of the most famous ancient Greek cities called Athens. It was known all around the world for its wealth and grand buildings. The people who lived in Athens were called 'Athenians'. When we read the play, you will be able to see how Shakespeare presents Athenians and their culture.



Ancient Athens

A Day in the Life of a Groundling: Transcript

I woke up at 6 from the noise of bells ringing outside – I was late for work! I work as a scullion on the other side of town, and I'd already been late twice that week. I didn't have time to have something to eat – normally some old bread and cheese – so I was starving by the time I got to work.

The cook was not pleased to see me. He knew I was late, and he gave me a real telling-off for being late again. He said that today was my final chance – if I was late once more he'd kick me out! That was the last thing I needed – I only earned a penny a day as it was, so losing this job would be a disaster. I got working immediately, cleaning all the pots and pans and plates from breakfast and washing the floor. The estate I work on is huge and there's a large family living here. They're known for miles around for being gluttons, so they get through a lot of food! They can afford it, so they can eat what they like. But it means more washing and cleaning for me!

By eleven o'clock I could barely stand – that's how hungry I was. I saw the page come down and start bringing all the delicious food for lunch up to the lords – stewed trout, boiled pigeons, calves tongues – it all looked so good! There was nothing for it. I waited until the cook has his back turned, then I tried to sneak some off the plate and into my empty stomach. But I wasn't careful enough. "Oi! What d'ya fink yer doin'?" cook yelled. Then, faster than you can peel a carrot, he picked up a pan and threw it straight at my face. It hit me right in the mouth and my two front teeth smashed immediately, and blood started gushing everywhere. "Get out of here! Don't you come back!" cook screamed. I ran out as fast as I could, looking for my teeth on the floor as I went.

It hadn't been a great morning, but I knew I had to get to the barber quickly to get my teeth looked at. I'd been to the barber before, but that was just for the occasional haircut, maybe around Christmas when I might have had a little more money. I'd seen the barber work on people's teeth before, and it looked terrible. He looked like he was just making it up as he went along, if I'm honest, but I didn't really have much else of a choice, did I?

An hour, a lot of screaming, a half gallon of ale, and three shillings (nearly all of my savings!) later, I left the barber. After the most miserable morning of my life, I decided what I really needed was some entertainment. I headed over the Thames to Southwark, which is where you have to go to have a good time in London. I decided to see a play first, and luckily it was a comedy rather than a tragedy. I don't think I could've stood seeing a miserable play, and the one I saw was pretty ridiculous, with a fairy king and queen, and a talking donkey. I might be ugly with my new horrible teeth, but at least I don't have donkey's head!

After some bear baiting and a cock fight, I decided to go home. It was getting dark, and I wasn't looking forward to having to find a new job in the morning. I

doubted anyone would employ me – I'm 33, and far, far too old to think about training in a new job. If I'm lucky, I might live to 50, but I'll have to avoid the plague, and dysentery, and goodness knows how many other unknown sicknesses. But just as I was having these terrible thoughts, I was overwhelmed by the most awful smell. It was truly unbelievable and indescribable. "Watch out!" a voice cried behind me. "Gong Farmer coming through!"

"Wait a second," I rasped. "Wait!" I took the man's shoulders in my hands. "Have you got any work? I've just lost my job and I'm looking for something to do. I hate early mornings, and I know you only work at night..."

"We've always got work going as a Gong Farmer. Not too many people want to wander the streets at night up to their necks in urine and excrement and cart it around the city! When can you start?"

I thought for a moment, and realised I had nothing better to do. "Pass me that bucket. I'll get started tonight!"

Life as a groundling

Jobs: What kinds of work would people do?

Food: What would people eat? Did all people eat the same food?

Health: How were people treated for illnesses? What kinds of illness were common?

Entertainment: What did people do to have fun?

How does Theseus think Hermia should treat her father?

Theseus

To you your father should be as a god,
One that compos'd your beauties; yea, and one
To whom you are but as a form in wax
By him imprinted, and within his power
To leave the figure, or disfigure it.

Act 2, Scene 1: Oberon and Titania meet in the magical forest

OBERON:	Ill met by moonlight, proud Titania!	Ill met – an unlucky meeting
TITANIA:	What, jealous Oberon? Fairies, skip hence. I have forsworn his bed and company.	jealous – envious forsworn – refused
OBERON:	Why should Titania cross her Oberon? I do but beg a little changeling boy to be my henchman.	cross – disobey; but – only; little changeling boy – a small child Titania has adopted henchman – helper
TITANIA:	Set your heart at rest. The fairy land buys not the child of me.	buys not – does not buy; of – from
OBERON:	Give me that boy.	
TITANIA:	Not for thy fairy kingdom. Fairies, away. <i>Exit Titania and her train.</i>	thy – your train – followers, entourage
OBERON:	Well, go thy way. Thou shalt not from this grove Till I torment thee for this injury.	Thou – you; shalt – will; grove – forest torment – torture, hurt

Helena and Demetrius: Act 2, Scene 1

The forest. Enter DEMETRIUS, HELENA following him.

DEMETRIUS

I love thee not, therefore pursue me not.
Where is Lysander and fair Hermia?
Thou told'st me they ran into this wood;
And here am I, and lost within this wood,
Because I cannot meet my Hermia. 5
Hence, get thee gone, and follow me no
more.

HELENA

You draw me, you hard-hearted adamant;
But my heart is true as steel – I won't give up.

DEMETRIUS

Do I entice you? do I speak you fair? 10
Or, rather, do I not in plainest truth
Tell you, I do not, nor I cannot love you?

HELENA

And even for that do I love you the more.
I am your spaniel; and, Demetrius,
The more you beat me, I will fawn on you: 15
Use me but as your spaniel, spurn me, strike me,
Neglect me, lose me; only give me leave,
Unworthy as I am, to follow you.
What worse a place can I beg in your love,
Than to be used as you use your dog? 20

DEMETRIUS

Tempt not too much the hatred of my spirit;
For I am sick when I do look on thee.

HELENA

And I am sick when I look not on you.

DEMETRIUS

You embarrass yourself;
You leave the city and commit yourself 25
Into the hands of one that loves you not,
Risking everything in this dark and lonely night.

HELENA

But you in my respect are all the world:
Then how can it be said I am alone,
When all the world is here to look on me? 30

DEMETRIUS

I'll run from thee and hide in the bushes,
And leave thee to the mercy of wild beasts.

HELENA

The wildest hath not such a heart as you.
Run where you will, the story shall be changed:

adamant – an Elizabethan word for a very hard metal with magnetic properties

entice – tempt or attract

fawn – worship someone
spurn – reject

The dove shall pursue the griffin; the gentle deer 35
Makes speed to catch the tiger!

DEMETRIUS

I will not stay thy questions; let me go:
Or, if thou follow me, do not believe
But I shall do thee mischief in the wood.

HELENA

Fie, Demetrius!

We cannot fight for love, as men may do; 40
We should be wooed and were not made to woo.

Exit DEMETRIUS

I'll follow thee and make a heaven of hell,
To die upon the hand I love so well.

Exit

griffin – a legendary beast

fie – an expression of anger

woo – to try to win the love of someone

Using quotations

When writing analytical paragraphs, you should choose quotations that:

- Show that the topic sentence is accurate.
- Avoid repeating the topic sentence.
- Last no more than two lines of your writing.

Have these students used quotations in a good way or a bad way?

1	Topic sentence	When Lysander falls in love with Helena, she assumes that he is making fun of her.	
	Quotation	This is evident when she says 'when at your hands did I deserve this scorn?'	
	Good quotation		Bad quotation

2	Topic sentence	Helena assumes Lysander is mocking her because his speech seems too intense.	
	Quotation	This is demonstrated when Lysander says, 'Not Hermia, but Helena I love.'	
	Good		Bad

3	Topic sentence	Helena does not trust Lysander because of his sudden change in attitude towards Hermia.	
	Quotation	This can be seen when he says, 'Content with Hermia? No. I do repent the tedious minutes I with her have spent. Not Hermia but Helena I love. Who will not change a raven for a dove?'	
	Good		Bad

Insult Bogey Tennis

Hermia insult 1:

You juggler! You canker blossom! You thief of love!

Hermia insult 2:

How low am I, thou painted maypole?

Hermia insult 3:

Not yet so low but that my nails can reach into thine eyes!

Helena insult 1:

You counterfeit, you puppet you!

Helena insult 2:

She is something lower than myself!

Helena insult 3:

When she is angry she is keen and shrewd;
She was a vixen when she went to school!

Quotation Hunter: A Midsummer Night's Dream

What's happening in the play at this point?	
Who is talking?	
Who are they talking to?	
Quotation (make sure you copy it exactly!)	
Notes on the quotation	

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