

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

A Midsummer Night's Dream

Scholars place Shakespeare's writing of this comedy—one of his most popular works—between 1595 and 1596. There is some debate as to whether or not Shakespeare wrote it to be performed at an aristocratic wedding, just as the tradesmen's play in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was written for the duke's wedding. Plays were often part of the entertainment at upper-class weddings during Elizabethan times.

Most of the play takes place in the fairy-infested dream world of the woods outside Athens. There is no single literary source for the dream world Shakespeare created in this play. But Elizabethans believed in fairies, so this world would have been very believable to them. Shakespeare explores a number of themes, including the capriciousness and changeability of love.



The title of the play refers to Midsummer Eve, celebrated on June 23, the day of the summer solstice. This evening was celebrated with festivities, temporary madness, and stories of fairy spells. Tradition also held that on Midsummer Eve you would dream of the person you were going to marry.

Activity: Have each student design a poster for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Compare and discuss how each student chose to represent the play. You might also include the illustration used on the cover of the mini-book in your discussion.

BARD CARD

A Midsummer Night's Dream

Plot Summary: This comedy, in which men and women—with the help of fairies—fall in and out of love, takes place in ancient Greece, in and around Athens.

Main Characters

- Theseus:** Duke of Athens
- Hippolyta:** Queen of the Amazons, Theseus's fiancée
- Egeus:** father of Hermia
- Hermia:** a maiden in love with Lysander
- Helena:** a maiden in love with Demetrius
- Lysander:** a young man in love with Hermia
- Demetrius:** a young man also in love with Hermia
- Oberon:** king of the fairies
- Titania:** queen of the fairies
- Robin Goodfellow:** fairy page to Oberon; also known as Puck
- Nick Bottom:** a carpenter, would-be actor, and temporary love object of the queen

Glossary

- amity:** friendship
- changeling:** a child secretly changed for another in infancy
- churl:** a rude, ill-bred person
- derision:** the use of scorn to show contempt
- disdainful:** full of scorn
- enamour'd:** charmed
- enthralled:** charmed
- eyne:** eyes
- henchman:** page; male attendant
- lamenting:** expressing sorrow
- mock:** to ridicule; to make fun of
- nymphs:** minor divinities of nature in classical mythology, represented by beautiful maidens
- page:** a boy attendant
- puck:** a mischievous sprite
- rebuke:** express strong disapproval
- render:** give up, yield
- revels:** celebrations
- woo'd:** courted