

A Midsummer Night's Dream in Pictures

Topic

Artwork inspired by Shakespeare's play 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'

Learning outcomes

- Ask and answer questions about key events in the plot of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'
- Find the important events in a short extract from the play (in original language)
- Describe paintings inspired by the play in both spoken and written forms

Age and level

13-17, Adults (B2+)

Time

70-80 minutes

Materials

- Presentation (PowerPoint or PDF)
- Student worksheet (optional)

Introduction

This lesson provides learners with the opportunity to revise their knowledge of the plot and characters from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Learners will study a short extract from Act IV Scene I and link the text to a visual representation of the scene. Learners will practise describing paintings inspired by the play.

This lesson will work best with learners who are familiar with the play, although there is an option to use the lesson with learners who are not familiar. Note that the artwork that is central to this lesson has nudity. Please bear in mind cultural sensitivities when deciding whether this lesson will be appropriate for your class.

A presentation accompanies this lesson. Teachers can print a student worksheet if they prefer, but they can carry out this lesson using just the presentation.

Procedure

1. Lead-in (10-20 mins)

- If your learners are not familiar with the plot of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream', or if they need to review the story, show a video summary of the play, or have them read a summary. Pause the video / reading often to check understanding. Alternatively, learners could review the plot before the lesson. There are several summaries online, for example:

<https://www.rsc.org.uk/shakespeare-learning-zone/a-midsummer-nights-dream/story/plot> (text)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M1wMfOwIAZ8> (video)

- Show **slide 2** of the presentation or refer learners to the **Lead-in** task in the student worksheet. Depending on the level of your class, you can review the words in the box and elicit some example questions first using different question words. Write them on the board if necessary. Examples:

Where does the play mostly take place? (In the woods outside Athens)

Who does Hermia want to marry? (Lysander) Who does her father say she should marry? (Demetrius)

Why does Titania fall in love with a donkey? (Puck puts potion in her eyes; he turns Bottom into a donkey)

What mistake does Puck make? (He makes many e.g. he puts potion in Lysander's eyes and Lysander falls in love with Helena)

Why did Oberon and Titania have a quarrel? (She refuses to give him a 'changeling', a human child taken to the fairies and replaced by a fairy child)

	<p>How does the play end? (The workmen perform a play at the wedding of Theseus and Hippolyta)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In pairs or small groups, learners ask and answer questions about the play using the words in the box. Walk around pairs / groups and encourage them to use different question words.
<p>2. Task 1: Looking at artwork (10 mins)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Show slide 3 of the presentation. Ask learners to say which moment of the play the painting represents. If necessary, ask questions: Where / who are they? If learners are familiar with the play, ask them for more details about the scene: Oberon and Titania, who are king and queen of the fairies, quarrel about the possession of a changeling (a human child carried off to the fairy realm and replaced by a fairy child). Titania refuses to give the child to Oberon. The main figures are surrounded by smaller fairy creatures. Show slide 4 of the presentation. Refer the class to the title of the painting and the artist. In small groups or as a whole class, learners say what they think about the painting. Repeat the steps with slides 5-8. <p>Slide 6: Oberon has punished Titania for her pride by making her fall in love with Bottom, a man with the head of a donkey.</p> <p>Slide 8: Titania and Oberon stand together reunited and are about to resolve the magically induced confusion between the two lovers (the man next to them and the woman on the left in the foreground) who are shown sleeping apart.</p>
<p>3. Task 2: Reading (20-25 mins)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Show slide 9 of the presentation or refer learners to Task 2A in the student worksheet. Explain that the slide has the first four lines of the dialogue from Act IV Scene I. Explain that Shakespearean English is different to modern-day English, and most readers find this challenging. Help them to understand the lines as much as possible e.g. 'thee' = 'you'; 'thy' = 'your'; 'coy' = stroke. Ask which words can help them match the lines to the correct picture e.g. 'large ears'. <p>Note: A modern translation of this is something like:</p>

Come and sit down on this bed of flowers, while I stroke your friendly cheeks, stick roses in your hair, and kiss your large, beautiful ears.

- Show **slide 10** of the presentation or refer learners to **Task 2B** in the student worksheet. Learners should read the dialogue to answer the questions (note that it is an adapted version). Emphasise that learners do not need to worry about understanding every word. If this task is very challenging for your learners, you could find a modern translation of the scene online, for example: <https://myshakespeare.com/midsummer-nights-dream/act-4-scene-1-full-scene-modern-english>
- In pairs or small groups, learners read and answer the questions. Check the answer with the class: Peaseblossom, Cobweb and Mustardseed are fairies. Bottom asks Peaseblossom and Mustardseed to scratch his head; he asks Cobweb to kill a bee and find some honey.
- Show **slide 11** of the presentation. Learners discuss the questions for a few minutes in pairs or small groups. Ask some to share their answers and share the notes below with the class.
 1. Titania and Bottom are in the centre of the painting. According to experts, Peaseblossom is scratching Bottom's head; Mustard-seed is on his hand and Cobweb is bringing him the honey-bag.
 2. There is a fairy holding a small, bearded man on a lead; there are doll-like figures; there is a fairy with the head of a butterfly; there is a hooded figure holding onto an ugly looking doll-like figure (art historians think this is a changeling).
 3. The beautiful young woman holding the tiny old man on a leash symbolises the triumph of youth over old age.

**4. Task 3:
Reading a
description of
a painting
(10 minutes)**

- Show **slide 12** of the presentation or refer learners to **Task 3** in the student worksheet.
- Individually or in pairs, learners complete the description of the painting 'Titania and Bottom'. If necessary, review the words and phrases in the box before they do the task. If using the slide, learners can just write numbers 1-5 and the matching words / phrases. They do not need to write the whole text.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check answers with the class e.g. by asking different learners to read out completed sentences. Answers: 1 In the centre, 2 beside, 3 To his right, 4 In the foreground, 5 a symbol of. • If necessary, review unfamiliar vocabulary in the description with learners, for example by asking them to guess what the words mean e.g. perches. <p>Note: You can find a very clear description of this painting at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DMxaK0xjldE</p> <p>Play this short clip to your students if you have time. Ask them to listen for information which is not included in the description they have just read.</p>
<p>5. Task 4: Describing a painting (15 mins)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show either slide 13 or slide 14. Describe one of the characters in one of the paintings e.g. (slide 14). It's a woman. She's wearing an orange gown. She's sleeping. Learners can say where the character is: It's the woman on the left in the centre. It could be Hermia or Helena. • In pairs, learners describe and guess characters. Listen as learners speak and help with language where necessary. • Finally, learners write about the picture on the slide using expressions from the description in Task 3. If they are not very familiar with the scene from the play, they can just describe what they can see. • Invite some learners to read out their descriptions to the class. <p>Suggested answers:</p> <p>Slide 13: This painting shows Titania and Oberon arguing over the young Indian prince. It is a very bright and light painting and there is a lot of detail. Titania and Oberon are in the centre. To Titania's right we see the young Indian prince. He is looking out shyly at Oberon. In the foreground there is a tree – a fairy sleeps in its hollow. In the background, lots of fairies dance.</p> <p>Slide 14: This painting shows Titania and Oberon making up after their quarrel. In the centre of the painting there is a large tree which Bottom is lying asleep on. He no longer has the head of the donkey. Titania is pointing at him, and Oberon is close by her side. In the foreground, Helena lies asleep. She is surrounded by fairies. At the front of the painting an ugly goblin attacks a fish.</p>

	<p>The strange creatures in the paintings are dreamlike and a symbol of the dark elements of Shakespeare's play.</p>
6. Homework	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Learners can read a summary of Act IV I of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream', then watch the scene on video. There are many online.