

# A Midsummer Night's Dream

## An Active Introduction to A Midsummer Night's Dream



Shakespeare's plays and characters can be brought vividly to life for children using a variety of interactive, energetic and engaging storytelling techniques. The following active introduction provides a great first encounter with Shakespeare and offers the opportunity for large groups of children to play several different roles. This style of introduction is a technique that is regularly used by drama practitioners, including the RSC, and is often described as a 'whoosh'.

### How it works

As the teacher you are the storyteller and the whole class should sit in a circle for this activity. You will need to use 'whoosh' or chose a particular action word or sound to use as a command. You could also choose a phrase or word from the play you are introducing, for example: skip hence means 'jump into action, spring up' and is from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. This command is written into the text that follows, but can be substituted as needed. The command signifies a change in the action and controls the pace of the storytelling. It is used to return the children quickly to their places in the circle after acting in each 'scene'. Everyone will have the opportunity to join in with the telling of the story, by becoming a character or an object in the tale.

Start telling the story and as soon as a character or an object is mentioned, indicate the first child to step into the circle. Encourage the child to strike a pose or make a shape. If two or more characters are introduced then they

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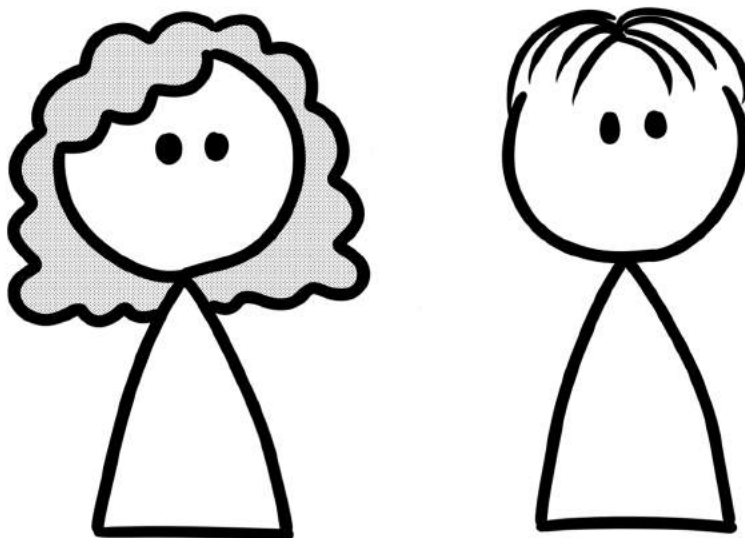
can step in at the same time to act their part of the story. When you call out the action word or blow the whistle/beat the drum the children should sit down. Continue telling the story with the next child/children from the circle.

As more characters or objects are introduced, move around the circle so that all the children are given a chance to take part. Explain to the children that it does not matter if the character they have been chosen to be is male or female. Using this technique means that different pupils get to play the same character at various times and everyone gets a chance at acting several roles, regardless of gender.

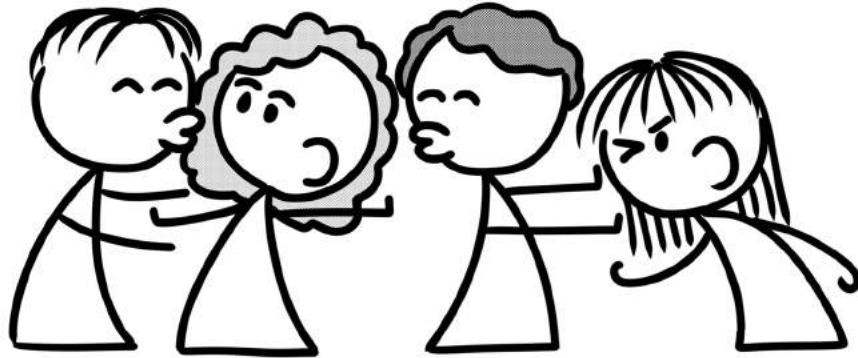
Continue telling the story, introducing more characters or actions, making sure all children are given a chance to take part. Props can also be introduced although this is not essential. The story continues to be told to the end.

The text that follows gives possible suggestions for interjections; however you may choose to adapt the text for your class. You may prefer to use quotations from Shakespeare or encourage children to use their own words. For ease of storytelling new characters in each 'scene' are highlighted in bold text.

In essence, this storytelling needs to be pacy and energetic. Above all, the story needs to be visual and fast moving so that it is fun, meaningful and driven.



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This story begins in Athens with a duke, **Theseus**, his guards (*choose as many as you wish*) and his **wise men**.

Duke Theseus is very rich and powerful and he's engaged to marry **Hippolyta**.

Theseus says, 'Fair Hippolyta, we will soon be married.'

Hippolyta says, 'Four nights will quickly dream away the time.'

Into the palace scene enters an old man called **Egeus**. Egeus is angry:

'Full of vexation I come with complaint,  
Against my child, my daughter **Hermia**'

Egeus wants Hermia to marry **Demetrius** but she wants to marry **Lysander**!

Egeus says, 'She is mine and all my right of her do I estate unto Demetrius.'

Theseus agrees and says, 'Demetrius is a worthy gentleman.'

But Hermia is in love with Lysander and so she says, 'So is Lysander!'

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Egeus wants Theseus to settle the argument. So Theseus offers her three choices, 'By the next new moon either prepare to die, wed Demetrius or live a nun.'

- skip hence -

**Hermia** has a plan (whispers to **Lysander**) which she tells **Helena**, her best friend (whispers to Helena.) Hermia and Lysander run away into the forest.

Helena decides to tell **Demetrius** the plan because she loves him and once he had loved her. But Demetrius decides that he must follow Hermia because he now loves her.

So Demetrius followed Hermia and Helena follows Demetrius.

- skip hence -

In the woods there is a fairy kingdom. The king and queen of the forest are **Oberon** and **Titania** who also have lots of **fairy servants** and **guards** (create Oberon's and Titania's court with as many students as needed). Oberon and Titania are arguing over a **human child** they have stolen to replace an elf child.

'He's mine' - 'No he's mine'

Titania says 'What, jealous Oberon?'

Oberon says, 'I do but beg a little changeling boy to be my henchman.'

Titania says, 'I will not part with him.'

Oberon says, 'Give me that boy!'

Titania says, 'Not for thy fairy kingdom! Fairies, away!'

Oberon and Titania were not happy!

- Skip hence -

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In the forest, **Oberon** is planning to get revenge on **Titania** for not letting him have her changeling boy. He sends **Puck**, his mischievous servant, to fetch a special flower called 'Love in Idleness'. This flower casts a spell that makes people fall in love with the first person they see when they wake up. Puck is delighted and flies off saying 'I'll put a girdle round about the earth in forty minutes.'

Oberon waits for Titania to fall asleep (*have Titania sleep*) and puts a magic potion on her eyes to make her fall in love with the first person she sees when she wakes up.

Oberon says, 'What thou see'st when thou dost wake, Do it for thy true love take.' (*puts potion on her eyes*)

- Skip hence -

In another part of the wood six tradesmen arrive to practice a play for Duke Theseus's wedding.

**Peter Quince** – the carpenter

**Bottom** – the weaver

**Snug** – the joiner

**Snout** – the tinker

**Starveling** – the tailor

**Flute** – the bellows mender

Bottom wants to play all the parts and each time Quince asks someone to play a part Bottom interrupts:

For example (*please note this is not Shakespeare text*):

Quince says 'We need a brave man to play Pyramus' and

Bottom says 'I will play him'

'We need a lion to roar' and Bottom says 'I will play him'

'We need a beautiful girl to play Thisbe' and again Bottom says 'I will play her'

- Skip hence -

**Hermia** and **Lysander** run for miles through the forest and fall asleep. The mischievous fairy, **Puck**, puts the magic potion on Lysander's eyes so he'll fall in love with the first person he sees when he wakes up.

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Puck says, 'Upon thy eyes I throw all the power this charm doth owe.'

And off he goes, leaving Hermia and Lysander still asleep.

**Demetrius** is in the forest looking for Hermia and **Helena** is following him.

Demetrius tries to get rid of Helena and says, 'I charge thee, hence, and do not haunt me thus!'

He runs off leaving her lost in the middle of the forest. She wanders around and eventually finds Hermia and Lysander.

Helena wakes Lysander up; he sees Helena and instantly falls in love with her.

Lysander says, 'Not Hermia but Helena now I love.'

Helena thinks he's making fun of her and says, 'You do me wrong.' And she runs off, followed by Lysander.

Hermia wakes up and says, 'Lysander? Gone? No sound, no word? Where are you?' and she goes off to look for him.

- Skip hence -

**Demetrius** is still wandering round the forest looking for Hermia. **Puck** finds him and puts the love potion in his eyes. **Helena** comes in, followed by **Lysander**, and Demetrius falls in love with her as well.

Demetrius says, 'Oh Helen, goddess, nymph, perfect, divine!'

Helena now has both Lysander and Demetrius chasing after her and she thinks it's all a cruel trick.

Helena says, 'You both are rivals and love Hermia, and now both rivals to mock Helena.'

**Hermia** turns up and says, 'Lysander, why didst thou leave me so?'

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Lysander says, 'I do hate thee, and love Helena.'

Helena runs away because she thinks they are teasing her, the boys run after her because they love her and Hermia runs after them crying.

- Skip hence -

Elsewhere in the wood **Titania** sleeps surrounded by her **fairies**. Mischievous **Puck** sneaks to where the workmen are rehearsing and meets **Bottom**. He changes Bottom into a donkey.....eeyore, eeyore!

The fairies move away.

Bottom says, 'Why do they run away? I see their knavery, this is to make an ass of me.'

Bottom walks up and down singing a song to keep his spirits up (*suggest children choose a song*) which wakes Titania and she falls instantly in love with him.

Titania says, 'What angel wakes me from my flowery bed? I do love thee.'

Bottom says, 'Methinks, mistress, you should have little reason for that.'

Titania says, 'I'll give thee fairies to attend on thee.' Lots of **fairies** gather round Bottom and treat him like a king and he falls asleep.

- Skip hence -

**Oberon** watches all this and feels really sad at the confusion he has created. He calls **Puck** and asks him to put everything right again.

So Puck finds the lovers (**Hermia**, **Lysander**, **Helena** and **Demetrius**) asleep again and sprinkles the juice in their eyes. Then he finds **Titania** asleep again and sprinkles the juice in her eyes. They wake up; Hermia and Lysander are back in love with each other again and Helena and Demetrius are in love and everyone goes back to Athens.

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Titania wakes up from her magic spell and makes friends with Oberon again, and Puck removes Bottom's donkey head while he's asleep.

Bottom wakes up and says, 'I had a dream. Methought I was... Methought I had... (feels for his ears) I cannot say what I thought I had.'

- Skip hence -

Everyone goes back to Athens for **Theseus** and **Hippolyta's** wedding. At the wedding the tradesmen, who call themselves the Mechanicals, at last perform their play.

**3 Mechanicals** make a wall

1 is the **moon**

1 plays a **lion** who roared

1 plays **Pyramus**

1 plays **Thisbe**

This is the play:

Pyramus and Thisbe are in love and try to see each other through the wall but they can't. So Pyramus says 'meet me at Ninny's tomb'. But at Ninny's tomb, Thisbe meets the lion and runs away, dropping her scarf.

The lion finds it and gets blood all over it from some meat he had eaten.

Pyramus sees the scarf and thinks his lover has been killed. He kills himself with his sword. Thisbe sees him..... 'What, dead, my love?' and kills herself too.

Then all the actors take a bow and the **audience** gives them a round of applause.

And so the story of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* ends!

With thanks to Pete and Valerie Cubitt and Andrew Cowie