

Simply Charlotte Mason presents

*A Midsummer
Night's Dream*

SAMPLE

Shakespeare in Three Steps

by Sonya Shafer

*An enjoyable and simple approach to
some of the greatest literature ever written—
the plays of William Shakespeare!*

Now you can help your students become familiar with Shakespeare's imaginative stories, memorable characters, and brilliant lines in **three simple steps: read the story, hear the script, and watch the play.**

Shakespeare in Three Steps provides everything you need:

- **A well-written story version of the play** by E. Nesbit or Charles and Mary Lamb—classic narratives that have been providing a wonderful introduction to Shakespeare's plays for decades;
- **The complete script of the play** with helpful notes to explain unusual terms or add to your understanding of Shakespeare's stories, characters, and lines;
- **An outlined plan for walking through the script**, divided into manageable portions with quick recaps, scene introductions, and summaries that will guide you each step of the way;
- **Script highlights**, featuring well-known or just ponder-worthy lines, that will gently introduce the Bard's genius and cultivate an appreciation for his wonderful way with words;
- **Parental advisories** to give you a heads-up on scenes that may contain material inappropriate for children;
- **Helpful lists** of the characters in the scenes and the number of lines each one speaks, so you can assign parts knowledgeably for reading sessions or acting roles;
- **Candid reviews** of several video recordings of the play to save you time previewing and help you select a suitable presentation for your students to watch and enjoy.

“To become intimate with Shakespeare in this way is a great enrichment of mind and instruction of conscience”—Charlotte Mason

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Charlotte Mason
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Shakespeare in Three Steps
A Midsummer Night's Dream

by Sonya Shafer

Recommended for Grades 2–12

Comedy

Summary: This is the story of two young couples crossed in love, a kingdom of fairies, and a bumbling troupe of would-be actors who all have definite plans for one evening in summer. When the king of fairies and his favorite sprite decide to play a trick on his queen, chaos ensues for all and they must scramble to put everything to rights again.

Shakespeare in Three Steps: A Midsummer Night's Dream
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Shakespeare in Three Steps

Understand and enjoy Shakespeare's plays by following these three steps.

Step 1: Read the story.

Read aloud the story version of the play to get familiar with the main characters and plot.

Step 2: Hear the script.

Listen to each scene on the audio dramatization and follow along in the script, or assign students to read aloud the various characters' lines themselves.

Step 3: Watch the play.

Enjoy a live or recorded presentation of the play.

Step 1: Read the story.

Ask students where on the calendar they might expect a festival called Midsummer to fall. Explain that Midsummer is celebrated around the summer solstice in June, the longest day of the year. This Shakespeare play is a mixture of fairies, magic, actors, and couples—a silly imaginative story that reminds us of something that someone might dream on Midsummer’s night.

Read aloud the story version of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* below to get familiar with the main characters and plot. Feel free to divide the story in half, reading half now and the rest later. If desired, help the students create a list of the main characters with a brief description of who each one is to help them keep everybody straight in their minds as you go along.

A Midsummer Night’s Dream

(from *Beautiful Stories from Shakespeare for Children* by E. Nesbit)

Hermia and Lysander were lovers; but Hermia’s father wished her to marry another man, named Demetrius.

Now, in Athens, where they lived, there was a wicked law, by which any girl who refused to marry according to her father’s wishes, might be put to death. Hermia’s father was so angry with her for refusing to do as he wished, that he actually brought her before the Duke of Athens to ask that she might be killed, if she still refused to obey him. The Duke gave her four days to think about it, and, at the end of that time, if she still refused to marry Demetrius, she would have to die.

Lysander of course was nearly mad with grief, and the best thing to do seemed to him for Hermia to run away to his aunt’s house at a place beyond the reach of that cruel law; and there he would come to her and marry her. But before she started, she told her friend, Helena, what she was going to do.

Helena had been Demetrius’ sweetheart long before his marriage with Hermia had been thought of, and being very silly, like all jealous people, she could not see that it was not poor Hermia’s fault that Demetrius wished to marry her instead of his own lady, Helena. She knew that if she told Demetrius that Hermia was going, as she was, to the wood outside Athens, he would follow her, “and I can follow him, and at least I shall see him,” she said to herself. So she went to him, and betrayed her friend’s secret.

Now this wood where Lysander was to meet Hermia, and where the other two had decided to follow them, was full of fairies, as most woods are, if one only had the eyes to see them, and in this wood on this night were the King and Queen of the fairies, Oberon and Titania. Now fairies are very wise people, but now and then they can be quite as foolish as mortal folk. Oberon and Titania, who might have been as happy as the days were long, had thrown away all their joy in a foolish quarrel. They never met

Notes

An alternate idea for younger children would be to read the picture book, A Midsummer Night’s Dream, retold by Bruce Coville, or listen to Jim Weiss’ retelling on his audio recording, Shakespeare for Children, from Greathall Productions.

Notes

*We recommend
The Arkangel
Shakespeare audio
dramatizations.*

Step 2: Hear the script.

Make a copy of the script on pages 35–110 for each student who can read. Work your way through the script over several sittings, as outlined on the following pages. Each session will follow a sequence similar to the one below:

- Use the notes to introduce each scene. Highlight the featured lines if desired.
- Listen to the scene(s) on the audio dramatization and follow along in the script, or assign students to read aloud the various characters' lines themselves.
- Invite any questions or comments, then set it aside until next time.

Act I, Scene 1

Notes

- Ask students what they recall from last time's reading of the story of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Explain that the play divides the story into five parts, called Acts. Some of the acts are divided into smaller portions, called Scenes. Today they will listen to Act I, Scene 1. Read the scene summary to give students the context for the lines they will be hearing.

Scene Summary: The play begins in the palace of the Duke, Theseus, who is looking forward to marrying his love, Hippolyta, in just four days. As you can imagine, it is hard for him to wait. He sends his servant to round up some entertainment for the festivities.

Into his court enter Hermia, her father, Egeus, and two young men, Lysander and Demetrius. Egeus has brought them all to explain their predicament to the Duke and to ask him to talk some sense into Hermia. Egeus wants her to marry Demetrius, but she wishes to marry Lysander. According to the law there in Athens, Hermia must marry as her father has decreed; if she does not, she may be executed or sent to live in seclusion as a nun the rest of her life. Theseus gives her four days to make her decision.

Lysander and Hermia secretly determine to make their way through the woods to Lysander's aunt's house and marry there, outside the boundaries of Athens and its laws. They confide their plans to Hermia's friend, Helena, who happens to be Demetrius' former sweetheart. Helena decides to inform Demetrius of their escape, hoping he will be grateful for the tip and grow to love her again.

- Distribute a copy of the script to each student who can read.
- (Optional) Take a sneak peek at these lines from the script and enjoy Shakespeare's wording.
 - » Lines 93–94: Lysander knows that Egeus prefers Demetrius for a son-in-law, so he wryly makes this suggestion to his rival:
You have her father's love, Demetrius;
Let me have Hermia's: do you marry him.
 - » Line 134: Upon having their hopes dashed, Lysander declares to Hermia that such is usually the case:
The course of true love never did run smooth.

Shakespeare wrote the lines of his plays in both prose (conversational speaking) and poetry.

PERSON: Prose lines will look like this.

*PERSON
Poetry lines will look like this.*

Notes

- » Lines 192–201 highlight the contrast between Hermia, Demetrius, and Helena as Hermia tries to discourage Demetrius from loving her and Helena tries to win his love.

HELENA

O, teach me how you look, and with what art
You sway the motion of Demetrius' heart.

HERMIA

I frown upon him, yet he loves me still.

HELENA

O that your frowns would teach my smiles such skill!

HERMIA

I give him curses, yet he gives me love.

HELENA

O that my prayers could such affection move!

HERMIA

The more I hate, the more he follows me.

HELENA

The more I love, the more he hateth me.

HERMIA

His folly, Helena, is no fault of mine.

HELENA

None, but your beauty: would that fault were mine!

- » Lines 232–239 summarize what this play will demonstrate, that “Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind.”

Things base and vile, folding no quantity,
Love can transpose to form and dignity:
Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind;
And therefore is wing'd Cupid painted blind:
Nor hath Love's mind of any judgement taste;
Wings and no eyes figure unheedy haste:
And therefore is Love said to be a child,
Because in choice he is so oft beguiled.

□ Listen to Act I, Scene 1, on the audio dramatization (approx. 15 minutes) and follow along in the script, or assign students to read aloud the various characters' lines themselves. If you are assigning students to read aloud, the following list might be helpful; it details the characters who speak and the approximate number of lines each one has in this scene.

- Theseus, the Duke (64 lines)
- Hippolyta, the Duke's fiancé (5 lines)
- Egeus, the father (30 lines)
- Hermia, Egeus' daughter (56 lines)
- Lysander, Hermia's true love (53 lines)
- Demetrius, young man who wants to marry Hermia (2 lines)
- Helena, young woman who loves Demetrius (43 lines)

Notes

Be sure to do your research to avoid any unpleasant surprises when watching Shakespeare productions. Unfortunately, some directors feel compelled to add unnecessary visual elaborations on the text. Preview any video presentation and check with someone who is directly involved with any live production to find out how it aligns with the original script and how appropriate it is for children.

Step 3: Watch the play.

Now that you and your students are familiar with the story line and the script, you are ready for the best part of this study: watch a presentation of the play! Check for any local live performances that you could attend, or watch a video recording. (See video reviews below.)

Video Recording Reviews

- The 1935 adaptation produced by Warner Brothers Pictures is very suitable for children. It features James Cagney, Olivia de Havilland, and Mickey Rooney among others. Note that it is an adaptation; not all lines are spoken, not all scenes are exact. But it highlights the comedy and the fantasy elements with plenty of fairies, sprites, nymphs, elves, and gnomes. It also features many musical pieces. Felix Mendelssohn composed music for a production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* during his lifetime, including his famous "Wedding March." Some of Mendelssohn's music has been re-orchestrated and woven into this 1935 adaptation. (*Approx. 143 minutes*)
- The 1981 BBC version directed by Elijah Moshinsky is more faithful to the original script, but the performance has a serious tone to it—at times almost . . .

Additional complete reviews are found in the full book.

A Midsummer Night's Dream

Notes

Act I, Scene 1

Setting: Athens, the palace of Theseus.

Enter Theseus, Hippolyta, Philostrate, with Attendants.

THESEUS

Now, fair Hippolyta, our nuptial hour
Draws on apace; four happy days bring in
Another moon: but, O, methinks, how slow
This old moon wanes! She lingers my desires,
Like to a step-dame or a dowager 5
Long withering out a young man's revenue.

HIPPOLYTA

Four days will quickly steep themselves in night;
Four nights will quickly dream away the time;
And then the moon, like to a silver bow
New-bent in heaven, shall behold the night 10
Of our solemnities.

THESEUS

Go, Philostrate,
Stir up the Athenian youth to merriments;
Awake the pert and nimble spirit of mirth;
Turn melancholy forth to funerals;
The pale companion is not for our pomp. 15

Exit Philostrate.

Hippolyta, I woo'd thee with my sword,
And won thy love, doing thee injuries;
But I will wed thee in another key,
With pomp, with triumph and with revelling.

Enter Egeus, Hermia, Lysander, and Demetrius.

EGEUS

Happy be Theseus, our renowned duke! 20

THESEUS

Thanks, good Egeus: what's the news with thee?

EGEUS

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

This is the Theseus who fought the mythical Minotaur.

Sometimes Shakespeare would split a line of poetry between two characters. Theseus' first line here finishes Hippolyta's previous line, so it is moved to the right to visually show that completion.