

BRISBANE FESTIVAL

Educational Notes

Brisbane Festival Presents

A Midsummer Night's Dream

Lyric Hammersmith and Filter Theatre (UNITED KINGDOM)



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EDUCATION NOTES

This document has been prepared to provide educators with information and resources to support the development of more comprehensive lessons in response to Lyric Hammersmith and Filter Theatre production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, presented by Brisbane Festival.

ABOUT BRISBANE FESTIVAL

Brisbane Festival's one of Australia's major international arts festivals.

Each September, it explodes across the city with a thrilling program of theatre, music, dance, circus, opera and major public events such as Sunsuper Riverfire.

OUR MISSION

Brisbane Festival aims to connect artists and audiences in ways that lift the spirit, disrupt the conventional and open our city to the world.

A MESSAGE FROM BRISBANE FESTIVAL ARTISTIC DIRECTOR, DAVID BERTHOLD

This extraordinary production, which I saw in London earlier this year, takes Shakespeare's most famous and accessible comedy and transforms it into a postmodern joy. I'm very proud to have it as a centrepiece of Brisbane Festival 2016, one of Australia's major international arts festivals.

The two former Royal Shakespeare Company collaborators who are the creative forces behind this work understand that the Elizabethan theatre toyed with the elements of drama in ways that remain deeply contemporary. That's brilliantly evident here. The characters and situations are rendered with utter freshness, often with new purpose but always in tune with the text, both Shakespeare's and invented.

The educational resources we've collected here offer some tasks and exercises that will help reveal the richness of the production and shine a light on how form, style and language affect meaning. We hope you find them useful.

We also hope that you and your students fall in love with the show as much as I did.

Warm regards,

David Berthold, Artistic Director

Brisbane Festival

"The sort of show that could spark a love affair with Shakespeare."

(WhatsOnStage, London)

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SEASON DETAILS

9-17 Sept

DURATION

1h 50mins

SUITABILITY

Suitable 14+

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Lyric Hammersmith and Filter Theatre (UNITED KINGDOM)

THE LYRIC AND FILTER CAST AND CREATIVES:

The 2016 production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is co-directed by Stef O'Driscoll and Sean Holmes. The set has been designed by Hyemi Shin with lighting by Oliver Fenwick, sound is designed by Tom Haines and The London Snorkelling Team.

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM CAST, IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER

(Actors may play various characters)

Hammed Animashaun
Jonathan Broadbent
Andrew Buckley
Chris Branch
Keith De Barra
Clare Dunne
Ed Gaughan
John Lightbody
Victoria Moseley
Ferdie Roberts
Cat Simmons

ABOUT FILTER THEATRE

Filter is led by actors Oliver Dimsdale and Ferdie Roberts, and composer Tim Phillips and they have been creating innovative, exciting theatre since 2003. Filter has produced several interpretations of classic texts: Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for the Lyric Hammersmith, Manchester Royal Exchange and a UK Tour (2012); Brecht's *Caucasian Chalk Circle* for the National Theatre (2006); Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* for the RSC and the Tricycle Theatre (2007); Chekhov's *Three Sisters* for the Lyric Hammersmith (2010); and most recently *Macbeth* at the Tobacco Factory Theatres and UK Tour (2014/2015).

The 2016 production *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was performed at The Lyric Hammersmith 19 Feb-19 March 2016.

SYNOPSIS

In Shakespeare's fanciful comedy set in ancient Athens, love and magic prevail.

In the city, The Duke of Athens, Theseus, prepares to wed the Queen of the Amazons, Hippolyta. The beautiful Hermia is in love with Lysander but in order to be with him she must escape an arranged marriage to Demetrius, with whom her friend Helena is in love. The four run away and spend Midsummer night lost in the woods, where they fall prey to the fun and mischief of the fairies. Bottom the weaver and his friends rehearse a play they hope to perform for the Duke at his wedding.

Robin Goodfellow, better known as Puck, who serves the fairy king Oberon, puts flower nectar on the eyes of Lysander, and then Demetrius, unintentionally causing both to love Helena. Oberon, who is quarrelling with his wife, Titania, uses the flower nectar on her eyes. She falls in love with Bottom, who now, thanks to Puck, wears an ass's head.

As the lovers sleep, Puck restores Lysander's love for Hermia, so that now each young woman is matched with the man she loves. Oberon disenchant's Titania and Bottom. All is set right and harmony is restored. The happy couples share the Duke's wedding day, the play is performed for the royal court and the fairies bless the palace.

RESOURCES

ONLINE

bardweb.net
folger.edu/shakespeare
playshakespeare.com
folgerdigitaltexts.org
reducedshakespeare.com
pangloss.com/seidel/shake_rule.htm
jageradaran.com.au
gubbigubbi.com
australia.gov.au/about-australia

IN THE APP STORE

Shakespeare Pro
SwipeSpeare - Modern Shakespeare
Shakespeare In Bits: A Midsummer Night's Dream
A Midsummer Night's Dream: Folger Luminary Shakespeare



CURRICULUM: CORE CONTENT

CONTEXT

- ❖ Dramatic
- ❖ Historical

THEMES

- ❖ Love
- ❖ Dreams
- ❖ Eroticism
- ❖ Family feud
- ❖ Marital strife
- ❖ Ambition
- ❖ Magic

DRAMATIC FORMS AND STYLES

- ❖ Live and mediated performance
- ❖ Absurdism
- ❖ Post-modern theatre
- ❖ Physical theatre and acrobatic elements

CONVENTIONS

- ❖ Multi-Media
- ❖ Song and Music
- ❖ Technology

ELEMENTS OF DRAMA

- ❖ Place
- ❖ Symbol
- ❖ Mood
- ❖ Movement
- ❖ Space
- ❖ Time
- ❖ Language
- ❖ Relationship

DRAMA SKILLS

- ❖ Acting
- ❖ Directing
- ❖ Critiquing
- ❖ Movement
- ❖ Working as an ensemble



INTERVIEWS

Interview with Ferdy Roberts (Artistic Director of Filter)

HOW DID THIS VERSION OF *A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM* COME ABOUT AND CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT FILTER'S WAY OF APPROACHING SHAKESPEARE?

It started because of our relationship with Sean (Holmes, Artistic Director of The Lyric) and the previous Shakespeare we worked on together - *Twelfth Night* which we made in 2006.

The Language we (Filter) use as a company is between actors and musicians and the text. The process we used for *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is similar to the one we used for *Twelfth Night*. We had very little budget and basically we just used what we had from the rehearsal room which was keyboards, a drum kit and guitars. We started from scratch. We put *Twelfth Night* together in a week and that meant we had to very quickly to make some very bold artistic choices to do with the text. All of those choices came from the play, they didn't come from a planned concept. We didn't have a model box, we just had actors, musicians and a script.

Arguably this way is a very traditional way and close to how it would have been performed in his (Shakespeare's) time which a lot of people don't give Filter enough credit for. A lot of people think we are updating Shakespeare or modernising it, which we are not! *With A Midsummer Night's Dream* - apart from a lot of the material that Ed (Gaughan) who is playing Peter Quince has written- everything else is Shakespeare. We haven't set it in a particular period. This has allowed us to be playful and anarchic yet as respectful to what we believe Shakespeare intended.

Part of the reason we have approached it like this is because most of us were studying Shakespeare at school, and I personally was slightly put off by it as quite often I was told my interpretation was wrong and that was partly to do with the way it was taught. I now believe that is quite a dangerous angle as I don't think there is a right or wrong way to interpret Shakespeare. Part of the reason we wanted to do this is to break down the academic ownership of Shakespeare. A week we worked on *Twelfth Night* with Sean Holmes -who had done lots of projects with the RSC- he said he felt that the one week we did on that show exploring, we got closer to the spirit of what we believed Shakespeare was - anarchic, black, funny. It spoke not only to the "Intelligencia" but spoke to people who would go and see a show at The Globe or The Rose to be entertained as well. We didn't sit around a table dissecting the play- we don't sit around- we get up and we play from day 1.

The language with musicians means they can create on the spot and that frees the actors up and lets them do the same without feeling like they have to get it "right" all the time. In Shakespeare's time we know he would write sides (sections of scripts) and give them out to actors and you didn't know what the other person had so nobody quite knew what was going on! I'm sure he (Shakespeare) did though.

Another way which we approach the show is that we don't ignore the audience - the play is set in the here and now. We haven't set it in 1920's New York or war torn Bosnia. We have gone it's here, it's live and the audience are as much a part of it as we are. This idea is interesting when you perform to a non-English speaking audience. We performed *Twelfth Night* in front of a Mexican audience at a festival. They completely got the energy of it and understood the nature without understanding the language because of the actors and the musicians and the back and forth energy. That's what we hope to achieve with *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Sean Holmes has brought in Hyemi (Shin) the designer because he wanted to focus on the sound world more (the instruments and musicians are visible on the stage in this production) and he doesn't want them to get lost on a large stage like The Lyric's. So the design and set become part of it- partly by necessity- we want the walls to be bare so we can rip through them in the same way we like to rip through Shakespeare - strip it back and see what's there!

Interview with Stef O’driscoll (Co-Director of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*)

CAN YOU TELL US HOW YOU BECAME A DIRECTOR AND A BIT ABOUT YOUR CAREER TO DATE?

I always thought I was going to be an actor and one day whilst rehearsing a youth theatre production my exasperated director suggested I should think about directing. It may have been the fact I could never get through a scene without stopping myself and self-directing! I was getting a lot of acting experience at Oval House Youth Theatre and I had a thirst for understanding all the different elements of theatre so I decided to study a BA in Drama at St Mary’s University instead of studying “pure” Acting at a drama school.

It was at uni where I got my real first taste of directing. In a naturalism class, my tutor introduced me to a play called *Yard Gal* by Rebecca Prichard and this is where it all started to click into place. It was the first time I had read a play that showed the world that I came from, that I understood, the characters spoke like me. I couldn’t understand why there were not more plays like this on our stages. In my final year I chose the directing module and directed *Yard Gal*.

As soon as I finished uni the show was picked up by Oval House Theatre. I blinked and I had directed my first professional production. With two stools and two pieces of steel deck, £500 from the Royal Victoria Hall Foundation and sheer determination we did it.

With good reviews and an award under our belts I sat back and expected the theatre world to come knocking.

This did not happen and the last eight years has been pure hard graft!

It was important with little director training I assisted people who made work that I admired to learn from my peers, and I was fortunate to work with organisations such as the Lyric and Paines Plough and assist Sean Holmes, James Grieve and Phyllida Lloyd.

It was also equally important that I also continued to produce and direct work myself.

I have an infinity with new writing, new stories with a social political conscious, and the exciting ways we present these stories.

DO YOU THINK SHAKESPEARE IS STILL IMPORTANT IN 2016?

Of course it is! We might not speak the same way anymore but we still love, we avenge, we get jealous, we cry, we laugh, we do stupid things and Shakespeare captures all that and more in his body of work.

SHAKESPEARE’S LANGUAGE CAN BE A BIT CONFUSING. HOW MUCH DO YOU DISCUSS IT DURING REHEARSALS AND DO THE COMPANY ALWAYS AGREE ON THE MEANING OF THE TEXT?

We edited the full text down, stripped it back to its bare essentials. We asked what do we need to tell the story? All the rest can be cut. It is important that Shakespeare is assessable and enjoyable, that it is not just for middle class white male academics. Shakespeare was intended for everyone! If we needed to clarify a meaning we referred to the original text in rehearsals and I had a handy app called SwipeSpeare - Modern Shakespeare. Filter is a devising company and if confused we would all integrate the meaning together. If there were contradictions within the company the actor would make a decision on what rings more true to their character and the way they are playing the scene.

THIS PRODUCTION HAS BEEN DONE BEFORE IN 2012. DOES THIS CHANGE HOW YOU APPROACH REHEARSALS? DOES IT MAKE YOUR JOB ANY EASIER OR HARDER?

It is tricky remounting a show with old and new cast combined.

You need to create an environment the new cast can play and create and find things, it is important the new cast members own their parts and do not try and recreate what another actor has done before them.

However with the cast who have done the show before there is an element of recreating and remembering what worked last time combined with trying to keep the show fresh and contemporary.

No one wants to say 'we did it like this' especially for the new cast members but sometime you find yourself trying all the different avenues to finally settle on what worked before.

WHAT'S YOUR FAVOURITE PART OF THE REHEARSAL PROCESS

Playing and discovering new ideas.

WHAT DO YOU THINK SHAKESPEARE HIMSELF WOULD THINK OF THIS VERSION?

He'd love it. He's definitely rocking out in his grave. The show was made on instinct in a short amount of time which forces actors to make choices and get on with it. I imagine it was similar in his day.

DESCRIBE THIS SHOW IN THREE WORDS

Magic mental fun.



WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Whilst Shakespeare is certainly the most famous playwright of all time- arguably the most famous writer of any kind- His personal life however is somewhat shrouded in mystery.

It's widely believed that William Shakespeare was born in Stratford-Upon-Avon in 1564. Whilst all births were not recorded at this time, Church records that do exist show he was baptised on the 26 April which, by the standards of the times, means he was likely to have been born around 23 April. This quick turnaround was probably due to a high infant mortality rate and the belief that unbaptised babies were not able to enter heaven, so babies were usually baptised quickly unlike today.

Shakespeare's early education is cause of much debate amongst scholars as very little is known leading some to question as to if the man actually existed at all (for the sake of this resource pack let's say he did though!). From the place in society his family held (his father was an alderman much like a borough councillor) he probably went to Kings New School in Stratford which taught reading and writing....No A-Level Drama in 16th Century England.

William Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway on November 28 1582 in Worcester, in Canterbury Province. Hathaway was from Shottery, a small village a mile west of Stratford. William was 18 and Anne was 26, and, as it turns out, pregnant. Their first child, a daughter they named Susanna, was born on May 26 1583. Two years later on February 2 1585, twins Hamnet (sound familiar?) and Judith were born. Hamnet later died of unknown causes at age 11.

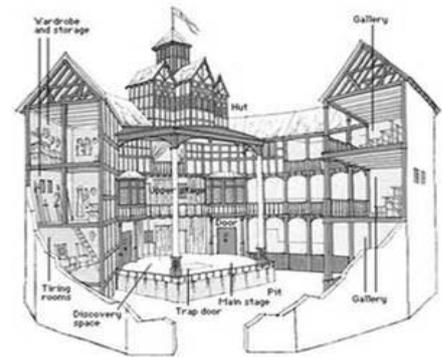
By 1592, there is evidence of William Shakespeare earning a living as an actor and a playwright in London, and possibly of him having several of his plays produced. Actor and Playwright Robert Greene - in what may have been the first version of a twitter feud - said of Shakespeare: "...There is an upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers, that with his Tiger's heart wrapped in a Player's hide, supposes he is as well able to bombast out a blank verse as the best of you: and being an absolute Johannes factotum, is in his own conceit the only Shake-scene in a country".

By 1597, almost half of Shakespeare's 37 plays were published. Local records suggests that due to the money he made from these he was able to buy the "2nd biggest" house in Stratford. Perhaps he didn't really think this through as it was a four-day ride by horse from Stratford to London, so it is believed that he only came home once a year during Lent when all of London's theatres were closed. By 1599, William Shakespeare and several partners built their own theatre on the south bank of the Thames River, which they called the Globe. It was in William Shakespeare's later period, after 1600, that he wrote the tragedies *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Othello* and *Macbeth*. Perhaps old age was making him grumpy (even though he was only 36 this was actually above the average life expectancy for the time).

It's suggested, although widely disputed, that Shakespeare died on his birthday in 1616, but again church records show he was buried on 25 April. Shakespeare famously left his wife "his second best bed" - if this is true it may not have been as bad a burn as it reads. Traditionally the 2nd best bed in the house was the marital bed and the best was reserved for guests. Most of his estate was passed onto his daughter Susanna.

SHAKESPEARE'S ORIGINAL PRODUCTION

The year *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was first performed is disputed, however; it is generally accepted it was performed for the first time between 1594 and 1598. *Romeo and Juliet* is believed to have been written around the same time and it is suggested that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was perhaps a lighter interpretation of young lovers and both are also influenced from the same classical text of Pyramus and Thisbe, causing some scholars to theorise that the two plays were intended as companion pieces. The play first appears in print in 1600 (with many errors) but was then included in the better known first folio of Shakespeare plays published after Shakespeare's death in 1623.



Historically, it was suggested that the original play was written for an aristocratic wedding, although more contemporary sources have stated there is little evidence for this and indeed there is currently no evidence to suggest that staging a play was part of Elizabethan wedding celebrations. This theory cannot however be completely discredited. It's also theorised that the play was performed for Elizabeth I. The lack of hard facts about the play's background makes it almost as mythical as the world it inhabits.

THE LYRIC AND FILTER'S PRODUCTION

The Lyric and Filter's production, however, was "definitely" first performed in 2012. It also "definitely" wasn't performed at a wedding (It's not a show you'd want to wear white near!) and Elizabeth I "definitely" didn't see it (she's been dead for 413 years)

POSTMODERN THEATRE

"Postmodern theatre makes a presentation, not a representation."

Mick Wallis, *Drama/Theatre/Performance*

The urge to disrupt the theatrical illusion has led to a variety of dramatic means such as a provocative audience addressing, or, even more radically, the attempt to establish physical contact with the audience ... It is precisely in the moment of the breakdown in a performance, that is, when the illusion of the stage as a closed world is denied, that the audience participation can take place and the spectator moves into the center of theatrical attention.

Kerstin Schmidt, *Postmodernism in American Drama*

"Previous concepts of plot and characterization, no matter whether they are in the Aristotelian or modernist sense, no longer exist in the postmodern theatre. Critical categories of the psychic, dream, distortion and plotlessness in modernist poetics are no longer the defining qualities of the postmodern theatre, which offers a new poetics of collage in playing with discontinuities and inconsistencies always in the making and unmaking."

A. Robert Lee, *Old Worlds, New Worlds*

“The mirror which postmodern theatre shows to its spectators may seem in some respects, a shattered one. It consists of numerous disparate elements which, even as a whole, render no meaningful unit, can reveal no unifying image. The image reflected by postmodern theatre is one of many "Others.”

Erika Fischer-Lichte & Jo Riley, *The Show and the Gaze of Theatre: A European Perspective*

“Generally postmodern performance wants to provoke the viewer/ reader to be aware of, and to critique the very strategies of representation.”

Phillip B. Zarrilli, *Theatre Histories: An Introduction*

“The postmodern theatre is almost obsessed with citation, almost like pieces of a collage, into new combinations with little attempt to hide the fragmentary and 'quoted' nature of these pieces.”

Marvin A. Carlson, *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine*

PRE-PERFORMANCE

CONTEXTUALISING SHAKESPEARE

Discussion: From Shakespeare’s England to Our Australia

- Shakespeare’s society is represented in the play by three distinct class groups. (The supernatural is represented by the fairies). Do you see a similar class structure in contemporary Australian society?
- Shakespeare’s works address timeless themes (love, dreams, eroticism, family feud, marital strife, magic, ambition). What makes these themes still relevant today?
- What do you imagine the different worlds of the play to look like? Describe the different locations (settings include the palace/court, the woods, the fairy kingdom).
- Arranged marriages are still common practice in some parts of the world. How would you feel about your life partner being chosen for you? What actions would you take if you were unhappy about the arrangement?
- What happens when you or a friend has a crush on someone? How does their behaviour change? What do they do? What do you observe in the behaviour of a person who has captured the attention of another?



CONTEXTUALISATION

In Shakespeare's world, Midsummer was a wonderful, magical time to celebrate love and the bounty of the earth. According to custom, people would use dreams as a means of divining the future, using the symbols and eroticism in dreams to predict who they would fall in love with. While the outcome of the play is not directly affected by dreams, the dreams are symbolic of love and desire. Mishaps, confusion and bizarre events are all attributed to dreams.

Respond to one of the quotes listed below (love or dreams) by explaining how it applies in a contemporary context.

LOVE

The course of true love never did run smooth.

Lysander, Act 1, Scene 1

One is very crazy when in love.

Sigmund Freud

There is no remedy to love but to love more.

Henry Thoreau

Perhaps the feelings we experience when we are in love represent a normal state. Being in love shows a person who he should be.

Anton Chekhov

DREAMS

If we shadows have offended,
Think but this and all is mended,
That you have but slumber'd here
While these visions did appear.
And this weak and idle theme,
No more yielding but a dream,
Gentles, do not reprehend:
If you pardon we will mend.

Puck, Act 5, Scene 1

Dreams are true while they last, and do we not live in dreams?

Alfred Lord Tennyson

In dreams begins responsibility.

William Butler Yeats

SHAKESPEARE'S LANGUAGE

The most striking feature of Shakespeare is his command of language. It is all the more astounding when one not only considers Shakespeare's sparse formal education but the curriculum of the day. There were no dictionaries; the first such lexical work for speakers of English was compiled by schoolmaster Robert Cawdrey as *A Table Alphabeticall* in 1604. Although certain grammatical treatises were published in Shakespeare's day, organised grammar texts would not appear until the 1700s. Shakespeare as a youth would have no more systematically studied his own language than any educated man of the period. Despite this, Shakespeare is credited by the Oxford English Dictionary with the introduction of nearly 3,000 words into the language.

Shakespeare wrote for an audience over 400 years ago but despite this, Shakespeare's English is only one linguistic generation removed from that which we speak today.

Use the following link to study the the time periods and differences between Old, Middle, and Early Modern, and Modern English:

<http://www.bardweb.net/language.html>

Although the Elizabethan dialect differs slightly from Modern English, the principles are generally the same. There are some (present day) anomalies with prepositional usage and verb agreement, and certainly a number of Shakespeare's words have shifted meanings or dropped, with age, from the present vocabulary. Word order, as the language shifted from Middle to Early Modern English, was still a bit more flexible, and Shakespeare wrote dramatic poetry, not standard prose, which gave some greater license in expression. However, Elizabethan remains a sibling of our own tongue, and hence, accessible.

This facility with language, and the art with which he employed its usage, is why Shakespeare is as relevant today as he was in his own time.

Source: [bardweb.net](http://www.bardweb.net)

Shakespeare's work features blank verse based on iambic pentameter. Iambic pentameter means that each line of verse can be broken into five "feet", however; at times the fairies use verse that has four "feet" not five. Whilst blank verse tends not to rhyme, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* Shakespeare makes comic use of rhyming couplets. Consider:

- > What has just happened when the lovers start rhyming?

- > What are the fairies doing when they speak in four-foot lines?



SHAKESPEARE'S LANGUAGE ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Filter's production is "riotous" and "irreverent", showing less regard for Shakespeare's original text than other versions. Consider how the language has been contemporised. Consider the way we now communicate so often via social media, using fewer words than ever.

Write the scene below as a Twitter conversation (140 characters per tweet).

Assume the identity of the play's characters to create their Twitter profiles and handles (names), and use appropriate hashtags. The conversation can include other characters. For example:

New Tweet

Lysander (@LysanderLover)

@hermia I think we're lost. Let's camp here. #liewithme

New Tweet

Hermia (@hermia)

@LysanderLover not a chance, buddy! #nicetry #findyourowngrassyknoll

New Tweet

Helena (@paintedmaypole)

@hermia @LysanderLover where you at? #lost #lovemyfriends #fridaynights

LYSANDER

Fair love, you faint with wandering in the wood.

And to speak troth, I have forgot our way.

We'll rest us, Hermia, if you think it good.

And tarry for the comfort of the day.

HERMIA

Be it so, Lysander. Find you out a bed,

For I upon this bank will rest my head.

LYSANDER

One turf shall serve as pillow for us both.

One heart, one bed, two bosoms, and one troth.

HERMIA

Nay, good Lysander. For my sake, my dear,

Lie further off yet. Do not lie so near.

HERMIA

No, Lysander. Please, for my sake, sleep a little farther away. Don't sleep so close to me.

LYSANDER

O, take the sense, sweet, of my innocence.
Love takes the meaning in love's conference.
I mean that my heart unto yours is knit
So that but one heart we can make of it.
Two bosoms interchainèd with an oath—
So then two bosoms and a single troth.
Then by your side no bed room me deny.
For, lying so, Hermia, I do not lie.

HERMIA

Lysander riddles very prettily.
Now much beshrew my manners and my pride
If Hermia meant to say Lysander lied.
But, gentle friend, for love and courtesy
Lie further off in human modesty.
Such separation as may well be said
Becomes a virtuous bachelor and a maid.
So far be distant. And, good night, sweet friend.
Thy love ne'er alter till thy sweet life end!

LYSANDER

Amen, amen to that fair prayer, say I.
And then end life when I end loyalty!
Here is my bed. Sleep give thee all his rest!

Watch this example of a Twitter Project:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NJ1VRr4Hyzw>

SHAKESPEARE'S LANGUAGE AND THE NATURAL WORLD

Shakespeare uses a lot of big language and he is known for drawing influence from the natural world (plants and animals). Examples of this can be found in many of his plays. Whilst we can never fully understand why he chose to do this it could be suggested that many people in England in the 16th and 17th Century were more in tune with nature and the seasons than we are now. Their knowledge would have influenced how they worked, ate or interacted with each other.

A Midsummer Night's Dream is filled with references to nature and animals. This is partly because a large amount of the play is set in a forest but also because the story draws so much from mythical creatures such as fairies, widely believed to have a strong relationship with the plants and animals around them.

Shakespeare uses suggestive names for the Mechanicals and the fairies, and evocative language to create a dreamlike mood, which helps us to suspend disbelief and believe that there is something magical happening. Detailed descriptions of the beauty and magic of the natural world are shared by Oberon and the fairies.

Write a description of your favourite natural place. Consider all the senses (sight, smell, touch, taste, sound) and choose adjectives that create strong imagery. Consider using Indigenous flora, fauna and place names. Read your description to a partner. Play with vocal expression, pace, pause and volume.

I must go seek some dewdrops here.

And hang a pearl in every cowslip's ear

Fairy, Act 2, Scene 1

A bank where the wild thyme blows,

Where oxlips and the nodding violet grows,

Quite overcanopied with luscious woodbine,

With sweet musk-roses, and with eglantine.

There sleeps Titania sometime of the night,

Lulled in these flowers with dances and delight

Oberon, Act 2, Scene 1

ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PERSPECTIVE

1. Is there an Indigenous story from your local area that addresses similar themes (love, dreams, family feuds, the irrational behaviour of young lovers)? The traditional custodians of the Sunshine Coast, Moreton Bay and Burnett Mary regions, the Gubbi Gubbi (Kabi Kabi), tell the story of the local Mountains, forming when Ninderry and Coolum fought violently over Maroochy.
2. Is there an Indigenous "Midsummer" or a similar celebration? Find out about the "seasons" observed by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Was there ever a "magical" time of year? Discuss.

MEET ME IN THE FOREST

Entrances and Exits

Remarkable moments can occur when one person is left alone on stage.

Anne Bogart, *The Viewpoints Book*

Shakespeare didn't use a curtain to denote an end to each scene or act. Instead, he would have everyone onstage exit at the end of one scene and have one or more characters enter for the next.

Students explore the space and join a partner to continue exploring the space in pairs. Play with proximity and pace, and simple entrances and exits. Students enter from opposite sides of the space to meet in the centre of the space / centre stage before they exit in opposite directions. Play with the possibilities: they may be strangers / they may know each other / they may have known each other once / they may not want to see each other etc. Play with role, relationship and status. Consider body language, gesture and facial expression. Play with movement, mood, tension and the use of stillness. Play with silence. Discuss focus.

TWO TRUTHS AND A LIE

Students sit or stand in a circle. Each student thinks of three statements about themselves. Two statements must be true and one statement must be a lie. Students must determine which of the statements is a lie. This can be done with a vote or by inviting individuals to answer.

VARIATION: TWO TRUTHS AND A DREAM

Instead of sharing a lie, students share a dream, a desire or a wish.

POST PERFORMANCE

FORMING: CHARACTER OUTLINES

In pairs, students trace around their partner's body on the floor using chalk or on butcher's paper using pen. Students choose a character and work together to write as much detail as they can inside the body to describe their chosen character. Consider what the character feels and says about themselves, and what is said *to* the character and *about* the character by others. Consider the character's relationships, objectives and obstacles.



FORMING / PRESENTING: IMPROVISATION

SHAKESPEAREAN INSULTS

To insult is to slur, offend and upset

In pairs, select two insults from the list below. Say the insult without emotion (remain neutral). Repeat the insult sarcastically. Repeat the insult angrily. Repeat the insult gleefully.

Consider the modern day equivalent of each insult. How would you get the same message across using modern English? Be aware that you may have to curb your language for the classroom and give each other a big hug after this exercise!

VARIATION: EMOTIONAL REPLAY

In groups of four, students improvise a scene that uses two Shakespearean insults. Play the scene without emotion (remain neutral). Replay the scene two or three times more, with a different emotion informing each replay. i.e. The scenario stays the same but each time it is played out with a different emotion. For example, you are at a three-day music festival without bottled water. Play the neutral scene and then replay the scene with all four performers showing the same emotion:

1. sadness
2. excitement
3. embarrassment

INSULTS

You counterfeit, you puppet, you!

Out, dog! Out, cur!

You painted maypole.

You juggler, you cankerblossom, you thief of love!

Out of my door, you witch, you rag, you baggage, you runnion.

Get you gone, you dwarf: You minimus of hindering knotgrass, you bead, you acorn!

Tempt not too much the hatred of my spirit, for I am sick when I do look on thee

Out tawny Tartar, out! Out loathéd med'cine! O, hated potion, hence!

FORMING:

MYO (Make Your Own) Shakespearean Insults

Optional: MYO (Make Your Own) Memes

Using a selection from the table below make your own Shakespearean Insult or Meme using memegenerator.net (or empower students by allowing them to choose their preferred app) and share with the class.

Shakespeare Insult Kit

Combine one word from each of the three columns below, prefaced with "Thou":

Column 1	Column 2	Column 3
artless	base-court	apple-john
bawdy	bat-fowling	baggage
beslubbering	beef-witted	barnacle
bootless	beetle-headed	bladder
churlish	boil-brained	boar-pig
cockered	clapper-clawed	bugbear
clouted	clay-brained	bum-bailey
craven	common-kissing	canker-blossom

For more Shakespearean insults go to http://www.pangloss.com/seidel/shake_rule.html

FORMING: Dramatic Treatment

Ben Jonson famously stated that Shakespeare is “not of an age but for all time”. Discuss what this statement means for today’s theatre directors.

Re-read the Interview with Director, Ferdy Roberts. He notes, “we had to very quickly make some very bold artistic choices to do with the text. All of those choices came from the play, they didn’t come from a planned concept. We didn’t have a model box, we just had actors, musicians and a script.”

Roberts also makes a point of saying, “we don’t ignore the audience - the play is set in the here and now. We haven’t set it in 1920’s New York or war torn Bosnia. We have gone it’s here, it’s live and the audience are as much a part of it as we are.”

As Director, and using Filter’s production as inspiration, select another of Shakespeare’s plays and present a folio of concepts to demonstrate the way in which you would stage the play in a contemporary context for a modern audience.

Consider how you would sensitively and convincingly communicate dramatic meaning by manipulating the Elements of Drama.

Consider the message you want to get across to a new audience of secondary school students and members of the general public.

Use specific examples - excerpts from the text, design ideas, technology - to support your Director’s Vision. Pitch your Vision to the class.

FORMING / PRESENTING / RESPONDING:

Performance Skills

The writer's job is to tell the story. The actor's job is to make the story come alive. Research and discuss three different approaches to acting / training actors. Select from the list below.

Choose one acting approach to discuss in detail and consider the way that you, the actor, will use the technique to prepare a monologue from Shakespeare's text. Consider The Viewpoints, specifically: gesture and kinaesthetic response.

Rehearse your monologue and perform it for the class.

Reflect on your performance. Consider the way you used the space, voice and movement, and your knowledge of the text and a range of acting techniques to enhance your performance. What will you do to improve how you feel about future performances?

APPROACHES TO ACTING

CONSTANTIN STANISLAVSKI

Constantin Stanislavski's work signalled a shift in 20th century acting and inspired a whole new generation of techniques and teachers. In addition to changing the face of acting worldwide, Stanislavski's Moscow Art Theatre was at the forefront of the naturalistic theatre movement in the Soviet Union and in Europe. His approach incorporates spiritual realism, emotional memory, dramatic and self-analysis, and disciplined practice.

LEE STRASBURG

An actor himself, Lee Strasberg's method was inspired by Stanislavski's system and the Moscow Art Theatre. His "method," derived from Stanislavski, encourages actors to magnify and intensify their connection to the material by creating their characters' emotional experiences in their own lives.

STELLA ADLER

Stella Adler was the only American actor to study with Stanislavski himself, and developed her own "method" built on the work of Stanislavski and Lee Strasberg. Adler's technique differs from Strasberg's in that it emphasises imagination in addition to emotional recall. She famously said, "Drawing on the emotions I experienced—for example, when my mother died—to create a role is sick and schizophrenic. If that is acting, I don't want to do it." Though Marlon Brando's lifelike acting style is often attributed to Strasberg's Method, he was actually trained by Stella Adler.

JERZY GROTOWSKI

Grotowski and his small groups of actors experimented with the physical, spiritual and ritualistic aspects of theatre, the nature of role, and the relationship between actor and spectator. Grotowski coined the term 'poor theatre', defining a performance style that rid itself of the excesses of theatre, such as lavish costumes and detailed sets (hence 'poor'). Acting in the style of Poor Theatre places emphasis on the physical skill of the performer and uses props for transformation into other objects, sometimes of great significance.

MEISNER TECHNIQUE

Sanford Meisner developed this unique approach in the 1930s, after working with Lee Strasberg and Stella Adler at The Group Theatre. Like Stanislavski, Strasberg, and Adler before him, Meisner taught his students to “live truthfully under given imaginary circumstances.” His approach is an imminently practical one; his famous repetition exercise, in which two actors sit opposite each other and respond in the moment with a repeated phrase, breaks down overly structured technique and builds openness, flexibility and listening skills.

PRACTICAL AESTHETICS

This action-based acting technique was developed by playwright David Mamet and actor William H. Macy, and incorporates elements of Stanislavsky and Meisner. It involves a four-step scene analysis that simply focuses on pursuit of an action; actors are taught to focus on what is literally happening in the scene and what is desired of the other characters.

IVANA CHUBBUCK

The Chubbuck Technique teaches actors how to use their emotions not as an end result, but as a way to empower a goal. The actor must understand himself thoroughly and have the tools to break down a script in order to make interesting and dynamic behaviour appear and feel like a subconscious process. The Chubbuck Technique stimulates this behaviour, allowing for this natural and powerful human drive to be realised.

FORMING: DEVISING PHYSICAL THEATRE

In groups of four devise a sequence of movement that is inspired by an excerpt from Shakespeare’s text. Consider *The Viewpoints*, specifically: architecture, shape, spatial relationship, tempo and repetition, acrobatics and contemporary dance, and working as an ensemble to create a dynamic performance piece of 2-3 minutes duration. Select from the passages below.

Consider the ways in which sound, music and song, imagery and lighting can be manipulated to support your group’s message. Be creative and think in terms that are more abstract than literal.

1.

ROBIN

How now, spirit? Whither wander you?

FAIRY

Over hill, over dale,
Thorough bush, thorough brier,
Over park, over pale,
Thorough flood, thorough fire.
I do wander everywhere
Swifter than the moon’s sphere.



And I serve the fairy queen
To dew her orbs upon the green.
The cowslips tall her pensioners be.
In their gold coats spots you see.
Those be rubies, fairy favors. In those freckles live their savors.
I must go seek some dewdrops here
And hang a pearl in every cowslip's ear.
Farewell, thou lob of spirits. I'll be gone.
Our queen and all our elves come here anon.

ROBIN

The king doth keep his revels here tonight.
Take heed the queen come not within his sight.
For Oberon is passing fell and wrath
Because that she, as her attendant hath
A lovely boy stolen from an Indian king.
She never had so sweet a changeling.
And jealous Oberon would have the child
Knight of his train, to trace the forests wild.
But she perforce withholds the lovèd boy,
Crowns him with flowers, and makes him all her joy.
And now they never meet in grove or green,
By fountain clear or spangled starlight sheen.
But they do square, that all their elves for fear
Creep into acorn cups and hide them there.

2.

My gentle Puck, come hither. Thou rememberest
Since once I sat upon a promontory
And heard a mermaid on a dolphin's back
Uttering such dulcet and harmonious breath
That the rude sea grew civil at her song
And certain stars shot madly from their spheres
To hear the seamaid's music?

ROBIN

I remember.

OBERON

That very time I saw (but thou couldst not)
Flying between the cold moon and the Earth,
Cupid all armed. A certain aim he took
At a fair vestal thronèd by the west,
And loosed his love shaft smartly from his bow
As it should pierce a hundred thousand hearts.
But I might see young Cupid's fiery shaft
Quenched in the chaste beams of the watery moon,
And the imperial votaress passèd on,
In maiden meditation, fancy-free.
Yet marked I where the bolt of Cupid fell.
It fell upon a little western flower,
Before milk-white, now purple with love's wound.
And maidens call it "love-in-idleness."
Fetch me that flower. The herb I showed thee once.
The juice of it on sleeping eyelids laid
Will make or man or woman madly dote
Upon the next live creature that it sees.
Fetch me this herb, and be thou here again
Ere the leviathan can swim a league.

ROBIN

I'll put a girdle round about the Earth
In forty minutes.

3.

QUINCE

Gentles, perchance you wonder at this show.
But wonder on, till truth make all things plain.
This man is Pyramus, if you would know.
This beauteous lady Thisbe is certain.
This man, with lime and roughcast, doth present
Wall, that vile wall which did these lovers sunder.
And through Wall's chink, poor souls, they are content
To whisper. At the which let no man wonder.

This man, with lanthorn, dog, and bush of thorn,
Presenteth Moonshine. For, if you will know,
By moonshine did these lovers think no scorn
To meet at Ninus' tomb—there, there to woo.
This grisly beast, which “Lion” hight by name,
The trusty Thisbe, coming first by night,
Did scare away, or rather did affright.
And, as she fled, her mantle she did fall,
Which Lion vile with bloody mouth did stain.
Anon comes Pyramus, sweet youth and tall,
And finds his trusty Thisbe's mantle slain.
Whereat, with blade, with bloody blameful blade,
He bravely broached his boiling bloody breast.
And Thisbe, tarrying in mulberry shade,
His dagger drew, and died. For all the rest,
Let Lion, Moonshine, Wall, and lovers twain
At large discourse, while here they do remain.

SHAKESPEARE'S COMEDY

Shakespeare weaves comedy throughout all three strands of the plot. The most ridiculous comedy comes from the working class “Mechanicals”, with their bastardisation of the play, Pyramus and Thisbe. The Mechanicals, unlike Shakespeare's other clowns and court jesters, are not wise or worldly but incredibly stupid. In a very contemporary way, we laugh *at* them rather than *with* them. The Mechanicals are the contemporary *lazzi*.

DISCUSS:

1. What purpose do the Mechanicals serve in the play?
2. How does Shakespeare use humour in the Mechanicals' scenes?
3. How do the Mechanicals act as foils to the lovers and royals in the play?

FORMING: MARKETING / SOCIAL MEDIA

Lyn Gardner (The Guardian) states, “The answer is clearly for theatres to embrace social media in all its forms, and use their natural creativity to do it well. That doesn't simply mean a website on which theatregoers can see what's playing and buy tickets, or maybe read a blog (which is often a thinly disguised bit of puffery written by some poor actor during rehearsals). Neither does it mean tweeting nice things about your own show. It means creating sites that are as lively, reciprocal and outward-looking as any other forms of social media, that draw people in and make them want to stay and poke about. And it means creating a relationship with audiences: allowing them to understand what you are trying to do, and being transparent enough for them to comment both favourably and unfavourably. In this way, theatres can genuinely share thinking, promote discussion and look beyond the boundaries of the individual organisation.”

Devise a social media strategy to promote a contemporary production of one of Shakespeare's plays. (For continuity have students use the play they selected for Forming: Dramatic Treatment).

Which social media platform would you utilise? What would you do to engage your audience and build community? How would you invite feedback from your followers? Would you expect your campaign to boost ticket sales? Discuss.

Source: <http://www.theguardian.com/stage/theatreblog/2010/apr/18/theatre-digital-twitter-facebook-social-media>

<http://www.dream2016.org.uk/company-news/twitter-through-the-eyes-of-a-fairy-a-smashing-opening-night/>

RESPONDING: BE THE CRITIC

Write a critical response (800 - 1000 words) to Filter's production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Include a brief synopsis and production details. Analyse and evaluate the way in which the Elements of Drama have been manipulated by the directors to create dramatic meaning. Is Shakespeare's message clear? Is the Vision clear? Are there any directorial choices you wish to discuss? Is the acting effective? Does the aesthetic appeal, and does the design work to support the performers and the production's themes? Are the events of sound, imagery and lighting successfully incorporated? Does the production successfully communicate Shakespeare's message and entertain a savvy contemporary audience?

Use examples from the production to justify your opinions.

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