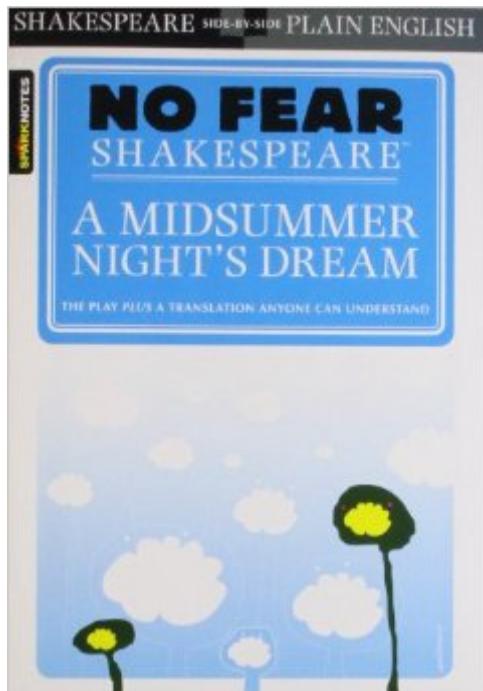


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A Midsummer Night's Dream (No Fear Shakespeare)



Synopsis

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- The complete text of the original play
- A line-by-line translation that puts Shakespeare into everyday language
- A complete list of characters with descriptions
- Plenty of helpful commentary

Book Information

Paperback: 192 pages

Publisher: SparkNotes; Study Guide ed. edition (July 3, 2003)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1586638483

ISBN-13: 978-1586638481

Product Dimensions: 0.8 x 5.5 x 7.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

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A piece of magic on the stage or screen--or on the electronic paper! This is probably Shakespeare's most delightful comedy, and I'm glad I have read it in several editions and seen various versions of the play on large screen, small screen, and stage. I wish schools would teach this instead of trying to get the kids to understand Romeo and Juliet and Julius Caesar. Even if they don't understand this one, they can tell that it's fun and somewhat vulgar, with Bottom running around in an ass's head and the Queen of the Fairies falling in temporary love with him. "Fairy" might not yet have had its most recent meaning, but Bottom in an ass's head suggested exactly the same thing then that it suggests now. While I was getting my doctorate in English, my Shakespeare teacher worshiped Shakespeare instead of enjoying it for what it was worth. She almost went ballistic when somebody pointed out vulgarities and slapstick in the plays, because we too were supposed to worship Shakespeare instead of analyzing him. Sorry, but I was right and she was wrong. Shakespeare was a very bawdy writer, and he enjoyed being bawdy. DO NOT see the movie *Dead Poet's Society* without reading or

watching this play first.

Okay, so maybe I'm not the world's greatest living expert on Shakespeare, considering the fact that, other than this, I have only read Romeo and Juliet. But hey, I thought it was great. Characters like Bottom and Robin Goodfellow were hilarious. Shakespeare seems to know how to make a tangled mess of everyone's lives very well. It amazes me his power to make that seem funny at times and then seem incredibly sad at others. I have to say, I really enjoyed this comedy better than his tragedy. I'm reading The Taming of The Shrew next. I don't know if I can handle Hamlet or Othello right now. By the way, if you're like me and you need someone to explain Shakespeare's language to you, I highly recommend the New Folger Library Copy with explanations on the opposite page.

There are many reasons for the popularity of Shakespeare's "A Midsummer Night's Dream", not the least among them is the almost unique joining of the humorous misuse of language (by the tradesman actors) and the utter beauty of language and expression (by Puck, Oberon, and Titania). One usually gets a farce of language or an attempt at the sublime. Here the music of the two enriches both. How can one put together these four disparate plotlines into such a wonderful whole? The quartet of lovers and their mixed and varied attentions forms the basis of the plot in the comedy and it is a delightful enough farce. The squabble of Demitrius and Lysander over Hermia while Helena pines over Demitrius, Oberon and Titania's argument over one of her servants and Oberon's use of Puck to manipulate Titania's affections including Puck's mistaken application of Oberon's potion to Lysander's eyes, the pending marriage of Thesus and Hippolyta, and the wonderfully, magically awful play being put on by the tradesman for the nobles. Putting all this into a wonderful whole is an achievement that I believe is unmatched. I do want to say that this play has suffered a great deal in our sex obsessed age. We have foisted on this play an eroticism that it does not claim for itself nor display. While the "adult" couples (Thesus & Hippolyta, Oberon & Titania) interact and talk in ways that include that aspect of their lives, the youthful couples always talk and act in ways that are concerned with propriety and modesty. Bottom is hardly the lust blinded brute depicted in modern productions. He is much more interested in eating and chatting with his Fairy friends than Titania. It is Titania who is under the influence of the magic flower who is infatuated with Bottom while he remains quite oblivious to her desires. In any case, this is a fine edition of the work with many helps for the reader. Almost half the book is filled with introductory essays that provide background on the play and its text. The play itself is full of notes to help the reader understand idioms and definitions of words that are obscure, unique to Shakespeare, or that have changed

meaning since 1596. There are four Appendices that cover source materials for the play, realigned text that the editors believe were corrupted in the sources we have for the play and the last one is the prologue to the play that Peter Quince butchers to the amusement of the nobles. The appendix provides us with the prologue with correct punctuation, as Quince should have read it. All the background material is interesting and enriches our understanding of the play. But it is the play that matters and is so much fun to read.

I'm surprised that none of the reviews I've read (I didn't read them all, but about 25) even mention the pictures in this wonderful edition by Bruce Coville. I've read the play and adore it, seen it several times, etc. But the reason one would buy this book rather than Shakespeare's words is for the clear, modern English storytelling and the gorgeous images. This is a wonderful book to introduce Shakespeare to anyone. I personally love the poetry of Shakespeare's lines but know that they are difficult for children and Shakespeare newbies. This book tells the story in clear words and great pictures, full of classical fairies and beautiful maidens and valorous youths (plus some great facial expressions on Bottom). Worth every penny.

I bought this audio recording of MSND to use as I taught the play to my 10th graders. The actors do well, and this is the complete version of the play. However, some of the character sound effects can get annoying, as well as some of the music. For whatever reason, the faeries' voices have a slight echo effect, which isn't too annoying, but when a faery--such as Puck or Oberon--is placing a spell on someone, there is an extreme echo placed on the voice. The echo was so extreme for the end of Act III, when Puck is confusing Lysander and Demetrius, that it gave me a slight headache. Also, while the use of a little music can be nice, many of my students didn't like it and I found that the music was on a little too long in some places and it stalls the progression of the play. The "braying" of Bottom sounds more like a pig grunt, which gets really old after awhile. Overall, I would recommend this version to those who don't mind slight annoyances like these--and maybe I'm being nitpicky--but if you think that those will wear on you, try to find another version.

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