A Midsummer Night’s Dream Study Guide

Act 1
Identifying Facts
1. As the play opens, what event arc Theseus mind Hippolyta anticipating? When will it take place, and where?
2. Why does Egeus angrily bring his daughter Hermia before the Duke? What choice docs Theseus give Hermia? How long does she have to make up her mind?
3. What plan does Lysander propose to Hermia?
4. What problem does Helena have when we first see her?
5. In her soliloquy at the end of Scene i, what does Helena decide to do, and why?
6. In Scene ii, what play are the Athenian trades- men planning to present at the court?
7. Who is assigned to play the pan of the love r? Who will play the lady?
8. According to Quince, where and when will the players rehearse?

Interpreting Meanings
1. What does Egeus's first long speech in Scene i suggest about his character? What conflict does this speech establish?
2. The choice Theseus gives Hermia seems harsh and stern. What irony do you see in the dead-line that Theseus sets for Hermia's decision?
3. What arguments does Lysander use when he tries to persuade the Duke that he should be allowed to marry Hermia?
4. What do Hermia's speeches in Scene i suggest about her character?
5. What points about the nature of love does Helena make in her soliloquy at the end of Scene i? How do you think these assertions may foreshadow the action to come?
6. How does the tone of Scene ii contrast with that of the first scene?
7. Nick Bottom, the weaver, seems to enjoy the limelight in Scene ii. What do his comments about the forthcoming play-within-a-play re-veal about Bottom’s character? How do the other tradesmen contrast with Bottom?
8. Quince announces at the end of Scene ii that the tradesmen will meet the following night to rehearse their play by moonlight. When you consider this information together with the plans of Lysander and Hermia at the end of Scene i, what may Quince's plan foreshadow about the complications of the plot in A Midsummer Night’s Dream?

Act II
Identifying Facts
1. Where does Scene i take place?
2. According to Puck, why is Oberon angry at Titania?
3. According to Titania, what are some of the effects on nature of Oberon’s quarrel with her? Why won’t she give in to Oberon?
4. How does Oberon plan to revenge himself on Titania? Whose aid does he enlist to accomplish his plan?
5. What further orders does Oberon issue after he witness the quarrel in scene i between Demetrius and Helena? How do these orders backfire in Scene ii? Explain Puck’s mistake.
6. Explain the consequences of this mistake for each of the four lovers: Hermia, Helena, Ly-sander, and Demetrius.

Interpreting Meanings
1. The quarrel between Oberon and Titania introduces a fresh complication into the plot of play. What is this complication, and what emotions motivate the behavior of the fairy king and queen?
2. How would you describe the character of Puck, as he is portrayed in the first scene of this act’?
3. Act II Scene i is notable for its setting. What details in the setting contrast with the settings of both scenes in Act I? What atmosphere, or mood, does this different setting held to establish?
4. Oberon plays his trick on Titania to revenge himself because of her stubbornness. He has a different motive, however, when he orders Puck to squeeze the love juice on the eyelids of Demetrius. What is paradoxical abut Oberon’s reasons for these actions?
5. In Scene ii, three characters fall asleep in rapid succession: Titania, Lysander, and Hermia. How do you think this sequence of actions may be related to the play's title?

6. The predominant verse form in A Midsummer Night's Dream is blank verse or unrhymed iambic pentameter. Where and how does Shakespeare vary this verse form in Act II? What reasons can you suggest for these variations?

7. Consider Shakespeare’s imagery in this act. What seems to be the most significant patterns, or clusters, of imagery? Explain your answer with some specific examples from the dialogue.

8. Puck seems to make his mistake casually, for easily understandable reasons. How might his mistake symbolize a more profound, underlying truth (about both the world of the fairies and the mortal world)?

9. During Act II, Helena becomes even more unhappy than she was in Act 1. What Sympathetic traits in her character suggest that Shakespeare intended us to pity her, rather than to regard her as a whining complainer?

10. How does Hermia's speech at the end of Act II help to increase the audience's suspense about forthcoming events? In addition to suspense concerning four lovers, what other subplot in the action of the play are you curious about at the end of Act II?

ACT III
Identifying Facts
1. What are some of the problems Bottom pints out to his friends about the play they are rehearsing? How do the tradesmen decide to solve each of these problems?
2. How is Bottom transformed by Puck? What is the reaction of Bottom’s friends? What is Titania’s reaction?
3. Who are Peaseblossom, Cobweb, Moth, and Mustard seed? What orders does Titania give them?
4. How does Oberon learn of Puck's mistake?
5. Why is Hermia angry at Helena in Scene ii?
6. What plan does Oberon devise to correct Puck's mistake?
7. How does Puck accomplish Oberon’s plan at the end of Scene ii? What prediction or promise does Puck make?

Interpreting Meanings
1. In Act II, scene i, the tradesmen create humor with numerous malapropisms in their dialogue. A malapropism is a humorous misuse of words, usually resulting from a confusion of similar sounds. [The term was coined after Mrs. Malaprop, a character in a comedy called The Rivals by the eighteenth-century English playwright, Richard Brinsley Sheridan.] Explain at least three examples of malapropism in this scene.
2. Dramatic irony is a pointed discrepancy between what the audience knows and what the characters on stage know. What is the source of the dramatic irony in Bottom’s transformation? How would you characterize the tone of this irony?
3. Bottom does not seem at all disconcerted by his new role in the world of the fairies. What does his behavior in Act III, Scene i reveal about his character?
4. We know that the tradesmen are rehearsing a play-within-a-play to present at the court of Theseus, in honor of the Duke’s wedding. What details in Act III suggest that the events in the forest are also a symbolic play-within-a-play, at least from the perspective of Oberon and Puck?
5. Describe the motivations of each of the four mortal lovers - Hermia, Helena, Lysander, and Demetrius - in Act III, Scene ii.
6. How does the action in the find part of Act III, Scene ii echo or parallel the action in Act II, Scene ii? What might be the significance of this parallel for the themes of the play?
7. At the end of this act, puck takes action to correct the mistake he made in Act 11. How do his deeds and his concluding speech comprise the structural climax, or turning point, of the play?
8. In Act III, what conflicts remain to be resolved? What is your prediction for how each conflict will or will not be resolved?

Act IV
Identifying Facts
1. Describe the humorous scene that opens Act IV.
2. Why does Oberon decide to "undo" his enchantment of Titania and Bottom?
3. Why have Theseus and Hippolyta come to the forest?
4. After the four lovers awaken, what does Theseus decide about their future?
5. At the beginning of Scene ii, why are the players upset?
6. What instructions does Bottom give the players for their final preparations?

Interpreting Meanings
1. Identify as many sources of humor as you can in the first part of Scene i with Bottom, Titania, and the fairies.
2. Reread Oberon's speech in Scene i, beginning, "Welcome, good Robin." What mixture of motives does this speech reveal?
3. How does Titania's reaction when she awakens foreshadow the reactions of the mortal lovers when they wake up later in Scene i?
4. In scene i, several characters refer to the approaching dawn. What symbolic significance might (his detail of setting have for the plot as it unfolds in this act?
5. Explain how the long speech of Demetrius in Scene i reveals him as a dynamic character.
6. As Theseus and Hippolyta discuss the sounds of the hunting hounds, they use imagery that seems paradoxical: "so musical a discord" and "such sweet thunder." How does Theseus apply the same paradoxical imagery to the new situation of the four young lovers?
7. How does Bottom's soliloquy at the end of Scene i echo the themes of illusion and dreaming that we have heard about before in this scene?
8. The very brief second scene seems necessary for one of the subplots, in that it reunites Bottom with his friends and prepares for the play-within-a-play in the final act. This scene is also enjoyable because it further characterizes Bottom. At this point in the play, how would you compare the characters of Bottom and Puck?

Act V
Identifying Facts
1. According to Theseus in his speech at the beginning of this act, what resemblance links the lunatic, the lover, and the poet?
2. Who is Philostrate?
3. Theseus considers a number of possible plays for performance after supper. Why does he choose the play on Pyramus and Thisby?
4. Summarize the events that Quince relates in the prologue to "Pyramus and Thisby."
5. How do the spectators react to the play-within-a-play?
6. How does the evening's entertainment conclude for the mortal character?
7. Who appears in the final scene, and why?

Interpreting Meanings
1. What new insight do we gain into the character of Theseus from his long opening speech in this act about the lunatic, the lover, and the poet?
2. What is humorous about the way Quince delivers his prologue to "Pyramus and Thisby"?
3. How does the style of Pyramus's speech beginning, "Sweet Moon, I thank thee for thy sunny beams" furnish a parody of a typical lament in tragedy or melodrama?
4. Many readers have noted that the mythical plot of "Pyramus and Thisby" contains striking parallels to the plot of Romeo and Juliet. In that tragedy, written about the same time as A Midsummer Night's Dream, Shakespeare told the story of "star-crossed lovers," whose fateful misunderstanding of events led to their deaths by suicide. How might the subject matter of the whole play-within-a-play be linked thematically to the main plot of A Midsummer Night's Dream? What turns the play-within-a-play into a farcical variation of the main plot of Shakespeare's comedy, and into a comic inversion of me plot of Romeo and Juliet?
5. How do Theseus and Hippolyta differ in their reactions to the play-within-a-play? How may Theseus's reaction be related to the themes of A Midsummer Night's Dream as whole?
6. Explain how the four main strands of Shakespeare's plot all come together in Act V.