



# SANTA CRUZ SHAKESPEARE EDUCATION PROGRAM

## Week Three With *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

Below you will find information about the Elizabethan Era (which is when Shakespeare wrote *Midsummer*), a lesson plan on conflict resolution, and further thinking on the governing of the Athenians in this play.

We encourage you to share these resources with your colleagues, and if you would like to share your work or any of your students' work on this platform, we would love to engage with you! Send questions or comments to [education@santacruzshakespeare.org](mailto:education@santacruzshakespeare.org).



### Life in Elizabethan England

We read a lot about Queen Elizabeth and the grandeur of her court, but have you ever wondered what it would be like to live in the late 16th century as a common person? Shakespeare would have been influenced by the laws and social norms of Elizabethan England; in particular those rules of marriage, family duty, and love which were written into *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. To help you prepare your students for reading this play, take a look at [Life in Elizabethan England: A Compendium of Common](#)

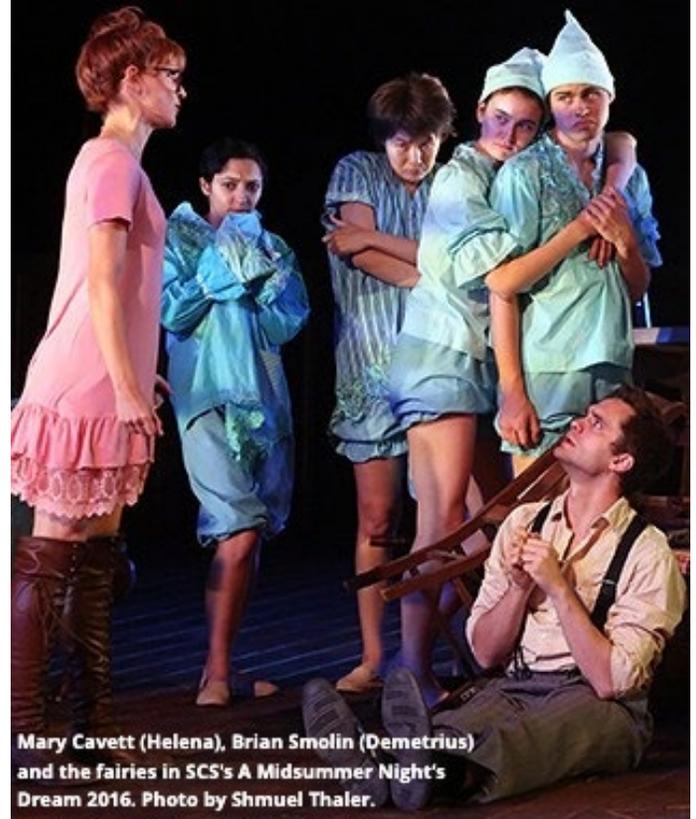
Knowledge. The sections on [love and marriage](#), [masters and servants](#), and [virtue and vice](#) will be particularly helpful.

## Conflict Resolutions & Happy Endings

Funded by the National Endowment of the Arts, EDSITEment! created a lesson plan for students to identify the conflicts and resolutions between the Athenian characters in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The guiding questions in this lesson are:

- What conflicts presented in the play need to be resolved in order for the characters to reach happy endings?
- What constitutes a happy ending?

This lesson has multiple activities that include character development, conflict resolution, and plot predictions, just to name a few. This lesson is traditionally for inside the classroom, but can easily be altered for distance learning. Lesson Link: [A Midsummer Night's Dream: Conflict Resolution and Happy Endings](#)



## Dramaturgy



### ATHENS AND THE FOREST

*Before the time I did Lysander see, Seemed Athens as a paradise to me. O, then, what graces in my love do dwell That he hath turned a heaven unto a hell!* (Hermia, I.1.204-207)

*A Midsummer Night's Dream* material by Kendra Dority (UC Santa Cruz Public Scholar) and Ashley Herum (Assistant Dramaturg, SCS 2016).

When Hermia exclaims that Athens has lost its paradisiac qualities since she has fallen for Lysander, she highlights the incompatibility between her own desire and the city's laws—and shows how her desire can reshape her perception of her home. Indeed, the first act of *Midsummer* presents a key source of tension for the play's characters, that is, the tension between personal desire and the norms that govern civic life. As such, the forest outside of Athens is seen as a refuge from the city's restrictions. When Lysander hatches his plan to escape with Hermia to his aunt's house, he is drawn to its location—a "remote seven leagues" from Athens—where he speculates that "the sharp Athenian law/ Cannot pursue us" (I.1.159, 161-163). Similarly, the "rude mechanicals," the group of players who prepare a performance for Theseus and Hippolyta, view the forest as a safe haven. Quince tells the players to meet "a mile without the town, by moonlight" in order to keep their play secret from meddlers (I.2.91-95). In such visions, the forest seems to offer a space of freedom, for desire, secrecy, artistry, and for the imagination.

#### For Further Thinking . . .

- When reading *Midsummer*, consider how the play presents the nature of Athenian law, especially in the first act. What do we learn about the laws and social norms that structure Athens and guide its citizens? In Egeus' complaints against Hermia and his appeal to the "ancient privilege of Athens," for example, we learn much about the ways that social space is governed by familial and gender hierarchies. In Santa Cruz Shakespeare's production, Egeus has been transformed into Egea, Hermia's mother. How does this change affect your understanding of Athens and its social landscape?
  - Compare the space of Athens to the space of the forest. To what extent is Lysander's speculation correct—that Athenian law "cannot pursue" its citizens into the forest? Do other laws or norms guide social interactions within the forest? Who or what (if anything) has authority there?
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