



# SANTA CRUZ SHAKESPEARE EDUCATION PROGRAM

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

Below you will find a study guide with questions to ask before and after reading or viewing the play, further thinking on Shakespeare's influences and transformations throughout *Midsummer*, and a performance lesson students can engage with during Distance Learning.

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).

### Before The Play Begins

Before reading or viewing *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, have your students research the play so they can feel prepared diving into the text and/or performance. The Oregon Shakespeare Festival created a thorough Study Guide with questions and resources to help you get prepared, as well as a series of questions for after reading or seeing the play. The OSF Study Guide can be found [HERE](#).

Make sure to check out OSF's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* streaming now until July 22! Only \$15 to stream for 48 hours. Click [HERE](#) for more info.



Christian Strange (Snout) in SCS's 2016 production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Photo by rr jones.

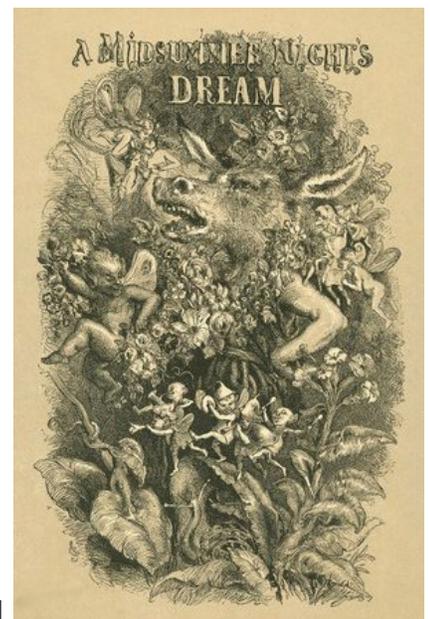
## Dramaturgy

TRANSFORMATION AS A METAPHOR FOR THE CREATION OF ART AND HARMONIOUS LOVE

*Bless thee, Bottom, bless thee! Thou art translated.* (Quince, III.1.114)

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

When, in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the intrepid and earnest Bottom the Weaver is changed by fairy-magic into a composite beast with a man's body and an ass' head, Peter Quince tells him, "Thou art translated" (III.1.114). (In Santa Cruz Shakespeare's 2016 production, Peter Quince has been transformed to a woman and his name accordingly altered to "Penny Quince.") Both Bottom's newly composite form and the term



Print by Dalziel Brothers, 19th century. (Folger Shakespeare Library ART File S528m5 no.101)

“translated,” as Quince uses it here, have meaning in the play that resonates far beyond this scene. For, like Bottom with his ass’ head, the play itself is, so to speak, a composite beast, made up of borrowings from classical literature about the gods and heroes, medieval romance about fairies and heroes, and native folk and literary traditions about the fairies. The play constitutes a “translation” of these various sources in the sense that, in being a (re-)combination and re-contextualization of them, it amounts to a transformation of them. This is fitting, given that transformation of the kind in which graceful unity is achieved out of disorder is a recurrent and unifying theme in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, as applicable to its characters’ inner lives and relationships as it is to its own status as a work of art (Keilen 115).

One of the major literary influences on *Midsummer* is *Ovid’s Metamorphoses*, which Arthur Golding translated into English in 1567. A series of stories about mythical transformations, Ovid’s work includes the tale of Pyramus and Thisbe—the story that Peter Quince and his crew transform into a play—that presents two lovers who are kept apart by their families (and a wall), and arrange a secret meeting in the woods. The central transformation that occurs in this tale is the change that a nearby plant undergoes when it is stained with Pyramus’ blood. In Golding’s translation, the stained roots of the plant cast “a deepe darke purple colour straight upon the berries” and, later, these darkened berries become a symbol of the lovers’ deaths (Book 4, ll. 150-152, 191-200).

For Further Thinking . . .

- When reading and watching *Midsummer*, trace the occurrences and types of transformation that occur throughout the play. What lasting effects, if any, do these transformations have on the play’s characters?
- Further examine Shakespeare’s translation and transformation of classical texts by considering how elements of the tale of Pyramus and Thisbe appear in new forms throughout *Midsummer*. In what ways is Quince’s selection of the tale of Pyramus and Thisbe appropriately attuned, and in what ways is it not, to the events that take place in Athens and its surrounding woods?

For Further Reading and viewing:

- Sean Keilen, *Vulgar Eloquence: On the Renaissance Invention of English Literature* (2006)
- Arthur Golding, *Ovid’s Metamorphoses* (1567)

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## Perform It Out Loud

Have your students work together during Distance Learning by using lessons provided by the Folger Method Express. With the help of Debbie Gascon, South Carolina HS teacher, and Greta Brasgalla,

Assistant Principal in Texas, Folger Shakespeare curated an *A Midsummer Night's Dream* resource packet. We loved their activity called Two-Line Scenes: A Midsummer Night's Dream. This engages students verbally with the text and allows them to express themselves with a scene partner.

Lesson Link: [Two-Line Scenes: A Midsummer Night's Dream](#)





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## Special Thanks

Oregon Shakespeare Festival

Kendra Dority

Ashley Herum

Folger Shakespeare Library

Susan and Michael Warren  
The California Arts Council  
NEH: Exploring the Human Endeavor  
And all who support SCS's Educational Programming



SANTA CRUZ SHAKESPEARE  
500 Chestnut Street Suite 250  
Santa Cruz, CA 95060



THE GROVE AT DELAVEAGA PARK  
501 Upper Park Road  
Santa Cruz, CA 95065  
[santacruzshakespeare.org](http://santacruzshakespeare.org)

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