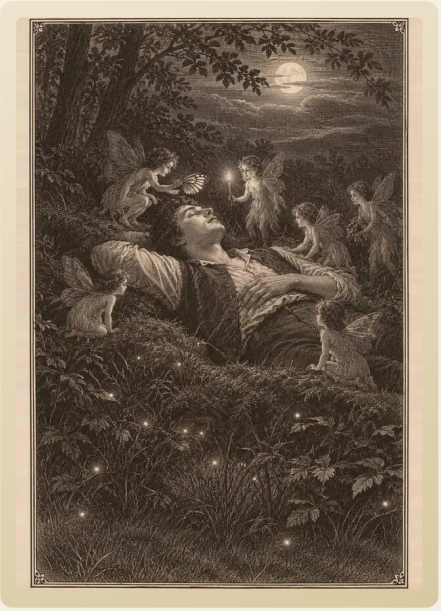
Daily Bard

LESSON PLANS

A Midsummer Night's Dream: three lesson plans

Three sixty-minute lessons that move from the court to the wood and back, ending with a printable worksheet on Theseus's speech about the lunatic, the lover and the poet.



LEVEL
Ages 14-18 (GCSE, A-level, AP Lit, IB); adaptable for first-year seminars

SEQUENCE
3 lessons of 60 minutes

FOCUS
Law and love in Athens, power and disorder in the wood, imagination and theatre

YOU WILL NEED
Copies of the play, the worksheet below, highlighters, sticky notes, space to move

Overview

This sequence follows the play's own shape: court, wood, court. Each lesson takes one passage and uses it to ask how a comedy can be built from serious materials. Students should know the outline of the four plots first; the act summaries in the **A Midsummer Night's Dream study guide** will do. Every lesson includes speaking the verse aloud, because the differences between the play's voices are heard before they are analysed.

- Students will be able to explain how the opening scene sets love against law and fathers against daughters.
- Students will be able to analyse how imagery links the fairies' quarrel to disorder in nature.
- Students will be able to evaluate Theseus's view of imagination against the evidence of the play.
- Students will be able to write an analytical paragraph on how comic form handles a serious idea.

Assessment focus. The lessons practise building a supported argument (the AO1 idea), analysing language, form and structure (AO2), and using context where it explains meaning (AO3). Lesson 3 introduces differing interpretations for older students. See the **assessment map** for how these emphases vary between courses.

The lessons at a glance

LESSON	TITLE	KEY QUESTION
1	Law against love	Why does a comedy begin with a death sentence?
2	A quarrel that floods the fields	How does Shakespeare make a marital argument matter to the whole world?
3	Shaping fantasies	Does the play agree with Theseus that imagination cannot be trusted?

LESSON 1

Law against love

Key question: Why does a comedy begin with a death sentence?

OBJECTIVES

- Identify the conflicts established in Act 1, Scene 1.
- Analyse the language of ownership used about Hermia.
- Explain how the scene prepares the escape to the wood.

TIME	ACTIVITY	WHY
0-7 min	**Starter.** Display "Hippolyta, I wooed thee with my sword / And won thy love doing thee injuries". Pairs decide: is this romantic, threatening or both? One sticky note each on a line across the board.	Introduces the play's link between love and power through one couplet.
7-17 min	**Teaching input.** Brief context: a father's authority over marriage; Athens as a place of law. Read aloud from Egeus's entrance to Theseus's ruling. List Hermia's three options on the board.	Supplies only the context the passage needs.
17-32 min	**Main task 1.** Students highlight every word that treats Hermia as an object or possession, starting with "As she is mine, I may dispose of her" and "as a form in wax". Then annotate her reply, "I would my father looked but with my eyes": what is she asking for?	Trains attention on word choice and on the first appearance of the eyes motif.
32-45 min	**Main task 2.** In threes, stage the exchange between Theseus, Egeus and Hermia twice: once with Theseus sympathetic to Hermia, once hostile. What changes in the lines? Where does Hippolyta stand, and what does her silence say?	Shows that tone is an interpretive choice and makes a silent character visible.
45-55 min	**Discussion.** Read Lysander's "The course of true love never did run smooth". Is he right, or is he quoting stories? Stem: "Shakespeare opens with a threat of death in order to ..."	Connects the scene to genre: comedy needs an obstacle to overcome.
55-60 min	**Plenary.** One sentence on a sticky note answering the key question.	Checks understanding of the scene's function.

Differentiation

- **Support:** provide the passage with a marginal glossary and three ownership words already highlighted.
- **Core:** complete the annotation and explain two word choices in full sentences.
- **Stretch:** compare Egeus with Capulet using the Romeo and Juliet study guide: why does one story end in a tomb and the other in a wedding?

Assessment and homework

The exit sentence should explain the death sentence as a dramatic device, not just restate it. Homework: read the essay on "The course of true love" and note three obstacles to love that the play goes on to stage.

Your notes

Timings that ran over, groupings, what to change next time.

LESSON 2

A quarrel that floods the fields

Key question: How does Shakespeare make a marital argument matter to the whole world?

OBJECTIVES

- Explain what Oberon and Titania are quarrelling about and why neither will yield.
- Analyse nature imagery in Titania's speech on the disordered seasons.
- Compare the fairy rulers with the mortal couples.

TIME	ACTIVITY	WHY
0-6 min	**Starter.** Two volunteers deliver "Ill met by moonlight, proud Titania" and "What, jealous Oberon?" three ways: icy, furious, amused. The class votes on which fits best and why.	Establishes the relationship through performance before analysis.
6-18 min	**Teaching input.** Read Act 2, Scene 1 from the rulers' entrance to Titania's exit. Clarify the changeling: a boy whose mother, Titania's follower, died in childbirth. Note the Elizabethan idea that discord among rulers disturbs nature.	Secures the plot and the one context point the speech depends on.
18-34 min	**Main task 1.** Pairs work on Titania's speech from "These are the forgeries of jealousy" to "We are their parents and original". Sort its images into three columns: water and weather, farming, the seasons. Choose the most vivid and explain its effect.	Builds a pattern from individual images and practises selection.
34-44 min	**Main task 2.** Focus on "progeny" and "parents". Why describe bad weather as offspring, in a quarrel over a child? Then read "And for her sake I will not part with him": what does Titania's motive add?	Moves from pattern to a single precise metaphor and to character.
44-55 min	**Discussion.** Oberon wins the boy by drugging his wife. Should we laugh? Stem: "The comedy asks the audience to accept ..., which is uncomfortable because ..."	Opens the question of power that critical readings pursue.
55-60 min	**Plenary.** Students write one similarity between Oberon and Titania and one mortal couple.	Links the fairy plot to the play's wider design.

Differentiation

- **Support:** give ten images from the speech on cards to sort, with modern paraphrases.
- **Core:** find the images independently and write a full explanation of one.
- **Stretch:** set the speech beside Helena's "I am your spaniel" later in the scene: what is the wood revealing about love and domination?

Assessment and homework

Check the explanations of the chosen image for a clear statement of effect. Homework: a paragraph on how Titania's speech presents disorder, drafted with the routine in the close reading toolkit. For regular exposure to Shakespeare's verse outside the set text, students can read the daily page in Daily Bard, where each passage has a plain-English reading on the back of the leaf.

Your notes

Timings that ran over, groupings, what to change next time.

LESSON 3

Shaping fantasies

Key question: Does the play agree with Theseus that imagination cannot be trusted?

OBJECTIVES

- Summarise Theseus's argument about lunatics, lovers and poets.
- Analyse how his language undercuts his scepticism.
- Evaluate his view against Hippolyta's reply, Bottom's dream and "Pyramus and Thisbe".

TIME	ACTIVITY	WHY
0-6 min	**Starter.** Display "How easy is a bush supposed a bear!" Students recall a time fear or hope made them see something that was not there, then name one moment in the play where a character does the same.	Makes an abstract idea concrete and retrieves prior knowledge.
6-16 min	**Teaching input.** Read the worksheet passage aloud twice. Establish the situation: the lovers have told their story and Theseus does not believe it. Define "compact" (composed) and "bodies forth" (gives shape to).	Removes vocabulary barriers before independent work.
16-34 min	**Main task 1.** Pairs complete worksheet questions 1 to 6.	Structured movement from comprehension to analysis.
34-44 min	**Main task 2.** Evidence hunt. Groups take one witness each: Hippolyta's reply; Bottom's "I have had a dream past the wit of man to say what dream it was"; the actors who explain that their lion is not a lion. Does the witness support Theseus or answer him?	Tests a character's claim against the rest of the play.
44-54 min	**Discussion.** Continuum line across the room from "Theseus is right" to "Theseus is wrong". Students justify their position with one piece of evidence; question 7 guides the debate.	Rehearses evaluation and requires evidence for a judgement.
54-60 min	**Plenary.** Begin the worksheet writing task: plan in three bullet points; finish for homework.	Turns talk into the outline of an argument.

Differentiation

- **Support:** a parallel modern paraphrase of the passage and sentence starters for questions 4 to 6.
- **Core:** all questions, with quotations embedded in answers.
- **Stretch:** consider Robin's epilogue, "If we shadows have offended": how does it continue the argument with Theseus?

Assessment and homework

The continuum discussion shows who can support a judgement with evidence.
Homework: complete the writing task, using the essay planner if a fuller essay is wanted.

Your notes

Timings that ran over, groupings, what to change next time.

Student worksheet: The lunatic, the lover and the poet

Name _____ Class _____ Date _____

The lovers have described their night in the wood. Theseus, newly married, gives Hippolyta his opinion of their story, and she answers.

> THESEUS The lunatic, the lover, and the poet
> Are of imagination all compact.
> One sees more devils than vast hell can hold:
> That is the madman. The lover, all as frantic,
> Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt.
> The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
> Doth glance from heaven to Earth, from Earth to heaven,
> And as imagination bodies forth
> The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
> Turns them to shapes and gives to airy nothing
> A local habitation and a name.
> HIPPOLYTA But all the story of the night told over,
> And all their minds transfigured so together,
> More witnesseth than fancy's images
> And grows to something of great constancy,
> But, howsoever, strange and admirable.
>
> A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM · ACT 5, SCENE 1 · 5.1.7-28

1. Which three kinds of people does Theseus group together, and what does he say they have in common?

2. In your own words, what does the madman see, and what does the lover see?

3. What does the poet do with “airy nothing”?

4. Theseus intends to criticise imagination. Which words or phrases in his description of the poet sound admiring instead? Explain your choices.

5. How does the list in the first line shape the way we see the poet? Consider the order of the three.

6. Hippolyta begins with “But”. What two reasons does she give for taking the lovers’ story seriously?

7. Theseus is a character in a play, invented by a poet. How does that fact affect the way an audience hears his speech?

8. Whose view does the play as a whole support, Theseus's or Hippolyta's? Give evidence from elsewhere in the play.

Name _____ Class _____ Date _____

Writing task

Write one paragraph (about 120 words) answering: how does Shakespeare present the power of imagination in this passage?

- State a clear argument in your first sentence.
- Embed at least two short quotations.
- Analyse one feature of language or structure by name.
- Refer to one other moment in the play.

Continue on lined paper if you need more room.

Teacher notes and indicative answers

1. The lunatic, the lover and the poet; all are made up entirely of imagination.
2. The madman sees devils without number. The lover sees the beauty of Helen of Troy in a face Theseus considers plain.
3. He gives it form, a place and a name: he makes something from nothing.
4. "fine frenzy", the sweep of "from heaven to Earth", and the creative verbs "bodies forth", "turns" and "gives". The description is a small poem in praise of poetry.
5. The poet comes last, the climax of a list of three that starts with madness; alliteration ties lunatic and lover together and the poet inherits their company.
6. The lovers' accounts agree ("all their minds transfigured so together"), and the story holds together as "something of great constancy".
7. It creates irony: the sceptic owes his existence to the faculty he dismisses, and the audience has seen the fairies he denies.
8. Either can be argued. Most students will find that the play sides with Hippolyta, since events in the wood were real within the play; Bottom's dream and the epilogue are useful evidence.

Model paragraph

Shakespeare presents imagination as a power that even its critics cannot resist. Theseus sets out to dismiss the lovers' story by placing "The lunatic, the lover, and the poet" in a single list, so that the poet is tainted by association with madness. Yet his language turns to praise: the poet's eye moves "from heaven to Earth", and his pen gives "airy nothing" a "local habitation and a name". The verbs are creative, and the lines are among the most lyrical in the play. The effect is ironic, since Theseus is himself a poet's creation and the audience has watched the fairies he doubts. Hippolyta's reply that the night "grows to something of great constancy" confirms what the play suggests throughout: imagination can reveal truth.

Extending the sequence

For a fuller unit, set the characters and themes sections of the **study guide** as reading and use the **quotation sheet** for retrieval starters. A fourth lesson could stage "Pyramus and Thisbe" beside the tomb scene, drawing on the **Romeo and Juliet lesson plans**. The essays on **"All the world's a stage"** and **"such stuff as dreams"** extend the theme of theatre and illusion, and the guide to **Shakespeare's language** supports work on verse and prose. As a two-minute starter, project **today's Daily Bard page** and ask which of the play's voices the passage most resembles.



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