



Book club 22: Illusion & reality

A Midsummer Night's Dream
by William Shakespeare



Rules

In this book club you will discuss *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by William Shakespeare in a group of 4-6 readers. The book club opens with a brief introduction that one of you reads out loud. The book club then continues in four rounds:

- 1 Round 1 consists of 5 questions about the plot. One of the group members acts as the quiz master who reads each question out loud, after which everyone (including the quiz master) writes down their answer. The correct answers will appear on the screen after you have turned over the final question card. You may then check your answers and calculate your scores.
- 2 Round 2 consists of asking and answering questions each of you have about the book/story: in turn, the players say what they did not understand about the book and try to find an answer together. When the biggest confusions are solved, round 3 starts.
- 3 Round 3 consists of discussion questions. The person with the most correct answers to the quiz questions from round 1 gets to be the first to turn over a card and respond to the question. The other members of the group may then add to the discussion by responding and sharing their ideas. Take turns until all cards are flipped.
- 4 Round 4 is when you get to review the text. How many stars would you give the text and why? Discuss this together until you have reached a shared verdict. Use the text box to explain your choice.

This book club was developed by the editors of LitLab, a digital laboratory for high school literature research. For more teaching materials, visit www.litlab.nl. A teacher's guide and a didactic justification of this teaching method are available at www.litlab.nl/docenten.



The book club is available for free under the Creative Commons licence 'NaamsvermeldingNietCommercieel-GelijkDelen 4.0 Internationaal'.

A Midsummer Night's Dream

Introduction

*Love can transpose to form and dignity.
Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind;
And therefore is wing'd Cupid painted blind.
Nor hath love's mind of any judgment taste;
Wings and no eyes figure unheedy haste:
And therefore is love said to be a child,
Because in choice he is so oft beguil'd
— Helena, Act 1, scene 1*

When the lovers Hermia and Lysander escape the court in Athens to secretly get married in a nearby wood, they discover they are not alone. Helena and Demetrius follow them, and the forest is also inhabited by the King and Queen of the Fairies, Oberon and Titania, a prankster fairy, and a group of workmen rehearsing a play. As magical tricks orchestrated by Oberon lead to chaos and hilarious mix-ups, the characters experience strange and amusing situations. Will true love prevail, and will order be restored? Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* explores themes of love, identity, and the boundary between reality and illusion. In this book club you will discuss these themes and relate them to your own experiences.

Round 1: Quiz

Turn over the 5 cards with quiz questions one by one. Write down the answer on a piece of paper.

Round 2: Initial questions

What questions popped into your head while reading *A Midsummer Night's Dream*? Were there any parts that left you confused or wondering? Take turns sharing your questions about the story and try to come up with answers together. Use evidence from the text to support your ideas.

Round 3: Discussion

The player with the most correct answers to the quiz questions gets to turn over a card first from one of the two piles of discussion questions. Once they have answered the question, the other members of the group may then add to the discussion by responding and sharing their ideas.

Round 4: Review

Review *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by rating the novel on a scale of one to five stars, and then provide an explanation for your choice. Discuss what aspects you enjoyed and what aspects you didn't, and provide reasons for your opinions. Reflect on whether the discussion influenced your individual perspective, and if so, how. Incorporate examples and arguments from your responses to the discussion questions to support your review.



Question 1

Why does Titania love the Indian changeling boy so much?

Question 2

Who is Helena in love with?

Question 3

What are the mechanicals doing in the forest?

Question 4

What mistake does Puck make with the love potion?

Question 5

How does the play end for the four lovers (Hermia, Lysander, Helena, and Demetrius)?

Answers

- 1 He's the son of a good friend of hers (who has died).
- 2 Demetrius
- 3 Rehearsing a play (to be performed at Theseus' and Hippolyta's wedding).
- 4 He puts the potion on Lysander instead of Demetrius.
- 5 Hermia marries Lysander, and Helena marries Demetrius.



Question

3

Question

2

Question

1

Answers

Question

5

Question

4



Personal connections? 1

The characters face situations where love and magic create confusion. Can you think of a time in your own life when a misunderstanding or a silly mix-up led to something funny or surprising? How does your experience compare to what happens to the characters in the play?

Personal connections? 2

How would you react if your parent or another loved one asked you to do something that absolutely does not feel right to you? Think about Hermia and Hippolyta's dilemmas.

Personal connections? 3

Many of the female characters, like Hermia and Titania, are controlled by men, such as their fathers or husbands. How do you think the women in the play feel about being controlled and underestimated? Do you think this is still a problem in today's world? Explain your opinion.

Personal connections? 4

Helena struggles with unrequited love: she loves Demetrius, but he doesn't love her back. This leads her to betray her best friend, Hermia. Can you think of an example from your own life or from a film/series where unrequited love made someone do something mean?

Personal connections? 5

Lysander calls Demetrius an 'inconstant man'. Later on, Helena says something similar about Demetrius. Why do they think that Demetrius is 'inconstant' and do you agree? Explain why.

Personal connections? 6

Oberon is trying to help Helena find true love when he orders Puck to sprinkle love potion in the lovers' eyes. Despite his good intentions, is this really so innocent? Or is it, in some ways, similar to spiking someone's drink in a bar? Explain your opinion using at least two arguments.

Personal connections? 7

Hermia insists on sleeping separately from Lysander. Why does she do this? Can you think of a time when you stuck to your principles, even though it was difficult?

Personal connections? 8

How did Shakespeare try to make this play interesting for different kinds of audiences? What part of the play appealed to you the most? Explain your answer.



Personal connections?

3

Personal connections?

2

Personal connections?

1

Personal connections?

6

Personal connections?

5

Personal connections?

4

Personal connections?

8

Personal connections?

7



Food for thought? 1

Discuss the theme of male dominance by exploring the relationships between Theseus and Hippolyta, Egeus and Hermia, and Oberon and Titania.

Food for thought? 2

What role do misunderstandings play in the plot? Give at least two examples from the play.

Food for thought? 3

How does Shakespeare play with illusion and reality in Act 3?

Food for thought? 4

Compare Theseus and Oberon as rulers, and Hippolyta and Titania as their partners. In what ways are these two men and two women similar or different? You can think about their relationships, their roles in the story, and how they deal with power or control.

Food for thought? 5

Compare Athens to the magical forest in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In what ways does the contrast between Athens and the magical forest help reveal the characters' true desires or identities?

Food for thought? 6

Discuss the function of the subplot involving the mechanicals' play *Pyramus and Thisbe*. How does it contribute to the main themes of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and how does it connect to the main plot?

Food for thought? 7

What consequences do the quarrels between Oberon and Titania have for the natural world?

Food for thought? 8

An important quote from the play is, 'The course of true love never did run smooth'. Do you think this applies to all the lovers in the play? Explain your answer.



Food for thought?

3

Food for thought?

2

Food for thought?

1

Food for thought?

6

Food for thought?

5

Food for thought?

4

Food for thought?

8

Food for thought?

7