

### **General Questions for *Midsummer Night's Dream*:**

There are 5 sets of lovers in this play: Theseus-Hippolyta, Lysander-Hermia-Demetrius-Helena, Oberon-Titania, Titania-Bottom, Pyramus-Thisbe

There are 4 “plots”: Theseus-Hippolyta, the 4 lovers, Oberon-Titania, the mechanicals

(A website with a cartoon of the story: <http://www.littleloud.com/ac/shakespeare/animation.html>)

1. What do various parallels between plots or characters suggest about gender relations and roles in the play and in the society?
2. The play seems to contrast imagination/love/passion with rationality. What insights does it give us into the limits and powers of each? (Are dreams “real”?)
3. There are quite a few “transformations” or “translations” in this play. What do these say about the nature of transformation, its role in our lives, how we feel about it? (For instance, with regard to the question of “finding oneself” or “losing oneself”?) (Love has often been said to “transform one’s life”)
4. What do various characters not know that the audience does know? Such discrepancies indicate the limitations of a certain kind of attitude. (With whom do you most identify in the play? Why? Does that character have limitations?)

### **Journal/Reading Questions for Acts III-V** (see next page for journal due Feb. 12)

1. Consider the likenesses/differences between Helena and Hermia and between Lysander and Demetrius. What comments does the play make about gender--men in love vs. women in love? (We get to see Helena and Hermia in opposite positions.)
2. What qualities does Bottom have that make his fellow artisans regard him the way they do? (Find their comments about him and examine what these indicate about their attitude.) What does the audience see that they don’t? (What insights concerning “realism” and “imagination” can Shakespeare provide us with by putting a character like Bottom in a play with Theseus and fairies like Oberon and Puck?)
3. What is funny about Bottom’s attitude in his scenes with the fairy queen? What does this show about the strengths and limitations of this type person (if, for instance, you were to label him a “realist”)? What comments does this scene make about the nature of love?
4. What makes the stage production of the artisans in Act 5 so funny? (Try to identify different kinds of things and give an example of each. Exs. rhyme, alliteration, apostrophe, meter, concrete detail) Consider how what you find funny relates to understanding the role and meaning of the “imagination” and/or the poetic process (we too are seeing a play!)
5. Compare Bottom's statement (4.1.196-211, p. 849) with Theseus' (5. 1. 2-12). How does their attitude differ? Can both attitudes be “true”?
6. Comment on how the words "shadows," "visions," "slumbered," "liar" in Puck's last speech connect to things we have seen in the play. (Consider how they apply to us sitting in the audience and what Shakespeare conveys about “reality” by making them apply.) Consider Theseus’ idea about these concepts as expressed in his speech at the beginning of Act V. (Puck gets “the last word” in this play!)

**Theseus speech ( p. 851, ll 2-22)-- journal for Feb. 12-- practicing for a test question:**

- 1) Paraphrase the speech (line by line). You're not summarizing; you're trying to put it into easy-to-understand English. Underline words in the original that seem surprising choices and words that had several meanings or connotations that made them hard to "translate." (You will focus in #4 on what meanings they contribute that a synonym would not.)
- 2) State a question or issue the play explores (see journal sheet)
- 3) State what the quote contributes to an understanding or exploration of that issue:
- 4) Support what you said in #3 with associations/connotations of particular words, relating them back to your statements in #3. Look for repetitions, inversions, and parallels, and write them down. What effects result? (e.g., connections of meaning and changes of meaning or an influence on our reaction)
- 5). In what sense do the events of the play both support and contradict what Theseus says in this speech? (Optional: Are there any references to things in the play that we know about and Theseus doesn't?)

**1Corinthians 2.9 (King James)**

9. But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.
- 10 But Got hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.
- 11 For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? Even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.