

**Grade level:** 11<sup>th</sup>-12th Grade

**Subject:** Language Arts

**Rationale:**

Students will examine the use of theme in the Manga Classics adaptation of William Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Students will be asked to focus on specific illustrations in the book and consider how the artist brings to light some of the major motifs of the play including (but not limited to) the Shakespearean comedy, fantasy, the play within a play, animal symbolism, dreams, and the nature of love.

**Instructional Duration:** 4-6 hours

**Objectives:**

Students will:

- ✓ Read the Manga Classics graphic novel *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and consider it as a visual adaptation of a classic piece of literature.
- ✓ Use images from the novel to answer specific essential questions.
- ✓ Understand the motifs of dreams, fantasy, love, and comedy as they pertain to a graphic novel adaptation of a classic play

**Front-loaded information / understanding:**

Theme - Students should be able to define and identify one or more themes from the original text. This lesson will translate that concept for the graphic novel medium.

Imagery - Students should be able to define and identify imagery in the original text. This lesson will translate that concept for the graphic novel medium.

Symbolism – Students should be able to define and identify one or more symbol from the original text. This lesson will translate that concept for the graphic novel medium with a particular focus on animal imagery.

Love – Students should be able to define and identify moments in the text where the artwork, actions of the characters, or dialogue point to the nature of love in the play. This lesson will ask students to consider what love is in the play and how it manifests through the manipulation of the characters.

Comedy – Students should understand the concept of comedy as it pertains to classic literature and, in particular, Shakespearean text. Consider the nature of this concept and the individual components specifically focusing on farce and how it plays out in the text.

Manga – Many students have not been exposed to this type of reading. Prior to assigning any reading in the Manga Classic Text, instructors should cover the “How to read manga” section at the beginning of the book with their students to ensure understanding.

### **Instructional Strategies:**

*NOTE: The lessons contained below assume that students are reading the Manga Classic adaptation after having already been exposed to some or all of the original text. If you are using the graphic novel adaptation as an alternative to reading the original novel, the lessons can still be utilized with modifications.*

Students should have read the original play *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by William Shakespeare. Have them share with the class what they know about the text itself. Specific attention should be paid to how students visualize some of the more crucial moments of the play including, but not limited to, character appearance and actions, conflict, thematic elements, dialogue, and comedy.

### **Activity #1 – Answering Essential Questions (Pre-Reading)**

Students should be asked to recall their experiences reading Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Instruct them to think about what parts of the novel stood out to them and why. Students should then be broken into groups of 3-4 and asked to consider how they themselves would adapt the text to a visual medium. In doing so, they will answer the following essential questions:

- ✓ *What is one major motif of the play? How does it manifest in the text?*
- ✓ *Which acts and scenes are the most memorable and impactful based on how the plot moves forward as a result? Choose three to consider and explain why you chose them.*
- ✓ *How would you stage the scenes that you chose from above if you were the director? How would you draw them if you were an artist tasked with adapting the play?*
- ✓ *How does Puck influence the other characters and how does his final soliloquy speak to his role in the play?*
- ✓ *How “funny” do you find the play having only read it but not seen it? How could some sort of visual representation (performance, animation, cartoon) help bring the comedy to life?*

For the second essential question in the list above, ask students to provide three sketches (one for each scene selected). These sketches do not need to be elaborate but should stage the scene in some way (position of characters, background, and objects). Sketches should include some sort of caption that contains specific guiding information that explains how the images shape understanding of the text (2-3 sentences).

## Activity #2 – Shakespearean Comedy and Farce

*A Midsummer Night's Dream* is one of Shakespeare's funniest plays. He manipulates his characters through misdirection, language doublespeak, and fantasy to create comedic situations. All this contributes to the work as a farce. Define this for the students through specific characteristics. A farce includes:

- **Exaggeration** – Over the top events, acting, and situations create something that is unrealistic yet grounded in reality
- **Extravagance** – The characters, scenarios, and interactions are rife with excess to a comedic level
- **The Improbable** – The situations that the characters find themselves in are fantastic and/or reach a level of coincidence that is absurd
- **Satire** – The conventions of the time are deconstructed and poked fun at by pointing out their hypocrisy and excesses
- **Slapstick** – Physical humor is used to create additional comedy by having characters engage in foolish, clumsy, and embarrassing ways
- **Misdirection** – The characters (and often the audience as well) are led around the story, never really knowing what is true and what is misunderstood

Have students reach into the text and apply these characteristics to the three couples (Hermia/Lysander, Helena/Demetrius, Oberon/Titania) as they are clearly at the center of the comedy. Ask them to consider how they specifically meet each of the bulleted criteria above and to what degree of fidelity to that definition they exhibit.

## Activity #3 – Love

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Shakespeare is focused on romantic love in the midst of supernatural intervention. What is love and how does it truly manifest itself? What is the play saying about love? Have students find examples of this and identify and explain them. Some example are:

Page 21 – Love as a storm crashing around Hermia and Lysander

Page 104 – The stories of romance intertwining around silhouettes of the lovers

Page 296 – Oberon and Titania as the royal fairy lovers surrounded by butterflies

Have students address the following question in regards to their chosen image:

*In the image(s) your team analyzed, explain how the artwork impacts your understanding of and attitude towards romantic love as it exists within the Manga Classics adaptation. How does it enhance your appreciation of these comparisons in some way by seeing it represented visually? If it does not, and your group feels that the images are not effective and the comparisons remain cryptic in some way, explain specifically why and what you might suggest to make it stronger.*

Students can share their thoughts to the class as a presentation or a simple discussion.

**Activity 4: Chibi and Shakespeare**

The term “chibi” is Japanese slang for small and represents a cartooning style where characters are represented (often temporarily) as shorter, cuter versions of themselves often displaying over the top expressions and actions. This is used often in The Manga Classics edition of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to illustrate some of the more comedic moments around characters like Puck and Bottom. Some examples include:

- Page 42 – Bottom becomes chibi when trying to portray Thisby
- Page 110-111 – Bottom and others become chibi during rehearsal
- Page 190 – The lovers as chibi puppets of Puck
- Page 267 – More chibi from the players

Students should research the history of “chibi” style, its implementation in modern animation and consider how it is implemented in this text. Have them then draw a minicomic utilizing this artistic style focused on a personal experience, previously read text, or new fictional story.

**Activity #5– Theme Identification**

There are a lot of moments where the text explores the nature of dreams and the supernatural. Select specific points in the novel where the artwork illustrates one of these themes in a particularly compelling manner. For example:

- Page 23 – Cupid is aiming at the young lovers
- Pages 51-55 – The introduction of Puck and his mischief
- Pages 58-60 – Titania and Oberon, fairy royalty
- Page 89 – A lullaby for Titania
- Pages 90-92 – Influencing the queen's dreams
- Page 94-96 – Hermia and Lysander fall asleep and Puck enchants them
- Page 107- Hermia dreams of a serpent (foreshadow!)
- Page 122 – Bottom is transformed into an ass!
- Page 129 – Titania falls in love with Bottom
- Page 135-136 – The fairy servants and Bottom
- Page 158 – Demetrius is smitten with Helena (with help from Puck)
- Page 190 – Puck as a puppet master
- Page 201 – Hermia wishes to sleep as an escape
- Page 212-213 – Oberon's victory and folly
- Page 214 – Oberon wakes Titania from her magical dream
- Pages 225-229 – The young lovers wake with fragmented memories and new love
- Page 233-235 – Bottom awakens from his dream and remembers little
- Page 298-299 – Puck's final message of dream

Or any others where you feel the artwork creates a visual representation of the idea of dreams or the supernatural within the novel that you find particularly compelling. Have students answer the following question about the image with a short essay:

What elements of the artwork bring a strong understanding of the concept of dreams and how the supernatural influences them within the Manga Classics adaptation on the page that play's dialogue and stage direction alone could not?

### **Final Assessment:**

One of the most unique elements of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is its “play within a play” structure. The themes of the primary love story all manifest within the production of *Pyramus and Thisbe* put on by Bottom and the craftsmen. Have students examine the nature of how the plot, characters, and conflicts play out between Hermia, Lysander, Helena, and Demetrius as well as the parallel story taking place between Titania, Oberon, and Bottom. Next, look closely at pages 257-289 and have them unpack the craziness of the performance. Once they have done that, have them answer one of the following questions. The answer can be in any form you choose (essay, presentation, Socratic Seminar, etc...)

- ✓ *Bottom is the one human link between Pyramus and Thisbe and the rest of the events of the play. How does he connect the themes as a result?*
- ✓ *Pyramus and Thisbe is also a love story. What motifs does it share with the main conflicts between the young lovers (Helena, Lysander, Hermia, Demetrius)?*
- ✓ *Both the play itself and the play within the play are designed to entertain. To what degree do each succeed separately and how effective are they when considered as a whole?*

### **Lesson Developed By:**

Michael Gianfrancesco, MA

English Department Faculty  
North Providence High School  
North Providence, RI 02904

Adjunct Professor of English  
Johnson and Wales University  
Providence, RI Downcity Campus

[michaelgtech@gmail.com](mailto:michaelgtech@gmail.com)

Twitter @tryingteacher