

'A Midsummer Night's Dream' Plot Summary - Reading Comprehension **Activity**

We begin our scene in Athens. A distressed young woman Hermia - is in a tense meeting with her father Egeus and the Duke of Athens, Theseus. Egeus is 'full of vexation' (he is really annoyed) because his daughter is refusing to marry Demetrius - the man he has picked out for her.

Things get complicated quickly because Hermia has good reasons for not wanting to marry Demetrius. Firstly, she is in love with Lysander. Secondly, Demetrius has someone who loves him already: Hermia's friend, Helena. Poor Helena wishes to be with Demetrius and is jealous of his affection for her friend.

Theseus (who is about to marry an Amazonian princess named Hippolyta) decides that Hermia should listen to her father. If she really cannot marry Demetrius, then she is welcome to become a nun or face death.

Hermia's love for Lysander comforts her. She says that, "The course of true love never did run smooth'. They resolve to run away together and try to make a new life and agree to meet in the woods the following evening. Hermia tells only her closest friend Helena of their plan.

Unfortunately for her, Helena tells the very person she does not want to know about their plans: Demetrius. Poor Helena is so in love with him that she risks her own happiness to tell him that if he wants to find Hermia he will need to follow them into the woods.

In the woods, mischief is made. The leaders of the fairies (Oberon and Titania) are fighting over a magical child known as a changeling. Oberon's assistant Puck (also known as Robin Goodfellow) is cheeky and wants to help his master

take revenge on the cold queen. Oberon asks Puck to find him a special flower whose juices, when placed on someone's sleeping eyes, cause them to fall in love with the first thing they see when they wake. Oberon hopes to make Titania fall in love with something hideous!

While Puck finds the flower, Oberon sees Helena chasing Demetrius through the woods. He is not kind about his lack of affection for her, saying, "I am sick when I do look on thee." Helena is not deterred, asking how she could possibly be alone in the woods when he is there. She lovingly says, "You in my respect are all the world.'



Oberon feels sorry for Helena. When Puck returns with the magical flower, Oberon tells him to put its liquid on the eyes of the Athenian man, who is rejecting the love of an Athenian woman. Unfortunately, neither Puck nor Oberon knows that there is more than one Athenian man and woman in the woods.

Puck finally finds the Athenian man he believes he is looking for. He (mistakenly) puts the juice of the flower onto Lysander's eyes. Helena, still chasing after Demetrius, discovers Lysander lying on the ground and wakes him up. As soon as he sees her, he says he would "run through fire" for her. His Love for her is instant and overwhelming. Helena thinks this is a cruel prank, so she continues trying to chase Demetrius as Lysander now starts following her. Poor Hermia is left to wake up alone.

Another strange group enters the forest. A band of (very) amateur actors are rehearsing a play that they hope to perform at Duke Theseus' upcoming wedding. They are practising in the forest that their work of art is kept a secret. They are tradespeople, collectively known as 'The Mechanicals'. The most eager actor is Nick Bottom, who is going to be playing the tragic hero Pyramus in their rendition of 'Pyramus and Thisbe'. The play they are rehearsing is a tragedy (much like 'Romeo and Juliet') where two young people from enemy families fall in love and try to make their relationship work. Unfortunately, a lion turns up at the lovers' meeting place and scares Thisbe away and she leaves her scarf behind. Pyramus, arriving later, sees the bloodied scarf and assumes the love of his life has been eaten, so takes his own life. Thisbe re-enters soon after and also kills herself.

The Mechanicals do such a poor job acting out this tragic play that Puck is rolling around laughing as he watches on without their knowledge. He decides to play a prank on Bottom, who is both extraordinarily arrogant and a terrible actor. Just as Bottom is about to step out and deliver his lines, Puck puts a spell on him that turns Bottom's head into a that of a donkey. His friends run away in fright and Bottom is left alone.

To reassure himself, Bottom begins singing. His voice wakes Titania who happened to be sleeping nearby and whose eyes Puck had already filled with the juice of the love flower. The queen of the fairies immediately falls in love with the donkey-man that is Bottom! She has her fairies dote on him and treat him like a king and Puck and Oberon congratulate themselves on a job well done.



Meanwhile, the Athenian lovers are moving deeper into the woods and their own misery. Puck realises his mistake and has now made Demetrius fall in love with Helena, so Helena is being chased by both Lysander and Demetrius, who seemed to pity or even hate her. Helena thinks this is a terribly cruel joke they are playing on her. Hermia, frightened and exhausted after walking through the woods alone, finally stumbles upon the group. Chaos ensues. Helena and Hermia want to hurt each other and Lysander and Demetrius challenge one another to a duel.

Annoyed at how much trouble has been caused and how much Puck seems to be enjoying the chaos, Oberon orders Puck to put everything back as it should be. Once the lovers are all lulled into a dreamy sleep, Puck fixes everything so that Lysander falls back in love with Hermia.

The flower's magic is also removed from Titania, who is disgusted when she realises she fell in love with Bottom, who, meanwhile, wakes up alone and back in his usual form, and feeling like he has had the strangest dream.

The lovers are discovered at the edge of the woods, waking up from a heavy sleep. Hermia and Lysander will now be permitted to marry as Demetrius remains in love with Helena.

At the end of the play, The Mechanicals put on a terrible performance of 'Pyramus and Thisbe'. Bottom returned in the nick of time and the group is chosen to perform at the wedding as they had hoped. The lovers and the duke all watch on, commenting on and laughing at the mistakes made by the blundering actors. The play ends with the characters' having gone to bed and the fairies entering in secret to bless the lovers' new lives together.

Answer the following reading comprehension using full sentences in your exercise book.

1. Identify why is Egeus angry at the beginning of the play.
2. Identify what choices Theseus gives to Hermia if she refuses to marry Demetrius.
3. Explain why Hermia wants to marry Lysander instead of Demetrius.
4. Identify the mistake Puck makes with the magical flower.
5. Identify how Helena reacts when Lysander declares his love for her.
6. Identify the purpose of The Mechanicals' play and explain how is it received.
7. Identify the prank Puck plays on Bottom and how it affects Titania.
8. Identify the cause of the chaos among the Athenian lovers in the woods.
9. Identify what Oberon does to fix the problems caused by the magical flower and outline how the problem is resolved.
10. Identify what happens at the end of the play and outline how the characters reflect on their experiences.