

Curriculum Units and Learning Outcomes

Content Area: English 8

Grade Level: 8

Unit Title: An Introduction to Shakespeare

Text(s): *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by William Shakespeare (pub. 1600/play/comedy)

Supplemental Text Options:

- *Bull* by David Elliott (pub. 2017/book in verse)
- *Heros, Gods and Monsters of the Greek Myths* by Bernard Evslin (pub. 1966/novel/select chapters read)
 - Zeus
 - Hera
 - Theseus
 - Eros and Psyche
 - Hermes
 - Artemis

Unit Summary:

This is one of William Shakespeare's great comedies, published in 1600. Students will dissect its complex plot and learn of the story's many characters as they are taken into a fantastical tale. Outside the walls of Athens, Greece, fairies rule the forest. This story will bring on interesting discussions about the difficulty of love, magic, dreams, and power. The three intertwining plots of the play include:

- The marriage of Duke Theseus and the Amazonian queen, Hippolyta
- Four young lovers--Hermia and Lysander, Helena and Demetrius
- The quarrel between King Oberon and Queen Titania, fairies who reside in the forest

Supplemental Text Options (Summaries):

With its setting in ancient Athens, Shakespeare incorporates several literary allusions to Greek mythological gods, goddesses, and demigods. While reading the five acts of the play, students are simultaneously taught the allusions that are made to important ancient Greek figures through the myths of . . .

- Zeus and Hera and their character similarities to Oberon and Titania, King and Queen of the Fairies

- The demigod Theseus, who is known as the ‘father of democracy’ and serves as the basis of the character Duke Theseus, the fair ruler of Athens in the play
- The myth of Artemis (or in Roman, Diana) who is referenced in Act 1 of the play as the goddess of whom Hermia may choose to worship in her life as a barren nun if she does not want to die or marry her father’s choice of suitor
- The myths of Hermes and Eros, who in combination comprise the character traits of Robin Goodfellow (Puck), the swift and mischievous messenger of King Oberon
- After reading the myth of Theseus, students may have the option to read the contemporary book *Bull* by David Elliot. This modern take on the myth of Theseus and the Minotaur is written in a whole new light. Students will read a modern spin on the myth, this time through the lens of the Minotaur (or Asterion). “It takes a god to make a boy into a beast, but it is we humans who turn him into a monster.” -A. Wolf. Students will be guided by the teacher in a discussion on the change in point of view and contrast the tales.

Live Performance: The unit may end with a live performance of the play by the professional company Shakespeare Now! (leading Shakespeare-In-Education theater company from Boston) in the Hopkinton Middle School Auditorium. This is subject to change yearly as the company is not always performing this particular play every year.

Massachusetts Standards:

Reading Literature

RL.3 Analyze how particular lines of dialogue or incidents in a story, poem, or drama propel the action, reveal aspects of a character, or provoke a decision.

RL.6 Analyze how differences in point of view between characters and audience (e.g., created through the use of dramatic irony) create such effects as suspense or humor.

RL.7 Analyze the extent to which an audio, filmed, or staged production of a story, drama, or poem stays faithful to or departs from the original text or script, evaluating the choices made by the director or performer(s).

RL.8a. Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning, tone, or mood, including the impact of allusion and irony.

RL.10 By the end of the year, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poetry, in the grades 6-8 text complexity band independently and proficiently.

Reading Informational Text

RI. 8.1 Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what a text states explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, quoting or paraphrasing as appropriate.

Writing

W.8.9 Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support written analysis, interpretation, reflection, and research, applying one or more grade 8 standards for Reading Literature or Reading Informational Text as needed.

Speaking and Listening

SL.8.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, teacher-led)

Language

L8.5 Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings. a. Interpret figures of speech (e.g. verbal irony, puns) in context. b. Use the relationship between particular words to better understand each of the words. c. Distinguish among the connotations (associations) of words with similar denotations.

Enduring Understandings:

Midsummer/Enduring Understandings:

- Shakespeare's writing alludes to the ancient Greek myths and characters.
- Shakespeare wrote plays of various genres (comedies, tragedies, histories, tragic-comedies)
- Shakespeare wrote about the human condition
- The life and times of Renaissance England played a major role in topics covered in Shakespeare's plays

Essential Questions:

Midsummer/Essential Questions:

- Why do we study Shakespeare?
- How is literature a comment on the human condition?
- How do people have power over others?
- How do our emotions influence our perceptions?
- How can love be difficult? What forces impede love?
- How do fantasy and imagination influence the way we look at the world?
- How is Shakespeare's fairyland a metaphor for things we cannot explain?
- What aspects about Renaissance England are revealed within the story's plot and messages?

Mythological Allusions/Essential Questions:

- How do myths reflect the values and beliefs of a culture?
- How do ancient Greek myths reflect the values and beliefs of Renaissance England?
- How does Shakespeare allude to the ancient Greek myths in his play?
- And how do these allusions help us better understand the characters and their roles within the play?
- How do we see ourselves and the human condition exhibited in both Shakespeare and myths?

Students will demonstrate KNOWLEDGE of:

- The definition of literary allusion
- How works of literature allude to past works of literature
- How Greek mythology influenced the plays of William Shakespeare, particularly his comedy *A Midsummer Night's Dream*
- The Ancient Greek Olympians, demigods, and monsters of the ancient Greek religion
- How oral tradition, by nature of the genre, both stays true and departs from the storyline from text to text
- Shakespeare's background and accomplishments
- How figurative language contributes to the meaning of a text

Students will be SKILLED at:

- Writing persuasive arguments using a single text for support
- Writing persuasive arguments using paired-texts for support
- Citing and analyzing a passage to support a claim
- Engaging in close readings of passages for the purpose of literary analysis and discussion
- Interpreting figurative language
- Comparing different forms of the same text

Estimated Duration: 3-4 weeks