

A Midsummer Night's Dream

By William Shakespeare

Questions for Act I

1. Why does Theseus mention the moon waning in the opening speech of the play?
 - a) He is calling Egeus an "old moon" for his strict old-fashioned ways in forbidding Hermia to marry the one whom she loves.
 - b) He is humorously calling his bride-to-be a "slow, old moon" for reluctantly accepting his proposal of marriage.
 - c) He is expressing his impatience in waiting for his wedding day, to come on the new moon.
 - d) He is calling Lysander's father a slow old man, as the father will be lavishing Theseus with a big wedding present.
 - e) The waning moon is especially romantic for lovers and he expresses a wish that the moon would forever be waning.
2. Which of the following does Theseus NOT say in his second speech (to Philostrate and Hippolyta, "Go...reveling")?
 - a) In view of his wedding, he wants the city Athens to make merry.
 - b) Sadness is for funerals, not for weddings.
 - c) He plans to have many pale companions at his father's funeral, but not at his wedding.
 - d) He won Hippolyta's hand in marriage with violence.
 - e) He plans to make the wedding a cheerful, merry affair.
3. What is the conflict presented in the first scene of this drama?
 - a) A father does not want his daughter to marry the one whom she loves.
 - b) A father wants his daughter to marry someone *he* likes.
 - c) Two men are in love with one woman.
 - d) The law forbids a woman to marry without her father's consent and gives a harsh penalty for disobedience.
 - e) All of the above
4. What will Hermia's punishment be if she does not follow her father's command? (Two answers)
 - a) She will be sent to a nunnery.
 - b) She will be executed.
 - c) She will be sent to Sparta.
 - d) She will become a slave.

- e) She will be sent overseas.
5. When Theseus speaks of “Diana’s altar,” he is referring to ____.
- a) being sent to Sparta
 - b) Hermia’s pious sacrificing to the goddess of the moon
 - c) Lysander’s good looks
 - d) the nunnery
 - e) Demetrius’s fine qualities
6. Which of the following best expresses Lysander’s argument explaining why he feels himself better suited to marry than Demetrius?
- a) Demetrius is already married to Nedar’s daughter!
 - b) Demetrius is not as wealthy as I am.
 - c) Demetrius is not as good looking as I am.
 - d) Helena is prettier than Hermia— why doesn’t Demetrius just marry her?
 - e) I have all the qualities of Demetrius, but also possess one thing that he does not have—Hermia’s love.
7. Which of the following summarizes what Lysander and Hermia are discussing in the beginning of their conversation (first 20 lines)?
- a) Fathers are cruel.
 - b) The class system set up by society is unfair.
 - c) Lovers have many obstacles.
 - d) The young grow old too quickly.
 - e) Lovers are only happy for a moment.
8. How do the lovers seek to resolve their conflict?
- a) to commit suicide together
 - b) to confront Theseus on the unfairness of the law
 - c) to go to Hermia’s father’s house and there Lysander will bring forth his argument afresh
 - d) to run away into the woods and get married outside of Athens
 - e) to get money from a rich widow aunt and bribe the strict father.
9. The conversation between Helena and Hermia shows the ____ of Hermia’s situation with Demetrius and the ____ of love in general.
- a) irony...unreasonableness
 - b) irony...adventure
 - c) desperateness...catastrophic consequences
 - d) desperateness...beauty

- e) humor...youthful strength
10. Which of the following best describes the relationship between Hermia and Helena as seen in Act I, Scene I?
- a) bitter and hateful rivals
 - b) acquaintances but not close friends
 - c) look-alike relatives
 - d) close friends and confidants
 - e) mistress and servant
11. Which of the following is NOT true of the performers of *Pyramus and Thisby*?
- a) The men are not nobles, but are members of the working class.
 - b) The men are planning to perform for the wedding day of Theseus and Hippolyta.
 - c) One of the men, Bottom, does not want to play any part of the play.
 - d) The manager and organizer of the men is named Quince.
 - e) The play that the men want to perform is about ill-fated lovers.
12. Which of the following is not true of Nick Bottom?
- a) He is a weaver.
 - b) He uses many malapropisms (he consistently uses words incorrectly).
 - c) He has confidence in his acting ability.
 - d) He is very talkative and consistently interrupts the proceedings of Quince assigning the parts.
 - e) He says that he is best suited to play the part of a lover in a play.
13. Why does Snug want to play the lion's part?
- a) He does not want to give it to Bottom.
 - b) He believes he is a good actor and the part has a lot of lines.
 - c) It is a part that he think he can handle, as he says that he does not learn his lines quickly.
 - d) He is afraid of getting the part of Thisby.
 - e) He wants to scare the audience, particularly the Duke (Theseus) and Duchess (Hippolyta).
14. When and where are the men going to meet again to rehearse?
- a) the next day at night...at Quince's home
 - b) the next day at noon...at Bottom's home
 - c) the next day at night...in the woods
 - d) that night...at the palace

e) that night...at Quince's home

15. Which of the following is not mentioned or referred to by the court of Theseus (the plot) or the players (the subplot)?
- a) the passion of love
 - b) violence and death
 - c) the moon
 - d) the woods
 - e) defeat in war

Questions and Topics for Writing and Class Discussion

1. What characters in the drama are involved in the "love triangle"?
2. One apparent feature of Shakespeare's historical plays of the ancient world is the use of anachronisms, or "things out of time." In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* Theseus talks of the "livery of a cloister" and "hymns," which are not features of the Temple of pagan Greece, but of the Church of England. Theseus is called the *duke* and Hippolyta the *duchess* of Athens; such words as *duke* and *duchess* are not quite appropriately applied to the leaders of Ancient Greek cities. What other anachronisms can you find in the play?
3. Research the exact time of Midsummer in the English calendar and write down the month and day.
4. Notice that there are two places specifically mentioned and delineated in the play: the *city* and the *forest*. The woods in the play represents wild abandon, passion, chaos, young, unmarried love, individualism, and youth. The city, on the other hand, represents obedience, reason and judgment, law, order, marriage, conformity, society, and age. In one sentence explain how these places are appropriate symbols of the things they represent. Also be able to explain how the symbols become important in the conflict of the play.
5. Notice the images of and classical references to love/passion and sterility in the play. They include *cloisters*, *Cupid*, *Diana*, the *cold fruitless [childless] moon* (Diana or Phoebe, who never married, was the goddess of the moon), and *the Queen of Carthage*, named Dido (who committed suicide because her beloved the Trojan founder of Italy, Aeneas did not return her love). How do these classical references reinforce the theme of the play?

Memory Quotations

1. "The course of true love never did run smooth."¹ (Lysander to Hermia, Act I, Scene I)
2. "Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind,
And therefore is wing'd Cupid painted blind."

For Further Reading

Read Thomas Bulfinch's rendition *Pyramus and Thisbe*. What does the tale have to do with the main plot and subplot?

¹ All quotations from Shakespeare are from David Bevington. *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*. Third Edition. Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1980.