

### Introduction

William Shakespeare was an Elizabethan playwright and poet whose writing helped to define the Renaissance. His plays have become texts by which human nature may be studied. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is one of his earliest plays; it deals with love and what happens to those who fall in love. The Renaissance was a time when people rediscovered their own importance; it was characterized by a thirst for knowledge and understanding of the supernatural, natural, societal, and personal realms of the world. Shakespeare's early characters are at times exemplums or caricature-type cartoons of very real character traits. In Renaissance romance, characters may represent a single trait and be named: Faith, Hope, or Charity. Shakespeare is never quite that heavy-handed, but his characters do reflect others like them for the Elizabethan stage. As you read *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, try to read it in sections: Act One (prosthesis or prologue), Acts Two, Three, Four (metastasis or complication), and Act Five (epistasis or epilogue). If viewed closely, Shakespeare writes his plays as we write an essay: an introduction, development, and conclusion.

### DUE

#### First Day of Class

**Instructions:** Answer all of the following questions; use notebook papers, allow for one page per answer. Please handwrite your answers. When you have finished, please staple everything together (using this sheet as your cover) and be ready to hand it in on the first day of class.

1. Setting is the first major element of fiction. In *AMND* Shakespeare creates a controlled world and a world where anything and everything is possible. Contrast the two settings of *AMND* and discuss the effect that each has on the characters of the play. Include in your response an identification of who seems to be in control of each setting.
2. In character analysis, three questions should be dealt with:  
Who is ...? (This answer should give **concrete details**.)  
What is ...? (This answer should give symbolic or allegorical references: **what does this character represent beyond her/himself?**)  
Why is ...? (This answer should discuss **why the author would create such a character**.)  
Apply all of the above to: Hermia, Helena, Demetrius, Lysander.
3. Shakespeare's goal was to entertain as many people as he could. The upper, middle, and lower classes all visited his theatre. What characters in *AMND* appear to be created by Shakespeare to entertain the superstitious people?
4. Who, what, and why is Bottom? (see question #2 above for explication of who, what, why). Which class is he meant to entertain?
5. Two themes run through *AMND*: "...what fools these mortals be" (III.i.116) and "the course of true love never did run smooth" (I.i.136). Explain how Shakespeare deals with these themes and what lesson he might be teaching about them.
6. **To plot** means to structure the action of a literary work. Each plot should be connected to the ones before and after (most likely by the method of "cause and effect"). Using a nine point plot structure, outline the action of *AMND*. You may find it easier to complete this activity with a chart or diagram (clearly labeled) than with paragraphs.
7. Choose three quotations that would best describe the character of Puck (who, what, why?).
8. If love is the major theme of the play, discuss three kinds of love that Shakespeare deals with.
9. Explain why *AMND* is a comedy.