YEAR 9 UNIT PLAN

A Midsummer Night’s Dream

Knowledge, understandings, skills

Students will:

• understand the play *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* in the context in which it was written
• work cooperatively in groups to create shared work for performance
• experiment with different ways of imaginatively and interpretively transforming the text
• explore characters, roles, situations and actions through drama activities.

Week 1: Introducing Shakespeare’s life and times

Graffiti activity

Provide one whiteboard marker for each student. Divide the whiteboard into two sections, one labelled ‘Shakespeare’s life’ and the other ‘Shakespeare’s times’. Allow students five minutes to graffiti the whiteboard with words, phrases, images or diagrams that represent their prior knowledge of Shakespeare. After five minutes, students return to their seats and discuss their work.

As a follow up, you might like to show the opening scenes of John Madden’s film *Shakespeare in Love*.

Group research

Place students into groups of three or four to generate research questions about Shakespeare’s life and times. Point students to their graffiti board for inspiration for forming questions.

When they have completed their question brainstorming, record questions on the board, then group these so that you have the same number of question groups as you have groups of students. Ensure that you cover all the basic areas of Shakespeare’s life and times.

Provide students with adequate research time in your library or resource centre.

Ask each group to present its findings to the class. You might like to give students the opportunity to present this information in a variety of ways, using PowerPoint, drama, song, rap etc.

Week 2: The story, the language

1. Starting out

Watch *BBC Animated Tales – A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.

Ask for students’ responses to the following question: *What is the story about?*

Ask them to write a response in 50 words. When students have completed this task, ask them to share what they have written with the whole class or a small group. When this has been done, ask them to write their answer in 10 words or less, then repeat the sharing process. Ask: *What aspect of the story captured your interest most?*
2. Moved synopsis
The term ‘moved synopsis’ has been developed by Bell Shakespeare to describe an interactive storytelling activity in which students act out a short synopsis of the play.

Warwick University drama educator Jonathon Neelands calls this approach the ‘Shakespeare whoosh’.

The point of the ‘moved synopsis’ or ‘Shakespeare whoosh’ activity is twofold.
1. Students start to interact by participating in a safe and entertaining activity.
2. Through participation, students learn the story of the play.

Your script should be in short sections for each scene or section of a scene that contains important action and dialogue. With your narrative script of the story in hand, invite your students to form a circle with you. Invite students to come into the circle to be the characters as they appear in the narrative.

3. Insults Elizabethan style!
• Use a data projector to show students the Shakespeare insult kit*.
• Students form pairs or trios to take up positions around the room. Groups prepare an insult by taking one word from each of the three columns. They then come up with a gesture for each word, and a way to perform it (all at once, one person per word etc). Students then fire an insult at the group to their right, one by one. Repeat activity with the audience becoming involved (oohs, aahs and boos as appropriate).

Week 3: Popcorn time
Watch Michael Hoffman’s version of A Midsummer Night’s Dream.

Watch the BBC’s Shakespeare Retold version of A Midsummer Night’s Dream.

Shakespeare in our time
Discuss the idea of re-telling Macbeth in different contexts and how we should judge modern reinterpretations. Is it possible to maintain the essence of the play when it is placed in a different setting and era, and uses contemporary dialogue?

So, what’s it all about?
As a class, discuss the big ideas (or themes) in A Midsummer Night’s Dream. Make a list of them on the board.

Divide the class into groups. Each group should be assigned one of the big ideas.

Each group:
• discusses what Shakespeare is saying through the play about this big idea
• collects evidence from the play to support the answer.

Ask students to go to Tag Galaxy and experiment with this application. When they understand how Tag Galaxy operates, ask them to create a galaxy that represents their theme. They can show their galaxy, with a commentary, to the rest of the class.
Weeks 4 and 5: Working through the play
Choose the key scenes of the play (somewhere between 5–7), read them aloud and discuss them in class. Along the way, choose some key speeches / interactions and workshop them using techniques from drama to focus on language, character development etc. For example:

1. Helena’s speech (‘O spite! O hell! I see you all are bent...’ Act 2 Scene 3)
Allocate a line of text to each student and get them to try various things, such as:
- walking around the room, reciting their line
- speaking only the vowel sounds in the line
- speaking only the consonants in their line
- playing with the pitch and rhythm in a variety of ways
- walking around the circle, speaking their lines in order
- running around the circle, doing the same
- identifying the natural builds and beat changes, without losing momentum, then taking them to the extreme
- running in a circle, but getting on a chair and declaiming their line when it’s their turn
- standing in a circle and sharing their line with a particular gesture
- standing in a circle and speaking the lines in order.

2. Divide the students into pairs and give each group a (different) small portion of Demetrius and Helena’s scene from Act two, Scene one (‘I love thee not, therefore pursue me not’). Each pair should workshop their scene independently, focusing on the staging and the conflict. After a short rehearsal time, students perform their ‘mini-scenes’ in order to the class.

Week 6: Bringing it together
1. Character map
In groups of three, students are to decide on ten significant moments for a main character in the script, for example: Helena, Hermia, Lysander, Demetrius, Bottom, Puck etc, and provide an accompanying quote from the play for each of those moments. Students are given a short amount of time to assemble a tableau for each event, with one student quoting the line in each one. Students perform for the group, and the audience closes their eyes during each transition while the teacher reads out the event description. After each performance, students discuss:
- the effectiveness of the tableaux/staging
- what they now understand about the character that they didn’t before
- possible modern day interpretations of the character.

2. Tweeting Shakespeare
See lesson plan.
3. Backstory
Write the backstory for one of the minor characters in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*: Starveling, Flute, Hippolyta, Egeus or Philostrate.

A backstory is the personal history of a character that is not described in the actual play or story. In other words, it is what happens to the character before the play starts.

4. Shakesbook
Create a social networking page for one of the main characters in the play.

**Week 7: Assessment 1**
Inform students that they have three lessons to create their major assessment assignment for *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* to be shared with a wider audience. They may work in groups, in pairs or independently.

**Choices**
- Choose a scene to present as a slideshow of images with selected pieces of text.
- Create a photo story for the entire play that can be presented with printed text or recorded voices. Pictures can be sourced from royalty-free photo sites on the internet, or your own photographs, or they can be original creations.
- Choose one of your rewrites of a scene to rehearse and polish for performance.
- Create a series of illustrations for key scenes that could be used in an illustrated version of the play.
- Create a cartoon version of a scene.
- Make a video inspired by a quote or a scene.
- Re-tell each of the five acts in poetry.
- Create a soundtrack for the play.

**Week 8: Assessment 2**
You will be given three lessons to write an analytical essay on the play.