

A Midsummer Night's Dream in pictures

Lesson plan

Topic: artwork inspired by Shakespeare's play *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

Level: C1

Time: 60 minutes

Aims

- to develop students' ability to describe a painting
- to give students practise in reading Shakespearean language (for both gist and detail)
- to raise students' awareness of visual art inspired by the play *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

Important – please read

This is the second of two lessons on *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and **it is assumed that the students will have completed the first lesson (which they will probably find slightly easier) and / or will be familiar with the story of the play.**

Also, the artwork that is central to this lesson does contain copious amounts of **nudity**, so do please bear in mind cultural sensitivities when deciding whether or not this lesson will be appropriate for your class.

Introduction

This lesson provides students with the opportunity to revise their knowledge of the plot and characters from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Students will study a short extract from Act IV scene I and link the text to a visual representation of the scene. Students will practise describing paintings inspired by the play.

Preparation

Print one copy of the **student worksheets** for each learner in the class.

There is also a **PowerPoint presentation** for displaying the three paintings. As much of the lesson centres around these paintings, it would be advantageous for the students to see them clearly and in colour, so you may also wish to print some of the slides (see below) as copies for groups of students to share.

Slide 2 shows all three paintings, and is intended for use in **Task 1**.

Slides 3, 4 and 5 show the paintings **without captions** (artist and title).

Slides 6, 7 and 8 show the paintings **with** captions.

It is recommended that you make a small number of full-page prints (colour if possible) of *either* slides **3-5**, *or* slides **6-8**, depending on whether you would rather the students see the captions or not.

Procedure

Warmer – the plot of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (10 minutes)

- Write *A Midsummer Night's Dream* on the board and tell students that you are going to see how much they remember about this play.
- Organise students into pairs. Focus their attention on the example questions and the words in the box. Nominate a confident pair to demonstrate the activity by asking and answering a *wh-* or *how* question about the play, using the words in the box to help them.
- Give students a couple of minutes to ask and answer their questions. Circulate, offering support where necessary.
- Conduct whole class feedback. Ask each pair of students to share one of their questions and answers.

Task 1 – pictures of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (10 minutes)

- Ask students to continue working with a partner. Focus their attention on the paintings and elicit that each painting represents a scene from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.
- **Show slide 2** of the PowerPoint file.
- If you have made **prints of slides 3-5** of the PowerPoint file, distribute them at this time.
- Give students a minute to match the paintings with their titles. Check answers around the class.
- Ask students if looking at the paintings have helped them to remember any further details about the play.

Answers:

1 b *Titania and Bottom* (1790) by Henry Fuseli

Oberon has punished Titania for her pride by making her fall in love with Bottom, a man with the head of a donkey.

2 c *The Quarrel of Oberon and Titania* (1850) by Joseph Noel Paton

Oberon and Titania, who are king and queen of the fairies, argue about the possession of a changeling (a human child carried off to the fairy realm and replaced by a fairy child). Titania refuses to give her own child to Oberon. The main figures are surrounded by smaller fairy creatures.

3 a *The Reconciliation of Oberon and Titania* (1847) by Joseph Noel Paton

Titania and Oberon stand together reunited, and are about to resolve the magically induced confusion between the two lovers (the man next to them and the woman on the left in the foreground) who are shown sleeping apart.

Task 2 – reading for gist and detail (20 minutes)

- Direct students' attention to the dialogue. Explain that Shakespearean English is quite different from the English spoken nowadays and stress that they must not worry about understanding every word.
- Ask students to quickly read the first four lines of the dialogue and decide which of the scenes from Task 1 it represents.
- Read the questions aloud to your students. Ask them to read the whole text, slowly, and answer the questions, using Fuesli's painting to help them.

Answer: *Titania and Bottom (1790) by Henry Fuseli (picture 1)*

1. *Fairies. Bottom asks Peaseblossom and Mustard to scratch his head. He asks Cobweb to kill a bee and bring him the honey bag.*
2. *Titania and Bottom are in the centre of the painting. According to experts, Peaseblossom is scratching Bottom's head; Mustard-seed is on his hand and Cobweb is bringing him the honey-bag. But do not worry too much if identifying these last three is difficult...*
3. *Fairy holding a small bearded man on a lead, doll like figures, fairy with the head of a butterfly, hooded figure holding onto a ugly looking doll – like figure (art historians think this is a changeling).*
4. *The beautiful young woman holding the tiny old man on a leash symbolizes the triumph of youth over old age.*
5. *Suggested answer: I love this painting because it's so imaginative and there is so much detail in all of the different figures. / I don't like this painting because it's dark and gloomy and some of the figures are really creepy.*

Task 3 – vocabulary (10 minutes)

- Ask students to read the text again, finding and underlining the words in the text and matching them to their definitions.
- Allow students to compare their answers with a partner before checking answers around the class.

Answers: 1a 2d 3c 4e 5b

Task 4 – describing a painting (10 minutes)

- Read the words in the box aloud to your students and focus their attention on the gapped text.
- Ask students to complete the description of the painting with words from the box.
- Read the description around the class.

Answers: 1 in the centre 2 beside 3 To his right 4 In the foreground 5 a symbol

Tip

You can find a very clear description of this painting at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DMxaK0xjldE>

Play this short clip to your students if you have time. Ask them to listen for information which is not included in the description they have just read.

Task 5 – speaking about a painting (10 minutes)

- Organise students into pairs. Tell them to choose one of the other paintings from this lesson and describe it to their partner. Remind them to use words and phrases from Task 4 to help them.
- Circulate as students complete this task, noting down any good examples of descriptive language.
- Conduct class feedback. Nominate a strong student to describe his/her chosen painting to the rest of the class.

Suggested answers:

This painting shows Titania and Oberon arguing over the young Indian prince. It is a very bright and light painting and there is a lot of detail. Titania and Oberon are in the centre. To Titania's right we see the young Indian prince. He is looking out shyly at Oberon. In the foreground there is a tree – a fairy sleeps in its hollow. In the background, lots of fairies dance.

This painting shows Titania and Oberon making up after their quarrel. In the centre of the painting there is a large tree which Bottom is lying asleep on. He no longer has the head of the donkey. Titania is pointing at him, and Oberon is close by her side. In the foreground, Helena lies asleep. She is surrounded by fairies. At the front of the painting an ugly goblin attacks a fish. The strange creatures in the paintings are dream like and symbolic of the dark elements of Shakespeare's play.