

elementary

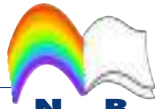
R A I N B O W S

A Midsummer Night's Dream

William Shakespeare



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A Midsummer Night's Dream

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The author

William Shakespeare



William Shakespeare is the greatest playwright and poet of the Elizabethan age.

He lived in Stratford-upon-Avon from his birth (23rd April 1564) until he was a young man. In this small market town, 32 kilometres south of Birmingham, Shakespeare attended¹ the local Grammar School² for eight years. His family was important and respected: his father, a merchant and glove-maker³, had various offices in the local administration and was Mayor⁴ for a time. After leaving school, Shakespeare perhaps helped his father in his business; at eighteen he married an older girl, Anne Hathaway and they had a daughter, Susan (1583), and later twins⁵, Judith and Hamnet (1585).

The next few years are a mystery, but probably around 1590 Shakespeare left his family and moved to London to start a career in the theatre.

In 1592, Shakespeare was already famous in London, because a rival playwright⁶ accused him of copying other authors' works.

First he worked as an actor and then he started writing plays. Soon he was a rich man and invested his money well: he formed a theatrical company, the Lord Chamberlain's Men and built the Globe Theatre (1599) with some partners.

He also bought a very large house in Stratford for his family (1597) and obtained⁷ a personal coat of arms⁸. In 1613 he returned to Stratford, where he died at the age of 52, on 3rd April 1616.

1. *attended*: went to regularly.

2. *Grammar School*: here pupils studied Latin and the Classics, History and Language.

3. *glove-maker*: craftsman who makes coverings for the hands.

4. *Mayor*: head of a city.

5. *twins*: born to the same mother on the same day.

6. *playwright*: dramatist.

7. *obtained*: got.

8. *coat of arms*: family emblem.

The London of the time was dominated by the figure of Elizabeth I, a patron⁹ of the arts and artists, and was under the intellectual influence of the Italian Renaissance. The spirit of the age and the protection of the nobles encouraged creative artists like Shakespeare to experiment in different areas. Audiences¹⁰ still laugh when they watch Shakespeare's comedies (e.g. *The Taming of the Shrew*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*), suffer for the destiny of his tragic heroes (e.g. *Richard III*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Othello*) and enjoy his romantic love stories with a touch¹¹ of magic (e.g. *The Tempest*). His 145 sonnets are also famous.

9. *patron*: person who supports and gives money to artists, writers or musicians.
10. *audiences*: all the people who are

- watching or listening to a play, concert, film or programme.
11. *touch*: trace.



Model of the Globe Theatre.

LIST OF CHARACTERS

The Royals:

Theseus: Greek hero who killed the Minotaur and now Duke of Athens

Hippolyta: Queen of the Amazon warrior women and Theseus' future wife

Noble Athenians:

Egeus: Hermia's father

Hermia (Mia): in love with Lysander

Lysander (Lys): Hermia's lover

Demetrius: Hermia's fiancé

Helena: in love with Demetrius

Athenian commoners:

Peter Quince: company director

Nick Bottom: Pyramus in the play and the donkey that Titania falls in love with

Francis: plays Thisbe

Robin: plays Moonshine

Tom: plays the Wall

Snug: plays the Lion

Supernatural characters:

Oberon: King of Fairies

Titania: Queen of Fairies

Puck: a faun, servant to Oberon

Fairies and Elves

Action:

Four days, but mostly at night, up to 1st May, or May Day, a traditional wedding date.

Setting:

The palace of the Duke in Athens, but mostly the wood, one mile from Athens, where the Fairy King and Queen live.



BEFORE READING

1 Tick what you know about Greece.

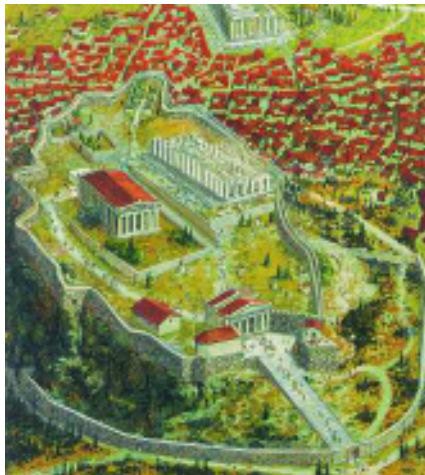
- a. Greece is situated on the sea.
 Baltic Caspian Mediterranean
- b. Its capital is
 Sparta Athens Olympia
- c. The place of the famous games is
 Delphi Corynth Olympia
- d. The ancient Greek gods lived on
 Mount Olympus Mount Ararat Mount Amiata

2 Underline the word which is different in each group.

- a. husband, cousin, wife, marriage
b. son, daughter, mother, fiancé
c. father, uncle, godmother, grandparents
d. grandmother, nephew, niece, aunt

3 Match the adjectives with their opposites.

- | | | |
|------------|--------------------------|--------------|
| a. patient | <input type="checkbox"/> | 1. bitter |
| b. quick | <input type="checkbox"/> | 2. unhappy |
| c. serious | <input type="checkbox"/> | 3. old |
| d. sweet | <input type="checkbox"/> | 4. impatient |
| e. young | <input type="checkbox"/> | 5. slow |
| f. happy | <input type="checkbox"/> | 6. merry |

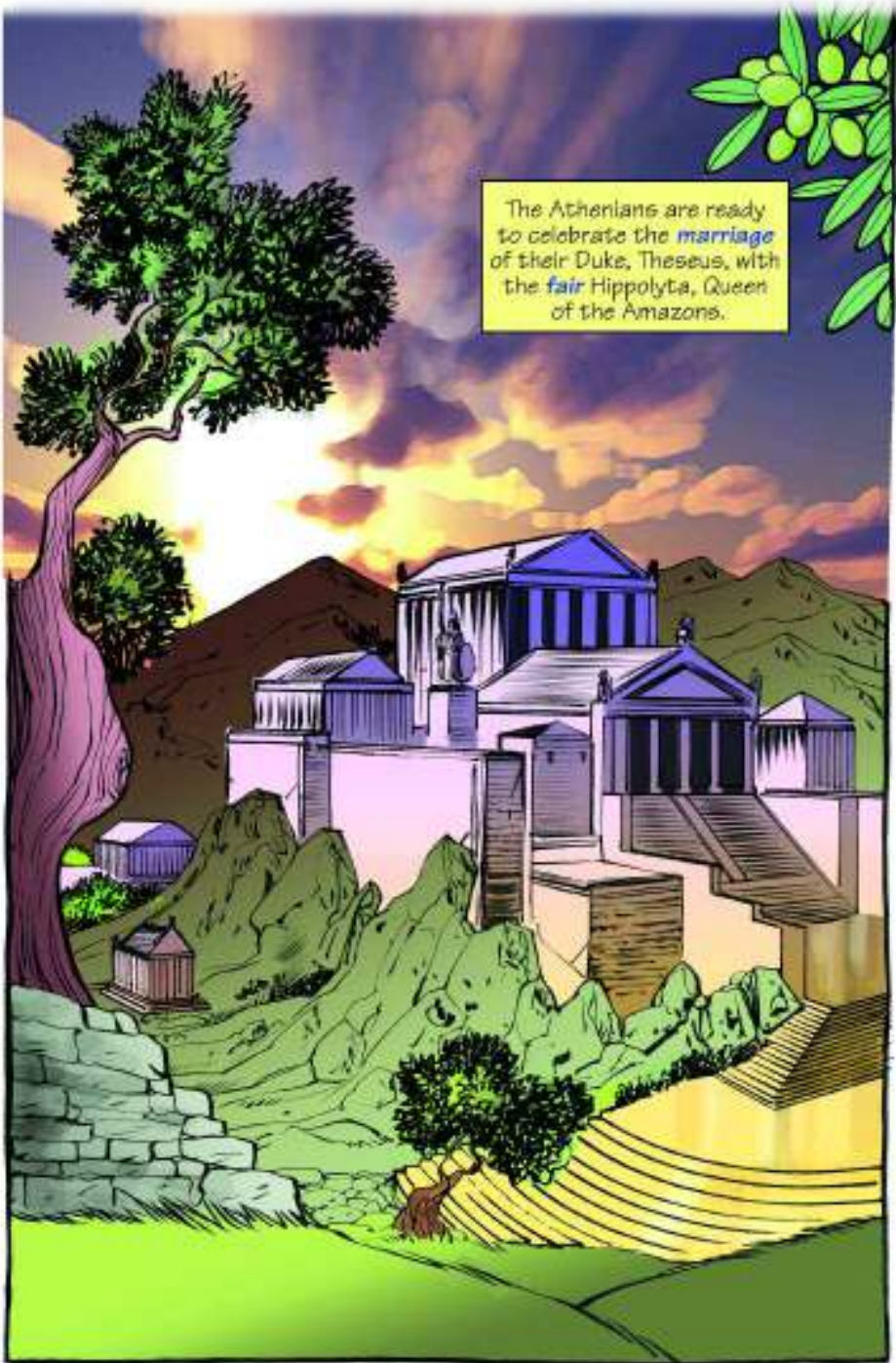


*The Acropolis
in 480 B.C.
(watercolour by
P. Connolly, 1998)*

A Midsummer Night's Dream

The price of disobedience

(Act I, Scene 1)



Theseus and Hippolyta are in the palace.
They are impatient to get married.

Dearest
Hippolyta! Four long
days before we get
married...

Four days
will pass quickly...
Don't worry, our *wedding*
night is near!

The nobleman Egeus
interrupts them. He
is very angry.

I wish
you happiness,
noble Theseus!

Thank you!
What *brings* you
here?

My good Lord,
this is Demetrius.
He has my *consent*
to marry
Hermia.

