Characters in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*
by William Shakespeare

**Study Guide:** Character Descriptions -- who they are, what they do, and why they matter.

*A Midsummer Night's Dream* begins in the afternoon and continues through the night and into the next day (although if one is paying CLOSE attention, the dialogue of the play indicates that four days and nights have passed!) There are three main groups of characters in the play. Understanding who is who, and the purpose of each character group, makes it easy to understand and enjoy this amusing and entertaining play.

**Royals** - The Royals, are the upper class Athenians in the play. Theseus' wedding plans begin the play and set the entire play in motion.

- **THESEUS:** Duke Theseus has won Hippolyta, the Amazonian Queen, and will marry her in four days’ time. He tells her that he wooed her with his sword, but will wed her in another vein: With POMP, with TRIUMPH, and with REVELING!
- **HIPPOLYTA:** Queen Hippolyta, warrior and betrothed to Theseus.
- **LYSANDER:** Young man in love with Hermia.
- **DEMETRIUS:** Currently engaged to Hermia, but against her will. Egeus, Hermia's father, favors Demetrius. Before the play begins, Demetrius "deflowered" Helena. Helena is still in love with Demetrius, but Demetrius has dumped Helena.
- **HERMIA:** Young woman in love with Lysander. Daughter to Egeus. Betrothed against her will to Demetrius. Hermia is small and considered very pretty.
- **HELENA:** Young woman in love with Demetrius. Helena is taller and of a fairer complexion than Hermia, though both women are considered very pretty in the eyes of the Athenian population.
- **EGEUS:** Father to Hermia. In the beginning of the play, Egeus wants Hermia to marry Demetrius, which is why Hermia and Lysander run away.
- **PHILOSTRATE:** Theseus' "Master of the Revels." Philostrate is a court employee who is planning the wedding of Theseus and Hippolyta.

**Fairies** - The Fairies exist in a magical realm, apart from mortals.

- **OBERON:** King of the Fairies. Angry at his Queen, Titania. He is jealous of the Changeling Boy. Oberon wants the little boy for himself (to serve him.) Oberon seeks revenge on Titania for her ignoring him and refusing to give him the boy.
- **TITANIA:** Queen of the Fairies. Titania's human friend has died, and Titania now cares for her son. She dotes on the little boy, and ignores Oberon’s insistence that she give the boy over to him.
- **CHANGELING BOY:** Orphan cared for by Titania.
- **PUCK:** Also known as Robin Goodfellow, Oberon's jester and lieutenant. Oberon sends Puck to find a magic flower. The juice of the flower, when put on someone's eyes, enchants this person. Note: a puck is what he is; Robin Goodfellow is his name. A puck is a mischievous sprite. The character is often referred to as Puck.
- **PEASBLOSSOM, COBWEB, MOTH, MUSTARDSEED:** Titania's fairy servants.
Mechanicals- The Mechanicals are working class humans. They come together to rehearse a play to be performed at Theseus' wedding celebration. They are clownish, and this group speaks in prose instead of verse. The play they perform is known literarily as "The Play Within the Play", and is the “Tragical …and Cruel death of Pyramus and Thisbe”.

- **PETER QUINCE**: The leader of the group of Mechanicals. Quince has written the play to be performed by his friends at the wedding celebration.
- **NICK BOTTOM**: Nick plays the character of Pyramus in The Play Within the Play. Bottom is the star of the Mechanicals. During the evening rehearsal, Puck turns Bottom's head into the head of a donkey. Titania wakes with the flower juice on her eyes, and sees Nick Bottom with the donkey's head. She immediately falls in love with him, and is a laughing-stock for Oberon.
- **FRANCIS FLUTE**: Flute plays Thisbe in The Play Within the Play. Thisbe and Pyramus are in love. Flute is a man but Thisbe is a woman. There are many puns and jokes surrounding this.
- **TOM SNOUT**: Plays a Wall. Snout portrays a stone wall between Pyramus and Thisbe, and they must speak through a chink in the wall.
- **SNUG**: Snug plays Lion who scares Thisbe away while she is waiting for Pyramus at their rendezvous point. Pyramus believes that Lion has killed his precious Thisbe.
- **ROBIN STARVELING**: Plays Moonshine. He comes on with a lamp. He is laughed at, and does not take it well.

Other Helpful Terms:

- **BROWNIE**: a legendary good-natured elf that performs helpful services at night.
- **FAIRY**: a mythical being of folklore and romance usually having diminutive human form and magic powers
- **SPRITE**: a small creature that has magical powers: an elf or fairy.
- **WOODSPIKE**: Green Woodpecker