

# Shakespeare Begins Response Pack

## Exercise 1

Story Woosh! In a circle, get volunteers to enact a portion of the story as explained to them, with the end of each scene and the beginning of another punctuated by a collective explosion of the word 'Woosh!' This keeps the energy up and helps to consolidate the action within each scene.

## Exercise 2

**Inference** In groups. Ask students to recount what they feel is the most memorable or significant moment of the story.

Get students to create a freeze frame of that moment. Observe and feedback, see if we can clearly see what the moments are.

Now get students to consider their freeze frame as the end of a story. Can they conceive of what happened 5 minutes before this freeze frame and create a freeze frame to express that?

And now can they create a freeze frame which showed the action from an hour ago?

And another from a day ago?

They should now have four freeze frames travelling back through time from the end of story to the beginning. Get the groups to reverse the order so they are telling the story from start to finish sequentially. Observe and feedback.

**Reflection:** This is a piece of responsive theatre to **A Midsummer Night's Dream**. What makes it responsive and what did we do?

## Thematic and Motif response

Within **A Midsummer Night's Dream** there are dominant themes which drive the drama, tension and humour.

One theme is **Love and Marriage** and the difficulty of making relationships work.

Some related scenes:

**Act 1 Scene 1:** Theseus describes his courtship of Hippolyta and the confusion of the four lovers begins with Egeus' formal complaint about his daughter's involvement with Lysander.

**Act 2 Scene 1:** Oberon and Titania quarrel over the Indian boy; Helena confronts Demetrius in the wood.

**Act 3 Scene 2:** Lysander falls in love with Helena on awakening with the love juice in his eyes: the lovers are in a state of great confusion.

**Act 4 Scene 1:** Titania expresses her love for Bottom, who has been transformed into a donkey.

**Act 5 Scene 1:** Three weddings and a fairy blessing bring all to a happy conclusion.

### **Exercise 3: A Midsummer Night's Dream Speed Dating.**

Pick a 'Single and ready to mingle' participant and three potential love interests to 'one minute speed date' with - all of whom must be gross, unappealing, bizarre or other-worldly etc. The object of this improvisational game is for the 'single' to keep straight-faced throughout and under a love spell, so that no matter how awful their date is, they have to remain totally enamoured with them. At the end of the improvisation, 'Single' must choose who they most love.

### **Exercise 4: 'Yes and' 'No but' Improv.**

Two volunteers to improvise two bookend scenes, one illustrating the rosy beginning of a marriage and the other the result of unhappy years together. In scene one, after the initial line every line following must start with an affirmative 'yes and'. Whereas the second scene, illustrating time gone by, every subsequent line must start with 'No but'. Observe and feedback.



## Appearance and Reality

How people and events are often not as they seem. Some related scenes:

**Act 3 Scene 1:** Bottom's transformation disrupts the Mechanicals' rehearsal.

**Act 3 Scene 2:** Puck's mistakes bring the lovers to great confusion.

**Act 4 Scene 1:** Titania awakes from her fantasy and the lovers comment on how dream-like recent events seem to them now.

**Act 5 Scene 1:** The play within the play highlights the theme of illusion and reality.

## Exercise 5: Subtext Scenes.

Two participants perform a straight version of 'Script 1'. Reflect and discuss potential hidden agendas and subtexts. The script is then performed again with two added participants as 'subtext heads' to add thoughts aloud within the script. The third time round remove the 'subtext heads' but actors must keep the subtext in their heads when performing. Observe and feedback. Appearances are deceiving but is there a way of demonstrating an 'illusion'?

## Eyes

As emblems of appearance and reality, as entryways to the heart, windows on the soul. For example:

*'I would my father look'd but with my eyes.'* Act 1 Scene 1

*'Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind'* Act 1 Scene 1

*'Reason becomes the marshal to my will / And leads me to your eyes, where I o'erlook / Love's stories written in love's richest book.'* Act 2 Scene 2

*'And then I will her charmed eye release / From monster's view, and all things shall be peace.'* Act 3 Scene 2

*'Methinks I see these things with parted eye, / When everything seems double.'*  
Act 4 Scene 1

*'The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling, / Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven...'* Act 5 Scene 1

## Exercise 7: Space, Gaze and Proxemics.

In pairs, gain permanent fixed eye contact. Experiment with spaces Public, Social, personal and intimate. What does this feel like? What, to an audience, does this look like? Is this a difficult activity and if so why?

### Plays

Rehearsals and roles/parts as symbols of magical transformation and of experimentation and preparation. Also as ironic comment on the insubstantiality of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and its themes. For example:

*'Nay, faith, let me not play a woman; I have a beard coming.'* Act 1 Scene 2

*'You can play no part but Pyramus'* Act 1 Scene 2

*'We will meet; and there we may rehearse most obscenely and courageously. Take pains; be perfect: adieu'* Act 1 Scene 2

*'Thus have I, Wall, my part discharged so; / And, being done, thus Wall away doth go.'* Act 5 Scene 1

*'If we shadows have offended, / Think but this, and all is mended: / That you have but slumbered here / While these visions did appear'* Act 5 Scene 1



## Exercise 9: Play within a play

Using the play of *Pyramus and Thisby*, as performed by the Mechanicals in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, mark out some off stage shenanigans as mini-scenes, perhaps illustrating an even more dramatic situation than the story being enacted on stage. Observe and feedback. What does the play within a play vision do for the audience?

## Order and disorder

Needed for a balance between the rational and irrational, between rules and magic, in the interests of love, harmony and creativity. Some related scenes:

**Act 1 Scene 1:** Theseus describes Hermia's punishment if she disobeys her father, prompting the lovers' escape to the woods.

**Act 2 Scene 1:** Titania describes the consequences for the natural world of her quarrel with Oberon.

**Act 3 Scene 1:** Bottom's transformation disrupts the Mechanicals' rehearsal.

**Act 3 Scene 2:** Puck's mistakes bring the lovers to great confusion.

**Act 4 Scene 1:** Titania expresses her love for Bottom who has been transformed into a donkey.

**Act 5 Scene 1:** Three weddings and a fairy blessing bring all to a happy conclusion.

## Exercise 6

Environmental Chaos. Two participants perform a police investigation scene with a potential criminal being interviewed by an officer. The second time the participants perform the scene the audience must dictate a new 'environment' for this interview to be taking place, as inappropriate as possible! Observe and feedback.

**Reflection:** What is the significance of environment in a scenario?

## Nature

Representing the magical world of the forest in contrast to Theseus's court; also as disrupted by the disharmony between the fairy king and queen. For example:

*'And through this distemperature we see/The seasons alter...'* Act 2 Scene 1

*'I know a bank where the wild thyme grows...'* Act 2 Scene 1

*'You spotted snakes with double tongue...'* Act 2 Scene 2

*'Out of this wood do not desire to go: / Thou shalt remain here, whether thou wilt or no. / I am a spirit of no common rate...'* Act 3 Scene 1

*'I'll follow you, I'll lead you about a round, / Through bog, through bush, through brake, through briar: / Sometime a horse I'll be, sometime a hound...'*

Act 3 Scene 1

## Exercise 8: Soundscapes and Walkways.

Groups 1 creates a soundscape of the markets streets of Athens for group 2 to experience with their eyes closed and the other group 2 create a forest walkway for Group 1 to run through. Experience and reflect. Can these exercises be realised within a response performance?



## Magic

Representing the unseen, the unpredictable, the irrational and inexplicable. For example:

*'And this same progeny of evils comes/From our debate, from our dissension.'*

Act 2 Scene 2

*'That very time I saw, but thou couldst not, / Flying between the cold moon and the earth, / Cupid all arm'd...'* Act 2 Scene 1

*'The juice of it on sleeping eye-lids laid / Will make or man or woman madly dote/ Upon the next live creature that it sees.'* Act 2 Scene 1

*'I'll put a girdle round the earth/In forty minutes.'* Act 2 Scene 1

*'But who comes here? I am invisible; /And I will overhear their conference.'* Act 2 Scene 1

*'Churl, upon thy eyes I throw / All the power this charm doth owe.'* Act 2 Scene 2

*'Sometime a horse I'll be, sometime a hound...'*  
Act 3 Scene 1

*'Bless thee, Bottom! bless thee! thou art translated.'*  
Act 3 Scene 1

*'Now, until the break of day, / Through this house each fairy stray. To be best bride-bed will we, / Which by us shall blessed be.'* Act 5 Scene 1

## Exercise 11: Enchanted Dinner Party

Someone is hosting a dinner party in the forest. Each guest has a secret enchantment given to them before they enter (for example, *snaps in and out of love with the host every time someone says 'cheers!'*) The host has to guess the enchantment so that the guest can leave the scene.

## Sleep and Dreams

Which take us to mysterious places, are states of innocence and vulnerability, cause confusion and the blurring of boundaries between fantasy and reality. For example:

*'Ay me, for pity! what a dream was here!'* Act 2 Scene 2

*'Tell me how it came this night / That I sleeping here was found / With these mortals on the ground'* Act 4 Scene 1

*'It seems to me / That yet we sleep, we dream'* Act 4 Scene 1

*'God's my life, stolen hence, and left me asleep! I have had a most rare vision. I have had a dream...'* Act 4 Scene 1

*'Why, then, we are awake: let's follow him / And by the way let us recount our dreams'* Act 4 Scene 1

*'I will get Peter Quince to write a ballad of this dream: it shall be called Bottom's Dream, because it hath no bottom'* Act 4 Scene 1



## **Exercise 12: Guided walks, through the land of my dreams.**

Start this session in pairs, one, the Traveller, with eyes closed and the other as Guide. This takes total focus and trust, if someone feels they can't do it, best if they sit out on this occasion. The Guide and Traveller practice in their first journey the mechanisms to signal *stop*, *start*, *slow*, *fast* etc. In the second journey, through no language but intonation through breath (panicked, hurried, underwater etc.), the Guide takes the Traveller on a 'real' journey through an environment, like a supermarket or a cave with a sleeping bear in it etc.

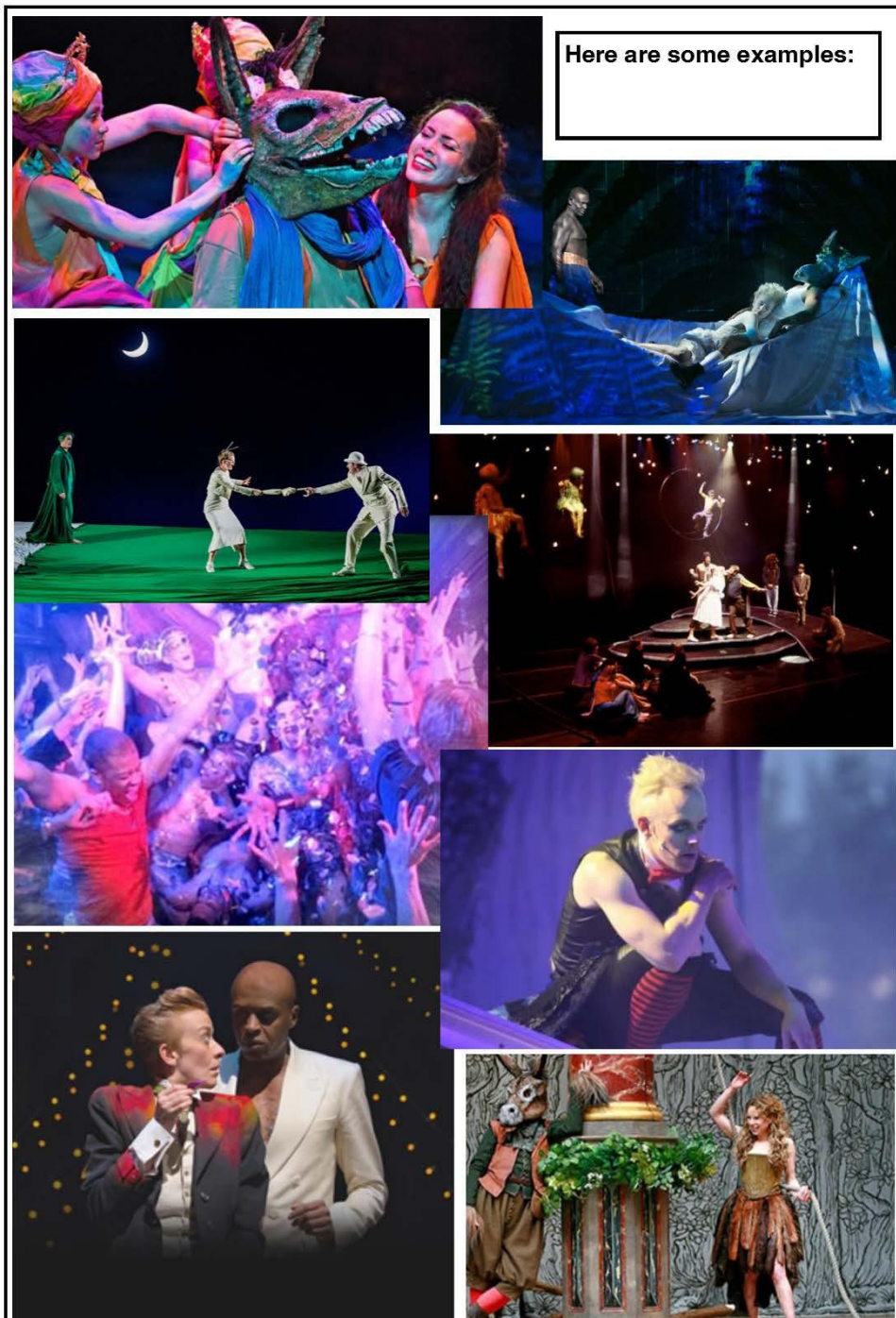
On completion, can the Traveller guess where they had journeyed through? On the journey, the Guide must take the Traveller through a strange and wonderful dream using only intonation of breath to illustrate the what, how, where or when. The Traveller won't necessarily be able to decipher what this dream was about, but can they give a feel for what was happening to them and what the atmosphere was?

**Reflection:** We can't literally do this with our audience but what can we take from this exercise



## Textual response

Our production is set, more or less, in the here and now, with a heavy Ziggy stardust influence and our characters at the mercy of the stars and planets. Even though our action takes place in the present day, you will see we have done away with distracting tech like phones and Ipad's as these don't help us to tell our version of what happened in Athens and a nearby forest. We've also laced live and recorded music through our show (Shakespeare loved music and it often gets a mentions in his plays and sonnets). **A Midsummer Night's Dream** has been told thousands of times in a thousand different ways.



### Exercise 13:

Working with this fast and furious text from Act II of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, can you reimagine the scenario, giving a background, environment, objectives etc to the characters? You can add more characters and text to support this reworking.

*Enter LYSANDER and HELENA*

*Enter HELENA, followed by a love-struck Lysander*

LYSANDER: Why should you think that I should woo in scorn?

HELENA: These vows are Hermia's!

LYSANDER: I had no judgment when to her I swore.

*Demetrius wakes, sees Helena, and falls madly in love.*

DEMETRIUS: O Helena, goddess, nymph, perfect, divine!

HELENA: O spite! I see you all are bent to set against me for your merriment.

LYSANDER: (to Demetrius) You are unkind, Demetrius. Be not so, for you love Hermia.

DEMETRIUS: Lysander, keep thy Hermia, I will none. If e'er I loved her, all that love is gone.

*Re-enter HERMIA*

HERMIA: *(sees Lysander and breathes a sigh of relief)* Lysander, why unkindly didst thou leave me so?

LYSANDER: Why seek'st thou me? The hate I bear thee made me leave thee so.

HERMIA: *(shocked)* It cannot be!

HELENA: *(Aha!)* Lo, she is one of this confederacy! Now I perceive they have conjoin'd all three to fashion this false sport. Injurious Hermia!

HERMIA: *(to Helena)* I scorn you not: it seems that you scorn me.

HELENA: Have you not set Lysander to follow me and praise my eyes? And made your other love, Demetrius to call me goddess, nymph, divine?

HERMIA: I understand not what you mean by this.

HELENA: Ay, do persevere! Counterfeit sad looks!

*She turns to leave.*

LYSANDER: Stay, gentle Helena.

DEMETRIUS: I say I love thee more than he can do.

LYSANDER: *(to Demetrius, in anger)* Hang off, thou cat, thou burr!

HERMIA: *(to Lysander)* Why are you grown so rude?

LYSANDER: *(to Hermia, in anger)* 'Tis no jest that I do hate thee and love Helena.

HERMIA: O me! *(to Helena, in anger)* You thief of love! What, have you come by night and stolen my love's heart from him?

HELENA: Fie, fie! You counterfeit, you puppet, you!

HERMIA: Puppet? Thou painted maypole!

*She attacks Helena.*

HELENA: Let her not hurt me!

*Lysander and Demetrius both step between her and Hermia, each trying to be the hero.*

LYSANDER: Be not afraid; she shall not harm thee, Helena.

DEMETRIUS: No, she shall not.

HELENA: Though she be but little, she is fierce.

HERMIA: *(struggling against the men, striking at Helena)* Let me come to her!

*The men push her back.*

LYSANDER: *(to Hermia)* Get you gone, you dwarf.

DEMETRIUS: *(to Demetrius)* Let her alone: speak not of Helena. Take not her part.

LYSANDER: *(challenging him)* Follow, if thou darest, to try whose right is most in Helena.

DEMETRIUS: Follow! Nay, I'll go with thee, cheek by jole.

*Exeunt LYSANDER and DEMETRIUS, posturing to fight each other.*

HELENA: *(to Hermia)* I will not trust you, I, nor longer stay in your curst company.

*Exit after the men.*

HERMIA: I am amazed, and know not what to say.

*Exit*

## Narrative or character response

The worlds of **A Midsummer Night's Dream** can be carved up into three character groups, all of whom have a distinctive essence:

### The Fairies

Tempestuous, powerful, ethereal, sensual, joyous, mischievous, fearless.

### The Mechanicals

Inadequate, ineffective, fearful, comical, aspirational, conceited.

### The Mortals (in this are the lovers)

Emotional, jealous, hot-headed, unstable, stubborn, self-centred, brave, arrogant.



## Exercise 14: Laban Characters

EFFORT is a system for understanding the more subtle characteristics about the way a movement is done with respect to inner intention. The difference between punching someone in anger and reaching for a glass is slight in terms of body organization-both rely on extension of the arm. The attention to the strength of the movement, the control of the movement and the timing of the movement are very different.

### The Eight Efforts and Their Four Components

Laban decided that human movement can be summarized by a combination of the following categories, each have two possible elements: Space/Focus (Direct or Indirect), Time (Quick or Sustained), Weight (Heavy or Light), and Flow (Bound or Free). So, if you're looking at Flow and the movement is bound, then it's very tight. It's very held in. Like an uptight businessman or cop. Whereas someone who flows freely, is the opposite. Think of a child, always running, always free, acting on any impulse that they desire.

The Eight Efforts are: Punch, Slash, Dab, Flick, Press, Wring, Glide and Float

The Four Components are:

Direction: Direct or Indirect

Speed: Quick or Sustained

Weight: Heavy or Light

Flow: Bound or Free

This is how they break down:

	SPACE/FOCUS	TIME	WEIGHT
PUNCH	Direct	Quick	Heavy
DAB	Direct	Quick	Light
PRESS	Direct	Sustained	Heavy
GLIDE	Direct	Sustained	Light
SLASH	Indirect	Quick	Heavy
FLICK	Indirect	Quick	Light
WRING	Indirect	Sustained	Heavy
FLOAT	Indirect	Sustained	Light

Get the students in pairs to take turns following each other and trying to adopt the physical components of their subjects Effort. Reflect on the complexity of this activity.

### Exercise 14:

Characters from A Midsummer Night's Dream. Pick a line from the lover's quarrel. Let's look at this character saying their line. Given what we know of them, which efforts might he or she use here? Try a few out. Reflect: Could we take these characters and drop them into a new world, perhaps, feed them diversions within the original narrative?

