This resource is designed as a reference guide for teachers. We have listed the major themes and motifs within *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and provided examples of scenes where you can study them.

**Themes**

- Love and marriage
- Order and disorder
- Appearance and reality
- Creative imagination

**Motifs**

(Recurring elements and patterns of imagery in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* which support the play’s themes)

- Nature
- The Moon
- Sleep and dreams
- Eyes
- Plays, rehearsals and roles-parts
- Magic
Themes

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 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.

Order and disorder and the need 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.

Appearance and reality and 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 like a dream recent events seem to them now.
- Act 5 Scene 1: The play within the play highlights the theme of illusion and reality.

Creative imagination and its reliance on the unconscious, the magical, the mysterious.
Some related scenes:

- Act 4 Scene 1: Titania awakes from her fantasy, the lovers comment on how like a dream recent events seem to them now and Bottom tells of his vision.
- Act 5 Scene 1: Theseus describes the poet's art, the play within the play provides its comment on artistic enterprise and all ends in harmony with the fairies' blessing of the sleeping house.
**Motifs**

**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

**The Moon** reflecting change, disruption and unpredictability, romance, the magical and mysterious, a journey.
For example:

- 'Four happy days bring in/Another moon'
  Act 1 Scene 1
- 'I'll met by moonlight, proud Titania'
  Act 2 Scene 1
- 'Therefore the moon, the governess of floods, / Pale in her anger, washes all the air...'
  Act 2 Scene 2
- 'We the globe can compass soon, / Swifter than the wandering moon'
  Act 4 Scene 1
- 'Now the hungry lion roars, / And the wolf behowls the moon'
  Act 5 Scene 1
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

Eyes as emblems of perception and perspective, 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 every thing 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
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

Magic as representing the unseen, the unpredictable, the irrational and inexplicable.

For example:

- 'And this same progeny of evils comes/From our debate, from our dissenion'
  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