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❧ ACT 1 ❧

PRE-GRAMMAR | Preparation

Prepare to think about the play and its Central One Idea by drawing upon my prior knowledge, experience, or interests.

1. Why do people choose to get married? Are there ever any considerations other than love? Think about different time periods and cultures when composing your answer.
2. Drawing from either your own experience or research, describe how parts are cast in a play. Do actors ever receive two or more parts? Why would they?

GRAMMAR | Presentation

Discover essential facts, elements, and features of the play through the Reading Notes, Words to Be Defined, and Comprehension Questions.

READING NOTES

Act 1, Scene 1

1. **Theseus** - In Greek mythology, the founder and king of Athens. According to legend, he slayed the Minotaur and found his way through the Labyrinth with the help of Ariadne. Legends are told about him in various sources Shakespeare would have had access to, including Plutarch's *Parallel Lives of the Greeks and Romans* (The Life of Theseus) and Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* (The Knight's Tale).
2. **Hippolyta** - In Greek mythology, the queen of the Amazons. She and the Amazons were conquered by Theseus before her marriage to Theseus. While some versions of legend state that she was kidnapped by Theseus, Shakespeare's play suggests a more consensual relationship. Theseus says, "*Hippolyta, I woo'd thee with my sword,*" hinting that Hippolyta was attracted to her conqueror (1.1.16).

3. **Then let us teach our trial patience,/Because it is a customary cross** (1.1.152-153) - Bearing one's cross patiently is a reference to Matthew 16:24 in which Jesus says, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me."
4. **gentle** (1.1.161) - noble, honorable
5. **translated** (1.1.191) - transformed
6. **The more I hate, the more he follows me./The more I love, the more he hateth me.** (1.1.198-199) - These two lines are almost direct inversions of lines from Golding's translation of Ovid's "Pyramus and Thisbe," which Shakespeare would have read and of which the tradesmen in the play are performing an adaptation. Ovid writes of Pyramus and Thisbe, "The closer they supprest/The fire of love, the fiercer still it raged in their breast."

Act 1, Scene 2

7. **Pyramus and Thisbe** - A myth originally told in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* about two lovers who are forbidden from seeing each other by their parents. After talking to each other through a crack in a wall, they decide to meet at Ninus' tomb. Thisbe arrives first, only to discover a lion already there. She runs away but leaves part of her cloak, which is drenched with blood from the lion's earlier kill. Pyramus then arrives and sees the cloak. Thinking Thisbe dead, he kills himself. Thisbe returns and, seeing Pyramus dead, kills herself. According to Ovid, their blood is the reason mulberries are so dark. This myth is performed by the tradesmen. It also happens to be one of the sources for Shakespeare's most famous tragedy, *Romeo and Juliet*.
8. **You were best to call them generally, man by man,/according to the scrip.** (1.2.2-3) - Bottom literally refers to the script that the tradesmen are using for their play, but this line could also be a sly jest by Shakespeare at the stage directions at the beginning of Act 1, Scene 2.

WORDS TO BE DEFINED

Definitions Bank

bestows affection or attention excessively	lively
bravely	renounce; reject
decreases in size or extent; dwindles	repulsively; offensively
judgment	rule; order
	widow who has inherited money from her husband

1. This old moon **wanes!** *v.* (1.1.4)
2. She lingers my desires,/Like to a step-dame or a **dowager**, *n.* (1.1.4-5)
3. Awake the **pert** and nimble spirit of mirth; *adj.* (1.1.13)
4. Either to die the death, or to **abjure**/For ever the society of men. *v.* (1.1.65-66)
5. and she, sweet lady, **dotes**,/Devoutly dotes, dotes in idolatry, *v.* (1.1.108-109)
6. It stands as an **edict** in destiny. *n.* (1.1.151)
7. A lover that kills himself, most **gallant**, for love. *adv.* (1.2.19)
8. if you should fright the ladies out of/their wits they would have no more **discretion** but to/hang us; *n.* (1.2.68-70)
9. there we may rehearse most/**obscenely** and courageously. *adv.* (1.2.93-94)



Read Act 1, marking the text according to the method taught in "How to Mark a Book."

WORDS TO BE DEFINED

1. decreases in size or extent; dwindles
2. widow who has inherited money from her husband
3. lively
4. renounce; reject
5. bestows affection or attention excessively
6. rule; order
7. bravely
8. judgment
9. repulsively; offensively

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

Act 1, Scene 1

1. Theseus and Hippolyta have planned to be married in four days' time under the light of the moon.
2. Egeus accuses Lysander of bewitching his daughter Hermia with poetry, songs, and other trifles. He says Lysander has turned Hermia's loyalty away from her father, who has pledged her to marry Demetrius.
3. Theseus says that if Hermia does not consent to marry Demetrius by the time of his wedding, she must be put to death or become a nun.
4. Lysander reminds Egeus and Demetrius that he has Hermia's love (and that they do not). He also argues that his fortune and reputation match that of Demetrius, so he has just as much claim to Hermia's hand in marriage.
5. Lysander tells Hermia that his aunt owns a house outside of Athens. If they flee there, then they will be outside the jurisdiction of Athenian law. They decide to meet in the woods on their way to the town where Lysander's aunt lives.
6. Helena decides to tell Demetrius that Lysander and Hermia have fled into the woods. She hopes that Demetrius will pursue Hermia but eventually fall in love with her.

Act 1, Scene 2

7. Peter Quince the carpenter, Nick Bottom the weaver, Snug the joiner, Flute the bellows-mender, Snout the tinker, and Starveling the tailor belong to the acting company. They are performing "Pyramus and Thisbe."
8. Bottom wants to play Pyramus, Thisbe, and the lion. Quince assigns Bottom to be Pyramus, Flute to be Thisbe, Starveling to be Thisbe's mother, Snout to be Pyramus' father, himself to be Thisbe's father, and Snug to be the lion.
9. Bottom is immediately a domineering and prideful figure. Although he is merely an actor, he tries to tell Quince how to organize everyone. In his conceit, he wants to claim three roles, including those of the titular characters for himself. He is also quite foolish. He suggests that he roar "*as gently as any sucking dove*," a counterintuitive choice (1.2.71). And he misuses words such as "*obscenely*" when he means "*obscurely*" or "*off-scene*" (1.2.94).

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

Act 1, Scene 1

1. What have Theseus and Hippolyta planned at the beginning of the play?
2. Of what does Egeus accuse Lysander? How does Hermia respond?
3. What is the ultimatum that Theseus gives to Hermia?
4. How does Lysander defend himself against Egeus' accusations?
5. Why do Lysander and Hermia flee to the woods?
6. What does Helena decide after hearing about Lysander and Hermia's departure?

Act 1, Scene 2

7. Who belong to the tradesmen's acting company? What play are they performing?
8. What roles does Bottom want to play? What roles does Quince assign?
9. Describe Bottom's character in Scene 2.

SOCRATIC DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Theseus and Hippolyta both personify the moon. Theseus calls the moon by female pronouns and says that "*she lingers [his] desires*" before his wedding night (1.1.4). Hippolyta also comments that the moon will watch their wedding, an action exclusively performed by people. The moon has several symbolic connotations that could be applicable. In the context of marriage, the moon could symbolize the virginity of Theseus and Hippolyta while they wait for their wedding night, since the goddess of the moon is the virgin goddess Diana, mentioned later by Theseus (1.1.89). The moon could symbolize madness. As the introductory material suggests, the characters in the play might be under the influence of "midsummer madness," but the moon (especially the full moon) has also been associated with madness. In fact, the Latin word for moon, *luna*, is where the English word "lunatic" is derived from. Lastly, the moon could symbolize the mingling of the human and the fairy world. The moon is often regarded as an intermediary object between states of being such as day and night or water and sky. Here the moon could foreshadow an orderly Athens forced to confront new magical, supernatural realities. Personified, the moon becomes almost another supernatural character, whose actions are outside of the control of the other characters.
2. The quick transition from days to nights almost conflates the two, making magic and the interference of fairies, who usually appear at night, all the more possible. It also sets up the four intervening days/nights as dreams themselves—either literal dreams of the characters or metaphorical dreams of Shakespeare's and the actors' creation.
3. Egeus has little support for his claim that Lysander has seduced his daughter by magical means. As Egeus notes, Lysander has merely given her poems, "*love-tokens*," songs, and jewelry, none of which have any magical power (1.1.29). Even if Egeus means that Lysander has taken advantage of Hermia, Egeus admits that Hermia has "*interchang'd love-tokens*" with Lysander, suggesting that she was an active participant in their relationship (1.1.29). Lysander's "*bewitchment*" of Hermia, therefore, does not show that magic permeates Athens as it does the forest. However, the connection between love and "*bewitchment*" may actually be a hint from Shakespeare that the true magic of the play, and thus the true magic of reality, is love itself.

LOGIC | Dialectic

*Reason with the facts, elements, and features of the play;
sort, arrange, compare, and connect ideas – and begin
to uncover and determine the Central One Idea.*

SOCRATIC DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

May be verbally discussed or answered in written form in your Literature Notebook.

1. Reread lines 1-11 of Act 1, Scene 1. What object do both Theseus and Hippolyta **personify**? What could this personified object **symbolize**? How does its personification amplify its symbolism?
 2. "*Four days will quickly steep themselves in night;/Four nights will quickly dream away the time ...*" (1.1.7-8)
How does the progression from day to night and their relationship to dreams frame the rest of the play?
 3. Egeus claims that Lysander has "*bewitch'd*" Hermia (1.1.27). How well does he support this claim? Does Lysander's supposed "*bewitchment*" of Hermia show that magic actually exists in Athens as well as the forest? How or how not?
 4. Contrast Hermia's defense of Lysander with Lysander's defense of himself. Why are the two so different?
 5. As Hermia and Lysander lament how their love is being thwarted, Lysander calls love "*swift as a shadow, short as any dream*" (1.1.144). What does the grammatical **parallelism** of these **similes** accomplish? What solution do Hermia and Lysander reach for their lament?
 6. "*Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind,/And therefore is wing'd Cupid painted blind.*" (1.1.234-235)
Summarize Helena's comments on the nature of love. Does she mean something as simple as "love is blind?" Compare her comments to those of Hermia.
 7. Why do the tradesmen fear that the ladies will shriek at the lion in the play? What does their fear reveal about how they view the audience's imagination?
 8. How is the tradesmen's choice to meet in the forest analogous to Hermia and Lysander's choice to flee to the forest?
4. Hermia's defense is very short. She tells Theseus that Lysander is a worthy gentleman like Demetrius. Then she wishes her father would see Lysander as she sees him. By contrast, Lysander gives a full, logical defense of himself as a suitor for Hermia. He shows that he matches Demetrius in wealth and position. Furthermore, he has the love of Hermia. Meanwhile, Demetrius already has the love of Helena. Hermia's defense is shorter likely because she is constricted by a society dominated by male influence. While Lysander feels free to defend himself, Hermia almost apologizes for speaking up: "*I know not by what power I am made bold*" (1.1.59). Hermia's short, apologetic response likely originates from her recognition of Athenian law, which is prejudiced against women. Athenian law requires her to "*fit [her] fancies to [her] father's will,*" lest she be executed or exiled (1.1.118). Thus Hermia has to weigh her love for Lysander against the consequences for disobedient women under Athenian law. Lysander does not, being a man with reputation and power.
5. The grammatical parallelism of this line reinforces the parallels Shakespeare has begun to make between love and magic. The brevity of love joins the quick progression of day into night and night's accompanying dreams mentioned by Hippolyta at the beginning of the play. In the presence of Athenian order and law, love becomes almost as ephemeral as dreams and the magic of the fairies the lovers will later encounter in the forest. Hermia and Lysander reach the conclusion that they must leave Athens in order for their love to flourish. In the forest, they can escape Athenian law and perhaps even the assaults of "*war, death, or sickness*" (1.1.142). The removal of Hermia and Lysander to the forest where the fairies also thrive further increases the parallel between love and magic.
 6. Helena's comments about love do imply that "love is blind." While she sees the faults of Demetrius, including his lack of love for her, she still loves him. She says that love can transform things that are "*base and vile*" to "*form and dignity*" (1.1.232-233). However, Helena's comments about love extend beyond love's ability to blind people from their beloved's faults. Helena states, "Nor hath love's mind of any judgement taste ..." (1.1.236). More than blinding people, love transforms how one sees the entire world. Love seemingly works at odds with reason, allowing for easy deception and the betrayal of one's word. Hermia agrees with at least part of Helena's assessment of love. Love has changed how she sees the world, since Athens seemed "*as a paradise*" before she loved Lysander (1.1.205).
 7. The tradesmen evidently fear that the ladies will be so engrossed in the play that they will think that the roaring actor is a real lion. The tradesmen trust that the audience has a vivid imagination, but they do not trust that the audience will be able to distinguish between imagination and reality.
 8. The tradesmen choose to meet in the forest because they do not want the restrictions of crowds and their play being known. Their choice reinforces Athens as a place that limits room for imagination, love, and magic. Just as the lovers have to escape the restrictive city for their love to flourish, the tradesmen must go to the forest for their imaginative production to be executed properly.

RHETORICAL EXPRESSION

1. Theseus and Hippolyta are reflecting on their imminent marriage until Egeus arrives at their palace. Egeus asks Theseus to force his daughter Hermia, who loves Lysander, to marry Demetrius or to have her executed. Theseus gives Hermia until his marriage to choose what to do. Lysander and Hermia then flee to the forest so they can stay together. Helena hears their plan and decides to tell Demetrius in the hope that he will love her for her information.

Meanwhile, several tradesmen are planning to put on a play called "Pyramus and Thisbe." Although one of the actors, Nick Bottom, tries to give himself three parts, he is assigned the part of Pyramus and everyone else gets a part. The tradesmen decide to meet in the forest to practice their play.

2. Answers will vary.

3. Answers will vary. Support for the Teacher's Central One Idea:

- Although Egeus' accusation of Lysander bewitching Hermia, his daughter, is false in a literal sense, Lysander and Hermia have worked their own magic by nurturing love in a society that requires Hermia's obedience to her father by law.
- Love has caused Hermia to see Athens as a paradise no longer. Love has also caused Helena to see past Demetrius' faults. As a result, Hermia seeks love's fulfillment with Lysander in the forest, where love can flourish unopposed by antagonistic societal forces. Helena follows a similar course by seeking out Demetrius, despite his dislike of her.
- Like Lysander and Hermia, the tradesmen recognize the restrictive nature of the city, deciding to practice their play in the forest instead. They believe in the imaginative capacity of the audience, though perhaps a little too much, and wish to enhance it. The tradesmen are not under the influence of love like Hermia, Lysander, or Helena, but they are beholden to their interaction with the imagination of the audience, a force that transforms how one sees reality on the stage, similar to how love changes how one sees reality itself.

RHETORIC | Expression

Express in your own words the Central One Idea with supporting points.

RHETORICAL EXPRESSION:

To be answered in your Literature Notebook in preparation for your essay.

1. In a paragraph, **summarize** Act 1.
2. Write the **Central One Idea** of Act 1 in a precise, eloquent sentence.
3. List three or four points that **support** your determination of the Central One Idea.
4. Write a **lead** (1-2 sentences) that grabs the reader's attention—such as a *quote, question, startling fact or statistic, scenario, piece of dialogue, etc.*
5. Write an **amplification/importance** (1-2 sentences) that explains why your thesis is important in a larger or more universal sense.

◆ **Central Quote:** Choose a quote from anywhere in Act 1 that you think best embodies the Central One Idea and copy it down.

📌 **Write the Central One Idea as expressed by the teacher.**

ESSAY OPTION

Choose a topic below and respond with a 2-5 paragraph essay that includes an Introduction with a clear thesis; a Body with organized, logical, and specific support of the thesis; and a Conclusion with an amplification of the thesis/support.

The essay should feature appropriate tone, voice, and point of view; correct grammar, usage, and mechanics; a variety of sentence structures enhanced by subordination and parallelism; a balance of general and specific detail; and enhanced rhetorical effect through transition words, appropriate diction, strong verbs, descriptive adjectives, and other rhetorical devices. Your essay should also be written legibly, with good cursive penmanship.

Note: Some of these prompts tend toward a shorter essay, and some toward a longer. Check with your teacher to see what length he or she suggests. Both short essays (1 page) and long essays (2-4 pages) are useful and helpful, depending on the intent and purpose.

1. Write an essay in which you analyze one of the characters as they are revealed and characterized thus far in Act 1: Theseus, Hippolyta, Egeus, Hermia, Lysander, Demetrius, Helena, Quince, or Bottom.
2. Write an essay in which you track the imagery of the moon or of day and night in Act 1 and explain the significance.
3. Write an essay in which you contrast the nature of love as described by Hermia and Helena with the nature of love detailed in Scripture. (Examine passages such as 1 Corinthians 13 and 1 John 4.)
4. Write an essay in which you analyze how the tradesmen expect to interact with their audience and compare this analysis to how you believe Shakespeare wants his audience to interact with his play.
5. [Central One Idea] Use the Central One Idea of Act 1 as your thesis, and support it with some evidence from your reading of Act 1.
6. [Open] Write an essay in which you analyze an aspect of Act 1 that is of import to you, such as a particular theme, character, setting, element of plot, dialogue, symbol, or other literary or rhetorical motif.
7. [Teacher] Essay prompt.

4. Answers will vary.
5. Answers will vary.

◆ **Central Quote:** Answers will vary.

Here is an example:

"Things base and vile, holding no quantity,/Love can transpose to form and dignity./Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind,/And therefore is wing'd Cupid painted blind."
(1.1.232-235)

- 1 Even in the most restrictive, ordered atmosphere, love transforms how one imagines the world, working its own magic.