SPOTLIGHT ON... COMEDIES

THE YOUNG LOVERS' STRUGGLE

as seen in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

- Young lovers struggle to be together, often thanks to problems caused by elders.
- The conflict generated by the struggle creates the comedy.



1. Lysander and Hermia love each other.

2. Hermia's friend Helena loves Demetrius, but he doesn't feel the same way.

3. Hermia's father wants Hermia to marry Demetrius, not Lysander.

4. Lysander and Hermia run away together.

5. Demetrius and Helena pursue them into a magical forest.

6. A love potion is given to Lysander and Demetrius, making them fall for Helena. Hermia is not pleased...

7. The four lovers chase each other in confusion through the woods. Comic chaos ensues.

8. A restoring potion is given to Lysander, who falls back in love with Hermia.

9. Lysander marries Hermia and Demetrius marries Helena!

'The course of true love never did run smooth...'
A Midsummer Night's Dream, Act 1 Scene 1

SEPARATED AND REUNITED

as seen in *Much Ado About Nothing*

- Two characters are separated, perhaps because of the lovers' struggle or through the trickery of others.
- The trouble is resolved and the characters are brought together again.

1. Hero and Claudio fall in love at first sight.

2. The night before their wedding, Claudio is tricked into thinking Hero has been unfaithful.

3. The next day, Claudio shames Hero in front of their guests and leaves her at the altar.

4. A friar, who believes Hero is innocent, persuades her family to pretend she is dead, to make Claudio realize his mistake.

5. When the truth comes out, Claudio is devastated and, still thinking Hero is dead, agrees to make amends by marrying Hero's cousin.

6. Claudio is surprised when the wedding veil is lifted from his new bride's face and she is revealed to be... Hero. No one is dead and the lovers are reunited!

'Some Cupid kills with arrows, some with traps.'
Much Ado About Nothing, Act 3 Scene 1

SHAKESPEARE'S FUTURE

As Shakespeare's friend and rival playwright Ben Jonson wrote of him in the introduction to the First Folio in 1623, 'Shakespeare is not of an age, but for all time.' Whether it's teenagers discovering his poetry in the form of hip-hop, or people in other countries reading translations or performing his work according to their own theatrical traditions, Shakespeare's universal themes of love and war, loyalty and betrayal, fate and free will, plus many more besides, appeal just as much to people today as they ever did. You can even be a groundling at a performance at the rebuilt Globe Theatre in London – although a ticket will now cost you more than a penny!

'When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st
So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,
So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.'
Sonnet 18



REBUILDING THE THEATRE

In 1997, on the south bank of the River Thames in London, Shakespeare's Globe Theatre was brought back to life, around 350 years since the Puritan government closed all theatres and the Globe was turned into housing. When a small part of the original foundations of the theatre was discovered in the 1980s, archaeologists were astonished to find that Shakespeare's Globe wasn't round, as had been commonly thought, but was a polygon of twenty sides!

The new Globe Theatre was built very near to the original site, following Elizabethan design and using traditional building methods wherever possible, even copying the open roof of the original.

THE GLOBAL BARD

To a man who, as far as we know, never left the shores of Great Britain, it would probably come as a surprise that his words have now reached the four corners of the Earth (and outer space), being translated into more than 100 languages! In China, Classical Chinese is used by some translators to replicate the beauty of Shakespeare's poetry.

In South Africa, a copy of *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare* was secretly passed around the political prisoners being held in the jail on Robben Island during the dark days of apartheid, where prisoners would choose their favourite passage and sign their name beside it. Written neatly in blue ink beside this quote from Julius Caesar, 'Cowards die many times before their deaths; The valiant never taste of death but once', was the signature: N. R. Mandela, 16.12.77.

REACHING INTO OTHER WORLDS

Just as Shakespeare took other authors' stories, like Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and updated them for his time, writers and performers continue to do the same with Shakespeare's work today. Akala, a British rapper and historian, uses hip-hop to bring Shakespeare to young people and communities who might not have seen or read Shakespeare before, or think it isn't accessible to them.

Shakespeare also reaches his inky fingers into the world of science, where we see twenty-five of the planet Uranus's twenty-seven moons named after Shakespearean characters. As Shakespeare has Pyramus say in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 'My soul is in the sky.'

LANGUAGE

Without even realizing it, we speak lines of Shakespeare every day! Next time you say, 'For goodness' sake', remember that this phrase first came from *Henry VIII*. Or if you say someone has a 'heart of gold', you're quoting from *Henry V*. Shakespeare even invented the word 'puking', which he uses in *As You Like It*!

He was just as good at insults, and here's a few of the funniest:

'... he has not so much brain as earwax...'
Troilus and Cressida, Act 5 Scene 1

'... your bum is the greatest thing about you...'
Measure for Measure, Act 2 Scene 1

'... thou pigeon-egg...'
Love's Labours Lost, Act 5 Scene 1

'... his breath stinks with eating toasted cheese.'
Henry VI, Part 2, Act 4 Scene 7

It's testament to his great talent that, even though we know few definitive facts about the man behind the quill, Shakespeare is still a living, breathing presence in our twenty-first-century lives.