

# Resetting Shakespeare

## Activities Plan

Students first read and discuss the play, then watch a film version in which the play has been reset in a different time and place. The teacher presents to the class other examples of Shakespeare productions that have been reset in new times and places.

Imagining they are each directors of their own unique production of the play, students choose an alternate setting for the play, then write a paragraph explaining their reasons for choosing the setting, telling how it is appropriate to the events, characters and themes of the play.

Students imagine they have an unlimited budget for cast, sets, and publishing a program to present to audience members. They then create the following elements to go in their programs:

- 1.) a cover that reflects the setting and/or the theme they have chosen to emphasize.
- 2.) a paragraph explaining the media used to create the cover and how the art represents their interpretation of the play.
- 3.) a list of where each scene will take place in the new setting.
- 4.) a cast list of who will perform each role in the play. Students may choose from well-known actors and celebrities, characters from familiar films or TV shows (e.g. Star Wars, Sesame Street, Lord of the Rings), students and teachers at their school, etc. For at least five of the characters, they must explain why the chosen performer is uniquely suited to the role.
- 5.) an explanation of a particular theme in the play that they are choosing to emphasize in their production. First they must explain how the theme is developed in the script, then they tell how they plan to highlight the theme in their production, using costumes, setting, actor's performance choices, etc.
- 6.) definitions and examples of important drama terms.
- 7.) definitions and examples of ten words or phrases that may be unfamiliar to the audience and are important to understanding the play.

Finally the students put all of the given elements together into visually-appealing programs. All students are required to use color and graphics to enhance the appearance of their programs. Almost all of the students choose to type their final product.

From this project, students come to appreciate the timeless nature of Shakespeare's works. They learn that the characters and themes generated in the Elizabethan era can be equally relevant in many other times and places. They take something that may seem distant and foreign and present it in a setting that is interesting to them. Students have the opportunity to consider some of the many decisions that must be made by directors, set designers, casting directors, and graphic designers -- occupations they may not have previously considered. Projects are evaluated with a rubric that assigns points to each of the required elements and explains what is required for an A.

Required materials: Copies of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* for each student, DVD or video of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (I use the 1999 Michael Hoffman version.)

Optional materials: Examples of real playbills, particularly those from productions of Shakespeare plays; clips from other movie versions of Shakespeare plays, such as *Romeo + Juliet*, or *Shakespeare Retold*, from the BBC.

NOTE: This project is most suited to Shakespeare and can be done with any Shakespeare plays that might be studied in the classroom.

## *A Midsummer Night's Dream Project* Creating a Program

*Imagine that you are directing a new production of A Midsummer Night's Dream. You must choose a unique setting and an excellent cast. Create a program for the play, following these guidelines:*

### **Cover: Title and artwork**

Draw, paint or photograph a picture (or create a collage) that introduces your audience to the play. You may wish to present some characters in the setting you have chosen or, if you wish to be more abstract, you can represent the themes or tone of your production. Be sure to put the title and setting (spelled and punctuated correctly!) prominently on the cover.

### **Inside Cover:**

- ❖ **The setting** – Explain where Shakespeare originally set the play, then tell where and when you have chosen to set your play. Clearly explain your reasons for your choice.
- ❖ **List of scenes with specific settings** (Include an intermission where you think it is most appropriate.) Give each scene a title and setting. It should look something like this:  
*Act I, scene i – **Hermia's Dilemma** – The governor's mansion*  
*Act I, scene ii – **The Clowns Plan Their Play** – Back room of Quince's Unfinished Furniture Store*
- ❖ **About the Cover** – Tell about the artwork on the cover. What is the medium you used? What aspects of the play are you representing?

### **Third Page:**

- ❖ **Theme** – Explain (in 1 well-developed paragraph) how a specific theme is presented in the play and (in another well-developed paragraph) tell how you are highlighting that theme in your production.
- ❖ **The Cast** – Imagine you have unlimited money and can get anyone you want to perform in your play. List **all** of the characters and the actors who will be performing them. Choose at least five actors and provide a sentence or two of explanation about why each of them is uniquely suited to his or her role.

### **Back Cover: Drama Vocabulary**

Provide your audience with a glossary (**definition and example**) of the following drama terms:

Drama	Exposition	Resolution/	Soliloquy
Comedy	Conflict	Denouement	Aside
Tragedy	Climax	Monologue	Foil

Also, choose **10 words in the play** that your audience should know. For each word, **copy a sentence** from the play in which it appears and **provide a definition**. Choose important words, not random ones.

## **Project Evaluation (100 points)**

### **Cover:**

- ❖ **Title and artwork** 20 points – Original artwork is neat, shows pride of workmanship, and clearly connects to the play.

### **Inside Cover:**

- ❖ **The setting** 10 points – Shows original thought; reasoning is clear and convincing.
- ❖ **List of scenes with specific settings** 10 points – Gives titles and settings for all nine scenes. Titles and settings are appropriate to the scenes and also to the overall setting you have selected for your production.
- ❖ **About the Cover** 10 points – Gives clear, convincing explanation of the thinking behind the artwork.

### **Third Page:**

- ❖ **Theme** 20 points – Shows insight into a specific theme in the play. Explanation is developed and convincing. Ideas are supported with details from the play.
- ❖ **The Cast** 10 points – All characters are cast with familiar performers. For at least five characters, there is clear and reasonable explanation of the casting choice.

### **Back Cover:**

- ❖ **Drama Vocabulary** 10 points – Each term has an accurate definition **and** a clear example.
- ❖ **Play Vocabulary** 10 points – Words chosen are frequent and/or highly significant words from the play. Each word is presented in context and has an accurate definition.

## Project Evaluation (100 points)

20 points	<b>Title and artwork</b> – Original artwork is neat, shows pride of workmanship, and clearly connects to the play.
10 points	<b>The setting</b> – Shows original thought; reasoning is clear and convincing.
10 points	<b>List of scenes with specific settings</b> – Gives settings for all nine scenes. Settings are appropriate to the scenes and also to the overall setting you have selected for your production.
10 points	<b>About the Cover</b> – Gives clear, convincing explanation of the thinking behind the artwork.
20 points	<b>Theme</b> – Shows insight into a specific theme in the play. Explanation is developed and convincing. Ideas are supported with details from the play.
10 points	<b>The Cast</b> – All characters are cast with familiar performers. For each of five characters, there is clear and reasonable explanation of the casting choice.
10 points	<b>Drama Vocabulary</b> – Each term has an accurate definition and a clear example.
10 points	<b>Play Vocabulary</b> – Words chosen are frequent and/or highly significant words from the play. Each word is presented in context and has an accurate definition.