



A Midsummer Night's Dream Poetic Wordplay

Any good writer will create rich, complex language that engages readers and layers meaning. Shakespeare is considered by many literary scholars to be the master at manipulating language. Even centuries after his death, he sets a standard for rich writing that few, if any, can match. Shakespeare used an arsenal of literary devices to craft the language in his plays, and puns are one of the most frequently found elements in his writing.

A **pun** is a form of wordplay in which a writer "plays" with the multiple meanings of a single word or uses two similar-sounding words with different meanings to create an effect (usually humor).

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Shakespeare relies heavily on puns to amuse readers and underscore some of the play's major themes.

In rows 1 and 2: Read the term and a pun that uses the term from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Review the connotative and denotative meanings of the term, the effect the pun creates, and the relationship between the pun and the play's themes.

In rows 3 and 4: Record two additional examples of puns from the play. Be sure to fill in all of the columns for each of your examples.

Term	Pun	Connotative Meaning(s)	Denotative Meaning(s)	Effect	Relationship to Play's Themes
lie	Hermia: Lie further off yet, do not lie so near. Lysander: Then by your side no bed room me deny, For lying so, Hermia, I do not lie. (No Fear: 2.2.33–41)	to recline; to say something false	Hermia asks Lysander to not lie so close to her but is also saying don't tell her lies while lying so close to her. Lysander insists he wasn't implying he wanted to sleep with her.	humor, playfulness	highlights the themes of nonsense and playfulness

ass	Bottom: What do you see? You see an ass head of your own, do you? . . . I see their knavery: this is to make an ass of me, to fright me if they could. (No Fear: 3.1.56–58)	a foolish person; a donkey	Bottom's head has been changed into the head of a donkey by Puck, causing the others to run away scared. Bottom says they must be seeing their own ass-headedness in themselves, or they are trying to make an ass of him by scaring him.	humor, mischief	highlights the theme of human folly but also the wisdom of fools since Bottom's statement is wise

RL.11-12.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful. (Include Shakespeare as well as other authors.)

L.11-12.4 Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grades 11–12 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.

L.11-12.5 Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.