

# Advanced English: Theater in English - Shakespeare

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This course is meant for students of the advanced C1 and C2 levels. Theme-based language classes aim at developing written and oral skills through the study of a specific topic.

## Course Objectives

This is a 12-week course that introduces students to Shakespeare in performance.

The three main objectives of this course are:

- Introducing students to basic acting tools that help organize and strengthen any oral presentation
- Guiding students through the process of learning a part and performing a scene with a partner
- Expanding students' knowledge and appreciation of Shakespeare through performance.

## Background

Shakespeare can seem intimidating, if not impenetrable, to the uninitiated. And yet, there is a reason that these plays are still performed four centuries after the playwright's death: they speak to universal, human truths that are still relevant to contemporary life. But how to get beyond the antiquated language and get to the rich meaning behind the text? That is the actor's job. Shakespeare, let us not forget, was an actor and playwright, and his plays were meant to be acted, not parsed in a classroom. While academics have their rightful place in analyzing these plays, this class will use a theatrical approach.

## Course Description

In the first weeks of the class, students will be introduced to vocal and physical preparation for stage work, which is particularly important for Shakespeare. They will then begin to learn how an actor analyzes and breaks down a text into objectives and actions, to better understand their characters' desires and what they are willing to do to attain their goals. Using exercises and improvisations, students will explore these tools individually, in pairs, and in groups.

The main focus will be exploring *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, one of Shakespeare's most famous comedies. Students will read the play both in English and in its French translation. They will then be split up into pairs or small groups to work on scenes from the play (in the original English). We will dig deep to understand the language, considering the historical and social context as well as the poetics of the text. Work will include scansion, character development, staging, rewriting scenes in modern English, and a short presentation on an aspect of Shakespearean performance. In the last week, students will perform their scenes in **a final showing in class for an invited audience**.

### Organization

Activities will cover the four language skills:

- Speaking: scene work, discussion, rehearsals
- Writing: text analysis, rewriting scenes in modern English
- Listening: videos related to Shakespeare and performance challenges
- Reading: preparation and research will include reading the play as well as articles pertaining to the social/historical context.