



## Character Explorer:

# Puck from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

### Who is Puck?

- One of the magical creatures living in the forest outside Athens
- A follower of Oberon, the fairy King
- Seems to love mischief, pranks, and mayhem
- Sometimes goes by other names, like Robin Goodfellow and Hobgoblin

### What happens with Puck?

We first meet Puck in the forest along with a fairy who serves Titania, the fairy Queen. This fairy has heard of the famous Puck and shares some stories of Puck's mischief and pranks. Upon hearing that Titania is approaching with more followers, Puck expresses alarm because Oberon is also approaching. Titania and Oberon are a powerful couple currently fighting over a 'changeling child'. This is a human child who now lives with Titania in the forest. Oberon wants custody of the child instead.

Oberon and Titania meet and exchange words and accusations. After Titania leaves, Oberon reminds Puck about a magical flower that was accidentally hit with one of Cupid's arrows. This flower now has an extraordinary power: when its juice is dropped into a sleeping person's eyes, they will fall in love with the first living creature they see upon waking. Oberon intends to use this juice on Titania, hoping that the object of Titania's desire will be a horrible beast, thereby humiliating Titania.

While Puck is off getting the flower, Oberon witnesses a scene between two young people from Athens: Helena is in love with Demetrius, but Demetrius treats Helena with disdain. Oberon asks Puck to take some of the flower, look for the Athenian couple, and drop the love juice into the disdainful youth's eyes, thereby helping Helena.

Puck searches the forest, and finally finds a young couple from Athens. However, Puck doesn't realize there are two young couples in the forest. Instead of finding Demetrius and Helena, Puck finds Lysander and Hermia, who are in love with one another. Puck squeezes the love juice into Lysander's eyes and believes that all is well. However, this mistake leads to some very mixed-up young lovers, as the love juice makes Lysander fall in love with Helena and abandon Hermia. This problem remains even after Puck uses the love juice on Demetrius.

Puck seems to delight in the mayhem. But it becomes clear that Demetrius and Lysander want to fight over Helena, and that Hermia is ready to fight with Helena. To avoid any violence, Oberon asks Puck to confuse the lovers and exhaust them so that they all go to sleep again. Puck uses the juice of a second magical flower to "remove all error", putting things right again for the young lovers.

*But wait, there's more!* ➡

## What happens with Puck (continued)

Meanwhile, Puck has found a group of tradespeople who are in the forest rehearsing a play. One of them, Bottom the Weaver, is especially exuberant. Puck decides to play a trick, giving Bottom the head of an ass (a donkey). This frightens the other tradespeople so much they flee, leaving Bottom all alone. Bottom decides to sing, which wakes up Titania. Under the influence of the magic love juice, Titania falls in love with the half-person, half-donkey Bottom.

Having at first delighted in this development, Oberon begins to pity Titania. Oberon uses the second magical flower to return Titania to normal, and Puck restores Bottom to normal too. As dawn approaches, the fairies leave Bottom sleeping.

That night, after the mortals have celebrated a triple wedding and watched the tradespeople's play, Puck and the other fairies arrive to bless everyone, and Puck has a last word with the audience.

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## Some words used to describe Puck

The ways that Puck is talked about can illuminate aspects of the character.

shrewd	messenger	knavish	Robin Goodfellow	merry
servant	sprite	goblin	gentle	honest
sweet	friends	hobgoblin	good Robin	liar

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## Some things Puck says throughout the play

Lines that a character speaks can reveal details about their personality and relationships with other characters. The lines below are listed in the order that they appear in the play.

- 1 I am that merry wanderer of the night.
- 2 Churl, upon thy eyes I throw  
All the power this charm doth owe.
- 3 My mistress with a monster is in love.
- 4 Those things do best please me  
That befall preposterously!
- 5 Lord, what fools these mortals be!
- 6 Believe me, king of shadows, I mistook!
- 7 I am fear'd in field and town.
- 8 On the ground, sleep sound.
- 9 I am sent with broom before,  
To sweep the dust behind the door.
- 10 Give me your hands, if we be friends,  
And Robin shall restore amends.

## Challenging assumptions about Puck

The typical idea of fairies as tiny, adorable, winged creatures formed a few hundred years after Shakespeare wrote *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In Shakespeare's day, ideas about fairies came from many different folk traditions, and reflected a range of beliefs. Sometimes people thought of fairies as kind and helpful. Sometimes people believed fairies were dangerous and spiteful. Sometimes people saw fairies as nature spirits, responsible for things like beautiful sunsets, extreme weather, or failed harvests.

What do you think? What do your cultural traditions have to say about fairies or other types of spirits or magical creatures? How would you like to imagine Puck or the other fairy characters in the play?

## Your Interpretation of Puck

Now it's your turn! Read through the information about Puck on the previous pages. Then, using these words, lines, and the story, choose activities from the list below to explore your own interpretation.

### MOVE

**How would your Puck move?** How would you express the thoughts with your body? How could you use your voice and/or body to create this character? Based on what you now know of Puck, create your own movement-based interpretation of the text.

**Create a sculpture or statue** using your body to express what Puck's lines mean to you. Create a gesture or sculpture for each line. You could also speak the line as you hold each pose. Try it many different ways and notice how each version feels to you.

### LISTEN

**What would your Puck's soundtrack be?** What types of instruments, ambient sounds, or music would accompany your Puck? Make a Puck playlist, or create a magical soundscape: if you like, you could include recordings of the descriptive words and/or the Puck's lines.

### WRITE

**Create a poem, story, or monologue** inspired by the list of words that describe Puck. Then, create another piece using the lines that Puck speaks. How are the two different?

### MAKE

**Create a costume design.** What would your Puck wear? Think about all aspects of the character: where do they live? what's the climate like? how do they spend their time? how do they move? what do they want others to think about them? what do they enjoy wearing?

**Gather objects** that your Puck might use or care about. (Just remember to ask before borrowing anything!) Use these props in your other explorations, or create a still life of the objects by drawing or photographing them.

**Create an art project** inspired by the words used to describe Puck and by the lines that Puck speaks.

## Reflect

- What discoveries did you make as you explored the text?
- Why did you make the creative choices that you made?
- What did you learn about Puck? About the play? About yourself?