

SUMMER OF SHAKESPEARE

A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM

Compliments and Insults

This play is full of characters falling in love...and falling out, so compliments and insults are traded frequently. Using some of Shakespeare's finest insults as inspiration, can you create your own?

Task 1: Permission to insult

Shakespeare loved an insult, he was the master of them! And although the story of A Midsummer Night's Dream is one of love, it is also one of other extreme emotions and there are lots of insults in here!

Using the insult generator [here](#), select your favourite insults for this exercise.

Start by saying **Thou art a...**

For example, '*Thou art a waggish, onion-eyed, dogfish!*'

Practise saying some of your favourite insults to your family (make sure you warn them that this is what you are doing, otherwise you might get into trouble)!

Show them the insult generator for them to choose their insult back to you!

Task 2: Counting to 10

This next task requires you to use this scene from the play where Helena is chasing Demetrius (who she loves) and he is trying to lose her (as he does not love her).

Read it over out loud, trying not to worry too much about what everything means but instead think about the gist of what is happening.

DEMETRIUS

I love thee not, therefore pursue me not.

Hence get thee gone and follow me no more

HELENA

You draw me, you hard-hearted adamant.



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DEMETRIUS

I'll run from thee, and hide me in the brakes,
And leave thee to the mercy of wild beasts.

HELENA

The wildest hath not such a heart as you.

DEMETRIUS

I will not stay thy questions, let me go;
Or if thou follow me, do not believe
But I shall do thee mischief in the wood

HELENA

I'll follow thee, and make a heaven of hell
To die upon the hand I love so well

Next we are going to count the number of syllables in each of the lines
E.g the first two lines

I love thee not, therefore pursue me not.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

There are 10 syllables in the line as 'therefore' and 'pursue' have two in each of them

Hence get thee gone and follow me no more

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

There are 10 syllables in the line as 'follow' has two syllables in the word

Count the syllables in each of the lines in the rest of the scene and write the number of syllables in total underneath (as we've done here).

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You should have noticed that there are ten beats per line. This regular rhythm is called **iambic pentameter**. Shakespeare often used this rhythm in his writing.

When he uses two lines with 10 syllables in each line, in a pair, this is called an iambic couplet.

In the following couplet, we find out how Demetrius and Helena feel about one another. (He hates her and she loves him).



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Demetrius: The more I hate the more she follows me

Helena: The more I love the more he hateth me

Task 3: I love you/I hate you

Imagine you are Demetrius and Helena and create an iambic insult. Come up with a pair of lines, which both have 10 syllables. One of them should be a compliment and the other should be an insult. You can do them in either order.

E.g:

Helena: Your eyes are just a lovely shade of blue

Demetrius: Will you get lost, I really don't like you

You could refer back to the **Shakespeare insult generator** for insulting inspiration but you will need to use it carefully as you must ensure that every sentence you create has exactly ten syllables.

Challenge!

Can you get someone in your family to help you act out your iambic couplet? Could you use soft toys or pets and create the voiceover to deliver your insults? You draw pictures of characters complimenting/insulting each other with your couplets in a speech bubble, or film yourself delivering them in character. We'd love to see what you come up with.

Happy insulting!

