Important Information – The Plot

Act 1:
Theseus is getting ready to marry Hippolyta when he's interrupted by one of his subjects: Egeus. He asks for the Duke's help; his daughter, Hermia, will not marry Demetrius – Egeus has chosen him for her - as she loves Lysander.
The Duke says she needs to be obedient to her father OR she must either die or accept to live as a nun.
Lysander and Hermia plan to elope, sharing their secret with Helena, Hermia's friend. Helena is in love with Demetrius, who has left her for Hermia. Lysander and Hermia escape from Athens but soon get lost.
Helena tells Demetrius they eloped; he follows the lovers into the woods. Helena follows Demetrius, hoping he will give up on Hermia and choose her. At the same time, a group of working men are preparing a play to present before the Duke on his wedding day.

Act 2:
Oberon - King of the Fairies - has quarrelled with his queen, Titania. She acquired a magical child and refuses to give him to Oberon. He plots his revenge for her disobedience, sending Puck to fetch a magical flower which makes people fall in love with the next creature they see.
Oberon overhears Helena and Demetrius arguing in the forest; he tells Puck to anoint 'the Athenian', so Demetrius will fall in love with the first person that he sees. But things go wrong and both Lysander and Demetrius end up in love with Helena.

Act 3:
Puck overhears the rehearsals and plays a trick by giving Bottom an ass's head. Oberon uses the magic potion making Titania fall in love with Bottom.
Hermia and Helena are both confused, they fight over the men, separate in the woods and eventually fall asleep.

Act 4:
Things are turned back to normal: Oberon undoes the magic and makes up with Titania; Puck makes Lysander and Demetrius fall in love with the right woman (Lysander+Hermia; Demetrius+Helena).

Act 5:
There are 3 weddings: Theseus + Hyppolita; Lysander + Hermia; Demetrius + Helena

Genre - Comedy

Key ingredients for a Shakespearean comedy:
A struggle of young lovers to overcome problems, often because of the interference of their elders
There is some element of separation and reunification
Mistaken identities, often involving disguise
A clever servant
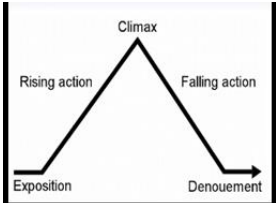Family tensions that are usually resolved in the end
Complex, interwoven plot-lines

Characters:
Theseus - Duke of Athens (the regional ruler)
Hippolyta - Queen of the Amazon, due to marry Theseus (after losing the war)
Egeus - important man in Athens, one of Theseus's courtiers, Hermia's father
Hermia - Egeus's daughter; in love with Lysander
Lysander - young man in love with Hermia
Demetrius - young man, initially in love with Hermia
Helena - Hermia's friend, in love with Demetrius
Oberon - King of the fairies, married to Titania, Puck's master
Titania - Queen of the fairies
Bottom - one of the workers involved in staging the play; Titania will fall in love with him (because of magic)
Puck - a mischievous fairy: his main job is to serve Oberon; often interferes and generates chaos or disorder

Themes:
Love: love is confusing, fickle and it changes people
Marriage: marriage was deemed to be the father's choice in the 16th century, but, often, love complicates plans
Appearance and reality: things are not as they seem
Order and disorder: there are periods of disorder (often brought about by supernatural forces) but, in the end, order will be restored and things will turn back to some normality
Power: the men appear to have more power over the women's lives but the love potion changes this for Demetrius

2. Context

Greek Mythology (Theseus – Greek hero; references to Cupid)
English country fairy lore (the character of Puck, or Robin Goodfellow, was a popular figure in 16th century stories)
The Theatrical Practises of Shakespeare's London (the craftsmen's play refers to and parodies many conventions of English Renaissance theatre such as men playing the roles of women).
Queen Elizabeth I fostered Shakespeare's poetic genius and invited his company to perform his works in her court on numerous occasions, which helped secure his reputation and success.
Gender roles: Fathers decided who their daughters would marry. Women were not in control of their own lives.
Fate: the belief that your life is predetermined by God
Great Chain of Being: a hierarchy of position with God at the top and plants at the bottom
The Supernatural: Elizabethans believed in witches and fairies. They were very superstitious.
Christianity: Elizabethans were very religious. They believed that your behaviour in this life was reflected in the after life – you would go to either Heaven or Hell.
Early Modern English: this is the language Shakespeare writes in. It is a development from Old and Middle English.

4. Key Vocabulary

playwright = writer of plays

dramatist = writer of plays
audience = listeners or spectators

play = is a work of drama usually consisting mostly of dialogue. Intended for theatrical performance on stage.

act = a) a deed; b) big section in a play
scene = a) cause scandal; b) small section in a play

line numbers = way of counting the lines in a play

character = a) mental or moral quality; b) person in a novel/play

perceive = a) become aware of something; b) to interpret

implicit (imply) = suggest or say indirectly

explicit = said in a clear way, leaving no doubt; antonym for *imply*

symbolism = using images to show an idea

establish = a) set up something; b) prove something.

motif = dominant or recurring idea

catharsis = emotional release/ a form of spiritual cleansing

inference - a conclusion reached on the basis of evidence and reasoning

connotation – an idea or feeling associated with a particular word

stereotype = a widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing

5. Links to Other Topics

Idea of Cupid and manipulation of love.
Serpent's Deception - women presented as having a weakness to temptation– Hermia tempted by Lysander according to Egeus.

6. Literary Devices

Characterisation: the way a character is presented is a writer's way of sending messages about that character or that theme

Dramatic irony: eg: the audience know that Puck is about to put the juice in the eyes of the wrong man, but HE doesn't know = we get worried because we know this will have consequences

Imagery: pictures you form in your head from Shakespeare's descriptions. These ideas might be repeated in the play e.g. the night represents a time of secrecy, where you can escape the rules and restrictions of the day (Athens). It is also a time for dreaming and fulfilling your desires.

Simile: comparing using "like" or "as" e.g. 'To you, your father should be as a god.' (Theseus to Hermia)
Metaphor: comparing without "like"/"as" e.g. 'What angel wakes me from my flowers bed?' – she means Bottom!

Personification: giving non living things human abilities, like the moon e.g. Theseus to Hippolyta: 'methinks how slow the old moon wanes. She lingers my desires.'

Motif = a recurring symbol: eg: the motif of magic reminds us that things can turn to chaos

Symbol = a thing that stands for / represents something else e.g. the Indian changeling boy represents the power struggle between Titania and Oberon

Rhyme: Rhyme is often used in the play to indicate to the audience that certain comments are meant to be humorous, rather than malicious
Iambic pentameter is often used when characters express their love (it mimics the beating of the heart). Each unstressed syllable is followed by a stressed syllable, so that lines have a de-DUM de-DUM de-DUM pattern.

Blank verse: unrhymed lines with an iambic pentameter rhythm. The nobles speak using this e.g. Theseus.

7. Structural Features

The setting moves from Athens, to the Woods (where desires are fulfilled) and back to Athens (a place of rules and order).

Dramatic **change**: the character makes a decision and performs an action, which moves the play on. That action has consequences, and so it goes on, until that initial action results in a climax, followed by a resolution.

Dramatic Structure-