**Shakespeare’s Comedies:**

**Unit Essay**

**Intro:** When studying Shakespearean comedy, you will notice that there are several traits that are common to all of his comedic works. It is important to note that the term "comedy" didn't quite have the same meaning to Elizabethan audiences as it does today. While there is certainly quite a bit of humor to be found in Shakespeare's comedies, "comedy" generally referred to a light-hearted play with a happy ending, as opposed to his more dramatic tragedies and historic plays.

The comedies of William Shakespeare are *All's Well That Ends Well, As You Like It, The Comedy of Errors, Cymbeline, Love's Labour Lost, The Merry Wives of Windsor, The Merchant of Venice, A Midsummer Night's Dream, Much Ado About Nothing, Pericles Prince of Tyre, Taming of the Shrew, The Tempest, Troilus and Cressida, Twelfth Night, Two Gentlemen of Verona, A Winter's Tale and Measure for Measure*. Some of these works are truly funny from beginning to end, while others, like *The Merchant of Venice*, have a very serious tone or strong dramatic moments. In all of these works, you'll find the following elements:

•**Young lovers struggling to overcome obstacles**: These obstacles are typically brought about by the elders in the play, often parents or guardians of the lovers. Various circumstances cause the lovers to be kept apart, either literally or figuratively, and thus they must find their way back together in the end.

•**Mistaken Identity**: Whether it takes the form of mixed-up twins or a clever disguise, mistaken identity was one of Shakespeare's favorite and most-used plot devices. Gender mix-ups were also quite popular. Shakespeare quite often had characters masquerading as the opposite sex, leading to many misunderstandings and comical situations. During Shakespeare's lifetime, men frequently played all the roles in a play, which added another dimension to the comedy.

•**Clever plot twists**: Shakespearean comedy always involves multiple plot lines, cleverly intertwined to keep the audience guessing. These unexpected twists are always straightened out in a happy ending.

•**Use of puns**: Shakespeare was a master of wordplay, and his comedies are filled with puns and witty language games. Sometimes silly, sometimes bawdy, yet always clever, his plays on words are a distinguishing feature of all his works. You'll need to brush up on your Elizabethan English if you want to catch all of his jokes.

•**Stock characters**: Shakespeare, like many classical writers, relied heavily on stock characters for his plays. You'll notice several that keep appearing in The Bard's work: the young couple, the fool, the clever servant, the drunk, etc. These stock characters were instantly recognizable stereotypes to Elizabethan audiences.

•**Happy endings**: All Shakespearean comedies end happily. Most often, this happy ending involves marriage or pending marriage. Love always wins out in the end.

**Assignment:**

Write a four paragraph essay analyzing how Shakespeare makes use of two of these elements in the play *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. **You must use at least two quotes from the play in your essay. Please cite your quotes as follows: (Shakespeare 3.2.15).** Essay must be typed in MLA format.

DUE: Sunday, April 1 by 10:00 PM.

\*You must submit your essay in turnitin.com.

**Introduction:**

* **Hook**
* **Mention titles and playwright**
* **BRIEF Background about play/film**
* **Thesis/Claim/Controlling Idea: What two elements does Shakespeare make use of in these works? \*Your thesis can’t be a question!!!**

## Body Paragraph 1: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

* **Topic sentence: Element #1**
* **Transition, Evidence from Work #1 and Work #2 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

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* **Commentary: What affect does this element have on the reader/audience?**
* **Transition, Evidence from Work #1 and Work #2 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

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* **Commentary: What affect does this element have on the reader/audience?**
* **Concluding sentence**

**Body Paragraph 2: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

* **Topic sentence: Element #2**
* **Transition, Evidence from Work #1 and Work #2 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

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* **Commentary: What affect does this element have on the reader/audience?**
* **Transition, Evidence from Work #1 and Work #2 \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

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* **Commentary: What affect does this element have on the reader/audience?**
* **Concluding sentence**

**Conclusion:**

* **RESTATE THESIS**
* **Sum up main points**
* **Universal idea: What effect do Shakespeare’s works have on readers? Why are they still popular today?**