

Publishing Project Plan: A Midsummer Night's Dream

Introduction

The purpose of this publishing project is to adapt a story from Charles and Mary Lamb's 1807 *Tales from Shakespeare* into a form suitable for contemporary children. I have chosen to rewrite *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as a short paperback novel for children around the age of nine to twelve. This report covers my vision for the project, its market context and practical planning. It also addresses the challenges this project will face and recommendations for pricing and marketing. Based on this research and planning, I foresee that this project should be a very worthwhile and profitable endeavour.

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The Approach

I plan to rework *A Midsummer Night's Dream* into a story about teenagers going to their end of year dance, in the place of adults getting married. Hermia, who is being pressured by her parents to date Demetrius, will be in love with Lysandra, the female version of the character Lysander. The story will conclude with Hermia's parents coming to terms with her choice to date Lysandra. Alike the play, Demetrius will end up with Hermia's best friend Helena, and the four of them will go to the dance as a happy group of friends. This way the basic storyline and outcomes can be maintained, while also allowing for exploration of some important issues faced by children growing up today.

The magic and mischief of the fairy world will remain, as an essential part of the plot. However, I will be omitting the rift between the fairy King and Queen about who gets to use the changeling boy, as this is not a vital part of the narrative and it does not translate well into a modern context.

The language and phrasing of the original text is very outdated and will need extensive editing. I will be striving to make the sentences shorter, simpler and more action based. I will also be structurally editing and rearranging sections of the text to make the different scenes integrate better.

The book will be image-heavy with a half page of black and white cartoon-style images on every double page spread. The images should focus on the emotions of the characters, as well as the magical elements.

My text will be primarily intended for use in schools in the United Kingdom, as a way of familiarising children with different types of relationships and the pressures some children may face because of their sexual orientation. The book will include reading group questions to assist teachers in guiding children in discussion about the themes of the book.

Market Research and Application

I have undertaken extensive market research while planning my project. This included observation of trends in the UK's most popular high street retailer, Waterstones. I also set up a questionnaire on Survey Monkey, for both parents and professionals, which received twenty-one responses. This gathered both quantitative data through multiple choice questions and qualitative data through open-ended questions. As well as this I consulted secondary sources by searching what information is available online.

An important observation at Waterstones, was that most of the stories feature child protagonists. This is supported by comments in my survey which stated that children enjoyed stories about other children and school life. This is why I have decided to change the age of my characters in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Similarly, I have realised the importance of emphasising the mischievous magic, with over eighty percent of my survey respondents listing humour as one of the most popular features of children's stories. When asked to rank what they look for in a book, survey respondents valued language-level the most. As such, I will be undertaking extensive editing to make sure the language is age-appropriate and using tools such as Flesch-Kincaid grading to monitor this.

Many of my survey respondents also commented on how they look for books with moral lessons. Changing the gender of Lysander will help me create a clear purpose for teaching the story. An article in *The Telegraph* by Patrick McAleenan from April this year reports how the National Union of Teachers has passed a motion asking the government to make it

compulsory to teach children about same-sex relationships. This indicates that there should be many teachers who would appreciate having literature available that includes homosexual characters.

Although the statistics in the podcast for our week six coursework show that ebooks are a growing part of the book industry, they do not appear to be taking away from the children's print book market. An article by Jonathan Nowell from April this year in the *Publisher's Weekly* discusses how although internationally adult book sales dropped in 2014, children's book sales have seen great growth in the past year. In the UK overall print sales fell by two percent, but children's print book sales were still up eight percent. In my survey only one of my twenty-one respondents said they used children's ebooks, and this was still alongside print versions. This supports my focus on the print rather than ebook format.

In terms of costs, whether sold online or in a store, most books for nine to twelve year olds were between six and seven pounds. The majority of my survey respondents said they were willing to pay up to seven and a half pounds for a children's paperback. However most books for children in this age group are around two hundred pages, which is much longer than my Shakespeare will be. As such, I would aim to keep the selling price under five pounds if possible. Discounts for schools bulk-buying should also be considered.

Marketing will be important for my book as, despite the existence of many children's Shakespeare texts, many of my survey respondents reported not having come across anything interesting and age appropriate.

Project Plan and Budgeting:

I would aim for the story to be published around January when school returns, to give me plenty of time and to avoid being lost among Christmas books. I could wait until next September for the start of the English school year. However, as most schools will cover Shakespeare in some form anyway, these texts could be used alongside pre-planned topics. I would be looking to have one hundred advance copies printed a few weeks early for the promotion of the book. The main print run would be for five thousand to ten thousand copies, depending on expected demand. Of course, further print runs could be undertaken if necessary.

My novel will have three thousand words in size thirteen font and one and a half spacing on standard paperback-size paper, with a half page illustration on every double spread. After using the online tool *Words to Pages* and considering the extra features such as a title page and discussion questions, I would expect the book to be about thirty pages long. The production of the book should be relatively simple, with only about ten illustrations and no indexing or graphs etc.

Assuming I will be the writer and editor, I will still need to hire an illustrator (around twenty-five pound per hour) and possibly a typesetter (around five pound per page). I should not have to pay for any permissions as the story is safely within the public domain. The biggest cost to consider is the cost of printing, which even when printing thousands is probably still at least one pound per book. Distribution costs also need to be considered, but these are

harder to predict. I would need to hire a developer for the website and possibly for a small game (around forty pound per hour). All of these costs are estimates based on online browsing, if I were to proceed with this project, I would be collecting comparison quotes.

I have already completed the project planning, market research and some structural editing.

Please consult the project plan chart below for a break-down of tasks still to be done.

Project Schedule:

	Oct 19-25	Oct 26-Nov 1	Nov 2-8	Nov 9-15	Nov 16-22	Nov 23-29	Nov 30-Dec 6	Dec 7-13	Dec 14-20	Break	Jan 4-10	Jan 11-17
Structural Editing												
Copyediting												
Illustration Briefs												
Illustration Drawn												
Study Questions												
Cover Design												
Typesetting												
Proofing												
Marketing												
Develop Website												
Advance Print												
School Visits												
Main Print Run												
Distribution												

Key:

Manuscript	
Extra Content	
Marketing	
Printing & Distribution	

Challenges to Address:

A story to be taught in schools that includes homosexual characters will not be pleasing to some particularly conservative or religious parents. Yet the story will not include any overtly political statements; Hermia and Lysandra will simply be normal teenagers who happen to be gay. I hope to be able to redress the sexist moralising of girls and rigid gender roles that Janet Bottom sees in the *Tales from Shakespeare*, as well as resist “the urge to slide over ethical problems highlighted by changed social attitudes [that] is apparent in even the best new versions” (Bottoms, 12).

Marketing Recommendations

I would suggest that marketing focuses on addressing teachers, using school catalogues and online databases. A decent website is essential and, if possible, a simple online game using the characters and dialogue would be great to make the subject more fun for kids. Search engine optimisation would be worth considering to address the problem that Shakespeare for children seems to exist largely unseen. Advance books should be sent to some schools, looking for reviews and hopefully pre-orders. If the book proves successful, a marketing program could be undertaken in other English-speaking countries where Shakespeare is taught or other works of Shakespeare could be produced in the same style.

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