Theseus—The duke of Athens. Theseus is a hero from Greek mythology—he refers to the fact that he's Hercules' cousin at one point—so his presence signals to the reader that the play takes place in a mythical Greek past. At the beginning of the play, Theseus has recently returned from conquering the Amazons, a race of warrior women, and is about to marry the conquered Amazon queen, Hippolyta. Because of this impending wedding, the mood of the play is one of holiday festivity, characterized by a heightened sense of erotic expectation and anticipation. Theseus himself projects confidence, authority, and benevolent power.

Hippolyta—The legendary queen of the Amazons, engaged to marry Theseus. Although Hippolyta is marrying Theseus because he defeated her in combat, she does not act at all like an unwilling bride. Theseus is very courtly in his manner toward Hippolyta, and she is unfailingly deferential toward him.

Egeus—A respected nobleman in Theseus's court. Egeus complains to Theseus that his daughter, Hermia, refuses to marry Demetrius, Egeus's choice for her. Egeus's wish to control his daughter is quite severe—he asks Theseus to impose the death penalty on her if she refuses to marry Demetrius. Theseus, however, reduces the penalty for noncompliance from death to life as a nun.

Hermia—Egeus's daughter. Hermia is a beautiful young woman of Athens, and both Demetrius and Lysander are in love with her. Hermia defies her father's wish that she marry Demetrius because she is in love with Lysander. She is unusually strong-
willed and independent—refusing to comply even when Theseus orders her to obey her father—and resolved to elope with Lysander. Hermia is also the childhood friend of Helena.

Lysander—A young nobleman of Athens in love with Hermia. Although Hermia's father refuses to let her marry Lysander, Lysander believes that love must conquer all obstacles, so he persuades Hermia to run away from her home and family with him, into the forest.

Demetrius—A young nobleman of Athens. In the past, Demetrius acted as if he loved Helena, but after Helena fell in love with him, he changed his mind and pursued Hermia. Emboldened by Egeus's approval of him, Demetrius is undeterred by the fact that Hermia does not want him.

Helena—A young woman of Athens in love with Demetrius. Helena has been rejected and abandoned by Demetrius, who had claimed to love her before he met her best friend, Hermia. Consequently, Helena tends to speak in a self-pitying tone. Moreover, she puts herself in dangerous and humiliating situations, running through the forest at night after Demetrius even though Demetrius wants nothing to do with her.

Robin Goodfellow—A "puck" or mischievous fairy who delights in playing pranks on mortals; he is sometimes referred to simply as Puck. Robin is Oberon's jester, and his antics are responsible for many of the complications that propel the play. At Oberon's bidding, Robin sprinkles "love juice" in the eyes of various characters to change who they love, but he makes mistakes in his application that create conflicts Oberon never intended. Though Robin claims to make these mistakes honestly, he enjoys the conflict and mayhem that his mistakes cause.

Oberon—The king of the fairies. Oberon begins the play at odds with his wife, Titania, because she refuses to relinquish control of a young Indian prince whom she has kidnapped, but whom Oberon wants for a knight. Oberon's desire for revenge on Titania leads him to send Robin to obtain the love-potion flower that creates so much of the play's confusion and farce.

Titania—The beautiful queen of the fairies. Titania resists the attempts of her husband, Oberon, to make a knight of the young Indian prince whom she has taken. Until Oberon gives up his demand, Titania has sworn to avoid his company and his bed. She is less upset by the fact that she and Oberon are apart than by the fact that Oberon has been disrupting her and her followers' magic fairy dances.

Nick Bottom—The overconfident weaver chosen to play Pyramus in a play that a group of craftsmen have decided to put on for Theseus's wedding celebration. Bottom is full of advice and self-confidence but frequently makes silly mistakes and misuses language. His simultaneous nonchalance about the beautiful Titania's sudden love for him and unawareness of the fact that Puck has transformed his head into that of an ass mark the pinnacle of his foolish arrogance.

Peter Quince—A carpenter and the nominal leader of the craftsmen's attempt to put on a play for Theseus's marriage celebration. Quince is often shoved aside by the abundantly confident Bottom. During the craftsmen's play, Quince plays the Prologue.

Francis Flute—The bellows-mender chosen to play Thisbe in the craftsmen's play for Theseus's marriage celebration. Forced to play a young girl in love, the bearded craftsman determines to speak his lines in a high, squeaky voice.
Snug—The joiner chosen to play the lion in the craftsmen's play for Theseus's marriage celebration. Snug worries that his roaring will frighten the ladies in the audience.

Philostrate—Theseus's Master of the Revels, responsible for organizing the entertainment for the duke's marriage celebration.

Peaseblossom, Cobweb, Mote, and Mustardseed—The fairies whom Titania orders to wait on Bottom after she falls in love with him.