

## Handout

### *Rare Words vs. the Facts*

Titania's seventeen-line speech (2.1.125-142) in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* reads:

TITANIA                    Set your heart at rest: The Fairyland buys not the child of me. His mother was a vot'ress of my order, And in the spiced Indian air by night Full often hath she gossiped by my side And sat with me on Neptune's yellow sands, Marking th' embarked traders on the flood, When we have laughed to see the sails conceive And grow big-bellied with the wanton wind; Which she, with pretty and with swimming gait, Following (her womb then rich with my young squire), Would imitate and sail upon the land To fetch me trifles and return again, As from a voyage, rich with merchandise. But she, being mortal, of that boy did die, And for her sake do I rear up her boy, And for her sake I will not part with him.

#### **Materials:**

Each student needs a copy of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*  
The above passage copied on an overhead slide

#### **Procedure:**

1. Have students read the passage aloud 2-3 times. Then have the all your students pair up. One student silently pantomimes the actions indicated in the piece while the other student reads the passage aloud, (e.g., gossiping in sands, laughing, grow big-bellied, etc.) Switch and repeat.
2. Put the passage on an overhead projector, and ask students to eliminate all the imagery from the passage including descriptive words and phrases. Pare the passage down to the facts, just the facts.
3. Read aloud what remains. Here is one possible version:

The Fairy land buys not the child from me. His mother was a vot'ress of my order. And she gossip'd. And sat with me. And we have laugh'd. But she did die. And do I rear up her boy. And I will not part with him.

4. Compare to the original. How has the meaning changed? What important details about their friendship are missing? All of the mental pictures are removed-how does this affect the meaning? What phrases from the original should be returned for clarity? How does the new version sound to your ear? How has the rhythm changed?
5. Using the overhead, ask volunteers to substitute synonyms for some of the excised words or phrases: for example, "the beach" for "Neptune's yellow sands," "goods" for "merchandise," "human being" for "mortal." Add these back into the speech. What effect does this have on clarity? On the listener? On the reader?
6. Read the revised passage aloud again. End with the whole class reading the original passage aloud.
7. Ask the students to sum up their impression of the two passages in a 1-2 page paper.

NOTE: If you have access to a computer lab, this is a great activity to use with your students. Have the students each call up a file with Titania's speech on their screens. Complete step 1, but then let the students complete step 2 on their own. Instead of eliminating the phrases, have the students move the imagery and descriptive phrases to the bottom of the screen. Share selected versions in step 3. Discuss step 4 and then have the students work individually on step 5. Share selected student versions again (step 6), and then give them time to complete step 7 in the lab or at home.