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LENS Reflection

King of Shadows

Intertextual

In *King of Shadows* by Susan Cooper, we are introduced to the character of Nat, a young actor with dark secrets in his past. The most obvious connection to other texts within the book is with Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. In *King of Shadows*, Nat is in a troupe of boys who travel to England to perform Shakespeare in the renovated Globe Theater. Nat practices his roles diligently until one day he falls ill and is hospitalized with the plague! When Nat wakes up he realizes that he has been transported back into Elizabethan England. He joins the troupe of William Shakespeare and practices for their performance of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.

The events of the story reflect history of Shakespeare’s time. The conflict between Lord Essex and the Queen was actually occurring during this time and caused a lot of conflict in England. Shakespeare’s troupe was often caught in the middle of the political wars because of their influence over the common people as well as needing the patronage of the wealthy class. Shakespeare even included things in his plays to specifically help one side of the other in the political war. In *Henry V* he slips references to Lord Essex into the story and in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* he makes one of the characters dress like the Queen herself. They even mention Kit Marlowe who was another famous playwright of the time period who died as a result of what most assume to be spy activities for the crown. The life of a playwright was not as safe as people would assume.

The story of Nat has obvious connections to the play when he goes back in time. The story in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* leaves the audience wondering if anything that happens in the forest was really a dream or if it happened in real life. Nat’s story leads the reader to wonder the same thing; is Nat really in Elizabethan England or is he simply hallucinating in his hospital bed in London? The final lines of the play that Nat recites as Puck that say, “That you have but slumbered here, while these visions did appear,” (133) bring this idea to the forefront of the play around the climax of the story. While his physical experiences do not reflect those of the characters in Shakespeare’s play the sense of another world pervades the whole story.

A story like this would be very helpful for students who have never encountered Shakespeare before. The language is easy and it mixes in plot details from his plays as well as historical information about Shakespeare himself. This text could be paired with *A Midsummer Night’s* Dream easily as a lead in to the more difficult Shakespeare text. The text provides a lot of details about Elizabethan England as well as the political situation of the time period so this book could also interest students in the time period or simply those who like history better than reading a book.