

Another use for literature

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Los Angeles Times:

I'm no stranger to "A Midsummer Night's Dream." I've read the play, seen movie versions, attended live performances — including one in which the cast included my then 7- and 5-year-old kids (now that was theater; I only wish you all could have been there). Nevertheless, each time I revisit the play, I find myself on the edge of complete confusion trying to keep track of Hermia, Helena, Lysander and Demetrius. Wait a sec, I ask myself: Who is in love with whom? Why are they all chasing Helena? Who is Lysander really in love with? Who does he think he's in love with? What did Puck know and when did he know it?

A recent study suggests that the effort is good for my social brain.

To understand the study's significance, you have to understand a bit about a trendy topic in psychology known as "theory of mind," sometimes abbreviated by social scientists as ToM. This area of research examines the ability of one person to understand the emotions, thoughts, beliefs and intentions of others.

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Now, research by David Comer Kidd and Emanuele Castano of the New School for Social Research, published in the journal *Science*, suggests that reading literature improves these intuitive abilities. But not just any literature. Literature with a capital "L."

Read the whole story: [*Los Angeles Times*](#)