

American Players Theatre
Presents



William Shakespeare's
**MUCH ADO ABOUT
NOTHING**
2014 STUDY GUIDE



MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

2014 STUDY GUIDE

Cover Photo: Colleen Madden and David Daniel

All photos by Carissa Dixon.

MANY THANKS!

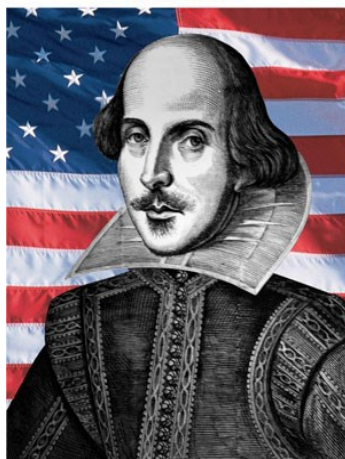
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If you have any questions or comments regarding the exercises or the information within this study guide, please contact Emily Beck, Education Coordinator, at 608-588-9207, or ebeck@americanplayers.org.

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www.americanplayers.org

Who's Who in *Much Ado About Nothing*

Character descriptions from *The Essential Shakespaere Handbook*



Beatrice (Colleen Madden)

Niece to the Governor of Messina, Leonato. She is quick-witted and enjoys banter, but has renounced any interest in marriage.

Don Pedro (Jeb Burris)

Prince of Aragon, recently victorious in battle against his half-brother, Don John, he accepts Leonato's invitation to sojourn for a month in Messina.



Benedick (David Daniel)

A lord of Padua, he claims he will never fall in love or marry. Of course, he does.



Don John (Eric Parks)

The illegitimate brother of Don Pedro, he is jealous of the war hero, Claudio, and schemes to destroy his wedding plans.



Leonato (Brian Mani)

Governor of Messina, father to Hero and uncle to Beatrice. He is overcome with rage when Claudio suddenly refuses to marry his daughter on the grounds of infidelity.

Claudio (Nate Burger)

A young lord of Florence, he falls in love with Hero and eventually marries her, despite leaving her at the altar on the first attempt.



Hero (Kelsey Brennan)

Daughter to Leonato, she is wrongly accused of "savage sensuality" and disloyalty thanks to the scheming of Don John.



Antonio (Paul Bentzen)

Brother to Leonato, he tries to comfort his family and scolds Claudio for his treatment of Hero.

Who's Who in *Much Ado About Nothing*

Conrade (Christopher Sheard)
Follower of Don John, he and Borachio are arrested and forced to confess.



Dogberry (James Pickering)
A constable, he manages to uncover Don John's plot, even though he constantly mis-speaks.

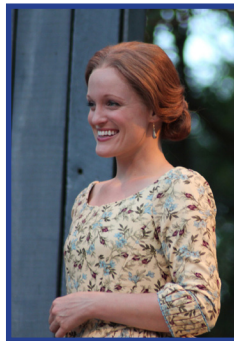
Borachio (Marcus Truschinski)
Follower of Don John, he dupes Claudio into believing he has seduced Hero in order to break up the marriage.



Verges (Tim Gittings)
He helps Dogberry interrogate Borachio and Conrade.



Ursula (Abbey Siegworth)
Gentlewoman attending to Hero, she helps to trick Beatrice into admitting her love for Benedick.



Margaret (Cristina Panfilio)
Gentlewoman attending to Hero, she is duped into helping Borachio with his plot to break up Claudio's intended marriage.

About the Play

MESSINA, where the play is set, is a region on the easternmost tip of the island of Sicily. In other words, it's what the Italian "boot" is kicking.

At Leonato's happy household in **MESSINA**, a messenger arrives with news that Don Pedro, a Spanish prince from Aragon, is returning from a successful battle, and that young Claudio is among his soldiers. Beatrice, Leonato's niece, asks the messenger about Benedick, and proceeds to make fun of him for being a bad soldier. Leonato explains to the confused messenger that: "There is a kind of merry war betwixt Signor Benedick and her," meaning that whenever Beatrice and Benedick are together, they mock each other mercilessly.

When the soldiers arrive, Leonato welcomes Don Pedro and invites him to stay for a month, while **BENEDICK AND BEATRICE** immediately resume their "merry war," though by the end of their exchange it doesn't feel so merry. Also among the travellers is Don Pedro's illegitimate brother Don John, who has only recently been reconciled with his brother.

Much Ado has frequently featured Beatrice and Benedick's story more prominently than that of the young lovers. For instance, a 1613 performance was entitled *Benedicke and Betteris*.

Claudio falls for Leonato's daughter Hero, and soon announces to Benedick his intention to court her. Benedick, who openly despises marriage, tries to dissuade his friend but Don Pedro encourages the marriage. Benedick swears that he will never get married. Don Pedro laughs at him and tells him that when he has found the right person he will.

A masquerade ball is planned in celebration of the end of the war, giving a disguised Don Pedro the opportunity to woo Hero on Claudio's behalf. At the ball, Benedick disguises himself and dances with Beatrice. She proceeds to trash talk Benedick to this "mystery man", who is hurt and angered by her insults.

Although many people believe that people married very young in Elizabethan times, that's not quite true. The average age was 23 for brides and 25-26 for grooms, slightly younger among the nobility. The legal age of marriage was 12 for girls and 14 for boys.

Meanwhile, Don John uses the party to once again turn on his brother by telling young Claudio that Don Pedro is wooing Hero for himself. Claudio confronts Don Pedro, but the misunderstanding is quickly resolved and Claudio wins Hero's hand in **MARRIAGE**.

Don Pedro and company decide to pass the time before Hero and Claudio's wedding by tricking Benedick and Beatrice into admitting they're in love with each other. They arrange for Benedick to overhear a conversation in which they say that Beatrice is madly in love with him but afraid to tell him. Shortly thereafter Hero and her maid Ursula make sure that Beatrice overhears them discuss Benedick's undying love for her. The tricks (or "**GULLING**") work, and both Benedick and Beatrice are delighted to think they are the object of unrequited love.

The scenes where Benedick and Beatrice are made to believe that the other loves them are often called the "gulling scenes." The word "gull" means to fool or deceive someone.

Meanwhile, Don John arranges for his associate, Borachio, to meet Hero's maid, Margaret, in Hero's bedroom. Then he tells Don Pedro and Claudio that Hero is unfaithful, and tells them to stand outside Hero's window that evening, where they will witness Borachio with Margaret, who they will believe is Hero. Claudio and Don Pedro are taken in, and Claudio vows to publicly humiliate Hero.

Much Ado is about 72% prose and 28% verse, the second highest prose-to-verse ratio of all Shakespeare's plays.

At the wedding the next day, Claudio denounces Hero before the stunned guests and storms off with Don Pedro. Hero faints. Friar Francis intervenes, believing Hero to be innocent. He suggests the family fake Hero's death

in order to extract the truth and Claudio's remorse. Prompted by the day's sad events, Benedick and Beatrice confess their love for each other. Beatrice then asks Benedick to kill Claudio for slandering her cousin. Benedick is horrified, but eventually gives in and challenges his friend to a duel.

DOGBERRY is a good example of a Shakespearean fool: a comic character, often of low rank, who sometimes manages to outsmart other characters despite having few wits of his own.

Luckily, on the night of Don John's treachery, members of the town guard apprehended Borachio and his ally Conrade. Despite the comic ineptness of the watch (headed by constable DOGBERRY, a master of mis-speaking), they have overheard the duo discussing their evil plans. They arrest the villains and eventually obtain a confession, informing Leonato of Hero's innocence. Though Don John has fled the city, a force is sent to capture him. Claudio, stricken with remorse at Hero's supposed death, agrees to her father's demand that he marry his brother's daughter, "almost the copy of my child that's dead" and carry on the family name.

At the wedding, the bride is presented to Claudio in a mask. She is soon revealed to be Hero, and the couple is reconciled. Beatrice and Benedick, have written each other love letters, but when they find out they were tricked by their friends, they try to deny their feelings. Hero and Claudio find the letters, and Beatrice and Benedick finally admit that they love each other, and decide to be married. As the play draws to a close, a messenger arrives with news of Don John's capture – but Benedick proposes to postpone his punishment to another day so that the couples can enjoy their new-found happiness.

American Players Theatre's *Much Ado About Nothing*



Beatrice (Colleen Madden) and Benedick (David Daniel) kick off their “merry war.”

There are few couples in Shakespeare that are quite as entertaining as Beatrice and Benedick. The line they walk between love and hate is a fine one, making them the very first will-they-won't-they couple. This is among the wittiest and most clever of Shakespeare's plays, and Beatrice is one of his most complex female characters – far ahead of her time in terms of her views on love, marriage and women's roles in society.

Colleen Madden, who plays Beatrice in APT's production of *Much Ado* says of her character: “They're [Beatrice and Benedick] cynical about love, but Beatrice is also very much cynical about society - women's place in society, and about soldiering and war, all the things that prop up this social structure. But as cynical as she is, she's very light-hearted. Very fun. She really likes

people. She's not complaining about her position in the family, but she likes to make fun of it.”

The other side of the couple, Benedick, is played by David Daniel, who describes his character as “the consummate bachelor.” David continues, “As actors, we can make up whatever back story we want for our characters. And because they're really two intelligent people, we decided that they had a fantastic love affair at some point in the past. Everything was perfect. And then, because they're so witty, somebody said something to the other person, which was completely misconstrued. And then she didn't call him, and he didn't call her, and she wasn't there when he went to war, and it all went sour.

Because it was so perfect, when it goes bad, it goes really bad. So I think his bachelorhood in this production is about not wanting to be hurt like that again. It's nothing against women; he doesn't speak against women. But he does speak against marriage. He's afraid of the pain that comes with giving yourself over to someone and then having that someone chew you up and spit you out. That's what he won't do again. So when they trick him, I think it's not just ‘we're going to trick our friend,’ I think it's also saving him.”



Benedick and Claudio (Nate Burger) have very different views on marriage.



Beatrice catches Benedick talking about her behind her back.

Their relationship is funny and sweet; poignant and painful, and in sharp contrast with the other relationship in the play between Hero and Claudio. Colleen explains: “Benedick and Beatrice have a complicated relationship. It's really built on sparring and on wit and on one-upmanship, so there's a competitive nature to their relationship, and the wit can quickly turn to barbs and they can insult each other, which is what happens. They've known each other so long, that they're kind of in a rut. They can't see each other with fresh eyes. That's juxtaposed with Hero and



Claudio and Hero (Kelsey Brennan) fall in love quickly, without a lot of thought about the long term.

Claudio, who barely know each other. We get the feeling that they've never even spoken, so they're going to get married with nary a conversation between them. They idealize each other. So when Claudio thinks he is betrayed, and therefore betrays Hero in public, that's a crisis, because maybe they don't know each other well enough to know what's true and what isn't. It's a real, raw moment of wrong. They're both wronged, or so they think."

Colleen continues, "Then, right after that, in Beatrice and Benedick's moment of crisis, Benedick stands up for Beatrice, so she begins to see him in a new light. And it's as if the two couples change places. We look at each other anew, and then in the end they all come to a place of stasis. It's a really lovely play. I actually think there's a great lesson in it for all of us to take a step back and get a new perspective."

That second relationship – the one between Hero and Claudio – starts out so simply, and suddenly takes an unexpectedly dark turn. Kelsey Brennan, who plays Hero, says "Hero experiences first love and a huge betrayal in the midst of that first love. I think it's really a testament to her character that she is open to forgiveness. There's a beautiful moment of forgiveness at the end of the play. But it's really fun for me to play someone who starts with such a pure sense of hope, only to learn that we can't have that every day in life. But to continue to hope, even after being betrayed by the person you

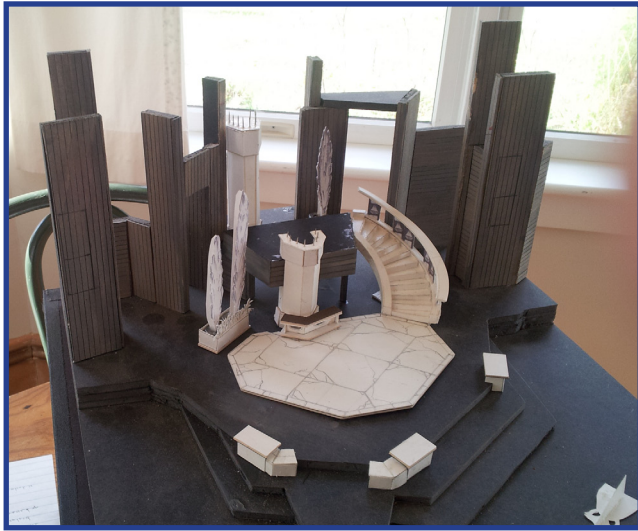
love the most, I think, is beautiful. She's a beautiful, strong female character that Shakespeare has written, and it's a great opportunity for an audience to watch someone forgive in a huge way."

Shortly after the wedding rejection comes another twist: Beatrice and Benedick confess their feelings for each other. But almost immediately after that, Beatrice asks Benedick to kill Claudio, his best friend. David says of this moment, "With *Much Ado About Nothing*, one of the first questions actors and directors are going to ask is, 'so what are we going to do about 'kill Claudio'?' It's that important to the play. The scene is so charged with love and then you get this contrasted line of saying, 'kill him.' It's tough. From Benedick's point of view, especially with this production, he really does mean 'ask me to do anything for you and I will do it.' The one thing that he'd never suspect in a million years is for her to ask him to kill his best friend. This is very important. And very dangerous, because Claudio is a much better soldier than Benedick. So saying, 'yes, I will challenge him' also means 'and I'm going to die.' The weight of these things hangs in the air at that moment. When he finally decides to do that, it gives his love of Beatrice validity and weight. He is offering to give up everything he has ever known in my life. That's where he makes the decision to stop being that confirmed bachelor. To say 'my friends are no longer as important as my love.' So it's a pretty big moment."

While the director and actors drive the action, the designers influence how you see the play. In the case of *Much Ado About Nothing*, veteran APT designer Robert Morgan created both the costumes and the set for this production. That's a pretty hefty task, but Robert says "Well, what does a costume and scenic designer do? When you put those two jobs together, and you add the lighting designer, everything visual that you see on



Claudio accepts Benedick's challenge, even though it means the end of their friendship, and maybe one of their lives.



A model of the *Much Ado* stage, by Robert Morgan.

stage is encompassed by those three people. So I provide, as a scenic designer, designs for everything on stage, including props. Then as a costume designer, I provide designs for all the clothing that the actors wear. So it's a process of creating a complete picture that helps tell the story."

At APT, the designers work with the directors on creative decisions such as when the play is going to be set (modern times or historical?), where it will be set and many other things that play a huge role in how the play will look and be perceived. Robert says "This production of *Much Ado* is set in the mid-nineteenth century, specifically between about 1845 to 1855. Designing Shakespeare in the 19th century is a very common choice among directors and designers. It's exotic and it's beautiful and it's fairy tale-like in a way, but as an audience we still understand the social conventions. And since it's only 150 years ago, some of those social conventions

still exist. I would say that that's the main reason that we chose the period. It allowed us to dress military men appropriately for war because of the time placement choice, but it also gave us an environment that seemed to support the emotional qualities of the play."



Costume Rendering by
Robert Morgan

All the challenges of designing a play – and the additional challenge of designing both costumes and set, which is pretty rare in theater – are magnified at APT because of the outdoor stage. All of a sudden the designer has to worry about how the costumes will affect the actors on hot days or cold ones, or whether the set will become slippery and dangerous when it rains. But Bob says of these challenges: "The problems of working outdoors at APT aren't as great as you would imagine. It's much harder on the actors. They're the ones who have to deal with the mosquitoes and the heat and the rain. I don't pay a lot of attention to it. I create the images that I think are appropriate, I buy the fabrics that I think are appropriate for that, and the wardrobe crew keeps them together for the run of the show. One of the great things about working outside is that it makes the audience pretend with the actor. When you're inside in the dark, the audience can be more

passive because it's in a controlled environment. You have to make them believe. When you go outside, there are all these other elements that become part of the show. The audience has to be more active. They have to participate by leaning forward and saying, "Yes, I will believe that." One of the great things about working outside, is that it stimulates the audience to join you in whatever reality you're creating."



And the real thing on Colleen Madden.

Much Ado About Nothing Photo Summary

In Messina, Don Pedro and his men return triumphantly from war. A messenger is sent ahead to let the Governor, Leonato, know of their impending arrival. One of the ladies of the house, Beatrice, asks about the well being of Benedick in a teasing way, and then sets forth insulting him.



Messenger: I see, lady, the gentleman is not in your books.
Beatrice: No; and he were, I would burn my study.

- Act I scene 1

Don Pedro has recently been reconciled with his illegitimate brother, Don John, who may still harbor a few grudges.



Leonato: Let me bid you welcome, my lord, being reconciled to the prince, your brother. I owe you all duty.

Don John: I thank you. I am not of many words, but I thank you.

- Act I scene 1

The troops - including Don Pedro, Benedick and the young lord Claudio, arrive at Leonato's manor, and he asks them to stay the month. They accept and Beatrice and Benedick resume their normal battle of wits.



Beatrice: I wonder that you will still be talking, Signor Benedick; nobody marks you.

Benedick: What, my dear Lady Disdain! Are you yet living?
Beatrice: Is it possible Disdain should die, while she hath such meet food to feed it as Signor Benedick?

- Act I, scene 1

Young Claudio and Leonato's daughter, Hero, soon fall in love. To help Claudio woo her, Don Pedro plans to disguise himself as Claudio and ask Hero and Leonato for her hand in marriage.



I will assume thy part in some disguise and tell fair Hero I am Claudio; and in her bosom I'll unclasp my heart and take her hearing prisoner with the force and strong encounter of my amorous tale. Then after to her father I will break, and the conclusion is: she shall be thine.

- Don Pedro, Act I scene 1

Things become a bit confused when Leonato's brother Antonio tells Leonato that a servant overheard Don Pedro say that he is in love with Hero. So Leonato, not yet ready to talk to Don Pedro about the situation, goes off to tell Hero she will be marrying the prince.



We will hold it as a dream till it appear itself. But I will acquaint my daughter withal, that she be better prepared for an answer, if peradventure this be true.

- Leonato Act I scene 2



Alone with his attendants, Don John admits that he still harbors ill will toward his brother and friends, and lays the groundwork for a plan to ruin Claudio's happiness.



I had rather be a canker in a hedge than a rose in his grace, and it better fits my grace to be disdained of all than to fashion a carriage to rob love from any. In this, though I cannot be said to be a flattering honest man, it must not be denied but I am a plain-dealing villain.

- Don John, Act I scene 3



As the masked ball begins, Beatrice, not recognizing Benedick, makes fun of Benedick “behind his back” (but really to his face). He is not amused.

Why he is the prince’s jester, a very dull fool; only his gift is in devising impossible slanders. None but libertines delight in him, and the commendation is not in his wit but in his villainy.
- Beatrice Act II scene 1

Claudio starts to think Don Pedro double crossed him, but everything gets cleared up and Hero and Claudio plan to be married, while Beatrice again swears she will never marry.

Speak, cousin, or, if you cannot, stop his mouth with a kiss and let not him speak neither.
- Beatrice Act II scene 1.



Don Pedro, Claudio, Leonato and Hero decide to “gull”, or trick Beatrice and Benedick into admitting they are in love. They start with Benedick, allowing him to overhear them talking about how Beatrice told Leonato that she loves him. It works.



I should think is a gull, but that the white-bearded fellow speaks it. Knavery cannot, sure, hide himself in such reverence.
- Benedick, Act II scene 3



Hero and Margaret do the same to Beatrice as she's hiding in the garden, saying Benedick will never tell her his feelings because she mocks everyone.



What fire is in mine ears? Can this be true? Stand I condemned for pride and scorn so much? Contempt, farewell; and maiden pride, adieu. No glory lives behind the back of such.
- Beatrice, Act III scene 1

Don John and Borachio plan to make Claudio believe Hero is unfaithful by tricking Margaret into meeting Borachio in Hero's bedroom. They tell Claudio and Don Pedro that they will be able to catch Hero in the act that evening, and though they don't believe him, they agree to meet that night to spy on Hero's bedroom window.

If I see anything tonight why I should not marry her, tomorrow in the congregation where I should wed, I will shame her.
- Claudio Act III scene 2



Constable Dogberry and his watch somehow manage to arrest Borachio and Conrade. Conrade is belligerent, but Borachio starts to feel guilty and admits his part in framing Hero.



I know that I have tonight wooed Margaret, the lady Hero's gentlewoman, by the name of Hero.
- Borachio, Act III scene 3



Claudio behaves oddly at the wedding, and people make excuses for him at first. Then he asks Leonato if his daughter is virtuous. Leonato says yes, and Claudio loses it, saying that Hero has been unfaithful.



There, Leonato, take her back again. Give not this rotten orange to your friend; she's but the sign and semblance of her honor.
- Claudio, Act IV scene 1



After being horribly and wrongfully insulted by Claudio, Don Pedro and her father, Hero faints, and most guests leave. The friar, who believes Hero, says they should fake her death as a tactic to prove to Claudio that she's innocent. And if it doesn't work, she'll become a nun.

Come, lady, die to live. This wedding day perhaps is but prolonged. Have patience and endure.

- Friar Francis, Act IV scene 1



Everyone leaves except Beatrice and Benedick. Benedick is moved by Beatrice's grief for her cousin and admits he loves her. Beatrice admits it back.

Benedick: I do love nothing in the world so well as you. Is not that strange?
Beatrice: as strange as the thing I know not. It were possible for me to say I loved nothing so well as you.
- Act IV scene 1





But the good feelings don't last long, as Beatrice asks Benedick to kill Claudio to avenge Hero's honor. He very reluctantly agrees to challenge Claudio to a duel.

By this hand, Claudio shall render me a dear account.
As you hear of me, think of me. Go comfort your
cousin, I must say she is dead. And so farewell.
- Benedick, Act IV scene 1

Leonato and Antonio break the news of Hero's "death" to Claudio, who looks to Benedick to cheer him up. Instead, Benedick challenges him to a duel, and he accepts. Benedick tells Don Pedro that Don John has fled.

Your brother, the bastard, is fled from Messina; you
have among you killed a sweet and innocent lady. For
my Lord Lack-Beard there, he and I shall meet. And
till then peace be with him.
- Benedick, Act V scene 1



Finally Dogberry and Verges bring Borachio and Conrade to Leonato's and they confess everything. Claudio, sad and guilt-ridden, agrees to Leonato's offer to marry one of Hero's cousins.

My brother hath a daughter almost he copy of my
child that's dead, and she alone is heir to both of us.
Give her the right you should have given her cousin,
and so dies my revenge.
- Leonato, Act V scene 1





Beatrice and Benedick meet in the orchard, but she refuses to kiss him until he kills Claudio. Ursula arrives and tells them Hero's name has been cleared, and that everyone knows that Don John framed her.

Beatrice: Will you go hear this news, Signor?
Benedick: I will live in thy heart, die in thy lap, and be buried in thy eyes - and moreover I will go with thee to thy uncle's.
- Act V scene 3

The next day Leonato presents his "niece" to marry Claudio. It is revealed that it's actually Hero, and everyone rejoices.

One Hero died defiled, but I do live, and surely as I live, I am a maid.
- Hero, Act V scene 4



Beatrice and Benedick have written each other love letters, but before they read them, they discover that they were tricked by their friends, and try to go back to pretending they don't like each other. But Hero and Claudio find their letters, and Beatrice and Benedick decide to marry.

Come, come, we are friends. Let's have a dance ere we are married, that we may lighten our own hearts and our wives' heels.
- Benedick, Act V scene 4



Classroom Activities

Dogberry: The Most Vigilant Lawman Ever

From Folger Shakespeare Library, by Janell Bemis, J.F. Kennedy Jr. High School, West Valley City, Utah.

Plays/Scenes Covered

Much Ado About Nothing 3.3, 3.5, 4.2, 5.1

What's On for Today and Why

Dogberry and his companions provide gregarious humor in *Much Ado About Nothing*. By turning the watch into bumbling fools, Shakespeare pokes fun at the law.

The goal of this lesson is to help students interpret Dogberry's haphazard speeches. The students should be able to identify his malapropisms and fix them. They should find the humor in the language of the scenes and devise actions to support the humor through performance.

This lesson should take one to two class periods.

What You Need

Documents:

Dogberry's Malapropisms (Included)

What To Do

Day One

1. Read Act 3, scene 3 aloud. Each student in the class should read one line at a time until the scene is finished. Ask the class what they understood and what they didn't understand about the scene. Don't get flustered if they say, "It doesn't make sense." This reaction is a good lead-in to the activity.
2. Explain the concept of a "malapropism" (the ludicrous misuse of words, especially through confusion caused by resemblance in sound). You may wish to introduce *The Rivals* by Sheridan, and the character of Mrs. Malaprop. Although this play was written much later than *Much Ado About Nothing*, Mrs. Malaprop became so famous for misusing big words that her name became the root word for this kind of verbal confusion.
3. Read the scene aloud again and have students stop every time they find a malapropism. Write each word on the board, and have students guess at the correct word. Then have the students come up with a short definition of the correct word. Continue identifying the malapropisms.
4. Assign students in pairs to work on 3.5, 4.2, or 5.1 to identify all of Dogberry's malapropisms. They may work on this assignment in class or complete it as homework. (See handout.)

Day Two

5. Dogberry not only uses malapropisms; he uses entire phrases incorrectly. Ask the class to identify these phrases and find an action that illustrates them. Assign students into groups of three to five, and choose a few lines for each group to perform. For example, 5.1.217-233, the scene in which Dogberry presents the prisoners, is a wonderful passage for this activity: “Marry, sir, they have committed false report, moreover they have spoken untruths, secondarily, they are slanders, sixth and lastly, they have belied a lady, thirdly they have verified unjust things, and to conclude, they are lying knaves” (5.1.225-229). Students should come up with the actions to fit key words or phrases, and then perform the passage to emphasize the ridiculousness of the situation.

How Did It Go?

Ask students to turn in their lists of malapropisms. Assign parts for acting out the scenes. Then hold a class discussion to analyze each performance. What did the actors do to illustrate Dogberry’s incompetence? Were the scenes funny? Why or why not?

Change Slander to Remorse: Unscripted Scenes

Sue Biondo-Hench, Carlisle Senior High School, Carlisle, Pennsylvania. Janet Field-Pickering, Folger Shakespeare Library, Head of Education 1996-2000.

Plays/Scenes Covered

This lesson may be tailored to work with many of Shakespeare's plays; however, this version is designed for the 4th act of *Much Ado about Nothing*.

What's On for Today and Why

Many of Shakespeare's plays offer tantalizing tidbits of information that allude to scenes, moments, and responses that are not included within the specific text of the play. In this lesson, the students will hypothesize about the content of unscripted moments, search for evidence in the actual text to support their hypothesis, and explore how this hypothesis would affect characterization.

This activity emphasizes higher level thinking, performance, and problem solving through direct involvement with the text.

This lesson will take at least two class sessions to complete.

What You Need

Folger edition of *Much Ado About Nothing*
Available in Folger print edition and Folger Digital Texts

What To Do

1. After reading the play, return to the moment in Act 4, Scene 1 when Hero comes out of her faint after being falsely accused by Claudio on their wedding day. Her friends devise a plan to pretend she is dead until they figure out how to clear her name. Hero doesn't speak much in this scene, but it obvious that she is filled with many conflicting emotions about what just happened to her.
2. Divide the students into groups, and ask them to complete the following tasks:
 - a. Create a scene that reveals what happens to Hero during the time she is pretending to be dead. We know how Beatrice feels, but how does Hero feel about Claudio and her father? How do her friends comfort her? How do they keep it all a secret?
 - b. Look for textual evidence that supports your characterization of Hero and her friends.
 - c. Write and rehearse a script that will bring this scene to life.
 - d. Prepare a report (including textual support) of your group's decision-making process during the creation and rehearsal of the scene.
3. Have each group perform its scene and present its report.
4. Discuss the similarities and differences among the scenes and responses.

How Did It Go?

Did the students create and perform a scene that was logically supported with evidence from the text? Was the defense clear and complete? Was the performance (both scenes and the defense) prepared and interesting?

ACTIVITIES

IMPROVISE! IMPROVISE! IMPROVISE!



*Hero in her wedding gown.
Design by Kate Turner -Walker.*

Improvise the wedding scene where Hero does not faint or pretend to be dead. What would Hero say to such slandering? How could she have reacted differently, especially in today's context?

Improvise a scene between Hero and Margaret (possibly include Beatrice as well) after the plot has unfolded and it is revealed that Margaret was the one wooed by Borachio. What does Hero/Margaret have to say about it? Why might Margaret be forgiven?

Improvise a scene in which the lovers are switched, Benedick in love with Hero and Claudio with Beatrice. Does this seem like a happy pairing? How does this illustrate the differences between the couples' relationships? Who is more mature in love?

Improvise the two scenes in which Beatrice and Benedick are overhearing tales of the other's affections but in the context of life today. How would these characters be persuaded now?

Improvise or write a scene with Beatrice and Benedick 20 years later and a scene with Claudio and Hero. How would they be different? How would they stay the same?

INTERACT IN A MOCK TRIAL

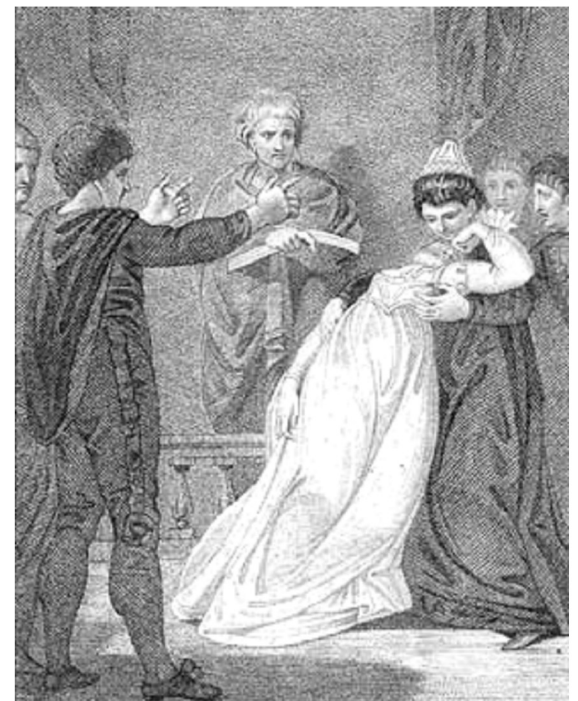
Put Claudio on the stand for slandering Hero. Put Don John on the stand for plotting against everyone. How would they defend themselves? What would be the verdict? How would the judge punish them?

Teachers may assign roles of judge, prosecutor, defense, etc.

WRITE A SCENE

Write a new scene that occurs while Hero is in hiding, where she discusses her situation with Margaret. What do you think these two characters would have to say to each other?

*J. J. Vanden Bergh after John Thurston. Much ado about nothing [4.1 Hero fainting at the church].
Engraving, 1798.*



ACTIVITIES continued . . .

ONE FOR THE JOURNAL

Your friend's brother tells you that your boy/girlfriend has been cheating on you. You break up with him/her the next day, shouting insults at him/her in front of the entire school. Later that day, you find out that your boy/girlfriend died in a car accident on their way home from school. How do you feel? A few days later, you find out that your friend's brother lied to you, and that your boy/girlfriend had not cheated. How do you feel now? Try writing these feelings and thoughts down in a journal, either as yourself or as one of the characters from the play.



FOUR STAR RATING

Rate the following characters in order, from most immoral to most moral: Beatrice, Benedick, Borachio, Claudio, Conrade, Don John, Don Pedro, Hero, Leonato, Margaret. Consider their actions and words in relation to the slander of Hero, and its aftermath. Be prepared to defend your choices.

As an extension, try rating all the characters in the play in the following ways: by status, gullibility, intelligence, bravery, kindness, who you would most like to hang out with, etc.

TIME AND PLACE

Folger Theatre's production of *Much Ado About Nothing* is set in England in 1945, at the end of World War II. What other time periods could you set this play in? Work in small groups to design a set and costumes for a production of *Much Ado About Nothing* set in the time period of your choice. (You may draw pictures of these, or construct them.) Perform a scene from the play in this new setting.



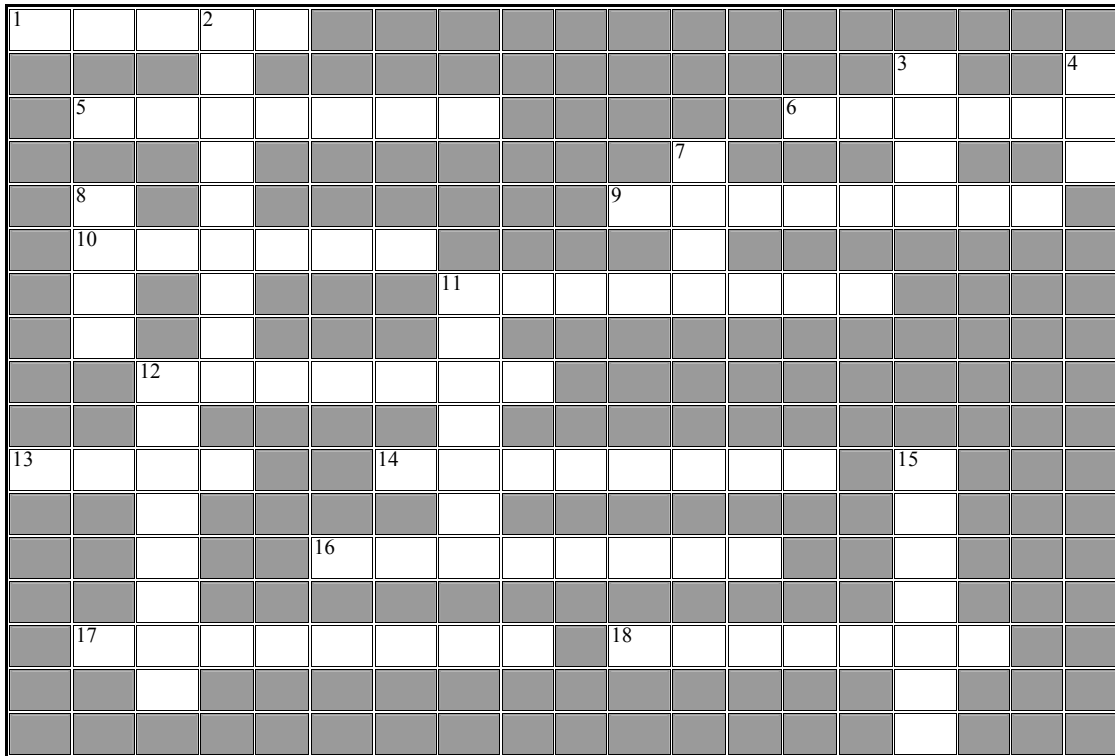
Margaret. Design by Kate Turner -Walker.

STATUS IN THE CLASSROOM

Each student should take on a character from the play. While in character, your task is to move all of the chairs in the classroom from one side of the room to the other. Watch how the characters interact. Does their status affect their actions/role in the activity? Who ends up doing all the work? Who gets to be the boss? Afterward, discuss the role of status in the play. Who has the most status? Who has the least? Does this explain any parts of the play you might find puzzling?

Shakespeare's Crazy Crosswords

Special Feature: *Much Ado About Nothing*



ACROSS

1. "I was born to speak all _____ and no matter."
5. Father of Hero and Uncle of Beatrice who says, "How much better is it to weep at joy than to joy at weeping!"
6. Don Pedro's nick-name.
9. Associate of Don John who helps conspire against Hero and Claudio by pretending to seduce Hero (though the woman Claudio sees is actually Margaret.)
10. Don Pedro is the Prince of _____.
11. Most powerful character of the play who ends up playing "matchmaker" for his friends. He is the first character to propose to Beatrice, but she believes he is joking and refuses his proposal.
12. This story takes place in this Italian city.
13. This character fakes her own death in order "to live."
14. Constable in charge of the Watch who constantly uses the wrong word to convey his meaning. He succeeds in apprehending Conrad and Borachio, and unravels Don John's evil plot.
16. Upon Beatrice's request, this character challenges Claudio to a duel to the death as a result of Claudio's accusation as to Hero's infidelity.
17. This sharp and witty woman maintains a "merry war of wits" with Benedick. She, also, appears to never want to marry.

18. _____ says, "But fare thee well, most foul, most fair. Farewell, thou pure impiety and impious purity." to Hero at their wedding ceremony, as he rejects her and calls off their marriage.

DOWN

2. "There was never yet philosopher that could endure the _____ patiently."
3. Balthasar sings the song, "_____ no more, ladies, _____ no more" at the masked party.
4. Have Benedick and Beatrice courted before? (Answer with Yes or No.)
7. "Speak low if you speak _____."
8. "What though _____ killed a cat? Thou hast mettle enough in thee to kill _____."
11. Illegitimate brother of Don Pedro who envy's his brother's social authority. He is the villain of the play.
12. Borachio's lover and Hero's servant who helps Borachio and Don John trick Claudio into thinking that Hero is unfaithful.
15. Benedick says, "I was not born under a _____ planet, nor I cannot woo in festival terms," when he tries to write a sonnet for Beatrice.

