DISCOVERY GUIDE
2008

Much Ado About Nothing

Directed by Robert Currier
Scenic Design: Bruce Lackovic
Lighting Design: Ellen Brooks
Costume Design: Michael A. Berg
Sound Design: Billie Cox

Discovery Guide written by Education Director Kate Magill
www.marinshakespeare.org
Introduction

Marin Shakespeare Company is so pleased to offer you this opportunity to see one of Shakespeare’s liveliest comedies on-stage and out-of-doors, as Shakespeare’s audiences would have seen them! As one of Shakespeare’s most accessible comedies, this show is a great introduction to ‘the Bard’ for students who are new to Shakespeare and a fun-filled re-introduction for students who have developed the ‘Shakespeare Yucks.’ For those already enchanted by Shakespeare’s works, this play is guaranteed to delight, as the master-storyteller has provided us with a story which is both touching and uproariously funny.

However you come to this production, there is much to be said for a little preparation before the performance! This DISCOVERY GUIDE is intended to provide you with some background on the play, some explanations of characters and plot lines and some pre- and post-show activities, exercises and discussion questions for further deepening your theatre-going experience!

Let us know if this DISCOVERY GUIDE is helpful (education@marinshakespeare.org)! Enjoy!

MSC’s Artistic Director Bob Currier is taking on Much Ado About Nothing for the second time in 2008! Marin Shakespeare Company has produced the show twice before (1995 and 2002), and this is Mr. Currier’s second time in the director’s chair, but his first this century!

So why present Much Ado again? That answer is simple, and Mr. Currier says it best -- because this show is like an old friend. Mr. Currier states that this show is “one of the half-dozen most requested and enjoyed comedies in the world’s canon. This marvellous Mediterranean mixture of triumphant love, mischief, and malapropisms has graced our stage...and surely will return in the not-too-distant future.”

But there’s another side to this story...Mr. Currier encourages Bay Area actors to tell him their ‘dream roles’ and enjoys having a venue with which to make their dreams come true -- such was the case with this show. Mr Currier says: “This fall, opening my mail, I found a small card; inside was written ‘Don’t be a <bleep>, Bob. Let us play Beatrice and Benedick. -- Cat (Thompson) and Darren (Bridgett).” Out of this humble beginning, the current production was born.

(ON THE COVER: CAT THOMPSON AND DARREN BRIDGETT AS BEATRICE AND BENEDICK)
DISCOVER: the origins of the play...

Shakespeare's Sources

We do not know exactly what sources Shakespeare knew about when he was writing this play. But we do know of some stories, books and poems which might have been available to him and which have similar plot-lines and themes to *Much Ado About Nothing*.

Lodovico Ariosto wrote a romantic epic poem in 1516 called *Canto V of Orlando Furioso* (the Frenzy of Orlando) which was later translated into English by Sir John Harrington in 1591. This poem provides a story line similar to the plot to prevent the marriage of Hero and Claudio. This epic poem was also a source for Edmund Spencer’s epic *The Faerie Queen*, (which presents a story of a woman scorned) which might have influenced Shakespeare, though *The Faerie Queen* is more serious and allegorical than Shakespeare’s play.

In 1554, a Dominican friar named Matteo Bandello wrote a series of popular short stories called *La Prima Parte de le Nouvelle* (1554; English translation/adaptation by Belleforest). These stories may have given Shakespeare the idea of setting the play in Messina, Italy, as well as adding to the marriage plot between Claudio, Hero and Don John. Also, Anthony Munday’s *Fedele and Fortunio*, (1585) has the male lovers (the title characters) vying for the attentions of a beautiful young lady, which may have influenced Shakespeare’s plot as well!

As for the story-line involving the ‘merry war’ between Beatrice and Benedick...there is more speculation here, too. Chaucer’s *Troilus and Criseyde* (a rather tragic love story which probably influenced many of Shakespeare’s plays) may be one source for their relationship.

Another possible influence is Baldassare Castiglione’s *The Courtier* (1588; English translation by Sir Thomas Hoby). Baldassare wrote *The Courtier* about his experiences with the virgin Duchess Elisabetta Gonzaga at the court of Urbino and the story is divided into 4 subjects, all based on how to be a proper courtier. The third section, in particular, describes the ‘perfect lady’ which Shakespeare quite possibly used as a basis for Benedick’s diatribe in Act II Scene iii.

First publication and performance

*Much Ado About Nothing* was likely first published in 1600, probably having been written and performed in (or around) 1598-1599 for an acting troupe called the Lord Chamberlain’s Men (the playing company Shakespeare worked for as an actor and playwright for a large part of his career). The QUARTO edition, published in 1600, names the actor William Kemp as the character “Dogberry,” and we know that Kemp left the Lord Chamberlain’s men in 1599, so we can deduce that the play was finished and performed before then.

The title page of the first publication states the play ‘hath beene sundrie time publikly acted by the Right Honorable, the Lord Chamberlaine his servants’ (aka: the play was performed publicly, several times, by the Lord Chamberlain’s Men).

QUARTO: is sheets of printing paper folded twice to form eight separate pages for printing a book. The Quarto editions of Shakespeare’s plays are generally considered ‘unauthorized’ and subsequent editions (called Folio) are considered more accurate.
LEONATO: The governor of Messina around whose home the play revolves. He is the father of Hero and the Uncle to Beatrice. [Actor: Christopher Hammond at right]

HERO: The sweet but spunky daughter of Leonato and the cousin of Beatrice. She falls in love with Claudio and suffers greatly when he rashly refuses her. [Actor: Khamara Pettus at left]

BEATRICE: Leonato’s niece and Hero’s cousin. She has a sharp tongue and a quick wit. She wages a war of wits between herself and Benedick...and often wins the battles! [Actor: Kat Thompson at right]

DON PEDRO, PRINCE OF ARAGON: A friend to Leonato, he is fun-loving and intelligent, though quick to believe the worst and take revenge. [Actor: William Elsman at right]

DON JOHN: The illegitimate brother of Don Pedro. He is sullen and envious and willing to do just about anything to ‘bring down’ those around him. [Actor: Ryan Schmidt at left]

BENEDICK: A soldier from Padua, Italy who is witty and enjoys a good joke, especially at Beatrice’s expense. [Actor: Darren Bridgett at right]

CLAUDIO: A soldier from Florence, Italy who falls in love with Hero at the beginning of the play. His suspicious nature makes him fall prey to Don John’s vengeful plots. [Actor: Christopher Maikish at left]

THE FRIAR and THE Sexton: Voices of reason in the world of Messina. [Actors: Friar - Terry Rucker (left) / Sexton - Rebecca Michelle David (right)]
**DISCOVER: the characters...**

**The Law**

**DOGBERRY, Constable:** As the chief policeman in Messina, he takes his job very seriously but has a bad habit of using exactly the wrong word to express his thought (called a malapropism). [Actor: Michael Ray Wiesly at right]

**VERGES:** Dogberry’s deputy, comedic sidekick and number one fan. He also has trouble choosing the right words for the occasion. [Actor: Michael A Berg at left]

**THE WATCH:** hired to watch over Leonato’s house during the wedding excitement, these guys would ‘rather sleep than watch’...though to their credit, they do manage to capture the bad guys! [Actors: Josh Attias (left), Steven Scot Bono (right), Len Pettigrew (photo unavailable)].

**Other Key Characters**

**BALTHAZAR:** A musician in Leonato’s house, he aids the gentlemen in their plan to help Benedick fall in love with Beatrice. [Actor: Terry Rucker at right]

**BORRACHIO:** An associate of Don John and lover of Margaret, he conspires to trick Claudio into thinking Hero has been unfaithful. His name means ‘drunkard’ in Italian. [Actor: Brian Trybom at left]

**CONRAD:** Associate of Don John and friend to Borrachio. [Actor: Mick Berry at right]

**MARGARET:** Hero’s gentlewoman and friend who unwittingly helps Borrachio deceive Claudio. She loves a dirty joke, but is honest. [Actor: LeAnne Rumbel at left]

**URSULA:** Another of Hero’s gentlewomen friends who helps Hero to ‘trap’ Beatrice into loving Benedick. [Actor: Linnea George at right]
ACT ONE:
As the play begins, Leonato, Governor of Messina, receives word of approaching visitors, returning home from war: Don Pedro, Prince of Aragon and his officers Claudio and Benedick. Also arriving is Don Pedro’s bastard brother Don John, a prisoner, having led an unsuccessful rebellion against Don Pedro. When the soldiers arrive, they are greeted by Leonato, his daughter Hero, his niece Beatrice and others. It is Benedick who livens things up with a few ‘off color’ jokes which provoke Beatrice to step in, with: “I wonder that you will still be talking, Signior Benedick: nobody marks you.” To which the equally quick-witted Benedick replies “My dear Lady Distain, are you yet living?” Thus the audience captures a first (but certainly not the last!) glance at the ‘merry war’ between these two sharp-witted protagonists!

Leonato invites his guests to stay for a month. Don Pedro heartily agrees and everyone goes inside – except Claudio, who stops Benedick to shyly ask “didst thou note the daughter of Senior Leonato?” Young Claudio has been eyeing the modest lady Hero and has quite fallen in love with her! Benedick mocks Claudio for falling in love, but when Don Pedro returns, the Prince agrees Hero and Claudio would make a good match and he offers to help. As Claudio is shy, Don Pedro proposes to woo Hero in Claudio’s name at a masked ball that will take place later that night. Says the Prince: “And the conclusion is, she shall be thine. In practice let us put it presently.”

Now we get to the antagonists of the story – Conrad and Borrachio, who are loyal to Don John. Don John tells us outright: “It must not be denied but I am a plain-dealing villain.” Borrachio has overheard the discussion of a marriage between Hero and Claudio and suggests they attempt to thwart the engagement. Don John heartily agrees to anything that will make mischief for his enemies.

ACT TWO:
Meanwhile, Leonato’s house is a flurry of excitement as everyone prepares for the masked ball. Don Pedro and his entourage arrive masked and there is high-spirited dancing. True to his word, Don Pedro woos Hero in Claudio’s name. Of course, it doesn’t take long for Beatrice and Benedick to go at it again, using their masks as a convenient facade to insult each other.

As the dancing concludes, Don John approaches Claudio, pretending to recognize him as Benedick. Don John deliberately plants a seed of doubt in Claudio’s mind that maybe…just maybe…Don Pedro is wooing Hero for himself! Claudio is easily persuaded, but before too much damage can be done, Don Pedro returns with “Here, Claudio, I have wooed in thy name, and fair Hero is won; name the day of marriage and God give thee joy!” At first Claudio thinks the Prince has won Hero for himself, but soon realizes Hero has agreed to be his wife and has the consent of her father to the match.

Everyone congratulates the couple, as Beatrice, to everyone’s surprise, bemoans her own lack-of-husband! Don Pedro asks Beatrice if she would consider him as a suitable spouse, and she, comparing him to fancy clothes, replies that he would be too valuable for her to ‘wear’ every day. As she leaves, Don Pedro exclaims “She were an excellent wife for Benedick” to which Leonato replies “Oh, my lord, if they were but a week married, they would talk themselves mad.” Don Pedro hatches a plot to help the two sparring wits fall in love: “if we can do this, Cupid’s glory shall be ours, for we are the only love-gods!”

Don John, having been thwarted in his first attempt at mischief, tells Borrachio “any bar, any cross, any impediment would be medicinable to me.” Borrachio has a new plan: he has been flirting with Hero’s friend, Margaret; he proposes to woo Margaret and make Claudio believe that he is wooing an amenable Hero. Claudio will think that Hero is being disloyal to him and would never marry her!
ACT TWO (cont.)

But, this is a comedy after all, so before that happens, Don Pedro, Leonato, and Claudio find Benedick alone, extolling the virtues of his imaginary-perfect-wife. They take the opportunity to talk where Benedick cannot help but overhear them. Don Pedro gets the ball rolling by asking, loudly: “What was it you told me the other day - that your niece Beatrice was in love with signior Benedick?” Knowing they now have Benedick’s undivided attention, Leonato and Claudio confirm that Hero has told them Beatrice is so in love with Benedick that she will certainly die of grief if he does not return her love. Celebrating their own ingenuity, the gentlemen leave Benedick alone to his own thoughts: “Love me! Why it must be requited!”

ACT THREE

Now that Benedick is caught in the net that has been spread for him, it is Hero’s turn to lay the same trap for Beatrice. Hero sends a messenger to tell Beatrice that Hero is talking about her behind her back, and, of course, Beatrice comes to listen in on the conversation. Timing things just perfectly, Ursula says: “But are you sure that Benedick loves Beatrice so entirely?” Hero replies: “So says the prince, and my new-trothed lord; but I persuaded them, if they loved Benedick, never to let Beatrice know of it. I never yet saw a man, how wise, how noble but she would spell him backward.” And then, after extolling the virtues of Benedick and giggling over their own genius, the ladies go in to prepare for Hero’s wedding, scheduled for the next day. Alone, Beatrice, exclaims: “Benedick, love on!” So now, both Beatrice and Benedick have fallen for the trap – both think the other is in love with them and vow to return that love in kind. But the wedding of Hero and Claudio fast-approaches, and the men-folk enjoy the frivolity of the day – until Don John approaches them. Don John is blunt: “I came hither to tell you, the lady is disloyal.” Naturally, Claudio and Don Pedro are not convinced, but Don John, according to Borrachio’s plan, invites them to join him under Hero’s chamber-window to see ‘proof’ of this disloyalty. Still uncertain, but swayed by Don John’s insistence, Claudio concludes “If I see any thing to-night why I should not marry her to-morrow in the congregation, where I should wed, there will I shame her.” And, sadly, because of Borrachio’s scheming, Claudio believes he sees Hero with another man and his love for the innocent Hero converts to ill-conceived hatred.

But all is not lost. Not yet! Enter Dogberry, the utterly inept but wholly hilarious constable of the town, who comes to charge the night watchmen in their duties – that is to look for mischief around Leonato’s house, as there is quite the hubbub with preparations for the wedding! With him are his side-kick, Verges, and several members of the night-watch including Hugh Otecake and George Seacole, who, not being the brightest crayons in the box, ask: “If we know {someone} to be a thief, shall we not lay hands on him?” Dogberry, true to form, responds “Truly, by your office, you may, but I think the most peacable way for you, if you do take a thief, is to let him show himself what he is and steal out of your company!” Dogberry and Verges leave the watch, who settle in for a good nap (for, as Dogberry says “I cannot see how sleeping should offend!”) But who should come stumbling by but Conrad and his drunken pal, Borrachio, who bragging, spills the whole story: “I have to-night wooed Margaret, the Lady Hero’s gentlewoman, by the name of Hero; the prince, Claudio and my master saw afar off in the orchard this amiable encounter. Away went Claudio, enraged: swore he would shame her with what he saw o’er night and send her home again without a husband.” The Watch jump out of hiding and the bad guys are carted off in search of justice.

The next day, the ladies prepare for the wedding. Beatrice arrives, love-sick from head to toe, and is teased mercilessly by Margaret who declares “I am not such a fool to think that you are in love or that you will be in love or that you can be in love.” The conversation is cut short as the men arrived to escort the ladies to church for the wedding. Brace yourselves – this won’t be pretty.
ACT FOUR
Claudio and Hero come before a Friar but when asked if he will marry her, Claudio passionately proclaims Hero has been untrue. When Leonato demands proof, Don Pedro says simply: “Upon mine honour, / Myself, my brother and this grieved count / Did see her, hear her, at that hour last night / Talk with a ruffian at her chamber-window / Who hath indeed / Confess’d the vile encounters they have had / A thousand times in secret. ‘ Heart-struck, Hero swoons and falls to the ground. Don Pedro and Claudio (with Don John, reveling in his wickedness) leave, full of righteous indignation. Poor Leonato – he believes the story of his child’s shame and it is inconsolable, even as Beatrice and Benedick insist upon Hero’s innocence. The Friar counsels Leonato to report that Hero is dead while they search for the truth in the story the Prince told. Leonato consents, and the Friar leads Hero away with: “Come, lady, die to live; this wedding-day perhaps is but prolong’d: have patience and endure.”

Beatrice and Benedick remain alone, all thoughts of merriment banished by Hero’s predicament. Somewhat uncomfortably, they each declare their love for the other. Benedick offers: ‘Come, bid me do anything for you.” Beatrice responds with: “Kill Claudio.” When Benedick protests he cannot kill his friend, Beatrice announces: “Is not Claudio a villain, that has slandered, scorned, and dishonored my cousin? O, God, that I were a man! I would eat his heart in the marketplace.” Benedick, seeing her mind is set, agrees: “I will challenge him. By this hand, Claudio shall render me a dear account!”

Now we move to a local jail, where Dogberry has rounded up a judge. The Watch reveal what they overheard, and Dogberry proclaims “Villain! Thou wilt be condemned into everlasting redemption for this!” (you read right…he says ‘redemption’). Dogberry calls for the accused to be bound, but Conrad looks at Dogberry and declares…”you are an ass!” Dogberry’s response: “Masters, remember that I am an / ass; though it be not written down, yet forget not / that I am an ass!”

ACT FIVE
Meanwhile, Don Pedro and Claudio find themselves in the uncomfortable position of standing alone in their indignation...until Dogberry arrives with Borracho and Conrad in tow. Borracho makes a full confession and proclaims Hero innocent, Margaret blameless, and Don John as the villain behind the plot. The truth is out. Leonato arrives and vents his wrath on Claudio and Don Pedro, who are overwhelmed and agree to any penance. Leonato states: “And since you could not be my son-in-law, Be yet my nephew: my brother hath a daughter, Almost the copy of my child that’s dead; and she alone is heir to both of us.” Claudio agrees to marry this mysterious cousin and they agree to meet the next day, after Claudio has spent the night mourning Hero’s death. Leonato thanks Dogberry for his sleuthing and all depart.

Now we arrive at the final scene of the play. Leonato’s house is preparing for this second wedding, and when Don Pedro and Claudio arrive, the tension could be cut with a knife. Several ladies appear, masked and unrecognizable. Claudio asks: “Which is the lady I must seize upon?” Leonato indicates one of the maidens and Claudio swears to marry her. The mysterious woman answers: “And when I lived, I was your other wife: And when you loved, you were my other husband.” She pulls off her mask revealing the innocent Hero! Claudio is forgiven and all is right with the world. The young lovers are ready to continue the wedding when Benedick steps forward, slyly asking which of the masked maidens is Beatrice. Benedick asks “Do not you love me?” and the embarrassed Beatrice replies “Why no; no more than reason.” Then Beatrice asks him “Do not you love me?” and he replies in kind. As the romantically inept couple try to maintain their dignity, Claudio and Hero pull out letters, written by Beatrice and Benedick, each declaring their love for each other. The merry-witted couple has been trumped – they realize the love they share is more important than their injured pride. And so, the two mad wits and the two young lovers are united at last. Don John has been captured for his villainy. But the merry mood of the day is not to be destroyed, and Benedick concludes the story with: “Think not on him till tomorrow: I’ll devise thee brave punishments for him. Strike up pipers!”
A literary theme is an idea, message or lesson which is explored in a literary work. Often these are implied rather than blatantly stated.

DECEPTION: There are a variety of deceptions which take place in this play, some of them harmless and fun-filled while others are malicious and intended to cause harm. A few of the deceptions are listed below, but there are more!
1. Claudio and Don Pedro are duped into thinking Hero is dishonorable
2. Beatrice and Benedick are tricked into falling in love with each other.
3. Claudio is deceived (by Don John) into thinking Don Pedro is wooing Hero for himself.
4. Many people are tricked into believing Hero is dead.

HONOR: The concept of honor (a person’s worth and social standing based on honesty, integrity, respect and other factors) varies greatly between men and women and this play gives us several means by which to study the concept and how it affects our actions as humans.

WOMEN: A woman’s honor is based on virginity and chastity and there is little she can do to regain her honor once it is lost. If a woman loses her honor, she loses all social status and, to top that off, her family’s honor loses status as well (which explains why Leonato is quick to distance himself from Hero when he thinks she is to blame!).

MEN: Alliances and military conquests are what completes a man’s sense of honor and he can defend and regain his honor through fighting a duel or a battle. This is why Beatrice demands that Benedick challenge Claudio in the name of Hero’s honor (Hero can not regain her own honor, by herself, but Benedick can do it for her).

SHAME: Tying in very closely with the idea of honor is the concept of shame. Hero is publicly shamed at her first wedding and the language which Leonato and Claudio use to further shame her, verbally, is incredibly harsh. Claudio calls her a “rotten orange” and “approved wanton;” Don Pedro calls her “common stale” and even Leonato says: "Death is the fairest cover for her shame / That may be wish’d for." Poor Hero faints (so she is physically effected) when her ‘shame’ is revealed!

And when you get down to it, for Don John, being proclaimed illegitimate and being defeated by his brother (when he attempted to usurp) are constant causes of shame to him. In fact it could be argued that he attempts to shame others to take the focus off his own shame!

NOTHING / NOTING: When this play was originally performed, the word “Nothing” would have been pronounced “Noting” -- so the play could really be called Much Ado About Noting! The concept of listening, writing, taking notes, eavesdropping and observing each other are continually brought up throughout the play.
1. Both Beatrice and Benedick ‘note’ their friends ‘secretly’ discussing their relationship and are tricked into falling in love.
2. Claudio ‘notes’ who he believes is Hero by her bedroom window, cheating with Borrachio.
3. The Watch ‘note’ Borrachio confessing the plot to Conrad.
4. The Sexton ‘notes’ the occurrences during the trial of Conrad and Borrachio.
5. At the end, two physical ‘notes’ (the sonnets) are the evidence provided to prove that Beatrice and Benedick do indeed love each other.
DISCOVER: Classroom Connections...

Classroom Discussion

Compare / contrast characters and plots in *Much Ado About Nothing* to other Shakespeare plays. Some connections are listed below, but see if you can find more!

1. Hero/Claudio vs. Othello/Desdemona (*Othello*)
2. Hero vs. Hermia (*A Midsummer Night’s Dream*) vs. Desdemona (*Othello*)
3. Beatrice vs. Katerina (*Taming of the Shrew*)
4. Hero vs. Hermione (*A Winter’s Tale*) or Claudio vs. Leontes (*A Winter’s Tale*)

Compare / contrast Beatrice and Benedick with other ‘sassy couples,’ from works of literature or movies. A few ideas are listed below to get you started, but there are many more!

1. Elizabeth and Darcy (*Pride and Prejudice*)
2. Scarlett O’Hara and Rhett Butler (*Gone With The Wind*)
3. Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger (*Harry Potter* books)

Discuss malapropisms (see page 13) and examine some of the Dogberry scenes in the play. Now write some of your own malapropisms OR take another scene from the play and re-write it using malapropisms. How does this change the scene?

Hold a mock trial in the classroom! Put Don John on trial for his treachery, or Claudio for his mistrust, or Beatrice for being shrewish, or....the possibilities are endless! But make sure your arguments are supported by the play!

Creative Writing

Write a society column or Elizabethan newspaper. Pick one of the social issues from the play, come up with a snappy headline, and then write a column for a ‘society paper’ or tabloid (the Messina Gazette, perhaps?). This is an excellent class project.

Write a ‘Dear Abby’ letter from the point of view of a character in the play. Ask for help with a major dilemma that the character must overcome in the play.

FOLLOW UP: have students switch papers and write a response from “Abby.”

Re-write the ending. Have students change one small plot-point in the play and re-write the ending accordingly. There are many ways this story could have ended -- encourage creativity!

Write a ‘new’ scene for the play (or re-write one)! Make sure your scene is supported by the play, and be creative! Some topics are below but feel free to come up with your own!

1. A scene between Hero and Margaret right after Hero is hidden away and it is proclaimed that she is dead.
2. How would Hero feel about Claudio after he dumped her at the alter? How would she feel about her father for all the things he said about her?
3. Margaret, Ursula and Balthazar discuss the bizarre happenings around them.
4. What if Hero did NOT faint at the wedding, but instead stood up for herself! What would happen? How would this affect Beatrice and Benedick’s love?
Art / Design Projects

Make a **costume book**. Use research to put together a photo-packet (with descriptions) of Elizabethan clothing. Include works cited. Alternatively, choose another era of time to set the show in and research and design costumes from that time period.

Design and build a **quilt**. Have one panel per scene and create a caption that includes the act, scene and a quote that gave you the inspiration for the design.

Design and sew several **costumes for the play to fit dolls**. Base your designs on research and make sure your dolls can stand or be displayed. Include a one-page paper to explain your choices in each costume; this paper should include works cited.

Design **scenery** for the play. Do a display on a poster or shadow box/diorama. Include a one-page explanation for your choices, including works cited.

Design a **comic book** for the show. Start by breaking the show down into scenes and then illustrating each scene. This could be an individual project or a class assignment.

Pre-Performance Questions

1. Why do you think this play has been performed for over 400 years?
2. What lessons do you think Shakespeare wanted us to learn from this play?
3. Which characters did you like in the play? Which characters did you dislike? Why?
4. If Shakespeare were in our classroom, what one question would you ask him about this play?
5. If you had the option to re-write part of the play, what would you change and why?
6. Do you see anything in the play that would be hard to perform onstage? How could you ‘solve’ this?

Post-Performance Questions

1. What did you think about the director’s choice to place this play in the 1930’s? Do you think it worked in that time and place? Why or why not?
2. Were the actor’s performances what you expected? Did they portray the characters in the way you envisioned them when reading? Why or why not?
3. What did you notice when watching the play that you did not pick up when reading it? Why do you think that is? Does this change your opinion about anything? Why or why not?
1. Don John is undoubtedly the ultimate villain of this story. Why do you think he behaves as he does? Look at his lines in Act 1, scene iii to start, but also see what other characters say about him, too.

2. Of all the play’s characters, Beatrice and Benedick are two of the most coveted roles for actors and the most recognizable characters to audiences. However, it is arguable that Beatrice and Benedick are really ‘supporting characters’ and that Hero/Claudio are the ‘leads.’ Why do Beatrice and Benedick have the ‘reputation’ they do? Discuss.

3. Compare and contrast the love story of Hero and Claudio with that of Beatrice and Benedick.

4. How do Don John’s actions affect the relationship between Beatrice and Benedick?

5. Beatrice asks Benedick to challenge and kill Claudio in order to regain Hero’s honor. Do you think it was fair of her to ask this of him? Do you think he was right to agree? Why? Support your answer.

6. Throughout the play, both Beatrice and Benedick give ‘laundry lists’ of reasons stating why they cannot fathom the idea of getting married. Find the passages in the play and compare their reasons. Are they different or similar? Do they ‘get over it’? How?

7. What is the climax of the play? What is the climax of the Hero/Claudio story? What is the climax of the Beatrice/Benedick story? Are they the same or different and why? Support your answer.

8. Is it significant that Don Pedro and the men are returning from war? Support your answer!

9. Why does Claudio send Don Pedro to woo Hero for him? Do you think he should have done this? Why, once he knows Hero is betrothed to him, is Claudio speechless?

10. Don Pedro’s plan to unite Beatrice and Benedick works like a charm. Why?

11. When the women (Hero and Ursula) discuss Beatrice, they say: “Nature never framed a woman’s heart / Of prouder stuff than that of Beatrice; / Disdain and scorn ride sparkling in her eyes, Misprising what they look on, and her wit / Values itself so highly that to her / All matter else seems weak: she cannot love, / Nor take no shape nor project of affection, / She is so self-endeared.” Do you think this is a fair description of Beatrice? Why or why not? Support your answer.

12. What does the Friar hope will happen as a result of his plan to announce that Hero is dead? What is his objective in suggesting this? Do you think he was right in planning to deceive everyone?

13. Act V, scene i presents Leonato and Benedick, who are intensely irate, in verbal and physical conflict with Claudio and Don Pedro. What is your reaction to the verbal/physical exchanges of these men? Why are they acting as they are? Support your answer.

14. What is the importance of Dogberry in the play? What does his usage of malapropisms tell us about his character? Why do you think Shakespeare chose to write this character like this?

15. What is the moral of the story? Support your answer.

16. Though he is forgiven in the end, Claudio makes some rash and unsupported decisions throughout the play and there are dire consequences. Where his reactions justified? Support your answer.

17. Much Ado About Nothing is classified as a COMEDY, but 9 of 17 scenes are about trouble or even TRAGEDY? So what makes this play a comedy when there are so many tragic elements? Support your answer.
For each of the following quotes from the play, respond with an answer which:
   a) states the meaning of the quote,
   b) connects the quote to the play as a whole or to other literary works,
   c) discusses personal feelings about the quote, the character or the action it causes OR
   d) connects the quote to your personal life.

(Act I, scene i)  “There is a kind of merry war betwixt Senior Benedick and her. They never meet but there’s a skirmish of wit between them.” (stated by Leonato, ‘her’ is Beatrice)

(Act I, scene iii)  “It must not be denied but I am a plain-dealing villain.” (stated by Don John)

(Act II, scene ii)  “Not honestly, my lord; but so covertly that no / dishonesty shall appear in me.” (stated by Borrachio about the plan to ruin the wedding)

(Act II, scene i)  “Yes, faith; it is my cousin’s duty to make curtsy / and say ‘Father, as it please you.’ But yet for all / that, cousin, let him be a handsome fellow, or else / make another curtsy and say ‘Father, as it please / me.” (stated by Beatrice, about Hero)

(Act III, scene i)  “I’ll devise some honest slanders / to stain my cousin with. One doth not know / How much an ill word may empoison liking.” (stated by Hero in the eavesdropping scene)

(Act III, scene iv)  “You may think perchance / that I think you are in love: nay, by’r lady, I am not such a fool to think what I list, nor I list / not to think what I can, nor indeed I cannot think, if I would think my heart out of thinking, that you / are in love or that you will be in love or that you can be in love.” (stated by Margaret, to Beatrice)

(Act IV, scene i)  “O, what men dare do! what men may do! what men daily / do, not knowing what they do!” (stated by Claudio at the wedding, in response to Leonato saying ‘I do’ for him)

(Act IV, scene ii)  “I am a wise fellow, and, which is more, an officer, / and, which is more, a householder, and, which is / more, as pretty a piece of flesh as any is in / Messina, and one that knows the law, go to; and a / rich fellow enough, go to; and a fellow that hath / had losses, and one that hath two gowns and every / thing handsome about him. Bring him away. O that / I had been writ down an ass!” (stated by Dogberry)

(Act V, scene i)  “Art thou the slave that with thy breath hast kill’d / Mine innocent child?” (spoken by Leonato, upon hearing of the truth about the slandering of Hero)

(Act V, scene iv)  “A miracle! here’s our own hands against our hearts.” (spoken by Benedick, when Hero and Claudio pull out the love-sonnets Beatrice and Benedick have written to each other)
A **malapropism** is the incorrect substitution of one word for another similar-sounding word, usually for comedic effect. This literary term provides endless amusement in *Much Ado About Nothing* in the form of Dogberry (and Verges, too!). Nobody ‘malaprops’ like Dogberry ‘malaprops!’

**ACTIVITY: Discovering Malapropisms**

The example shows only a few of Dogberry’s malapropisms throughout the show! Get a copy of this whole scene (available for FREE online at http://shakespeare.mit.edu/much_ado/much_ado.4.2.html) and circle all the malapropisms. Then make a chart like the one below, figure out what you think Dogberry MEANT to say! Then, read the scene out loud, using the correct words and then again using the malapropisms...can you see why Shakespeare chose to write this character this way?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dogberry’s Word</th>
<th>Correct Word</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>perjury</td>
<td>slander</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>burglary</td>
<td>bribery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>redemption</td>
<td>damnation (or hell)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Shakespeare often used animal imagery in his plays and *Much Ado* is no exception. These images present figurative pictures which can seem unclear to a modern audience. However, with a bit of effort, we can have a clearer picture of what Shakespeare was trying to get across -- in this case, some slammin’ insults! Look at the excerpt below from Act I scene i (lines 53-58).

**BEATRICE:** I had rather hear my dog bark at a crow than a man swear he loves me.

**BENEDICK:** God keep your ladyship still in that mind! So some gentleman or other shall 'scape a predestinate scratched face.

**BEATRICE:** Scratching could not make it worse, an 'twere such a face as yours were.

**BENEDICK:** Well, you are a rare parrot-teacher.

**BEATRICE:** A bird of my tongue is better than a beast of yours.

**BENEDICK:** I would my horse had the speed of your tongue, and so good a continuer. But keep your way, i' God's name; I have done.

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**ACTIVITY: Deciphering Animal Imagery**

**AT FIRST GLANCE:** Without understanding the exact images in bold, you can get a sense of the characters. What do you learn about these characters and their relationship?

**GOING DEEPER:** Let’s look at this one image at a time. Three are done, but see if you can come up with the answers to the rest of them! (note: this may require some research).

“...hear my dog bark at a crow...”
**EXPLANATION:** Beatrice is saying she would rather hear the harsh sounds of a dog barking (and probably a crow caw back) than hear any man say the words ‘I love you.’

“...rare parrot-teacher...”
**EXPLANATION:** Like a parrot (who echoes only what he hears) Benedick accuses Beatrice of speaking (or echoing) only empty words, void of all meaning.

“...a bird of my tongue is better than a beast of yours.”
**EXPLANATION:** Beatrice says she’d rather be an animal who speaks *something* rather than a dumb (or unable to speak) beast of burden like a horse or ox (which would be Benedick).

“I would my horse had the speed of your tongue...”
**EXPLANATION:** ... you try this one!

“...a jades trick...”
**EXPLANATION:** ...try this one, too!

**TAKE IT ONE STEP FURTHER:** These are only a few of the animal images Shakespeare presents us in this play! Start with Act I, scene i; Act II, scene i; Act III, scene i; Act V, scene iv (but there are more!). What other animal images can you find? What do they mean?
WEBSITES

http://www-tech.mit.edu/Shakespeare/
Read/print any of Shakespeare’s plays scene by scene or in its entirety.

http://absoluteshakespeare.com/
Absolute Shakespeare, the essential resource for William Shakespeare’s plays, sonnets, poems, quotes, biography, and the Globe Theatre

http://www.folger.edu/index.cfm
The Folger Library’s internet guide to Shakespeare for Teachers and Students

http://www.pbs.org/shakespeare/educators/index.html
PBS’s Guide to Shakespeare in the Classroom

http://shakespeare.palomar.edu/
Mr. William Shakespeare and the Internet -- easy navigation for students.

http://www.shakespearehigh.com/classroom/index.shtml
“Shakespeare High in the Classroom” -- easy navigation for students.

BOOKS

A Shakespeare Glossary by CT Onions
ISBN: 978-0198125211
A short, easy-to-use glossary that can be very valuable for the beginner

Shakespeare Lexicon and Quotation Dictionary by Alexander Schmidt
This book provides definitions, locations, and meaning for every word in Shakespeare’s plays and poems. The 2 volumes contain more than 50,000 quotations.

The Oxford English Dictionary

The Age of Shakespeare by Francois Laroque
ISBN: 0-8109-2890-6

VIDEO
