

Much Ado About Nothing Organiser

Characters:

Verges: assistant to Dogberry.

Sexton: assistant to Dogberry.

Ursula: Hero's serving lady and friend.

Balthasar: a servant to Don Pedro who sings.

Don Pedro: Prince of Aragon, returned victorious from war.

Antonio: Leonato's brother who provides a steadying influence.

Dogberry: Constable in charge of the Watch. Often confuses his words.

Conrad: a follower of Don John who helps him in his plot to discredit Hero.

Borachio: a follower of Don John who helps him in his plot to discredit Hero.

Benedick: a lord, soldier and friend of Don Pedro. Known for his quick wit. Loves Beatrice but does not know it.

Claudio: a lord, soldier and friend of Don Pedro. Young and naïve. Falls in love with Hero.

Don John: the half-brother of Don Pedro. Resentful and angry because of his status. Plots to destroy the happiness of others.

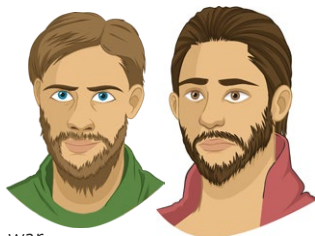
Leonato: Governor of Messina, where the play is set. Old and wise, but easily swayed by the opinion of others – he believes it when Hero is first accused.

Hero: Leonato's daughter. Young, naïve. Falls in love with Claudio and is falsely accused of being unfaithful to him.

Beatrice: Leonato's niece. Quick-witted and intelligent. She is in love with Benedick but does not know it.

Margaret: Hero's flirtatious serving lady who unwittingly helps trick Claudio into thinking Hero is unfaithful.

Friar Francis: the priest who is supposed to marry Claudio and Hero and who advises Hero to pretend to be dead.



Style: One of the few Shakespeare plays where the majority of the dialogue is written in prose, rather than blank verse. The former is usually used to denote casual speech, while latter is used for more socially-elevated occasions. Much of the play's humour derives from the word play between Beatrice and Benedick, which suits a more relaxed form of speech.

Philosophy: Belief that everyone had his or her place in life. There is a strong social hierarchy within the play, which the audience would have expected and understood – Don Pedro is the most powerful man, with Leonato the second-highest status. It is this hierarchy which causes resentment for Don Pedro. Women are seen as inferior and lower status.

Gender: A strong focus of the play is the differences in expectations for men and women. Women were expected to be submissive, sexually pure and meek. It was, however, accepted that men would be sexually experienced. It was also thought that excessive education or wit in women was inappropriate – which is why Beatrice is an unusual and strong character.

Setting: The play takes place in Messina, a Sicilian city, in the 16th century. Much of the action is specifically within Leonato's property, so it has a domestic tone. The setting is a refuge from the war which has been raging – it is an idyllic and peaceful place. There is also an atmosphere of celebration after the recent victory: which helps to set up the matchmaking and revelry that form much of the play.

Key Quotations:

"It is certain I am loved of all ladies, only you excepted. And I would I could find it in my heart that I had not a hard heart, for truly I love none." Benedick, Act 1, Scene 1

"I had rather hear my dog bark at a crow than a man swear he loves me." Beatrice, Act 1, Scene 1

"In mine eye she is the sweetest lady that ever I looked on." Claudio, Act 1, Scene 1

"If I can cross him any way, I bless myself every way." Don John, Act 1, Scene 3

"He is of a very melancholy disposition." Hero, Act 2, Scene 1

"He is the Prince's jester, a very dull fool." Beatrice, Act 2, Scene 1

"She loves him with an enraged affection." Leonato, Act 2, Scene 3

"I will be horribly in love with her." Benedick, Act 2, Scene 3

"And, Benedick, love on. I will requite thee, taming my wild heart to thy loving hand." Beatrice, Act 3, Scene 1

"I am not as I have been." Benedick, Act 3, Scene 2

"Leonato's Hero, your Hero, every man's Hero." Don John, Act 3, Scene 2

"When rich villains have need of poor ones, poor ones may make what price they will." Borachio, Act 3, Scene 3

"She's but the sign and semblance of her honour." Claudio, Act 4, Scene 1

"I stand dishonoured, that have gone about to link my dear friend to a common stale." Don Pedro, Act 4, Scene 1

"For thee I'll lock up all the gates of love" Claudio, Act 4, Scene 1

"I do love nothing in the world so well as you. Is not that strange?" Benedick, Act 4, Scene 1

"Thy slander hath gone through and through her heart." Leonato, Act 5, Scene 1

"I do suffer love indeed, for I love thee against my will." Benedick, Act 5, Scene 2

"She died, my lord, but whiles her slander lived.", Leonato, Act 5, Scene 4

"Peace, I will stop your mouth." Benedick, Act 5, Scene 4

Very Brief Plot Summary:

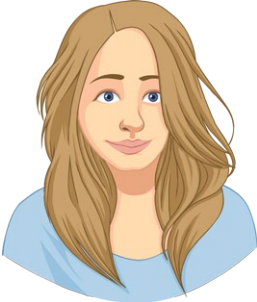
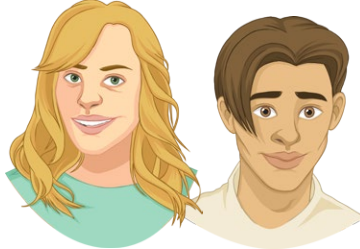

Act 1: Don Pedro arrives in Messina. Claudio falls in love with Hero. Beatrice and Benedick tease each other. Don John plots revenge on his brother.

Act 2: At a masked ball, Claudio becomes engaged to Hero. Don John plots to disgrace Hero. His friends trick Benedick to believe Beatrice is in love with him.

Act 3: Beatrice is tricked to believe Benedick loves her. Don John tells Claudio that Hero is unfaithful. The Watch arrest Conrad and Borachio.

Act 4: Claudio accuses Hero at their wedding - she collapses and is believed dead. Beatrice and Benedick confess their love for each other.

Act 5: Don John's plot is discovered thanks to the Watch. Claudio attends Hero's funeral and discovers she is still alive. They are reunited. Beatrice and Benedick agree to marry.

| Themes | Key Vocabulary | Language and Techniques |
|---|--|--|
| <p>Honour</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Don Pedro, Claudio and Benedick have arrived in Messina with honour – they have just won the war. Don John feels that he is not viewed honourably because of his status as a bastard. Hero is publically shamed and has her honour tarnished thanks to Don John’s plot. Claudio and Don Pedro take Hero’s apparent unfaithfulness as a slur on their honour – it is as if she has contaminated them. Leonato is furious when he believes Hero has dishonoured their family – it is the ultimate disgrace. Benedick promises Beatrice that he will do anything to help her – then his honour demands that he follows through with this by challenging Claudio, despite their friendship. | <p>Love</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Beatrice and Benedick love each other but need help to realise the fact. Claudio apparently loves Hero at first sight but is quick to shame her when he believes she has been unfaithful. Hero also loves Claudio at first sight – this is a naïve and more traditionally romantic view of love. Leonato loves Hero but is quick to condemn her when he thinks she has been unfaithful to Claudio. His paternal love is nearly broken by shame. Claudio and Benedick pledge love and loyalty to Don Pedro, but Benedick is forced to challenge him when he believes Hero has been wronged. Beatrice’s love for her cousin Hero is one of the strongest examples of love in the play – she never doubts Hero’s innocence and fights to protect her. | <p>antagonist betray chastity deception disguise faithful / unfaithful friendship gender hero hiding honour humiliation humour intelligence moral/immoral</p> <p>language love loyalty noting power protagonist romance sexuality shame soliloquy status usurp wit word-play villain</p> <p>antithesis dramatic irony iambic pentameter imagery irony metaphor personification pun repetition rhyming couplets semantic field simile</p> <p>Key words to look out for: deception honour language love sex</p>    |
| <p>Men and Women</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Society’s expectations of men and women are very different. Men are allowed to be sexually promiscuous, whereas women must be submissive and chaste. Hero is portrayed as an ideal woman of the era – pure, modest and devastated by any insinuation that she has been unfaithful. Beatrice is unusual for women of the time – she is feisty, opinionated and intelligent. But she is constrained by expectations of women. | <p>Language</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Title is thought to be a play on the ‘noting’ – all the characters watch and ‘note’ each other, often with disastrous consequences. Beatrice and Benedick revel in word-play; they flirt using language. The power of language is revealed when Claudio confronts Hero at their wedding – his words and accusations make her physically ill. Dogberry demonstrates the comedic power of language, by continually confusing words and phrases. | <p>Deception</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Characters ‘deceive’ each other by pretending to be different people at the masked ball. Don Jon deceives Claudio in an attempt to discredit Don Pedro. Beatrice and Benedick are deceived by their friends into thinking they have each confessed their love. Claudio falsely accuses Hero of deceiving him. The Friar advises Hero to deceive Claudio and Don Pedro by pretending to be dead. Not all deception is portrayed as wrong – there are degrees of deception. |