



Oregon
Shakespeare
Festival.

2024 Study Guide



Fun Facts about *Much Ado About Nothing*

- The play was written between 1597 and 1599 but no public performance of record until 1613.
- Historians don't know when it was first performed.
- The play may be inspired by both *Novelle* by Matteo Bandeo and Ludovico Ariost's poem *Orlando Furioso*.
- 75% of the play is in prose, only 25% in verse.
- Dogberry was written for comic actor William Kemp, who left the troupe in 1599.
- "Malapropism" or the mistaken use of a word in place of a similar sounding one to humorous effect, is sometimes called "dogberryism" after the character Dogberry.
- The line "What, courage, man! What though care killed a cat?" may be the origin of the phrase "curiosity killed the cat?"

2024 costume design for Benedick by Helen Huang.



Much Ado About Nothing by William Shakespeare



Miriam A. Laube: The Director

- Miriam has worked at OSF for 17 seasons - so she has an intimate knowledge of the stages at the Festival.
- She was Associate Director for OSF's production of *Oklahoma!*
- She has played many roles at OSF including: Cleopatra in *Antony and Cleopatra*, Olivia in *Twelfth Night*, Rosalind in *As You Like It*, Julia in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Circe in *The Odyssey*.
- She has been seen on Broadway in *Bombay Dreams* and Off-Broadway.
- She is the recipient of a Henry Award, Best Supporting Actor; Theater Communications Group-Fox Fellow and was a 2018 Lunt-Fontanne Fellow.



William Shakespeare, Cobbe portrait,
Wikimedia Commons

Shakespeare


- Born around April 23, 1564.
- Married Anne Hathaway at the age of 18. They had three children between 1583 and 1585.
- Became an actor and playwright for the Lord Chamberlain's Men, which became the King's Men when King James I was crowned in 1603.
- Wrote 37 plays, 2 epic poems and 154 sonnets over a 25-year career.
- *Much Ado About Nothing* was written circa 1597-99.
- Died in his hometown of Stratford-upon-Avon on April 23, 1616.
- Buried in Stratford's Holy Trinity Church.

Before seeing/reading the play

1. What is the definition of nothing? What does the idiom “Much Ado About Nothing” mean? In what ways is *Much Ado About Nothing* a play about nothing? Find at least five meanings of the word “nothing” that applies to the play’s title. (Marjorie Garber in *Shakespeare After All*, pages 379-380, covers the subject thoroughly.) These and other websites provide information:
<http://dictionary.classic.reference.com/search?q=nothing>
<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/much-ado-about-nothing>
<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/nothing>
<https://interestingliterature.com/2020/06/shakespeare-much-ado-about-nothing-summary-analysis/>
2. What is prose? What is verse? In Shakespeare’s plays, who usually speaks prose? Who usually speaks verse? These and other websites provide information:
<https://www.shakespearesglobe.com/learn/secondary-schools/playing-shakespeare-with-deutsche-bank/much-ado-about-nothing-playing-shakespeare/language-and-analysis/verse-and-prose/>
<http://cla.calpoly.edu/~dschwart/engl339/verseprose.html>
<http://shakespeare.about.com/od/shakespeareslanguage/a/prose.htm>
3. Research Elizabethan courtship and marriage customs. What was the position of a married Elizabethan woman? What degree of control did married and unmarried women have over their income, occupation, and social status? How much self-expression were they allowed? To whom did each answer, and on whom did each depend? These and other websites provide information:
<http://www.elizabethanenglandlife.com/courtship-marriages-and-divorces-during-elizabethan-era.html>
<http://www.elizabethanenglandlife.com/the-life-and-roles-of-elizabethan-era-women.html> <http://elizabethan.org/compendium/10.html>
<http://www.elizabethi.org/contents/women/>
4. What is honor? What does honor mean in regard to gender? What does family honor mean? How can one’s honor be lost or tainted? How can one’s honor be regained? How did Elizabethans view honor? These and other websites provide information:
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Honor>
<https://uca.edu/cahss/files/2020/07/Christa-Wilson-CLA-2017.pdf> <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/jacobs-staff/201808/what-has-happened-to-the-concept-of-honor>



5. What is a cuckold? According to folklore, what physical characteristic distinguishes cuckolds? Why would an Elizabethan man find it shameful to be cuckolded? These and other websites provide information:
http://www.answerbag.com/q_view/448058
https://www.oed.com/dictionary/cuckold_n1?tl=true
<http://www.shmoop.com/much-ado-about-nothing/cuckold-horns-symbol.html>
<https://www.birdsofshakespeare.com/birds/common--cuckoo>



Refer to your research on the different meanings of the words “nothing” and “noting.” In what ways do the meanings of “nothing” appear in the play? In what ways does “noting” become important? In what ways is all the “noting” really “nothing”?

6. What did music mean to the Elizabethans? These and other websites provide information:
<http://www.bragod.com/bragod4-4.html>
<http://www.elizabethan-era.org.uk/elizabethan-music.htm>
7. What did dancing mean to the Elizabethans? Research Elizabethan dances, paying special attention to those mentioned in the play: the Scotch jig, the measure, and the sinkapace (aka galliard). These and other websites provide information:
<http://www.luminarium.org/renlit/orchestr.htm>
http://www.wwnorton.com/college/english/nael/noa/pdf/27636_16u67davies.1_9.tp.pdf
<http://www.elizabethan-era.org.uk/elizabethan-dance.htm>
8. What did the Elizabethans mean by “gulling”? These and other websites provide information:
<http://www.thefreedictionary.com/gulling>
<https://www.birdsofshakespeare.com/birds/gull-various-species>
9. Research the Elizabethan archetype of the “malcontent.” These and other websites provide information:
<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/malcontent?s=t>
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malcontent>
10. What is a malapropism? Why is it also called a Dogberryism? What is the French origin of the word? What is the dramatic origin? These and other websites provide information:
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malapropism>
<http://grammar.about.com/od/mo/g/malapterm.htm>
<http://grammar.about.com/od/words/a/What-Is-A-Malapropism.htm>

11. What do the names “Beatrice,” Benedick,” “Hero,” “Claudio,” and “Borachio” mean? These and other websites provide information:
<http://www.sheknows.com/baby-names/name/beatrice>
<http://www.thinkbabynames.com/meaning/1/Benedick>
http://babynamesworld.parentsconnect.com/meaning_of_Hero.html
<http://www.sheknows.com/baby-names/name/claudio>
<https://www.wordnik.com/words/borachio>

Learn more about Shakespeare’s life and times at the following websites:
<http://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/Library/SLT/index.html>
<http://www.folger.edu/template.cfm?cid=865&C-FID=6230886&CFTOKEN=25420173>
<http://www.shakespeare.org.uk/explore-shakespeare.html>
<http://shakespeare.palomar.edu/life.htm>
<http://www.bardweb.net/man.html>

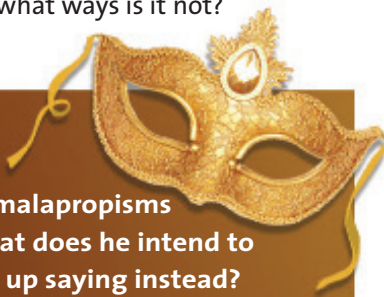


2023 costume designs for Dogberry in *Much Ado About Nothing* by Helen Huang.

After seeing/reading the play

1. Refer to your research on prose and verse in Shakespeare’s plays. Why, in *Much Ado About Nothing*, do Benedick and Beatrice speak prose? What is Benedick’s opinion of verse? What happens when they venture out of prose into verse? Which characters speak verse? When is verse spoken in this play? Why? Which characters speak prose? Why?
2. In the text, there is evidence of a past relationship that existed between Beatrice and Benedick. Where and when did it take place? How was it resolved? How does each feel about their relationship as the play begins?
3. How is the war before the play converted into the “merry war” during the play? What weapons are used? Identify Beatrice’s initial assault on Benedick, before he comes onstage. How do her tactics change once he is present? How does he retaliate? Who wins the first battle?
4. Describe the exact arrangement by which Hero is courted. Who misunderstands what is happening during her courtship? Who causes the misunderstanding? What are the results of each misunderstanding?
5. Although the play is full of talkers, several characters are relatively silent. Who are they? What causes them not to speak? What are the consequences of their silence?
6. One of the play’s major themes is the conflict between appearance and reality. Taking the play scene by scene, identify what seems to be and what is, who people appear to be and who they actually are, what characters believe to be happening and what is in fact taking place. Which characters wear literal masks? Which characters wear figurative masks? In what circumstances? In each case, what are they concealing?
7. *Much Ado About Nothing* takes place within a small, closed society. How does Don John feel about this small, tight-knit world? How do the actions of that one character, Don John, impact the lives of every other character in the play?
8. What is Beatrice’s attitude toward marriage? What is Benedick’s? What would Beatrice lose by marrying? What would she gain? If Benedick married, what would he lose and gain? As the play begins, what does Beatrice claim might cause her to change her mind on the subject? What does, in fact, change the minds of both characters?
9. Describe the scene in which his friends “gull” Benedick. Describe the scene in which her friends “gull” Beatrice. What is the purpose of the deceptions? Why do the friends feel a more direct approach would fail? Compare the two gulling scenes: How are they similar? How do they differ?

10. What changes does love cause in Benedick's behavior and appearance? How does Beatrice change once she falls in love?
11. Refer to your research on the archetype of the "mal-content." How does Don John reflect this pattern? What elements in his life account for his grudges? What explanation does he give for his disposition? What is Don John's grievance against his brother, Don Pedro? Against Claudio? Against Hero? Why does he attack Don Pedro through Claudio by means of Hero, rather than confronting him directly? In what ways is this tactic successful? In what ways is it not?
16. Consider the events in the wedding scene (Act IV, scene i). Describe the ties and loyalties at the beginning of the scene and follow them as they shift. Which relationships change and why? Which remain the same from beginning to end?
17. How does Claudio justify shaming Hero in public rather than in private? Why does Don Pedro agree? Why does Leonato ally himself with them rather than with his daughter? Why does Benedick refuse to join with his friends in attacking Hero?



Malapropisms
Identify at least three malapropisms in Dogberry's lines. What does he intend to say? What does he end up saying instead? Why is this funny?

12. How does Don John orchestrate the "evidence" against Hero in order to convince Don Pedro and Claudio she is unfaithful? How is his plot uncovered, and by whom? Why is it not immediately revealed to its victims?
13. Refer to your research on cuckolds. Why do the characters in the play find cuckoldry and horns such an entertaining source of jokes? Why do they tease the women with the threat of making their husbands cuckolds? What happens when cuckoldry converts from imaginary and humorous to an actual threat?
14. Consider the theme of conversion. How do Beatrice, Benedick, Claudio, and Hero convert from the beginning of the play to the end? In what ways are their conversions external? In what ways are the conversions more internal in nature? In what ways are other characters of the play converted as well?
15. Consider the theme of deception. In what ways are the characters of this play deceived by others? To what misunderstandings do these deceptions give rise? When are these deceptions benign? When are they malicious?

18. Referring to the incidents in the play, answer these questions: On what does a woman's honor depend? A man's? Once a woman's honor is stained, what can restore it? What can restore a man's honor?
19. How does Benedick react when Beatrice tells him "Kill Claudio!"? How does she convince him to take action against Claudio and Don Pedro? What actions does he take? Why are his loyalties realigned?
20. Two duels are proposed although not fought in the play. Who are the duelists in each case? On whose behalf do they mean to fight? What is each intended to accomplish?
21. Refer to your research on Elizabethan beliefs about music and dance. At the masked ball near the beginning, who dances with whom? Who conspicuously does not dance? What is the symbolic meaning of Beatrice's comparisons of courtship and marriage with dances?
22. Taken symbolically, what is the meaning of Hero's "death"? Who and/or what has killed her? What is necessary to resurrect her? What does the reborn Hero have that the earlier Hero lacked?
23. How deep is Claudio's grief? His repentance? What acts of repentance must he perform? What are his principal concerns once Hero's reputation is rehabilitated?



2024 costume design for Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing* by Helen Huang.

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