

The Orlando Shakespeare Theater in Partnership with UCF
Study Guide for
William Shakespeare's

Much Ado About Nothing

Introduction

The goal of the Orlando Shakespeare Theater in partnership with UCF is to ensure that all patrons experience the best quality theater that the region and nation has to offer. With that, it is important to us that each audience member gets the most out of every performance he or she attends. This is why a number of years ago, we developed a concept to bridge the gap between our younger audience members and the often complex language of Shakespeare and various other playwrights used in the season. The plays of a season come to life with the creative explanation of certain themes, character analyses, and modern parallels that many middle through high school students can identify with. It is our desire that this will kindle the desire for its readers to learn more about Shakespeare and other notable works long after the curtain closes.

Enjoy the experience!

Character Breakdown for Much Ado About Nothing

Benedick-- is witty soldier in Don Pedro's regime.

Beatrice-- is the witty niece of Leonato and the cousin to Hero

Don Leonato--is Hero's father and master of the Villa in Messina

Don Pedro--is a prince from Aragon (part of modern day Spain) and leader of the army that won the war.

Hero--is the beautiful daughter of Don Leonato

Don Claudio-- is a leading soldier under Don Pedro's regime

Antonio--is Don Leonato's older brother.

Don John--is the bastard brother to Don Claudio

Borachio-- is a henchman to Don John and is critical in driving Much Ado's plot.

Conrade- is another one of Don John's devoted henchmen.

Margaret--is a comical lady in waiting to hero

Ursula-- is the second lady in waiting to Hero.

Balthasar--is a musician

Dogberry--is chief policeman in Messina and king of using words in the wrong context.

Verges-- is Dogberry's deputy.

Seacole/1st Watchman--servant.

Oatcake/2nd Watchman--servant.

Friar/Sexton--is the town priest.

Synopsis

Much Ado About Nothing is one of Shakespeare's bawdiest comedies. The laugh out loud love story takes place in the rolling hills of Sicily as Don Claudio and his men retire from the battlefield of war to rest at the villa of Don Leonato who has a beautiful daughter named Hero and a niece. When Don Claudio sees Hero, he is love struck and must have her as his wife. Amidst their courtship, one of Don Claudio's soldiers, Benedick gets a twinkle in his eye for one of Hero's cousins, Beatrice. When in each other's company during the day, Benedick and Beatrice are like two bantering chickens. At night Beatrice professes how much she actually loves Benedick to her friends. Don John is the enemy and half-brother to Don Claudio and makes it his life's mission to make his brother's life miserable. The major plan that drives the play is when Don John conspires with his henchmen to make Don Claudio believe that his future wife is really a whore. One of Don John's men, Borachio has sex with Hero's attendant Margaret in an open window. Deceived Don Claudio watches the backside of a fake Hero from afar off and waits until the wedding to publicly call Hero a harlot. Don Leonato, Hero and all the wedding guests were devastated. Out of desperation, the town friar told Hero to go into hiding and they would pretend as though she were dead until the knot of deception can be undone. Eventually, the constable, Dogberry and his men wind up revealing that Hero had not been unfaithful and that it was a plan of the evil Don John. To remain in good standing with Don Leonato, Don Claudio agrees to marry one of Don Leonato's other nieces. Upon unveiling the mysterious niece at the altar, Don Claudio is surprised to see Hero, whom he is most happy to wed. This story has a buffet of emotions, twists and turns exhibited by each character. Come and see how the power of love and truth can untie a knot of confusion and jealousy.

The Setting of the Play

While some theaters hold true to form, in the past decade many theaters that produce Shakespeare, do so within a different time period other than the time that Shakespeare lived (1500's). Though the word choice and sentence structure is still present, Much Ado About Nothing can be placed into any time period that makes logical sense with the storyline that the dialogue dictates.

This particular OST production is set in post World War II Italy. This is a time period that is fairly recent opposed to 500 years ago and it is in the same geographic vicinity. Yet it is accepted because the setting imposes the same demeanor as a medieval villa in Sicily, which is just south of Italy.

What other settings from the past and present could you place this play amongst?

The World of Insults

Many Shakespearean plays contain clever insults to which many modern audiences are oblivious. Much Ado is perhaps most famous for the lighthearted insults that Today's equivalent is what our parents call, "playing the dozen," or what the current generation of youth calls ribbing (because the witty exchanges cause spectators' ribs to hurt from laughing for an extended period of time).

One thing to note is that insults of Shakespeare's day were not just one or two words; rather they were phrases and even paragraphs. They contained references from the classical Greek period through medieval times. When one person was insulting another, they would often begin with "thou" which means "You." Below is an example of an insult from the long list in Shakespeare's complete works.

"Thou knavish, eye- offending, cutpurse."

Translates: You low life, ugly, thief.

As shown above, the usual pattern of an effective insult is executed using two adjectives and ending with the noun that ties everything together. While insults amusing in the world of Shakespeare, they are not advised in to solve problems in the real world.