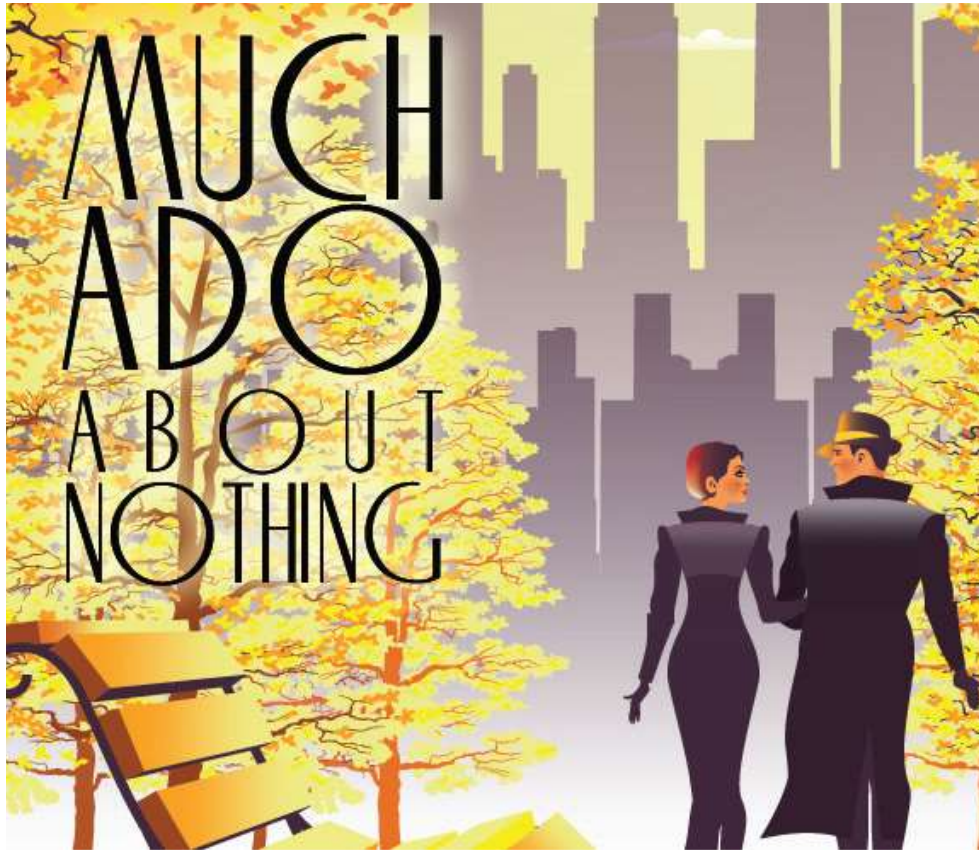


# Theater at Monmouth 2021 ShakesME Tour Teacher Resource Guide



Adapted by Katie Moshier Directed by Michael Dix Thomas

## Inside This Guide

1	From the Page to the Stage	9	On Shakespeare
2	The Much Ado in Much Ado	10	On Elizabethan England
3	Character Connections	11	Performances in Shakespeare
4	Production History	12	Collaborating on Design Concept
5	More Ado in Much Ado	13	Verse and Prose
6	Shakespeare's Italy	14	Before the Performance
7	With This Ring	15	After the Performance
8	Battle of the Sexes	16	Resources for Teachers



Supported in part by The Onion Foundation a private philanthropic foundation based in Maine.



Theater at Monmouth's production is funded in part by a grant from the Maine Arts Commission an independent state agency supported by the National Endowment for the Arts.

## FROM THE PAGE TO THE STAGE



Ellen Terry as Beatrice and Henry Irving as Benedick in an 1887 performance of *Much Ado About Nothing*.

This season, Theater at Monmouth's *Shakespeare in Maine Communities* Tour brings classic literature to students across Maine with a 90-minute version of *Much Ado About Nothing*. The text was adapted to streamline the plot and help students connect more strongly to Shakespeare's verse, themes, and relevance to a modern audience. *Shakespeare in Maine Communities'* workshops and extended residencies offer students the opportunity to study, explore, and view classic literature through performance.

TAM's Education Tours and complimentary programming challenge learners of all ages to explore the ideas, emotions, and principles contained in classic texts and to discover the connection between classic theatre and our modern world.

Teacher Resource Guide articles and activities were developed to help students form a personal connection to the play before attending the production; Common Core-aligned activities are included to explore the plays in the classroom before and after the performance.

The best way to appreciate Shakespeare is to do Shakespeare. That means getting students up on their feet and physically and vocally exploring his words. Using performance-based activities will help students to build a richer understanding of the text and identify with the characters and conflicts in the plays.

Thank you for taking some of your classroom time to teach your students about *Much Ado About Nothing*! If you need more information to support your preparation for the production, please call 207.933.2952 or email [boxoffice@theateratmonmouth.org](mailto:boxoffice@theateratmonmouth.org).

Enjoy the show!

Dawn McAndrews  
Producing Artistic Director  
Theater at Monmouth

# THE MUCH ADO IN MUCH ADO

A synopsis of what happens in the play



Don Pedro and his men return to Leonato's house after the war. Benedick resumes a prickly relationship with Leonato's niece, Beatrice. Both solemnly declare they will never marry. Claudio falls in love with Hero, Leonato's daughter. Don Pedro agrees to woo Hero for Claudio, at a reception that evening. Don John, Pedro's bastard brother, plots with his two men, Borachio and Conrade to make some mischief.

At the party, Claudio is told by Don John that Don Pedro is wooing for himself, but Claudio learns that this is not so, and that Hero is his. Further antagonism between Beatrice and Benedick leads Don Pedro and the others to trick them into falling in love with each other. Leonato, Claudio, and Don Pedro let Benedick overhear them speak of how much Beatrice loves him. Later, Hero and Margaret let Beatrice overhear their talk about how much Benedick loves her. Benedick and Beatrice find they have feelings for each other, and appear love-struck to their friends. Meanwhile, Don John arranges for Borachio to woo Hero's maid, Margaret, at Hero's window. He informs Don Pedro and Claudio that Hero is unfaithful and arranges for them to be witness the act. They see Borachio calling Margaret 'Hero', and are tricked.

The Watch, led by Dogberry and Verges, prepare to carry out their evening duties. Borachio is overheard telling Conrade about the plot, and they are arrested. Dogberry and Verges begin an interrogation, but the time of the wedding arrives before they can reach any conclusions. Claudio and Don Pedro reveal the 'truth' about Hero. She faints and Don John flees the estate. Hero, protests her innocence. The priest suggests they pretend she has died until the truth is revealed. Beatrice and Benedick declare their feelings for each other, and Beatrice asks Benedick to kill Claudio for shaming Hero.

Leonato and Antonio offer to fight with Claudio, then learn the truth from the Watch. Dogberry and Verges bring Borachio and Conrade to confess before Claudio and Pedro, and Claudio begs forgiveness. Leonato demands that Claudio mourns Hero, and in recompense marries his brother's daughter—who happens to look exactly like Hero. Claudio agrees, and at the ceremony encounters the real Hero when she is unveiled. Beatrice and Benedick stop denying each other and agree to be married. As they are all about to dance, they receive news of Don John's capture.

# THE WHO'S WHO IN MUCH ADO

*Much Ado About Nothing's* characters are some of Shakespeare's best-loved comedy creations. Whether it is Beatrice and Benedick's bickering or Dogberry's slapstick antics, *Much Ado About Nothing* characters are what makes this play so quotable and memorable.

---

## THE LOVERS

**Benedick:** Young, clever, and locked in a love-hate relationship with Beatrice. He's been away fighting under Don Pedro, and upon his return to Messina, he vows never to marry. Throughout the play his attitude towards marriage changes and by the time he agrees to kill Claudio, we know that he is committed to her. His sharpest weapon is his wit, but he meets his match in Beatrice.

**Beatrice:** In many ways, she is very similar to her lover, Benedick; she is locked into the same love-hate relationship, is quick-witted, clever, and refuses to marry. The events of the play soon reveal her vulnerable side. Once she is tricked into thinking that Benedick is in love with her, she reveals her sweet, sensitive side. However, it is hinted throughout the play that Beatrice was once in love with Benedick, but their relationship went sour: "I know you of old," she scorns.

**Claudio:** One of Don Pedro's men and a young lord of Florence. Although commended for his bravery, Claudio is often naive. Throughout the play, he swings from love to despair to revenge too easily. In the first scene, he falls in love with Hero (without even speaking to her!) and quickly takes revenge when he thinks he has been wronged by her. It is this character trait that enables the play's central plot.

**Hero:** As the daughter and sole heir of Leonato, she attracts the attention of Claudio, who instantly falls in love with her. She is the innocent victim in the play when she is slandered by Don John as part of his plan to crush Claudio. Her sweet, gentle nature highlights her piety and contrasts nicely with Beatrice.

## THE BROTHERS

**Don Pedro:** Prince of Aragon, Don Pedro is the most powerful character in the play, and happy to use his power to manipulate events for the good of his soldiers and friends. He determines to get Benedick and Beatrice together and arranges the marriage between Claudio and Hero. He is too quick to believe his villainous brother, Don John, about Hero's infidelity and to help Claudio seek revenge. Don Pedro makes advances for Hero and Beatrice in the play, perhaps explaining his melancholy in the final scene when he is the only nobleman without a wife.

**Don John:** Referred to as "the Bastard," Don John is the illegitimate half-brother of Don Pedro. The villain of the play, he needs little motivation to ruin the marriage of Claudio and Hero. Before the play begins, Don John had been leading a rebellion against his brother; which is the battle Don Pedro and his men return from triumphant in the opening scene. Although he claims to be "reconciled" to his brother, he secretly wants revenge.

**Leonato:** Governor of Messina, father to Hero, uncle to Beatrice, and host to Don Pedro and his men. His long friendship with Don Pedro doesn't stop him from lambasting him when he sides with Claudio over his claims on Hero's infidelity. He is the only character in the play with enough authority to give Don Pedro a piece of his mind. The honor of his family is very important to him, and he suffers greatly when Don John's plan destroys this.

**THE OTHERS:** Antonio, Leonato's brother and father figure to Beatrice. Margaret and Ursula, attendants to Hero. Balthasar, attendant to Don Pedro. Borachio and Conrad: Don John's henchmen. Friar Francis: Devises the plan to redeem Hero's reputation. Dogberry: a bumbling constable. Verges: Dogberry's second in command. The Watch: They overhear Borachio and Conrad and discover Don John's plot. The Sexton: Leads the trial against Borachio and Conrad.

## PRODUCTION HISTORY OF MUCH ADO



*Much Ado About Nothing* was written in 1598, but the story takes place sometime around the 16th century during the Italian Wars in Messina, Italy. Shakespeare's characters thus come from many different places in Europe and Italy, including Aragon, Padua, and Florence. Although *Much Ado About Nothing* has romantic elements which might lead some to call it a romance, it is generally considered a comedy, since its portrayal of love and marriage is humorous and outlandish rather than serious. Elizabethan audiences would have found Shakespeare's meditations on love and court politics hilarious, because he pokes fun at the traditions and expectations surrounding love and marriage during his time.

*Much Ado About Nothing* was first published in 1600. For a clue about the play's theme, readers need look no further than the title; the word "Nothing" was pronounced in Elizabethan times as "Noting": the primary action of this play revolves around characters "noting" or observing one another. The lighthearted title also hints to the fact that despite the drama, in the end it will prove of little or no consequence. Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* is predominantly written in prose. The substantial verse sections achieve a sense of decorum. The Play is set in Messina, a port city on the island of Sicily, when Sicily is ruled by Aragon. The action of the play takes place mainly at the home and grounds of Leonato's Estate.

Like many of Shakespeare's plays, *Much Ado* borrowed some basic ideas from popular stories of the period. Many believe, for instance, that the Hero-Claudio tale, a story of a virtuous lady falsely accused, may have been borrowed from the pages of *Orlando Furioso*, which was written in 1516 and translated into English by Sir John Harington in 1591. Although Claudio's behavior towards Hero may seem shocking to a modern audience, during the time in which Shakespeare wrote, there was a strong cultural fear of husbands being betrayed by their wives. Listen for the number of lines about cuckolds, or references to horns throughout the work—jokes about wearing a cuckold's horns are commonplace throughout the literature of the period. In a world of "noting," social emotions like honor and shame become extremely important. While drastic to us, Claudio's actions may have been a bit more excusable to an Elizabethan crowd.

Benedick's behaviors are thought to be modeled after Baldassare Castiglione's famous book, *The Book of the Courtier*. Published in English in 1561, Castiglione argues that sophisticated men and women must practice what he calls *sprezzatura*, or, "cultivated nonchalance." Beatrice and Benedick work hard to make their witty banter come across as jaunty and indifferent.

Beatrice and Benedick have your typical kindergarten romance—they tease because they love. The witty wooing of Beatrice and Benedick is apparently original, and a very unusual style and syncopation. It is generally agreed that Beatrice and Benedick are the model for the witty lovers in comedy and drama of later centuries; it can be argued that they led to Elizabeth and Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice* and to Scarlett and Rhett in *Gone with the Wind*.

# MORE ADO IN MUCH ADO

## GENDER ROLES



Herbert Beerbohm Tree as Benedick and Winifred Emery as Beatrice. 1905.

Benedick and Beatrice quickly became the main interest of the play. They are considered the leading roles even though their relationship is given equal or lesser weight in the script than Claudio and Hero's situation. Charles II wrote "Benedick and Beatrice" beside the title of the play in his copy of the Second Folio. The provocative treatment of gender is central and should be considered in its Renaissance context. Amussen notes that the undoing of traditional gender clichés seems to have inflamed anxieties about the erosion of social order. It seems that comic drama could be a means of calming such anxieties. Ironically, the play's popularity suggests that this only increased interest in such behavior. Benedick wittily gives voice to male anxieties about women's "sharp tongues and proneness to sexual lightness." In the patriarchal society of the play, the men's loyalties were governed by conventional codes of honor, camaraderie, and a sense of superiority over women. Assumptions that women are by nature prone to inconstancy are shown in the repeated jokes about cuckoldry, and partly explain Claudio's readiness to believe the slander against Hero. This stereotype is turned

on its head in Balthazar's song "Sigh No More," which presents men as the deceitful and inconstant sex that women must suffer.

## INFIDELITY



Beatrice, Hero and Ursula, Jo Jones. (1771)

Several characters seem to be obsessed with the idea that a man has no way to know if his wife is faithful and that women can take full advantage of this. Don John plays upon Claudio's pride and his fear of cuckoldry, which leads to the disastrous first wedding. Many of the men easily believe that Hero is impure, and even her father condemns her with little proof. This motif runs through the play, often referring to horns (a symbol of cuckoldry). Balthazar's song *Sigh No More* asks women to accept men's infidelity and continue to live joyfully. This is supported by Benedick's cynical comments about the song where he compares it to a howling dog.

## DECEPTION



Beatrice overhears Hero and Ursula. John Sutcliffe.

There are many examples of deception and self-deception in the play. The games and tricks played on people often have the best intentions: to make people fall in love, or to help someone get what they want, or to lead someone to realize their mistake. But not all are well-meant: Don John convinces Claudio that Don Pedro wants Hero for himself, and Borachio meets 'Hero' (who is actually Margaret) in Hero's bedroom window. These modes of deceit play into a theme of emotional manipulation, the ease with which the characters' sentiments are redirected and their propensities exploited as a means to an end. The characters' feelings for each other are played as vehicles to reach an ultimate goal of engagement rather than seen as an end in themselves.

# SHAKESPEARE'S ITALY

Italy and Italians fill so many of Shakespeare's plays that it's clear that Shakespeare, as well as his countrymen, were fascinated with Italy! Scholars believe that for the Elizabethan audience Italy represented everything that England was not: a warm, vibrant place where discipline was relaxed and people gave free reign to their passions—eating, drinking, loving, and feuding.

As in Shakespeare's England, Italian ports and cities attracted travelers from around the world, and many people were drawn to the great cities to seek their fortunes, a spouse, money or higher learning. Most of what Elizabethans "knew" about Italy was based on exaggerated travelers' tales and stories. The English believed the Italian personality to be fiery, passionate, and temperamental. Italian characters, culture, and literature were a strong presence in the literature and drama of Shakespeare's day. And the Bard's plays were no exception.



More than a dozen of Shakespeare's 37 plays take place in Italy: *All's Well that Ends Well*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Coriolanus*, *Cymbeline*, *Julius Caesar*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Othello*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Titus Andronicus*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, and *The Winter's Tale*. While some members of Shakespeare's acting company went to Italy, there is no firm evidence that Shakespeare himself ever did. His plays contain vivid details and knowledge of Italian cities, names, and customs, as if written by someone who had spent a great deal of time there.

In addition to a fascination with Italy, there was another good reason for Shakespeare to set his plays abroad. Censorship was strong in England during his lifetime and theatres whose works offended the queen could be shut down. It was safer to set the plays in Italy—a symbol to the English of corruption and lost ancient glory—than to set them in England. Audiences could both admire Italy's classical foundations, its economic energy and cultural richness, and also hold the people in contempt for their hypocritical behaviors.

By setting his plays abroad, Shakespeare could write more freely about what he thought of class differences, hypocrisy, religion and politics in his own country since his points were not directly aimed at his society or monarch. By setting his plays in a very different country, Shakespeare gave his audience distance, both literally and figuratively, to reflect on its own society's ills.

## Reflections

- What stereotypes about the Italians do we see in our society today?
- How do stereotypes from our time period and the Elizabethan period differ?
- Can stereotypes be both positive and negative?
- How does Shakespeare reflect these stereotypes in *Much Ado About Nothing*?

# WITH THIS RING

## Courtship, Marriage Customs, and Ceremonies in the Elizabethan Era

In *Much Ado About Nothing*, Don Pedro and Hero decide to act as matchmakers for Beatrice and Benedick. Don Pedro explains to Hero: "I will teach you how to humor your cousin, that she shall fall in love with Benedick; and I, with your two helps, will so practice on Benedick that, in despite of his quick wit and his queasy stomach, he shall fall in love with Beatrice. If we can do this, Cupid is no longer an archer: his glory shall be ours, for we are the only love-gods." (act 2, scene 1) Don Pedro and Hero agree that they will convince Benedick that Beatrice loves him and convince Beatrice that Benedick loves her. As a result of their trickery and deception, Beatrice and Benedick do fall in love and marry.



### What Was Courtship in the Elizabethan Era?

The very concept of courtship was derived from the Elizabethan era where the ladies of the court were wooed and won by knights and lords of the court through gestures such as frequent visits, gifts, and compliments. Men generally asked a woman's father for permission to court his daughter, that implied that the man was seriously and openly desiring the responsibility of marriage. In saying "yes" to a courtship proposal, the father was granting the man permission to visit his daughter, give her gifts, accompany her to formal to social events, etc.

### Elizabethan Era Marriage Customs

The chief difference between marriages then and today is that in the Elizabethan Era a woman possessed very little right in choosing her husband. The matrimony was arranged by families of the bride and the groom in order for the two sides to benefit from one another. Mostly, these were arranged marriages keeping wealth and reputation into consideration. Couples usually met each other on the day of the wedding. However, people in the lower class would normally arrange marriages with the children of friends and neighbors.

### Elizabethan Era Marriage Ceremony

Elizabethan Era marriages normally took place through the help of a miniature picture given by the man. Women were regarded as second-class citizens and they were expected to tie the knot despite their social standings. Single women were regarded as witches. With a parent's consent, a boy and a girl could marry at the age of 14 and 12 although it was not common for marriage to take place at such a young age. Boys would often not marry until they reached the age of consent, 21. The ceremony could vary but the prerequisites before the matrimony were always the same. It commenced with the Crying of the Banns where the intention of the couples to marry was made before the public.

## Reflections

- What customs about dating and marriage do we see in our society today?
- How do the roles in a marriage from our time period and the Elizabethan period differ?
- How does Shakespeare reflect these changing customs of arranged marriage in *Much Ado About Nothing*?



## THE BATTLE OF THE SEXES IN *MUCH ADO*



In the first moments of *Much Ado About Nothing*, Leonato tells us that there “is a kind of merry war” between his niece Beatrice and a soldier named Benedick. He explains: “they never meet but there’s a skirmish of wit between them.” Beatrice and Benedick always fight, but not physically; the blows they exchange are verbal. Benedick says that Beatrice’s language is like a sword “and every word stabs.” Each wants to prove their cleverness, sarcasm, and wit to be deadlier than the other’s. In this play, the age-old battle of the sexes is played out on

a battlefield where insults are the weapons and you never admit defeat.

The battle of the sexes is a common theme throughout the history of western culture. It appears in several other Shakespearean plays, most notably in *The Taming of the Shrew*, where the battle becomes physical, mental, and emotional as Petruchio tries to “tame” his new wife Kate. Modern uses of the term include a board game that pits men against women and a Ludacris album where duets between male and female artists contrast the differing points of view held by men and women.

So, why does this battle continue to be fought? In 1993 John Gray wrote a book called *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus*. It was hugely popular. The premise of the book is that healthy heterosexual relationships can’t exist without recognizing that men and women are supposed to be dissimilar. But is that true for Beatrice and Benedick?

One of the challenges for Beatrice and Benedick is that they are too similar. They are both smart, sharp-tongued, stubborn individuals who claim that they don’t want to be married, and certainly not to each other. They try to make it appear as though they hate one another: Beatrice calls him “a court jester,” and Benedick says he would rather travel to far-off countries than talk to her. Yet it is clear that they are drawn to each other, and relish the verbal jousting.

They are so alike that when Don Pedro first suggests that they would make a good couple, Leonato protests: “if they were but a week married, they would talk themselves mad.” However, their friends know that their similarities will make them a good match and conspire to make them fall for each other. Perhaps Cupid, the god of love, will be able to end their war.

But even when Benedick and Beatrice fall for the trick, and each other, they still can’t stop fighting their verbal battle. Perhaps they don’t want or need to stop. Verbal sparring is how they communicate. Benedick says to her: “thou and I are too wise to woo peaceably.” They are smart enough to know that the spark in their relationship is witty conflict.

There are, of course, differences between men and women. But what Benedick and Beatrice learn by the end of the play is that the things that unite them are much more powerful. Eventually, passionate kisses win over harsh words. The battle is finally over, and both sides are winners.

## ON SHAKESPEARE

No man's life has been the subject of more speculation than William Shakespeare's. For all his fame and celebrity, Shakespeare's personal history remains a mystery. We know a man named William Shakespeare was baptized at Stratford upon Avon on April 26, 1564, and was buried at Holy Trinity Church in Stratford on April 25, 1616. Tradition holds that he was born three days earlier, and that he died on his birthday—April 23—but this is perhaps more romantic myth than fact.

Scholars assume that Shakespeare went to grammar school, since his father was first a member of the Stratford Council and later high bailiff. A grammar school education would have meant that Shakespeare was exposed to the rudiments of Latin rhetoric, logic and literature.

Church records tell us that banns (announcements) were published for the marriage of a William Shakespeare to an Ann Whatley in 1582. On November 27 of the same year a marriage license was granted to 18-year-old William and 26-year-old Anne Hathaway. A daughter, Susanna, was born to the couple six months later. Twins, Hamnet and Judith, were born soon after. We know that Hamnet died in childhood on August 11, 1596. We don't know how the young Shakespeare came to travel to London or how he first came to the stage.

Whatever the facts may be, it is clear that in the years between 1582 and 1592, William Shakespeare became involved in the London theatre scene as an actor and playwright. By 1594, Shakespeare was listed as a shareholder in the Lord Chamberlain's Men, one of the most popular acting companies in London. He was a member of this company for the rest of his career, which lasted until 1611. When James I came to the throne in 1603, he issued a royal license to Shakespeare and his fellow players, inviting them to call themselves the King's Men. In 1608, the King's Men leased the Blackfriar's Theatre in London. This theatre, which had artificial lighting and was probably heated, served as their winter playhouse. The famous Globe Theatre was their summer performance space.

In 1616 Shakespeare's daughter Judith married Thomas Quiney, the son of a neighbor in Stratford. Her father revised his will six weeks later; within a month he had died. The revised version of William Shakespeare's Will bequeathed his house and all the goods to his daughter Susanna and her husband Dr. John Hall, leaving Judith and Thomas only a small sum of money; his wife, who survived him, received the couple's second-best bed.

In the years since Shakespeare's death, he has risen from obscurity to the most read, adapted and translated writer of all time. In the 1800s, his plays were so popular that many refused to believe that an actor from Stratford had written them. To this day some believe that Sir Francis Bacon or Edward De Vere, the Earl of Oxford, was the author. Still others prefer to believe that Walter Raleigh or Christopher Marlowe penned the lines attributed to Shakespeare. While most people are content to believe that genius can spring up in any social class or setting, the gap between the known facts and the myths that surround Shakespeare's life leaves ample room for speculation.



William Shakespeare

## ON ELIZABETHAN ENGLAND



The age of Shakespeare was a great time in English history. During the reign of Elizabeth I (1558—1603), England emerged as the leading naval and commercial power of the Western world, consolidating this position with the defeat of the Spanish Armada in 1588. During this time, Elizabeth I firmly established the Church of England (begun by her father Henry VIII after a dispute with the Pope). London in the 16th century underwent a dramatic transformation; the population grew 400% between 1500 and 1600, swelling to nearly 200,000 people in the city proper and outlying region by the time an emerging artist from Stratford came to town. A rising merchant middle class was carving out a productive livelihood, and the economy was booming.

During Shakespeare's lifetime, England also experienced a tremendous cultural revival. This so-called English Renaissance found expression in architecture, music, literature and drama. Shakespeare both drew inspiration from high and popular culture of the English Renaissance. Popular entertainment during the 16th century tended to be boisterous and often violent. Many men, women and children attended public executions of criminals that took place on a regular basis, and persons of all social classes and genders attended theatre performances. The trade of bookmaking flourished during the period as public education fueled the appetite for great works in print.

During the years 1590-1593, England suffered from an outbreak of terrible proportions; the bubonic plague or "Black Death" claimed so many lives that English society stood on the verge of collapse. Many businesses, including theatres, closed, in part to keep people from spreading the disease and in part because of the labor shortage that resulted from such widespread illness and death. Once the epidemic subsided, the theatres reopened and quickly regained their former popularity.

This explosion of commerce and culture lasted throughout Elizabeth's reign and into that of her successor, James I. James' rule brought many changes to English life; the two most pivotal were a bankrupt economy and an intense dissatisfaction from a minority religious group—the Puritans. In September 1642, the Puritan Parliament issued an edict that forbade all stage plays and closed the theatres; an act that effectively ended the Elizabethan Renaissance. Theatres rapidly fell into disrepair and neglect until the Restoration in 1660.

In writing his plays and sonnets, William Shakespeare drew ideas from many different sources. His eye for detail and his understanding of human nature enabled him to create some of the most enduring works of drama and poetry ever produced. But his work also provides an insightful commentary on 16th-century English values, life, history and thought.



## PERFORMANCES IN SHAKESPEARE'S TIME

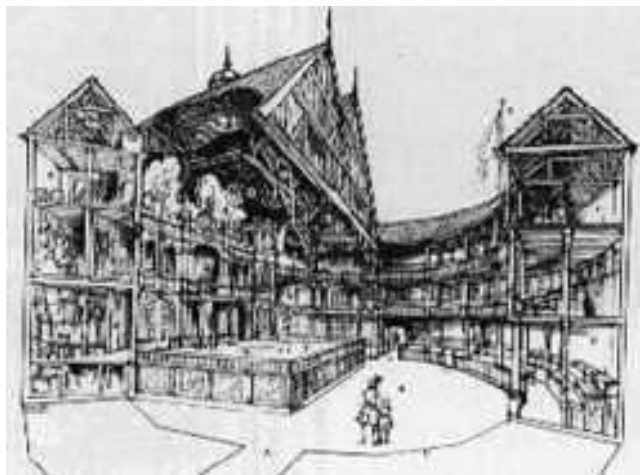


In Shakespeare's day theatre was the most popular form of entertainment. The theatre district was located in Bankside, just outside of London across the Thames. Bankside was a seedy part of town known for its taverns, brothels, gambling houses and bear baiting arenas. Playhouses were built to accommodate an audience of almost 3,000 people sitting in boxes, benches on the stage, or standing in the pit directly in front of the actors. As there was no electricity for lighting, performances started at 2:00pm to make the most of daylight.

All classes came to the theatre; in one audience you could see nobleman, court dandies, and young apprentices. To pack the audiences, playhouses undersold all other popular entertainment—which included bear baiting arenas. A day at the Elizabethan theatre cost just one penny—

equivalent to the price of a movie ticket today. For two pence or three pence more a patron could purchase a seat in the gallery and rent a cushion.

In a typical season a theatre company might play six days a week, forty-nine weeks a year, and perform more than forty plays, over half of them brand new. Shakespeare's company, The Lord Chamberlain's Men (renamed The King's Men after James I took the throne), was considered the most talented company of the time. Acting was not a well-respected profession at this time and women were not allowed to perform on stage; boys performed all female parts, including Juliet and the Nurse in *Romeo and Juliet*. In a day when acting paid enough for the average actor to just get by, the Lord Chamberlain's Men did so well one or two company members became prosperous middle-class citizens. Shakespeare was writing for the stage in an exciting time where theatre was a fast-paced popular form of entertainment attended by courtiers and whores, lawyers and cutpurses, tradesmen and servants.



# COLLABORATING ON DESIGN CONCEPT

This activity will provide your students with insight into theatrical design and practical experience in the creative process that stage designers use when establishing the world of a play.

**Essential Question:** How can we communicate the specific world of a play to an audience using characterization and analysis of the text?

## Objectives:

- Examine the plot, characters, and themes of the play
- Explore *what happens in the play* and *what the play is about* to inform design choices
- Analyze design choices based on playwright's intentions and relevancy to a modern audience

**Overview:** The job of theatrical designers is to support the director's vision and interpret the playwright's intentions by using costumes, sets, lights, and sound to create the world of the play for a modern audience. Each designer's work should:

- Evoke the mood and tone of the production
- Specify the time and place
- Clarify relationships between characters

Designers read the play many times searching for clues contained in the text about the look and feel of the play. They research the period in which the play was written as well as analyzing the plot and characters for visual motifs. The design team meets with the director to brainstorm a specific concept or approach to the play. The designers collaborate to ensure that all of the elements come together in a cohesive manner.

## Activity:

1. Divide students into teams of five with each member assuming the role of one of the artistic team for the production: director, sets, costumes, lights, and sound. Ask students to discuss the plot, character, time and place, and overall concept for the production.
  - a. Determine the mood of the production from beginning to end. How might it influence the design?
  - b. Decide where to set *Much Ado About Nothing* to make it the most relevant for your audience?  
(Coaching) Remind students that the concept must work for the entire play—not just certain scenes.
  - c. What images or motifs occur repeatedly throughout the play? How would you show these onstage? What are the different locations of the play?
2. Once a setting is decided, ask each group to research the time period in order to be as authentic as possible in creating the world of the play.
3. Each member of the team should produce a creative representation of their design (a poster, sound clips, a collage, fabric swatches, and so on).
4. Ask each group member to write a design/director statement in support of the concept, including the historical research that supports their decisions.
5. Display the concept boards as a team and have each team present their concept to the class.

**Reflection:** After students see the production, ask them to reflect on the design choices made by the TAM team. Compare and contrast TAM's production concept with the students' vision for the play. How were the designer choices similar or different? How did they serve the play?

# VERSE AND PROSE

## Iambic Pentameter

Shakespeare wrote much of his dialogue in a form of poetry, following the rules regarding rhythm and meter that were commonly used in his time. The form he used is called iambic pentameter [call out]. “Iambic” means a line of iambs; iambs are two syllables together, the first one is unstressed and the second is stressed. For instance, say the word ‘today’—notice how the ‘day’ seems stronger than the ‘to’? Try reversing the stresses and see how it sounds. “Pentameter” refers to the number of iambs in the line. Penta is the Greek word for five—think about the Pentagon and how many sides it has—so there are five iambs in each line.

So iambic pentameter feels like a heartbeat: Short, **Long**; Short, **Long**; Short, **Long**; Short, **Long**; Short, **Long**. An actor uses scansion to interpret the meter of a piece of verse. It can tell the reader, the actor, and the audience important information about the character.

*Here is an example from R&J Act II, Scene 2*

### ROMEO

But **soft**, what **light** through **yonder window breaks**?

Actors use the notation “U” for unstressed syllables and “/” for stressed:

U / U / U / U / U /  
But soft, what light through yonder window breaks?

Actors use the meter as a clue to discover what Shakespeare's characters are feeling. The stressed words are usually the most important (or “operative”) words in a verse line. But sometimes the iambic pentameter lines are not “normal” (meaning they have 10 unstressed and stressed syllables) giving the actor another clue. For example:

### ROMEO

But soft, what light through yonder window breaks?

It is the east, and JULIET is the sun.

Romeo starts off in regular verse, but once she appears his heart begins to race. Saying her name for the first time causes his heart to beat faster and Shakespeare gives the actor a line with an extra beat—11 syllables—to emphasize how he is feeling. This is called a feminine ending (because it ends unstressed and is therefore weaker). It is also possible that in saying her name, he makes a contraction “Jul’et” keeping it two rather than three syllables and remaining a regular line of verse—the actor can decide!

## Prose

Shakespeare wrote his plays using two styles—verse and prose. Verse, the style used most by Shakespeare, is text written with a meter or rhythm. Prose is text written without meter or rhythm. Prose is a more common form of speech, sounds more natural, and does not follow the rules or form of poetry. Prose is most often found in the comedies where servants or lower classes (or character's talking about “lewd” subjects) speak in prose. Shakespeare often uses the switch from verse to prose (or back) to indicate a change in emotion or mood within a scene. In Romeo and Juliet Mercutio switches from verse to prose and back again in the scene where he is killed. Shakespeare's shift from verse to prose provides a new and different way to convey not only wit and humor but also great depth of feeling and character.

# BEFORE THE PERFORMANCE

## 1. Witty, Punny, Funny

Define “wit.” Who is the wittiest person you know? What traits makes them witty and fun to be around? Have they ever used their wit at the expense of someone else’s feelings? How did that make you feel? In what ways can a humorous comment or observation reveal a truth? In order for something to be witty or funny, must it also be true? Discuss as a class.

## 2. Opposites Attract...or do they?

Many people think *Much Ado* is one of Shakespeare’s greatest comedies, at least in part because of the characters of Beatrice and Benedick. Beatrice is an unusual heroine as she is an equal to her suitor. She is a woman who is in charge of her own destiny—no father to tell her how to think and behave. She accomplishes what many other Shakespearean heroines can only accomplish while disguised as men. Using the Kenneth Branagh Film, watch the first scene between Beatrice and Benedick and then the later scene where they admit they are in love. Discuss how the characters of B&B demonstrate their love and how the characters of Hero & Claudio express theirs.

## 3. O Shakespeare, My Shakespeare

What are the first thoughts and/or images that come to mind when you hear the name “Shakespeare”? Why do you think his plays continue to be read and produced almost 400 years after his death? Do you think his work is relevant to modern audiences? Why or why not? What are some of your expectations about seeing Theater at Monmouth's production of *Much Ado About Nothing*? Ask students to make lists with the following headers: Why do we read Shakespeare? How is his work relevant today? What are my expectations about seeing *Much Ado*?

## 4. The Greatest Love Story of All

What makes a great love story? What is your favorite love story of all time? What makes it so memorable? What fictional romantic couple best captures your imagination and defines your understanding of romantic love? What is it about their connection, relationship and passion that stands out? How does the fictional portrayal of love and relationship, the media bombardment of what love and romance “should look like,” color the way you think about falling in love, dating, marriage, etc.?

## 5. Living Well is the Best Revenge

Have you ever been so overcome with hurt, frustration and/or hate that your desire to get even cancels out all rational thought and decent behavior? What happens when you act on that primal desire to strike back? Is revenge sweeter in thought or deed? Explain. Have you ever regretted a moment when you did seek retribution? Why?

## 6. Forgiving and Forgetting

What does it take for you to trust someone? What does it feel like to have trust and faith betrayed? Is there any way to get past a deep sense of betrayal? How do past loyalties shift when someone you care about shocks and disappoints you? What does it take to forgive and move on? What is the difference between forgiving and forgetting? Which is more powerful?

# AFTER THE PERFORMANCE

## 1. A Comedy Tonight?

Now that you have seen the play, how do you judge it as a comedy? Mood is the feeling of a piece of literature. Is the mood of this play light and humorous or serious and weighty? First free write about your reaction to these questions and then look back to the play for quotes and scenes used to establish the dominant mood.

## 2. Life Imitating Art

Write a comic scene modeled on *Much Ado About Nothing*. Think about an episode that could happen at school between a boy and girl. What things might lead to complications? Create a dialogue and some stage action. Try out the scene with several other students and then revise your scene according to their directions.

## 3. Adaptation Adaptation Adaptation

Compare one section of Joss Whedon's film version of *Much Ado* to the text of one act of the play. What did the screenplay leave out or change? What is the effect of such changes? Review the act you have chosen. Describe what changes or adaptations you might make in your film version of this act.

## 4. Deception, Deception, Deception

Examine the theme of deception in *Much Ado*. In what ways are characters deceived by others? By themselves? To what misunderstanding do these deceptions give rise. Who do they hurt?

## 5. Battle of the Sexes or the Sexist?

Consider the theme of "war" throughout the play. What war is being fought before the play begins? Who is victorious? How does the victory set the tone for the play? In what ways do B&B's feelings for each other change through the course of the play? Discuss the "merry war" between Beatrice and Benedick. What weapons do they use to battle? What "land" are they protecting?

## 6. Appearance Versus Reality

One of the major themes of the play is the conflict of Appearance versus Reality. What were the most frustrating examples of this in the play? Why can some characters see the truth behind the appearance, and what blinds others from seeing the realities?

## 7. Prose and Verse

Shakespeare's comedies very often include sections of both Prose and Verse. Read the descriptions of both on page 13 of this guide, then explore how Shakespeare uses both in *Much Ado*? Why do you think he writes in this manner and what information does it provide the actor in creating the roles and the audience in interpreting them?



# RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

## Books on Shakespeare

- Cahn, Victor L. *The Plays of Shakespeare: A Thematic Guide*. Greenwood Press, 2001
- Greenblatt, Stephen. *Will in the World*. W.W. Norton, 2004
- Holmes, Martin. *Shakespeare and His Players*. Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972
- Kermode, Frank. *Shakespeare's Language*. Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 2000
- Pritchard, R. E. *Shakespeare's England*. Sutton Publishing Limited, 1999

## Books on Teaching Shakespeare

- Gibson, Rex. *Teaching Shakespeare*. Cambridge University Press, 1998
- Rosenblum, Joseph. *A Reader's Guide to Shakespeare*. Salem Press, Inc., 1998
- Toropov, Brandon. *Shakespeare for Beginners*. Writers & Readers Publishing Inc., 1997

## Books on Much Ado

- Cox, John F., ed. *Shakespeare in Production: Much Ado About Nothing*, by William Shakespeare. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Dusinberre, Juliet. *Shakespeare and the Nature of Women* (3rd edition). New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.
- Everett, Barbara. "Much Ado About Nothing: The Unsociable Comedy." In *English Comedy*, ed. Michael Cordner, Peter Holland, John Kerrigan. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- Gay, Penny. "Much Ado About Nothing: A King of Merry War." in *As She Likes It: Shakespeare's Unruly Women*. London: Routledge, 1994. 143–177.
- Howard, Jean. "Renaissance Antitheatricality and the Politics of Gender and Rank in *Much Ado About Nothing*." In *Shakespeare Reproduced*, ed. Jean Howard and Marion O'Connor. New York: Routledge, Chapman and Hall, 1987. 163–187.

## Websites

- In Search of Shakespeare <http://www.pbs.org/shakespeare/educators/>  
Companion website to Michael Wood's four-part PBS series *In Search of Shakespeare*.
- Folger Shakespeare Library. <http://www.folger.edu>
- The Atlantic, "Such Ado: The Fight for Shakespeare's Puns."  
<https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2016/03/loves-labours-found-saving-shakespeares-puns/471786/>

## Common Core Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy addressed in the Guide: Anchor Standards for Speaking and Listening

- Comprehension and Collaboration
  - Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
  - Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.
  - Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric.
- Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas
  - Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
  - Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations.
  - Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and communicative tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.