

Key Stage 3 Shakespeare

Much Ado About Nothing

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(Sample pages)



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The plot of *Much Ado About Nothing*

Set in Sicily, the plot (story) of the play concerns Don Pedro and his friends Claudio and Benedick, who have defeated his half-brother in battle and bring him back to Messina. In Messina they are the guests of the Governor, Leonato.

Leonato has a daughter – **Hero**, and a ward – **Beatrice**. (In effect, Leonato has adopted Beatrice.) Beatrice and **Benedick** always argue and banter when they are together. This amuses their friends, who see that they are in love but do not seem to realise it.

Count Claudio wants to marry Hero, and so **Don Pedro** (the Prince) successfully woos her on Claudio's behalf. Don Pedro also plays a trick on Benedick and Beatrice so that each will think that the other loves them and therefore admit to their own love.

Don Pedro's half-brother **Don John** tries to stop Hero's wedding by deceiving Claudio and Don Pedro into thinking that Hero is

unfaithful the night before her wedding.

Claudio denounces Hero publicly at the altar and leaves with Don Pedro, both thinking she is dead. The **Friar** suggests to her father that they let Claudio and Don Pedro carry on thinking this until they find out what really happened. The Friar and Leonato believe in Hero's innocence.

The **Watch** (police constables) discovers Don John's trick. Beatrice and Benedick help to prove to Claudio that Hero is innocent and the two are reconciled. Benedick and Beatrice then declare their love and the two couples can marry. Thus all ends happily as it must in a comedy!

Understanding the plot

Watch the play (Kenneth Branagh's film version is good, if you cannot go to a live performance), listen to a recording of it (*Arkangel Complete Shakespeare* – Penguin Group) or read the play and then use page 3 of this guide to help you to remember the play and what it is about. You may want to add your own notes to the guide to help you when you are revising the play later on.

Two plots for the price of one

In this play there seems to be more than one plot. Shakespeare links the main story of the play – Hero and Claudio's wedding, which includes Don John's plot to spoil the wedding, to the scheme to get Beatrice and Benedick married as well. The Beatrice–Benedick story is often called the **sub-plot**.

Alongside the plot there are **themes** and **issues** that the play presents to the audience. The theme is marriage. The issues involve how the characters react and behave when their friendship and love are tested.

Task 1: Think about the plot

There are two schemes to get people married in the play. The first involves Hero and Claudio and the second Beatrice and Benedick.



Which do you think the audience will be most interested in?

Give three reasons for your answer. Remember there are no right or wrong answers to this question. Your views are important, but make sure you can use the text to explain them. You need to do the following:

P = make a **point**

E = give **evidence** from the text

E = **explain** how your evidence supports your point.

Remember PEE – point, evidence and explanation

Notes to help you

You might, for example, write:

I think that the audience would be most interested in Beatrice and Benedick because they are always scoring points off each other

Benedick: *Well you are a rare parrot-teacher.*

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

Their arguments keep the audience interested in them as they want to know who will win the battle of wits.

Task 2: Why does Don John try to spoil everything?

Don John is important in the plot to spoil Hero and Claudio's wedding day. What sort of character do you think he is? Can you suggest why he behaves in such a spiteful way? Look at Act 1 scene 3, lines 20–26 to help you find an answer.

Note to help you

When you write or talk about characters, ask yourself why they are in the play. What is their role in the plot? How does Don John's scheme add to the plot?

Task 3: Extension work

In Tasks 1 and 2 you have developed your ideas about the characters and how an audience might respond to them. Now focus on how the characters fit into the plot of the play.

- How does Don John's behaviour help Beatrice and Benedick to admit that they love each other?
- How does Beatrice ask Benedick to prove that he loves her?
- Do you think it was a fair request?

Write three paragraphs for your answer.

Notes to help you

You should write about:

- what Don John does
- how Beatrice and Benedick respond to Hero's good name being ruined
- what you think about Beatrice asking for Benedick's help in the way she does.