

# GCSE Shakespeare Coursework Support

## *Much Ado About Nothing*

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## Leonato, governor of Messina

Leonato is an important man, as he is the area's governor and social leader. He is responsible to Don Pedro and answers to him. As father to Hero, he has absolute control over her life – a fact that a Shakespearean audience would understand better than a modern one. Hero will accept his choice of husband – in this case whom the Prince wants her to marry. Leonato tells the audience what has happened and lets them know about the 'merry war' between Beatrice and Benedick.

He introduces his daughter to Don Pedro and is kind in the manner that he welcomes Don John to his home. He is willing to take part in Don Pedro's scheme to unite Benedick and Beatrice. When his daughter is denounced at her wedding, he is shocked, but is soon persuaded of her innocence and when the Watch bring him proof, he extracts his revenge on Claudio and Don Pedro before he marries Hero to Claudio.

Is Leonato a kindly father? How would Shakespearean and modern audiences respond to him?

### Activity 3: Leonato

Imagine you are Leonato. Choose a scene he is in and act it out to the class. Show his character in the way you speak his lines and the way other characters respond to him. Think about:

- The way he walks and talks – his physical qualities as a character
- How others react to him
- How he shows his feelings and emotions.

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## Hero

Hero is the only child of Leonato and he is very fond of her. She is young, fresh and innocent. Her manner is lively and charming and she has a sense of humour, but is not as free or as clever with words as her cousin. She has less freedom than Beatrice and must obey her father in all things. She is in love with Claudio and happy to marry him. She knows that she is innocent of the accusations

made against her and collapses when Claudio rejects her so publicly. Death is deemed to be better than dishonour – her virginity and innocence are what make her a worthy bride.

Think about how a modern audience might respond to her plight and what their reaction might be when she forgives Claudio (perhaps too easily) and still wants to marry him.

## Don John

Don John is the bastard (illegitimate) half-brother to Don Pedro and deeply resents the consequences of his birth. He has no real status or power and, in Shakespeare's time, such offspring were regarded as dangerous, as they might try to claim the possessions of the legitimate family. Don John has already fought with his brother for power and lost. In Act 1, scene 3, he discusses his feelings and what it is like to be a bastard. Would a modern audience feel any sympathy for him?

### Activity 4: Don John

- 1 Read the scenes and note the comments of Don John and his followers. What is your response to them as characters?
- 2 Think about the role of Don John in the play. How does Shakespeare use him to move forward the plot?

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## Dogberry

Dogberry is the leader of the Watch. He is a pretentious man who thinks he has a great command of language. He mangles and misuses words (malapropisms) making it difficult for those listening to understand what he is trying to say.

Although verbose and not particularly intelligent, he does save the day, because the members of his Watch, despite being careless in their duty, are not afraid to arrest those they discover boasting of their role in Don John's plot against Claudio and Hero.

## Activity 4: The Watch

- 1 In Act 3, scene 3, we learn about the duties of the Watch and the difficulties they face in trying to execute those duties. Compare the duties of the Watch then to the duties of the police today – which tasks remain unchanged?
- 2 Why do you think Dogberry does not like to arrest a man 'who hath any honesty in him'?

Think about the law and justice in Shakespeare's time. What is Shakespeare telling his audience through this comment?

- 3 Borachio and Conrade are arrested and in Act 3, scene 5, Dogberry tries to inform Leonato of their arrest. In a group, read the scene and identify the malapropisms (at least ten).

How would you act this scene out to ensure that the audience catch the humour and the clever wordplay?

- 4 Dogberry is a comic character. Does the audience feel any sympathy for his complaint that he has been called an 'ass' in Act 4, scene 2?

- 5 In Act 5, scene 1, lines 185–290, the 'knaves' are brought before Don John. How does Dogberry conduct himself in this scene? What is your response to Dogberry as a character?

## Extension activities

- 1 In groups, make a collage of the characters in the play.
- 2 Choose a theme tune – or compose one – for each of the main characters. Introduce each character to the audience as if you were a member of the chorus. Explain who they are and their importance to the plot.
- 3 Using ICT, print out your introduction to each character as a statement that others can read to remind themselves about that character and his or her part in the play.
- 4 Identify the characters in the picture below. Find the exact place in the text where this scene takes place.

Comment on how you would direct the actors in this scene to bring out the qualities of the characters.



