

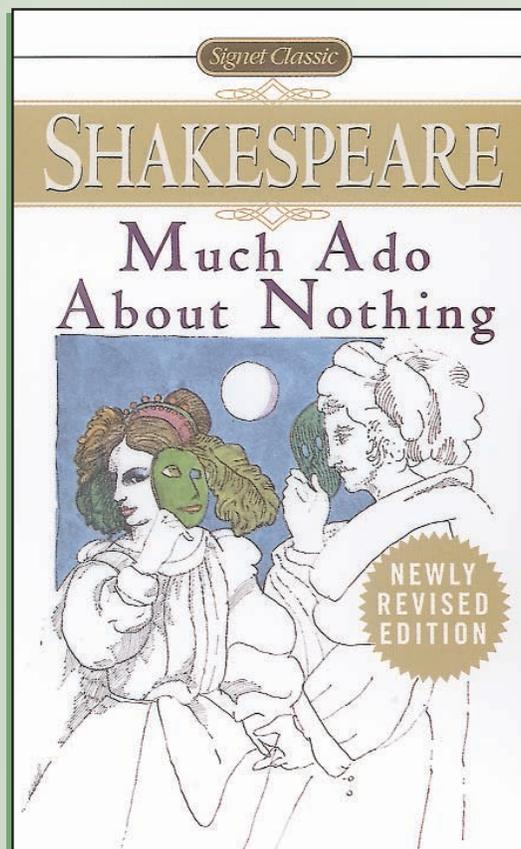


A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO THE SIGNET CLASSIC EDITION OF

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

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INTRODUCTION

Love, villainy, friendship, parent-child relationships, society and customs—*Much Ado About Nothing* touches on all of these. It presents a rich, ambiguous blend of life's relationships, folly, and catastrophe. Shakespeare introduces us to a group of people who have a past with each other that is immediately apparent as soon as Beatrice asks the messenger if all the soldiers are returned from the war. This is not a casual inquiry. Beatrice's question marks feelings that she does not yet comprehend. She and Benedick are attracted to each other but do not know how to deal with these feelings.

The relationship of Beatrice and Benedick is counterpoised to the more traditional relationship of Hero and Claudio. Claudio, having returned from the war, now has the leisure and desire to marry Hero. He is concerned about her social (and economic) position and how others perceive her. He asks Benedick what he thinks. He also allows the Duke to intervene on his behalf, to approach the lady and her father with his suit. He is a proper if somewhat distant lover. Meanwhile Hero is cautioned by her father to obey his will when it comes to the choice of a husband. This is just the beginning of complications involving two sets of lovers, giving the audience and the readers a hint of the rich variety of human motives and relationships.

Much Ado About Nothing is a play that will entertain and challenge high school and college students. They will enjoy the wonderful comic elements in the play—the "battle of the sexes" played by Beatrice and Benedick, the trick played on these two to turn them into lovers, and the farcical speeches of Dogberry and Verges. They may find mirrored in the play many of their own dilemmas about love, familial responsibility, and relationships. And they will have much to think about in weighing the actions of Claudio and Don Pedro and in analyzing the elements of tragedy, melodrama, comedy, and farce united in the play. Students will find in this play a rich source from which to draw in developing their abilities to read, analyze, discuss, and write. *Much Ado About Nothing* is a Shakespearean work accessible to modern students; it is a true classic and timeless in its appeal.

This teachers' guide presents strategies and activities to use in presenting the play to high school or college students. It consists of a detailed synopsis and suggested teaching activities for before students read, while they read, and after they read the play. More activities are listed in each section than can be used, therefore teachers should choose those that match their teaching style and the needs and interests of their students. Activities that are especially appropriate for advanced students are marked with a star (*). In addition a bibliography lists works related to themes and literary genre of the play.

OVERVIEW

CHARACTERS BY RELATIONSHIP

Don Pedro, Prince

Leonato, Governor

Don John, his bastard brother

Antonio, his brother

Borachio, follower of John

Conrade, follower of John

Claudio, young lord

Hero, daughter of Leonato

Benedick, young lord

Beatrice, niece to Leonato

Margaret and Ursula, attendants to Hero

SYNOPSIS**ACT I, SCENE I [PP. 33-44]**

A messenger brings word to Leonato that Don Pedro of Aragon is passing through Messina on his return from a victorious battle. Beatrice asks if Benedick is part of the company and hides her interest with disparaging comments. Shortly the company of Don Pedro, Claudio, and Benedick arrives and Beatrice and Benedick trade witticisms, both professing that love is only for fools. Meanwhile Claudio, attracted by Hero's beauty, thinks he is in love. He asks Benedick what he thinks of the lady, but Benedick only rails against marriage and womankind. Don Pedro, however, supports Claudio's suit, telling him that he will speak to Hero and her father during the masked revels that evening.

ACT I, SCENE II [PP. 44-45]

A complication arises immediately when Antonio reports to Leonato that he overheard the Prince telling Claudio that he is in love with Hero. Leonato says that he'll wait to see what will happen.

ACT I, SCENE III [PP. 45-47]

Meanwhile Don John, Don Pedro's illegitimate brother, hides his malicious nature, waiting for the right moment to cause problems for his brother and Claudio, who he thinks has taken his place in his brother's affections. He hopes Claudio's desire to wed Hero will give him an occasion to cause some mischief.

ACT II, SCENE I [PP. 48-61]

Leonato and his daughter and niece are ready for the revels to begin. While Beatrice complains that there is no man who can match her spirit, Hero obediently assents to her father's counsel to accept the Prince when he woos. All wear masks for the dance which leads to confusion and fun. Don Pedro talks to Hero privately while Benedick and Beatrice, behind their masks, exchange insults. Meanwhile, Don John pricks Claudio's jealousy saying that Pedro surely plans to wed Hero himself. Claudio thinks he has lost Hero. However, Pedro comes in to announce that he has completed the match between Hero and Claudio, and instantly Claudio's jealousy turns to joy. Now that the wedding is arranged, the Duke decides to find a husband for Beatrice who is as witty and fun-loving; he thinks the ideal match would be Benedick. Plans are made among the company to trick Beatrice and Benedick so that they will fall in love with one another.

ACT II, SCENE II [PP. 61-63]

Don John and Borachio hatch a scheme to thwart Claudio's marriage plans by making Hero seem unchaste. Borachio will arrange to meet with Margaret at Hero's window in the middle of the night. Thereby, he will fool the Duke and Claudio into believing that Hero is having an affair.

ACT II, SCENE III [PP. 63-72]

Benedick is in the garden lamenting how love has changed Claudio. He is no longer a simple, frank, natural soldier but a lover, concerned about fashion, manners, and poetry. Benedick reconfirms his resolve to have nothing to do with marriage. The woman he would surrender himself to must be fair, wise, and virtuous, and he hasn't met any woman like this.

He hides in an arbor when Don Pedro, Claudio, and Leonato approach. Having seen him, they begin their scheme to get Benedick and Beatrice romantically involved. They announce, for Benedick's benefit, that Beatrice loves Benedick, but they express fear that Benedick will just make fun of the lady.

Benedick is completely fooled by their trick, and when he sees Beatrice coming to call him in to dinner, he is enamored of her. Although Beatrice is sharp in her speech, Benedick now hears declarations of love where once he heard only her barbs.

ACT III, SCENE I [PP. 73-77]

Hero arranges for Beatrice to overhear a conversation about Benedick's love sickness and desire for Beatrice. Beatrice listens while Hero and her waiting lady commiserate about how Beatrice would only make fun of Benedick if she knew. Beatrice is taken in and has a complete change of heart; she vows to love Benedick if he will have her.

ACT III, SCENE II [PP. 77-82]

Don Pedro, Claudio, and Leonato tease Benedick saying he doesn't look like himself; he is pale and melancholy as well as clean and newly shaven. Finally when he can't stand their teasing anymore, Benedick asks to talk privately with Leonato.

Don John joins Don Pedro and Claudio and accuses Hero of being unfaithful. He says he wants to save Claudio from a dishonorable marriage, and he will take them that night to Hero's bedroom window where they will see her with a man on the night before her wedding. Claudio swears that if she is with a man, he will shame her at their wedding before the whole congregation.

ACT III, SCENE III [PP. 82-88]

The night watch assembles and gets muddled instructions from Dogberry and Verges to be alert for enemies of the prince. They overhear Borachio brag to Conrade about just earning a thousand ducats from Don John by fooling Claudio and Don Pedro into believing that Hero met with him at her window. He had met with Hero's maid Margaret. The watch officers step forward and arrest Borachio and Conrade for this treachery.

ACT III, SCENE IV [PP. 88-91]

Hero is nervously preparing for the wedding while Beatrice acts lovesick and melancholy. Margaret teases Beatrice, saying she may be in love, just like Benedick.

ACT III, SCENE V [PP. 91-93]

The Constable Dogberry meets with Leonato to tell him the Watch has taken two prisoners during the night, and they need to be examined. However, Leonato is in a hurry to leave for the church with Hero and can't make sense out of Dogberry's and Verges' foolish speech. He orders them to conduct the examination.

ACT IV, SCENE I [PP. 94-105]

Everyone convenes at the church for the wedding of Hero and Claudio. When the friar asks if Claudio is here to marry this lady, he says no. He tells Leonato to take Hero back; she's a "rotten orange," "the sign and semblance of her honor." To the shocked questioning of Hero and Leonato, Claudio says that he knows Hero is unchaste and rejects her. Hero swoons while her father staggers beneath these accusations.

Beatrice, Benedick, Leonato, and the friar try to understand what has happened. They begin to suspect that Don John is behind the accusations. The Friar suggests a strategy: let people think Hero has died. Remorse will begin to work on Claudio, and they will have time to find out what has happened.

Left alone together Benedick confesses his love to Beatrice, who finally admits that she loves him also. As a sign of his love, Beatrice asks Benedick to take revenge for the wrong done to Hero. He pledges to challenge Claudio.

ACT IV, SCENE II [PP. 105-108]

The Constables convene the assembly to interrogate the prisoners, and after much confusion caused by Dogberry's fractured vocabulary, the Sexton accuses Borachio and Conrade of plotting against Hero.

ACT V, SCENE I [PP. 109-121]

Leonato is full of anger at the slander against Hero and refuses to be comforted by his brother. When Don Pedro and Claudio appear, Leonato challenges him to a duel to regain the honor of his daughter. Antonio, Leonato's brother, joins in the challenge, but Claudio and Pedro refuse to fight.

Benedick meets with Claudio and Pedro and challenges Claudio to a duel for the honor of Hero. He also tells Don Pedro that his brother has fled Messina and that they have falsely accused and killed an innocent lady.

The constables find Don Pedro and Claudio and reveal the scheme of the villain Don John. Pedro and Claudio are shocked, and Claudio thinks of his first love of Hero. Leonato hears of the revelation, but when he comes before the company, he proclaims Pedro and Claudio the true villains. They are the ones who really caused the death of Hero by believing the accusations against her. When they beg for penance, Leonato charges them to announce Hero's innocence to the people. Also, Claudio must marry his niece the next day.

ACT V, SCENE II [PP. 121-124]

Benedick meets with Beatrice to declare his love again and to tell her that he has challenged Claudio. Ursula, the lady's gentlewoman, comes in to tell them the news about Don John's scheme.

ACT V, SCENE III [PP. 124-126]

At the family monument of Leonato, Claudio recites an epitaph to Hero and keeps vigil throughout the night.

ACT V, SCENE IV [PP. 126-131]

Leonato awaits Claudio whom he plans to wed to his daughter, Hero. Benedick asks the friar also to marry him and Beatrice. The women come forward masked. Claudio declares himself husband to the woman he stands beside, and Hero reveals herself.

Beatrice and Benedick begin to argue about whether they really love one another, but their friends have proof, poems they have written declaring their love. They kiss and all are joined together in a dance to celebrate the marriages about to take place.

BEFORE READING

These activities are designed to prepare students to read and enjoy the play and to anticipate some of its key themes.

GENRE: COMEDY OR TRAGICOMEDY

Reading *Much Ado About Nothing* is not like reading a traditional comedy; instead it has the potential to turn into a tragedy. Comedy is made up of complications, but in this play the complications could be disastrous. Therefore, before reading the play, discuss with the students the nature of comedy and tragicomedy. Suggest that students think about contemporary comedies (books, films, videos, or television shows) that use the standard boy-meets-girl format. Ask them: Which are light and humorous throughout? Which have a darker side and a potential for disaster? If students are familiar with *Romeo and Juliet*, they can discuss what makes it a tragedy. Ask: What would have to be changed for *Romeo and Juliet* to become a comedy? *

CHARACTER

As in most of Shakespeare's plays, the characters (on page 32 of the Signet Classic edition) are listed in the order of importance in the social hierarchies governing Elizabethan society. Therefore, the Prince of Aragon, Don Pedro, is listed before Leonato, Governor of Messina. It is interesting to note that the women are listed after all the male characters, except for the unnamed messengers and attendants. Students can compare this listing of characters to the modern convention of listing characters in order of appearance or importance to the film. They can discuss the implications of Shakespeare's arrangement. It is also useful for students to diagram the relationships among the characters from the information contained in the *Dramatis Personae*. *

Show students the roster of characters listed by relationship on page 2 of this guide. To stimulate students' thinking prior to reading the play, ask them: What possibilities are suggested by this roster of characters? They might respond: There are two sets of brothers, Don Pedro-Don John and Leonato-Antonio potentially allowing Shakespeare to contrast them. This also could allow for parallel action: what happens between one pair of brothers may mirror what is happening between the other pair. There also are two women of aristocratic family and two young lords. The relationship of one set can be compared to that of the second set. There are two sets of servants; this could lead to comparisons between the upper and lower social classes.

PLOT

Although not a complicated plot, students may have some difficulty following the action as they independently read the play.

Explain to the students that the first act reveals background information, expectations about the characters and their interactions, and the nature of the conflict or complications of the plot.

Read aloud the first scene. As the students listen, suggest that they visualize the action. Ask the students: How do the characters look? What do they do as they speak? After the reading, discuss the students' images or have them draw a picture of a part of the scene. Suggest that the students not worry about their drawing skill, but instead attempt to reveal their personal impressions of the scene. They can compare their drawings in pairs or small groups and discuss similarities and differences in their responses.

Pair the students and suggest that they imagine the first scene as a ballet and themselves as choreographers. Have them discuss how the characters move in relation to each other and diagram a version of the "dance" of the main characters. With other pairs, allow students to compare their diagrams and, perhaps "dance" one version for the class. Afterwards ask: What did you learn about the characters from these activities? What kind of expectations does Shakespeare establish in this opening scene? What predictions can you make about how each character will act?

In order for students to discover the play and its richness and themes for themselves, we do not recommend viewing a film version of the play before reading and reacting to it. Instead, show the first scene after students have read and discussed their reading. A recent film version of the play begins with such delightful energy that it will whet students' appetites to read, savor, and later see the rest of the play on film. (*Much Ado About Nothing*: A Kenneth Branagh Film, adapted for the screen by Kenneth Branagh. A Renaissance Films Production and Samuel Goldwyn Company, 1993. Produced by Stephen Evans, David Parfitt, and Kenneth Branagh. Directed by Kenneth Branagh.)

Alternatively, a film may be shown following the reading of each act of the play. This sensitizes students to significant details in the play and interpretations made by the director. Also, this strategy allows less adept readers to keep up with the action and participate in class discussion.

It may be helpful for some readers to use the detailed synopsis of the play located at the beginning of this guide. The plot summary contained in the commentary on pp. 135-137 of the Signet Classic edition is more appropriate for mature readers. Although written in the eighteenth century, it can alert students to some of the issues of dealing with plot, characterization, and theme prior to reading the play.

LANGUAGE

Even for the most experienced readers, language may be an issue when reading Shakespeare's plays. Many readers become frustrated because they do not understand every word in the text and have to refer to footnotes.

Suggest to students that they need not understand every word to experience the action. You can demonstrate this by giving students a brief passage from the play in which every third or fourth word is blocked out. Ask students to read for the main idea and later compare this passage to the original in the play. Ask: Do you understand what is happening even when you do not know all the words?

Other elements of language students may miss are puns, innuendo, and bawdy talk. Select one or two passages from the play. In pairs or small groups, have students interpret what the words say and/or imply. To help students identify contemporary double layering of language, you may want to brainstorm with them a few examples from popular culture: slang, jokes, and cartoons. Have each group list as many contemporary examples as they can. These should be shared with the class and explained.

NOTE: An additional benefit of carefully looking at several selected passages prior to reading the play is that students will see that the language makes sense. They will also recognize the passage and build on their knowledge of its meaning when they are reading it in context.

After students have shared contemporary examples of double layering of language and have analyzed an example you selected from the play, they can either examine more examples you provide or can search for examples on their own. *

PUN

Messenger: And a good soldier too, lady.

Beatrice: And a good soldier to a lady. But what is he to a lord?

Messenger: A lord to a lord, a man to a man; stuffed with all honorable virtues.

Beatrice: It is so, indeed; he is no less than a stuffed man. But for the stuffing-well, we are all mortal. (I, i, 51-57) [p. 35]

CLEVER WORD PLAY

Benedick: What, my dear Lady Disdain! Are you yet living?

Beatrice: Is it possible Disdain should die while she hath such meet food to feed it as Signior Benedick? Courtesy itself must convert to Disdain if you come in her presence. (I, i, 114-119) [p. 37]

INNUENDO AND BAWDY LANGUAGE

Leonato: By my troth, niece, thou wilt never get thee a husband if thou be so shrewd of thy tongue.

Antonio: In faith, she's too curst.

Beatrice: Too curst is more than curst. I shall lessen God's sending that way, for it is said, "God sends a curst cow short horns"; but to a cow too curst he sends none.

Leonato: So, by being too curst, God will send you no horns.

Beatrice: Just, if he send me no husband; for the which blessing I am at him upon my knees every morning and evening. Lord, I could not endure a husband with a beard on his face. I had rather lie in the woolen! (II, i, 18-31) [p. 49]

["Horns" in this passage is used as a phallus symbol. There are several other references to horns made by Benedick referring to the horns of a cuckold (see I, i, 191; 231-233; 253-255). Students may wonder about the prevalence of this joke about adultery and if it expresses a common behavior among spouses during Shakespeare's time. One critic suggests that the cuckold was a metaphor for the changes in social and economic class relationships of the time. In this view, the worry about becoming a cuckold expresses indirectly the anxiety the growing merchant class felt about private property. Because of this economic connection the horns of the cuckold are derived from beasts of burden, the horns of the ox and the horn-like ears of the ass (Bruster, D., "The Horn of Plenty: Cuckoldry and Capital in the Age of Shakespeare," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, Vol. 30, No. 2, Spring 1990.)

After examining Shakespearean language, discuss with the students attitudes of the seventeenth century towards sexuality, and how and why these attitudes have changed. *

THEME

The main themes of the play grow out of the "game of love"-the nature of attraction between man and woman, the role of marriage in society, gender roles, romance, and standards of sexual mores. A related theme, the nature of truth and reality versus appearance, explores how one lover constantly tries to determine the other lover's faithfulness through outward signs and actions. It can be helpful to have students discuss the meaning of several of these themes prior to reading the play.

Begin a discussion of themes in the play by having students complete a personal opinion survey.

What's Your Opinion?

Mark the statements as true or false:

1. Men and women should marry persons of a similar social and economic status as themselves.
2. People choose with whom they will fall in love.
3. It is better not to marry than to marry and risk being cheated on by your spouse.
4. Most people can be trusted to be faithful in marriage.
5. Men are attracted to women who are assertive and bold.
6. Jealousy in a romantic relationship is usually a sign the relationship has problems.
7. Because parents usually know what is best for their children when it comes to choosing a mate, children should go along with their parents' wishes in this regard.

Students can discuss their answers in small groups or with the whole class.

Customs pertaining to courtship and marriage of men and women differ among cultures. Students can do a mini-research project or conduct interviews within the school or community asking people from several different cultures about their customs. Following the research, ask students: What are some common customs across cultures? What differences exist? Why are customs an important part of courtship and marriage?

Students can also research the customs for courtship and marriage during Shakespeare's time, and examine how these differ from customs today. *

In small groups or pairs, students can research where the idea of romantic love originated. They can examine the origins of courtly love and the medieval courts of love. They can read courtly love poetry or a courtly love tale, such as Giovanni Boccaccio's "Federigo's Falcon" (from *The Decameron*, "Fifth Day, Ninth Story" trans. by Mark Musa and Peter Bondanella, Mentor Books) or Marie de France's "Guigemar" (from *The Lais of Marie de France*, trans. by Glyn S. Burgess and Keith Busby, Penguin Classics). The tradition of courtly love can be contrasted to the medieval laws concerning women, their dowry, and property rights. After the students have shared their research and poetry with the class, ask them: Does it seem likely that courtly love is a fantasy that does not fit within the social reality of the time? What might have been the purpose of such stories? What effect might they have had on people? Are there still remnants of courtly love literature in popular romances or in contemporary love songs? *

The old cliché "love is blind" can serve as an introduction to the theme of appearance versus reality. In small groups, have the students brainstorm and list some popular sayings about love, lovers, and marriage, such as "love at first sight," "love is in the eye of the beholder," or "marry in haste, repent in leisure." After the lists have been shared, ask the students: Is there a basis for these sayings? What is it about love that causes people to be "blind," to be "a little mad," to "lose themselves in love"?

Have students brainstorm individually and in small groups the titles of songs dealing with love and romance. After the titles have been shared, ask the students: What types of love are sung about (i.e. young love, married love, sexual desire, unfulfilled love, unfaithful love, jealous love)? What do these different kinds of love say about human nature?

Discuss with students the concept of a "double standard." Suggest that the students think about these questions: To what extent does it still operate today? Why does it still operate? How does it account for different gender-specific behaviors?

SHAKESPEARE'S THEATER

"Shakespeare's Theater" in the Prefatory Remarks provides students with useful background information about Elizabethan staging practices and prepares them to visualize the action of the play more clearly. After students have read this, teachers can choose among the following activities.

Students can draw a diagram of the theater or look for pictorial representations in stage histories and explain the main parts and functions of the theater.

Students can list on poster paper the main conventions (e.g.: scenery and spectacle, the staging of entrances and exits, the way setting is conveyed in the character's speech) employed by Shakespeare.

Students can read the list of Shakespeare's plays on p. xii of the Signet Classic edition and discuss themes explored by Shakespeare in other plays they have read.

In small groups, students can design informal poster reports (a visual diagram and summary) of the plot and themes of Shakespearean plays with which they are familiar. These posters can be placed around the classroom to represent the chronology of plays created by Shakespeare enabling students to see the place of *Much Ado About Nothing* in Shakespeare's body of work. After students have completed the posters, ask: What plays came before *Much Ado* or were written at about the same time? What generalizations about Shakespeare's concerns and the preoccupations of his time can be made from these plays? *

After students have completed discussing other Shakespearean plays, review with them the events of Shakespeare's life and discuss the use of biography in critical literary analysis. This might naturally lead to a discussion of whether or not the plays were written by Shakespeare. *

WHILE READING

- Through class discussion, generate a running plot line of the material covered each day. Post the plot line in a prominent place. Use the plot line to make predictions about what will happen next in the play and to generate analytical and interpretive questions.
- Ensure that students know how to make use of the footnotes explaining obscure terms or expressions in the text. One way to do this is through a model-and-practice exercise:
 - a. Choose a scene from the material assigned to be read.
 - b. Read at least a page of the scene out loud to the class, just as you would silently read and study it.
 - c. Go back over the page and show students how you figure out its meaning by referring to the footnotes and pausing at difficult parts to think out loud about these parts. Let them see how you deal with ambiguity and difficulty and how you arrive at your personal interpretation.
 - d. Have the class discuss the method you use. List on the board the strategies they identify. Ask them what they might do differently, making it clear that different approaches can be effective for different people.
 - e. Pair students and have them take turns reading and thinking out loud through alternate pages of text. The readers should be careful to say all of their thoughts as they are thinking them to the listeners. The listeners should follow along in the text and ask questions the readers have not explained.
 - f. When students have finished working through the scene, or after a maximum of 20 minutes, discuss with the whole class their understanding and interpretations of the scene and also identify the efficacy of their individual strategies in reading and studying the text.
- Assign short parts (100-130 lines) of significant scenes in each act of the play for students to act out in small groups using a form of reader's theater.
 - a. Divide students into groups according to the number of characters in the scene with an extra person as narrator.
 - b. Allow time in class for students to discuss their scene and to plan how they will perform it.
 - c. Give a copy of these guidelines to each group.

Performance Guidelines

1. Use simple props, costumes, and background music if appropriate.
 2. You can retain the original setting or change it to modern day if you wish.
 3. Make sure you all understand and agree on a single interpretation of your scene.
 4. Choose a narrator to give the background of the scene and to explain transitions.
 5. Rehearse your parts ensuring clear and fluent reading. You can use simple action or remain stationary revealing your emotions through gestures and facial expressions.
 6. (optional) At the end of your performance, be ready to discuss the significance of your scene to the rest of the play read thus far.
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- d. Use clear evaluation criteria making individual students and the group accountable for the success of the group's planning process and performance. Students can be graded as a group for being on task and working cooperatively. Individually, students can be graded on how well they carried out their parts in the performance. Also, have each student write a brief description of how he or she contributed to preparing for the group performance and the significance of the scene the group presented.
- e. The following scenes are appropriate for reader's theater:
- I, iii, 1-72 [pp. 45-46] (3 characters) Don John reveals his villainous character.
 - II, i, 260-336 [pp. 57-59] (5 characters) Beatrice, Benedick, and Claudio interact. Claudio is jealous.
 - III, i, 1-116 [pp. 73-77] (3 characters) Beatrice is tricked into thinking Benedick loves her.
 - III, ii, 76-130 [pp. 80-82] (3 characters) Claudio is duped into suspecting Hero's virtue.
 - IV, i, 1-111 [pp. 94-98] (5 characters) Claudio rejects Hero at the church.
 - V, i, 1-108 [pp. 109-113] (4 characters) Leonato tells Claudio that Hero has died.
 - V, ii, 42-102 [pp. 122-144] (3 characters) Benedick and Beatrice mock fight; they learn that Hero's innocence is proved.
 - V, iv, 33-123 [pp. 127-131] (7 characters) Claudio and Hero, Benedick and Beatrice agree to marry.

STUDENT RESPONSE PROMPTS

The following activities are designed to prompt student response at the knowledge, comprehension, and application levels.

JOURNAL WRITING

- At the beginning of each class, give students a list of quotes from which to choose one quote and write their personal response for five to seven minutes. After writing, students can share their responses in pairs, small groups, or with the class. Or, one day each week can be set aside for students to choose their best response and share it in small groups or with the class. Their responses can take many forms.
- Write a three part response: 1) indicate the meaning of the quote, 2) connect the quote with other parts of the play, other literature, or personal experiences, and 3) discuss your personal feelings about the quote, the character, or the action. *
- Write a purely personal expression. Take off from the quote and freewrite wherever your thoughts may take you—into fantasy, reflections on your day, problems you are experiencing, or people you care about.
- Write a poetic response. Write your own rejoinder or rebuttal to the quote or continue the dialog using Shakespeare's style. Or, write a poem reflecting a theme or idea suggested by the quote.
- Copy the quote and illustrate it. In lieu of writing, draw the characters or illustrate the action in whatever detail you like from symbolic representation to realistic characterization.
- Reply to the character. Write a letter to the character, either from your point of view or from the point of view of another character in the play.

The following quotations provide rich possibilities for student response:

ACT I

1. "There is a kind of merry war betwixt Signior Benedick and her. They never meet but there's a skirmish of wit between them." (I, i, 58-61) [p. 35]
2. "Because I will not do them the wrong to mistrust any, I will do myself the right to trust none; and the fine is (for the which I may go the finer), I will live a bachelor." (I, i, 233-237) [p. 41]
3. "It must not be denied but I am a plain-dealing villain." (I, iii, 29-30) [p. 46]

ACT II

1. "I have a good eye, uncle; I can see a church by daylight." (II, i, 81-82) [p. 51]
2. "Friendship is constant in all other things
Save in the office and affairs of love.
Therefore all hearts in love use their own tongues;
Let every eye negotiate for itself
And trust no agent; for beauty is a witch
Against whose charms faith melteth into blood." (II, i, 173-178) [p. 54]
3. "I have known when there was no music with him but the drum and the fife; and now had he rather hear the tabor and the pipe." (II, iii, 12-15) [p. 64]

ACT III

1. "I'll devise some honest slanders/ To stain my cousin with. One doth not know/ How much an ill word may empoison liking." (III, i, 84-86) [p. 76]
2. "If I see anything tonight why I should not marry her tomorrow, in the congregation where I should wed, there will I shame her." (III, ii, 119-121) [p. 81]
3. "Yet Benedick was such another, and now is he become a man. He swore he would never marry; and yet now in despite of his heart he eats his meat without grudging. And how you may be converted I know not; but methinks you look with your eyes as other women do." (III, v, 84-89) [p. 91]

ACT IV

1. "You seem to me as Dian in her orb, As chaste as is the bud ere it be blown;
But you are more intemperate in your blood
Than Venus, or those pamp' red animals
That rage in savage sensuality." (IV, i, 56-60) [p. 96]
 2. "I love you with so much of my heart that none is left to protest." (IV, i, 284-285) [p. 103]
 3. "I cannot be a man with wishing; therefore I will die a woman with grieving." (IV, i, 320-321) [p. 105] Act V
 4. "Men
Can counsel and speak comfort to that grief
Which they themselves not feel; but, tasting it,
Their counsel turns to passion" (V, i, 20-23) [p. 110]
 5. "No, I was not born under a rhyming planet, nor I cannot woo in festival turns." (V, ii, 40-41) [p. 122]
 6. Benedick: "Your niece regards me with an eye of favor."
Leonato: "That eye my daughter lent her; 'tis most true."
Benedick: "And I do with an eye of love requite her."
Leonato: "The sight whereof I think you had from me,
From Claudio, and the Prince." (V, iv, 22-26) [p. 127]
 7. "One Hero died defiled; but I do live, And surely as I live, I am a maid." (V, iv, 63-64) [p. 128]
 8. "Since I do purpose to marry, I will think nothing to any purpose that the world can say against it; and therefore never flout at me for what I have said against it; for man is a giddy thing, and this is my conclusion." (V, iv, 104-108) [p. 130]
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ORAL RESPONSE

Students can be guided to deeper levels of understanding of the play through small group or class discussion. Once the plot is understood by the students, their responses can focus on analysis and evaluation. The oral response questions suggested below can also be used as student writing prompts.

GENERAL QUESTIONS

- What is Shakespeare telling us about ourselves-about what we want or need to be happy, about how men and women need to interact? What is Shakespeare's understanding of human nature?
- Is the play true?
- Was the play realistic in terms of how people lived in Shakespeare's time?
- Is it realistic in terms of the way people behave today?

ACT I

- Why is it significant that Don Pedro and his men are returning from the wars?
- Why does Beatrice ask about Benedick? What is the "real" reason?
- Beatrice and Benedick say that lovers are fools, and they want nothing to do with love. Why do you think they say this?
- How does Benedick react to Claudio's declaration that Hero is "the sweetest lady that ever I looked on"?
- Why does Claudio send Don Pedro as his emissary to Hero to declare his love?
- Why does Don John want to cause trouble? Why is he so morose?

ACT II

- What are Beatrice's reasons for not wanting to have anything to do with men?
- What are Leonato's instructions to his daughter, Hero, and what do these show about traditional attitudes?
- According to the stage directions for the dance, Don John is not masked during the revels? Why?
- Do you think Beatrice and Benedick know each other when they speak behind their masks? Why? Why not?
- Why does Don John pretend that he does not recognize Claudio?
- How does Benedick feel about his conversation with Beatrice?
- What does Beatrice mean when she says, "once before he [Benedick] won it [my heart] of me with false dice"? (II, i, 277-278) [p. 57]
- Why is Claudio unable to speak when Don Pedro tells him that the Lady Hero is his?
- Why does Don Pedro's plan work so well?
- How does Benedick rationalize himself into loving Beatrice?

ACT III

- Why do the women praise Benedick so highly when they describe how he loves Beatrice?
 - Why does Hero say that she will not tell Beatrice about Benedick's love?
 - How fair are the women in their description of Beatrice's behavior? Is she too hard on men? (Think back to her description of Don John.) Why are they devoting so much time to her reputation for "disdain"?
 - What is Beatrice's reaction to the women's speech?
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- Why do the men make fun of Benedick?
- How does Don John plan to deceive Claudio and Don Pedro?
- Why does the Watch arrest Borachio and Conrade?

ACT IV

- How does Claudio judge Hero's behavior when he accuses her?
- How do the rest of the company react? How can you explain in relationship to their other behavior in the play Leonato's denunciation, Benedick's confusion, and Beatrice's conviction that Hero has been slandered?
- How does the Friar propose to judge the situation?
- What does the Friar hope will happen as a result of his plan to have it published that Hero is dead? What kind of change does he think will come about in Claudio?
- What happens between Benedick and Beatrice?
- Why does Beatrice want to kill Claudio?
- How does the confusion in the speech of Dogberry fit the theme of appearance versus reality?

ACT V

- What does Antonio say that gets Leonato to think again about his passionate denunciation of Hero?
- Does Leonato think Hero is guilty of being unvirtuous? Why? Why not?
- Do you think Claudio makes a move to draw his sword against Leonato? Why or why not?
- What is the purpose of this scene in which Leonato and his brother Antonio challenge Claudio for slandering Hero?
- What is Claudio's attitude? What does this show about his character? Does it fit with your sense of his character?
- How does Don Pedro act when Benedick meets them? What is your reaction to the exchange of the three men? Why do you think they are acting as they do?
- To what extent is the punishment Leonato places on Claudio fitting? Why does he want Claudio to believe that he has killed Hero?
- Why do Beatrice and Benedick talk about loving each other only according to "reason"? How do they really feel about each other?

AFTER READING

- After reading the play, conduct follow up activities extending students' learning and enriching their understanding of the play and its themes.
 - Show a complete film version of *Much Ado About Nothing*. In five groups, have the students discuss how each act of the film differs from the same act of the play.
 - Use writing response assignments to get students to deepen their understanding. Organize writing response groups to provide an audience and feedback for rough drafts and sharing of finished pieces. Suggest the following topics:
 - a. Now that you have read 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 freewrite about your reaction to these questions and then look back to the play for quotes and scenes used to establish the dominant mood. *
 - b. Draw a diagram of the play showing the movement of the mood (mood shifts) occurring during the action. Write an explanation of your diagram.
 - c. 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.
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- d. A lot of the humor involving Dogberry and Verges arises from their fractured sense of word meanings. Examine several of their speeches and write some of your own malapropisms.
 - e. Compare one section of the 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.
 - f. Who would you rather be—Beatrice or Hero; Claudio or Benedick? Compare and contrast the two female or male characters. Why do you think Shakespeare created the pairs of characters?
 - g. Study a map of Italy. Pinpoint the places mentioned in the play. Do some research about the historical situation in Italy in the sixteenth century. Explain historically the wars which Don Pedro and his men have been fighting. *
 - h. Select one character and write a letter describing the events in Leonato's house from that character's point of view.
 - i. Write a dramatic monologue patterned after the monologues of Robert Browning (for example, "My Last Duchess" in *Selected Poems of Robert Browning*, edited by Daniel Karlin, Penguin Poetry Library, 1990), which you will recite orally to your group. *
 - j. Choose a passage in the play which best represents one of the themes. Explain what the passage means and what it reveals about the theme.
- Many students will enjoy and benefit from more physical responses to the play.
 - a. Directors often make changes in a play to express a particular point of view, interpretation of character, or illustration of theme. Small groups of students can work together on a scene or part of a scene. Decide who will be the director, assistant director, and actors. Plan your interpretation of the scene, rehearse your scene, and act it out for the class. Be ready to explain your interpretation of the scene.
 - b. Critics make a distinction between low comedy and high comedy. Low comedy is the boisterous, rowdy play of characters who often come from lower social classes; the language of these social classes often includes dialect, lots of bawdy language, innuendo, and word play. High comedy is more sophisticated and involves the characters of the upper class. High comedy is more intellectual and arises from the pleasure of seeing complications resolved. Brainstorm high and low comedy you have seen on television, video, or film. Pick a situation between a boy and a girl that might occur at school. Write the scene as high or low comedy. Present it to the class and ask them to identify the type of comedy you have presented.

Or, choose a high comedy and a low comedy scene in *Much Ado About Nothing*. Act out each scene including as much action as possible. Discuss how each type of comedy affects the viewer and how we derive pleasure from viewing comedy.*
 - c. Practice a key speech that helps develop the character who is speaking. Recite the speech to a small group and describe why you chose it.
 - d. Select one or several pieces of music (or compose one) that you think reflects the mood of a scene or several scenes. In a small group, practice reading the scene(s) with the music as a background. Record your reading on an audio recorder.
 - e. Select a scene. Design the set for the scene. Be sure to include both scenery and props.
 - f. Select a character. Go through the play and draw designs for costumes for that character.
 - The Introduction and Commentaries in the Signet Classic edition can be explored profitably by students after their own reading of *Much Ado*. The Introduction is especially helpful in comparing the relationship of Claudio and Hero with that of Benedick and Beatrice. The various essays in the Commentaries section can give students an historical sense of changing responses to the play. In addition, the essay by Carol Thomas Neely gives insight into the various gender-related issues raised in the play. One use of these essays would be to have students first freewrite about their personal views, read an appropriate essay, and then compare their view to that of the essay's author. *
 - With a small group or as a class, read *Keeping Christina* by Sue Ellen Bridgers (Harper, 1993). In the book, the teenage students debate whether or not Shakespeare was actually the author of the plays. Discuss the points raised by the teenagers in Bridgers' book. Research the controversy over the authorship of the plays and hold a class debate.
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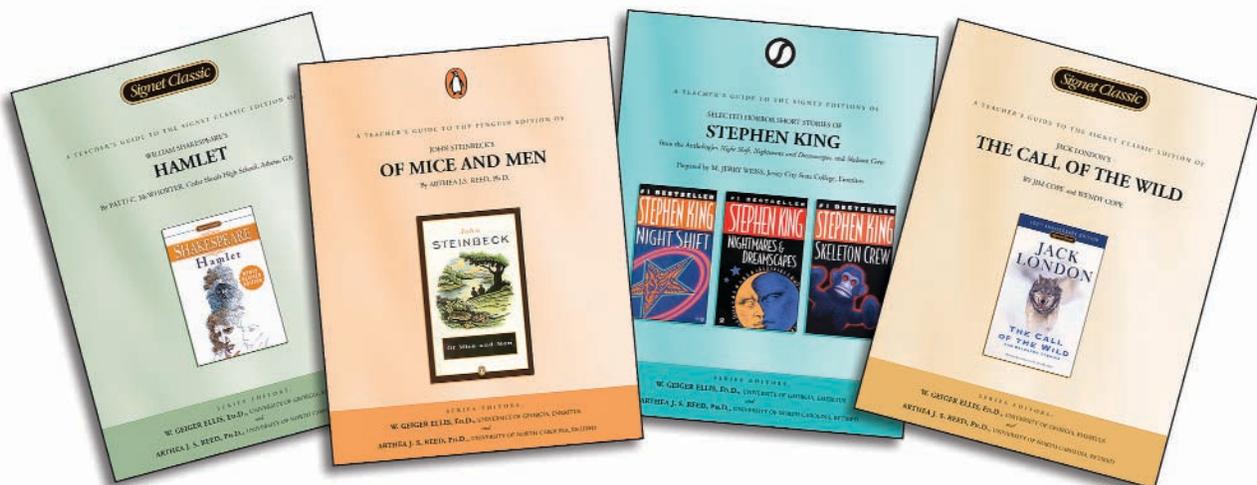
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