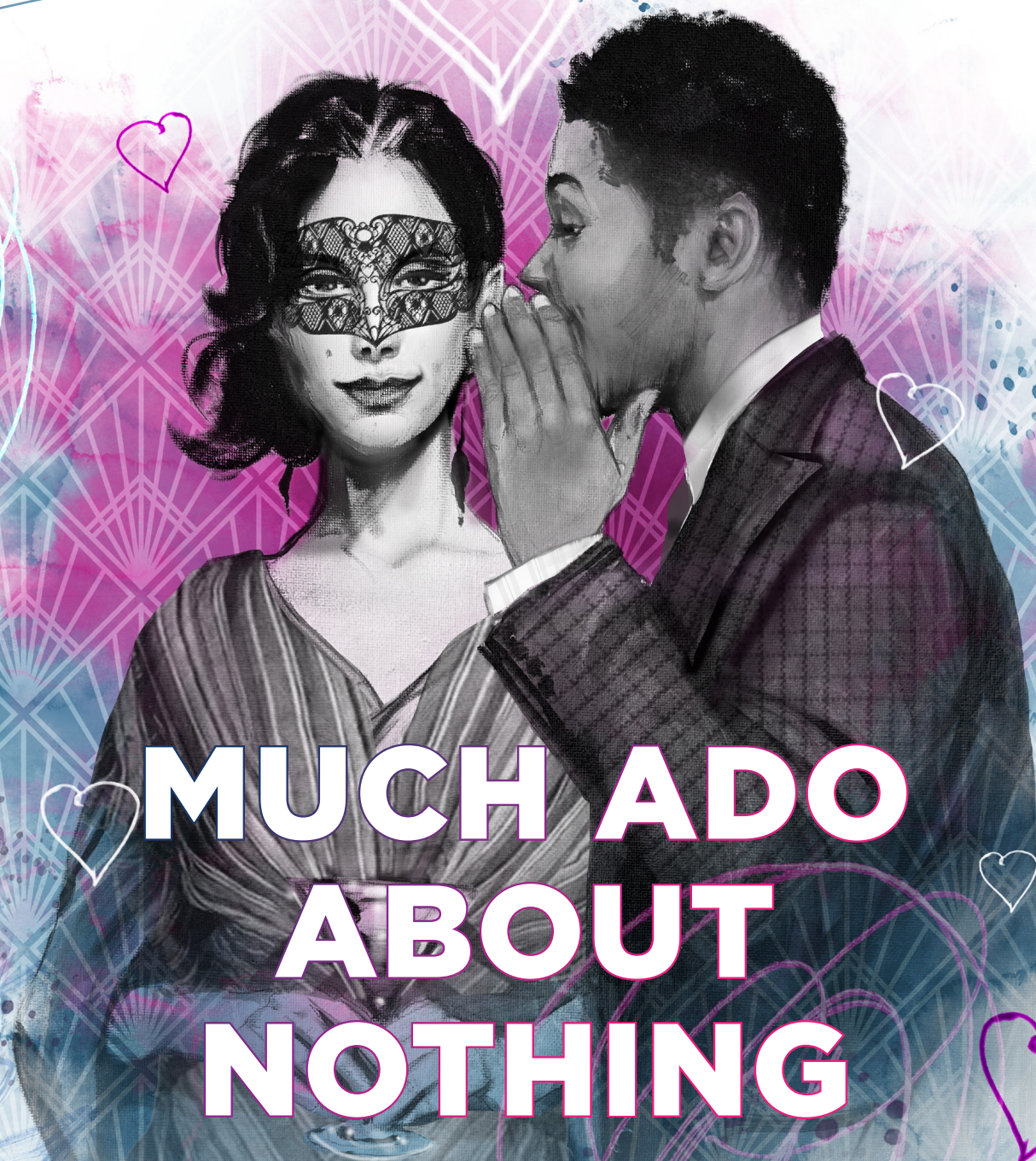




DENVER CENTER FOR THE  
PERFORMING ARTS  
Theatre Company

# INSIDE OUT

A STUDY GUIDE FOR EDUCATORS



## MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING



# INSIDE OUT

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***Much Ado About Nothing***

By **William Shakespeare**

Directed by **Chris Coleman**

**SEP 30 - NOV 6**  
**KILSTROM THEATRE**

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# SYNOPSIS

## Act I

*Much Ado About Nothing* is set in Messina, Sicily in Italy. The Governor of Messina, Leonato, lives with his daughter, Hero, and her cousin, the Lady Beatrice. Leonato receives a message that his friend, the Duke Don Pedro, has returned from battle and plans to visit the family's home with some of his fellow soldiers, including Claudio, who is a companion of the Duke and Benedick (a lord who vows he will never marry). Upon their return from war, Claudio falls in love with Hero, while Benedick verbally spars with Beatrice.

## Act II

To celebrate the return of the soldiers, Leonato holds a masked ball. This event also helps arrange the engagement of Claudio and Hero, wherein Don Pedro serves in Claudio's stead to woo her. At the same time, Don Pedro's Machiavellian and jealous half-brother, Don John, devises a plan to upend the engagement and cause upheaval in the community. With his comrades and fellow soldiers Borachio and Conrad, Don John devises a plot to deceive Claudio, Don John, and the rest of the court that Hero has lost her virginity and cheated on him before the wedding.

## Act III

Because of their verbal repartee and flirty witticisms, Hero, Claudio, Leonato, and Don Pedro decide Benedick and Beatrice should be together and device a plan that will lead them to connect. In their plot, Benedick and Beatrice overhear from the strategists that the other has fallen in love with them, thus making them realize they are in fact in love with each other. Contrastingly, Don John alerts Claudio and the Duke to secretly watch Hero's bedroom window, where they see Margaret (Hero's maid and also confidant) interact with Borachio. They mistake Margaret for Hero, as Don John and his men planned, and think she has cheated on Claudio.

## Act IV

At Hero's wedding, the deceived Claudio denounces her. Hero, crestfallen and shocked, faints, as all the men, except Benedick, are appalled and berate her. Claudio leaves Hero, seemingly dead. Hero's priest creates a plan with her, Leonato, Beatrice, and Benedick to pretend that Hero is dead until her name can be cleared. The village constable Dogberry, and his men of the guard, overhear Borachio and Conrad brag about the ruse they carried out on Claudio and Don Pedro. They arrest the pair.

## Act V

Dogberry's incriminating findings are ultimately discovered by Leonato, Don Pedro and Claudio. As amends for thinking he's caused Hero's death, Leonato asks Claudio to marry Beatrice in her place. Claudio agrees. At the wedding, by hiding under their veils, Beatrice and Hero reveal themselves. Hero is alive, and Claudio is joyous. They are married, and Benedick and Beatrice announce that they will marry as well. Offstage, Don John has been captured while trying to escape. A future trial will take place. The rest of the community celebrates the union of the couples.

## QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION:

- 1) What is Leonato's relationship with the women throughout the play?
- 2) What agency do the female characters have in the play? Who has more agency and why?
- 3) How important is class in the play?
- 4) How is Hero physically described?
- 5) How does Benedick treat the women in the play?
- 6) What's the war the soldiers return from?
- 7) What is slander? What is its role in the play?
- 8) Who is morally right and wrong in the play?
- 9) How is Dogberry treated throughout the play?
- 10) What happens to Don John at the end of the play?

# CHARACTER BREAKDOWN

**Hero** is Leonato's daughter. She is a young, demure woman, who doesn't speak much, especially in Act I. She is extremely close to her family, especially her father and cousin, Beatrice. Eventually, she devises a plan to help bring Beatrice and Benedick together, in which Benedick overhears her say that Beatrice is in love with Benedick and vice versa. This is an example of slander, as well, but doesn't lead to harm.

**Beatrice** is Leonato's niece, whose parents have died and so she lives in her uncle's household. She is older than Hero and has strong reservations to marry. She often quarrels/flirts with Benedick. She staunchly defends her cousin's honor and contends that she wants to kill Claudio for his wrongdoing.

**Leonato** is the governor of Messina and the father of Hero and uncle of Beatrice. He has an excellent relationship with the women and is often around them. He does initially believe the slander but soon is convinced otherwise.

**Claudio** is a Count of Don Pedro's charge. He did well in war. He is from Florence and has fallen in love with Hero. He can be easily swayed by what he sees rather than asking deeper questions.

**Benedick** is a well-respected man of Padua, serving in Don Pedro's army. They are close friends. He's very clever and witty and determined to remain a bachelor. He often picks up new best friends, such as Claudio, frequently for financial purposes.

**Don Pedro** is the Prince of Aragon. He has just won in war against his illegitimate half-brother Don John. They find peace with each other, though they avoid each other. He is a bachelor himself and does propose to Beatrice. He does understand when she declines him. He assists in wooing Hero for Claudio and also in her slander and admits he was wrong in believing Don John as well. He helps restore peace to the community.

**Don John** is an illegitimate, half-brother of the Prince of Aragon. He has just lost in battle, likely is in unrequited love with Hero, and wants to see the demise of the community. He is Machiavellian and devises the entire slander plot to cause disharmony.

**Borachio** is one of Don John's crew. He's an acholic, who has an affair with Margaret, which is part of the slander plot. His bragging about it is overheard by Dogberry's crew.

**Dogberry** is the constable of the Watch, whose job is to patrol the streets of Messina at night and keep order. Dogberry is qualified for his job (although his competency is questioned) but is a person lacking in words, class, and wits, which doesn't do well in society. He surrounds himself with more competent support staff.

**Margaret** is Hero's lady-in-waiting and good friend, in whom she also confides. Margaret is very flirtatious and has an affection for Borachio. She is torn when Hero is wrongly accused of slander, as she realizes that she unknowingly was part of the ruse and misused.

**Ursula** is a gentle-woman, who cares for Leonato's family. She's almost like an aunt figure and sounding board for Leonato.

**Friar Francis** presides over the wedding and also helps devise the plot to correct the slander against Hero.

**Antonio** is Leonato's older brother.

**Balthasar** is an attendant of Don Pedro's and a musician

**Conrade** is part of Don John's crew.

**The Watchman** are Dogberry's crew and overhear Borachio and Conrade's speak of Don John's plan of the slander against Hero.

## QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION:

- 1) What is Benedick's relationship with the other soldiers in the play?
- 2) What is Don Pedro's relationship with Don John?
- 3) What is Margaret's standing in the play?
- 4) Can you map Benedick and Beatrice's relationship throughout the play?
- 5) Who is the primary couple throughout the play and why?

# WHO WAS WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE?

William Shakespeare was born on April 23, 1564 in Stratford-upon-Avon, England. He was the son of John and Mary Arden Shakespeare. William was likely educated at the King Edward VI Grammar School in Stratford, where he learned Latin and some Greek and read the Classical Greek and Roman plays. At 18, he married Anne Hathaway, a woman seven or eight years his senior. Together, they had two daughters: Susanna, who was born in 1583, and Judith (whose twin brother, Hamnet, died in boyhood), born in 1585.

Little is known about Shakespeare's activities between 1585 and 1592. Robert Greene's *A Groatsworth of Wit* alludes to him as an actor and playwright. Shakespeare may have gone to London to begin his apprenticeship as an actor. Due to the plague, the London theaters were often closed between June 1592 and April 1594. During that period, Shakespeare probably had some income from his patron, Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton, to whom he dedicated his first two poems, "Venus and Adonis" (1593) and "The Rape of Lucrece" (1594). The former was a long narrative poem depicting the rejection of Venus by Adonis, his death, and the consequent disappearance of beauty from the world. Despite conservative objections to the poem, it was immensely popular and was reprinted six times during the nine years following its publication.

In 1594, Shakespeare joined the Lord Chamberlain's company of actors, the most popular of the companies acting at Court. In 1599, Shakespeare joined a group of Chamberlain's Men that would form an association to build and operate a new playhouse: the Globe, which became the most famous theater of its time. With his share of the income from the Globe, Shakespeare was able to purchase New Place, his home in Stratford.

While Shakespeare was regarded as the foremost dramatist of his time, evidence indicates that both he and his contemporaries looked to poetry, not playwriting, for enduring fame. Shakespeare's sonnets were composed between 1593 and 1601, though not published until 1609. A sonnet is a poem of 14 lines using any of a number of formal rhyme schemes, in English typically having ten syllables per line. *The Sonnets of Shakespeare*, consists of 154 sonnets, all written in the form of three quatrains and a couplet that is now recognized as Shakespearean. The sonnets fall into two groups: sonnets 1-126, addressed to a beloved friend, a handsome and noble young man, and sonnets 127-152, to a malignant but fascinating "Dark Lady," who the poet loves in spite of himself. Nearly all of Shakespeare's sonnets examine the inevitable decay of time, and the immortalization of beauty and love in poetry.

In his poems and plays, Shakespeare invented thousands of words, often combining or contorting Latin, French, and native roots. His impressive expansion of the English language, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, includes such words as: arch-villain, birthplace, bloodsucking, courtship, dewdrop, downstairs, fanged, heartsore, hunchbacked, leapfrog, misquote, pageantry, radiance, schoolboy, stillborn, watchdog, and zany.

Shakespeare wrote more than 30 plays. These are usually divided into four categories: histories, comedies, tragedies, and romances. His earliest plays were primarily comedies and histories such as *Henry VI* and *The Comedy of Errors*, but in 1596, Shakespeare wrote *Romeo and Juliet*, his second tragedy, and over the next dozen years he would return to the form, writing the plays for which he is now best known: *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, and *Antony and Cleopatra*. In his final years, Shakespeare turned to the romantic with *Cymbeline*, *A Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest*.



*This was long thought to be the only portrait of William Shakespeare that had any claim to have been painted from life, until another possible life portrait, the Cobbe portrait, was revealed in 2009. The portrait is known as the 'Chandos portrait' after a previous owner, James Brydges, 1st Duke of Chandos. It was the first portrait to be acquired by the National Portrait Gallery in 1856. The artist may be a painter called John Taylor who was an important member of the Painter-Stainers' Company. (public domain)*

Only 18 of Shakespeare's plays were published separately in quarto editions during his lifetime; a complete collection of his works did not appear until the publication of *The First Folio* in 1623, several years after his death. Nonetheless, his contemporaries recognized Shakespeare's achievements. Francis Meres cited "honey-tongued" Shakespeare for his plays and poems in 1598, and the Chamberlain's Men rose to become the leading dramatic company in London, installed as members of the royal household in 1603.

Sometime after 1612, Shakespeare retired from the stage and returned to his home in Stratford. He drew up his will in January of 1616, which included his famous bequest to his wife of his "second best bed." He died on April 23, 1616 and was buried two days later at Stratford Church.

From [Poets.org](https://poets.org), *Academy of American Poets*, 8/1/22, <https://poets.org/poet/william-shakespeare>

## QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION:

- 1) Have you read any other Shakespeare's other plays? If so, what?
- 2) Where is Stratford-upon-Avon?
- 3) What's the plague that Shakespeare kept avoiding?
- 4) Who are the Lord Chamberlain's Men? Who are the King's Men?
- 5) What is the Blackfriars?
- 6) What is the Old Globe?
- 7) What is a sonnet? Can you choose a sonnet and analyze it?
- 8) What's a word Shakespeare invented?
- 9) When did Shakespeare become a writer?
- 10) What was Shakespeare's family's trade?

## TIMELINE OF SHAKESPEARE'S LIFE

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <b>1564</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• William Shakespeare born in Stratford-upon-Avon</li></ul>  | <b>1598</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Shakespeare is first mentioned as a sonneteer and author of 12 plays in <i>Palladis Tamia</i></li></ul>  |
| <b>1582</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Shakespeare marries Anne Hathaway</li></ul>  | <b>1599</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Shakespeare's father is granted a confirmation of arms; Shakespeare's acting company takes down its old theater and uses the timber to build the Globe</li></ul> |
| <b>1583</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Shakespeare's first child, Susanna, is born</li></ul>  | <b>1600</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Extracts from Shakespeare's plays and poetry appear in <i>Bel-vedere</i>, the first printed literary commonplace book to include plays</li></ul>                 |
| <b>1585</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Shakespeare's twins, Judith and Hamnet, are born</li></ul>   | <b>1601</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Shakespeare's father, John Shakespeare, dies</li></ul>   |
| <b>1592</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Shakespeare is first alluded to as a playwright, in Robert Greene's <i>A Groatesworth of Wit</i></li></ul>   | <b>1602</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The heralds dispute the legitimacy of a group of coat of arms, including Shakespeare's; Shakespeare ratifies his purchase of New Place</li></ul>                 |
| <b>1593</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Shakespeare's first printed poem, "Venus and Adonis", appears</li></ul>                                      | <b>1603</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Shakespeare's acting company, the Lord Chamberlain's Men, becomes the King's Men at the accession of James I; <i>Hamlet</i> appears in print</li></ul>           |
| <b>1594</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Shakespeare's first printed play, <i>Titus Andronicus</i>, appears</li></ul>                                 | <b>1607</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Shakespeare's daughter Susanna marries John Hall</li></ul>   |
| <b>1596</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Shakespeare's father, John Shakespeare, is granted a coat of arms; Shakespeare's son, Hamnet, dies</li></ul> |  |
| <b>1597</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Shakespeare purchases New Place in Stratford-upon-Avon</li></ul>   |  |

### 1608

- Shakespeare's mother, Mary (Arden) Shakespeare, dies; his granddaughter Elizabeth is born

### 1609

- Shakespeare's sonnets appears in print

### 1613

- Shakespeare purchases the Blackfriars gatehouse in London; the Globe burns down during a performance of *Henry VIII* and is rebuilt within a year

### 1616

- Shakespeare writes his will; his daughter Judith marries Thomas Quiney; Shakespeare dies

### 1623

- *The First Folio* is published; Shakespeare's widow Anne dies.

From "Timeline for Shakespeare's Life," Folger Shakespeare Library, 8/1/22, <https://shakespearedocumented.folger.edu/timeline-shakespeares-life>.

## QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION:

- 1) What major world events were concurrently happening on the timeline?
- 2) When was the production of each of Shakespeare's plays?
- 3) On the timeline and past it, when are some of his premieres and major productions through history? Why did you highlight these productions?

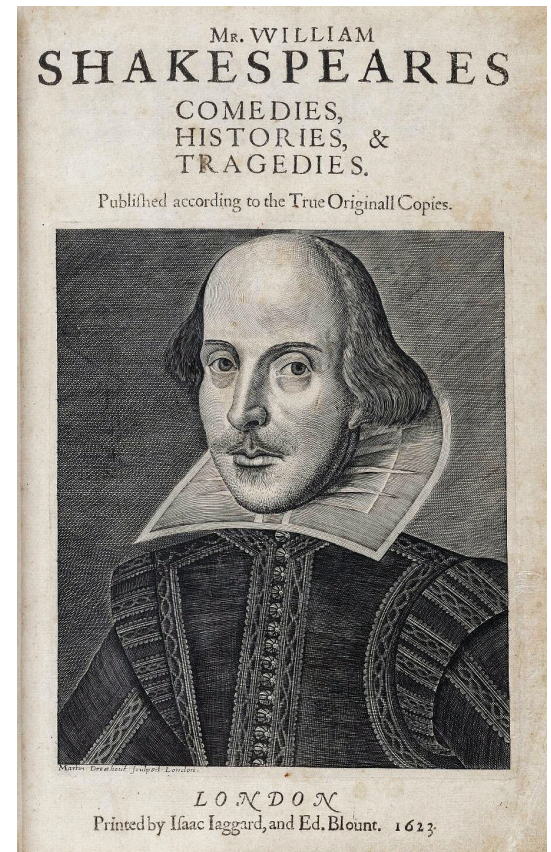
## THE FIRST FOLIO AND THE QUARTOS

Printed in 1623, *The First Folio*, the first published collection of Shakespeare's plays, was produced seven years after his death, with the title *Mr. William Shakespeare's Comedies, Histories & Tragedies*. A folio is an extensive book created by folding printed sheets of paper in half, with each sheet forming four pages. This form was usually designated for history, religion, and other subjects of note. *The First Folio* was the first folio ever published in England devoted exclusively to plays. Prior to 1623, about half of Shakespeare's plays were published in quartos, which are small, one-play books made by folding sheets of paper twice, thus creating eight pages per sheet.

Quartos are like paperbacks of today, and relatively few of them survived. *Much Ado About Nothing* was printed in a quarto. There was only one edition of it (see image). "The play was registered with the Stationers' Company, along with *Henry IV Part 2*, on August 23, 1600 by Andrew Wise and William Aspley, marking the first time Shakespeare's name appeared in the *Register*. "The edition was printed for Wise and Aspley soon thereafter, around two years after it was first written and performed. The text of the edition seems to have been set from a working draft of the play, for in several places the names of the actors are used instead of the characters." The quarto edition of *Much adoe about nothing* is archived at the British Library in London. The play was printed again as part of *The First Folio* in 1623. The Folio edition corrected the stage directions and made additions to the directions about the play's music. Scholars believe the *Folio* edition is sourced from the text used in performance and the quarto is Shakespeare's own manuscript.

A folio was a more expensive and a sturdier physical binding, so it was more likely to survive.

The first anthology of his work groups his plays into these categories: comedies, histories, and tragedies. From the 36 plays included in *The First Folio*, 18 never had prior publication. The 18 plays that appear first in the *Folio* (and not in the quartos, like *Much Ado*) are *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *As*



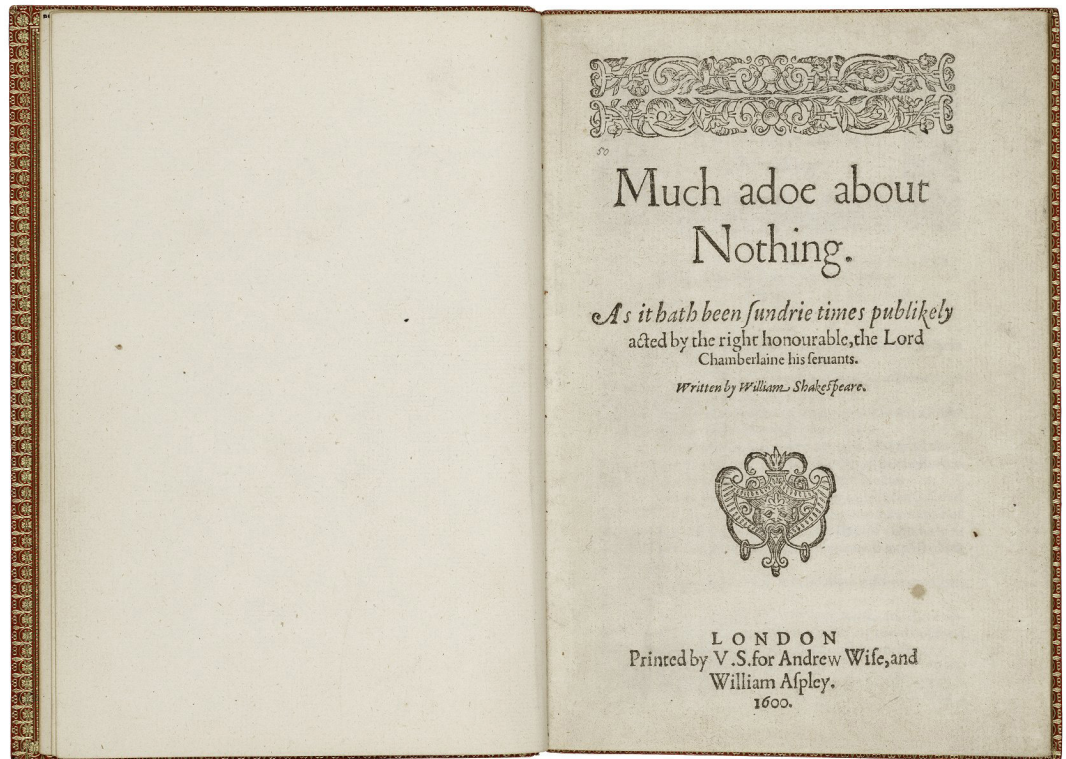
William Shakespeare - *Mr. William Shakespeares Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies*, artist Martin Droeshout, (public domain)

*You Like It, The Comedy of Errors, Coriolanus, Cymbeline, Henry VI, Part 1, Henry VIII, Julius Caesar, King John, Macbeth, Measure for Measure, The Taming of the Shrew, The Tempest, Timon of Athens, Twelfth Night, The Two Gentlemen of Verona, and The Winter's Tale.*

The printed editions in *The First Folio*, are the closest copies we have to the plays as Shakespeare wrote them. About 750 copies of *The First Folio* exist, which was a typical print run in the 1600s. A total of 235 *First Folios* are currently known to have survived, including two additional copies that were discovered in 2016. *The First Folio* was created in 1616 by his friends and colleagues, John Heminge and Henry Condell, who were also partners in the King's Men acting company. They were able to bring together his plays. The *Folio* was published "by a London syndicate headed by Edward Blount and Isaac Jaggard. Isaac's father, William Jaggard, printed it at his London printing shop, but he died before the book was completed. Isaac Jaggard took over the shop after his father's death" and completed the publication.

In 1600, *The First Folio* cost 15 shillings and a copy with a plain calf binding cost a pound or 20 shillings, which is about \$200. The title page of *The First Folio* includes a portrait of William Shakespeare with an authentic engraving by the artist Martin Droeshout. The portrait was authenticated by the editors of the *Folio*. As it was printed, *The First Folio* was copyedited, creating small differences in the copies of the 750. For instance, some copies acquired notes and drawings and some copies were damaged and have missing pages. *The First Folio* preserved 18 of Shakespeare's plays, which is critical. But some of the other 18 plays in *The First Folio* vastly vary from previous editions. *The First Folio* includes material that might have been lost.

From "What is a First Folio," Folger Shakespeare Library, 8/1/22, <https://www.folger.edu/shakespeare/first-folio/faq>. And "Much Ade about Nothing," Folger Shakespeare Library, 8/1/22, <https://shakespearedocumented.folger.edu/resource/document/much-ado-about-nothing-first-edition>.



Creator: William Shakespeare

Title: Much adoe about nothing. As it hath been sundrie times publikely acted by the right honourable, the Lord Chamberlaine his seruants. Written by William Shakespeare.

Date: London : printed by V[alentine]. S[immes]. for Andrew Wise, and William Aspley, 1600.

Repository: Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington, DC, USA

Call number and opening: STC 22304, title page

## QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION:

- 1) What were other plays, in addition to *Much Ado About Nothing*, that were printed as quartos first?
- 2) What are some of the specific differences between the *Folio* and quarto publication of *Much Ado About Nothing*?
- 3) Did *The First Folio* tour the U.S.? Where did it tour?
- 4) Who were the editors of *The First Folio*?
- 5) Have there been any plays about the creation of *The First Folio*? If so, where have they been developed?

# ELEMENTS OF COMEDY

The following are *key characteristics of Shakespeare's comedies*.

## Marriage

- Comedies often result in marriage.

## Misconception

- In Shakespearean comedies much that is humorous arises from the misconceptions between lovers. In *Much Ado about Nothing* the friends of Benedick and Beatrice convince them that they are in love with each other.

## Disguise

- Shakespeare often uses disguise in comedy.

## Settings

- Often the comedies take place in imagined, idyllic, or magical settings.
- Tropes of Comedy from John Mullan's article "An Introduction to Shakespeare's Comedy."

## QUESTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION:

- 1) Provide specific examples how every one of these traits of Shakespearean comedies applies to *Much Ado About Nothing*.

# FACTS ON THE WRITING AND PREMIERE OF *MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING*:

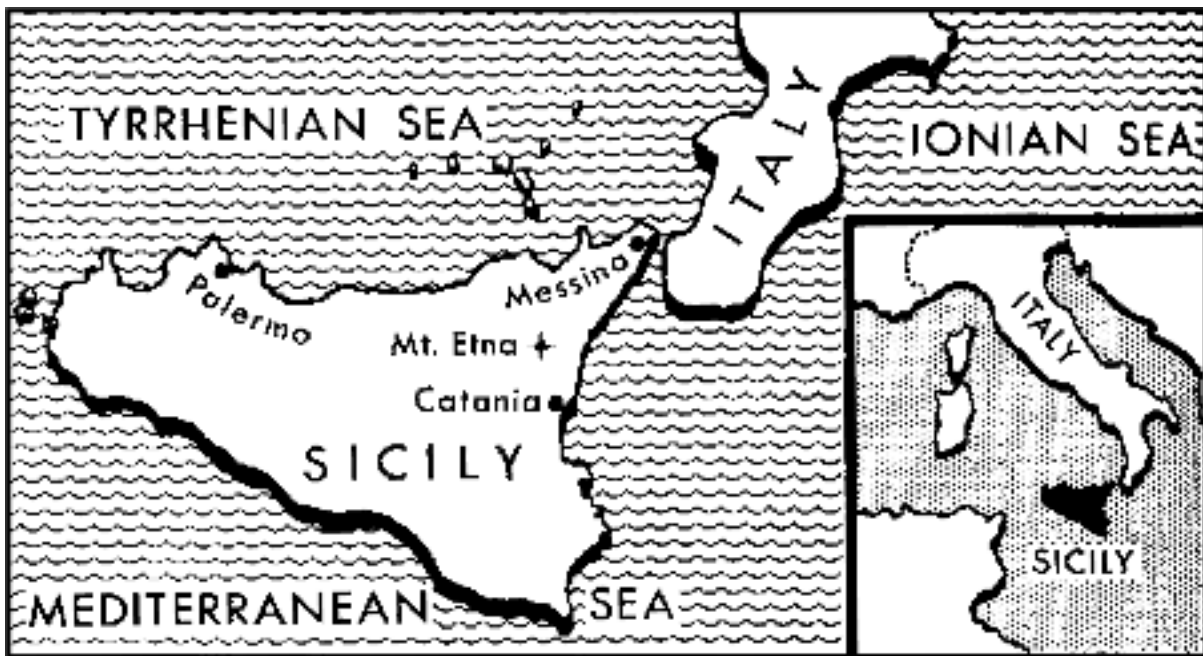
- *Much Ado About Nothing* was produced in 1598 when William Shakespeare was in his middle 30s.
- The play's alternative title, according to Charles I and the Second Folio, was *Benedick and Beatrice* or *Benedick and Betteris*.
- Shakespeare wrote *Much Ado About Nothing* midway through his career. It is considered one of the early or even his mid comedies. He wrote *Titus Andronicus*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Richard II*, *Henry IV* before it. *Hamlet* shortly followed it.
- *Much Ado About Nothing* is considered more unified than his other comedies, with its two overlapping plots and a consistent narrative. But it fluctuates between tragedy, romance, and comedy.
- Messina is a self-absorbed society in the context of the play. Appearances are very important to this society. The play's language reflects Messina's upper-class society with its puns, antithesis, alliteration, euphemism, syntax, and repetition. For many reasons, including their wit, Beatrice and Benedick, are considered of great esteem and interest in their Italian hamlet.
- The Lord Chamberlain's men were the first to perform *Much Ado About Nothing*, and the beloved actor Will Kempe played Dogberry.
- The first production was well received by audiences. But throughout time, many critics feel that the play is less serious than many of Shakespeare's sonnets.
- There were many cases of slander during the Elizabethan era, because of the power of the Church. They were often tried in court. For instance, a trial is staged in one of the source texts – Matteo Bandello's *La Prima Parte de le Novelle*. It's intriguing Shakespeare decided not to stage a trial in the context of the play.
- The title of the play reminds us that life is serious but that as humans we pass much of our time on dailyness of life.

# NOTES ON MESSINA, SICILY, ITALY

(sourced from *Much Ado About Nothing*, Linda Eller, ed. DCPA: *Inside Out*, January 2001):

Messina is the third largest city in Sicily. It lies on the northeastern coast of the island, on the strait of Messina, a body of water separating Sicily from the landmass of Italy. Today it is noted for its exports of fruit, wine, silk, and damask. Historians believe that pirates founded Messina in the 700s BC. About 500 BC, Greek colonists settled there and gave the city its name. The First Punic War was fought for control of Messina and, at the end of this war, the colony fell to the Romans. Despite wars and earthquakes, the city has remained, rebuilding after each disaster.

## MESSINA:



## QUESTIONS OF CONTEXT:

- 1) What is Sicily known for?
- 2) How many Italian Americans live in the U.S.? How many Sicilians?
- 3) What's the population of Sicily today?
- 4) What other Shakespeare plays are set in Sicily?
- 5) What's the political connection between Sicily and Italy?

## SOURCES TEXTS AND INSPIRATIONS FOR *MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING*

There are three sources for the Claudio and Hero plot (deemed the main plot, as the narrative action hinges on it) in the play and Benvolio and Beatrice (usually the preferred but not main plot) is completely original. The primary source for the main plot is from the Italian poet and novelist Ludovico Ariosto (1474 to 1533). The inspiration is sourced from Book 5 of the long narrative poem "Orlando Furioso." The work was published in the writer's native Italian in 1561 and then it was translated and published in English, by Peter Beverley, in 1591. This preceded *Much Ado About Nothing's* creation by seven years.

Ariosto set it in Scotland, and it's told from the perspective of Dalinda, a lady's maid, who is analogous with the character Margaret. Dalinda is the lover of knight Polynesso, Duke of Alban. He, in turn, wants to

marry her mistress Genevra, surrogate for Hero, daughter of the Scottish King. She loves the Italian knight Ariodante. Polynesso asks Dalinda to meet him in the clothing of her mistress to trick Ariodante. When the claim is brought to Ariodante, he defends Genevra. After many accusations of slander and an attempted suicide, all is rectified.

This narrative inspired many adaptations, including the 1591 adaption by Sir John Harrington written in verse. Inspired by the work, Edmund Spenser wrote *The Faerie Queene*, an allegory published in 1596. *The Faerie Queene* became its own inspiration for Shakespeare and serves as Mercutio's Queen Mab speech in *Romeo and Juliet*, published in 1597.

Book 2 of *The Faerie Queene* is a second source for *Much Ado*. The third major source is from the 20th story from the *Novelle* by Matteo Bandello (1480 to 1562). He was an Italian writer, soldier, monk, and, later, a Bishop mostly known for his novellas. This work was published in Italy in 1582 and translated into French in 1582 in Belleforest's *Histoires Tragiques*. The setting of the story is actually Messina, such as in *Much Ado About Nothing*, and again there is lover Sir Timbreo, his bride-to-be Fenicia, and a jealous rival Sir Girondo, who creates a "scene" of infidelity. Sir Timbreo de Cardona falls in love with Fenicia, a daughter of a poor family with ancient lineage. Because Fenicia is chaste, he must marry her. Another suitor, in love with Fenicia, trying to stop the marriage, through a third party, slanders Fenicia. Another reversal of deception is pursued, and Fenicia is overwhelmed with shame. She falls into a comma and is laid out for burial. Meanwhile, the suitor who caused the harm, Sir Girondo, becomes suicidal. Sir Timbreo also confesses his culpability. A year later, after Fenicia regains her strength, she marries Timbreo a year later.

Although, Shakespeare was inspired by these dynamic Italian and, once removed, English source texts, much of the work seem to be fashioned from his own imagination. The characters of Beatrice and Benedick, along with Dogberry, Verges, and The Watch are all thought to be original Shakespearean creations.



Creator: Reverend Matthew William Peters

Date: 1788-1789

Owner\*: Carnegie Museum of Art

Credit: Gift of Alex C. Speyer, Jr., Darthea Speyer, and Nora Fromboluti

Copyright: Image © Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- 1) What other inspirations have Shakespeare in the creation of his plays?
- 2) What contemporary works has Shakespeare inspired?

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# QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

## Pre-Performance questions

1. What prior knowledge do you have about *Much Ado About Nothing*? Which moments do you expect to see highlighted in the play?
2. Why do first impressions carry such weight? Do our impressions soften or harden with time? Does everything always work out for the best?
3. Do you believe in love at first sight? What are the benefits and problems that may arise from your belief in love at first sight? What is the difference between love and infatuation?
4. How do traditions and rituals dictate the future? What are the consequences when someone challenges established traditions?

## Post-Performance Questions

1. How do the scenic elements of set design, costuming, lighting, and sound help tell the story? Which are the most effective and why?
2. What does the land of Messina represent? Why does Shakespeare set the play in Messina?
3. How would you describe the relationship between Benedick and Beatrice? How would you describe the relationship between Claudio and Hero? Explain which couple you believe to be the main focus of the play.
4. How would you characterize the love stories in the play? How do the relationships change in the story?
5. How would you describe the relationships between the ruling class and the other characters? How is class and status presented in the play?
6. What does this play say about gender and the role of gender in society?
7. Why does Don Pedro offer to woo Hero for Claudio and why does Claudio allow Don Pedro to woo Hero?
8. Why does Don John plan to destroy the match of Hero and Claudio?
9. Why does Don Pedro decide to be the matchmaker between Benedick and Beatrice?
10. How does Dogberry and the Guard fit into the world of the play?
11. How do you think the love stories end for the different characters? Are all things resolved or do we see some problems on the horizon?

# ACTIVITIES

## The Dating Game

1. Divide the class into smaller groups. Each group will focus on one character from the play *Much Ado About Nothing* and will create both a dating profile of the character and a list of potential questions for their suitors.
2. To create the dating profile, start with information that you know from the text or from the performance about the character. This would include how the character describes themselves or what others characters say about them. List some of the characters mannerisms and characteristics. Create some fictional facts about the character to fill in some of the blanks about likes and dislikes.
3. With your group, create a list of three or more questions that the chosen character would ask to potential suitors. What information would they like to gather about the other characters? What questions could they ask that are designed to explore, compare and contrast what the other character may have in common with them?
4. Once the profiles and questions have been created, share the information by choosing a representative from the group to play the character and have them ask the questions to the other representative and answer the questions to the best of their ability.
5. Discuss what questions and answers surprised them and which questions and answers they agree or disagree.

**Colorado Writing PG:** Articulate the position of self and others using experiential and material logic.

**Colorado Drama and Theatre Arts PG:** Employ drama and theatre skills, and articulate the aesthetics of a variety of characters and roles.

## Love Letters

Write a love letter from one character to another in the play. Describe your feelings, your hopes, how the other treats you and what you desire from the relationship. Which form of language will you use? What happens if we change these into tweets or status updates?

**Challenge** – write your love letter as a Sonnet.

**Colorado Writing PG:** Effectively use content-specific language, style, tone and text structure to compose or adapt writing for different audiences and purposes.

**Colorado Writing PG:** Write with clear focus, coherent organization, sufficient elaboration, and detail.

## Perspective Writing-Personal Narratives for characters

1. The other characters in *Much Ado About Nothing* only have a partial view of what is happening during the play. Select an important moment from a play that has more than one person in attendance. For example, when Claudio meets Hero. Write a short narrative from Hero's perspective about this meeting.
2. From this moment, the students are to pick a character from the story and to give the character's perspective and attitude of what transpired. Explanations of how they felt about this moment and how it affects them should be explored.

3. Each person will write a short monologue describing the moment from the character's perspective of what they experienced.
4. Compare the monologues about the event from other characters that were involved. Discuss the similarities and differences that arose during the writing process. Was there general agreement of what happened or marked differences? Why were the moments similar or different? Were they subtle or obvious variations? Did the class agree on what was important to include and why? If not, how would the elimination of some elements change the way the story would be understood when read?

**Colorado Writing PG:** Articulate the position of self and others using experiential and material logic.

**Colorado Writing PG:** Write with clear focus, coherent organization, sufficient elaboration, and detail.

## Contemporizing Shakespeare

The director of *Much Ado About Nothing* chose to set the play during a more contemporary time rather than its original time. This is a common practice in the production of Shakespeare because the language and stories are universal to any time period.

1. Do you think *Much Ado About Nothing* would translate into the United States in 2022? Try setting the characters in Messina High School, a modern high school in the United States. What type of student, teacher or administrator would each character be? Who would be a cheerleader? A football player? A computer wizard? Class president? History teacher? Principal?
2. Where would you set each scene? A locker room? The cafeteria? The office?
3. Create a short scene with two of your modern-day characters. How does the situation stay the same, but mannerisms and language differ?
4. What other settings would adapt well to the play? Create a list of potential settings. Are there some settings that are more adaptable than others? Why are some settings more adaptable than others?

**Colorado Writing PG:** Articulate the position of self and others using experiential and material logic.

**Colorado Drama and Theatre Arts PG:** Employ drama and theatre skills and articulate the aesthetics of a variety of characters and roles.



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