



MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

**By William Shakespeare
Directed by Robert Ramirez**

AMERICAN PLAYERS THEATRE STUDY GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to APT's Study Guide, created to accompany the Student Matinee performances of William Shakespeare's ***Much Ado About Nothing***. Use it however you see fit - before or after the performance, whatever is most valuable to your class.

In this packet, you'll find a number of resources designed to help your class better understand and engage with the play. Use them all, or select the sections that best suit your needs. We hope you enjoy APT's production of ***Much Ado About Nothing***. Find **more information on the play and APT's education resources online at americanplayers.org**.

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CHARACTER GUIDE

GET TO KNOW THE VILLAGE OF MESSINA.



Beatrice played by **Jessica Ko**

A niece to Leonato and cousin to Hero. She is quick-witted and enjoys her independence. She bickers with Benedick whenever given the opportunity.



Benedick played by **Marcus Truschinski**

A young lord of Padua, he initially claims he will never marry. In fact, he makes fun of his friend Claudio for falling in love with Hero.



Hero played by **Samantha Newcomb**

The only child of Leonato and a cousin to Beatrice, Hero falls in love with Claudio. Much of the plot centers on their (almost) wedding.



Claudio played by **Ronald Román-Meléndez**

A young lord of Florence, he falls in love with Hero and enlists the help of Don Pedro in wooing her before proposing.



Don Pedro played by **Rasell Holt**

The prince of Aragon, he is recently victorious in battle against his half-brother, Don John. He accepts Leonato's invitation to stay in Messina. He comes up with the idea to trick Beatrice and Benedick.



Leonato played by **James Ridge**

The Governor of Messina, he welcomes the returning soldiers to the town and his household. He is father to Hero and uncle to Beatrice.



Antonio played by **Lester Purry**

Brother to Leonato, he is a trusted and respected member of the community.



Ursula played by **Miranda Pepin** (right)

Gentlewoman attending to Hero, she helps trick Beatrice into admitting her feelings for Benedick.



Margaret played by **Briana J. Resa** (right)

Another gentlewoman attending to Hero, she is very flirtatious, especially with Borachio.



Don John played by **Casey Hoekstra**

Half-brother to Don Pedro, he is jealous of the new war hero Claudio, and schemes to destroy Claudio and Hero's wedding plans to get his revenge.



Conrade played by **Elizabeth Ledo**

An associate of Don John's, he and Borachio help execute his corrupt plans. Conrade famously calls Dogberry "an ass."



Borachio played by **Sam Luis Massaro**

A follower of Don John, he uses Margaret to make it look like Hero is disloyal to Claudio.



Friar Francis played by **Tim Gittings**

The priest that tries to officiate the wedding of Hero and Claudio. When Hero is accused of infidelity and embarrassed at the altar, he steps up with the plan to hide Hero until the matter is cleared up.



Dogberry played by **Triney Sandoval** (left)

A constable of Messina, he is passionate about leading the Watch in protecting the town. He is famous for mixing up his words.



Verges played by **Sam D. White**

Dogberry's partner in office, he helps interrogate Borachio and Conrade.



The Watch played by **Aaron Allen, Sydney Lolita Cusic, Harrison Farmer, Bryant Louis Bentley** and **Molly Martinez-Collins**

The eager team responsible with discovering Don John, Borachio and Conrade's plans. They attempt to protect the city of Messina under Dogberry and Verges' instruction.



Balthasar played by **Seth Ajani**

A musician in Messina, he entertains citizens and soldiers alike through his songs.

SYNOPSIS

A DESCRIPTION OF THE PLAY, FROM START TO FINISH.



Leonato is the governor of Messina. He receives word from a messenger that the Prince of Aragon, Don Pedro, and his accompanying army of lords are on the way to town after a victorious battle. Leonato's niece, Beatrice, makes fun of one of the returning soldiers, a lord named Benedick.

When the army returns, the town of Messina celebrates their arrival. Leonato welcomes everyone back from battle, including Don John, the half-brother of Don Pedro who recently tried to start a failed revolt against his own brother. Don John and his associates Conrade and Borachio thank Leonato for his hospitality, but keep at a cold distance while the rest of the army and citizens enter the city.



Beatrice and Benedick immediately start to quarrel, exchanging jabs at one another for their own entertainment.

Claudio, a young lord who has proven himself in battle and has become friends with Don Pedro and Benedick, confides in them that he has feelings for Hero, the daughter of Leonato. Don Pedro volunteers to help Claudio woo Hero at the party that night.



Antonio talks to Leonato after overhearing the conversation between Don Pedro and Claudio. He mistakenly tells Leonato that Don Pedro is actually the one in love with Hero.

Before the party that night, Leonato talks to Hero about what she'll say if she's proposed to by Don Pedro. Beatrice adds her own advice as well, telling her cousin to follow her own will and marry whomever she wants. Beatrice doubles down on her aversion to marriage.



When the guests arrive for the party, Don Pedro follows the plan of talking to Hero for Claudio. While Claudio waits, Don John - who is jealous of Claudio's popularity with his brother - lies and tells him that Don Pedro is actually going to steal Hero for himself. Claudio becomes upset and feels embarrassed that he fell for Don Pedro's trick. Benedick comes over to try and cheer the mistaken Claudio up, but doesn't succeed, so instead he just ends up talking about how Beatrice hurt his feelings.

Don Pedro returns and tells Claudio that Hero feels the same way. Realizing Don John was lying and Don Pedro actually was playing wingman (a true friend), Claudio is overjoyed and he and Hero step aside to talk about making plans to be married in a few days.



Reveling in his matchmaking abilities, Don Pedro proposes a plan to make Benedick and Beatrice fall in love. He enlists the help of Leonato, Claudio and Hero. They all agree to help trick their friends.

Don John is once again frustrated that his plans to meddle and cause a disturbance for his brother and his friends failed. Borachio, a friend to Don John, pitches a new idea. Borachio and Margaret, one of Hero's friends and gentlewomen, have a pretty flirty relationship. He thinks that he can be seen with Margaret in Hero's room and convince Claudio and Don Pedro that it's actually Hero being disloyal. Don John loves the idea and pays Borachio for his work.





The next day, Benedick is once again talking about how he could never find a woman he'd fall in love with. He overhears Don Pedro, Claudio and Leonato walking near and decides to hide and listen to their conversation. Knowing he's nearby, Don Pedro, Claudio and Leonato start to talk about how much Beatrice is in love with Benedick (much to the surprise of Benedick).

Benedick decides he must be in love with Beatrice, too.



A little bit later, Hero and Ursula tell Margaret to run and tell Beatrice that they're talking about her. When Beatrice arrives, she hides to overhear their conversation. Ursula and Hero talk about how Benedick is in love with Beatrice (much to the surprise of Beatrice).

Beatrice decides she must be in love with Benedick, too.





The night before the wedding, Don John pretends to be a good friend and tells Claudio and Don Pedro that Hero is cheating on him. When they arrive at Hero's window, Claudio and Don Pedro are convinced that Margaret is actually Hero with Borachio. Heartbroken, Claudio leaves.

That same night, the Watch, a troupe of Messina citizens tasked with patrolling the streets and ensuring no mischief is happening, are being trained by leaders Dogberry and Verges. Though their instructions may not be clear, they make up for it in passion!



Borachio tells Conrade about how he and Don John tricked Claudio while the Watch are listening. They capture both Borachio and Conrade to be questioned by the Sexton.

In the morning, Hero is getting ready for the wedding with Margaret and Ursula. While they help pick out what she plans on wearing, a sick Beatrice joins their group. Margaret and Hero tease Beatrice about Benedick before Ursula tells them the wedding is getting ready to start.





At the wedding, Claudio, Don Pedro and Don John accuse Hero of being disloyal. She and Leonato deny the accusation, but Claudio refuses to marry her. Hero faints from the shock and Claudio and Don Pedro leave.

Friar Francis, who was supposed to officiate the wedding, steps up to the defense of Hero against a frustrated Leonato. Friar Francis crafts a plan to fake Hero's death until her name is cleared to make Claudio and Don Pedro feel guilty about their actions. Hero and Leonato agree and leave with him.



A distraught Beatrice cries in the church after, upset for her cousin. Benedick stays to comfort her.

They confess their feelings for one another. Beatrice asks Benedick to defend her cousin's honor and "Kill Claudio." At first Benedick refuses, but after Beatrice gives an impassioned speech about how society won't let her fight Claudio herself, Benedick agrees. He leaves to challenge Claudio to a duel.





Later that day, Dogberry, Verges and the rest of the Watch are interrogating Conrade and Borachio semi-successfully. Before being taken away to jail, Conrade calls Dogberry "an ass." He (and the rest of the Watch) take this as a sign of extreme disrespect.

Friar Francis, who was supposed to officiate the wedding, steps up to the defense of Hero against a frustrated Leonato. Friar Francis crafts a plan to fake Hero's death until her name is cleared to make Claudio and Don Pedro feel guilty about their actions. Hero and Leonato agree and leave with him.



Leonato and Antonio bump into a distant Don Pedro and Claudio on the street. They both challenge him, but Claudio refuses to fight the old men. They tell Don Pedro and Claudio that Hero has died of grief while Borachio confesses to everyone how he helped play a hand in the action. Everyone learns that Don John has fled Messina to avoid any fallout.

Realizing the harm of his actions, Claudio asks Leonato to punish him in some way for the death of Hero. Leonato tells Claudio to marry an unknown cousin of Hero tomorrow to make up for it, as well as visit her grave and mourn her annually. He agrees.





The next day, everyone is at the church again, this time for a somber wedding. Claudio vows to love and marry the strange, veiled cousin, who is revealed to be the very-much still alive. She forgives him and the two embrace.

Benedick and Beatrice realize they've been tricked and pretend not to like each other any more in public. But after some coaxing, they confess they do love each other. Benedick asks Friar Francis to marry Beatrice and himself as well.



Word comes that Don John has been captured and brought back to Messina. Benedick urges Don Pedro not to think about him on such a happy day. Everyone dances.

ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

BY KAYCEE SWIERC, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF MUCH ADO



FOREWORD

When APT initially announced that we were doing *Much Ado About Nothing* this season, we received one overwhelming response: "That is my FAVORITE Shakespeare", and for good reason too. In my humble opinion, as a self-proclaimed expert on the subject, *Much Ado About Nothing* is one of the best - and most influential - romantic comedies of all time. Look no further than the recent success of the big-screen *Much Ado* adaptation *Anyone But You* to see that this story stands the test of time, which is why we decided to bring it to APT audiences this summer.

The pairing of this perfect Shakespeare rom-com with APT's commitment to language and its excellent company of actors and support teams provided us with the perfect opportunity to hear and experience this play anew.

In case you need a brush up on the plot, or this is the first interaction you are having with the play, here is a little synopsis to get us all on the same page: A close-knit community in Messina, Italy, centered around the house of Leonato, receives a visit from Don Pedro of Aragon and his entourage as they return home from a battle. Old flames are rekindled, in the characters of Benedick and Beatrice, and new ones are born in Hero and Claudio. But of course, because this is a Shakespeare play after all, true love faces many obstacles, some of which take a terrible toll on this family and community. In the end, Shakespeare reminds us **groundlings*** that love and forgiveness are what save us and bind us as a community.

Now, please join me as I take you through our production of *Much Ado About Nothing* as we talk about the sense of community, love, and the themes that make this story continue to resonate today.

***Groundlings**: a term used during Shakespeare's time to describe audience members who stood around the stage on the ground level to watch the show



COMMUNITY

The idea of community, both physical and metaphorical, is at the core of our production of *Much Ado About Nothing*. Inspired by our director's travels and love for Italy, we have set our play in a 17th-century coastal Mediterranean fishing town. It is beautiful, lush, and runs on the energy of its inhabitants who care for it. Everyone, regardless of class or status, works and takes pride in contributing to their community. Leonato, the leader of this great house, may be seen carrying a bucket of fish. Beatrice, who runs all of the operations within the house, will be out with other folks hanging laundry.

The community is inclusive of all people: locals, visitors, BIPOC, LGBTQ and non-binary folk. Sometimes, when audiences see a diverse company reflected on stage in a classical work, they consider it “revolutionary.” But as director Robert Ramirez said on our first day of rehearsal, “We’ve always been here, so there’s no need to explain our existence & belonging here.”

Does Messina’s love, grit, and dedication to community remind you of anything? Because it reminds me of Spring Green. APT’s idyllic grounds are a magnificent setting for the Italian seaside village of Messina. The rolling lush green 100 acres that APT sits on inspires levity, romance, and celebration, which is what we wanted to be able to see on our stage as much as possible (you will notice that the entire center section of the stage is exposed to allow Spring Green’s beauty to play a part in this production).

Spring Green resembles the world of our show not only in its beauty but also in the neighborly embrace of the folks who travel from all across the world to work at the American Players Theatre. I have never felt so embraced by a town when working on a contract. They are kind. They are warm. And oh my, do they love the theater



LOVE

Love is most definitely in the air in Messina. *Much Ado About Nothing* is a cacophony of love stories coming to a head, overwhelming the senses, and moving at a fast pace, which leads to a plot that is both hilarious and heartbreaking. To lean into the romance in our world-building, each of our design elements frames the romantic moments in an idyllic way.

Designed by **Sartje Pickett**, the music uses coastal sound elements such as birds, water, and the ocean, combined with original music inspired by the Italian Renaissance. This sonic transformation begins the moment we enter the lobby and continues until we board the bus back down the hill after the performance.

The costumes, designed by **Daniele Tyler Mathews**, feature a romantic, rustic color palette. Embracing the heat and allure of Messina, the design includes expertly constructed bodices, skirts, and corsets, highlighting the beauty and sensuality of the characters.

Dawn Chiang's lighting design highlights intimate moments and helps set the time of day, which can be challenging for outdoor theater. Even when the show is happening in broad daylight (for matinees, students, and other special performances), the lighting design creates the feeling of being in the moonlight on the amorous dance floor of Leonato's home.

Josafath Reynoso designed a set that looks well-loved rather than run-down, featuring striped turquoise, ancient gates, anchors, and roof tiles. It gives the appearance of a great house that has withstood the test of time, much like the lovers in our play who, regardless of the wear and tear of their relationships, remain steadfast with one another.

The eclectic choreography by **Brian Cowing** includes dance moves inspired by fish, which, while not the first thing that comes to mind when thinking of romance, creates some of the most alluring sea creature partner dances imaginable that help drive our lovers' story through moments of great celebration and fellowship.



DECEPTION

In our production, Messina is a place known for its welcoming festive spirit and penchant for playful deception. Among the most iconic moments in Shakespeare's repertoire are the ***gulling**** scenes in which the men trick Benedick into believing that Beatrice is in love with him, and the women similarly deceive Beatrice into thinking Benedick loves her.

These scenes are memorable not only for their witty dialogue and physical comedy but also because they serve as a culmination of the romantic hints scattered throughout the first part of the play. The actors skillfully lay these breadcrumbs, leading to a satisfying payoff when the hijinks finally ensue. The audience, drawn in by the text and staging, eagerly anticipates the moment when Beatrice and Benedick will succumb to love, feeling almost as if they are part of the deception themselves.

While this dramatic device is one of the most fun parts of this play, it also is the most destructive. Our villain, Don John, uses deception to his advantage to tear Claudio and Hero apart. This is just one example of the way Shakespeare will take a thematic device that brings joy to bring an equal amount of destruction.

FOREGIVENESS

In our production, Hero transcends the typical Shakespearean ingenue, embodying both strength and piety while symbolizing hope and forgiveness. When her virginity is questioned, her true moral integrity is revealed. Claudio, her beloved, betrays her, publicly makes a false accusation against her virtue, and even threatens her, yet Hero forgives him and takes him back. As a woman, I find this challenging to accept. If this were to happen to me, I could not so easily forgive those who wronged me in such a heinous way.

****Gulling:*** To fool, deceive, mislead, or trick. It is not a bird pun in our coastal setting, although, that would be funny.

So how did we approach this? In our production, we emphasize Hero's journey toward forgiveness through transitions between scenes, showcasing her remarkable emotional intelligence and willingness to take control of the narrative that has been forced upon her by Don John. By celebrating her strength, we aim to find a path to forgiving Claudio in the end. Hero's virtues go well beyond mere chastity, emphasizing that forgiveness represents the highest form of generosity and understanding. In a divided society where forgiveness is rare, Hero's character reminds us of the crucial need for compassion and unity.



CELEBRATION

In our production of *Much Ado About Nothing*, we ensure that despite exploring deep themes like deception and forgiveness, the ending is firmly rooted in celebration. Throughout the play, while delving into these complex issues, we maintain a focus on a joyful celebration. Our festivities include a song to greet and connect with our community, dances to prepare for and welcome visitors, a celebratory song during the gulling, a dance at the fish festival, a grand white wedding, and a final dance that hints at a happily ever after. Movement, song, dance, drink, and, of course, love drives these vibrant celebrations. It is when joy overflows that the true celebration of life emerges.

We want the audience to leave the theater with their hearts brimming with love, their spirit uplifted by laughter, and a renewed sense of generosity.

We hope you enjoy the show!

“For man is a giddy thing, and this is my conclusion.”

William Shakespeare, *Much Ado About Nothing*

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS TO GET YOU CHATTING



CHECK OUT THE “WHERE DO YOU STAND?” ACTIVITY GUIDE FOR MORE INFORMATION ON BRINGING THESE QUESTIONS TO LIFE IN YOUR CLASSROOM

- 1. Trusting rumors without evidence is a good way to make decisions.**
- 2. It's acceptable to use deception for a good cause.**
- 3. Public humiliation is an appropriate way to handle personal disputes.**
- 4. First impressions are always accurate.**
- 5. People can change their nature for love.**
- 6. Friends should help in each other's romantic relationships.**
- 7. Friends should interfere in each other's romantic relationships.**
- 8. It's important to test someone's loyalty before committing to them.**
- 9. Eavesdropping is a reliable way to gather information.**
- 10. Forgiveness is essential in maintaining relationships.**
- 11. Love and infatuation are the same thing.**
- 12. Marriage is the ultimate goal of a romantic relationship.**
- 13. A person's reputation is more important than their actions.**
- 14. Witty banter is a sign of true affection.**
- 15. It's possible to fall in love with someone you initially dislike.**
- 16. Misunderstandings can strengthen relationships.**
- 17. Honor should be defended at all costs.**
- 18. One should always speak their mind, regardless of the consequences.**
- 19. Loyalty to friends is more important than loyalty to a romantic partner.**
- 20. People should be judged by their actions, not their words.**
- 21. It's important to keep one's promises, no matter the personal cost.**
- 22. People should always forgive their friends, no matter the offense.**
- 23. Appearances are often deceiving.**
- 24. Love can blossom out of friendship.**
- 25. Gossip is a harmless way to pass time.**
- 26. Jealousy can ruin relationships.**
- 27. It's important to keep one's emotions private.**
- 28. True love can survive any obstacle.**
- 29. It's better to admit a mistake than to cover it up.**
- 30. Trust should be given freely, not earned.**
- 31. It's acceptable to manipulate situations for a positive outcome.**

NEWS & MULTIMEDIA

VIDEOS, PLAYLISTS, INTERVIEWS AND MORE!



DIRECTOR'S NOTES

Program notes contributed by **Robert Ramirez, Director of *Much Ado About Nothing***

I have a long history with this play. It was my very first paid acting job – here in Wisconsin actually! - and I have been attached to several productions of it in some way or another over the span of my career. The excitement I feel at being able now to direct it at one of my favorite theaters in America is indescribable. APT's commitment to language, and the excellent company of actors and support teams here provide us with the perfect opportunity to hear and experience this play freshly, and find ourselves somewhere inside of it.

APT's idyllic grounds are a magnificent setting for the Italian seaside village of Messina, which inspires levity, romance and celebration. Inspired by my many months spent in Italy, our designers have been working with me for months on creating this world where, on the eve of a yearly feast in celebration of nature's bounty, love is born. This close-knit community, centered around the house of Leonato, receives the visit of Don Pedro of Aragon and his retinue. Old flames are rekindled, and new ones are born. But of course, true love faces obstacles, some of which take a terrible toll on this family and community.

I love this play. I love its unabashed romanticism, its witty wordplay and outright physical humor. I even love its sometimes-seeming implausibility. I also believe in its inherent messages; those of forgiveness, redemption, and most importantly, love. Love has the power to transform people and to equip them with the strength they need to endure whatever trials they face. And, ultimately, to forgive those responsible for our pain. The enduring heaviness of the world and the complexity of our modern problems has left us wanting. As the media (sometimes rightfully) bombards us with terrible news from both abroad and our own back yards, we collectively yearn for some respite, and for some small moment to breathe. Perhaps even just to laugh. Laughter is essential. We are all deserving of some lightness and laughter. I hope this play offers you the opportunity to do so.

SEASON SELECT: MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

An APT blog series for more info about current productions

FAST FACTS ON MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

Playing: Hill Theatre | June 14 - September 29

Featuring: Jessica Ko, Marcus Truschinski, Tim Gittings, Rasell Holt, Sam Luis Massaro, Samantha Newcomb, Lester Purry, Ronald Román Meléndez, James Ridge and Triney Sandoval

Genre: Shakespeare Comedy

Last Seen at APT: 2014

Go If you Liked: *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (2023), *Love's Labour's Lost* (2022), *Pride and Prejudice* (2015)

Many scholars believe *Much Ado* may have its origins in Shakespeare's early 1595 work, *Love's Labour's Lost*, especially when considering the similarities between the witty and wisecracking duos of Rosaline and Berowne and Beatrice and Benedick. Plus, there's the argument that the sequel to *Love's Labour's Lost*, sensibly titled *Love's Labour's Won*, was at one time in the works, only to be semi-scraped for pieces, resulting in the "from the vault," *Much Ado*.

Regardless of how it came to be, we can all agree that we're very glad *Much Ado* exists. Even in Shakespeare's day the play was a success from all accounts. When published in the Quarto I in 1600, the title page points out that the play has been "sundrie [several] times publikely acted," which means that, for hundreds of years, we have had a soft spot for this screwball romantic comedy. It seems we note it quite a bit.

FIND THIS POST ON THE APT WEBSITE AS PART OF OUR SEASON SELECT SERIES!

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STUDY GUIDE CREDITS

ABOUT THE PRODUCTION BY KAYCEE SWIERC
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS PROVIDED BY DAVID DANIEL
STUDY GUIDE DESIGN BY ERIN MILLEVILLE
PHOTOS BY LIZ LAUREN, 2024

