MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING
BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE
DIRECTED BY CHRIS ABRAHAM

GRADE RECOMMENDATION
Grades 6 and up.

CONTENT ADVISORY
Deals with mature themes and contains some sexual innuendo.

STUDENT MATINÉE DATES
May 7, 12, 18, 29; June 2, 11, 16, 23; September 1, 10, 16, 29; October 8, 15*, 20.
(* = Performance starts at 12:30 p.m.)

FUN FACT!
In 1980 Maggie Smith played the role of Beatrice in Much Ado About Nothing at the Stratford Festival. You may already know her from her more recent roles as Professor Minerva McGonagall in all the Harry Potter films and the Dowager Countess of Grantham in the Downton Abbey series.

SYNOPSIS
The villainous Don John, illegitimate brother of Don Pedro, Prince of Aragon, conspires to prevent the forthcoming marriage of Claudio, a Florentine lord, and Hero, the daughter of Leonato, Governor of Messina. Tricked by Don John into believing that Hero has been unfaithful to him, Claudio cruelly renounces her on their wedding day. Hero faints at the altar, and it is later given out that she has died.

Meanwhile, Hero’s cousin Beatrice and Claudio’s friend Benedick, old adversaries who have long waged a “merry war” of witty insults, have been brought by the helpful machinations of their friends to realize that they love each other. Beatrice calls on Benedick to prove his love — and avenge Hero’s honour — by killing Claudio. With great reluctance, Benedick agrees and challenges Claudio to a duel.

Tragedy is averted, however, when the bumbling but persistent night watchman Dogberry overhears one of the parties to Don John’s plot bragging about his role in it to one of his friends, and all ends happily with a surprise reunion and a double wedding.

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

GLOBAL COMPETENCIES:
• Creativity
• Learning to Learn/Self-Awareness
• Communication
• Collaboration
• Critical Thinking

GRADES 6–8:
• The Arts (Dance, Drama, Music, Visual Arts, Media Arts and Multimedia Technology).
• Language/English (Oral Communication, Reading, Writing, Media Studies).
• Health and Physical Education (Understanding Healthy Concepts, Making Healthy Choices, Making Connections for Healthy Living).

GRADES 9–12:
• The Arts (Dance, Drama, Music, Integrated Arts, Media Arts, Visual Arts).
• Language/English (Oral Communication, Reading and Literature Studies, Writing, Media Studies).
• Health and Physical Education (Understanding Healthy Concepts, Making Healthy Choices, Making Connections for Healthy Living).
POSSIBLE ESSAY QUESTIONS, REFLECTIONS OR CLASS DISCUSSION

From your list of “barbed” words (a remark or joke, sometimes mean and hurtful), what stood out for you and why? What is your impression of Benedick and Beatrice’s relationship so far? Do you think this couple has a chance of getting together? Why or why not?

EDUCATION ENRICHMENT

Study Guide available at stratfordfestival.ca/studyguides

Prologues (interactive presentations on stage) are available at 11:00 a.m. on: May 12; June 2, 16; September 16, 29.

Workshops and post-show chats may be arranged by calling the Education Department at 519.271.4040, ext. 2354.

Festival Theatre, Costume and Props Warehouse, Archives and Set Changeover tours may be arranged by calling the Box Office at 1.800.567.1600.

BOOKING INFORMATION

Online: www.stratfordfestival.ca/schools
Email: groups@stratfordfestival.ca
Phone: 1.800.567.1600 or 519.273.1600
Mail: Stratford Festival
Attn: Groups and Schools
P.O. Box 520
Stratford, ON N5A 6V2

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Prologues, Study Guides and Stratford Shorts

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GRADES 11–12:

• Social Sciences and Humanities (Dynamics of Human Relationships, Equity and Social Justice: From Theory to Practice, Gender Studies, Human Development Throughout the Lifespan, Introduction to Anthropology, Psychology and Sociology).

GRADE 12:

• Canadian and World Studies (World History since the 15th Century).

THEMES

• Love, courtship and marriage
• Lies and deception
• Honour
• Jealousy, slander and humiliation
• Power and gender
• Battle of wits
• Perception and reality
• Language and communication
• Respect and reputation
• Social graces
• Mistaken identity
• Pride
• Maturity and transformation

THREE KEY FIGURES TO LOOK FOR IN MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

CHARACTERS
Beatrice
Benedick
Don John

ADJECTIVES
Opinionated
Witty
Envious

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY: BEATRICE AND BENEDICK’S WAR OF WORDS (ACT 1, SCENE 1)

1 class (approx. 60 minutes)

OBJECTIVE: Students will examine the dialogue between Beatrice and Benedick and explore the possible reasons for their antagonistic jokes and comments to one another.

INSTRUCTIONS: Teachers will need to copy the Act 1, scene 1, excerpt for each student. Have the students work in pairs to examine the scene and present the excerpt.

RESOURCES: Copies of Act 1, scene 1, excerpt (see attached separate page), notebooks, pens, pencils.

1. Discuss with the class what they think is meant by “barbed” words.
2. Then give them the definition: a remark or joke that sometimes can be mean or hurtful.
3. Next, discuss what characters they know from television, film etc. who use such sarcastic, even antagonistic comments. Why do audiences find them entertaining?
4. Give each student a copy of the script excerpt. Read as a class aloud together (choral reading): half the class will read Beatrice’s part and the other half will read Benedick’s responses.
5. Working in pairs, students will read the script again and then get the scene up on their feet, sharing ideas on how they might use movement, levels, eye contact, indications of status (e.g., does one character behave dominantly over the other character?) etc.
6. The students then come together and perform their scenes for one another.
7. Afterwards, have the students share their findings.
8. Discuss with the class who won the battle of wits and why.
Benedick and Beatrice have met before, and now they renew their battle of wits, each attempting to score points in their war of words.

BEATRICE
I wonder that you will still be talking, Signior Benedick, nobody marks you.

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.

BENEDICK
Then is Courtesy a turncoat: but it is certain I am loved of all ladies, only you excepted: and I would I could find in my heart that I had not a hard heart, for, truly, I love none.

BEATRICE
A dear happiness to women, they would else have been troubled with a pernicious suitor. I thank God and my cold blood, I am of your humour for that: I had rather hear my dog bark at a crow than a man swear he loves me.

BENEDICK
God keep your ladyship still in that mind, so some gentleman or other shall 'scape a predestinate scratched face.

BEATRICE
Scratching could not make it worse, an 'twere such a face as yours were.

BENEDICK
Well, you are a rare parrot-teacher.

BEATRICE
A bird of my tongue is better than a beast of yours.

BENEDICK
I would my horse had the speed of your tongue, and so good a continuer: but keep your way, i' God's name. I have done.

BEATRICE
You always end with a jade's trick: I know you of old.