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| **Context** – The play was written by William Shakespeare sometime around the years 1598 and 1599. | | | |  | **Scene-by-Scene Summary** – Take note of the key quotations from each scene. | | | |
| **Shakespeare’s Time** – Shakespeare wrote at the time of two monarchs: Queen Elizabeth I and James I. The plays that he wrote during the period of Queen Elizabeth are generally happy and joyful, reflecting the mood at the time. However, darker plays such were written in the era of James I, which was far more unstable. Much Ado About Nothing, a comedy, was written in the earlier period, between 1598 and 1599. | | Shakespeare’s Influences – Shakespeare set a number of his plays in Italy. As is the case with many of Shakespeare’s plays, it is unlikely that the plot of *Much Ado About Nothing* was entirely original. It is thought that he borrowed a details of characters and plot through source material. For example, *Orlando Furioso*, written in 1591 by Lodovico, is likely the basis of Claudio and Hero’s love story. | |  | Act 1 Scene 1 | Don Pedro, Claudio, and Benedick arrive at the home of Leonato in Messina. Beatrice and Benedick renew a rivalry of jesting with insults. Claudio reveals he has fallen in love with Hero. Don Pedro agrees to help make the match at the ball that evening. | | BENEDICK: *In such great letters as they write “Here is good horse to*  *hire” let them signify under my sign “Here you may see Benedick, the married man.”* |
| Act 1 Scene 2 | Antonio mistakenly tells Leonato that Don Pedro has been heard professing his love for Hero, and that he plans to woo her. | | ANTONIO: *the Prince discovered / to Claudio that he loved my niece your daughter and / meant to acknowledge it this night in a dance* |
| Act 1 Scene 3 | Don John, the bastard brother of Don Pedro, has accompanied the party to Messina. He is told by Borachio (one of his servants) that Claudio is planning to court Hero, so Don John plots to make trouble. | | DON JOHN: *Will it serve for any model to build mischief*  *on? What is he for a fool that betroths himself to*  *unquietness?* |
| Image result for crown pixabaySocial Status and Bastardry – The social class system was far more rigid in Shakespeare’s time than in the present day. Those born into a high social class would be in possession of land, wealth, and power over others. In the play Don Pedro holds power over all of the other characters due to his higher social position. His bastard brother, Don John, was born out of wedlock. Therefore, he would have been treated as an illegitimate – denied of power, land or wealth. | | Image result for female sign**The Role of Women** – Despite the strength of Elizabeth I’s reign, society at the time was patriarchal – women were considered inferior to men. Women belonged to their fathers (or brothers if their fathers had died) and then their husbands. They were not permitted to own land or enter most professions. They were instead expected to bear children, and be gentle and womanly. Across Europe, in countries such as Italy, similar rules were in place. Hence the men’s power in the play. | |  | Act 2 Scene 1 | At the masked ball, Beatrice offends Benedick. Don John informs Claudio that Don Pedro is taking Hero for himself. Claudio storms out. When he returns, Don Pedro informs him that Hero has agreed to marry him (next Monday), and Leonato agrees. To pass the time, Don Pedro concocts a plan to make Beatrice and Benedick fall in love. | | BEATRICE: *What should I do with him? Dress him in my*  *apparel and make him my waiting gentlewoman? H]e that is more than a youth is not for me, and he that is less than a man, I am not for him.* |
| Act 2 Scene 2 | Borachio thinks of a plan to help Don John ruin the wedding – he will ask his lover (Margaret – Hero’s serving woman) to dress up in Hero’s clothing when he next dalliances with her Do John will then position Claudio and Don Pedro beneath the window to make them believe that it is Hero and that she is being unfaithful to Claudio. Don John agrees to the plan. | | BORACHIO: *Offer them instances, which shall bear no less*  *likelihood than to see me at her chamber window, hear me*  *call Margaret “Hero,” hear Margaret term me “Claudio,”* |
| The Honour of Women – In Shakespeare’s time, a woman’s honour depended upon her virginity and her chaste behaviour. Having sexual relations before marriage would cause a woman to lost all social standing and would tarnish the name of her family. This is the shame that Hero is threatened with at the play’s climax. Such a loss would have been impossible for her to rectify - her life would be in ruins. | | Image result for red cross healthcareHealthcare and Medicine – Healthcare and medicine were not as advanced in Shakespeare’s age as they are today – there were numerous ailments and diseases that were not yet understood. When Hero faints after being jilted at the altar, some of the other characters (including Beatrice) think that she has died. This would have been a genuine concern - medical understanding and treatment were not as advanced. | |  | Act 2 Scene 3 | Don Pedro and Claudio, aware that Benedick is eavesdropping, pretend that they have just heard Beatrice declare her love for Benedick. Benedick, aside, decides that he will attempt to marry Beatrice. | | BENEDICK: *By my troth it is no addition to her wit—nor no great argument of her folly, for I will be horribly in love with her.* |
| Act 3 Scene 1 | Hero and her waiting women arrange for Beatrice to overhear them pretending that Benedick loves her. Beatrice, in the same way as Benedick previously, is shocked, and determines aside that she will love him back. | | HERO: *Our talk must only be of Benedick.*  *When I do name him, let it be thy part*  *To praise him more than ever man did merit.* |
| Act 3 Scene 2 | Benedick announces that he is a changed man. He takes Leonato aside. Once Claudio and Don Pedro are alone, Don John approaches, warning them of Hero’s infidelity. He says he will show them, and they leave. | | CLAUDIO *If he be not in love with some woman, there*  *is no believing old signs. He brushes his hat o'*  *mornings. What should that bode?* |
|  | |  | |  | Act 3 Scene 3 | In a street near Leonato’s house, the local police, led by the ridiculous Dogberry, assemble. It is clear that they are inept. The watchmen overhear Borachio and Conrad boasting of the plan they pulled off to ruin the wedding. They are arrested by the watchmen and taken to Dogberry. | | Image result for police hat cartoonDOGBERRY *Come hither, neighbor Seacoal. [Seacoal*  *steps forward.] God hath blessed you with a good*  *name. To be a well-favored man is the gift of*  *fortune, but to write and read comes by nature.* |
| **Main Characters** – Consider what Shakespeare intended through his characterisation of each of the below… | | | |  |
| Claudio – A young soldier who has won great respect whilst fighting under Don Pedro in recent wars. When the party arrive in Messina, Don Pedro immediately falls for Hero. Claudio is aware of his position (e.g. respectful of Don Pedro) and shy (he does not approach Hero himself). His deeply suspicious nature makes him quick to believe rumours, and to be distrusting of Hero’s nature. | | Hero – Hero is the beautiful young daughter of Leonato and the cousin of Beatrice. Hero is lovely, gentle, kind and innocent. She falls in love with Claudio when he falls in love with her, but is also respectful to the wishes of her father. When Don John unfairly slanders her name, she is left jilted and heartbroken by Claudio at the altar. At the end of the play she shows forgiveness. | |  | Act 3 Scene 4 | Hero awakes on her wedding morning, with jitters that she is unable to explain. Claudio and his party arrive to take Hero to church. | | HERO: *God give me joy to wear it, for my heart is*  *exceeding heavy.* |
| Act 3 Scene 5 | Dogberry and Verges (his deputy) speak to Leonato on his way into the wedding, but their long-winded and foolish attempts to convey the story compels Leonato to ask them to wait until after the wedding. | | VERGES: *Marry, sir, our watch tonight, excepting your Worship’s*  *presence, ha' ta'en a couple of as arrant knaves as any in / Messina.* |
| Act 4 Scene 1 | As the wedding starts, Claudio launches into a scathing attack on Hero, for her perceived infidelities. Don Pedro backs him up, stating what they have seen. Hero cries out and faints. Leonato wishes her dead in his despair. Claudio, Don Pedro, and Don John leave. The Friar then steps in, stating that he believes Hero. As Hero regains consciousness, they realise that this must be the scheming of Don John. They concoct a plan to pretend that Hero has died, in order to evoke Claudio’s sympathy. As the others leave, Benedick tells Beatrice he loves her, which she reciprocates. Beatrice asks Benedick to challenge Claudio for his cruelty. Benedick agrees. | | CLAUDIO: *O Hero! What a Hero hadst thou been*  *If half thy outward graces had been placed*  *About thy thoughts and counsels of thy heart!*  *But fare thee well, most foul, most fair! Farewell,*  *Thou pure impiety and impious purity.*  *For thee I’ll lock up all the gates of love,*  *And on my eyelids shall conjecture hang,*  *To turn all beauty into thoughts of harm,*  *And never shall it more be gracious.* |
| First Scene: Act I Scene I | **Final Scene:** Act V Scene IV | **First Scene:** Act I Scene I | **Final Scene:** Act V Scene IV |  |
| **Leonato** – Leonato is a well-respected nobleman from Messina. It is at his home where the entirety of the play runs its course. Leonato is the father of Hero (for whom he clearly cares deeply) and the uncle of Beatrice. As the governor of Messina, he is second in social power only to Don Pedro. He takes the reputation of his family extremely seriously, and is left in a state of anxiety when Hero is accused of infidelity. He is forgiving of Claudio’s mistake at the end of the play. | | **Don Pedro/ Don John –** Don Pedro is an important nobleman from Aragon, who is occasionally referred to as ‘Prince’ throughout the play. He is the longtime friend of Leonato, and has formed a close relationship with his soldiers – Claudio and Benedick. He has the most social power of any in the play. His bastard brother, Don John, is deceitful and melancholy. He deliberately seeks to destroy the happiness in the play as a result of his envy and misery. | |  |
| Act 4 Scene 2 | Dogberry and his team interrogate Borachio and Conrad. They admit that they were paid by Do John to set up the scam and ruin the wedding. The watchmen tie up the criminals and take them to Leonato’s house. | | DOGBERRY: *Dost thou not suspect my place?*  *Dost thou not suspect my years?* |
| First Scene: Act I Scene I | **Final Scene:** Act V Scene IV | **First Scene:** Act I Scene I | **Final Scene:** Act V Scene IV |  | Act 5 Scene 1 | Leonato challenges Claudio to a dual for ruining his daughter’s good name. Claudio pretends not to hear. Benedick then arrives and challenges Claudio to a dual, stating that their accusations killed an innocent woman. Right at that moment, Dogberry and Verges enter with the criminals, who tell the full story. Claudio and Don Pedro admit their mistake, and return to Leonato to beg for his forgiveness, stating that they will take any punishment he has to offer to try and make up for the loss of his daughter. Leonato replies that he has a niece that is almost identical to Hero, who Claudio must marry. Claudio agrees, thanking him for his generosity. | | LEONATO: *Tomorrow morning come you to my house,*  *And since you could not be my son-in-law,*  *Be yet my nephew. My brother hath a daughter,*  *Almost the copy of my child that's dead,*  *And she alone is heir to both of us.*  *Give her the right you should have giv'n her cousin,*  *And so dies my revenge.* |
| Benedick – Benedick is an aristocratic soldier who has been fighting under Don Pedro, and a close friend to the love-struck Claudio. In contrast to Claudio Benedick presents throughout much of the play as being highly skeptical of love. Benedick is extremely witty, and is always making witty jokes and puns with his extremely colourful language. He carries on a ‘merry war’ of words with Beatrice, but with a little help from the other characters, his feelings develop. | | **Beatrice** –Beatrice is Leonato’s niece and Hero’s cousin. She is a ‘pleasant-spirited lady’ with an extremely quick wit and sharp tongue. She is essentially a kind and warm character, but she chooses to mock others (mainly Benedick) with her elaborate jokes and puns. She engages in the ‘merry war’ with Benedick, and often wins. Influenced by the actions and words of her friends, she begins to fall for Benedick towards the end of the play. | |  |
| Act 5 Scene 2 | Beatrice and Benedick meet and declare their love for one another once more. They are informed about the plot that has come to light. | | BENEDICK: *The god of love / That sits above,*  *And knows me, and knows me, / How pitiful I deserve—* |
| First Scene: Act I Scene I | Final Scene: Act V Scene IV | First Scene: Act I Scene I | Final Scene: Act V Scene IV |  | Act 5 Scene 3 | Claudio reads an epitaph at the supposed tomb of Hero, before getting ready for the wedding (that he thinks is to Leonato’s niece) | | CLAUDIO: *Done to death by slanderous tongues*  *Was the Hero that here lies.* |
|  | |  | |  | Act 5 Scene 4 | At the wedding, Hero is revealed to be the true bride, to Claudio’s joy. After the wedding, Benedick and Beatrice’s love for one another is revealed. The characters hear that Don John has been captured. | | BENEDICK: *Come, come, we are friends. Let's have a*  *dance ere we are married, that we may lighten our* |
| **Themes** – A theme is an idea or message that runs throughout a text. | | | |  |  |  | |  |
| **Dramatic Devices in *Much Ado About Nothing*** | | **Features of a Comedy** | |
| **Social Grace** – The characters’ colourful language is representative of the ideals that Renaissance courtiers strove for in their social interactions - their witty use language would gain attention and approval in noble households. Although this seems effortless, the characters are locked in a constant struggle to maintain social positions, e.g. Claudio and Benedick must constantly stay in favour with Don Pedro. | | | |  | Dramatic Irony | The audience is aware of Don John’s numerous deceptions, but the characters are not initially aware. | Image result for pen writing cartoonPlayful Language – Puns, quips and vibrant figurative language are written into the text to demonstrate wit. | |
| **Confusion and Misunderstandings** – A great deal of the comic effect and dramatic tension in the play is created through the various characters’ confusion and misunderstandings of events and one another. One example is Claudio’s misunderstanding that Don Pedro is trying to win Hero for himself, whilst another is the confusion caused through Dogberry’s poor communication skills. | | | |  | Soliloquy | *They say the lady is fair – ‘tis a truth,* Benedick considers his love for Beatrice in Act II Scene III. | Misunderstandings/ Confusion/ Deception – Humour is derived from characters’ shrouded perceptions of reality. | |
| Deception – Many of the confusions and misunderstandings throughout the play have their root in deliberate deceptions – some of which have sinister intentions, and others which are more benign. For example, Don John’s duping of the other characters very nearly lead to the play becoming a tragedy, whilst the light-hearted deception used on Beatrice and Benedick enables them to fall in love. | | | |  | Aside | Adding to the themes of confusion and deception, there are asides throughout, as characters speak to a selected audience. | Underlying Critique – Shakespeare ridicules some of the issues in society, e.g. systems of class, love and honour. | |
| **Honour –** At the climax of the play, Claudio jilts Hero at the altar due to his mistaken belief in her infidelity. In Leonato’s eyes, this does not only dishonor Hero, but also the whole family as well. His shame in her is such that he states ‘hence from her, let her die’ (IV.I 153) He sees her loss of honour as a stain upon his family, from which he can never distance himself. | | | |  | Rhyming Couplets | *The god of love,*  *That sits above,*  Benedick sings of his love for Beatrice. | Happy Ending – Normally involving a marriage. | |

**Much Ado About Nothing**

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