The play centers on the fickle nature of mankind. The central themes are: The difficulty to perceive reality; The power of words to create images, distort and shape reality, and their power to maintain or destroy alliances; The inadequacy of reason to cope with the passions; The dangers associated with rulers who cannot detect truth from falseness; and The inadequacies of idealized love combined with arranged marriages to provide a sound framework for marriage.

I see the play in terms of unknowns. Masks are a key image. The duplicity of characters and their ability to hide unacceptable traits from others is extremely important. The reality is masked itself; perhaps even jarringly so. Structures may be altered by deep shadows, or lack what they typically contain. There should be a sense of Renaissance and Classical influences, but these should only outline a time in which the characters and their concerns could truly reside. The duplication of reality is unnecessary. In fact, a fully-fleshed out reality would contradict the major theme since what is seen is largely a product of what we are told we will see. Instead of a complete, symmetrical, beautiful picture, there needs to be elements that are left out, unknown, and incomplete. The audience should have to fill in the voids. Symmetry should be attempted, but fail. Rather, this world is not tranquil and settled like formal balance would suggest. Disturbance juxtaposes with order. What one sees depends upon viewpoint, and it can be altered. Severe and artificial lighting shifts will highlight perceptual differences and shifting opinions. I would, also, like to see simultaneous realities, much like what is achieved through cubism. The world of the play is, therefore, artificial and somewhat illusionary. Multiple textures should be evident and range from fine grained sandpaper to a heavy stucco look. Hardness and hard surfaces the norm. Mirrors and other reflective surfaces should lightly intermingle with heavier, dulled textures. A maze or puzzle may be incorporated; at least, repeated patterns should exist. The sense that this world is isolated from the outside should be made evident through walls, gates, or some other architectural choice. Boundaries have sharp edges.

Play Synopsis
William Shakespeare's classic comedy "Much Ado About Nothing" is a tale of love, intrigue, and mistaken identity. In the town of Messina, Italy, Don Pedro's soldiers have come to stay with Leonato, the local governor. Romance blossoms as Claudio, a young count, falls instantly in love with Hero, Leonato's only daughter. Two members of the party, though, have sworn that they shall never marry- Leonato's niece, Beatrice, and Benedick, one of Don Pedro's men. There is a merry war of wits between them, as neither can stand the other. They delight in mocking and insulting each other. To pass the time before Hero's wedding, Don Pedro decides to trick Beatrice and Benedick into falling in love. Meanwhile, Don John, the prince's treacherous brother, conspires to destroy the bond between Hero and Claudio. Faces become masks and truth becomes deception as everyone becomes entangled in their own manipulations. While in the end, love takes the day, questions about truth and identity linger, leaving one wondering if it was, in fact, truly much ado about nothing.
**Setting**
Messina, Italy 1600’s

**Male Characters**

**Leonato** - Governor of Messina, father to Hero and uncle to Beatrice. Leonato is a merry old gentleman, quick to throw a party and open his home to the town. He is witty, friendly, and good-hearted.

**Don Pedro** - The Prince of Arragon. Don Pedro is loved by his people for his bravery in war and his light-heartedness at other times. He enjoys playing well-meaning tricks on people to pass the time. Although he is friendly with his citizens, there is never any doubt that he is always in command.

**Claudio** - Count Claudio is a young soldier, recently back from the war. Now that he has returned from battle, his heart is filled with romance, and he falls almost instantly in love with Leonato’s daughter, Hero. He is well-liked by all, a favorite of Don Pedro.

**Benedick** - Also one of Don Pedro’s soldiers. Benedick fancies himself a witty man, and enjoys trading insults with Beatrice, Leonato’s niece. He is exceptionally honorable, and holds everyone to his high standards. Benedick has sworn off love, claiming that he could never find a woman good enough for him.

**Don John** - Don Pedro’s brother. Don John is treacherous and deceitful, determined to make others unhappy. He is displeased with his lot in life, and has decided that no one else should be able to rejoice in their own life.

**Borachio** - one of Don John’s flunkies. Borachio helps carry out the plan to destroy Hero and Claudio’s wedding by seducing Margaret.

**Conradee** - Conradee also works for Don John. He helps Don John convince Claudio that Don Pedro is in love with Hero.

**Dogberry** - Constable of the Watch in Messina. Dogberry fancies himself a powerful, intelligent man, but in reality is an over-blown fool. His speech is awkward, filled with malapropisms and ludicrous sentence structure.

**Verges** - Dogberry’s foolish sidekick. Verges follows Dogberry around, generally getting in the way and making things more difficult.

**Female Characters**

**Beatrice** - an entertaining and merry woman, Beatrice is Leonato’s niece. She has determined never to marry, as a husband would only keep her from pursuing her own life. Beatrice delights in lampooning Benedick, as she finds him incredibly foolish.

**Hero** - Hero is the perfect, obedient daughter. She is proper and modest, but still enjoys games and wit. She is in love with Count Claudio.

**Antonia** - Leonato’s sister, Antonia helps run his household. She has a feisty spirit, and will not hesitate to go to the defense of one she believes has been wronged.

**Margaret** - Hero’s gentlewoman. Margaret is friendly, simple, and enthusiastic. She trusts easily, and is often deceived because of it. Margaret also has an unrequited interest in Benedick.

**Ursula** - Also Hero’s gentlewoman. Ursula is very put-together and practical. She helps Hero and Margaret play tricks on Beatrice.
This production of Much Ado About Nothing is presented by Central Theatre Ensemble of Central Washington University in Ellensburg, WA. Much Ado About Nothing is directed by Graduate Student/Teaching Assistant Julie Somers-Gulsvig. Scenic and lighting design is by Associate Professor Derek Lane, and costume design is by Professor Scott R. Robinson. The other members of the design and management team are CWU students: Holly O’Hara, assistant scenic designer; David Mackie, assistant lighting designer; Chris McNeeley, sound designer; Katy Wickersham, stage manager; and Allison Wooldridge, hair and makeup design. This production is unique in that a Department of Theatre Arts faculty member and two community members are in the cast. Acting Professor George W. Bellah III plays Leonato, the Governor of Messina. There are two CWU Theatre Arts alumni in the show as well: Kristl Miller plays Leonato’s niece, Beatrice, and Steve Nabors plays Friar Francis. All other cast and crew members are CWU students.

Director’s Concept on Design

The set should be highly versatile—both inside and outside décor must be simple and adaptable. Tables and benches should combine in a myriad of ways to create new environments in simple, elegant ways; and the use of one set piece ought to transform itself for yet another use in later scenes. Transformations and set changes need happen through the work of appropriate cast members in full view; time and place is more relative than absolute, and lighting, dialogue and action will provide any needed time order and sense of place.

The possible color palette includes warm tones such as dark umber, browns, burgundy, burnt orange, rich yellows, and sage greens. The warmth of Sicily and its dryness should be reflected, but bold shadows are a necessity whether they stem from the paint treatment or lighting changes.

The costumes need to “fit” within this world, but there is no need for complete realism. Silhouettes may reflect the 1600’s, but a sense of constriction and propriety is more important. The costume colors should reflect the warm, rich tones of Messina, although the visiting prince and his army should be arrayed in tones that designate their foreignness. Perhaps black or grays could suffice as a base color since the Spanish influence of Arragon would be appropriate. The hierarchy of the classes should be evident in the color choices, as well as through displays of ornamentation. Only the prince, Claudio, and Benedict are allowed the privilege to wear personal weapons; and these must be conventional swords or daggers rather than firearms.

Music will be chosen based on traditional instrumentation from the period between 1500 – 1650. Used to underscore transitions from scene to scene, it will also set mood and provide appropriate music for entrances. The convention will use offstage music to also accompany singing and the dances within the play—music will be heard but instruments and players will not be seen. The only instruments that may be used on stage would be a drum and a tambourine to accompany the entertainment during the masque unless an appropriate recording can be either found or engineered.
Activities for After the Play

Short Answer Questions

Q1. **Speech and conversation are important in the play, and many of the characters have distinctive ways of speaking. How do the characters’ speech patterns differ?**

A1. The speech patterns of the play’s characters vary widely. Some speak with elegance and passion. Two examples of particular eloquence are Leonato’s speech after Hero is betrayed and Beatrice’s expression of her anger at Claudio. But Benedick and Beatrice also share a special way of speaking all their own, in which they are constantly making jokes and puns; this verbal sparring highlights their special gift of wit. Other characters have no such skill with words. Dogberry is always getting his words wrong to very humorous effect. However, his mistakes hinder communication, as in Act III, scene v, when Dogberry and Verges try to tell Leonato that they have caught Borachio but cannot make themselves understood. Finally, some characters seldom speak at all, like the sullen and bitter Don John or the gentle but usually shy Hero and Claudio.

Q2. **How do gossip, conversation, and overhearing function in the play?**

A2. Much of the plot is moved along by characters eavesdropping on a conversation and either misunderstanding what they overhear or being deceived by gossip or by a trick. Hero, Claudio, and the rest trick Benedick and Beatrice by setting them up to overhear conversations in which their friends deliberately mislead them. Don John’s spiteful gossip makes Claudio and Don Pedro suspicious that Hero is disloyal. The window trick, in which Borachio and the disguised Margaret make love at Hero’s window, is itself a sort of overhearing. In this case, two people spying on the scene, Claudio and Don Pedro, misunderstand what they see, because Don John has set it up to deceive them. The window scene restages the trick played upon Beatrice and Benedick, but with the opposite effect. Instead of causing two people to fall in love, it causes Claudio to abandon Hero. Finally, at the end of the play, overhearing restores order. The men of the Watch, hearing Borachio brag about his crime to Conrade, arrest them and bring them to justice (III.iii).

Suggested Essay Topics

1. A central theme in the play is trickery or deceit, whether for good or evil purposes. Counterfeiting, or concealing one’s true feelings, is part of this theme. Good characters as well as evil ones engage in deceit as they attempt to conceal their feelings: Beatrice and Benedick mask their feelings for one another with bitter insults, Don John spies on Claudio and Hero. Who hides and what is hidden? How does deceit function in the world of the play, and how does it help the play comment on theatre in general?

2. In some ways, Don Pedro is the most elusive character in the play. He never explains his motivations— for wooing Hero for Claudio, for believing Don John’s lie, even for setting up Beatrice and Benedick. He also seems to have no romantic interest of his own, though, at the end of the play, without a future wife, he is melancholy. Investigate Don Pedro’s character, imagine the different ways in which he could be portrayed, and ascribe to him the motivations that you believe make him act as he does. Why is he so melancholy? Why does he woo Hero for Claudio? Is he joking when he proposes to Beatrice, or is he sincere? Why would Shakespeare create a character like Don Pedro for his comedy about romantic misunderstandings?

3. In this play, accusations of unchaste and untrustworthy behavior can be just as damaging to a woman’s honor as such behavior itself. Is the same true for males in the play? How is a man’s honor affected by accusations of untrustworthiness or unfaithfulness? Do sexual fidelity and innocence fit into the picture in the same way for men as it does for women? Examine the question of honor and fidelity as it relates to four male characters in the play: Benedick, Leonato, Claudio, and Don Pedro. What could Shakespeare be saying about the difference between male and female honor?
A ctivities for A fter the Play

M ultiple C hoice Q uestion

1. W ho refuses to marry in the be- 
   ginning of the play? (A) Hero (B) Don 
   Pedro and Don John (C) Benedick and 
   Beatrice (D) Hero and Claudio

2. H ow does Claudio woo Hero? (A) 
   He doesn't; Don Pedro does (B) He 
   writes her a sonnet (C) He serenades 
   her window at night (D) He asks her 
   father to tell her that he loves her

3. A t the beginning of the play, what 
   is Beatrice's relationship to Benedick? 
   (A) Lover (B) Enemy (C) Wife (D) He 
   asks her father to tell her that he loves her

4. W ho is Leonato? (A) Beatrice's 
   father (B) Don Pedro and Don John's 
   father (C) Claudio's father (D) Hero's 
   father

5. W hat does Don John want? (A) To 
   marry Hero (B) To make Beatrice and 
   Benedick fall in love (C) To ruin Clau- 
   dio (D) To kill Dogberry and Verges

6. W ho carries out Don John's plan? 
   (A) Balthasar and Antonio (B) Dog- 
   berry and Verges (C) Claudio and Don 
   Pedro (D) Borachio and Margaret

7. W hat reason does Don John give 
   for his sullenness? (A) Too many peo- 
   ple have wronged him (B) It's in his 
   nature (C) It's an act to gain sympathy 
   (D) He thinks that noblewomen are 
   attracted to brooding types

8. W ho is said to be "an ass"? (A) 
   Dogberry (B) Borachio (C) Verges (D) 
   Conrade

9. W hy does Claudio reject Hero at 
   the altar? (A) She smells like a rotten 
   orange (B) He thinks she lied to him 
   about her wealth (C) He thinks she 
   cheated on him and lost her virginity 
   (D) He decides he just isn't ready to 
   get married

10. W ho discovers Don John's evil 
    plot? (A) Benedick (B) Margaret (C) 
    Leonato's Household (D) The 
    Watch

11. W hat does Leonato's household 
    do to punish Claudio for shaming 
    Hero? (A) He pretends Hero is dead 
    and challenges Claudio to a duel (B) 
    He drives Claudio out of town (C) 
    He violently beats Claudio (D) Abso- 
    lutely nothing at all

12. W hich two characters write 
    love sonnets? (A) Claudio and Don 
    Pedro (B) Claudio and Hero (C) 
    Beatrice and Benedick (D) Don 
    Pedro and Beatrice

13. T o whom does Don Pedro pro- 
    pose marriage? (A) Hero (B) Ursula 
    (C) Beatrice (D) Margaret

14. W hy is Margaret mistaken for 
    Hero? (A) She is wearing a mask (B) 
    She is wearing Hero's makeup (C) 
    She is wearing a red sash (D) She is 
    wearing Hero's clothes

15. W hich character is sad at the 
    end of the play? (A) Don Pedro (B) 
    Don John (C) Benedick (D) Hero

16. W hat makes Claudio realize that 
    he wrongly accused Hero? (A) A 
    note that she left him (B) His utter 
    remorse at having publicly shamed 
    her (C) Leonato's harsh reprimands 
    (D) Borachio's confession of Don 
    John's plot

17. H ow do Don Pedro and Claudio 
    make Benedick fall in love with Bea-
    trice? (A) They convince him of her 
    virtues (B) They have him overhear 
    their conversation in which they 
    assert that she is in love with him 
    (C) They force him to spend one 
    evening locked in a room alone with 
    her (D) They insult, humiliate, and 
    belittle him until he agrees to love 
    her

18. H ave Beatrice and Benedick 
    courted before? (A) Yes, but Bene- 
    dick left her (B) No, because they 
    are enemies (C) Yes, but Beatrice 
    left him (D) They had a blind date 
    when they were younger, but neither 
    of them was interested

19. W hy is it necessary for Hero to 
    seem to die? (A) Because she is very 
    tired and worn out (B) Because she 
    is pregnant (C) Because her reputa-
    tion has been publicly tarnished (D) 
    Because she cheated on Claudio

20. W hat term best describes D og- 
    berry's verbal comedy? (A) Slapstick 
    (B) Malapropism (C) Witty banter 
    (D) Hyperbole

21. W hat is Balthasar's song in Act 
    II, scene iii about? (A) The infidelity 
    of men (B) The infidelity of women 
    (C) The beauty of love (D) The wind 
    and the rain

22. W hat does the "savage bull" 
    symbolize? (A) Happiness in marriage 
    (B) A world without law (C) A sol-
    dier's honor (D) The man unwilling 
    to marry

23. W ho is the most socially power- 
    ful person in the play? (A) Leonato 
    (B) Beatrice (C) Don Pedro (D) 
    Dogberry
This educational guide is offered to schools and organizations attending or sponsoring a production of the Central Theatre Ensemble production of *Much A do A bout Nothing*. This guide is intended to help prepare students to see the play, and to enhance their experience during and afterward. It is intended to promote the experience of theatre-going as positive, fun, and educational.

Central Theatre Ensemble welcomes and appreciates letters from young people that have seen the production!

Multiple Choice Quiz Answers


The Players of *Much A do A bout Nothing*

**Residents of Messina**
- Leonato  .  .  .  .  .  .  .  .  .  George W. Bellah 3rd
- Beatrice  .  .  .  .  .  .  .  .  .  Jillian Vashro
- Hero  .  .  .  .  .  .  .  .  Kristl Miller
- Antonia  .  .  .  .  .  Bride Schroeder –  LaPlatney
- Margaret  .  .  .  .  .  .  .  .  Maggie Hillding
- Ursula  .  .  .  .  .  .  .  .  Allison W ooldridge
- Friar Francis/ Sexton  .  .  .  .  Steve Nabors
- Women of Messina  .  .  .  .  Sarah DeGrave
- Crystal Love
- Christina Welch
- Teagan Wilson

**Men of the Military**
- Don Pedro  .  .  .  .  .  Isaiah Charles Crowson
- Benedick  .  .  .  .  .  .  .  .  Alex Garnett
- Don John  .  .  .  .  .  .  Andrew Kunellis
- Claudio  .  .  .  .  .  .  .  Jeff Carpenter
- Conrade  .  .  .  .  .  .  .  Aaron Siebol
- Borachio  .  .  .  .  .  .  .  Cole Cook
- Balthasar  .  .  .  .  .  .  Jerrod Neal

**The Watch**
- Dogberry  .  .  .  .  .  Rudy Schuepbach
- Verges  .  .  .  .  .  .  .  Brian T. Kiger
- George Seacoal  .  .  .  .  Jordan Morris
- Watchman 1  .  .  .  .  Tyson Daily
- Watchman 2  .  .  .  .  Arturo Suarez