

1. *Much Ado About Nothing* is supposedly a comedy: Beatrice and Benedick trade insults for professions of love, and Claudio and Hero fall in love, out of love, and back in love again. But the play contains many darker, more tragic elements than a typical comedy. In what ways is this play tragic?

2. 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 theater in general?

3. Language in *Much Ado About Nothing* often takes the form of brutality and violence. "She speaks poniards, and every word stabs," complains Benedick of Beatrice (II.i.216). Find examples of speech and words representing wounds and battles in the play. What do Shakespeare and his cast of characters accomplish by metaphorically turning words into weapons? What does the proliferation of all this violent language signify in the play and the world outside it?

4. 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?