



MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

EDUCATION ACTIVITIES PACK

The activities in this pack are inspired by rehearsal room approaches and have been created around Iqbal Khan's production of *Much Ado About Nothing* which opened on 4 Aug 2012 at the Courtyard Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon and then played from 29 Sept - 27 Oct 2012 at the Noel Coward Theatre in London.

This production is part of the [World Shakespeare Festival](#), a celebration of Shakespeare as the world's playwright. Produced by the RSC in an unprecedented collaboration with leading UK and international arts organisations, it's the biggest celebration of Shakespeare ever staged. All productions in the RSC repertoire during the Festival explore other cultures through the lens of Shakespeare's plays. For the Festival, The RSC could think of no better setting for *Much Ado About Nothing* than modern India, with the contemporary world existing alongside traditional values.

These activities in this pack can work in a classroom (or hall or studio space), either as stand-alone practical approaches to the text or as supporting activities for students seeing the production. They've been designed with KS2 and KS3 students in mind, but can be adapted for other age groups.

ABOUT OUR EDUCATION WORK

We want children and young people to enjoy the challenge of Shakespeare and achieve more as a result of connecting with his work. Central to our education work is our manifesto for Shakespeare in schools, [Stand up for Shakespeare](#). We know that children and young people can experience Shakespeare in ways that excite, engage and inspire them.

We believe that young people get the most out of Shakespeare when they:

- Do Shakespeare on their feet - exploring the plays actively as actors do
- See it Live - participate as members of a live audience
- Start it Earlier - work on the plays from a younger age

ABOUT ENSEMBLE

We also believe in the power of ensemble: a way of working together in both the rehearsal room and across the company enabling everyone's ideas and voices to be heard.

Director Iqbal Khan created a rehearsal space where all the actors were encouraged to contribute ideas, think about their character's back-story and improvise around it. For the first three weeks of rehearsal, the actors took part in RSC movement, voice and dialect sessions as well as spending time with Iqbal unlocking the meaning of the text and discussing which parts of the play resonated with them. Iqbal also asked the actors to create improvisations so that they could gain a deeper insight into the motivations and relationships of the characters.

Meera Syal (playing Beatrice) said that even though this made her incredibly nervous, it also provided a secure base so that once they got to staging the scenes for the performance, they didn't need to keep stopping and working out the relationships between the characters and how their characters should respond to one another.

CONTENTS

Introduction	Page 1
About our Education work	Page 1
About ensemble	Page 1
More resources	Page 2
Introductory notes	Page 3
Tradition versus modernity	Page 4
Behind Hero's public mask	Page 5
The masquerade party	Page 7
Hero's nightmare & The shaming of Hero	Page 9

These symbols are used throughout the pack:



READ

Contextual notes from the 2012 production



ACTIVITY

A classroom or open space activity



LINKS

Useful web addresses

MORE RESOURCES



Visit www.rsc.org.uk/education/resources for more resources on *Much Ado About Nothing*:

- Interview with Kimberley Sykes, Assistant Director on this 2012 production, and actor Madhav Sharma, who plays Leonato
- Teachers' activity pack based on the 2011 Young People's Shakespeare production
- Images, videos and information about past productions in the Resource Bank

More teaching activities to support your active approaches to Shakespeare can be found in our book, *RSC Shakespeare Toolkit for Teachers*, which is available to buy at the [RSC Shop](#).

We also run a range of courses for teachers and students - for more information:

www.rsc.org.uk/education

All photos by Ellie Kurtz © RSC
Pack written and designed by RSC Education

INTRODUCTORY NOTES



This production of *Much Ado About Nothing* began when Michael Boyd (RSC Artistic Director) asked Meera Syal to perform with the RSC. Initially they discussed *The Taming of the Shrew* as Meera was keen to play Katherine. However that play was already being staged in the Festival, so *Much Ado About Nothing* was suggested with Meera as Beatrice. A role with some similarities but as Meera now says, for her, Beatrice is a deeper and richer part.

Iqbal Khan, a much celebrated director, was brought on board and the decision was made to set the production in modern India.

When asked about this decision Iqbal said :

My feelings about Shakespeare generally are that I will do everything I can to make it feel as urgent and contemporary as possible. So the more I thought about it, the more I felt modern India, particularly Northern India and Delhi, which is a place of transition, would provide a tremendously compelling way into the play.

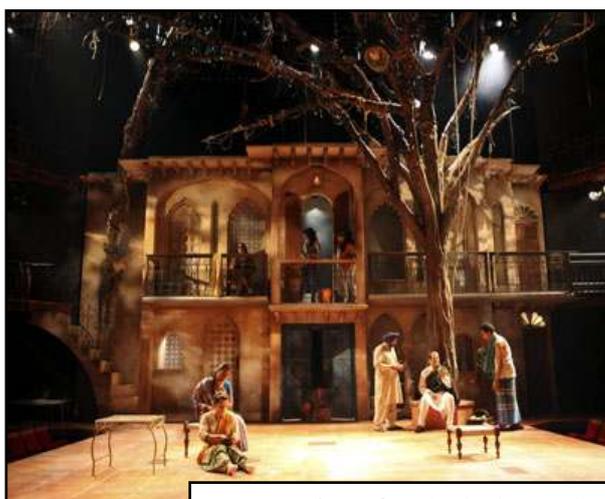
Iqbal and the set designer Tom Piper went on a reconnaissance visit before rehearsals to experience the atmosphere and architecture of Delhi. Tom Piper described India as a ‘city of contradictions’ with the traditional way of life mixed with the modern: loud markets and traffic outside the peace and quiet of prayer rooms; the latest modern technology intertwined with tradition. He said:

In old Delhi there was a crazy confusion of cabling, colour and smells. I want the audience to get some of that experience when they come to see the show. The foyer space will have a bustling atmosphere and so we need to create a space away from that when creating Leonato’s house.

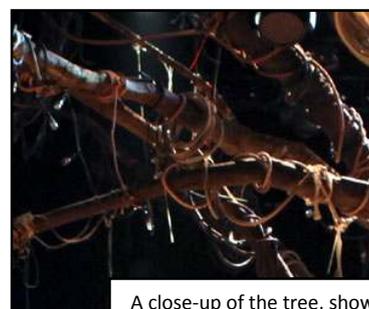
The contradiction that Tom Piper describes is illustrated in the set design where a tree is set at the back of the stage with its branches entangled in electrical wires - from a distance it looks as though the electrical wires are growing from the tree itself.



Benedick (Paul Bhattacharjee) and Beatrice (Meera Syal) in Iqbal Khan’s production



Tom Piper’s set of *Much Ado About Nothing* in the Courtyard Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon



A close-up of the tree, showing wires draped around it

TRADITION VERSUS MODERNITY



The character of Hero embodies this production's key theme of tradition versus modernity. Iqbal was keen that Hero's silence should not always be read by the audience as compliance.

As an example, in the scene where we see Leonato and his family preparing for the masquerade party, Iqbal made the creative decision to include Hero and Beatrice getting ready for the party in private. Hero feels comfortable with her cousin Beatrice and therefore is able to show her true personality.

Meera Syal (Beatrice) and Amara Karan (Hero) improvised around this concept before deciding they would be drinking wine, smoking cigarettes and singing filthy songs.



The cast in rehearsal for the party

In this private moment between the two women, Iqbal wanted the audience to understand that Hero has both a public and private face and is not always the quiet, reserved girl that she appears in the company of men.

Once Hero is at the masquerade dance she feels empowered by her disguise and is able to present herself as a confident young woman to Don Pedro:

DON PEDRO Lady, will you walk a bout with your friend?

HERO So you walk softly, and look sweetly, and say nothing, I am yours for the walk, and especially when I walk away.

At the beginning of Act 2 Scene 1, Leonato and Antonio try and convince Beatrice that she needs to find a husband while telling Hero that the Prince Don Pedro will propose marriage to her that evening. Even though Hero barely says anything in the scene below, it was clear from Amara's (Hero) facial expressions and body language that she is a keen observer, has a mind of her own and doesn't love Don Pedro. This decision - to portray Hero in this way - is an interpretive choice by the director. Iqbal asked Amara to convey to the audience that she's not happy to comply with this arranged marriage. In the following activity, your group will explore for themselves the interpretive choices and status in this scene.



Behind Hero's public mask

- Ask the group to stand in a space in the room and imagine they're getting ready for a party. Tell them they can use movement but not sound to show themselves getting ready, considering what type of party they are going to, whose party it is and who they are going with.
- During their improvisations, tell them you're going to introduce some of the characters who are going to this party and as you read each character out, they will become these characters to see how the character description changes their improvisation:
 - A rich man aged 60 – he owns the property and is hosting the party.
It's an important event for him because he wants to impress his potential future son-in-law.
 - A woman aged 20 – she's been told that someone she doesn't love is going to propose marriage to her tonight
 - A woman aged 30 – at the party, she'll see an ex-boyfriend who she still has feelings for
 - A man aged 70 – he's the host's brother and looking forward to a great night of dancing!
- Explain that these are the four characters that appear in this scene - Leonato, Hero, Beatrice and Antonio. Split the group into groups of four and ask them to cast themselves as the four characters. The groups read through the edited Act 1 Scene 2 (see page 6).
- Discuss with the students what they think is happening between Beatrice, Leonato and Antonio. The beginning of the scene shows a private family moment which illustrates Leonato's frustration at Beatrice's vow never to get married. In contrast to this, Leonato also reveals to Hero that Don Pedro will be making a proposal to her. What do the students think Hero is thinking as she's watching the scene unfold? For example, does she agree with her father that Beatrice is 'so shrewd of thy tongue'? How does she respond to her father's order that 'if the prince do solicit you in that kind, you know your answer' and accept his proposal of marriage even though she does not love Don Pedro?
In Shakespeare's original text, in the early part of Act 1 Scene 2, Hero only has one line of text as she comments on Don John's 'melancholy disposition' which also illustrates she is not passive but a keen observer to the goings on in Leonato's house.
- Ask the students to return to their groups of four and agree what they think Hero might be thinking at the points given in the dialogue, writing down her thoughts on the empty lines given in the script.
Then, ask them to stage the scene with Hero speaking her internal thoughts directly to the audience. After time for rehearsal, ask the groups to present their scenes.
- After you've watched the scenes together, consider:
 - Did any of Hero's internal thoughts make you view the scene in a different way?
 - Are you surprised by any of Hero's thoughts?
 - What more have we found out about Hero in this scene?
 - How do the other characters treat Hero in this scene?

EDITED SCENE Act 2 Scene 1

LEONATO *[To BEATRICE]* By my troth, niece, thou wilt never get thee a husband, if thou be so shrewd of thy tongue.

Hero's thought: _____

ANTONIO In faith, she is too curst.

BEATRICE Too curst is more than curst, I shall lessen God's sending that way: for it is said, God sends a curst cow short horns, but to a cow too curst, he sends none.

LEONATO So, by being too curst, God will send you no horns.

BEATRICE Just, if he send me no husband, for the which blessing I am at him upon my knees every morning and evening: Lord, I could not endure a husband with a beard on his face, I had rather lie in the woollen!

ANTONIO *[To HERO]* Well, niece, I trust you will be ruled by your father.

Hero's thought: _____

BEATRICE Yes faith, it is my cousin's duty to make curtsy, and say, father, as it please you: but yet for all that, cousin, let him be a handsome fellow, or else make another curtsy, and say, father, as it please me.

LEONATO *[To HERO]* Daughter, remember what I told you: if the prince do solicit you in that kind, you know your answer.

Hero's thought: _____

GLOSSARY

lessen God's sending reduce what God has given me

just just so

at him praying to God

the woollen scratchy blankets

solicit ... kind propose marriage

THE MASQUERADE PARTY



In Act 2 Scene 1, the pressure put on Hero by her father is quickly undercut with the revellers entering the stage for the masquerade party which Leonato is hosting to celebrate the return of the Don Pedro and his men to Messina.

Here we see a good example of masks worn by the characters to hide their true identities. In Iqbal Khan's production he uses this idea because in many Indian celebrations, there are times when men and women gather separately with the ladies pretending to dance like the men and the men imitating the women to make their friends laugh. So for the masquerade in this production, Iqbal decided to have the men dressed as women and vice versa.



Benedick (Paul Bhattacharjee) and Beatrice (Meera Syal) in disguise at the masked ball

In rehearsals there was plenty of discussion about when the characters at the party would recognise their dancing partners and how this influences the playing of the scene. The actors felt that at the beginning of the scene they weren't sure who their dancing partners were but by the end, they fully recognised each other despite the disguise.



Masquerade As Ifs

To create a sense of disguise in this exercise, you could give scarves to the boys and hats to the girls.

- Split the group into pairs (Hero/Don Pedro, Margaret/Balthasar, Antonio/Ursula, Benedick/Beatrice) and allocate each pair a short section of the masquerade party text (see page 9).
- Ask the students to read aloud their allocated scene as if:
 - You *don't* know the identity of your partner throughout the scene
 - You *do* know the identity of your partner throughout the scene
 - Start the scene as if you *don't* know the identity of your partner. Then choose a point in the scene where you recognise them (each character can choose a different point in the scene)
- Once the students know their text well, ask them to consider which character has more status or power in the scene. Tell them that when they agree who has the status and why, they must stage the scene showing physically who has the higher status by using body language, facial expressions and text to coerce their partner into a corner of the room. If they feel the status shifts between the two characters, they can swap the status between them as the scene is played out, always with the motivation of the most powerful character trying to force the other character into the corner of the room using only body language, facial expressions and text.
- Starting with the Hero and Don Pedro scene, ask the pairs to perform their scenes in turn so that the audience can compare and contrast the scene. Then watch Margaret and Balthasar, then Antonio and Ursula and finally Benedick and Beatrice. After this, reflect together on the activity:
 - Which interpretation do you think worked best in your scene and why?
 - How did recognising or not recognising the other character affect the atmosphere?
 - What effect did being able to physicalise your status have on the scene?

TEXT EXTRACTS

Act 2 Scene 1 – The masquerade party

Hero and Don Pedro

DON PEDRO Lady, will you walk a bout with your friend?
HERO So you walk softly, and look sweetly, and say nothing, I am yours for the walk, and especially when I walk away.
DON PEDRO With me in your company.
HERO I may say so when I please.

Margaret and Balthasar

BALTHASAR Well, I would you did like me.
MARGARET So would not I for your own sake, for I have many ill qualities.
BALTHASAR Which is one?
MARGARET I say my prayers aloud
BALTHASAR I love you the better, the hearers may cry amen.

Ursula and Antonio

URSULA I know you well enough, you are Signor Antonio.
ANTONIO At a word, I am not.
URSULA I know you by the waggling of your head.
ANTONIO To tell you true, I counterfeit him.

Beatrice and Benedick

BEATRICE Will you not tell me who told you so?
BENEDICK No, you shall pardon me.
BEATRICE Nor will you not tell me who you are?
BENEDICK Not now.
BEATRICE That I was disdainful, and that I had my good wit out of *The Hundred Merry Tales*: Well, this was Signor Benedick that said so.
BENEDICK What's he?
BEATRICE Why he is the prince's jester, a very dull fool.
BENEDICK When I know the gentleman, I'll tell him what you say.

GLOSSARY

walk a bout	dance	The Hundred Merry Tales	[a joke book]
so you	so long as you	What's he?	Who's he?
counterfeit	impersonate		



Hero's nightmare

The merriment and comedy at the masquerade party is undercut when we see Don John planning to trick Claudio into thinking that Hero is promiscuous and not 'as chaste as is the bud ere it be blown' as he first thought.

In Act 4 Scene 1 of *Much Ado About Nothing*, we see Hero being shamed on her wedding day when she's accused by Claudio of being unfaithful on the evening before their marriage. Here's what Kimberley Sykes, Assistant Director on this production, said about this scene:

I can't imagine this scene set anywhere else where it would resonate so strongly. It's not just about Hero feeling shame at being accused but the shame on her family and her father that works well for a production set in modern India.

Meera Syal also spoke about how modern Indian society still highly values a woman's virginity; it being of utmost importance on her wedding day. In rehearsals, Amara Karan who plays Hero was asked by the director to 'stand up for yourself' and maintain her dignity portraying her innocence through her silent response to this accusation.



Beatrice (Meera Syal), Hero (Amara Karan) and Don Pedro (Shiv Grewal) at Hero's wedding



The shaming of Hero

In order for the students to empathise with Hero's plight, this next activity underlines how all the guests are complicit in shaming her by not defending her honour.

- Explain that as a group you will create a still image of a wedding scene. Decide what type of wedding it is: is it set within a particular culture or time? Build up the picture in turn, starting with the bride and bridegroom (Claudio and Hero) who place themselves in the centre of the image. Add the Friar and the father of the bride (Leonato). Then add the groomsmen (Benedick, Don John and Don Pedro) and bridesmaid (Beatrice). Finally position everyone else as guests and servants around the wedding party.
- When everyone is position, the student playing Claudio reads out the accusation (see page 10). Ask the group to think about what their character would be thinking after Claudio's made this accusation and to think of a line to say in reaction to it.
- Explain that when you touch them on the shoulder, each person will speak aloud what their character is thinking. Walk around the image, touching each of the students on the shoulder in turn until everyone's reaction has been heard.
- Next ask the student playing Hero to sit on a chair in the centre of the image while the rest of the group form a circle around her. Cut out the insults spoken to Hero (see page 10) so that every student has one to say (some of the lines will have to be repeated). Point to each student in turn and ask them to read out the insult they've been given, repeating it over and over, getting louder and louder until Hero can't stand it any long; she should then stand up from her chair and gives her response (see text below). As soon as she stands up, all the insults must stop.
- After this, reflect together on the activity:
 - How did Hero feel when she was wrongly accused of being with another man?
 - What would you do if you were Hero in this situation?
 - How did it feel when they were insulting Hero (in role as guests and servants)?

TEXT EXTRACTS

Act 4 Scene 1

To cut out and use in the activity on page 9.

Claudio's Accusation

Myself, my brother, and this grieved count
Did see her, hear her, at that hour last night,
Talk with a ruffian at her chamber window,
Who hath indeed most like a liberal villain,
Confessed the vile encounters they have had
A thousand times in secret.

Insults to Hero

rotten orange

cunning sin

her blush is guiltiness

approved wantan

pampered animal

savage sensuality

impious purity

beggar's issue

foul tainted flesh

Hero's response

O God defend me, how am I beset!

What kind of catechising call you this?