

Much Ado About Nothing

Sample Analytical Paper Topics

The following paper topics, each with a sample outline, are designed to test your understanding of *Much Ado About Nothing*. Each deals with the play as a whole and requires analysis of important themes and literary devices.

TOPIC #1

Shakespeare interweaves two love stories in *Much Ado About Nothing*, the Claudio–Hero plot and the Benedick–Beatrice plot. Write an analytical essay on the ways in which they parallel or counterpoint each other in characterization, in dialogue, and in plot structure.

Outline

I. Thesis Statement: *The Claudio–Hero and the Benedick–Beatrice love stories are interwoven in Much Ado About Nothing through a series of parallels and contrasts in characterization, in dialogue, and in plot structure.*

II. Characterization

A. Parallels

1. Hero and Beatrice are kinswomen and good friends and Claudio and Benedick are comrades-in-arms and good friends
2. Both couples knew each other in the past
3. Both couples are learning to discriminate properly and to estimate each other's true value
4. Both couples' ability to love will be tested

B. Contrasts

1. Claudio and Hero are slaves to convention and Benedick and Beatrice are free spirits
2. Claudio seeks a wooing intermediary and Benedick woos directly
3. Claudio and Hero rely on knowledge, and Benedick and Beatrice rely on their intuition.
4. After professing their love, Claudio and Hero are easily derailed, but nothing will stop Benedick and Beatrice

III. Dialogue

A. Parallels

1. Both couples are educated aristocrats
2. Both couples talk about marriage
3. Both Claudio and Benedick speak about their fears of cuckoldry
4. Both couples will learn to speak more directly

B. Contrasts

1. Claudio and Hero usually speak in verse and Benedick and Beatrice usually speak in prose
2. Claudio and Hero comply with social superior's voices and Benedick and Beatrice challenge social superior's voices
3. Benedick and Beatrice radically change their speech patterns and Claudio and Hero do not

IV. Plot structure

A. Harmony of plots

1. The Claudio–Hero plot and the Benedick–Beatrice plot are harmonized because they are friends
2. The Claudio–Hero plot and the Benedick–Beatrice plot are harmonized because they are both love stories
3. The Claudio–Hero and the Benedick–Beatrice plot are both harmonized by their gaiety until crisis occurs

B. Polarization of plots

1. The polarization of the plots begin when reflective Benedick will no longer play court jester for Claudio and Don Pedro
2. The crisis in the Claudio–Hero plot, the refusal and accusal of Hero, precipitates an extended crisis in the Benedick–Beatrice plot
3. The crisis in the Benedick–Beatrice plot, Beatrice’s demand that Benedick kill Claudio, accelerates the polarization between the two plots
4. The two plots are completely polarized when Benedick agrees to, and then challenges, Claudio

C. Reconciliation of plots

1. The Claudio–Hero plot is reconciled with the Benedick–Beatrice plot when Benedick releases penitent Claudio from his challenge
2. The Claudio–Hero plot is reconciled with the Beatrice–Benedick plot as both couples prepare for their double-wedding

V. **Conclusion:** Shakespeare uses parallels and counterpoints to interweave two love stories, one based on convention, the other on invention, in a pattern that begins in harmony, splits in crisis, and resolves in reconciliation.

TOPIC #2

Appearance versus reality is the major theme in *Much Ado About Nothing* and the lesson of the play is to learn to discriminate properly and to estimate everything at its true value. Write an analytical essay on misnotings that take place in this play, as well as the way in which they are resolved; include the motifs, imagery, dialogue, and theatrical devices that Shakespeare employs to explore this theme.

Outline

I. **Thesis Statement:** *In Much Ado About Nothing, Shakespeare explores the theme of appearance versus reality and its lesson—proper discrimination and true value estimation—through a series of deceptions, emphasized by mask motifs and fashion imagery, which are resolved as the characters are willing to perceive the truth.*

II. **Appearance versus reality brought about by a series of deceptions**

A. Benign deceptions

1. The servant of Antonio overheard a conversation that concerned his master’s niece and he shared it with him
2. The friends of Benedick and Beatrice gulled them into believing each loved the other
3. Friar Francis suggested that Leonato tell everyone his daughter Hero died until her name was cleared
4. Leonato tests Claudio’s contrition with the penance of mourning at the tomb and marrying his niece, sight unseen

B. Malicious deceptions

1. Don John deceived Claudio into believing that his friend Don Pedro wooed Hero for himself
2. Don John and Borachio deceived Claudio and Don Pedro into believing that Hero was a wanton

III. **Appearance versus reality emphasized with mask motifs**

A. Social masks

1. The pointed wordspar between Benedick and Beatrice is a mask for their real feelings for each other

2. The decorous language of the aristocrats masks their real feelings and thoughts, which are hidden beneath their words
3. Dogberry uses high-faluting words he doesn't understand to impress others

B. Actual masks

1. The men wear actual masks at the masquerade ball to purposefully deceive each other
2. Margaret wears Hero's clothing to pretend she is Hero
3. The women wear masks in the denouement to hide their identities from their future husbands

IV. Appearance versus reality stressed with fashion imagery

A. Dialogue

1. Beatrice uses fashion imagery to describe Benedick
2. Benedick uses fashion imagery to describe Beatrice
3. Claudio and Don Pedro use fashion imagery to describe Benedick
4. Borachio uses fashion imagery to introduce his tale of villainy to Conrade
5. Benedick uses fashion imagery to describe his freedom from another man's opinion

B. Costumes

1. Claudio is dressed as a groom although he intends to renounce Hero
2. Dogberry is dressed as a magistrate for his examination of the prisoners although he has not studied law

V. Appearance versus reality is resolved through recognizing the truth

A. Proper discrimination

1. Claudio recognizes his error of mistaking, and Hero recognizes she was wronged only as long as she was slandered
2. Benedick and Beatrice both recognize the depth of their feelings for each other

B. Estimating true value

1. Claudio and Hero recognize that their relationship must begin with trust and faith
2. Benedick and Beatrice recognize that their love for each other has more value than their friends' opinions of them

VI. Conclusion: Willingness to see the truth gives the proper discrimination and estimation of true value to see past deceptions, and is emphasized in *Much Ado About Nothing* with mask motifs and fashion imagery.

TOPIC #3

In *Much Ado About Nothing*, Benedick and Beatrice explore an unconventional path of love. Write an analytical essay on the lovers' journey in awareness, and the way in which Shakespeare uses syntactic structures to reflect this movement.

Outline

I. Thesis Statement: *Benedick and Beatrice explore an unconventional path of love; a journey in awareness which is reflected in their syntactic expression.*

II. Unconventional path of love

A. Refuse to comply

1. Benedick and Beatrice are contemptuous of convention
2. Benedick and Beatrice are marriage-bashers

B. Follow their ideals

1. Benedick and Beatrice spontaneously explore their relationship
2. Benedick and Beatrice commit to a true union

III. Journey in awareness

- A. Point of departure
 - 1. Benedick and Beatrice mask their feelings
 - 2. Benedick and Beatrice have an adversarial relationship
 - 3. Benedick and Beatrice are locked in past memories
 - 4. Benedick and Beatrice are negatively obsessed with each other
- B. Change of course
 - 1. Benedick and Beatrice recognize their true feelings for each other
 - 2. Benedick and Beatrice recognize their faults and resolve to mend their ways
 - 3. Benedick and Beatrice see each other with a fresh viewpoint
 - 4. Benedick and Beatrice are truly concerned about each other
- C. Arrival
 - 1. Benedick and Beatrice express their feelings and confess their love for one another
 - 2. Benedick and Beatrice work in harmony
 - 3. Benedick and Beatrice openly explore each other
 - 4. Benedick and Beatrice unite and their joy flows out to others

IV. Syntactic change of expression

- A. Begins
 - 1. Benedick and Beatrice camouflage their feelings with clever banter
 - 2. Benedick and Beatrice wordspar for intellectual supremacy
 - 3. Benedick and Beatrice speak elaborately for oblique rhetorical effect on others
- B. Changes
 - 1. Benedick and Beatrice restrain themselves during their parallel gulling scenes
 - 2. Benedick and Beatrice, in soliloquies, change their speech patterns as they change their intentions toward each other
- C. Ends
 - 1. Benedick and Beatrice express their feelings
 - 2. Benedick and Beatrice good naturedly tease each other and harmonize their wit
 - 3. Benedick and Beatrice are true to themselves and speak directly from their hearts

- V. Conclusion:** Benedick and Beatrice's unconventional path of love took them on a journey in which they recognized and surrendered their false verbal masks and found their true voices.

TOPIC #4

Shakespeare uses off stage action in the plot structure of *Much Ado About Nothing*. Write an essay, analyzing the types of offstage action employed and its value to the play.

Outline

- I. **Thesis Statement:** *Shakespeare employs valuable types of off stage action in his play, Much Ado About Nothing.*
- II. **Types of off stage action**
 - A. Conversations
 - 1. Antonio's servant overhears Claudio and Don Pedro
 - 2. Benedick and Beatrice begin their conversation before we hear their dialogue at the masked ball

B. Actions

1. Don John, Claudio, and Don Pedro witness the staged deceit to slander Hero
2. Leonato conducts a formal examination of persons involved in the slander

III. Value of off stage action

A. Information

1. Shakespeare keeps us informed of truths the players are not privy to
2. Shakespeare keeps our imaginations working so that we participate as active observers

B. Movement of action

1. Shakespeare dynamically uses off stage action to condense the action of the play
2. Shakespeare economically uses off stage action for emphasis
3. Shakespeare uses off stage action for tonal changes

IV. Conclusion: The different types of off stage action that Shakespeare uses in *Much Ado About Nothing* are necessary for information and movement of action.