

## Disguise in Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing*

### Student worksheets

#### Warmer – Truth or lie?

Think of two true facts about yourself and one lie. Write them in the box (in any order).

e.g. 'I've never eaten an egg' or 'When I was 1 year old, I won first prize in a baby beauty contest.'

1.

2.

3.

Work in small groups. Take it in turns to read your sentences. The rest of your group must guess which is the lie.

#### Task 1 – Discussion

Look at the picture. It's from a film of Shakespeare's play *Much Ado About Nothing*.

Discuss in pairs:

1. Who do you think the people are?
2. Why are they wearing masks?



Beatrice ↑ and friends in disguise in the 1993 film of *Much Ado About Nothing*

## Task 2 – Introducing *Much Ado About Nothing*

You are going to read a short summary of Shakespeare's play *Much Ado About Nothing*. Work in pairs to answer the questions. You can use the glossary below to help you.

1. What kind of people do you think Beatrice and Benedick are?
2. How do Beatrice and Benedick feel about each other? How do you know?
3. Why do the characters use masks at the party?
4. Who is disguised at the party: Beatrice or Benedick?

### Disguise in *Much Ado About Nothing*

Disguise<sup>1</sup> is very important in *Much Ado About Nothing*, particularly in the relationship between a woman called Beatrice and a soldier called Benedick. Beatrice and Benedick, who are both playful and clever, have disliked each other for many years. They often argue and insult<sup>2</sup> each other. At a party, the characters use masks to hide their faces, and pretend to be someone else. This is great fun, as that they can say whatever they like without being recognised. Beatrice and Benedick begin a conversation. Benedick is disguised, but Beatrice is not, and she doesn't realise who she is talking to. Benedick tells Beatrice that no one thinks she's funny. Beatrice tells Benedick that everyone thinks he's an idiot<sup>3</sup>. This leads their friends to make a plan. They decide to stop Beatrice and Benedick arguing, and make them fall in love instead.

#### Glossary

<sup>1</sup> disguise (n)	something you wear or use to change your appearance, so that people cannot recognise you
<sup>2</sup> insult (v)	to say something bad about someone, and make them feel upset
<sup>3</sup> idiot (n)	a very stupid person

## Task 3 – Adjectives: describing character

Work in pairs. Match the adjectives of character in the box to their definitions.

outrageous	miserable	immoral	grumpy
furious			

- a. \_\_\_\_\_ – unhappy
- b. \_\_\_\_\_ – not considered to be good or honest by most people
- c. \_\_\_\_\_ – bad-tempered (in general)
- d. \_\_\_\_\_ – very angry (now)
- e. \_\_\_\_\_ – shocking or extreme

**Task 4 – Controlled practice: gap fill**

Fill in the gaps using the adjectives in the box.

outrageous	miserable	immoral	grumpy
furious			

- I often feel \_\_\_\_\_ when I wake up in the morning, particularly when I have to get up early.
- At the moment, I'm feeling really \_\_\_\_\_, because I've got lots of problems.
- I can't believe that café charges \$32 for a coffee! It's \_\_\_\_\_! I'm not going to pay that!
- He's an \_\_\_\_\_ person. He doesn't know the difference between right and wrong.
- I was absolutely \_\_\_\_\_ when my brother borrowed my new car without asking me first.

**Task 5 – Act 2 Scene 1: Matching**

You are going to read some phrases from Act 2 Scene 1 of *Much Ado About Nothing*. Beatrice and Benedick are at the party. Benedick is wearing a mask but Beatrice is not. Beatrice begins to talk about Benedick, not realising that it is actually him under the mask. She insults him.

Read phrases **a–d**. They are modern translations of things that Beatrice says about Benedick.

- he's only really good at inventing stories
- he makes people laugh and at the same time he makes them furious
- he's miserable
- only immoral people enjoy spending time with him
- he's the Prince's clown, and a stupid idiot

Work in pairs. Complete the table below by matching modern translations a–d to extracts from Shakespeare's original text. An example has been done for you.

Shakespeare's original text	Modern translation
e.g. he is the Prince's jester, a very dull fool	= e. he's the Prince's clown, and a stupid idiot
1 none but libertines delight in him	
2 strikes him into melancholy	
3 for he both pleases men and angers them	
4 only his gift is in devising impossible slanders	

**Task 6 – Reading comprehension**

- a. *Read the full extract below and check your answers to Task 5 – Act 2 Scene 1: Matching.*
- b. *Now answer questions 1-4. Remember that Beatrice doesn't realise she's talking to Benedick, even though she's talking about him!*
1. How does Beatrice feel about Benedick?
  2. What sort of people like him?
  3. What effect does he have on people?
  4. How does he respond when people don't laugh at his jokes?

**Shakespeare**

BENEDICK

I pray you, what is he?

BEATRICE

Why, he\* is the Prince's jester, a very dull fool, only his gift is in devising impossible slanders. None but libertines delight in him, and the commendation is not in his wit but in his villainy, for he both pleases men and angers them, and then they laugh at him and beat him. I am sure he is in the fleet. I would he had boarded me.

BENEDICK

When I know the gentleman, I'll tell him what you say.

BEATRICE

Do, do. He'll but break a comparison or two on me, which, peradventure not marked or not laughed at, strikes him into melancholy, and then there's a partridge wing saved, for the fool will eat no supper that night.

**Modern translation**

BENEDICK

Who is this man? Tell me!

BEATRICE

He's\* the Prince's clown and a very dull idiot. He's only really good at inventing stories. Only immoral people enjoy spending time with him, and that's not because he's funny – it's because he's outrageous. He makes people laugh and at the same time he makes them furious. They laugh at him and then beat him up. I'm sure I saw him out there with the dancers. I'm sure he stepped on my toe!

BENEDICK

When I meet this gentleman, I'll tell him what you've said.

BEATRICE

Yes, please tell him. He'll probably make a joke or two about me – and if no one laughs, he'll be grumpy. But that will mean there will be more food for us, as he won't eat anything when he's miserable.

\* Benedick

### **Task 7 – Free practice: describing a person**

Work in small groups. Describe a person using adjectives from Task 3 – Adjectives: describing character. It could be someone that you know, or a character from a film or book. Explain why you have used those particular adjectives and give examples.

### **Cooler – Discussion**

In *Much Ado About Nothing*, Beatrice and Benedick don't continue to hate each other. Their friends make a plan to help them fall in love, and they do! They both realise that they were wrong about each other.

Discuss in small groups.

1. Why do you think that first impressions of a person are important?
2. Is it possible to change your mind about someone's personality? Can you give any examples of this, either from your own life, or from a film or book?