MRHS English Presents:
A Shakespearean Comedy in Five Acts
Written in 1598 (most likely)
Performed First in 1599

Much Ado About Nothing
By William Shakespeare

Opening:
January 4, 2010
Coffin Theatre
Room 229
Morell High School

Study Calendar
Choice Activities
Final Examination Essay Topics
Writing a Literary Essay
Much Ado About Nothing Unit

While studying this unit, we will read, watch, and perform this Shakespearean comedy. Typically, we will read or perform a scene together and then watch trained actors do the same, while identifying significant plot details and important literary elements. During the next three weeks, students will also be required to complete various activities to demonstrate comprehension. In total, 12 Ducats (Italian currency) worth of activities will be completed. The oral presentation is obligatory (no choice – must be done). The other eight points are choice.

English 521 Calendar - January 2009

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Much Ado About Nothing Choice Activities (Each Worth 4 Ducats)

Much Ado About Nothing Oral Presentations (4 Ducats - Obligatory)
Your task is to choose ONE or TWO passages to present. Lines should be memorized, then performed (Coffin-approval required). Your passage(s) MUST be a MINIMUM of 10 lines. An oral presentation rubric is available from Coffin. This may be completed any day during the unit (until the final submission date of January 21).

Casting the Play (4 Ducats)
Cast the play with famous people OR MRHS students. Choose ten characters from the play and fill each role with a famous person OR an MRHS student, explaining your choice for each role in approximately 75-100 words each.

Moral Dilemmas (4 Ducats)
Every story or play involves some difficult moral questions. For Much Ado About Nothing, pose six difficult moral questions and then provide possible answers to those questions. Each response should be around 75-100 words.

Comic Strip (4 Ducats)
Create a 12-15 panel comic strip which accurately tells the story of one part of the play. Make sure you choose a significant event or occurrence. It does not have to be in color. Dialogue balloons or narration are required.

Inventing the Context (4 Ducats)
Presumably, William Shakespeare got the idea for Much Ado About Nothing from somewhere. Your task in this assignment is to create the fictional context for this play. Write a narrative (five-hundred or so words) which explains what was going on in Shakespeare’s life that prompted (or inspired) him to come up with the plot for Much Ado About Nothing. This can be written in first (as Shakespeare himself) or third-person (an observer).

Shakespeare Re-Told (4 Ducats – 12 Ducats)
Update the setting, time, storyline, and characters of the play to fit members of 521 English. Think of a modern retelling of the play. If you want to perform it in class or on film, it can be worth up to 12 points and release you from the obligations of the oral presentation. This assignment must be submitted on January 21.

Song Parody (4 Ducats – 8 Ducats)
Write a song parody, using the plot of Much Ado About Nothing, as your subject. The parody should borrow the tune of a popular song and substitute its lyrics for your own. If you actually want to perform it, it can be worth 8 Ducats and release you from the obligations of the oral presentation. Performances happen January 21.

Film a Scene (Up to 12 Ducats)
Groups of students perform a short scene from our play together on video. Students from other classes may also participate, but the scene must be unscripted. These must be submitted on January 21.

Create Your Own (4 Ducats):
Create your own assignment. As always, Coffin-approval required.
Much Ado About Nothing Final Exam Essay Topics

The final exam will require you to prepare to write a major essay. Since the study of English encourages students to plan, each student is REQUIRED to prepare an outline for ONE of the following essays below. Outlines must be prepared using proper MLA style. Students take a GOOD COPY of the outline to the exam to produce a literary essay of approximately 1000 words which examines and supports (using passages from the play) their chosen topic.

The Function of Deceit
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. 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 life in general?

The Violence of Language
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 (Act Two Scene One, line 216). Find examples of speech/words representing wounds and battles in the play. What does Shakespeare and his characters accomplish by metaphorically turning words into weapons? What does the use of this violent language signify in the play and the world outside it?

Examining Don Pedro
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, he is melancholy. Investigate Don Pedro’s character, imagine the different ways in which he could be portrayed, and relate 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 by proposing to Beatrice, or is he sincere? Why would Shakespeare create a Don Pedro for his comedy about romantic misunderstandings?

Male & Female Honor
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 the 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 for women? Examine the question of honor and fidelity for the 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?

Shakespeare’s Point of View
Each of Shakespeare’s plays contains some of his own point of view or prejudices on the subjects and themes. In Much Ado About Nothing, discuss (using examples from the play) how Shakespeare allows his own point of view enter into his writing and his characterizations.

Love Stories
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.

Appearance vs Reality
Appearance versus reality is the major theme in the play, whose lesson is to learn to discriminate properly and to estimate everything at its true value. Write an analytical essay on mistakes/misunderstandings that take place, 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.

The Ideal Couple?
Are Beatrice and Benedick an ideal couple? Is the fact they are roughly equal in wit and intelligence significant? Do you find their attitude toward love and their courtship more satisfying than Claudio and Hero’s? Why or why not?

Character Studies
Discuss the character of Beatrice and/or Benedick. Is Benedick ‘less than a man’ because he abandons his male friends? Is Beatrice a harsh woman or a shrew because she is not obviously submissive? In what ways do Beatrice and Benedick challenge traditional sex roles? Is the challenge a healthy one?

Examining Beatrice & Benedick
Discuss the character of Beatrice and/or Benedick. Is Benedick a womanish man because he abandons his male friends? Is Beatrice a mannish woman or a shrew because she is not obviously submissive? In what ways do Beatrice and Benedick challenge traditional sex roles? Is the challenge a healthy one?

A Choice of Your Own
After getting ‘schooled’ on some of the literary writing techniques, perhaps you will want to choose your own topic from Much Ado About Nothing. These choices MUST have Coffin-approval on the Monday morning prior to exams.
Try to write about something about the play that you find interesting. Choose a topic that you can examine further in essay form.

Remember, your topic should also address the discussions surrounding our play. Again, read the front and back matter of your play, check out sparknotes and cliffnotes and discuss with peers.

Give your essay an interesting title that leaves no doubt about the position you are taking.

Assume a very intelligent reader will be looking over the work, and that he’s read the play, but he has NEVER examined the theme. That’s your job.

Keep your tone straightforward and your explanations concise, which means don’t waste words – be clear without being overly-verbose.

Write as directly and clearly as you can, but remember that ‘simple’ isn’t ‘simplistic’: it’s clear and to the point.

Don’t retell the story. A re-telling of the plot is of limited value in literary essays and is usually used only to set up the context of the quotations you plan to analyze. Instead, express an opinion about what you’ve read.

Don’t be afraid to take risks to interpret. Aim for a thesis that not everyone would agree with.

Don’t assume there’s one correct view; in literary study there isn’t. This does not mean that ANY position you take about is correct; some arguments fit the evidence better than others, so be careful about the one you make.

Make sure any argument you present is supported by text evidence (properly-cited lines from the play).

Explain your arguments thoroughly and patiently. Don’t expect the handsome reader to grasp your claims easily.

Show that you care about your work by proofreading carefully for small errors.

Organizing a Literary Essay

Organize your paragraphs according to the development of your argument, not the chronological order of the text.

Cover one argument per section of your essay.

Use transitions to show how sections are logically connected to each other and to your thesis.

In this examination, you shall be required to use HEADINGS for each section of your essay:

- Introduction (but give it a creative, catchy title)
- Paragraph 1 Title (catchy title)
- Paragraph 2 Title (catchy title)
- Paragraph 3 Title; and so on (catchy title[s])
- Conclusion (again, use a catchy title)

Don’t try to say everything you’ve learned in one essay.

Use present tense to show that literary works and the issues are still alive. Not “Don John was...” but “Don John is...”

Supporting Your Points

- Select only those quotations that advance and support your particular thesis. Keep them as brief as possible.
- Set up quotations with a brief reminder to readers of what is happening in the text at that point (but don’t summarize plot), followed by some sort of analysis of the passage.
- Integrate quotations into your essay so that everything reads as coherent sentences (use the Three Steps).
- When quoting the play, make certain to use proper MLA in-text quotation: (Act. Scene. Line.)
- Roman Numerals must be used for act/scene. For example: It is clear that Dogberry is an uneducated man when he states that he and Verges are the malefactors. (III. iv. 81-82)

Writing a Literary Essay for Shakespeare’s Works

Great Essays Will:

- Have a strong introduction that clearly states an integrated thesis that is thoughtful, argumentative, and specific; strong introductions ‘hook’ the reader. How will you hook?
- Integrate supporting details, examples, and quotes with insightful, on topic information to support analysis. This shows the reader that you – as a Shakespeare reader – have fully understood the play and the essay you choose.
- Use well-selected textual evidence & create substantial proof of thesis, meaning students will use actual lines from the play in order to support any claims they make about the play.
- Use the Three Steps to In-Text Citations:
  - Analyze how the evidence supports the main idea of the section (using the Three Steps);
  - Don’t just insert a line from the play without telling the reader how it supports your thesis.
  - Insightfully connects analysis to the thesis;
- Remember, the entire essay is being written to support a thesis statement.
  - If you wander in another direction during the writing of your essay, then you aren’t staying on topic.
- Select the most effective organizational pattern in support of the thesis;

What is the Best Way to Set Up This Essay?

- use transitions to effectively link ideas;
- avoid slang and saying “you” or “I”;
- show maturity through precise word choices, sentence variety, and paragraph development;
- be free of spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors;
- keep a consistent tense

The Outline

- Must be typed or neatly-handwritten on a single page.
- Four identification lines in top left corner
- Parallelism is still very important
- Must include the following elements/headers:
  - Title of your essay (centered at the top of the page)
  - Introduction (use the catchy one you created)
  - Under the Introduction, write out thesis statement.
  - Section One (but use your catchy name)
  - Section Two (but use your catchy name)
  - Section Three (you MUST have at least three)
  - Conclusion (again, use a catchy phrase)

More Outline Stuff

- No line in your outline may exceed eight words.
- Outlines follow this format:

I. Introduction
   A. Thesis Statement
   B. Supporting Detail

II. Section One
   A. Supporting Detail
   B. Supporting Detail
      1. More Info
   C. Supporting Detail

III. Section Two

General Rules for this Exam Essay

- You will be required to stay for 1.5 hours.
- Essays must be double-spaced.
- You MUST arrive with your outline prepared or it shall receive NO CREDIT.
- Essays must be within the 1000 word range.
- If you use quotes LONGER than four lines, then the quote must be indented on both sides AND single-spaced.
Final Examination Literary Essay Assessment Rubric

The following essay criteria will be assessed on a scale of 4.
4 = Excellent
3 = Strong
2 = Adequate
1 = Weak

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<th>Introduction &amp; Thesis &amp; Conclusion</th>
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<td>- Contains strong introduction that clearly states an integrated thesis that is thoughtful, argumentative, and specific.</td>
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<td>- Contains strong conclusion that clearly re-states the thesis and summarizes the arguments.</td>
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<th>Proof of Thesis, Ideas, Concepts &amp; Themes/Supporting Details &amp; Use of Evidence</th>
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<td>- Integrates supporting details, examples, and quotes with insightful contextual information to support analysis.</td>
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<td>- Incorporates highly effective, well-chosen, relevant evidence taken directly from the text and used to emphasize essay’s points.</td>
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<td>- Writing shows thorough understanding of the topic/supporting details.</td>
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<td>- Within the essay, when material is referenced, it is done so according to the agreed-upon format.</td>
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<th>Analysis &amp; Connections</th>
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<td>- Analyses how evidence supports the main idea. Insightfully connects analysis to the thesis without summarizing.</td>
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<td>- Develop ideas with a high degree of logic and coherence. There are no areas which are unclear or confusing to the reader.</td>
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<th>Organizational Elements</th>
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<td>- Selects the most effective organizational pattern in support of the thesis. Arguments are arranged in climactic order. Section headings are used.</td>
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<td>- Essay should be very well organized. Distinct paragraphs are evident. Ideas flow in a logical sequence with clear transitions.</td>
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<td>- Grammar/spelling consistent with grade level; includes using a consistent verb tense and appropriate and precise word choices.</td>
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<td>- The essay should contain few, if any, spelling, punctuation, capitalization, grammar, or usage errors.</td>
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<td>- Adheres to essay conventions: uses effective transitions to link ideas; avoids slang and saying “I” or “you”.</td>
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<td>- Command of essay form (develops a strong thesis or controlling idea, organization, strong body paragraphs, conclusion).</td>
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<th>Essay Style, Language &amp; Voice</th>
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<td>- Shows stylistic maturity; sentence variety, and paragraph development; understands the style of writing literary pieces.</td>
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<td>- Language and voice are effective, consistent, and appropriate for the essay and the academic level.</td>
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<th>Guidelines &amp; Focus</th>
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<td>- Follows agreed-upon elements insisted upon for this examination; student shows commitment to essay form and style.</td>
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<td>- Essay is related to the assigned topic and allows the reader to understand much more about the topic without summarizing.</td>
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<th>Essay Outline</th>
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<td>- Student presents a good copy essay outline which serves as the basis for the essay. Essay follows outline carefully.</td>
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<td>- Essay outline is presented in proper MLA format.</td>
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<th>Coffin Caliber Score</th>
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<td>- Satisfying the elements required to suitably impress Coffin’s demanding/exacting standards.</td>
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<td>- Given time restraints and planning availability, student produces a piece of writing relative to his/her potential.</td>
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