Much Ado About Nothing Discussion Topics

The Function of Deceit in Much Ado About Nothing
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 Story
What is Shakespeare actually suggesting about love in this play? Though we come to like Beatrice and Benedick, and to root for their romance, in the end, they get the same reward (marriage) as Claudio and Hero. Is Shakespeare undermining marriage here, by saying it's not necessarily an indicator of true love? Do Claudio and Hero have true love? Do Beatrice and Benedick?

Much Ado
The only way to justify all the “ado” about Hero's virginity is to understand that in Shakespeare's day, all a woman really brought to a marriage was her chastity. It seems our modern mores, being different than Shakespeare's, that make the foundation of the play a little tenuous. If this scandal of disloyalty before a wedding were to crop up today, would the same brouhaha occur? Is it fair to say that this fuss is really “about nothing”?

Real Hero
Is there a hero (besides the character named Hero) in this play? Are there any characters you trust to be simply “good” people, or do each of the characters transform too much in order to trust them?

B and B
Beatrice and Benedick's love seems the most believable in the play, though it's originally couched in mutual hatred. This scheme of “I say I hate you, so I mean I love you” is as old as school children’s habits on the playground. Why is this tradition of masked love such a time-honored device? What does it say about the power of love? Further, is there a possibility that Benedick and Beatrice really do hate each other, and are only tricked into romance by circumstance and to prove they aren't proud?
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 Four Faces of Benedick
Describe how Benedick is - at the same time - the following: the Outsider, the Lover, the Soldier, the Messenger.

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?

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?

Other Questions for Consideration
❖ Describe how Beatrice tests Benedick's love for her in the play.
❖ Describe the ‘merry war’ between Beatrice and Benedick.
❖ Explain how the plots and subplots in Much Ado About Nothing resemble a modern-day sitcom television show.
❖ Explain the influence of Don John's character in the play.
❖ Give examples of Hero's use of deceit in Much Ado About Nothing.
❖ How do gossip, overhearing, and conversation function in the play, Much Ado About Nothing?
❖ How do the lower characters Dogberry and Verges fit into the main plotline of Much Ado About Nothing?
❖ In Act V - Scene I, how does Borachio (at least in part) atone for his earlier actions in the play?
❖ How does Claudio possess the characteristics of a little boy (or a wuss) more than those of a man and a soldier?
❖ In Much Ado About Nothing, who do you think has more honor - the men or the women? Explain.
❖ Who sees Don John as the probable cause of the problem between Claudio and Hero at the wedding in Act Four and what does that show about him?
❖ Why might it be hard to believe that Hero and Claudio love each other?
❖ List four separate plots in the play, Much Ado About Nothing.
❖ Our play is a comedy, yet it tackles issues like trust and honor, etc. What is the secret message that lies in the final celebration?
❖ The term ‘much ado about nothing’ means to make a fuss over something trivial or unimportant. Provide an example of much ado about nothing from Much Ado About Nothing.
❖ What does Beatrice mean when she says: ‘God help the noble Claudio! If he hath caught the Benedick, it will cost him a thousand pounds ere he be cured’?
❖ What does the messenger mean when he says that Claudio has ‘borne himself beyond the promise of his age, doing in the figure of a lamb, the feats of a lion’?
❖ What is the ‘monument’ Benedick wishes to build ‘ere (before) he dies in Act V - Scene II?
❖ What reasons does Don John give for his bad mood in Act I - Scene III in Much Ado About Nothing?
❖ Why is it necessary for Hero to seem to die in Much Ado About Nothing?

More Questions/Debatable Statements to Consider
❖ Men and women should marry persons of similar social and economic status as themselves.
❖ People choose with whom they will fall in love.
❖ It is better not to marry than to marry and risk being cheated on by your spouse.
❖ Most people can be trusted to be faithful in marriage.
❖ Men are attracted to women who are assertive and bold.
❖ Jealousy in a romantic relationship is usually a sign that the relationship has problems.
❖ Because parents usually know what is best for their children when it comes to choosing a mate, children should go along with their parents’ wishes in this regard.