

Disguise in Shakespeare's 'Much Ado About Nothing'

Topic

The use of disguise in Shakespeare's play 'Much Ado About Nothing'

Learning outcomes

- Identify and discuss the theme of disguise in 'Much Ado About Nothing'
- Develop ability to read Shakespearean language alongside a modern translation
- Write and perform a short script about a misunderstanding (optional)
- Give opinions about perceptions of people

Age and level

13-17, Adults (B1)

Time

Approximately 50 minutes + optional 30–40-minute writing task

Materials

Presentation OR student worksheet

Introduction

This lesson plan introduces students to the theme of disguise in Shakespeare's play 'Much Ado About Nothing'. Students read a short summary of the role of disguise in the play and are introduced to the main characters of Beatrice and Benedick. They read and analyse a short extract from the play with the

help of a modern translation. They have the option of writing and performing a short script about a misunderstanding. They end the lesson by discussing perceptions of people.

Teachers can print a two-page student worksheet to accompany the lesson, or they can use a presentation for a no printing option.

Procedure

1. Lead-in (10 mins)

- **Option 1 (if using presentation):** Show **slide 2** of the presentation. Explain that the picture shows a scene from a film of Shakespeare's play 'Much Ado About Nothing'. Explain that students will talk about the picture, but it doesn't matter if they don't know the play or the film. They can guess.
- Students discuss questions 1-3 in pairs, small groups or as a whole class. If students discuss in pairs or groups, invite some to share their thoughts. If some know the play or film, ask them to give their answers to the questions. Alternatively, you can provide **answers**.
 1. The picture shows two important characters from the play at a party. These are Beatrice (second from left) and her cousin and friend Hero (far right). They are accompanied by other friends.
 2. When they wear masks, they can disguise themselves and pretend to be other people. They can say and do what they like without being recognised.
 3. It is set in Italy during the 16th century.
- Now tell students to write five words they associate with the picture. Students compare words in pairs. If you like, you can ask some to share their words with the class.
- **Option 2 (if not using the presentation):** Tell students that they are going to read a scene from Shakespeare's play 'Much Ado About Nothing'. Ask if they know anything about the play. Establish that it is set in Italy in the 16th century, and that it is about two women, Beatrice and her cousin, Hero; and two men, Benedick and Claudio.
- Explain that the scene that they will read takes place at a masked party. Ask students to discuss the pros and cons of attending a masked party (e.g. you

	<p>don't know who you are talking to so you could accidentally insult them: nobody knows who you are so you can behave in a different way). Invite some students to share their thoughts.</p>
<p>2. Task 1: Introduction to 'Much Ado About Nothing' (10 mins)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show slide 3 of the presentation or refer students to Task 1 in the student worksheet. • Before students read the text, check that they understand the word 'disguise'. Explain that the text talks about the role of disguise in the play. It also talks about the main characters Beatrice and Benedick. • Students read the text, then discuss questions 1-3 as a whole class, or in pairs / small groups. If they discuss in pairs / small groups, ask some to give their answers. Check the meanings of any important words e.g. insult, argue, idiot. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. They are both playful and clever. They have disliked each other for many years. They often argue and insult each other. Benedick is a soldier. 2. He says that no one thinks she's funny. 3. She tells him that everyone thinks he's an idiot.
<p>3. Task 2: Matching (10 minutes)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain that students are going to read a short extract of the play. The extract is from the party scene described in the previous text i.e. when Beatrice is insulting Benedick. Explain that Benedick is wearing a mask, so Beatrice does not know who he is. • Show slide 4 of the presentation or refer students to Task 2A in the student worksheet. Explain that sentences 1-5 are some of Beatrice's insults. If using the student worksheet, tell them to cover Task 2B. • In small groups, students discuss the sentences and see if they can guess what any of them mean. Some of them will be easier to guess (e.g. number 4), and they could consult dictionaries. If this is too challenging, just go straight to the next step. • Show slide 5 of the presentation or refer students to Task 2B in the student worksheet. Students match sentences 1-5 to modern translations a-e. Check understanding of any unfamiliar adjectives e.g. furious, miserable, immoral

	<p>Answers: 1e, 2d, 3c, 4b, 5a</p>
<p>4. Task 3: Reading and comprehension (10-15 minutes)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show slide 6 of the presentation or refer students to Task 3 in the student worksheet. Explain that the extract is from Act 2, Scene 1 of 'Much Ado About Nothing'. • Ask questions to establish the background: Where are Beatrice and Benedick? (At a party) What is their relationship? (They dislike each other) Who is disguised? (Benedick) Does Beatrice know that she is talking to Benedick? (No) Who is Beatrice talking about? (Benedick) What is she saying about him? (She is insulting him) • Give students time to read the extract and the modern translation. The modern translation is available on slide 7. • Refer students to questions 1-4 below the extract or show slide 8. Students discuss in pairs or small groups. If necessary, write the questions on the board or ask students to note the questions. Then show slide 7 so that they can refer to the text as they discuss. Ask some groups to share their answers. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. She doesn't like him. She says he is a fool / idiot; that he invents lies about people; he's outrageous. 2. Immoral people. 3. He makes people laugh, and he makes them furious / angry. They laugh at home and then beat him up. 4. He's miserable and he doesn't eat.
<p>5. Optional Task: Writing a scene (30-40 mins)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain that students are going to write a short scene between two people at a party. One of the people is wearing a disguise. Elicit the kinds of misunderstandings that could happen e.g. a person insults another; they tell a secret; they declare love etc. • In pairs or small groups, students write a short scene between the two people. If you feel that 'insults' is not an appropriate scenario, then choose a different one e.g. declaring love.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Walk around the room as students write and help if necessary. When they are ready, give pairs / groups some time to practise reading their scripts.• Pairs / groups perform their scripts. If you have a large class, choose just some pairs / groups, or put pairs / groups together to perform in front of each other. If you like, you can make notes of language use as students perform, then choose some mistakes to review at the end.
6. Task 4: Discussion (10 mins)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Explain that 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 they were wrong about each other.• Show slide 9 or the presentation or dictate / write the following questions on the board:<ol style="list-style-type: none">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?• Students discuss in pairs, groups or as a whole class. If they discuss in pairs / groups, invite some to share their thoughts.