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The Macmillan Readers provide a choice of enjoyable reading materials for learners of English. The series is published at six levels – Starter, Beginner, Elementary, Pre-intermediate, Intermediate and Upper.

Level Control

Information, structure and vocabulary are controlled to suit the students' ability at each level.

The number of words at each level:

Starter	about 300 basic words
Beginner	about 600 basic words
Elementary	about 1100 basic words
Pre-intermediate	about 1400 basic words
Intermediate	about 1600 basic words
Upper	about 2200 basic words

Vocabulary

Some difficult words and phrases in this book are important for understanding the story. Some of these words are explained in the story, some are shown in the pictures, and others are marked with a number like this: ...³. Phrases are marked with ^P. Words with a number are explained in the *Glossary* at the end of the book and phrases are explained on the *Useful Phrases* page.

Answer Keys

Answer Keys for the *Points for Understanding* and *Exercises* sections can be found at www.macmillanenglish.com/readers.

Audio Download

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A Note About The Author

William Shakespeare was born in the year 1564 in Stratford-upon-Avon, a town about eighty miles north-west of London. His father, John Shakespeare, was a well-known businessman, but he was often in debt. So, although William had a good education at the local school, there was not enough money for him to go to university.

In 1582, when Shakespeare was only eighteen, he married a twenty-six-year-old woman called Ann Hathaway. They had a daughter six months later and then twins were born in 1585.

We know nothing about Shakespeare's life for the next few years. However, we do know that by about 1590, he was working in London as an actor. By 1592, Shakespeare was already well-known as a playwright. We know this because another playwright, Robert Greene, was jealous of Shakespeare's success. In 1592 Greene wrote about Shakespeare, saying that he was uneducated and making fun of Shakespeare's name.

Shakespeare soon started to write plays for a company of actors in London called The Lord Chamberlain's Men. From 1599, they acted in a fine new theatre called the Globe, but they were sometimes called to the royal court to put on a play for Queen Elizabeth I. All the plays were read by the Lord Chamberlain before they were performed. He had to make sure that nothing in the play would upset the Queen.

There were about 200,000 people living in London at this time and there were only four or five theatres for them to visit. These theatres were round or eight-sided buildings, and they held about 3000 people. The audience stood around three sides of the stage. There was no roof over the central part of the theatre so most people, including the actors, had no protection from the weather. Rich people paid more to sit down and be under cover.

At the back of the stage, there was a balcony for musicians and another for the actors to use. The space under the balconies was part of the stage, but could be separated from it by a curtain. Actors walked onto the main stage through two doors at the back and they were always very close to the audience. Plays had to take place in daylight and so they began at two o'clock in the afternoon and finished by five in the evening.

The people of London always wanted new plays and sometimes six different ones were performed by a company in one week. At that time plays were not often published, so a clever playwright could make old plays into new ones by writing extra scenes or changing parts of the story. Shakespeare sometimes took stories from other writers and sometimes he made them up. He knew the actors in the company well, so he was able to write parts that would suit them. He worked very fast and knew just what his audience wanted. His plays could frighten people, or make them laugh or cry and this is what made them so popular.

Shakespeare's name soon became well known. Some playwrights, like Greene, laughed at Shakespeare because he had never been to university. But others respected him and became his friends.

During his years in London, Shakespeare often went to Stratford to visit his family. By 1613 he had retired¹ and lived back in his home town, where he had bought a big house. He lived there until his death in 1616.

All the theatres where Shakespeare worked, including the Globe, were destroyed long ago. However, there is now a new Globe on the South Bank of the River Thames. There you can see Shakespeare's plays performed just as they were in his lifetime. It is an exciting experience.

A Note About This Play

Much Ado About Nothing was written and first acted towards the end of 1598. It was printed a year or so later and soon became very popular.

Shakespeare wrote many comedies – plays which are written to make the audience laugh – and *Much Ado About Nothing* is one of these. The play has a happy ending, and like all Shakespeare's comedies, it is also a love story. All of the action in the play takes place in the city of Messina, a port in the north-east of Sicily, which was then governed by Spain. The main story, or plot, is about two young lovers, Count Claudio and the rich and beautiful Hero, whose father is the Governor² of Messina. They love each other very much and plan to get married. Their story nearly ends very unhappily, and such a sad ending would have turned the comedy into a tragedy. The same romantic story can be found in several Italian and French books of the time and Shakespeare borrowed it for the plot of his play. However, Shakespeare added another plot, which made *Much Ado About Nothing* one of Shakespeare's cleverest comedies.

This second plot is also a love story, but it is certainly not romantic, because Beatrice and Benedick find it difficult to believe that they could ever love each other. They spend most of their time arguing cleverly and pointing out each others' faults. Neither of them likes the idea of getting married to anyone and certainly not to each other.

But it is this story that people always remember because Beatrice and Benedick are so witty³. At the end of the play, their friends trick them into falling in love with each other, so their story has a happy ending too.

Shakespeare's plays were acted by members of his company and he often wrote parts for certain actors, who were well

known to their audiences. One of these actors was a man called Will Kemp, who always played funny characters. Audiences loved him, but Shakespeare was often angry with Kemp because he added words of his own. Kemp was the first actor to play the part of Dogberry, the silly old man who, by mistake, discovers the villain⁴ – Don John. Don John is the bastard⁵ brother of Don Pedro. This is an important part of the story because it means that the play can end happily.

Shakespeare wrote about a third of this play in a kind of poetry called *blank verse*. Blank verse does not rhyme, but each line has several strong beats, usually five. The romantic story of Claudio and Hero is told in blank verse and that makes it more sad and slow. Here is an example in Shakespeare's own words.

Claudio: O, my lord,
When you went onward on this ended action,
I looked upon her with a soldier's eye
That liked, but had a rougher task in hand
Than to drive liking to the name of love.
But now I am returned, and that war-thoughts
Have left their places vacant, in their rooms
Come thronging soft and delicate desires,
All prompting me how fair young Hero is ...
Saying I liked her ere I went to wars.

Shakespeare did not worry too much about the titles of his comedies. The title of this play means: A Lot of Trouble about Nothing – because Hero does nothing wrong. There is another meaning to the title – and it is a joke. The word 'nothing' was often spoken like 'noting' – listening to people in secret. Many of the problems in this play are caused by characters hearing things they do not understand or that are not true.

For more information about William Shakespeare, including projects and webquests, visit the Macmillan Readers website at www.macmillanenglish.com/readers.

This Version Of Much Ado About Nothing

This Macmillan Reader includes some 'real' extracts of text from *Much Ado About Nothing*. We hope that these texts will help readers to both understand and enjoy Shakespeare in the original. The extracts follow immediately after their simplified form. They are shaded in grey and have a separate glossary. In the glossary, words that are old English (no longer used in today's English) appear in *italics>*. See the example (from page 11) below:

Beatrice: Then God help the worthy Claudio! Benedick is like a disease – easy to catch and difficult to get rid of. Now that Claudio has caught the Benedick disease, he'll have to spend all his money on medicine.

Beatrice: O lord, he will hang upon him like a disease, he is sooner caught than the pestilence, and the taker runs presently mad. God help the noble Claudio. If he have caught the Benedick, it will cost him a thousand pounds ere he be cured.

simplified text

original text

sooner = more quickly

pestilence = a serious illness which is easy to catch

runs = becomes

presently = at once

ere = before

glossary

The People In This Story



Don Pedro Prince of Aragon, a kingdom in northern Spain



Don John brother of Don Pedro



Leonato Governor of Messina, in the north-east of Sicily



Hero
Leonato's daughter



Beatrice
Leonato's niece



Claudio
a count⁶ from Florence



Benedick
a lord from Padua



Borachio
Don John's friend

Act 1, Scene 1

[Enter Leonato, who is the Governor of Messina, Hero, his daughter, and Beatrice, his niece, with a messenger who gives Leonato a letter]

Leonato: I see from this letter that the Spanish prince, Don Pedro, will soon be here in Messina.

Messenger: That's true. He is not far behind me.

Leonato: How many gentlemen were killed in this war?

Messenger: Few who were important and no one well known.

Leonato: That's good. It makes the victory⁷ twice as welcome. I also read that Don Pedro of Aragon praises⁸ a young man from Florence whose name is Claudio.

Messenger: That's right. Count Claudio deserves all the praise Don Pedro has given him. That young man behaved like an experienced soldier. I don't have the words to tell you how brave he was.

Leonato: Claudio's uncle is here in Messina. He will be very pleased to hear about his nephew's bravery.

Messenger: He already knows. He cried when he read about it, but his tears were happy ones.

Leonato: Those are the best kind of tears.

Beatrice: Excuse me, but has Signor Sharp-sword⁹ returned from the war or not?

Messenger: Sharp-sword? There is no soldier with that name, lady.

Hero: My cousin means Signor Benedick of Padua.

Messenger: Oh, he's come back – still making jokes as usual.

Beatrice: Benedick's the man who challenged¹⁰ Cupid, god of love, to a shooting match, here in Messina. My uncle's fool¹¹ said that he would shoot Cupid's arrows¹² for him, so that's two fools we are talking about! Signor Benedick is the bigger fool because he's sure that the little god's arrows will never reach his heart. Do tell me how many men Benedick killed in the war.

Messenger: Why do you want to know, lady?

Beatrice: Before he went away, I promised Signor Benedick that I would eat anyone he killed!

Leonato: You are very hard on Benedick, niece. But he'll have plenty to say to you, I am sure.

Messenger: He's a good soldier. He fought well, lady.

Beatrice: Well, he can fight a lady. He's brave enough for that. He's brave enough to eat bad food too. All soldiers have to. What a man! What a soldier!

Leonato: You must excuse my niece, sir. There is a merry¹³ war of words between her and Signor Benedick. When they meet they always argue. They enjoy a challenge of wits¹⁴.

Beatrice: And Benedick always loses at least four of his five wits in the challenge. Then he is no better than his own horse. Tell me, who is Benedick's best friend now? He changes his friends as often as he changes his hat. Then they both behave badly and are happy to go to the devil¹⁵ together.

Messenger: Signor Benedick's close friend is now the noble¹⁶ Claudio.

Beatrice: Then God help the noble Claudio! Benedick is like a disease – easy to catch and difficult to get rid of. Now that Claudio has caught the Benedick disease, he'll have to spend all his money on medicine.



Beatrice: O lord, he will hang upon him like a disease: he is sooner caught than the pestilence, and the taker runs presently mad. God help the noble Claudio. If he have caught the Benedick, it will cost him a thousand pounds ere he be cured.

sooner = more quickly

pestilence = a serious illness which is easy to catch

runs = becomes

presently = at once

ere = before

Leonato: That will never happen to you, niece.

Beatrice: No, not until we have summer in January.

Messenger: Here comes our prince, Don Pedro.

[Enter Don Pedro, Claudio, Benedick, Don John and Balthasar, who is a singer and servant of Don Pedro]

Don Pedro: Signor Leonato, I thank you for inviting us to stay. Our visit will give you a lot of trouble.

Leonato: No trouble at all. I am delighted to have you here.

Don Pedro: [Smiling at Hero] I think this must be your daughter.

Leonato: That's what her mother says and I believe her!

Benedick: And so you should, sir.

Leonato: Yes. You are too young to be her father!

Don Pedro: And she is just like you, Signor Leonato.

Benedick: Really? Does the daughter have her father's white hair?

[Don Pedro and Leonato walk away to talk together]

Beatrice: [To Benedick] Don't you ever stop talking? No one is listening to you.

Benedick: It's my Lady Scorn¹⁷! So you are still alive then.

Beatrice: Scorn feeds on the words of fools. Scorn will never go hungry when you are around.

Benedick: No other lady scorns me except you. All the others love me. It is a pity that I don't love them.

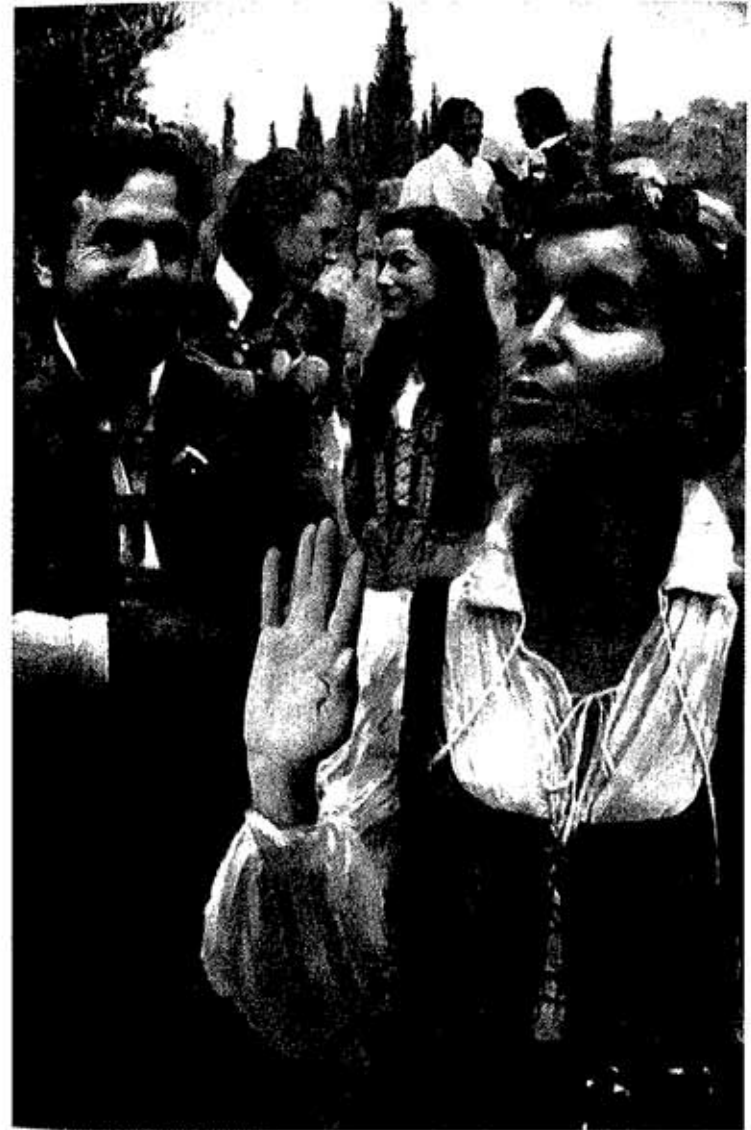
Beatrice: It's lucky for them that you don't. What an awful lover you would make! I am like you in one thing, though. I don't want loving words from anyone. I would rather hear my dog bark.

Benedick: I hope you never change your mind. Any lover of yours would be sure to have a scratched¹⁸ face!

Beatrice: And that scratching would not make it worse than yours!

Benedick: You speak without sense, just like a parrot¹⁹.

Beatrice: At least a parrot can speak. That makes the bird better than a *dumb*²⁰ animal, like a horse.



Don't you ever stop talking? No one is listening to you.