SHAKESPEARE ACTIVITY

Song: “Sigh no more, ladies, sigh no more”
BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

(from Much Ado About Nothing)

Sigh no more, ladies, sigh no more.  
    Men were deceivers ever,  
One foot in sea, and one on shore,  
    To one thing constant never.  
Then sigh not so, but let them go,  
    And be you blithe and bonny,  
Converting all your sounds of woe  
    Into hey nonny, nonny.

Sing no more ditties, sing no more  
    Of dumps so dull and heavy.  
The fraud of men was ever so  
    Since summer first was leafy.  
Then sigh not so, but let them go,  
    And be you blithe and bonny,  
Converting all your sounds of woe  
    Into hey, nonny, nonny.

1. Who do you think is saying this? To whom is the narrator speaking?

2. What is the narrator’s message or lesson?

3. How does Emma Thompson read this in the beginning of the movie? Why do you think so?

4. How does Balthasar sing it in act 2? Why do you think so? How is it different from Thompson’s reading?
Dogberry and Verges are complete idiots, and despite their blunders, they lend humor to a dark situation. We call characters like these “comic relief” (for example, Donkey in Shrek, C3PO and R2D2 in Star Wars, Timon and Pumba in The Lion King).

How does Shakespeare make these two characters so funny? Let’s take a look at their lines:

[Dogberry] “Are you good men and true?”
[Verges] “Yea, or else it were a pity but they should suffer salvation, body and soul”
[Dogberry] “Who think you the most desertless man to be constable?... You are thought here to be the most senseless and fit man for the constable of the watch.”

[Dogberry] “I would have some confidence with you that discerns you nearly.”

[Dogberry] “O villain! Thou wilt be condemned into everlasting redemption for this… Dost thou not suspect my place?”

What do you notice about the underlined words (they all have something in common)? What are they actually trying to say?

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Try to imagine what you think is the “typical” romantic comedy.

1. What sort of characters are involved?

2. What are the basic plot points (set-up, conflict, resolution)?

3. What other elements (music, setting, lighting, costumes) lend to the atmosphere of the movie/play?

4. How is Much Ado About Nothing a “typical” romantic comedy?

5. How is Much Ado About Nothing different from today’s “typical” rom-com?
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Customs, and Values, and Innuendos - oh my!

**Age** - as soon as a girl is able to have children, she is of marrying age. If a woman is married at the age of 12, she cannot change her mind later. If a woman is married younger, she has the chance to change her mind until she turns 14. Marriage is forever binding.

**Dating** - girls have no say in their marriages. As parents have more experience and wisdom, they will make a wise decision for their daughter. All dates are chaperoned. A third party is typically used to suggest dates and seek engagement.

**Dowry** - marriage is a business trade. In return for taking a daughter off the hands of her parents, the groom is given a dowry (money, goods, property, etc.). Social and political connections and favors are also valued.

**Engagement** - men and women make (1) private promises to one another, which can be broken, and then (2) public proposals, which are considered binding.

**Ceremony** - this marks the inseparable connection between a man and woman and the union of their lives.

**Worthiness** - chastity is the primary virtue of a woman, which strengthens the rest of her virtues and makes her desirable. If she is “pure,” men will want her; if she is not, no one will want her. To be “soiled” is to be worthless. Women who are found not to be “maids” are often outcasted, disowned, or even killed by their family. Such women often kill themselves out of shame.

**Much ado about “nothing”** - this word has more than one meaning! (1) Today, the word “nothing” means to have no progress or value. In Shakespeare’s time, (2) “noting” was a word for gossip and rumors, and (2) “nothing” was slang for the female anatomy.

Considering all this, provide at least 3 reasons why the play is titled *Much Ado About Nothing*:

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