

- ❑ Beatrice is especially good at the witty disparagement or “cut-down.” When the Messenger says, “I see, lady, the gentleman is not in your books,” she takes his figurative phrase “in your books” (i.e. “in your good graces”) and plays on its literal meaning in her response: “No. An[d if] he were, I would burn my study [library]” (I.i.76-78). She means that if she literally found Benedick between the leaves of one of her books, she would burn her whole library to get rid of him. This is brilliant wit because it is both an answer to the messenger’s question and a literal play on his figurative phrase. In our imaginary game of tennis, she has just turned his ball into a rubber duck and sent it soaring back over the net. Her comment is also a cutting remark to Benedick.
 - ❑ Our Folger Shakespeare Library edition of *Much Ado About Nothing* notes that Beatrice likes to take other people’s figurative meanings literally, as in the example above. It also points out that Benedick, though he engages in Beatrice’s kind of word-play, more often uses metaphor and what we would call “imagery” to express himself (xxii). For example in his long protestation against marriage in act I (i.234-262), he speaks of having horns put on him, of being hung up as a sign-post, or in a bottle (“like a cat”) and shot at, and of being like a bull advertised as “for sale.” These are all images or figurative uses of language with which he metaphorically identifies himself. Or again, in act II, Benedick speaks of his friends’ potential quips (now that he is in love) as “paper bullets of the brain”—another metaphorical image (II.iii.242-243).
 - ❑ The last type of diction that we will consider this week is Dogberry’s constant malapropism.¹ Examples abound, as when Dogberry mistakes Leonato’s word “tedious” for something like “wealthy,” or when he repeatedly mistakes the word “redemption” for “damnation” (III.v.17-26 and IV.ii.59). This accidental misuse of language is hilarious in itself; and it makes a delightful foil for the intentional puns and word-play of characters such as Beatrice, Benedick, Claudio, Don Pedro, and Hero.
4. In your drama analysis, focus on action. (Student Question #2)
- ❑ Notice how the story is told from multiple perspectives by many characters. There is no one “commentator,” whether a chorus or a prologue, or even a main character. Instead, various characters or groups of characters have pieces of the whole picture. Dogberry knows (though he doesn’t understand) about Don John’s plot long before the main characters do. Leonato, the Friar, Benedick, and Beatrice all know that Hero is not really dead. Claudio and Don Pedro *think* they know more than the rest about Hero. Beatrice really *knows* Hero’s true character.
 - ❑ Because Shakespeare has scattered the puzzle pieces among the various players, he is able to keep suspense throughout. Will Claudio think that Don Pedro has stolen Hero’s affections? No! The wedding is on! But now Don John has pulled off something even worse. Will Dogberry tell Leonato about the plot in time? No! Claudio refuses to marry Hero! Will Leonato cast her off? No, but he will pretend that she is dead. Will Benedick kill Claudio in a duel? No! Will Claudio marry Hero’s cousin? No, he will marry Hero herself! And then of course there is all the suspense of the Benedick and Beatrice plot, which Shakespeare keeps up until their last-minute decision to marry each other after all, “out of pity” for each other.
 - ❑ Notice also the artistic symmetry of the Benedick and Beatrice love story (see the chart on page 48). It proceeds by pairs of scenes (two pairs, of which two scenes are devoted to each of them, between act II scene 3 and act III scene 4), with an additional two “public conversations” (both “skirmishes of wit”: I.i and V.iv) and four “private conversations” (the first two skirmishes, the third serious, and the fourth a mixture: II.i, II.iii, IV.i, V.ii).
 - ❑ The Hero and Claudio story is the serious, even potentially tragic background against which the sparkling Benedick and Beatrice plot plays itself out in the foreground. Notice on the chart how Shakespeare has woven the two plotlines in such a way as to keep suspense at a maximum and to prevent the play from ever growing too “dark.” He has orchestrated matters so that one plot is often going up just when the other seems to be going down, or one is getting messy just when the other appears to be momentarily resolved. Yet both threads are inextricably wrapped up in each other, and both share the same moment for their turning points, climaxes, and denouements.
 - ❑ The brilliance of Benedick and Beatrice’s repartee and their comical eavesdropping scenes distract us from the gathering storm-clouds of Don John’s scheme up until the storm actually bursts. Then Benedick and Beatrice are also swept into the bitter whirlwind—but by that time we know that all will be well, for the truth has been unwittingly uncovered by Dogberry, and the reunion of Claudio and Hero, together with the marriage of Benedick and Beatrice, seem to be only a matter of time.

¹ Malapropism: The single act or the habit of confusing a word or words in a ludicrous way, especially by substituting for the right word one which is similar in sound, but different in meaning.

In the following chart, Benedick and Beatrice's plot is noted in black; Claudio and Hero's plot is in red.

ACT & SCENE	PLOTS	PLOTLINE
1	1 The first "skirmish of wits" occurs between Benedick and Beatrice. Claudio confesses his love for Hero to Don Pedro, who promises to woo her for him.	<i>Exposition; C&H Inciting Moment</i>
	2 Leonato hears a mixed-up account of the conversation between Claudio and Don Pedro, and concludes that Don Pedro wants to marry Hero.	<i>C&H Rising Action</i>
	3 Don John hears an accurate account of Claudio and Don Pedro's conversation, and plans to ruin the match, if possible.	<i>C&H Rising Action</i>
2	1 Benedick and Beatrice skirmish again during the dance; Don Pedro decides to pass the week until Claudio's wedding by tricking Benedick and Beatrice into love. Don Pedro woos Hero successfully for Claudio, but Don John makes Claudio believe that Don Pedro woos for himself. The misunderstanding is resolved; Claudio and Hero's wedding is planned.	<i>B&B Inciting Moment; C&H Rising Action</i>
	2 Don John and Borachio plan to use Margaret to make Hero seem unfaithful in Claudio's eyes.	<i>C&H Rising Action</i>
	3 Don Pedro, Claudio, and Leonato trick Benedick into believing himself the beloved of Beatrice. Benedick decides to return her love. He and Beatrice meet and skirmish again.	<i>B&B Rising Action</i>
3	1 Ursula and Hero trick Beatrice into believing that Benedick loves her. Beatrice decides to return his love.	<i>B&B Rising Action</i>
	2 Benedick shows signs of having fallen in love. Don Pedro and Claudio tease him. Don John appears and promises to prove to Don Pedro and Claudio that Hero is unfaithful.	<i>C&H Rising Action</i>
	3 Borachio succeeds in making Claudio and Don Pedro believe that Hero is unfaithful. In the act of telling Conrade about it, he and Conrade are overheard and arrested by the Watch.	<i>C&H Rising Action</i>
	4 Beatrice shows signs of having fallen in love. Margaret and Hero tease her.	<i>B&B Rising Action</i>
	5 Dogberry and Verges try to tell Leonato about Borachio and Conrade, but Leonato, confused and in a hurry, tells them to look into the matter themselves.	<i>C&H Rising Action</i>
4	1 Benedick and Beatrice pledge their mutual love; Beatrice demands that Benedick kill Claudio as proof of his affection. Claudio denounces Hero at the altar and refuses to marry her. Leonato is enraged, believing his daughter to be unchaste. The Friar counsels them to pretend that Hero is dead.	<i>B&B Turning Point and Further Complication; C&H Turning Point</i>
	2 Dogberry questions Borachio and Conrade. The Sexton realizes the importance of their crime and orders them taken to Leonato.	<i>C&H Further Complication</i>
5	1 Benedick challenges Claudio to a duel. Don Pedro, Leonato, and Claudio learn how Hero was slandered. Claudio, in an agony of remorse, promises to mourn her (still thinking her dead) and to marry her cousin (whom Leonato offers as a suitable substitute and means of restitution).	<i>B&B and C&H Further Complication</i>
	2 Benedick and Beatrice discuss their love; Benedick tells Beatrice that he has challenged Claudio. Benedick and Beatrice are summoned to hear how Hero was slandered.	<i>B&B and C&H Further Complication</i>
	3 Claudio goes to Hero's family tomb and mourns her, still believing her to be dead.	<i>C&H Further Complication</i>
	4 Claudio, in front of witnesses, swears to Hero's "cousin" (who is really Hero) that he will marry her. She reveals herself, to his great joy. Benedick and Beatrice finally promise to marry, in front of witnesses. Everybody dances (to be followed by a double wedding).	<i>C&H and B&B Climax and Denouement</i>