

★ Quicklook at Much Ado Word Detectives

This and the other collaborative activities around the text of *Much Ado* demonstrate very clearly that collaborative learning is not about simplifying tasks, but about making difficult work more cooperative and playful. Now that this play is chosen for work at Key Stage 3 teachers will no doubt be wondering how to clarify the text. The play presents more difficulties than most at word level and particularly in the prose passages. I suspect it might be the play with the largest number of familiar words used in unfamiliar ways although *Love's Labours Lost* might be a strong contender. This activity tries to provide a way into word study that could be used at all phases and by all students by encouraging cooperative talk around modern meanings, and coaxing students into making intelligent guesses as to what Shakespeare meant. It is in effect an alternative approach to the glossary - text - dictionary work which I remember slogging through at A level. The idea here is to first help pupils to focus on their understanding of what the word means in modern parlance (a good opportunity for collaborative talk), and then have a collaborative go at understanding the word in a Shakespearean context.

Words work hard and carry a lot of meanings. The words stay around for us to use, but the meanings change over the years. *Much Ado About Nothing* contains a large number of words that carry disappeared meanings. This activity turns you into word detectives.

Instructions

This activity works best if you are in groups of four. You work as two pairs.

Each pair needs a set of cards.

First sort the cards into "word" cards and "quotation" cards. Put the quotation cards to one side.

Choose a word card and decide on its present day meaning with your partner. Write one or two sentences on a slip of paper that show its meaning well.

Find the quote card where Shakespeare uses the word.

Now exchange your word card, the quote card and your sentences with the other pair.

Look at the word in Shakespeare's quote. Can you work out his meaning?

Try to write a modern sentence using Shakespeare's meaning of the word.

Share your sentence with the other pair, and with the rest of the class when invited

stale

sort

break

...if he found her accordant, he meant to take the present time by the top, and instantly break with you of it.

How many gentlemen have you lost in the action?
But few of any sort, and none of name.

..spare not to tell him that he hath wronged his honour in marrying the renowned Claudio,.....to a contaminated stale, such a one as Hero.