

Benedick (Male, 20s to 40s,)

A gentleman from Padua, senior courtier to Don Pedro, and one of the main characters in the play. He is an experienced soldier who has a history with Beatrice. From the beginning of the play he and Beatrice are engaged in a battle of wits, exchanging barbs and sarcastic remarks designed to demonstrate their mutual contempt for the opposite sex, and for each other. His character arc takes him from this disdain for women in general and Beatrice in particular, to one where he and Beatrice finally admit to themselves and each other that they love one another, to the point where Benedick is prepared to duel with his best friend Claudio and depart Don Pedro's service because of his love for Beatrice.

Beatrice (Female, 20s to 40s)

A lady, niece to Leonato, cousin/confidante to Hero, and Benedick's counterpart as the focus of the play. Her disdain for men in particular and Benedick in particular are an important storyline in the play. Beatrice seems to have some history with Benedick, and it is possible that sometime in the past he has hurt her, and this may explain her attitude to men in general. Beatrice is intelligent, and refuses to cover up her intelligence to please men. She is strong-willed, independent and kind to everyone – provided they don't want to marry her, because that's when she will put them to the (verbal) sword.

Don Pedro (Male, 30s up)

Prince of Arragon, and the most socially important character. Don Pedro is very close to his two main courtiers, Benedick and Claudio. Now that the war is over, he is looking forward to enjoying the peace and takes the lead in matching up his courtiers with suitable partners. He is single and enjoys dancing and music, but has a strong sense of his position and authority.

Claudio (Male, late teens to 20s)

A young gentleman, and one of Don Pedro's courtiers. Claudio is high-born and has recently come out of his first battle, where he has distinguished himself. None too bright, prickly in matters of honour but essentially good-hearted, Claudio is normally played as a stereotypical 'young leading man.'

Don John 'the Bastard' (Male, 20s up)

The illegitimate half-brother of Don Pedro, and our villain. Don John is a bitter man, jealous of his half-brother, and only recently forgiven by him for rebellion. Don John is the chief

author of all the troubles in the play, anxious to do as much mischief as possible. He has the intelligence and confidence to persuade and mislead the other characters in the play.

Hero (Female, late teens to 20s)

Leonato's daughter, and the main love interest for Claudio. Hero is an attractive and innocent young woman, high-born and a little sheltered by her life at Messina, where her father is Governor. Much of the action of the play takes place around Hero, and her character contrasts with that of Beatrice; Hero is much less able to take her own fate in her hands. She is fun-loving and eagerly joins in with the plot to match Benedick and Beatrice together.

Leonato (Male, 50s up)

Governor of Messina, and after Don Pedro the most socially important person in the play. Father of Hero, and guardian of his niece, Beatrice. Essentially kind, but acutely aware of his social position and takes his honour and reputation (and that of his family) very seriously.

Antonio (Male 50s up)

Leonato's widowed brother. Supports his brother, and, like him, takes his family's honour seriously. Enjoys dancing and parties.

Borachio (Male, age unimportant)

One of Don John's henchmen. His name means 'drunkard.' Think Bluto from Animal House. Big, unshaven, smelly, lecherous, drunk, cunning, and the one who helps Don John to come up with plans to cause trouble for the other characters.

Conrade (Male character late teens to 20s)

Henchman to Don John. Conrade and Borachio are the team that put Don John's nefarious schemes into effect. Some of the scenes between Don John and Conrade hint that their relationship was a little more than villain and henchman. Don John seems to use Conrade as something of a sounding board, which is useful for the audience but also creates an intimate atmosphere between them.

Margaret (Female, age unimportant but in height could be mistaken for Hero)

One of Hero's ladies-in-waiting, Margaret is fun-loving, experienced in life and love, and plays an innocent part in Don John's plot to bring down Hero.

Ursula (Female, age unimportant)

One of Hero's ladies-in-waiting.

Dogberry (Male, age unimportant)

The Constable, head of the Watch. Convinced of his own importance, Dogberry provides the 'comic relief' mainly in the form of malapropisms and confusing (almost unintelligible) orders to his Watch officers. He frustrates his superiors, confuses his colleagues in the Watch and, through his eagerness to seem clever, makes himself look idiotic. NOTE: Much of Dogberry's part depends upon deliberate misuse of some archaic words. The ability to get 'off script' as soon as possible is very important in this role.

Verges (Any Gender, age unimportant)

Verges acts as Dogberry's second-in-command, and tries simultaneously to obey his boss, but also to be a (small) voice of reason.

Sexton (Any Gender)

A judge and an important official, the sexton examines Borachio and Conrade when they are captured by the Watch, and has to endure Dogberry's attempts to question the two scoundrels.

Friar Francis (Male)

A cleric. Marries Hero and Claudio. Clever, a bit street-wise.

Balthasar (Male or female – SINGING ROLE)

Sings the song 'Sigh No More' that ends the first half of the play. Any vocal range considered, with the ability to accompany yourself on guitar an advantage.

Hugo Oatcake (Male)– First Watchman and George Seacoal (Male) – Second Watchman

Long-suffering Watch officers. Completely confused by Dogberry, but they try to do their duty as best they can. Overhear Borachio and Conrade reveal details of their role in Hero's downfall, and arrest them.

Messenger (Any Gender)

Arrives at the beginning of the play – kicks things off and helps to establish Beatrice's character. May also double up as the Lord in a later scene in front of Hero's tomb.

Extras – other Watch members, Lords and Ladies, Attendants