

How does William Shakespeare use
symbolism in *Much Ado About Nothing*?

In this lesson you will
learn how the author develops meaning
by analyzing
the use of symbolism.

Let's Review

Much Ado About Nothing

Shakespeare, 1623

Act I, Scene I

SCENE I. Before LEONATO'S house.

Enter LEONATO, HERO, and BEATRICE, with a Messenger

LEONATO

I learn in this letter that Don Peter of Arragon
comes this night to Messina.

Messenger

He is very near by this: he was not three leagues off
when I left him.

LEONATO

How many gentlemen have you lost in this action? 5

Messenger

But few of any sort, and none of name.

LEONATO

A victory is twice itself when the achiever brings
home full numbers. I find here that Don Peter hath
bestowed much honour on a young Florentine called Claudio.

Messenger

Much deserved on his part and equally remembered by
Don Pedro: he hath borne himself beyond the
promise of his age, doing, in the figure of a lamb,
the feats of a lion: he hath indeed better 10

- Author: William Shakespeare
- Play
- Written in 1623
- Comedy
- Act I, Scene 1

Let's Review

Symbolism



Desire

Erotic Love

Attraction

Core Lesson

- 1** Examine examples of a recurring image and ask, “Could this be a symbol?”
- 2** Ask, “What does the symbol mean?”
- 3** Ask, “What ideas does the author communicate by way of the symbol?”

Core Lesson

1 Examine examples of a recurring image, and ask, “Could this be a symbol?”

DON PEDRO

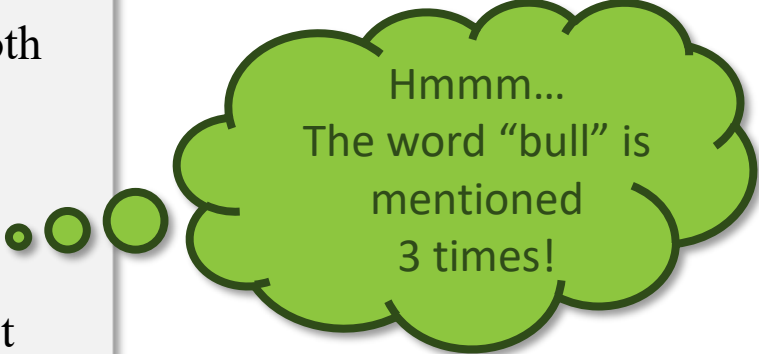
Well, as time shall try: ‘In time the **savage bull** doth bear the yoke.’

BENEDICK

The **savage bull** may; but if ever the sensible Benedick bear it, pluck off the **bull’s horns** and set them in my forehead: and let me be vilely painted, and in such great letters as they write ‘Here is good horse to hire,’ let them signify under my sign ‘Here you may see Benedick the married man.’

229. *yoke*: a device for joining together a pair of draft animals.

(I.i.228-235)



Hmmm...
The word “bull” is
mentioned
3 times!

Core Lesson

1 Examine examples of a recurring image, and ask, “Could this be a symbol?”

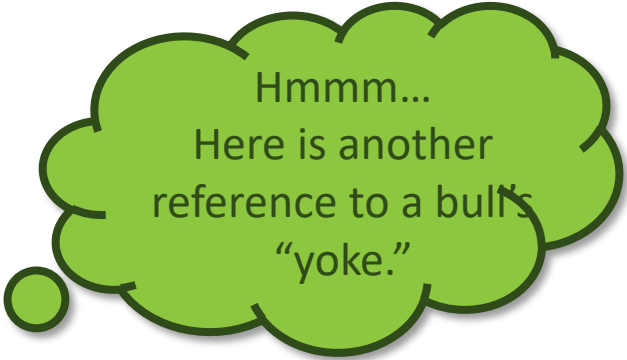
CLAUDIO

I would scarce trust myself, though I had sworn the contrary, if Hero would be my wife.

BENEDICK

Is't come to this? In faith, that not the world one man but he will wear his cap with suspicion? Shall I never see a bachelor of three-score again? Go to, I' faith; an thou wilt needs **thrust thy neck into a yoke**, wear the print of it and sigh away Sundays. Look Don Pedro is returned to seek you.

(I.i.170-177)



Hmmm...
Here is another
reference to a bull's
“yoke.”

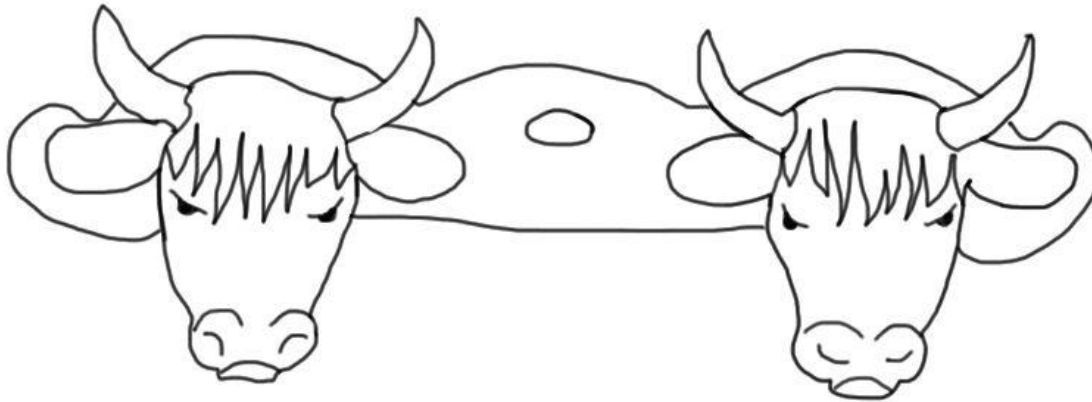
Core Lesson

2 Ask, "What does the symbol mean?"



Wild

Free



Tame

Harnessed

2 Ask, “What does the symbol mean?”

BENEDICK

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231. *pluck . . . forehead: horns grow in the forehead of a cuckold, a husband whose wife is unfaithful.*

(I.i.230-235)



Shame

2 Ask, “What does the symbol mean?”

BENEDICK

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173. but . . . suspicion: his cap may be hiding his growing horns. 174. three-score: $3 \times 20 = 60$.

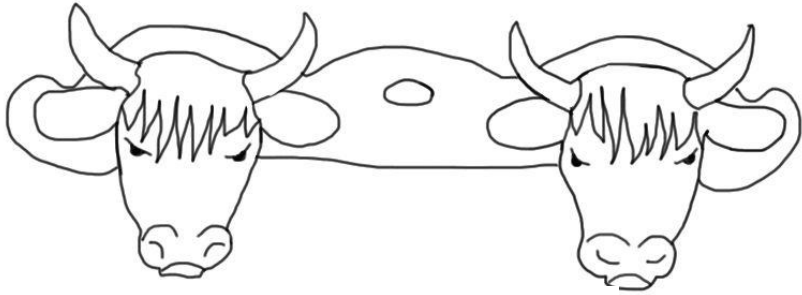
(I.i.172-177)



Now I get it!

Core Lesson

3 Ask, “What ideas does the author communicate?”



Marriage

- form of bondage
- results in ridicule
- boring

Is there anything good about it?

Core Lesson

How does William Shakespeare use symbolism in *Much Ado About Nothing*?

William Shakespeare uses symbolism in Act I, Scene 1 to draw parallels between concrete objects and abstract ideas by including several references to yoked bulls and cuckolds as a way of inserting commentary about marriage. Must falling in love and getting married always result in loss of power and shame?

Core Lesson

- 1** Examined examples of a recurring image and asked, “Could this be a symbol?”
- 2** Asked, “What does the symbol mean?”
- 3** Asked, “What ideas does the author communicate by way of the symbol?”

In this lesson you have learned how the author creates meaning by analyzing the use of symbolism.