

BELL SHAKESPEARE PRESENTS

# THE TAMING OF THE SHREW

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**TEACHERS' KIT**



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## **TEACHERS' KIT: THE TAMING OF THE SHREW**

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# BELL SHAKESPEARE

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### About This Kit

This kit has been devised for use in English and Drama classes with preparatory and follow-up exercises for students. Exercises may be copied to distribute to students and are denoted as



Written activities



Physical activities



Research and discussion activities associated with cultural content in the play

**It is essential that teachers take students through the synopsis of **THE TAMING OF THE SHREW** prior to the performance.**

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This Teachers' Kit has been devised by Linda Lorenza BA Grad Dip Ed COGE MA, Head of Education at Bell Shakespeare.

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## **SYNOPSIS: THE TAMING OF THE SHREW**

*The Taming Of The Shrew* is set in Padua, near Verona (Italy). It is the story of a strong-willed young woman named Katherina, whose father, Baptista, is determined that she will be married before her sweet-tempered, beautiful younger sister, Bianca, can be married.

Shakespeare includes a prelude - or Induction - to the play proper. It is rarely performed and is not included in the 2009 Bell Shakespeare production.

Lucentio, the son of a wealthy merchant, accompanied by his servant, Tranio, comes to Padua to study Philosophy. He sees Baptista's younger daughter, Bianca, and immediately falls in love with her. Lucentio overhears Baptista telling locals Gremio and Hortensio that he will not let Bianca marry until Katherina is married. He explains that his daughters will remain at home being tutored in music and poetry. Lucentio decides the best way to win Bianca's love is to be near her, so he disguises himself as a teacher called Cambio, and gains work as her Latin tutor. He makes his servant Tranio swap clothes with him and pretend to be him in Padua.

Lucentio has several rivals for Bianca's love: Hortensio, the young man about town, and a rich, old man, Gremio. Hortensio also thinks to disguise himself as Bianca's tutor - her music teacher, Litio - to win her attention and love.

Hortensio is met by his friend Petruchio who hears of Bianca's shrewish, elder sister, Katherina. Petruchio determines to marry Katherina against every objection around him. He seeks out Baptista and asks to marry her, meets Katherina, seems to stun her into silent submission and thereby wins her hand in marriage.

Petruchio is every bit as witty, sharp, obstinate, and shrewish by return to Katherina and everyone declares they are both mad and 'madly mated'. Petruchio's plan is very deliberate: to give the obstinate Katherina a taste of her own medicine. He turns up late and inappropriately dressed to this own wedding and then abandons the wedding feast, taking her with him to his own house, where he proclaims his love for her, and then deprives her of food and sleep and eloquently out-wills her at every opportunity.

Gremio and Hortensio soon drop out of the contest for Bianca and Lucentio, disguised as Cambio, is doing well but needs the financial guarantee of his absent father for the coming marriage. Tranio, still posing as Lucentio, gains the help Biondello, an opportunist, who disguises himself as Lucentio's father, Vincentio, in order to make the required guarantee.

Katherina and Petruchio, returning to Baptista's house, meet the *real* Vincentio. He has come to Padua to visit his son. They innocently bring Vincentio to Baptista's home where Tranio, and Biondello (posing as Vincentio), are forced to admit they are imposters. The real Lucentio and Bianca enter happily having just been married, and the plot of disguises is unraveled.

At Bianca's wedding feast it is Katherina, 'the shrew', who is apparently transformed into a gentle and acquiescent wife, while Bianca and Hortensio's new wife are petulant and difficult. In the final speeches, it is clear that Petruchio has succeeded in taming his shrew and that she is happy to be tamed.

## **BACKGROUND: THE TAMING OF THE SHREW**

From Dunton-Downer, L. & Riding, A. (2004) *Essential Shakespeare Handbook*

*The Taming Of The Shrew* was a farcical comedy for Elizabethan audiences. Today it is a controversial comedy about the sexual politics of marriage. The first performance was in 1663 although there is some evidence of a play of the same name being performed by the Lord Chamberlain's Men in 1594.

In 1588 Queen Elizabeth spoke to her soldiers, "I know I have the body of a weak and feeble woman, but I have the heart and stomach of a king, and a King of England, too... I myself will take up arms, I myself will be your general, judge and rewarder of every one of your virtues in the field." This was a few years before Shakespeare wrote the play and Elizabeth may well have been an inspiration for the character of Kate – the warring daughter and sister.

The strongly anti-feminist themes of the play were regular dramatic content in Shakespeare's day and the slapstick violence between Kate and Petruchio was a comic device taken from the works of Roman playwrights.

Like many of his plays Shakespeare has written around the ideas of disguise and mistaken identity. This creates the physical and often farcical humour. In order to follow the play the audience must actively keep track of who is disguised as whom with characters Tranio, Lucentio and Hortensio are actively involved in the plot mostly as their disguised characters.

There is considerable dated humour in the many puns and jokes that captivated the Elizabethan audience. Today's audience may follow the intention rather than the detail of the puns in the heated dialogue between Katherina and Petruchio, yet the often sexual nature of Shakespeare's word play seems to be easily followed by the contemporary audience when the action is lively and matched to text. In 1897 George Bernard Shaw said, "The last scene is altogether disgusting to modern sensibility." Yet Germaine Greer (1971) argued, "Kate's speech at the close of the play is the greatest defence of Christian monogamy ever written."

Today the play has become a director's play about power and gender. The relationships throughout the play are defined by fierce power struggles. Of course the key relationship is that between Katherina and Petruchio, yet the relationship between Baptista and his daughters also demands careful consideration. In this day and age the play requires a strong cast and solid interpretation to ensure the production is not reduced to a period farce. The play can invite audiences into the Elizabethan world and its domestic politics or it can take a contemporary bent and draw the audience into its continuing social relevance. The latter often being explored through devices such as contemporary set and costume design and using an all-female cast.

### ***The Taming Of The Shrew* on film**

Directed by Franco Zeffirelli (1967) with Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor

Directed by Sam Taylor (1929) with Douglas Fairbanks and Mary Pickford

Cole Porter's Broadway musical, *Kiss Me Kate* (1953) Directed by George Sidney with Kathryn Grayson and Howard Keel

Shakespeare Re-told Season 1 Episode 3 *The Taming Of The Shrew* (2005)

## **KEY CHARACTER PROFILES: *THE TAMING OF THE SHREW***

### **BAPTISTA'S HOUSE**

#### **Baptista Minola**

A lord of Padua. Father of Kate and Bianca.

#### **Katherina**

Baptista's elder daughter. She is known about Padua as the "shrew" for her "scolding tongue". Petruchio's unconventional methods change her behaviour to the point she even says that women are "bound to serve, love and obey".

#### **Bianca**

Baptista's younger daughter and Katherina's sister. She is often the victim of Katherina's violent temper. Bianca is the love interest of three suitors. One of which is Lucentio whom she marries.

#### **Vincentio**

Father of Lucentio, he comes unexpectedly to Padua to visit his son. He is outraged to discover that he is being impersonated by an old schoolteacher.

#### **Hortensio**

Another of Bianca's suitors and an old friend of Petruchio. He disguises himself as Litio the music tutor to access Bianca.

#### **Tranio**

A witty servant. He pretends to be his master, Lucentio, so that his master may pose as Cambio, Bianca's tutor in poetry.

#### **Biondello**

He is the second servant of Lucentio. He is not happy about pretending that his fellow servant, Gremio, is his master, Lucentio. In this production he impersonates Vincentio.

#### **Gremio**

A fool and veteran suitor of Bianca. He is wealthy, old and determined to include pretty Bianca amongst his worldly treasures.

## KEY CHARACTER PROFILES: *THE TAMING OF THE SHREW*

### PETRUCHIO'S HOUSE



#### **Petruchio**

A flamboyant adventurer from Verona. He comes to Padua to find a wife from a wealthy family. He behaves outrageously until he is able to subdue his tempestuous wife, Kate.

#### **Grumio**

He is Petrucchio's servant. Somewhat irreverent himself, Grumio gives Petrucchio plenty of practice in taming strong-willed people.

#### **Curtis**

Another of Petrucchio's servants. He has a knack for double-entendre.

#### **Tailor**

Petruchio orders him to make clothes, which Petrucchio then rejects.

#### **Haberdasher**

He makes hats for Katherina.



The Taming of the Shrew: Bell Shakespeare Company - Photo Designer: Sara England, schakespeare.org.au

## **THEMATIC CONCERNS: *THE TAMING OF THE SHREW***

### **Motifs\* and Imagery**

*\*Motifs are recurring structures, contrasts, or literary devices that can help to develop and inform the text's major themes.*

#### **Preparing for a wedding**

This is a key motive throughout the play and, of course, the play does conclude with the wedding of Bianca. Anna Tregloan's set design for this production draws on this idea and the play is set in a location that represents an empty function centre, which is gradually being dressed for a wedding. The function centre is Baptista's territory, whereas Petruchio's house is bare.



#### **A Man's World – Patriarchal Society**

The play draws on the many social behaviours of the patriarchal society that was the Elizabethan period. The religious ruling of the time was that everyone accepted their place in the Great Chain of Being under God the Father and his representative on earth, the monarch, in this case Queen Elizabeth. That the monarch was female upset this ruling and it could be considered that Shakespeare has drawn on this in *The Taming Of The Shrew*.

The relationship and manner between Gremio, Hortensio and Baptista highlights the business of marriage as negotiated by men. Hortensio and Gremio try to politely outdo each other in presenting Baptista with what Bianca stands to gain by marrying each of them. The woman at the centre of the negotiation is not present for the discussion.

The play opens in Baptista's house, in this case the function centre. The dress of the male characters is reminiscent of the television show *The Sopranos*. This production uses an all female cast yet they are not impersonating men to the point of caricature, thus challenging the audience to consider the misogynistic tendencies of the script.

#### **Being cruel to be kind**

The play enacts the defeat of a woman's threatened rebellion against the norm of submission. It argues that the cruel treatment is for the victim's good and enables her to become a compliant member of patriarchal society (Schafer, 2002). In the twenty-first century the depiction of this "taming" will influence whether the audience will be convinced that brainwashing and starvation are appropriate techniques. The "taming" occurs in Petruchio's house, a bare stark space with stacked chairs and only one table – a contrast to Baptista's lush reception centre.

## PRE-PERFORMANCE ACTIVITIES

### ENGLISH

#### A Man's World

In Act 2 Scene 1:325-399 Hortensio and Gremio are in discussion with Baptista. Each is trying to convince Baptista to select him to marry Bianca. The scene does not include the “object” for which they are, in essence, bartering!

#### ACTIVITY ONE

Read the excerpt from Act 2 Scene 1 on the next page.

- 1) Write a list of what each suitor has to offer?
- 2) Make a contemporary comparison – write the list of what you consider to be equivalent items in today's society.
- 3) Looking at your lists, imagine you are Baptista. Who would you choose to marry your daughter? Why?

You do not have to choose Hortensio as Baptista does in the play.

- 4) Write two letters. One to Hortensio and the other to Gremio explaining your decision and giving a detailed explanation of why each has or has not been successful. Consider the following:
  - a. The language you would use for each recipient. This may differ, why?
  - b. How you will justify your decision in the letter.

## Act 2 Scene 1:325-399

### **GREMIO**

No doubt but he hath got a quiet catch.  
But now, Baptists, to your younger daughter:  
Now is the day we long have looked for:  
I am your neighbour, and was suitor first.

### **TRANIO**

And I am one that love Bianca more  
Than words can witness, or your thoughts  
can guess.

### **GREMIO**

Youngling, thou canst not love so dear as I.

### **TRANIO**

Graybeard, thy love doth freeze.

### **GREMIO**

But thine doth fry.

Skipper, stand back: 'tis age that nourisheth.

### **TRANIO**

But youth in ladies' eyes that flourisheth.

### **BAPTISTA**

Content you, gentlemen: I will compound this  
strife:

'Tis deeds must win the prize; and he of both  
That can assure my daughter greatest dower  
Shall have my Bianca's love.

Say, Signior Gremio, What can you assure  
her?

### **GREMIO**

First, as you know, my house within the city  
Is richly furnished with plate and gold;  
Basins and ewers to lave her dainty hands;  
My hangings all of Tyrian tapestry;  
In ivory coffers I have stuff'd my crowns;  
In cypress chests my arras counterpoints,  
Costly apparel, tents, and canopies,  
Fine linen, Turkey cushions boss'd with pearl,  
Valance of Venice gold in needlework,  
Pewter and brass and all things that belong  
To house or housekeeping: then, at my farm  
I have a hundred milch-kine to the pail,  
Sixscore fat oxen standing in my stalls,  
And all things answerable to this portion.  
Myself am struck in years, I must confess;  
And if I die to-morrow, this is hers,  
If whilst I live she will be only mine.

### **TRANIO**

That 'only' came well in. Sir, list to me:  
I am my father's heir and only son:  
If I may have your daughter to my wife,  
I'll leave her houses three or four as good,  
Within rich Pisa walls, as any one  
Old Signior Gremio has in Padua;  
Besides two thousand ducats by the year  
Of fruitful land, all which shall be her jointure.  
What, have I pinch'd you, Signior Gremio?

### **GREMIO**

Two thousand ducats by the year of land!  
My land amounts not to so much in all:  
That she shall have; besides an argosy  
That now is lying in Marseilles' road.  
What, have I choked you with an argosy?

### **TRANIO**

Gremio, 'tis known my father hath no less  
Than three great argosies; besides two  
gallieses,  
And twelve tight galleys: these I will assure  
her,  
And twice as much, whate'er thou offer'st  
next.

### **GREMIO**

Nay, I have offer'd all, I have no more;  
And she can have no more than all I have:  
If you like me, she shall have me and mine.

### **TRANIO**

Why, then the maid is mine from all the world,  
By your firm promise: Gremio is out-vied.

### **BAPTISTA**

I must confess your offer is the best;  
And, let your father make her the assurance,  
She is your own; else, you must pardon me,  
if you should die before him, where's her  
dower?

### **TRANIO**

That's but a cavil: he is old, I young.

### **GREMIO**

And may not young men die, as well as old?

### **BAPTISTA**

Well, gentlemen,  
I am thus resolved: on Sunday next you know  
My daughter Katharina is to be married:  
Now, on the Sunday following, shall Bianca  
Be bride to you, if you this assurance;  
If not, Signior Gremio:  
And so, I take my leave, and thank you both

## ENGLISH

### Cruel to be kind

When Petruchio and Katherine first meet there is an instant war of words through their witty dialogue. The dialogue is loaded with animal imagery and puns and word play.

#### ACTIVITY TWO

Look at the following excerpt from Act 2 Scene 1.

This is Petruchio's monologue just prior to his meeting Katherine.

- 1) Read it through for meaning.
- 2) In the space beneath each line rewrite the line using your own words.

#### PETRUCHIO

I will attend her here,

And woo her with some spirit when she comes.

Say that she rail; why then I'll tell her plain

She sings as sweetly as a nightingale:

Say that she frown, I'll say she looks as clear

As morning roses newly wash'd with dew:

Say she be mute and will not speak a word;

Then I'll commend her volubility,

And say she uttereth piercing eloquence:

If she do bid me pack, I'll give her thanks,

As though she bid me stay by her a week:

If she deny to wed, I'll crave the day

When I shall ask the banns and when be married.

But here she comes; and now, Petruchio, speak.

#### ACTIVITY THREE

Following is Kate and Petruchio's dialogue at their first meeting (Act 2 Scene 1:177-218).

- 1) What do the images in their language suggest?
- 2) Describe Petruchio's manner?
- 3) Why does Kate slap him?

## Act 2 Scene 1:177-218

*Enter KATHARINA*

Good morrow, Kate; for that's your name, I hear.

**KATHARINA**

Well have you heard, but something hard of hearing:

They call me Katharina that do talk of me.

**PETRUCHIO**

You lie, in faith; for you are call'd plain Kate, And bonny Kate and sometimes Kate the curst;

But Kate, the prettiest Kate in Christendom Kate of Kate Hall, my super-dainty Kate, For dainties are all Kates, and therefore, Kate,

Take this of me, Kate of my consolation; Hearing thy mildness praised in every town, Thy virtues spoke of, and thy beauty sounded,

Yet not so deeply as to thee belongs, Myself am moved to woo thee for my wife.

**KATHARINA**

Moved! in good time: let him that moved you hither

Remove you hence: I knew you at the first You were a moveable.

**PETRUCHIO**

Why, what's a moveable?

**KATHARINA**

A join'd-stool.

**PETRUCHIO**

Thou hast hit it: come, sit on me.

**KATHARINA**

Asses are made to bear, and so are you.

**PETRUCHIO**

Women are made to bear, and so are you.

**KATHARINA**

No such jade as you, if me you mean.

**PETRUCHIO**

Alas! good Kate, I will not burden thee; For, knowing thee to be but young and light--

**KATHARINA**

Too light for such a swain as you to catch; And yet as heavy as my weight should be.

**PETRUCHIO**

Should be! should--buzz!

**KATHARINA**

Well ta'en, and like a buzzard.

**PETRUCHIO**

O slow-wing'd turtle! shall a buzzard take thee?

**KATHARINA**

Ay, for a turtle, as he takes a buzzard.

**PETRUCHIO**

Come, come, you wasp; i' faith, you are too angry.

**KATHARINA**

If I be waspish, best beware my sting.

**PETRUCHIO**

My remedy is then, to pluck it out.

**KATHARINA**

Ay, if the fool could find it where it lies,

**PETRUCHIO**

Who knows not where a wasp does wear his sting? In his tail.

**KATHARINA**

In his tongue.

**PETRUCHIO**

Whose tongue?

**KATHARINA**

Yours, if you talk of tails: and so farewell.

**PETRUCHIO**

What, with my tongue in your tail? nay, come again,

Good Kate; I am a gentleman.

**KATHARINA**

That I'll try.

*She strikes him*

## PRE-PERFORMANCE ACTIVITIES

### DRAMA

#### Bonny Kate

Every character has an opinion of Katherina. Most of which Petruchio hears before he meets her. In their first meeting Petruchio repeatedly calls her Kate, which he has been told she hates. He proceeds and follows this with all sorts of adjectives and metaphors.

#### ACTIVITY ONE

In the first meeting between Petruchio and Katherina the conversation is rather heated. They spar off each other and the quick turns of phrase present a matching of intellects and wit between the two.

#### Exploring the dialogue as a class

- 1) Divide the class in to two groups two represent the Petruchio group and the Kate group.
- 2) Line the groups up on opposite sides of the space, each group facing the other.

One student can be the character or spokesperson for the group, announcing the line to the other team. For example,

#### KATHERINA

Remove you hence: I knew you at the first  
You were a moveable.

*After which the Kate group make encouraging and enthusiastic noises and gestures, suggesting that she has outwitted Petruchio.*

#### The Petruchio speaks up:

#### PETRUCHIO

Why, what's a moveable?

*His team of supporters make encouraging and enthusiastic noises and gestures, suggesting that he has outwitted Katherina.*

Work through the script excerpt like this, allowing the students to play with the language and develop their own strength in the language.

## POST-PERFORMANCE ACTIVITIES

### ENGLISH

#### Interpreting a play

The Director and Designer of a production spend time researching the play, when and why it was written and how it has been presented over time; they undertake lengthy discussions to develop the concept of the production.

#### ACTIVITY ONE

- 1) This production has some casting and design aspects to consider in your response to the play. Think of the production you have just seen and write a dot point list of all the things you remember about:
  - The cast
  - The set and lighting design
  - The costumes
- 2) Using the information in your list write your own review of the production.



*'A woman scorned...'*

**ACTIVITY TWO**

Kate's final speech is perhaps the most contentious speech in the play. Whilst comic and entertaining to audiences in Shakespeare's day, today the contents of the speech would not be acceptable in the contemporary western working woman's world.

- 1) How was the speech presented in this production?
- 2) How did Kate respond to Petruchio's request prior the speech?
- 3) Where and how did she speak the words in the speech?
- 4) What was the atmosphere created by the characters' responses to Kate's speech?

**Challenge:**

- 1) How would you direct the speech to create a different atmosphere?
- 2) Consider tone of voice, the position of Kate and the other characters on the stage and gestures they might use. Think about whom Kate might direct particular lines of the speech to.

## CULTURAL

### Obedience, Dominance, Submission

#### ACTIVITY ONE

The final resolution of the text suggests that Katherina has submitted to her husband Petruchio. However the interpretation of Kate's final speech (Act 5 Scene 1:148-191) may be ironic.

Early in the play it is Katherina who dominates Bianca (Act 2 Scene 1).

There are many commentaries on and opinions about this play. Germaine Greer writes of *The Taming Of The Shrew* that it is the "greatest defense of Christian monogamy ever written... It rests upon the role of husband as protector and friend, and it is valid because Kate has a man who is capable of being both, for Petruchio is both gentle and strong." (Nuttall, 2007)

What do you think?

Could you place the relationships and behaviour in this play in the context of another culture and religion?

Your task:

1. Research a selection of cultures and explore the rules of marriage within those cultures.
2. Try to find cultures that do not stem from Christianity so that you might look at comparing them.
3. Is there a culture where the woman chooses her husband?

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