

Advanced Placement in
English Literature and Composition

Teaching Unit
Individual Learning Packet

The Taming of the Shrew

by William Shakespeare

Written by Rebecca Grudzina

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Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. Discuss the structure of the play and its impact on comic effect.
2. Analyze the sources of comedy in the play.
3. Evaluate the effectiveness of certain dramatic techniques in contributing to the comic effect: situational irony, dramatic irony, verbal irony, foil and stock characters, and hyperbole.
4. Analyze the use of verse and prose on characterization, effect, and meaning.
5. Respond to free-response questions similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition exam.
6. Respond to multiple-choice questions similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition exam.

Introductory Lecture

Introduction

Scholars are unable to date *The Taming of the Shrew* exactly, but it is almost certainly one of Shakespeare's earliest comedies—most likely written in the late 1580s or early 1590s, about 8–10 years before *Much Ado About Nothing* (1598), to which it is often compared. Both plays are famous for their amusingly combative protagonists engaged in a never-ending battle of wits.

A probable source for *Shrew* is an Italian farce, *Gli Suppositi* (*The Suppositions*), by Ludovico Ariosto. This play had been translated into English by George Gascoigne as *The Supposes*. Another play, *A Pleasant and Conceited History Called the Taming of the Shrew*, is believed by some to be another source, but other scholars believe it is really nothing more than a corrupt version of Shakespeare's play.

Type of Play

The Taming of the Shrew is a comedy that satirizes courtship and marriage, often through farce, relying on exaggeration, horseplay, and unrealistic or improbable situations to provoke laughter. In a farce, plot takes precedence over character. A farce is a type of comedy that entertains its audience by means of unlikely and exaggerated situations; disguises and mistaken identity; verbal humor, often very obvious and bordering on the vulgar; and a fast-paced plot that often ends in an elaborate chase scene. Farce is also characterized by physical humor, the deliberate use of absurdity or nonsense, and broadly stylized performances.

Characteristics of farce include lighthearted and slapstick humor, disguises and deception, and a happy ending in which most of the characters come out satisfied. Like Shakespeare's other comedies, *The Taming of the Shrew* focuses on courtship and marriage, but—unlike most of his comedies—it devotes a great deal of attention to married life after the wedding. The other comedies—romantic and festival comedies—conclude with the wedding ceremony itself.

Because plot is of primary importance in a farce, many of the characters in these broad comedies are *stock* or *conventional* characters. Among the most popular comic stock characters of the day were “shrews” or “scolds”—and henpecked husbands. In some of the literature, it is difficult to distinguish between behavior that is being parodied and that is presented as an ideal to emulate. We see this ambiguity in *The Taming of the Shrew*, which both celebrates Katharine's quick wit and fiery temper and revels in Petruchio's “taming” of her.

What Shakespeare contributes to the genre is that—while other henpecked husbands finally gain control of their wives through corporal punishment (whipping and caning) or public punishments like the stocks, pillory, or dunking—Petruchio praises, pampers, and coddles Katharine in order to deny her an opportunity to complain.

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Study Guide Student Copy

INDUCTION

Scene I

1. What is the dramatic and structural purpose of the Induction?
2. What is implied by calling this part of the play an “Induction,” and not an “Introduction,” “Preface,” or “Foreword”?
3. What comic conventions does Shakespeare use from the very beginning of this play?
4. What is the difference between the Lord and his huntsmen’s language and Sly’s?
5. For what dramatic purpose does Shakespeare have the Lord and his huntsmen meddle with someone like Sly?
6. How do the Lord’s instructions to Barthol’meu introduce the main theme of the play?

ACT I
Scene I

1. What exposition does Shakespeare reveal in the first speech of the scene?
2. What is the nature of the first exchange involving Baptista and Katharine?
3. What pun does Shakespeare make in the conversation between Katharine and Hortensio?
4. To whom do the pronouns refer in Gremio's line,:

Why will you mew her up,
Signior Baptista, for this fiend of hell,
And make *her* bear the penance of *her* tongue?

ACT II

Scene I

1. How does the opening of this act contrast with the end of Act I?
2. What bit of psychological insight do we gain into the reason for Katharine's shrewishness?
3. What surprising condition does Baptista impose on Petruchio's proposal?
4. How does Petruchio say he will win Katharine's love?
5. Is Petruchio being sarcastic when he says he is now more eager than ever to speak with Katharine? Why do you think this?
6. Explain the source of comedy in this exchange between Petruchio and Katharine:

PETRUCHIO: Myself am moved to woo thee for my wife.
KATHARINE: 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?
KATHARINE: A join'd-stool.
PETRUCHIO: Thou hast hit it: come, sit on me.
KATHARINE: Asses are made to bear, and so are you.
PETRUCHIO: Women are made to bear, and so are you.
7. Why does Petruchio protest that he is a gentleman?

ACT III

Scene I

1. How do Bianca's instructors' lessons mirror their true intentions?
2. What is the nature of Lucentio's Latin lesson?
3. What other misidentification adds to the humor of this scene?
4. What is the "gamut" to which Hortensio and Bianca refer?
5. What is a pedant?

ACT IV

Scene I

1. What does Grumio's account of the incident with Katharine's horse illustrate?
2. How does Grumio's speech change from when he is addressing his fellow servants to when he is speaking to Petruchio?
3. What is ironic about this change?
4. Describe the visual humor of this scene.
5. Again, what is the effect of Petruchio's behavior on Katharine?
6. What excuse does Petruchio concoct for their not being able to eat the burnt meat?
7. What does Petruchio reveal in his closing monologue about his strategy for taming Katharine?

ACT V

Scene I

1. What does it mean, at the beginning of a scene, for a character to be specified as “discovered”?
2. How does dramatic irony create much of the comedy in this scene?
3. How is this scene farcical?
4. What is significant about Katharine’s suggesting that she and Petruchio follow everyone to see how the Baptista-Lucentio-Bianca-Vincentio drama plays out? What is the ultimate result of her suggestion?
5. What is suggested about a wife’s submission to her husband by the dialogue about the kiss?