

Taming of the Shrew Study Guide

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for

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Original Practice and Playing Shakespeare

The Shakespeare Tavern on Peachtree Street is an Original Practice Playhouse. Original Practice is the active exploration and implementation of Elizabethan stagecraft and acting techniques.

For the Atlanta Shakespeare Company (ASC) at The New American Shakespeare Tavern this means every ASC production features hand-made period costumes, live, actor-generated sound effects, and live period music performed on period instruments in our Elizabethan playhouse. Our casts are trained to speak directly to the audience instead of ignoring the audience through the modern convention of acting with a “4th wall.”

You will experience all of this and more when you see ASC’s Taming of the Shrew.

Who’s Who in Shrew

Lucentio: A student of Philosophy. He falls in love with Bianca at first sight. He masquerades as “Cambio,” a poor scholar.

Tranio: His “trustworthy servant” He masquerades as Lucentio himself.

Baptista: Father to Kate and Bianca. An “affable and courteous gentleman” or “cruel,” depending on who you ask.

Gremio: An older suitor of

Bianca’s. He is afraid of Katherine.

Hortensio: A younger suitor to Bianca and friend of Petruchio. He is also afraid of Katherine, the “fiend of hell.”

Biondello: A “rogue” and servant to Lucentio

Katherine: Older daughter of Baptista. She is “wonderful forward.” She is the Shrew of the title.

Bianca: Younger daughter to Baptista. She is unable to marry ‘til her older sister does. She “taketh most delight in music, instruments and poetry.” She is also described as “sweet beauty” and a “young, modest girl.”

Petruchio: A bachelor, newly “come to see the world.” He “comes to wive it wealthy in Padua. If Wealthily in Padua then happily in Padua.” He will marry and try to tame the Shrew.

Grumio: Servant to Petruchio. A “villain” and a “rascal.”

The Widow: Marries Hortensio; not too nice a lady.

The Story

The play opens as Lucentio and his servant Tranio arrive in Padua. Immediately they see Baptista, followed by his daughters Bianca and Katherine, pursued by Bianca’s suitors Hortensio and Grumio. We learn that Baptista, a wealthy merchant of Padua, forbids Bianca to wed either man until her older sister Katherine is wed. That is a

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problem since no man in Padua wishes to marry such a Shrew. Baptista decrees he will accept offers of teachers for his daughters. Hortensio and Gremio bemoan their fate, and make a pact to get Kate married ASAP to some poor fool so they can compete more successfully for Bianca. Lucentio immediately falls in love with Bianca and devises a scheme to woo her for himself. He will disguise himself as a scholar named Cambio and Tranio as Lucentio himself, to gain access to Bianca. Biondello, Lucentio's other servant, shows up and is cautioned to treat Tranio as the master when they are in public.

Next, we meet Petruchio, a young man seeing the world after his father has died. His servant, Grumio, accompanies him. His good friend Hortensio tells him of a beautiful girl, still unmarried because of her shrewishness, but rich and beautiful for all that. Petruchio immediately resolves to marry her for her money. They travel along to Baptista's house and meet Tranio disguised as Lucentio and Lucentio disguised as his scholar "Cambio."

The scene moves to Baptista's house, where Katherine and Bianca are fighting. Baptista is angry and we see the family discord that Kate's shrewishness has caused. Petruchio and company enter and Baptista eventually agrees to let Kate meet Petruchio. Petruchio decides that no matter how awful Kate behaves, he will praise her. By the end of the scene they are both exhausted, but apparently engaged!! Petruchio is cheerful and Kate is enraged.

We now watch as Hortensio, disguised as "Lutio" the music teacher and Lucentio, disguised as "Cambio" the Latin scholar, both compete for Bianca's affections.

The wedding day dawns and Petruchio is nowhere to be found. He eventually shows up dressed outlandishly and behaves in such a dreadful manner that everyone feels sorry for Kate for once. Kate is incensed to be

treated this way and hollers at everyone in sight. After the wild off-stage marriage Petruchio abruptly declares they must leave, without participating in the marriage feast (very rude for the time).

He gets his way and the scene shifts to Petruchio's country house. He behaves even worse at home and Kate, servants and friends alike are put on edge at his "behavior." He explains to the audience that he will keep Kate from eating, sleeping and changing clothes 'til she is quieter. He says "all is done in reverend care of her" so that we know he will not use force or violence against her. He continues this behavior 'til Kate begins to question if love will ever exist in her marriage. She is also learning to hold her temper. This is very useful in a scene where a lovely dress and hat, made for her to wear to Bianca's impending marriage to "Lucentio," are completely destroyed by the seemingly out of control Petruchio. The couple and Hortensio, jilted by Bianca, travel to Padua for the next wedding- still in the wrecked wedding attire of the last act.

Back in Padua, Tranio and Lucentio have paid a Merchant to dress as Lucentio's father, Vincentio.

As Kate, Petruchio and Hortensio travel to Padua they meet up with the Real Vincentio and bring him along with them. Petruchio finally gets through to Kate that "going along to get along" can be very useful in marriage and in life in general. She seems to acquiesce.

A series of mistaken identities, mishaps and wacky scenes later, we arrive at the marriage feast of three couples (Lucentio/Bianca, Kate/Petruchio and Hortensio/Widow). As they sit around the table eating and chatting, the barbs fly between Petruchio and the Widow. Kate is insulted and nearly comes to blows with the Widow, but Bianca inserts some shrewish comments of her own and the three wives leave the room. While they are gone, wagers amongst the husbands as to whose wife is the most obedient begin.

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Each man sends for his new wife, but only Kate appears. Petruchio commands her to explain a wife's duties, which she does at some length. By the end, it is apparent to all that Kate and Petruchio, the most unlikely of couples, have found a special bond. It is also apparent that the other men will not be blessed with the marital bliss that Kate and her husband are.

Before a Performance, Think About This:

Kate's Names:

Throughout the play the Shrew is called variously Kate, Katherine or Katherina. Why do you think there are so many versions of her name? When does her name change? What does SHE want to be called? How does Petruchio use her name? What works for you and when? And just what exactly does it mean to be a "Shrew?"

Physical Actions Revealed:

Suit the deed to the word, the word to the deed. Where are there examples of the text itself telling the reader what the physical action on stage should be? Example: "Insooth you scape not so" and "I chafe you if I tarry, let me go" Act II, sc. I

Theatergoing Then and Now:

Find out what the typical Elizabethan audience was like and imagine what a performance might have been like back then. What is different about theatre going nowadays? The answers may surprise you!

After a Performance, Talk About This:

Who do you think is going to be the happiest married couple (Lucentio/Bianca, Kate/Petruchio and Hortensio/Widow)? Which couple is a good example of Elizabethan "courtly love" and which couple is the exact opposite? Which couple has a marriage that seems familiar to our 21st century eyes?

Does directly addressing the audience effect what you think and feel about the characters? Does it affect your understanding of what is going on onstage? Does it interfere? Why do you think Shakespeare wrote his plays this way? What are the benefits to the actor and/or audience? What are the risks?

Words Invented by Shakespeare and Used for the First Time in this Play:

Quarrelsome

Undress

Madcap

Pedant

Find for yourself where they appear in the play! Can you spot them in performance? Do they mean what you thought they meant?

(See definitions below.)

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For Further Information/Exploration:

Websites:

Mr. William Shakespeare and The Internet: <http://shakespeare.palomar.edu/>- this site contains excellent resources and is a great metasite.

Shakespeare's Globe website
www.shakespeares-globe.org

Books:

Shakespeare's Flowers by Jessica Kerr

The Taming Of The Shrew, New Folger Library Edition

The Elizabethan World Picture by E.M.W. Tilyard

Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human by Harold Bloom

Asimov's Guide to Shakespeare by Isaac Asimov

Staging In Shakespeare's Theatres by Andrew Gurr and Mariko Ichikawa

Movie Versions:

10 Things I Hate About You – a modern update with Heath Ledger-rated PG-13

Zeffirelli's Taming of the Shrew with Elizabeth Taylor and Richard Burton. Made in 1967.

Kiss Me Kate- The classic Cole Porter musical based on Taming of the Shrew

Answers:

Definitions of Words Invented for Shrew:

Quarrelsome: argumentative, contentious

Undress: to remove clothing or other covering

Madcap: reckless and impulsive, foolish

Pedant: teacher or schoolmaster, narrow-minded pedagogue

Before a Performance, Think About This:

Variations on Kate's names: Look in Act I, sc i, line 52, Act I, sc ii, line 100, Act II, sc I line 21, 46, 175 and 192- and all of Petruchio's next monologue!! Also check out the final scene of the play...

After a Performance, Talk About This:

Courtly love- women were worshipped from afar and men were knights in shining armor.