

2013 Study Guide for *The Taming of the Shrew* by William Shakespeare

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**Before seeing/reading the play**

1. Look up the word “shrew.” What do you expect from the play based on its title? This and other websites provide information:  
<http://mw1.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/shrew>
2. *The Taming of the Shrew* takes place in Padua, Italy, renowned for the University of Padua. What was the role of education in Padua? These and other websites provide information:  
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Padua>  
<http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/438066/University-of-Padua>
3. Locate the following Italian cities mentioned in the play on a map of Northern Italy: Padua, Pisa and Verona. What is the distance between the cities? These and other websites provide information:  
<http://www.sacred-destinations.com/italy/italy-northern-interactive-map.htm>  
[http://www.mapcrow.info/cgi-bin/cities\\_distance\\_airpt2.cgi?city3=-](http://www.mapcrow.info/cgi-bin/cities_distance_airpt2.cgi?city3=-)
4. Research Elizabethan wedding customs. In what ways were weddings a business transaction, especially among the middle and upper classes? What were the financial and social advantages of marriage in this society? How could individuals raise or lower their social status through marriage? These and other websites provide information:  
<http://www.william-shakespeare.info/elizabethan-wedding-customs.htm>  
[http://www.ehow.com/about\\_4571160\\_marriage-elizabethan-times.html](http://www.ehow.com/about_4571160_marriage-elizabethan-times.html)
5. Research “dowry” or “marriage portion” during the Elizabethan era. Research “jointure.” These and other websites provide information:  
<http://www.elizabethan.org/compendium/62.html>  
<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/jointure>

6. Research expectations of women in the Elizabethan era. What was the function of a wife? How was she expected to behave? What were the options for unmarried women? These and other websites provide information:  
<http://www.william-shakespeare.info/elizabethan-women.htm>  
<http://www.elizabethi.org/us/women/>  
<https://sites.google.com/site/nothingbutshakespeare/role-of-women-in-elizabethan-times>
7. What laws and traditions governed how money and property was passed down to children and grandchildren in Elizabethan England? If a man had several daughters and sons, who would inherit his money and property? If a man had several daughters (and no sons) who would inherit? What laws and traditions governed the rights of women to possess money and property? This and other websites provide information:  
<http://elizabethan.org/compendium/41.html>
8. What is the art of falconry? What are the steps in “manning” a falcon? What is the ideal partnership between the human and the falcon? What is the goal of manning a falcon? This and other websites provide information:  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Falconry\\_%28training%29](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Falconry_%28training%29)

## Resources

### Adaptations:

*Kiss Me, Kate* by Cole Porter

*10 Things I Hate About You* (1999)

### Learn more about Shakespeare’s life and times at the following websites:

<http://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/Library/SLT/index.html>

<http://www.folger.edu/template.cfm?cid=865&CFID=6230886&CFTOKEN=25420173>

<http://www.shakespeare.org.uk/explore-shakespeare.html>

<http://shakespeare.palomar.edu/life.htm>

<http://www.bardweb.net/man.html>

## After seeing/reading the play

1. What is the significance of the title of the play?
2. Refer to your research on laws and traditions that governed how money and property was passed down to children and grandchildren in Elizabethan England. Find the references to money in the play. What is the value of money to the characters? What is the value of having possessions? What value is there in passing money along to future generations?
3. Find the references to education in the play. What is the value of education to the characters? In what ways is learning a commodity? Which characters are seeking education? Why? Who refuses the education that is offered? Why? Why does Baptista want Bianca and Katherine to be educated?
4. Tranio says to his studious master, Lucentio in Act I, scene i, “No profit grows where is no pleasure tane:/ In brief, sir, study what you most affect.” What other kinds of education are there other than academic schooling? Which characters take life journeys in the play? What do they learn?
5. Find the references to women as possessions or merchandise in the play. What is the value of women? What is their worth, and to whom?
6. Refer to your research on “dowry” and “jointure.” In the play, Baptista promises Petruchio a dowry if he marries Katherine. Bianca has a dowry as well, but Gremio and Hortensio promise a jointure to Baptista if they marry Bianca. What does this say about the difference between Katherine and Bianca? What did the size of a dowry indicate about a woman’s worth? What is Baptista’s relationship to the business of marriage? Petruchio’s? Lucentio’s?
7. In the course of the play, Katherine is described in many ways that are not positive. Find instances of these references. What does each description tell you about the speaker’s attitude toward her? What is the effect on Katherine of so many unflattering descriptions? What is the effect on other characters? On the audience?

8. Baptista mentions love to Petruchio in Act II, scene i: “Ay, when the special thing is well obtained, /That is, her love, for that is all in all.” He never mentions love to Bianca’s suitors. What does this say about Baptista’s relationship to his daughters’ marriages? Why might love be important in relationship to Katherine and not Bianca?
9. What is the difference between marriage and love in *The Taming of the Shrew*? What are the social expectations of men and women, respectively, in the play? How much pressure is there to conform to social expectations? How much room is there for men to be different? For women? What are the positives and negatives of conforming, and of not conforming? Who chooses to act outside the norm and how? Who chooses to conform?
10. In what areas does Katherine have power and in what areas does she not? How does Petruchio empower her? How does she find her own power?
11. What is Petruchio’s strategy for winning Katherine? Describe each of his actions and strategies and the objective he is trying to achieve at each point. How do his objectives change? What does he learn while “taming” Katherine?
12. Describe the balance of power between men and women in the play. How do the husbands, wives, fathers and daughters choose to assert their power? Refer to your research on falconry. What are the specific steps to manning a falcon and how are they carried out in the play? In terms of falconry, describe the partnership Katherine and Petruchio achieve. What is the moment when Petruchio lets Katherine fly free?
13. Consider Katherine’s behavior and the reasons she might have for acting the way she does. Does her behavior justify her being thought of as a shrew? Why or why not? Support your answer with specific examples from the play.
14. Compare the women in the play: Katherine, Bianca and the Widow. In what ways are they different and in what ways alike? How does each negotiate the misogynistic world they live in? How is each woman weak? How is each powerful? What lesson does each learn by the play’s end?

15. Compare the three men who woo Bianca: Lucentio, Gremio and Hortensio. What would be the positives and negatives of each match for Bianca? Why does Bianca choose to elope with Lucentio? What rules of behavior does her elopement flout?
16. What is the role of disguise in the play? Which characters are someone or something other than what they seem? Why do they choose to disguise themselves? Which ones literally disguise themselves, which ones figuratively disguise themselves, and which do both? How do these disguises benefit the individuals who employ them and how do they not?
17. Find references to clothing in the play. When in the play do “clothes make the man” and when do they not? Why might Shakespeare have included two characters whose job it is to make clothes, the tailor and the haberdasher? What does Petruchio hope to gain by dressing so outlandishly at the wedding; what do his wedding clothes represent? What do the clothes represent to Petruchio and Katherine when they argue about them? What does the cap represent?
18. Chart Bianca’s journey through the play. Compare her journey to Katherine’s. What has each sister learned by the play’s end? Find separate instances in the play when Bianca and Katherine remain silent. Why does each choose to do so – what prevents them from speaking in these moments?
19. Read Act IV, scene v, where Petruchio and Katherine argue about the sun and the moon. What is Petruchio trying to teach Katherine in this scene? Why does she go along with him? How does this scene change the relationship between the two?
20. In what ways is Katherine “tamed” by the play’s end? In what ways does she allow herself to be tamed and in what ways is her taming forced upon her?
21. Chart Petruchio’s journey through the play. When and how does Petruchio pretend to be other than whom he is, and when does he not? What does Katherine teach him?

22. Read Katherine's speech at the end of Act V, scene ii about the role of women. Why does Katherine make this speech? What does it say about the expected role of women in the Elizabethan era? In what ways has she decided to accept this role? In what ways is she rejecting it? Divide your class into groups and assign each group a different time period such as Shakespeare's time, the Victorian era, the 1900s, the 1920s, the 1950s, the 1960s, the present. Have each group research their assigned time period and the role of women in that period. How would women feel about this speech in each time period?
23. Based on the women's responses to the bet in Act V, scene ii, write a scene that takes place five years after the play ends. Which couples are happy and why? Which couples are not happy and why? What text in the scene supports your answer?
24. How did the boardwalk setting of OSF's 2013 production of *The Taming of the Shrew* reinforce the themes of love and transformation found within the text? How did the costume design signify different groups of characters on stage and emphasize certain character traits? How did the music contribute to the story?
25. How did the choice to make Biondello a woman in the 2013 OSF production influence the story? What was the effect of having another couple on stage at the play's end?
26. If you are seeing *Cymbeline*, *King Lear*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or *My Fair Lady*, compare the daughters in the plays. How is each daughter valued and by whom? How much power does each daughter have? Which daughters find power by defying the societal expectations of their role as women? Which by conforming? How much choice does each have about whom she will marry? Compare the role of the fathers in the plays. How does each father try to control his daughter(s)? How successful is each?
27. If you are seeing *Cymbeline*, *King Lear*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or *My Fair Lady*, compare the relationship between love and marriage in the plays. On what factors do the fathers decide who will marry their daughters? How much influence do the daughters' wishes have? What attributes other than love do the fathers value?

28. If you are seeing *My Fair Lady*, compare Eliza's transformation with Katherine's taming. What techniques do Petruchio and Higgins use to alter the behavior of Katherine and Eliza that are similar? That are different? What does each woman gain by the play's end and what does she lose?
29. If you are seeing *My Fair Lady*, compare Higgins' last line, "Eliza? Where the devil are my slippers?" to Katherine's last lines in *The Taming of the Shrew*, "...for it is no boot/and place your hands below your husband's foot." (Act V, scene ii, 176-177). What are these lines, aside from their literal meanings, meant to communicate to the people (Eliza, Petruchio) they are said to? How do they sum up the journeys these two different couples have undergone together?

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