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Literature
Teaching Unit
Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



The Taming of the Shrew

by William Shakespeare

- Learning objectives
- Study Guide with short-answer questions
- Background information
- Vocabulary in context
- Multiple-choice test
- Essay questions
- Literary terms



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 **Prestwick House**

P.O. Box 658, Clayton, DE 19938
www.prestwickhouse.com
800.932.4593

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The Taming of the Shrew

Objectives

All references come from the Prestwick House edition of *The Taming of the Shrew*, copyright 2007.

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

1. explain Shakespeare's
 - presentation of the motif of appearance vs. reality.
 - use of animal imagery to parallel a husband's mastery over animals with his mastery over his wife.
 - depiction of the contrast between the role of servants and that of the nobility.
 - portrayal of the proper behavior and qualities of a wife. Discuss Katharina, Bianca, and the Widow.
 - portrayal of the various reasons why men decide to marry. Discuss Petruchio, Hortensio, Lucentio, and Sly.
2. point out how the structure of the play (a play within a play) supports the motif of distinguishing appearance from reality.
3. define and contrast, using examples from the play, the terms "aside" and "soliloquy."
4. identify the comic characters in the play, and discuss the ways in which they add humor to the plot.
5. define "stock character" and "pantaloon"; identify which characters in the play fit these definitions.
6. describe Petruchio's use of animal imagery to explain his plan to tame Katharina; evaluate the effectiveness of Petruchio's plan.
7. point out, by using examples, Shakespeare's use of prose to denote an uneducated servant; also point out the use of prose when noble characters are discussing mundane matters.
8. identify examples of rhyming couplets in the verse that are used to stress important actions or the emotions of the characters.

The Taming of the Shrew

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Some critics believe that this play is missing the final scene. They argue that in the original play, Sly awakens outside the tavern and everything that happened in the play was just a dream. Assuming this is true, what do you think Sly the tinker might have learned from his dream?
2. Read aloud the last long speech of Katharina in which she lectures her sister and the Widow on the proper behavior for a wife. How can the way you read the speech change its meaning? Is she being sarcastic or sincere?
3. What do you think is Shakespeare's opinion of the proper role of women in marriage?
4. One of the motifs in this play is the use of animal imagery by the male characters when describing women. Identify at least two examples of this motif. Why do you think Shakespeare chooses to compare women to animals?
5. Given the fact that Tranio is different from the other servants, what do you think Shakespeare is saying about the qualities that separate the classes?
6. Discuss Petruchio's plan to tame Katharina. Do you think he really cares for her, or does he simply want to dominate her?
7. Compare Katharina and Bianca at the beginning of the play and again at the end. Who is the shrew and who is the model of the perfect woman? How is this change an example of irony?
8. Sum up what you think the play is saying about the reasons men get married. Why do you think the women get married?
9. Define "pantaloon," and explain why Gremio fits this definition. Aside from his role as a comical character, how does his presence add suspense and advance the plot of the play?
10. Sums of money are mentioned many times in the play, specifically with regard to marriage. What does this suggest about the relationship between money and marriage during Shakespeare's time? Is money as important a factor in marriage negotiations today?
11. Comment on the apparent cruelty of Petruchio's treatment of Katharina. Do you find his behavior humorous, offensive, or a combination of both? Give reasons for your opinion.

2. What, according to the Lord and his huntsmen, are the qualities of a good hunting dog?

3. The Lord and his two Huntsmen plan to play an elaborate practical joke on Christopher Sly. What are they going to do to him?

4. The Lord is delighted to receive some traveling players in his home. He enlists their help in playing the joke on Sly. What is the Lord concerned about in the following quotation?

“But I am doubtful of your modesties;
Lest over-eyeing of his odd behavior,—
For yet his honour never heard a play—
You break into some merry passion”

5. One of the major motifs in the play is the battle between the sexes, specifically the definition of the proper behavior of a wife. Bartholomew the page is asked to dress up like a lady and pretend to be Sly’s wife. What advice does the Lord give his page on this theme?

Scene II – Padua. Before Hortensio’s house

Vocabulary

adversaries – enemies, opponents
affable – friendly; pleasant
amorous – passionate; romantic
bade – commanded, instructed
beguile – to trick or deceive
beseech – to beg
brawling – fighting
contrive – to plan, plot, or scheme
crowns – coins worth five shillings
daunt – to discourage or intimidate
disfigure – to damage or scar
fray – a fight or dispute
indifferent – equally; in the same way
intolerable – unbearable, awful
irksome – annoying, irritating
liberality – kindness; generosity
perused – read carefully
sooth – truth, fact
'twixt – between
whit – a tiny amount
whither – where

1. Find an example of a pun in the conversation between Petruchio and his servant Grumio at the beginning of this scene.

2. Why is Petruchio in Padua?

4. Besides wearing old clothes, list two things Petruchio does on his wedding day that go against tradition. What message is he trying to send to Katharina? How does Katharina behave during the wedding?

5. What is Lucentio thinking in the following passage?

“Were it not that my fellow-schoolmaster
Doth watch Bianca’s steps so narrowly,
’twere good, methinks, to steal our marriage”

6. In the following passage, what is Katharina saying about a wife’s relationship with her husband?

“I see a woman may be made a fool,
If she had not a spirit to resist.”

7. What is Petruchio saying about a wife’s position in her husband’s house in the following passage?

“She is my goods, my chattels; she is my house,
My household stuff, my field, my barn,”
