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Teaching Unit™

# Sample

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## Literature Teaching Unit

Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



### She Stoops to Conquer

by Oliver Goldsmith

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



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# She Stoops to Conquer

## Note to the Teacher

### *The Author*

Oliver Goldsmith (1750 - 1775) is an interesting figure in the history of English literature. His father, a minister, spent an exorbitant amount of money on his daughter's dowry so when Oliver went to Trinity College in Dublin he had to attend the school on a poor boy's work scholarship. His inferior status, which was clearly marked in the type of robe he wore, certainly did not help his already shy and withdrawn personality. Not unlike young Marlow, his hero in *She Stoops To Conquer*, Oliver Goldsmith's shyness would cause him throughout his life to stammer and trip over his words whenever he was involved in social situations with people who were not his social inferiors.

Goldsmith, however, if given the opportunity, was not above putting on absurd airs. Once, on a trip home from school when he was sixteen, Goldsmith stopped to spend a night in a small village. When he asked for directions to an inn, some joker, not unlike Tony Lumpkin, directed Goldsmith to the house of a local gentleman. When the young Goldsmith, thinking that the man and his wife were innkeepers, started ordering the man and his wife around, the gentleman thought it was amusing and went along with the gag. Years later, the practical joke played on Goldsmith became the pivotal action in one of the best and well-known comedies in English literature.

### *Socio-Historical Context*

While it is not necessary to know anything of Goldsmith's life or the context in which he wrote, being aware of the following historical context does add interest to the reading.

When the Puritans ruled in England, they closed the theaters, which they viewed as places of sin and depravity. In 1660, when Charles II was restored to the throne, the theaters were reopened. The dramas written and staged during this period were dubbed Restoration Drama. The comedies of this period, which were called "comedies of manners," were quite different than anything that had been on the English stage before. The men, all dandy aristocrats, were amoral women chasers; their wives were no better. During this period, both the characters on stage and the audience were gentry, and they were pleased with this kind of entertainment.

Later in the century, however, the rising middle class became the theater audiences, and they were repulsed by the amorality on stage. This audience, demanding moral plays, desired to see the type of comedy that became known as "sentimental comedy."

Critics complained that the sentimental comedies, which blatantly appealed to the emotions, were filled with tears, but laughs were absent. These sentimental comedies attempted to teach moral lessons by making people weep: the villains always received their proper punishments, and, seeing the error of their ways, they promised to reform.

# She Stoops to Conquer

## Objectives

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

1. define irony and satire, and point out instances of these in the play.
2. describe the social and historical context of the play, and show how the play is both a comedy of manners and a satire on the “sentimental comedy.”
3. describe each character in terms of traits, attitude, values, and motives.
4. summarize plot developments.
5. discuss the following thematic ideas:
  - a. comedy is a more useful tool than sentimentality to make people see their own mistakes.
  - b. people who put an emphasis on the superficialities in life often appear absurd.
6. discuss what constitutes honorable behavior as exhibited in this play.
7. state Goldsmith’s view of the upper and lower classes.
8. understand, discuss, and give examples of the following terms:
  - farce
  - irony
  - litotes
  - satire
  - hyperbole

# She Stoops to Conquer

## Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Discuss the humor in this play, where it occurs, and what gives rise to it.
2. Dr. Johnson defined satire as a literary form “in which wickedness or folly is censured.” Relate Johnson’s definition of satire to the play by identifying what the targets of satire are in *She Stoops to Conquer*.
3. Discuss the examples of irony you can identify in this play.
4. Write a brief character sketch for each of the following: Kate, Constance, Hastings, Young Marlow, Tony Lumpkin, and Mr. and Mrs. Hardcastle.
5. In regard to barmaids, how does Marlow show himself to be an honorable opportunist?
6. What view of the lower classes is represented in this play? What picture do we get of the upper class?
7. In what ways are the sentimental comedies a reaction to the Restoration comedy of manners that came before them?
8. In what ways are comedies of manners, such as Goldsmith’s, a reaction to the sentimental comedies?
9. Explain the differences between high comedy and farce.

**Act I**

## VOCABULARY

**chamber** – room  
**affectation** – false behavior  
**consumptive** – a person with tuberculosis  
**superfluous** – unnecessary  
**indigent** – poor  
**tete-a-tete** – head to head; one on one  
**allons** – (*French*) let's go  
**jorum** – huge drinking bowl  
**ecod** – my goodness  
**alderman** – a noble or judge

1. Mr. Hardcastle is introduced as an old-fashioned man. What details convey this?

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2. Describe Tony.

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3. What is comical about the difference between Mrs. Hardcastle's feelings about Tony and Mr. Hardcastle's feelings? (Remember, Tony is Mr. Hardcastle's step-son.)

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4. What agreement have Kate and her father made regarding her manner of dress?

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**Act II**

VOCABULARY

**larder** – kitchen pantry  
**impudence** – offensively bold behavior  
**assiduities** – persistence; constant efforts  
**dissembler** – someone who lies  
**alighted** – landed  
**degagee** – (*French*) casual  
**friseur** – (*French*) to curl  
**cantankerous** – disagreeable

1. Why are Hardcastle’s servants so inept?

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2. Why does Marlow feel that he will never marry?

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3. What is comical in the scene between Hardcastle, Marlow, and the Hastings? Explain the dramatic irony that creates this comic effect.

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4. How does Hastings find out about Tony’s practical joke?

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**Act III**

VOCABULARY

**importunate** – annoyingly urgent  
**masquerade** – disguise  
**prerogatives** – rights or privileges  
**sprightly** – lively; spirited

1. What conclusion do Kate and her father come to in respect to Marlow?

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2. Summarize what has transpired with the jewels in this act. In your opinion, what is the funniest bit in this business?

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3. In this act, Marlow does not recognize Kate. What early details has Goldsmith incorporated into the play earlier to make Kate’s pretense to be a servant convincing to Marlow?

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4. In your opinion, what point is Goldsmith making about social expectations, customs, and distinctions? Do you find any evidence of these points today? For instance, are there people like Mrs. Hardcastle? Are there certain social languages that must be used in certain situations?

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