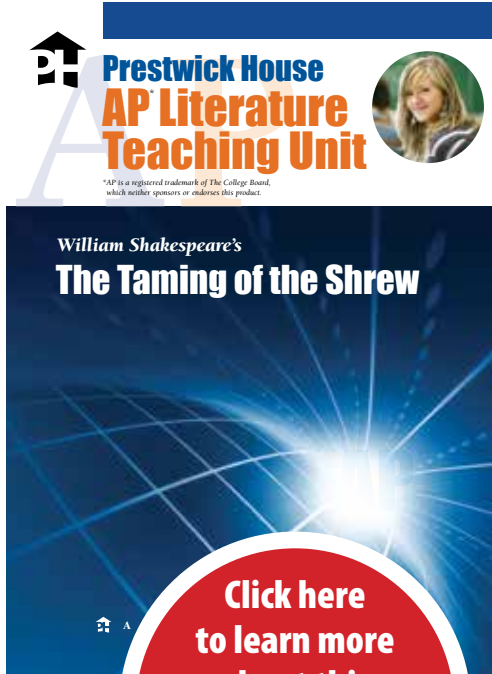




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Teaching Unit

The Taming of the Shrew

by William Shakespeare

written by Rebecca Grudzina



Prestwick House

Item No. 302775

The Taming of the Shrew

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 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.

The Taming of the Shrew

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?

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?

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 II

1. What does the Widow mean when she says, “He that is giddy thinks the world turns round”?

2. What seems to be a possible consequence of the Widow’s comment? How do the men react?

3. How has Bianca changed since her wedding?

4. How do the men arrive at the amount they will wager on their wives’ obedience?

5. Compare the ways each of the husbands tries to persuade his wife to attend him. Which man is the most successful? What do you think Shakespeare is saying about the proper relationship between a husband and a wife?

6. What is different about whom Petruchio sends for his wife? Why might this be significant?
