Education Pack

The Taming of the Shrew

Propeller

Directed by Edward Hall
Designed by Michael Pavelka
Lighting by Mark Howland and Ben Ormerod

Pack compiled by Will Wollen
Thanks to the cast and creative team
To Teachers

This pack has been designed to complement your class's visit to see Propeller's 2006-7 production of The Taming of the Shrew at The Watermill Theatre, The Old Vic, the RSC Complete Works Festival and on national and international tour.

Most of the pack is aimed at A-level and GSCE students of Drama and English Literature, but some of the sections, and suggestions for classroom activities, may be of use to teachers teaching pupils at Key Stages 2, 3 & 4, while students in higher education may find much of interest in these pages.

While there are some images, the pack has been deliberately kept simple from a graphic point of view so that pages can easily be photocopied for use in the classroom.

Your feedback is most welcome. You can email any comments to me at: will@watermill.org.uk

A3 Posters from The Watermill production are available for purchase at £4 (inc. p&p). Please email Jan Ferrer at jan@watermill.org.uk.

Workshops to accompany the production are also available. Call me on 01635 570927 or email me on the above address.

I hope you find the pack useful.

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Why not visit the Propeller website? www.propeller.org.uk
Synopsis

The play starts with a tinker, Christopher Sly, who is drunk enough for a group of hunting noblemen to persuade him that he is a Lord. Sly is given a disguised page as his lady and he is entertained at the nobleman’s house with a comedy presented by a group of travelling actors.

The play that Sly watches opens as Lucentio, a student, arrives in Padua. He overhears the merchant Baptista saying that his pretty younger daughter, Bianca, may not be married before her shrewish sister, Katherina. When Lucentio sees Bianca he decides straightaway to woo her and changes roles with his servant Tranio. Bianca already has two suitors, but cares for neither. The first, Gremio, engages Lucentio, disguised as a Latin tutor, to woo Bianca on his behalf, while the second, Hortensio, disguises himself as a musician to obtain access to her. Meanwhile Hortensio’s friend, Petruchio, arrives from Verona. He learns about Katherina and resolves to court her, aided enthusiastically by both Gremio and Hortensio.

Baptista encourages Petruchio’s suit for his extremely reluctant eldest daughter and together the men fix a wedding day. Petruchio arrives at the church in outlandish clothes, and after he is married to his unwilling bride the two of them set off for Verona. On reaching home Petruchio, with the help of his servants, denies Kate all food and rest. In a campaign to teach her to obey him Petruchio will not allow Kate any new clothes. Eventually, worn down by her husband’s waywardness, Kate submits and they leave to visit her father in Padua.

On the journey the couple meet Vincentio, Lucentio’s wealthy father. The three reach Padua where Hortensio, rejected by Bianca, has married a widow and Baptista has been tricked into believing a passing stranger is Tranio’s rich father. While Vincentio attempts to solve the problem his son Lucentio returns from a secret wedding with Bianca.

Baptista holds a wedding feast for both his daughters. After the meal Petruchio devises a scheme to prove whose wife is the most obedient. Bianca and the widow fail to come to their husbands when called while Kate, now much altered, resolutely tells the other women the duties of a wife.

As the play closes, Sly is abandoned to sleep off his drunken dream.

Classroom activity:
Make a newspaper with different articles describing events in the play. You might have ‘lifestyle’ interviews with one of the characters, offer editorial comment, draw cartoons, or make up horoscopes.
Main characters

Christopher Sly - The principal character in the play’s brief Induction. We see the action of the play through his eyes.

Katherine - The “shrew” of the play’s title, Katherine, or Kate, is the daughter of Baptista Minola, with whom she lives in Padua. She is sharp-tongued, quick-tempered. She has a troubled relationship with her sister, Bianca, who is their father’s favourite.

Petruchio - Petruchio is a gentleman from Verona. Boisterous, eccentric, quick-witted, and frequently drunk, he has come to Padua in order to search for a wife who comes with a large dowry. He sees marriage as a business deal. He chooses Katherine before he has even seen her.

Bianca - The younger daughter of Baptista. She is much more sweet-tempered than her older sister, Katherine, and she has many suitors. Her father, Baptista, however, will not let her marry until Kate is wed.

Baptista - Minola Baptista is one of the wealthiest men in Padua. He, too, sees marriage as a business arrangement, and Kate’s nature is probably derived from the lack of emotional care he gives her.

Lucentio - Lucentio comes to Padua from Pisa to study at the city’s renowned university, but falls in love with Bianca at first sight. By disguising himself as a tutor named Cambio, he convinces Gremio to offer him to Baptista as a tutor for Bianca so that he can gain access to her.

Tranio - Lucentio’s servant, Tranio, accompanies his master. While Lucentio is pretending to be Cambio, Tranio assumes Lucentio’s identity so that he can bargain with Baptista for Bianca’s hand.

Gremio and Hortensio - Two gentlemen of Padua. Gremio and Hortensio are Bianca’s suitors at the beginning of the play. Though they are rivals, these older men also become friends during their mutual frustration with and rejection by Bianca. Hortensio directs Petruchio to Kate and then dresses up as a music instructor to court Bianca.

Grumio - Petruchio’s servant and the fool of the play.
William Shakespeare

The person we call William Shakespeare wrote some 37 plays, as well as sonnets and full-length poems; but very little is actually known about him. That there was someone called William Shakespeare is certain, and what we know about his life comes from registrar records, court records, wills, marriage certificates and his tombstone. There are also contemporary anecdotes and criticisms made by his rivals which speak of the famous playwright and suggest that he was indeed a playwright, poet and an actor.

The earliest record we have of his life is of his baptism, which took place on Wednesday 26th April 1564. Traditionally it is supposed that he was, as was common practice, baptised three days after his birth, making his birthday the 23rd of April 1564 – St George’s Day. There is, however, no proof of this at all. William’s father was a John Shakespeare, a local businessman who was involved in tanning and leatherwork. John also dealt in grain and sometimes was described as a glover by trade. John was also a prominent man in Stratford. By 1560, he was one of the fourteen burgesses who made up the town council.

William’s mother was Mary Arden who married John Shakespeare in 1557. They had eight children, of who William was the third. It is assumed that William grew up with them in Stratford, one hundred miles from London.

Very little is known about Shakespeare’s education. We know that the King’s New Grammar School taught boys basic reading and writing. We assume William attended this school since it existed to educate the sons of Stratford but we have no definite proof. There is also no evidence to suggest that William attended university.

On 28th November 1582 an eighteen-year-old William married the twenty-six-year-old Anne Hathaway. Seven months later, they had their first daughter, Susanna. Anne never left Stratford, living there her entire life.

Baptism records reveal that twins Hamnet and Judith were born in February 1592. The Taming of the Shrew was probably written later that year. Hamnet, the only son died in 1596, just eleven years old.

At some point, Shakespeare joined the Burbage company in London as an actor, and was their principal writer. He wrote for them at the Theatre in Shoreditch, and by 1594 he was a sharer, or shareholder in the company. It was through being a sharer in the profits of the company that William made his money and in 1597 he was able to purchase a large house in Stratford.

The company moved to the newly-built Globe Theatre in 1599. It was for this theatre that Shakespeare wrote many of his greatest plays.

In 1613, the Globe Theatre caught fire during a performance of Henry VIII, one of Shakespeare’s last plays, written with John Fletcher, and William retired to Stratford where he died in 1616, on 23rd April.
Source of the Story

Turnover of plays was very rapid in Shakespeare’s time and there was considerable pressure on playwrights to produce new entertainments for their audiences. Copyright restrictions were not what they are today and writers freely recycled characters and plots. It is believed that Shakespeare wrote *The Taming of the Shrew* in about 1592, and he appears to have drawn on many sources. Different elements of the play can be traced to different influences.

**The Induction**

Sly’s story - of a poor man tricked into thinking he is a nobleman - was common in Europe and Asia in the sixteenth century and probably predates the story of the beggar, Abu Hassan, in *The Arabian Nights*. Shakespeare also makes reference to his own background in Warwickshire. Sly is ‘old Sly’s son of Burton Heath’; Shakespeare’s aunt lived in Barton-on-the-Heath. ‘Ask Marian Hacket’, insists Sly, ‘the fat alewife of Wincot, if she know me not.’; In 1591 there were Hackets living in a small community south of Stratford, called Wincot. Stephen Greenblatt in his book *Will in the World* suggests that Sly might be partly based on Shakespeare’s own father who, after gaining an important place in the local community, had fallen on hard times and taken to drink.

**The “Shrew”**

Women viewed as opinionated, bossy, and sharp-tongued are found in the folklore and literature of many cultures. The earliest example in English drama is thought to be the character of Noah’s wife in the medieval mystery plays. Shrewish wives featured in a number of sixteenth century plays and often received severe punishments.
Prologue from George Gascoigne's Supposes

I Suppose you are assembled here, supposing to reape the fruite of my travayles: and to be playne, I meane presently to presente you with a Comedie called Supposes: the verye name wherof may peradventure drive into every of your heades a sundry Suppose, to suppose, the meaning of our supposes. Some percase will suppose we meane to occupie your eares with sophistical handling of subtill Suppositions. Some other wil suppose we go about to discipher unto you some queint conceiptes, which hitherto have bene onely supposed as it were in shadowes: and some I see smyling as though they supposed we would trouble you with the vaine suppose of some wanton Suppose. But understand, this our Suppose is nothing else but a mystaking or imagination of one thing for an other. For you shall see the master supposed for the servant, the servant for the master: the freeman for a slave, and the bondsclave for a freeman: the stranger for a well knowen friend, and the familiar for a stranger. But what? I suppose that even already you suppose me very fonde, that have so simply disclosed unto you the subtilities of these our Supposes: where otherwise in deede I suppose you shoulde have hearde almoste the laste of our Supposes, before you coulde have supposed anye of them arighte. Let this then suffise.
Interview with Edward Hall – Director

What is a director for? The job broadly falls into two categories. One is an organiser, organising entrances, exits, design, costume, lots of practical parts of directing, which is like being a sort of big administrator. And the other part, broadly, of a director’s job, is to help release and discover the spirit of the play by inspiring what the actors are discovering as they work with the text.

What makes Propeller special and how does that affect the work? The idea of Propeller being something that you can sort of define is not one I adhere to. So I don’t even know if Propeller is special. It’s just a group of actors trying to make wonderful plays work. I think our approach is to try, in the staging of the plays, to be as imaginative as the poetry of the text is, and use all the skills that the actors possess - singing, dancing - to help the story.

*The Shrew* is one of Shakespeare’s earlier plays, and Propeller’s last production was *The Winter’s Tale*, one of his later plays. Do you notice a difference in the way they are written? Yeah absolutely, *The Winter’s Tale* was written for an indoor theatre, so is a very different style of writing. It’s more complex verse, much more complicated, and the characters’ thoughts are more intricate and are, in many senses, more profound. The profundity of the story is just expressed in a different way; it gets linguistically more detailed and complex in *The Winter’s Tale* because performing indoors was quieter. Whereas *The Taming of the Shrew* is written for outdoor theatre, so it needs to be more robust, and the writer isn’t really allowed the same latitude and freedom in some of the more delicate uses of language.

*The Shrew* has been called sexist because of the way Kate is treated in the play. As an all-male company you can only have an all-male take on it, can’t you? I don’t have a take on *The Taming of the Shrew* and I don’t think it’s a sexist play. That’s rubbish. The play is a very sophisticated comedy which is an ironic comment on how men treat women in marriage. The same arguments exist for plays like *The Merchant of Venice* when people say well Shakespeare’s anti-semitic - no, he’s writing ABOUT anti-semitism. Just like in *The Taming of the Shrew* he is writing ABOUT how men can abuse their women in order to try and make them submit to them in a marriage or relationship situation,
and he’s created a world where marriage is used as a trade; it’s a business. Everyone pretends it’s all about love, but no matter how they talk about it, it’s all about how much money they can raise to buy the thing they want. So women are merely possessions and Shakespeare writes about this to great ironic effect. Petruchio claims to be marrying for money. That’s how he sets himself up before he meets Kate, then falls in love with her hand over fist the moment he claps eyes on her. And of course her behaviour could be explained, beautifully illustrated in the writing, by her father’s appalling treatment of her in refusing let her younger sister get married until she’s married first. You could say it’s a pretty abusive relationship. You wouldn’t have to be a Katherine Minola to get upset about your father treating you in that fashion. Shakespeare, very, very clearly, gives Kate every reason in the world to be angry with all of those men around her. And her father is centre of that; she’s treated like an object or possession. And at the end of the play it’s dark and ironic that having tortured Kate, as Petruchio does, in the same way you might in medieval times have trained a hawk, depriving her of sleep, depriving her of food, she then submits to him. As, perhaps you could argue, anyone would who was abused in that fashion. Now, where, in all that, would you say is a sexist story? Does Shakespeare endorse Petruchio’s behaviour? He never, ever makes his point of view clear in any of his plays; he merely makes the points of view of his characters clear. It is up to us to decide what we think the rights and wrongs of his story is, and that’s why the play is argued about so ferociously, because it is particularly brilliant in that it deals with the one issue that everyone has first hand experience of - and that is relationships.

Do you have any misgivings about not involving women in the show? Well, we’re an all male Shakespeare company and I’m sure I’ll direct the play one day with a mixture in the company, but no, otherwise I wouldn’t be doing it!

Is there a past production of The Shrew that stands out for you? I’ve never seen it before.
How would you describe Katherine at the beginning of the play? I’m assuming Kate is a teenager, maybe 18: she’s still at home with her family, and she has all that unripe, turbulent energy that Shakespeare seems to have enjoyed writing. And she’s very unhappy. Her dad thinks he’s doing the right thing for her by trying to set her up in a good marriage, but he talks about it as a transaction, and that leaves no room for the person Kate is. I imagine she has Juliet’s passion but hasn’t got a Romeo. She has Rosalind’s intelligence but she’s locked up in a house instead of having a forest to explore. She has Beatrice’s wit, but none of the people around her are a match for her. And on top of that, everything her father does seems designed to remind her, and the whole town, that she is second class goods. No-one wants her.

She strikes me as the kind of girl who hasn’t grown into herself yet. Her looks haven’t quite come together, maybe, she doesn’t have a good sense of who she is; she doesn’t understand the reactions she provokes in other people. Given two or three years of calm development and she would grow into a very impressive young woman.

The only thing we know about her mother is that she’s not there. Maybe she was a good antidote to Baptista’s very male commercialism. Maybe Kate misses her badly. Maybe all that is irrelevant. The important thing is that she feels humiliated by her dad. It makes her very, very angry, and angry is not something that young women in the marriage market are supposed to be.

Her relationship with her sister, Bianca, is pretty fraught. How do you think bad relationships between sisters are different from bad relationships between brothers? Good question. I have to guess at this because I have just one brother with whom I have a very calm relationship. But of course there’s a lot of guesswork going on anyway, I’m playing a teenage girl, for goodness’ sake.

First of all, I think Bianca and Kate could have got on very well, but their relationship is put under impossible strain by Baptista. His insistence that
Bianca can’t marry until Kate is hitched more or less forces them to be enemies to each other. The sisters express themselves in very similar ways - ‘I’l not be tied to hours nor pointed times’ says Bianca, and Kate says ‘what shall I be appointed hours…?’ - and both are feisty. And so I think they have been close, with that closeness that girls tend to be good at from puberty onwards, but some boys never learn in their whole lives. For instance, the conversation which we catch up with when Kate has Bianca tied up may have begun amicably enough two hours earlier. Kate wants to hear what will hurt her most, that Bianca is happily in love - our black moods are often masochistic like that - and doesn’t want her sister to spare her feelings. But Bianca has nothing to tell, and so the two spiral into the kind of angry squabble that has infuriated fathers for centuries. So rivalry is at the heart of it, as it is with most siblings. But whereas boys can go out and do something about their hopes and dreams, exactly as Petruchio is doing - “…I have thrust myself into this maze / haply to wive and thrive as best I may” - the girls in this world can only sit and wait to see what happens to them.

What’s happened to her by the end of the play? To be honest, as I’m talking halfway through rehearsals, I’m looking forward to finding out! A few facts are clear though. She has been abandoned by her father into the hands of a man who dangles a promise of love in front of her but treats her like something between a dog and an unwanted toy. She has been dragged through a mockery of a wedding in front of everyone she knows. She has endured an unimaginably wretched journey. She has been starved of food and not allowed to sleep for over two days, in a way that’s so inventively vindictive as to be frightening as well as physically gruelling. And she’s been publicly forced to deny what is plainly true and to talk nonsense, like a madwoman. Petruchio would be kicked out of Guantanamo for being too hard-line.

Most of us know people who have been in abusive relationships. From the outside we wonder why our friend stays with the man who treats her so badly, but there seems to be a genuine dependency there. Kate is emotionally vulnerable when she leaves home, and Petruchio is a charming, good-looking, powerful and determined man. He messes with her mind, and adds physical extremity for extra leverage. What hasn’t happened to her?

Do you think Petruchio and Kate have a strong foundation for their marriage? No I don’t, and I don’t think the play encourages us to. It’s tempting to impose our modern sensibilities onto Kate, partly because we don’t like to think of our hero, Shakespeare, as the sexist boor who would approve the sentiments she expresses. This seduces modern actresses into playing her big last speech as if it were a knowing joke
between her and Petruchio, full of irony and sly complicity that promises well for their happiness together. But it’s a mistake to feel that any one character carries the message of the play, and the fact that Kate speaks these words doesn’t mean they are Shakespeare’s own feelings on the matter. She is, in fact, the last person we should look to for a reasoned response to what has been going on. The play goes out of its way to show what a wreck she must be at this point. Don’t look to her, any more than you would ask Othello for advice on not letting jealousy undermine a marriage. I think her closing words come from a shallow and troubled place, and if I were a friend of hers I would be sure to call at least once a week to check that she was OK.

And look what’s going on around her: she’s surrounded by men, her new husband included, who are laying bets on the kind of woman she is, gambling on her as if she were a greyhound. On the page it looks like her speech stands alone, but on stage, where it counts, it has this clear dramatic context, and it doesn’t say much that’s good about the ground that their marriage is rooted in.

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Read Simon’s interview and imagine you are the costume designer for a production of The Shrew. What clothes would you give Kate and her more obviously attractive sister? Your task is to make drawings that will help a wardrobe department find and make the costumes. Think about what signals clothes give. How much do the sisters care about their appearance? Remember they are from a rich family. How do they want to appear? Do they choose their clothes or does their father decide what they wear?
Interview with Dugald Bruce-Lockhart – Petruchio

What specific challenges are there in playing Petruchio? The main thing is trying to identify what he wants and why he wants it so we can account for his behaviour towards Kate – which has to be seen more than just a boisterous young man trying to tame a ‘mouthy’ woman and bring her in line! The important thing is going to be to establish a firmly grounded and real inner life for Petruchio… to find out what he might be afraid of – such as losing face, losing the challenge and therefore ultimately his ‘cred’, or perhaps of falling in love with her only to be refused possibly at any moment. In Shakespeare’s time men and women had very different roles in society and today’s audience will not necessarily want to witness a chauvinistic morality play on how women should behave towards their menfolk! That’s why an inner truth needs to be established…

His mood swings and energy is mercurial, as is his wit and word-play and that alone is going to take huge energy and breath and concentration, lightness of touch yet control etc etc!!!

Do you think he has a ‘game plan’? He sets out to find a rich wife first and foremost. Then when he hears of Kate’s reputation he falls in love with the idea of her, and also then the idea of taming her – (second to marrying her for her money, as weddings were all about money in that time). Then when he meets her he falls for her and this complicates his plan - there is now more at stake emotionally and psychologically. And he undergoes a meltdown as he executes his methods of taming her… it’s not all plain sailing for him by any means…

How much has Petruchio changed by the end of the play? He does change. He grows up. He has to – after what he has put Kate - and himself - through. And this is true in spite of (to a modern audience) the extraordinarily chauvinistic ending. More so – Petruchio is Christopher Sly. They are the same. Christopher Sly is terrified of marriage and when he gets to the altar (at the opening conceit in our play) he collapses and has a dream. In his dream he finds himself an alter ego and becomes Petruchio, fearless and bold and ready to take on the world and a feisty woman whom he realises is just like him, and with
whom he actually does want to spend his life. In experiencing this dream Sly/Petruchio undergoes a spiritual awakening and when Sly awakes at the end he believes he now knows how to tame a Shrew. This may not in fact be the case, but he is now ready to face up to the complications, compromises and complexities that a well-rounded relationship will demand of him and her.

**What's your favourite line in the play?** “To me she’s married, not unto my clothes.”

![Bob Barrett at the piano in rehearsal](image-url)
Other important versions and productions of The Shrew

1611  John Fletcher writes *The Woman's Prize, or The Tamer Tamed*. In this play Katherine has died, Petruchio marries again and his second wife tames him. John Fletcher wrote a number of plays with Shakespeare and would almost certainly have had his blessing to write the sequel. The fact that a sequel is written almost twenty years after the original shows that *The Taming of the Shrew* must have enjoyed enduring popularity. Sequels were, and, of course, still are, a way of cashing on the success of an earlier play.

c. 1670  During the restoration John Lacy wrote an adaptation called *Sauny the Scot*. In this version Lacy extends the maltreatment of Katherine; she is threatened with violence and having her teeth pulled out.

1735  James Worsdale produces *A Cure for a Scold* which seems to be based on Lacy’s version rather than the original.

1754  David Garrick’s Catherine and Petruchio simply concentrates on the taming of ‘Catherine’ and leaves out the Bianca-Lucentio subplots.

David Garrick was a very important 18th Century English actor, who rejected the popular declamatory style of the time, and opted instead for a more relaxed natural style. This might seem normal to us now, but it would have been very striking then. He was a small man, measuring only 5’4”, but his reputation was enormous and he was the first actor to be called a ‘star’. He was born in 1717 and died in 1779.

In the 18th and 19th centuries it was very common to find Shakespeare’s scripts cut and adapted to feature only part of the plot. In the 20th centuries it is more common to treat Shakespeare’s text as ‘holy’. Propeller’s *Rose Rage* (2001), however, was a confilation of some of Shakespeare’s history plays - another new adaptation for a new audience.

1890  At the Globe Theatre (a proscenium arch theatre in London’s West End – not Shakespeare’s original),
Constance Benson played Kate. When Petruchio was taking her back to Padua she was led off on a real donkey. When the production toured the provinces she needed a new donkey every week and received a great many bruises from the untrained animals.

1935

A glamorous Broadway production with Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontanne, the king and queen of American theatre actors, featured Katharina being led away on horseback in a her splendid bridal gown, with Petruchio in a cloak and sombrero. When they left the stage at the end of the performance they left behind a spectacle of song, dance and acrobatics.

Alfred Lunt (1892-1977) and Lynn Fontanne (1887-1983) were two of the most highly respected actors of the twentieth century, and Broadway’s golden couple. Many actors paid tribute to them:

“Everything I know about acting I learned from Alfred Lunt.” – Laurence Olivier

“The Lunts were among the most influential people in my life, and I still hold them up as shining examples to all my young colleagues.” – Uta Hagen

“A perfect combination which we can never hope to see again, but which all of us who had the pleasure of seeing them will always remember with admiration and delight.” – John Gielgud

1939

Tyrone Guthrie’s production at the Old Vic, with Roger Livesey as Petruchio and Ursula Jeans as Katharine, drew on traditional Italian Commedia dell’Arte for its spirit and imagery and was a slapstick spectacle of harlequins and acrobatic tumbling.

1948

*Kiss Me, Kate* is a stage musical by Samuel and Bella Spewack (book) and Cole Porter (music and lyrics), based on Shakespeare’s story, that ran for 1,077 performances. Like Shakespeare’s play it involves a play within a play, telling the tale of two once-married, now-divorced musical theatre actors, Fred and Lilli, who are performing as the main lovers in a musical version of The Taming of the Shrew. A film of the show was made in
1953, but many of the lyrics were judged to be too racy, and the script was toned down for the big screen.

1954

“Marius Goring took a civilized way with Petruchio. Here was no heavyweight champion battling for a wench, but a fellow of some sensitiveness and perception ... By the time that he and Katharina were on their way back to Padua and that perverse argument about sun and moon was being thrashed out, we realized that this couple had fallen deeply in love, and Petruchio’s “Kiss me, Kate!” was not so much a command as an invitation.” – TC Kemp referring to George Devine’s 1954 production with Marius Goring as Petruchio and Yvonne Mitchell as Katharina.

1966

Franco Zeffirelli’s film version of the play, starring Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor, completely omitted any reference to the Sly framework, so there was no sense of a play within a play. This allowed the film to concentrate on the main Petruchio/Katherine story, and avoid the alienation effect of the Sly frame which would have been inappropriate for the film’s realism. The film stresses the economic attraction Katherine holds for Petruchio, and in his bet at the end of the play, Petruchio is clearly enlarging his dowry.

1978

Michael Bogdanov’s RSC production, with Jonathan Pryce as Petruchio and Paola Dionisotti as Katherina, was truly memorable for some. The production was in modern dress and Jonathan Pryce also played a version of the Sly character, starting the show as a drunken tramp in the stalls. He proceeded to climb on stage and wreck the scenery, while an usherette (Dionisotti) tried to stop him. The scene was so realistic that members of the audience sometimes tried to lend a hand in ejecting him from the theatre! As Petruchio, Pryce made another extraordinary entrance on a motorbike. The production emphasised Petruchio’s maltreatment of Katherine, and because it was staged in modern dress the audience were confronted with the idea that misogynistic attitudes were not ancient history.

1992

The RSC production directed by Bill Alexander, in contrast to the Zeffirelli film, expands the Sly framework and makes it a central focus of the play. The main tension in the production came from the antagonism
between the classes of the lords watching the play and the actors performing it for them. Petruchio and Kate’s story was almost pushed into second place.

1999

*10 Things I Hate About You* is a film remake of Shakespeare’s play. The Stratford sisters: pretty and popular Bianca (Larisa Oleynik), and Kat (Julia Stiles), her ill-tempered older sibling, attend a modern American high school. Strict rules in the Stratford household forbid Bianca from having a boyfriend until her odious sister has one of her own – which is not likely soon as Kat is a social disaster. Bianca’s desperation for romance turns into a convoluted scheme to match Kat with her male equivalent—a guy whose reputation is so infamous, Kat might rise to the challenge. Patrick Verona (Heath Ledger) is bribed by Bianca’s boyfriend-to-be (Andrew Keegan) to woo and win Kat, in order to clear his way to Bianca.

2003

At the newly-reconstructed Shakespeare’s Globe attitudes towards misogyny were given a fresh take when *The Taming of the Shrew* was played by an all-female cast, directed by Phyllida Lloyd. Like all of the productions at the Globe, the show was lit by daylight and the designer’s main work went into sumptuous recreations of Elizabethan clothing. The female actors portrayed a patriarchal ‘laddish’ culture, with Petruchio, played by Janet McTeer, urinating against one of the stage pillars. In this production Katherine (Kathryn Hunter) was not defeated by Petruchio but clearly chose to humour him and her final ‘submissive’ speech became a thoroughly tongue-in-cheek lecture, which involved her standing on the table, lifting her skirts, clearly embarrassing her nervous husband.
Catherine’s harangue to her sister and the widow on the duty of wives to their husbands, if the ladies would read it with a little regard, it might be of mighty use in this age. Charles Gildon 1710

It shows admirably how self will is only to be got the better of by stronger will and how one degree of ridiculous perversity is only to be driven out by another greater still. William Hazily 1817

I think no woman should enter a theatre where that play is being performed; and I should not have stayed to witness it myself, but that… I desired to see with my own eyes whether any civilised audience would stand its brutality. Of course it was not Shakespear: it was only Garrick adulterated by Shakespeare. Instead of Shakespeare’s coarse, thick-skinned money hunter, who sets to work to tame his wife exactly as brutal people tame animals or children—that is, by breaking their spirit by domineering cruelty—we had Garrick’s top who tries to “shut up” his wife by behaving worse than she: a plan which is often tried by foolish and ill-mannered husbands in real life, and one which invariably fails ignominiously, as it deserves to. George Bernard Shaw, Letter to the Editor, Pall Mall Gazette, 8 June 1888, signed Horatia Robinson

…the last scene is altogether disgusting to modern sensibility. No man, with any decency of feeling, can sit it out in the company of a woman without being extremely ashamed of the lord-of-creation moral implied in the wager and the speech put into the woman’s own mouth. George Bernard Shaw 1898.

...the trouble about The Shrew is that, although it reads rather ill in the library, it goes very well on the stage…As for Katherina, only a very dull reader can miss recognising her, under her forward mask, as one of Shakespeare’s women, marriageable and willing to mate; a Beatrice opposing a more repellent barrier, yet behind it willing, even seeking, to surrender. - from his Introduction to The Taming of the Shrew by Arthur Quiller-Couch 1928

It is, of course, possible to present Petruchio as pure bully; but half the gaiety is lost if the minds of feminists in the audience are allowed to wander in the direction of handcuffs and iron railings. There is, moreover, a good humour in some of Petruchio’s raillery, a lurking pride
in Kate’s spirit … And under her flame of temper isn’t Katherine herself a little enamoured of this disarming termagant, won against her will by his glib and unblushing recital of her charms … and the note of real admiration she perhaps senses, with a woman’s acuteness, beneath it?

“Old Vic Drama” by Audrey Williamson (Rockcliff, 1948)

A more inhuman play, I have always felt, than even Titus Andronicus, since it argues (as nobody in Titus does) that cruelty is good for the victim. Kenneth Tynan 1960, The Observer

(Recent) productions have tended to soften (the) humiliating demonstration of man’s mastery over women. By a gesture or a wink or a cynical chirp in the voice, Kate’s final submissive speeches have indicated that her surrenders are merely tactical and that in the long run she will again be the boss. Evening Standard 1960

The male part of the audience may decently rejoice, not at seeing a woman beaten down by the superior strength of a man, but at seeing the offensive strength familiar in their wives overwhelmed by a man who can nag back just as unreasonably as a woman. William Empson 1961

There is, however, a larger question at stake. It is whether any reason to revive a play that is so offensive to our age and society. My own feeling is that it should be put back firmly and squarely on the shelf. Michael Billington 1978

The play shows the possibility of marriage as a rich, shared sanity. David Daniell 1986

Kate has the uncommon good fortune to find Petruchio, who is man enough to know what he wants and how to get it. Germaine Greer 1986

The Taming of the Shrew is not a play about fifteenth-century Italy … but about the more subtle sexism of the modern world. - from “Looking at Shakespeare” by Dennis Kennedy (Cambridge University Press, 1993)

In a post-feminist era, the jury is still out on The Taming of the Shrew. Margaret Loftus Ramald 1994
Cue script exercise

This exercise is really about listening. In Shakespeare’s time, the actors would only be given a cue script which contained their lines and three or four words from the person who spoke just before them. They would learn their words and remember to speak when they heard their cue. The script did not necessarily tell them directly which character they were talking to or where they were on stage. So, with only a few afternoons’ rehearsal, they had to be alert and directing themselves on stage (there was no director as such) so that the story made sense. This was a great skill and actors (all boys and men) would learn their trade as apprentices from the age of twelve. Here is a scene in which several actors are required yet Petruchio does nearly all the talking. It would have been an excellent training scene for the younger actors in the company.

Use the following cue scripts to perform part of the scene where Petruchio brings his new bride back home. The actors simply say their line when they hear their cues. You will need:

- Petruchio – this part needs someone good at sight-reading and might need preparation – sometimes the teacher should do this
- Katherine
- First servant
- Peter
- Three other servants who don’t have a script.
- A dog (maybe quite a lively one!)
- Some props ready offstage to use as: plates of food, cups, a water jug, Petruchio

In this scene, Petruchio is the only person who needs stage directions – everyone else needs to listen and do as he tells them! Text in bold type is your cue. Italics are for stage directions. If you don’t have any lines it doesn’t mean you have nothing to do – and if you don’t say your line when you get your cue then the scene stops!

- Now imagine your playing one of the servants - it’s your first job, aged twelve, and you have thousands of people watching – and no script! In a way Shakespeare is helping you – all you have to do is listen...
Go, rascals, go, and fetch my supper in.
(Singing)
Where is the life that late I led--
Where are those - Sit down, Kate, and welcome. - 
Sound, sound, sound, sound, sound!
(Re-enter Servants with supper)
Why, when, I say? Nay, good sweet Kate, be merry.
Off with my boots, you rogues! you villains, when?
(Sings)
It was the friar of orders grey,
As he forth walked on his way: -
Out, you rogue! you pluck my foot awry:
Take that, and mend the plucking off the other.
(Strike him)
Be merry, Kate. Some water, here; what, ho!
Where's my spaniel Troilus? Sirrah, get you hence,
And bid my cousin Ferdinand come hither:
One, Kate, that you must kiss, and be acquainted with.
Where are my slippers? Shall I have some water?
Come, Kate, and wash, and welcome heartily.
You whoreson villain! will you let it fall?
(Strike him)
... 'twas a fault unwilling.
A whoreson beetle-headed, flap-ear'd knave!
Come, Kate, sit down; I know you have a stomach.
Will you give thanks, sweet Kate; or else shall I?
What's this? mutton?
Ay. Who brought it?
I.
'Tis burnt; and so is all the meat.
What dogs are these! Where is the rascal cook?
How durst you, villains, bring it from the dresser,
And serve it thus to me that love it not?
There take it to you, trenchers, cups, and all;
You heedless joltheads and unmanner'd slaves!
What, do you grumble? I'll be with you straight.
...you were so contented.
I tell thee, Kate, 'twas burnt and dried away;
And I expressly am forbid to touch it,
For it engenders choler, planteth anger;
And better 'twere that both of us did fast,
Since, of ourselves, ourselves are choleric,
Than feed it with such over-roasted flesh.
Be patient; to-morrow 't shall be mended,
And, for this night, we'll fast for company:
Come, I will bring thee to thy bridal chamber.
…will you let it fall?

Patience, I pray you; ’twas a fault unwilling.

…I’ll be with you straight.

I pray you, husband, be not so disquiet:
The meat was well, if you were so contented.
…What’s this? mutton?

Ay.
...Who brought it?

1.
Katherine’s final speech

Thy husband is thy lord, thy life, thy keeper,
Thy head, thy sovereign; one that cares for thee,
And for thy maintenance commits his body
To painful labour both by sea and land,
To watch the night in storms, the day in cold,
Whilst thou liest warm at home, secure and safe;
And craves no other tribute at thy hands
But love, fair looks and true obedience;
Too little payment for so great a debt.
Such duty as the subject owes the prince
Even such a woman oweth to her husband;
And when she is froward, peevish, sullen, sour,
And not obedient to his honest will,
What is she but a foul contending rebel
And graceless traitor to her loving lord?
I am ashamed that women are so simple
To offer war where they should kneel for peace;
Or seek for rule, supremacy and sway,
When they are bound to serve, love and obey.
Why are our bodies soft and weak and smooth,
Unapt to toil and trouble in the world,
But that our soft conditions and our hearts
Should well agree with our external parts?
Come, come, you froward and unable worms!
My mind hath been as big as one of yours,
My heart as great, my reason haply more,
To bandy word for word and frown for frown;
But now I see our lances are but straws,
Our strength as weak, our weakness past compare,
That seeming to be most which we indeed least are.
Then vail your stomachs, for it is no boot,
And place your hands below your husband’s foot:
In token of which duty, if he please,
My hand is ready; may it do him ease.

How much has Katherine changed? Look at the several ways she is described in the play:

curst - too rough - a shrew - a most impatient devilish spirit - waspish -
bonny - stark mad - rough, coy and sullen - devil - the devil’s dam -
famous for a scolding tongue - renowned in Padua for her scolding
tongue - Katherine the curst - a raging fire - intolerable curst - an
irksome brawling scold - wildcat - shrewd and froward beyond all
measure
Attitudes towards Women in Shakespeare’s Time

- There was no effective birth control so it was pretty much impossible for married women to work full time outside the home. Married women of child-bearing age could expect to have, on average, a baby every two years. Within marriage, husband and wife both worked extremely hard, and both had clearly defined roles. The wife’s role was to look after children and the husband’s role was to work outside the home.

- Only boys went to school. Daughters of rich families might be educated at home by a private tutor and could receive very good educations. Girls were not, however, allowed to go to university.

- Women were not allowed to be doctors or lawyers or join the armed forces. They were not allowed to act upon the stage. They often worked as cooks or domestic servants.

- Women could not inherit their father’s titles – with the exception of a queen. They could, however inherit property, but usually the bulk of any inheritance would go to any brothers first.

- Men were seen to be the head of a marriage, and had the legal right to chastise their wives. Wives were expected to obey their husbands, but that did not mean that all marriages were abusive and men could be punished by law for being cruel to their wives.

- Marriage was seen as the proper route for a woman (despite the unmarried queen!) and unmarried older women could be regarded with suspicion. They were the most likely candidates to be accused of witchcraft.

She was no sooner made but straightway her mind was set upon mischief, for by her aspiring mind and wanton will she quickly procur’d man’s fall. And therefore ever since they are and have been a woe unto man...

There are sixe kinds of women which thou shouldest take heed that thou match not thy selfe to any one of them; that is to say, good nor bad, faire nor foule, rich nor poore... For if a woman be never so rich in dowry, happy by her good name, beautifull of body, sober of countenance, eloquent in speech, and adorned with vertue, yet they have one ill quality or other, which overthroweth all the other: like unto that Cow which giveth great store of milke, and presently striketh it down with her foote, such a cow is as much to be blamed for the losse, as she be commended for the gift...

Joseph Swetnam, The Arraignment of Lewd, Idle, Froward and Unconstant Women, 1615