



— SANTA CRUZ — SHAKESPEARE

EDUCATION PROGRAM

The Taming of the Shrew - Week 1: Introduction



What is a shrew?

A shrew is a small mammal similar to a mouse, with a long sharp snout. In the early modern period, a shrew could refer sometimes to men, but mostly to women who were given to railing or scolding or other perverse or malignant behavior.

The shrew existed as a character long before Shakespeare's play in jokes, songs, and oral folklore as well as plays. The most famous example is a ballad called "A Merry Jest of a Shrewd and Curst Wife, Lapped in Morel's Skin" from 1550. Like Shakespeare's play, this ballad features two sisters, the younger has suitors and is the father's favorite, while the older is considered unmanageable.

Shakespeare may have seen this image, from the church in Stratford-upon-Avon, where he grew up. It depicts three faces of the same woman: the first with her tongue hanging out, a symbol of the devil; the middle showing her gossiping or scolding her husband; and the third carving shows her being punished by having her tongue forcibly held down with a metal bar, called a "scold's bridle".



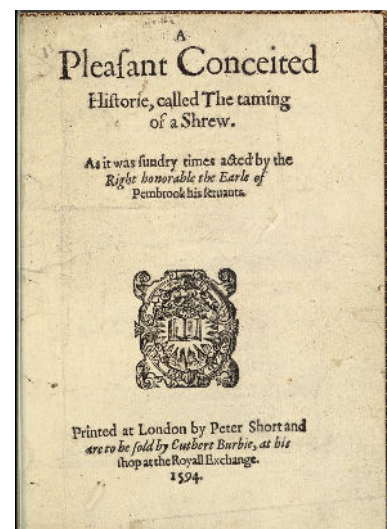
Fifteenth-century misericord of scolds; Holy Trinity Church, Stratford-upon-Avon

- DISCUSS! As you start to read the play, what other characters do you think might also be considered a shrew? Do you expect anyone to really be "tamed" by the end?

A Shrew vs The Shrew

The Taming of the Shrew is closely related to another play from 1594, the anonymous *The Taming of A Shrew*. The two Shrew plays share many plot similarities. Their main differences are:

- In *The Shrew* Christopher Sly falls asleep and disappears by the end of the play, but in *A Shrew*, he remains onstage and continues to comment.
- In *A Shrew*, Kate delivers an aside in which she reveals she is willing to get married, whereas in *The Shrew*, we never understand how Kate really feels about her marriage to Petruchio.
- Kate's final speech in *A Shrew* draws on a biblical argument that woman's creation from Adam's rib confirms her subordinate status, while Kate in *The Shrew* discusses the relationship between women and men within marriage.



The Induction

The Taming of the Shrew is an unusual play because it opens with a framing device called the Induction in which we see characters preparing to watch the play. In the Induction, a local drunkard, Christopher Sly, has been thrown out of a tavern by the Hostess for breaking some glasses and refusing to pay for them. As the Hostess runs to fetch a police officer, Sly falls asleep and a Lord and his huntsmen see Sly in the road. The Lord decides to play a trick on Sly and dresses him up in fine clothing, provides him with a wife (who is really his page boy, Bartholomew, dressed up as a woman) and persuades him that he has a disease that made him forget who he really was for all these years, and that he is really a “mighty lord.” As well as providing him with fine wine, beautiful tapestries and rich clothing, Sly is presented with an acting troupe who will perform a play for him, which Bartholomew calls “a kind of history.” (Induction, 2.137).



Image from *The Taming of the Shrew* at Shakespeare's Globe, 2012. Directed by Toby Frow.

- WRITE! Read over the opening two lines of the play again. What does the opening tell us the play might be about? What themes do the hostess and Sly anticipate through their exchange?

SCENE I. Before an alehouse on a heath.

Enter Hostess and SLY

SLY I'll **feeze** you, in faith
Hostess A pair of **stocks**, you rogue!

Glossary

Feeze 'do for', 'beat, flog', drive off or frighten away.

Stocks heavy timber frame with holes for the ankles. Stocking was a common public punishment for minor offenses for scolds or shrews.

The main characters in *The Taming of the Shrew*

BAPTISTA MINOLA One of the wealthiest merchants in Padua and the father of Katherina and Bianca. He wants to see both his daughters married to wealthy husbands, but insists on his eldest daughter getting married first.

KATHERINA The oldest daughter of a rich merchant named Baptista Minola. We never learn her motive for behaving like a shrew. She is called by the diminutive pet name “Kate” by Petruchio, which signifies her domestication and Petruchio’s control over her. Katherina does not want to get married, yet is sometimes jealous of her sister Bianca, who receives much attention and praise from suitors.

BIANCA The youngest daughter of Baptista Minola, Bianca’s name signifies whiteness, or purity. Bianca has quite a different personality from her elder sister and comes across as quiet and obedient, and is keen to get married. At the beginning of the play she has attracted three potential suitors: Hortensio, Gremio and Lucentio, and she enjoys studying music, languages and literature.

LUCENTIO A young gentleman student from Pisa, following his father Vincentio’s wishes, Lucentio has arrived in Padua with his servant Tranio to begin his studies at university. But as soon as he sees Bianca he decides to put aside his studies and pursue her as a suitor instead. His plan to achieve this is to disguise himself as a classics teacher called Cambio. While pretending to teach her Latin, Lucentio secretly woos Bianca.

TRANIO The servant of Lucentio, Tranio supports his master’s wishes to woo Bianca. While Lucentio disguises himself as Cambio the classics teacher, Tranio must dress up in Lucentio’s clothes and pretend to be him in Padua, receiving and entertaining Lucentio’s guests while his master is spending time at Bianca’s house.

BIONDELLO A servant to Lucentio.

VINCENTIO Lucentio’s father.

PETRUCHIO A gentleman of Verona, who has come to Padua after the death of his father to find a wealthy wife who will fund his expensive lifestyle. Upon hearing about Katherina, he immediately decides to marry her, and is confident he can come up with a plan to “tame” her wild behavior.

GRUMIO Servant to Petruchio, Grumio provides slapstick comedy and also humorous commentary on the behavior of other characters in the play.

GREMIO A rich old man who is a suitor to Bianca. Known as “The old pantaloon” in this play, Gremio is similar to a stock comic figure in the Italian *commedia dell’arte*, an old, miserly man, who fears being cuckolded.

HORTENSIO Petruchio’s friend and initially a suitor to Bianca, who ends up marrying the Widow.

WIDOW A character stereotype, with no name, the widow is a rich single woman who is in love with Hortensio.



Samantha Spiro and Simon Paisley Day in *The Taming of the Shrew* at Shakespeare’s Globe, 2012.





SOCIAL JUSTICE!

- Although we may not call people a shrew today, what other gendered derogatory names do people use? What positive words do we associate with stereotypes in society?
- How do you think the use of pronouns like they / them plays a factor in stereotyping? Do you think stereotyping will become eradicated?