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The Taming of the Shrew

William Shakespeare · *c. 1590–92 · original English text*

A drunken tinker is made to watch a play about a Paduan courtship: Baptista will not marry his mild Bianca until her fierce sister Katherina is wed. Petruchio undertakes the match and 'tames' her by hunger, sleeplessness, and a will as loud as hers. The comedy is brilliant and hard, and the last speech is not to be rushed past.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

What kind of 'taming' is this—a cruel breaking, a rough education in a harsh world, or a game two strong natures learn to play—and how should Kate's last speech be heard?

"I am asham'd that women are so simple To offer war where they should kneel for peace,"

Katherina · Act V, the last scene's wager

Petruchio comes for money and stays for a contest. He woos in outrage, marries in motley, and denies Kate food, sleep, and even the evidence of her eyes on the road. The Bianca plot is a more ordinary comedy of disguise, and it is Bianca who is not obedient at the end. Kate's speech on a husband's lordship is this text's wording and must be read, not replaced with a theory. Students should hear both its rhetorical power and the unease it has always caused, and should know that the play begins with the Christopher Sly induction: we are watching a play put on for a man who is himself being fooled.

KEY CHARACTERS

Katherina (Kate)
Baptista's elder daughter, sharp of tongue, whose last speech is the play's most argued passage.

Petruchio
A gentleman of Verona who comes to wive it wealthily and turns the courtship into a campaign.

Bianca
The apparently mild sister, won by disguise, who is not the obedient wife of the wager.

Baptista Minola
The father who makes one daughter's marriage the price of the other's.

Christopher Sly
The tinker of the induction, for whom the Padua play is performed.

ASHAM'D, AND A KINDNESS

> *"This is a way to kill a wife with kindness;"*
> **Petruchio** · Act IV

> *"I am asham'd that women are so simple To offer war where they should kneel for peace,"*
> **Katherina** · Act V

Grades 9–12
Read the full text free at classicslaunch.org.

01
The Induction
BEFORE ACT I: SLY AND THE LORD'S JOKE

Christopher Sly, a tinker, is taken up by a lord and told he is a nobleman. A company of players will perform for him. The frame is the first disguise.

- The play about taming is itself a performance inside a trick.
- Sly's plot is not fully closed in this text; do not invent a frame ending the book does not print.
- Watching, and being made to watch, is part of the comedy's subject.

02
Padua, and a Condition
ACTS I–II

Bianca has suitors; Baptista will not hear them until Kate is married. Petruchio arrives, and the first meeting is a battle of puns and will.

- Lucentio, Hortensio, and Gremio begin the under-plot of tutors and disguises.
- Petruchio's 'kiss me, Kate' is already a claim as well as a joke.
- The dowry is never a hidden motive.

> *"And kiss me, Kate; we will be married o' Sunday."*
> **Petruchio** · Act II

03
A Mad Wedding
ACT III

Petruchio comes late, dressed like a mockery of a bridegroom, swears, and carries Kate away before the feast.

- The public shame is part of his method.
- Bianca's more polite courtship continues in the same house.
- The comedy's laughter is already mixed with a flinch.

04
The Country House, and the Road
ACT IV

At Petruchio's house Kate is kept from food and sleep in the name of kindness. On the road he makes her call the sun the moon, then a man a woman.

- 'This is a way to kill a wife with kindness' is Petruchio's own name for the method.
- The Hortensio–widow and Lucentio–Bianca plots ripen in Padua.
- The sun/moon scene is about language, power, and whether agreement can be play.

05
The Wager
ACT V

Back in Padua, the disguises fall. A wager on the wives' obedience is won by Kate, who then speaks the long charge to the other women.

- Bianca and the widow refuse the call; Kate comes.
- The last speech uses this text's 'I am asham'd that women are so simple.'
- Teach the speech in full context: the induction, the hunger, the wager, and the unease. Do not skip it, and do not preach it as a simple rule for a household today.

Will and Rule | Disguise | Marriage as Contest | Language and Power | A Play within a Trick

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 9–12

1. The hosted text is the original English of Project Gutenberg #1508. It opens with the Christopher Sly induction; the Padua play is a performance inside that frame.
2. Kate's last speech in this text is "I am asham'd that women are so simple" (asham'd, not ashamed). Quote this spelling.
3. Also exact: "And kiss me, Kate; we will be married o' Sunday." And: "This is a way to kill a wife with kindness;" And: "Thy husband is thy lord, thy life, thy keeper,"
4. The taming includes hunger, sleeplessness, and public humiliation. It is a comedy, and it is also a problem. Teach it as both; do not flatten Kate into a joke or Petruchio into a simple villain.
5. This play is often bowdlerized in school editions. Stay with the words on this page, including the last speech, and talk through them.

Quotations are verbatim from the original English text, Project Gutenberg #1508, the public-domain text hosted at classicslaunch.org/works/the-taming-of-the-shrew/. Citations give book and chapter (or canto and line) so every line can be checked.