

# Classroom Connections

Before the performance...



## The Rules

Every culture has its own set of rules and customs regarding dating and marriages. Ask students to make a list of customs about relationships and dating in our time. Then ask them to research another culture and compare similarities and differences. Are the rules always different for men and women? What roles do parents play? Is there deception in dating? If so, why?



## Page to Stage: When Would You Set It?

After reading the play or reviewing the synopsis, ask the class to summarize what happens in the play. The summary should be as concise as possible but include the key events of the plot. After the summary, begin a discussion about what the play is about. What is interesting or meaningful about the play? What themes or issues are important to the students? Note that when a contemporary director approaches a production of Shakespeare, he or she has two primary responsibilities: to the playwright and to the audience. The director needs to make the production relevant for a contemporary audience while remaining true to the intentions of the playwright. Based on what the students said was interesting or meaningful, ask students to develop an idea for the setting of *The Taming of the Shrew*. Students can focus on a specific time period, location or world event. How does the design communicate the meaning of the play?



## Sibling Rivalry, Creating Characters

In *The Taming of the Shrew*, Kate is constantly compared to her younger, sweeter sister, Bianca. The younger sister is distraught since she cannot marry until Kate finds a husband. This leads to fights between the sisters. Ask students to make a list describing the qualities of both Kate and Bianca. (For example, Kate may be “fierce” and Bianca may be “docile.”) Then ask students to move around the room in a neutral walk. Ask them to experiment with leading with different parts of their body: head, chest, hips and feet. After each type of movement, discuss with students how it made them feel, and what type of character may be inspired by that type of movement. Ask students to imagine that they are actors preparing to play the parts of either Kate or Bianca. How would the students portray each of those characters? What type of “lead” might inspire their movement? Ask students to move around the room as one of the characters, then the other. What did they learn about the characters by moving like them?



## Casting Call

We can enjoy the story of *Taming* from reading Shakespeare’s text, but it needs the right combination of actors to bring it to life. Have students develop descriptions of the characters based on the text by casting the play with celebrities or classmates. Ask students to cast six roles and write a short explanation for each casting choice.



## Abuse and Violence in the Play

In *The Taming of the Shrew*, Shakespeare uses violence especially between masters and servants and husbands and wives for comedic effect. Similar to the tradition of “slap stick” in commedia dell’arte, characters are violent with each other to emphasize their class differences and to get the audience to laugh. Ask students to find examples of violence throughout the play. How does Shakespeare use the violence to create comedy? Discuss how a director might create this violence on stage. Prepare to look for it while watching the play, and discuss what works or doesn’t work after seeing the performance.



19<sup>th</sup>-Century American actor James E. Murdoch as Petruchio in *The Taming of the Shrew*. Mary C. Henderson’s *Theater In America: 250 Years of Plays, Players, and Productions* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1996 edition).

# Classroom Connections

...After the performance



## Happily Ever After?

As most comedies do, *The Taming of the Shrew* ends happily. Bianca and Lucentio are married, and Petruchio proves Kate is no longer a shrew. Divide students up into small groups and ask them to imagine what happens to each of the characters after the play, writing a short epilogue for each one. Encourage students to be creative and come up with humorous and apt endings for each of the characters. Then, ask the groups to create a silent tableau (or posed statue) for each of their characters' epilogues. Have the groups present their tableaux while reading the epilogues.



## Wise and Loving

Henry David Thoreau was a 19th-century author and philosopher who wrote the following quote:

*"Man is continually saying to woman, 'Why will you not be more wise?' Woman is continually saying to man, 'Why will you not be more loving?' It is not in their wills to be wise or to be loving; but, unless each is both wise and loving, there can be neither wisdom nor love."*

Ask the students to explain what the quote means to them. Ask students to discuss how Thoreau's quote relates to *The Taming of the Shrew*.



## Let's Get Critical

The director and design team for the Shakespeare Theatre Company's *Taming of the Shrew* had a concept, or artistic vision, for this production. Ask students to write a review of *Taming*, describing what they thought the story of the play was, and how the set, lights, sound and costumes helped to tell the story (or detracted from it). In their critiques, students should select a particular scene to support their opinions. Share the reviews in class and discuss the similarities or differences of opinion. Collect all the reviews and send to the Shakespeare Theatre Company Education Department.



## Fathers and Daughters

Some Shakespearean scholars believe that in his latter works, the Bard examined more closely the bonds between fathers and daughters because of his developing relationship with his eldest daughter Susanna. Reflect with the students on their views of father-daughter relationships: What are contemporary views of the roles of fathers and daughters in each others' lives? What images or stories from television shows, news, movies, books or magazines support these views? How do you see them playing out in your personal experiences? Have students compare their contemporary views to the relationships between Baptista and each of his daughters.



## What If?

*The Taming of the Shrew* is full of conflict and deception, just like the people we see on talk shows today. Have the students stage a talk show using the characters and events from the play. Divide the class into five groups and assign each group an act from the play. Have each group write a short summary of a distressing situation in the act from the point of view of two of the characters involved. Then have two members from each group discuss their situation for the class as if they were on a talk show, perhaps casting another classmate to play the part of talk show host/mediator.



## Opposites

Shakespeare incorporated many opposites into his plays, within the dramatic structure as well as the language, and *The Taming of the Shrew* is no exception. Working individually, have students brainstorm opposites in the play—referring to the language, story, characters or events. Ask students to share their responses. Which opposite seems to be most prominently explored throughout the play? How could it be shown in a production through costumes, scenery, lights and sound? Have students work in small groups to brainstorm a production concept and share with the rest of the class.

On left: Watercolor *The Shrew Katherina* by Edward Robert Hughes, 1898. Courtesy of Mr. and Mrs. Sandor Korein Collection.