

Comic Wordplay: *The Taming of the Shrew*



This activity can be used before viewing *Henry V* or at any point in the curriculum. It can also be used to reflect on the scene with the Princess of France in Part Three of the film at pause point 00:59:11.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Identify and analyze moments of wordplay in a scene of Shakespeare
- Physically and vocally interpret text to emphasize wordplay

MATERIALS

- *Taming of the Shrew* Handout (page 3)
- *Taming of the Shrew* Glossary (page 6)

INTRODUCTION

In Act Three, Scene Five, of *Henry V*, Katherine is taking English lessons from Alice. Shakespeare uses wordplay to poke fun at the French language and insert some risqué jokes. In this activity, we will investigate the wordplay in Act Two, Scene One, of *The Taming of the Shrew* as Petruchio woos a disinterested Katherine.

INSTRUCTIONS

Step One: As a full class, or in groups of three or four, have students read the scene in “popcorn” style, thought by thought. As students are reading, they should underline moments of wordplay and circle terms they would like to look up to better understand the humor.

Step Two: After the reading, have the small groups go back over the scene to explore meanings and identify moments of wordplay together.

Step Three: Once the text has been discussed, invite a pair of students to read the scene aloud to the class, using vocal variation to emphasize moments of wordplay that were pointed out in the group discussion.

Step Four: Consider the following prompts to promote discussion.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How did the wordplay impact your experience of the language?
- What emotions did the wordplay evoke?
- How does wordplay inform us about character relationships?
- Brainstorm as a class some modern examples of wordplay. Consider songs, lines from movies, etc.

RESOURCES

The Taming of the Shrew. Folger Shakespeare Library.
folger.edu



The Taming of the Shrew

COMIC WORDPLAY: *THE TAMING OF THE SHREW*



ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

Petruchio

Good morrow, Kate, for that's your name, I hear.

Katherine

Well have you heard, but something hard of hearing.
They call me Katherine that do talk of me.

Petruchio

You lie, in faith, for you are called plain Kate,
And bonny Kate, and sometimes Kate the curst.
But Kate, the prettiest Kate in Christendom,
Kate of Kate Hall, my super-dainty Kate
(For dainties are all Kates)—and therefore, Kate,
Take this of me, Kate of my consolation:
Hearing thy mildness praised in every town,
Thy virtues spoke of, and thy beauty sounded
(Yet not so deeply as to thee belongs),
Myself am moved to woo thee for my wife.

Katherine

"Moved," in good time! Let him that moved you hither
Remove you hence. I knew you at the first
You were a movable.

Petruchio

Why, what's a movable?

Katherine

A joint stool.

Petruchio

Thou hast hit it. Come, sit on me.

Katherine

Asses are made to bear, and so are you.

Petruchio

Women are made to bear, and so are you.

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

Katherine

No such jade as you, if me you mean.

Petruchio

Alas, good Kate, I will not burden thee,
For knowing thee to be but young and light—

Katherine

Too light for such a swain as you to catch,
And yet as heavy as my weight should be.

Petruchio

“Should be”—should buzz!

Katherine

Well ta'en, and like a buzzard.

Petruchio

O slow-winged turtle, shall a buzzard take thee?

Katherine

Ay, for a turtle, as he takes a buzzard.

Petruchio

Come, come, you wasp! I' faith, you are too angry.

Katherine

If I be waspish, best beware my sting.

Petruchio

My remedy is then to pluck it out.

Katherine

Ay, if the fool could find it where it lies.

Petruchio

Who knows not where a wasp does wear his sting?
In his tail.

Katherine

In his tongue.

Petruchio

Whose tongue?

ACT TWO, SCENE ONE

Katherine

Yours, if you talk of tales, and so farewell.

Petruchio

What, with my tongue in your tail?

Nay, come again, good Kate. I am a gentleman—

Katherine

That I'll try.

She strikes him.

Petruchio

I swear I'll cuff you if you strike again.

Katherine

So may you lose your arms.

If you strike me, you are no gentleman,

And if no gentleman, why then no arms.

The Taming of the Shrew

Glossary

COMIC WORDPLAY: *THE TAMING OF THE SHREW*



Terms are listed in the order they appear in the text and read from top to bottom by column.

Morrow

Morning

Talk of

To speak about. In Shakespeare's time, this phrase could carry the implication of gossip or common discussion.

In faith

In truth

Plain

Simple or unadorned

Bonny

Attractive or beautiful

Curst

Cursed or ill-tempered

Christendom

The Christian world

Hall

An area of significance or status (like a manor or a gathering place); Petruchio uses it here to tease her and give her a grand title

Super-dainty

Excessively delicate or refined. The word "dainty" is still in use today, but "super-dainty" was a way to emphasize this quality.

Consolation

Comfort or a source of comfort

Mildness

Gentleness or softness. Refers to a gentle temperament or behavior.

Virtues

Good qualities or moral excellences. Commonly used today with a similar meaning.

Sounded

Made known or celebrated. Refers to the spreading or mentioning of her beauty in this case.

Deeply

To such great extent/depth

Moved

Compelled to take action; motivated; influenced

Woo

To court or to seek the affection of someone

Hence

Away from here

Movable

Able to be moved; a piece of furniture; easily manipulated

Joint stool

A type of wooden stool, often used in the home. "Joint" refers to how the pieces were joined together.

Hit it

Guessed correctly

Asses

Donkeys

Bear

To carry or endure

Bear

To endure or to give birth to

Jade

An old or worn-out horse

Swain

A young man or lover

Well ta'en

Well taken; well received

Buzzard

A type of hawk, used here to describe a foolish person. "Buzzard" was often used to mock someone as being slow-witted or worthless.

Turtle

A turtle dove, used here to symbolize a gentle bird, contrasting with the buzzard

Ay

Yes

Come come

Calm down

THE TAMING OF THE SHREW GLOSSARY (CONTINUED)

Wasp

A stinging insect, used to describe someone who is irritable or quick-tempered

Waspish

Irritable or prone to anger

Remedy

A solution or treatment

Fool

A silly or unwise person

Tongue

The organ of speech

Try

Test

Cuff

Slap or strike

Strike

Hit or slap

Arms

Weapons or limbs