

The Story We look inside the world of a contemporary theatre company which is rehearsing “*The Taming of the Shrew*”, a play by William Shakespeare set in Italy and written in the late 16th century.

The central story of “The Taming of the Shrew” The play’s main characters are Katherina, a woman with such a bad temper¹ that men are afraid to come near her, and the strong-willed² Petruchio, who decides to woo³ Katherina as his wife in order to obtain her wealthy dowry⁴. Petruchio wants to marry into a rich family and meets with Baptista, Katherina’s father, to agree the financial terms of the marriage.

Petruchio immediately sees that Katherina is a “shrew”, but being of strong character himself, he is instantly attracted to Katherina’s powerful⁵ presence. He tells Katherina that they will be married, and soon. Katherina opposes the marriage, but because she is a woman who lived in the late 16th century, she has no choice; the decision is always made by the father. So they marry. But Petruchio does not want to live with such a “difficult” woman, and sets out to tame⁶ Katherina in order to have an obedient wife.

For her part, Katherina is also attracted to Petruchio’s strength⁷, but vehemently resists Petruchio’s attempts to change her behavior. Petruchio is a very determined man, though, and finally achieves his goal⁸: at the end of the play, Katherina becomes a submissive wife, declaring her total love and obedience to her husband in the play’s final speech⁹.

The Contemporary Story Behind the scenes¹⁰, the company rehearsing the play immediately faces a major problem: their leading actress (who plays Katherina) suddenly abandons the production less than two weeks before its premiere¹¹. She is quickly replaced by Kate Minola who takes over the role¹². Nathan likes the new actress, but Peter is not so sure. He finds her “difficult” to work with and criticizes her for being a feminist who questions the play’s sexist themes.

For her part, the assistant director, Blanca, works hard to keep the production going, helping Nathan with the direction and making sure the new actress fits in.

After a few days of rehearsals, relations between the two leading actors get much worse. Kate accuses Peter of very inappropriate behaviour¹³ which Peter strongly denies¹⁴. He also criticizes Nathan for listening to Kate’s ideas, and accuses Kate of manipulating the director. Peter takes his anger out on poor Blanca, whom he bullies and treats badly.

The play’s premiere is drawing near¹⁵, but things go from bad to worse as tensions continue to rise¹⁶. Will they manage to open the play on time, and if they do, will it be a success¹⁷?

UNDERSTANDING THE CHARACTERS AND THE STORY - Decide if these statements are true or false.

	TRUE	FALSE
1. Katherina is Baptista’s wife.		
2. Baptista allows Katherina to choose her future husband.		
3. A shrew means: a woman who is the opposite of submissive or docile.		
4. Petruchio comes to Padua to find a rich wife.		
5. Peter is only an actor the play.		
6. Peter did Nathan a favour by giving him the job of director.		
7. Blanca does not have a lot to do in the theatre company.		
8. Petruchio tries to change Katherina’s behaviour.		
9. Kate is the original actress to play Katherina in this production.		
10. Kate believes women should have the same rights as men.		
11. Kate and Peter like each other.		
12. Kate accuses Peter of inappropriate behaviour.		
13. Katherina obeys her husband at the end of “ <i>The Taming of the Shrew</i> ”.		
14. Blanca has many roles in the theatre company.		

¹ Bad temper = mal carácter; mal genio

² Strong-willed = tozudo / a

³ To woo = cortejar

⁴ Dowry = dote

⁵ Powerful = potente, poderoso

⁶ To tame = domar

⁷ Strength = fuerza, fortaleza

⁸ Goal = meta, objetivo

⁹ Speech = discurso

¹⁰ Behind the scenes = entre bastidores

¹¹ Premiere = estreno

¹² Role = papel

¹³ Inappropriate behaviour = comportamiento inapropiado

¹⁴ To deny = negar, desmentir

¹⁵ To draw near = acercarse

¹⁶ To rise = aumentar

¹⁷ Success = éxito

EXTRACT FROM THE SHAKESPEARE PLAY

This scene takes place in the church. It is the WEDDING¹⁸ DAY. However, Petruchio is late and Baptista, who is talking to the Priest, is very worried. Finally Petruchio arrives, but his appearance shocks them.

BAPTISTA: Good Father, my daughter's to be married,
And yet we hear not of our son-in-law¹⁹.
What say you Father to this shame²⁰ of ours?

KATHERINA: My shame you mean to wed²¹ a lunatic.
Now must the world point at poor Katherina
And say, "Lo, there is mad Petruchio's wife,
If it would please him come and marry her!"

PRIEST: Patience Katherine, Petruchio means but well.
Though he be rude, I know him to be true.

KATHERINA: Would Katherine had never seen him though. *She exits crying.*

BAPTISTA: Go girl, I cannot blame thee for crying²²,
For such an insult would test a very saint.

PRIEST: Petruchio is coming, Petruchio is coming!

Petruchio enters singing and dressed ridiculously.

PETRUCHIO: How is my father? Morning, gentlemen!

BAPTISTA: Why sir, you know this is your wedding-day!
Fie, doff²³ this habit²⁴! Shame on your estate²⁵!

PETRUCHIO: To me she's married, not unto my clothes.
Now, I should say good morrow to my bride.

TRUE / FALSE QUESTIONS: Decide if these statements **EXTRACT 2** are true or false.

	TRUE	FALSE
1. Petruchio warned ²⁶ them that he was going to be late.		
2. Katherina is ashamed because she is waiting at the church, but she has no-one to marry.		
3. The Priest defends Petruchio and thinks he will come for the wedding.		
4. Baptista wants Petruchio to change his clothes.		
5. Petruchio apologises to Baptista for dressing inappropriately for his wedding.		

¹⁸ Wedding = boda

¹⁹ Son-in-law = yerno

²⁰ Shame = vergüenza ... ashamed = avergonzado/a

²¹ To wed = casarse

²² To cry = llorar

²³ Doff (An old Shakespeare word) = to take off – quitar ropa

²⁴ Habit = (An old Shakespeare word) vestimiento, ropa

²⁵ Estate = (An old Shakespeare word) = estado, aspecto

²⁶ To warn = avisar

ADJECTIVES and their OPPOSITES

1. Below are some adjectives that describe the characters of Petruchio and Katherina (*at the beginning of the play*). Sometimes we give you the adjective to describe the character; sometimes we give you its **opposite**. Find the missing adjective from the words listed under the table.

Here is one example: **cruel / kind** (*Use a dictionary if you don't know the meanings.*)

PETRUCHIO	Petruchio - opposite	KATHERINA	Katherina - opposite
cruel	<i>kind</i>	impulsive	
	<i>foolish</i>	violent	
sexist			<i>polite</i>
	<i>boring</i>	exhausted	
tyrannical			<i>obedient</i>
forceful		starved	<i>mild</i>

peaceful hot-headed open-minded amusing intelligent
 democratic submissive rude disobedient rested patient

EXTRACT from the contemporary story: *Kate, Peter and Nathan discuss a scene they have just rehearsed. (See EXTRACT 1).* Kate starts by telling Nathan (who plays²⁷ Baptista) that she's not happy with what he did in the rehearsal. Then Peter intervenes in the conversation and he and Kate have an argument²⁸.

The dialogue is NOT IN THE CORRECT ORDER, except for part **A** which is the FIRST part of the conversation. Read it carefully and see if you can put the dialogue in the **correct order**.

- A** KATE: Was that necessary, Nathan? (*Imitating him*) "You will be married on Sunday."? Your daughter's just been totally humiliated and you make fun of her²⁹. Was that Shakespeare's intention?
- B** PETER: Impressive, but the Oxford English Dictionary would disagree with you.
- C** PETER: A cage³⁰! Exactly where a wild³¹ animal should be if it's to be tamed. That was Shakespeare's intention... "The Taming of the Shrew", shrews being small, mouse-like mammals³² with very sharp³³ teeth, that...
- D** KATE: Of course. It was written by men.
- E** KATE: But I am still your daughter. It's as if I've been locked up³⁴ in a cage and you two have thrown away the key.
- F** NATHAN: I improvised, sorry. It's just that I'm so happy you'll be gone from the house.
- G** KATE: ... that, because of their aggressive nature, can kill animals much larger than themselves.. It also means: "an aggressive woman who cannot be controlled, a witch³⁵, a she-devil³⁶." I prefer this: an intelligent woman who loses her temper³⁷ every time a man tells her what to do or how to think.

²⁷ To play = en este contexto, TO PLAY quiere decir "interpretar" (un papel o personaje)

²⁸ Argument = una discusión, debate, bronca

²⁹ To make fun of = burlarse

³⁰ Cage = una jaula

³¹ Wild = salvaje

³² Mammals = mamíferos

³³ Sharp = afilado /a

³⁴ To lock up = encerrar

³⁵ Witch = bruja

³⁶ She-devil = diabla

³⁷ To lose your temper = perder la paciencia, perder los estribos

WHO SAYS WHAT?

Who do you think will say **what** during the play? Write their names next to the sentences and then **CHECK** it again **AFTER** you see the play. These phrases are said by the characters in the Shakespeare play **AND** the characters from the contemporary story. Think of this: Is it Petruchio speaking, or Peter, the actor? Is it Katherina, or Kate, the actress? Is it Baptista or Grumio or Nathan? Is it Blanca? Were you correct?

1) *Sir, have you not a daughter called Katherina, fair and virtuous?*

2) You need to talk to your leading man. If his behaviour doesn't change, I'm leaving.

3) If I be waspish, best beware my sting.

4) It's just sometimes I wish we could be a normal couple, do normal things.

5) She seems promising. Definitely strong enough to play Katherina.

6) Petruchio is coming!
Petruchio is coming.

8) *And by God, then her horse fell, and she under her horse, and then my master left her in the mud with the horse upon her. Then she waded through the dirt, screaming and cursing.*

9) You know me. I love a challenge, especially in the female form.

7) She is my goods, she's my house, my horse, my anything.

11) She ate no meat today, nor none shall eat. Last night she slept not, nor tonight shall sleep. Thus I shall curb her mad and headstrong humour.

10) But Katherina is not like the other women in the play; she's more like the men.

12) I see a woman may be made a fool if she had not a spirit to resist