

Headlines & Tableaux: *Taming of the Shrew*

Headlines and **Tableaux** are effective, fun exercises to use when beginning the study of a play. They can also be adapted for films, novels, short stories, or even poems. Used together, headlines and tableaux help students synthesise a play, identify key plot points, and understand character relationships through embodied interaction.

Headlines starts with the teacher breaking students into groups and assigning each group a scene. Groups have to summarise the scene and distil into one "headline." (The teacher could provide sample newspaper headlines or write a few examples, such as "TOWN TINKER SLY DUPED INTO THINKING HIMSELF A LORD!"). Each group writes their headline on an index card. (For the sake of time, I have provided scene summaries below.)

Next, students try to capture a key moment in their scene through a **tableau** (think of a movie still or living portrait) that expresses the relationships among characters at a significant moment in the scene. After deciding as a group what moment in the scene they will bring to life, each student will take a role and decide on a posture to adopt that communicates their character. The group then experiments with gestures and body positions (observing from the side, engaged in battle, etc.) until they compose themselves in a still image that captures a suspended moment of action. If there are more group members than characters in the scene, encourage students to "play" parts of the scenery, such as a tree in a courtyard, an office desk, or a king's throne. If there are more characters than group members, students will choose which characters to focus on and represent.

Finally, the headlines are read and tableaux performed by each group in chronological order, so the class hears / sees / enacts a summary the play. Class discussion could follow, in which students connect each tableau to specific lines in the scenes and comment on what new meanings or questions emerged after seeing the characters and plot points embodied. If time, students can be asked to write individual reflective responses to the scene they worked on, perhaps even in the voice of the character they embodied in the tableau.

If students have a difficult time coming up with gestures and poses for their tableaux, you might show them images of Renaissance paintings, which are replete with stylised postures.

Scene Summaries*

PROLOGUE, SCENES 1 & 2

In the English countryside, a poor tinker named Christopher Sly becomes the target of a prank by a local lord. Finding Sly drunk out of his wits in front of an alehouse, the lord has his men take Sly to his manor, dress him in his finery, and treat him as a lord. When Sly wakes, they fool him into believing that he himself is a lord and that he has been in a fevered state in bed for the past fifteen years. They dress up a page boy as Sly's wife. An acting troupe arrive and put on a play for him, which is *The Taming of the Shrew*.

ACT 1 SCENE 1

Supported by his 'father's love and leave', Lucentio has travelled from Pisa to study at the university in Padua. His servant Tranio hopes that they will be 'no stoics nor no stocks' and have fun in this new city.

As they wait for Lucentio's other servant Biondello, they see local merchant Baptista with his two daughters, Katherina and Bianca. Hortensio and Gremio are in love with Bianca, but Baptista will not allow her to marry until her older sister has a husband. Neither Hortensio nor Gremio wish to marry the 'stark mad or wonderful forward' Katherina. Bianca says her books and instruments will be her 'only company' until her sister is married, and Baptista asks Gremio and Hortensio to find some 'cunning men' to be teachers to live in his house. Lucentio has fallen in love with Bianca ('I burn; I pine; I perish'), and decides to disguise himself as a schoolteacher to get close to her. He asks Tranio to help him in his pursuit of Bianca's love by pretending to be him, and the two exchange clothes.

Biondello finally arrives and is confused to see Tranio wearing his master's clothes. Lucentio quickly instructs him that the plan is to 'save [his] life', misleading Biondello into believing that he killed someone on arrival and now must be in hiding. Biondello agrees to serve Tranio as his master.

*Scene summaries adapted from RSC's Learning Zone: <https://www.rsc.org.uk/shakespeare-learning-zone/the-taming-of-the-shrew>

ACT 1 SCENE 2

Petruchio arrives in Padua from Verona with 'crowns in [his] purse', looking to find a rich wife. His 'best-beloved and approved' friend Hortensio tells him that there is a very rich, beautiful woman who he could marry, but she is 'intolerable curst'. Petruchio is not fazed by stories of Katherina's behaviour and decides that he will 'Board her though she chide as loud / As thunder when the clouds in autumn crack'.

Hortensio asks Petruchio to help him in his pursuit of the 'jewel' Bianca by introducing him to Baptista, in disguise, as a schoolteacher for Bianca. Meanwhile, Lucentio, disguised as the schoolteacher Cambio, has convinced Gremio to introduce him to Baptista by saying he will use the lessons to persuade Bianca to love Gremio, 'as firmly as yourself were still in place'.

The men wish Petruchio luck in his visit to 'woo this wildcat' but Petruchio is determined: 'Think you a little din can daunt my ears?' Tranio, disguised as Lucentio, introduces himself to Hortensio and Gremio as another suitor for Bianca's love. Gremio fears that this new 'gentleman will out-talk us all'.

ACT 2 SCENE 1

Katherina torments Bianca about her suitors; tying her up, physically attacking her and making her a 'bondmaid and a slave'. Katherina wants to know who Bianca wishes to marry, however Bianca states that she 'never yet beheld that special face'. Baptista despairs over what to do with the 'devilish spirit' of his daughter.

Gremio arrives at Baptista's house with a Latin teacher Cambio (who is Lucentio in disguise), and Petruchio arrives with a music teacher Licio (who is Hortensio in disguise). Petruchio says that he has heard of Katherina and 'her beauty and her wit' and wishes to marry her, offering Licio as a gift. Baptista welcomes Licio but warns Petruchio against Katherina. Gremio puts forward Cambio as a gift and Baptista welcomes him into his household. Tranio introduces himself to Baptista as Lucentio and expresses his interest in Bianca, gifting her some books and a lute.

Petruchio and Baptista discuss the marriage of Katherina further, including Katherina's dowry of 'one half of [Baptista's] lands'. Baptista's only stipulation is that Petruccio must first win 'the special thing', her love. Petruchio accepts, promising that 'where two raging fires meet together' / They do consume the thing that feeds their fury'. Hortensio, as Licio, has tried to teach Katherina the lute and she has broken the instrument over his head. This excites Petruchio and he plans to react in opposition to everything she says and does in order to confuse her. Katherina and Petruchio war with words, and she tells him to 'beware [her] sting' and hits him.

Petruchio tells Katherina that they will marry because he was 'born to tame' her. Petruchio leaves to buy wedding clothes and asks Baptista to prepare for the wedding on his return that Sunday, leaving an angry Katherina who does not wish to marry 'A madcap ruffian and a swearing Jack'. Gremio and Tranio (as Lucentio) argue over who will win Bianca's love now that she is free to marry. Baptista stops the argument by saying that whoever offers the biggest dowry can marry Bianca. Tranio promises 'two thousand ducats by the year' so Baptista agrees that on the Sunday after Katherina and Petruchio marry, Bianca will marry Lucentio, as long as Lucentio's father gives assurance of the dowry money.

ACT 3 SCENE 1

Lucentio, as Cambio, and Hortensio, as Licio, argue over who will teach Bianca. Bianca interrupts them saying that she will 'not be tied to hours nor 'pointed times': whilst Licio tunes his instrument, she will listen to Cambio reading Latin. Instead of translating the passage, Lucentio reveals his and Tranio's true identities to Bianca. Bianca says she doesn't trust him but will listen. She tells him to 'presume not' but also 'despair not'.

Next, Bianca has a music lesson with Licio, during which he attempts to reveal his true identity as Hortensio, however Bianca pretends not to understand, saying she 'like[s] it not'. They are interrupted by a servant asking Bianca to help Katherina prepare for the wedding. Hortensio notices that Cambio looks like he is in love with Bianca, and wonders whether there is hope in still pursuing her if Bianca will 'cast [her] wandering eyes on every stale'.

ACT 3 SCENE 2

Everyone has gathered for the wedding, but Petruchio is late, humiliating Katherina. She feels she has been 'forced / To give [her] hand opposed against [her] heart'. News arrives that Petruchio is coming, but dressed in a very strange outfit of 'a new hat and an old jerkin' with a broken 'old rusty sword'. Baptista is shocked by the 'eyesore' of Petruchio's choice of clothing.

Meanwhile, Tranio explains to Lucentio his plan to find a man to pretend to be Lucentio's father Vincentio. This person will confirm Lucentio's financial status to Baptista, thus allowing the marriage of Bianca to Lucentio. Lucentio wonders if it might be better to elope. Gremio returns from the church and reports that 'Such a mad marriage never was before', because Petruchio's behaviour has been so strange that Katherina has been stunned into silence. Petruchio announces that he and Katherina will not stay for the wedding feast. Katherina argues, saying that 'a woman may be made a fool / If she had not a spirit to resist' but Petruchio demands that they leave for Verona. Baptista announces that this shall be a practice feast for Bianca and Lucentio (who is still Tranio in disguise).

ACT 3 SCENE 3

At Petruchio's house in Verona, Grumio and the other servants prepare for the arrival of their master and Katherina, who are 'almost frozen to death'. The servants have heard tales of Katherina's behaviour, but Grumio tells another servant Curtis that Petruchio has already changed her. He tells of their horrible journey from Padua to Verona; Katherina fell from her horse and Petruchio blamed and beat Grumio, so Katherina 'waded through the dirt to pluck him off' Grumio. Curtis remarks that Petruchio is 'more shrew than she'.

On his arrival, Petruchio is rude to his servants and makes demands for food and water. When the servant brings food, Petruchio sends it away saying it is 'burnt, and so is all the meat' even though Katherina says it is 'well'. Petruchio explains to the audience that he has 'politically begun [his] reign' and will deny her food and sleep to 'curb her mad and headstrong humour'.

ACT 3 SCENE 4

Hortensio, disguised as Licio, and Tranio, disguised as Lucentio, watch Lucentio, disguised as Cambio, teach Bianca about The Art of Love. Hortensio is shocked by Bianca's apparent infidelity and reveals his identity. Tranio convinces Hortensio that they will both give up their love for Bianca and they 'firmly vow / Never to woo her more'. Hortensio decides to marry a wealthy widow, saying he values 'Kindness in women, not their beauteous looks'. Tranio reveals to Bianca and Lucentio that he has rid them of the both suitors. Tranio jokes that Hortensio will tame this widow as he has been to Petruchio's 'taming school'.

Biondello arrives with news that he has found an 'ancient angel' to pretend to be Vincentio, Lucentio's father, and ensure Lucentio's marriage to Bianca. Tranio tells the 'angel' he must disguise himself as Vincentio in order to save his life; in return, he asks the stand-in to assure Baptista of his financial status.

ACT 4 SCENE 1

Katherina is in great distress, asking 'did he marry me to famish me?' She has been starved of food and sleep, but Petruchio says he 'does it under name of perfect love'. She asks Grumio for help in finding some food, but he teases her by suggesting a dish and then saying it is not good enough for her. Petruchio and Hortensio arrive with a plate of meat, and although Katherina is reluctant, she thanks her husband.

Petruchio tells her to eat quickly as they will then return to her father's house and 'reveal it as bravely as the best', wearing beautiful clothes and jewellery. A tailor and haberdasher bring a beautiful hat and gown for Katherina. She likes them, but Petruchio sends them away calling the hat 'lewd and filthy' and the dress 'carved like an apple tart'. He secretly sends Hortensio to ensure the two sellers are paid. They are about to depart for Baptista's house when Petruchio says it is seven o'clock in the morning; Katherina says it is two o'clock. He reprimands her for 'crossing' or contradicting him and says 'It shall be what o'clock I say it is'.

ACT 4 SCENE 2

Tranio, disguised as Lucentio, arranges for the merchant, disguised as Vincentio, to meet Baptista. Tranio encourages the merchant to 'hold [his] own' and successfully play his part in the trick. The merchant and Baptista agree to the marriage, and decide to sign the legal documents at Lucentio's house that evening, as Baptista fears being overheard in his own house by the servants as 'pitchers have ears'.

Baptista sends Cambio to tell Bianca of the news that Lucentio's father has agreed to the marriage. Biondello tells Lucentio that Tranio has arranged it so that Bianca and Lucentio can secretly elope to St Luke's Church to marry that evening whilst Baptista is occupied with a 'counterfeit assurance'.

ACT 4 SCENE 3

As they are about to set off on the journey to Padua, Petruchio comments on the shining moon. Katherina argues that she 'know[s] it is the sun that shines so bright'. Upon hearing her contradict him again, Petruchio threatens to return home, so Katherina gives in that it is 'moon or sun or what you you please'. Petruchio pushes her further to agree with him and she relents: 'What you will have named, even that it is, / And so it shall be so for Katherine.'

They encounter the real Vincentio, Lucentio's father, and Petruchio calls him a young woman with a 'heavenly face'; Katherina goes along with this description but Petruchio calls her 'mad' because Vincentio is actually an old man. Katherina apologises for her 'mad mistaking'. Vincentio reveals that he is on his way to visit his son, and Petruchio tells him of Lucentio's planned marriage to Bianca.

ACT 4 SCENE 4

Lucentio and Bianca elope to the church moments before Petruchio, Katherina and Vincentio arrive at Lucentio's house. The merchant, disguised as Vincentio, meets the real Vincentio and an argument breaks out. Petruchio calls it 'flat knavery to take upon you another man's name', and Vincentio fears he has been tricked and 'undone', accusing his son of sending all his money at university whilst he 'play[s] the good husband at home'.

Tranio and the merchant maintain the lie that they are the real Lucentio and Vincentio, whilst Vincentio argues the truth that this is Tranio in disguise and then accuses him of murdering his son. Tranio calls an officer and, as Vincentio is about to be taken to prison, Lucentio and Bianca return. Tranio and the merchant run away whilst Lucentio asks for his father's forgiveness. Lucentio explains the truth that 'love wrought these miracles', however Vincentio remains furious with Tranio, saying he'll 'slit the villain's nose'.

Petruchio asks Katherina to kiss him in the middle of the street and she agrees, which pleases Petruchio ('Is not this well? Come my sweet Kate.').

ACT 5 SCENE 1

There is a wedding banquet, celebrating not only the marriage of Bianca and Lucentio, but also of Katherina and Petruchio, and of Hortensio and the widow. The couples joke and tease one another, and Petruchio mocks Hortensio saying he 'fears his widow'. Petruchio, Lucentio and Hortensio decide to have a bet 'whose wife is most obedient / To come at first when he doth send for her'.

Bianca is 'busy, and she cannot come', whilst the widow will not be 'entreated' and bids Hortensio to 'come to her'. Katherina comes immediately to Petruchio saying 'What is your will'. Winning the bet, Petruchio tells her to bring the two other women to him, which she does and Petruchio admires her 'new-built virtue and obedience'. Petruchio tells Katherina to describe the 'duty' women owe to their husbands. Katherina tells the two women that women are 'bound to serve, love and obey' their husbands. Petruchio celebrates 'being a winner' and retires to bed with Katherina.