

(b) Comic conventions and structure

✕ Refers to links on www.crossref-it.info

- ❖ **Lesson focus:** To explore the structure and conventions of the play, and to consider how Shakespeare manipulates comic conventions for the purposes of the play.
- ❖ **Opening exercise:** Distribute (ideally A3) copies of *The Taming of the Shrew* **b)i Comedic structure diagram** (Freytag's pyramid). Use this to teach the traditional structure and features of a comedy. (Helpful examples include *Much Ado About Nothing* and/or *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, as they may be familiar from previous study and fit the conventional pattern of broken relationships/peril in Act 3, and multiple marriages in Act 5).
 - Try mapping *The Taming of the Shrew* onto the diagram, and consider where the play fits into - and departs from - the conventional structure (e.g. the induction scenes; a wedding in Act 3; marriages don't always signify resolution).
 - In what other ways might the play seem different from other comedies?
 - For example, does the audience laugh and learn from the characters' foolishness, and feel satisfied by a 'happy ever after' ending?

✕ *The Taming of the Shrew* > Structure > The framing device; Comic structures
- ❖ **Textual examination:** In which other ways might we think about the play's structure? Work through the following points, making notes on *The Taming of the Shrew* **b)ii Comic conventions and structure table:**
 - Look at the opening and closing scenes and consider how they differ from a more conventional comedy.
 - How do the induction scenes change the focus away from a conventional exposition, which introduces characters and situation?
 - How does the final scene compare to an expected wedding celebration?
 - How does knowing that there 'should' be a wedding affect the way we interpret Katherina's speech and the final message of the play?
 - Try separating out the main plot (Petruccio and Katherina) from the sub-plot (Bianca and her suitors), plotting each as a separate story.
 - How does the sub-plot compliment the main plot in terms of:
 - mirroring and contrast?
 - comic relief from bigger ideas?
 - being itself an interesting story?
 - Make a list of which scenes focus on the main plot, which on the sub-plot, and which incorporate both?
 - How do we understand the timescale/ pace of the play?
 - Can we deduce how much time passes over the course of the play?
 - Where is the pace increased to heighten the comedy?
 - Which scenes are set in Padua, and which at Petruccio's house?
 - What is the significance of these settings, and the movement between them?

✕ *The Taming of the Shrew* > Structure > The framing device; Comic structures; Geographical structures; Main and sub-plots

✕ *The Taming of the Shrew* > Synopses and commentaries > Induction, Scene 1; Act 5 > Scene 2

(b) Comic conventions and structure

✕ Refers to links on www.crossref-it.info

(b) Comic conventions and structure

- ❖ **Discussion ideas:** Distribute the *The Taming of the Shrew* b)iii **Comedy convention checklist** to explore the extent to which the play 'fits' comic conventions.
 - For each point, discuss examples from *The Taming of the Shrew*, and how Shakespeare has used these conventional features to further the particular ideas and messages of the play.

- ❖ **Recreative task:** How might the focus and message of the play be different if it had a more conventional structure?
 - Try re-plotting the story, so that the play ends with traditional happy weddings. What foci would be changed, and what ideas might be lost?

- ❖ **Critical task:** 'Comedies entertain and instruct, and leave audiences with a final sense of joy.' To what extent do you agree with this in relation to *The Taming of the Shrew*?
 - ✕ *The Taming of the Shrew* > Structure > Comic structures
 - ✕ *The Taming of the Shrew* > Synopses and commentaries > Act 5

- ❖ **Extension task:** Research Commedia dell'Arte and how Shakespeare has also incorporated these comic conventions into the play.
 - ✕ *The Taming of the Shrew* > Theatrical context > The influence of Commedia dell'Arte in *The Taming of the Shrew*