

Debate Script Sample Response

Prompt: Your team must argue that *The Taming of the Shrew* is incorrectly classified as a comedy.

Opening Statement

Take a moment and imagine yourself at the movie theater eating popcorn and laughing at funny quips from the actors and actresses in the film. You are smiling and enjoying yourself. Now imagine yourself reading Act 4, Scene 1 as Petruchio withholds sleep and food from Katherine. Are you laughing? You shouldn't be! This is, without a doubt, abusive behavior. Yet, traditionally, *The Taming of the Shrew* is classified as one of William Shakespeare's comedy plays alongside *As You Like It* and *The Comedy of Errors*. While the play contains disguise, wordplay, and marriage, which are typically associated with comedies, it is impossible to ignore the problematic behavior in the play. Therefore, today, we are here to convince you that *The Taming of the Shrew* is not a comedy. We take this position because we firmly believe that the play should be classified as a tragedy due to Katherine being ignored, abused, and silenced. By the end of this debate, we are confident that you, too, will believe that *The Taming of the Shrew* is misclassified.

Argument #1

The Taming of the Shrew should be classified as a tragedy because Katherine's wishes are ignored throughout the play. In Act 1, Scene 1, lines 48–58, after Baptista declares that Bianca cannot marry until Katherine does, Katherine wants to know her father's intentions with the suitors, but Baptista does not even bother to reply to his daughter about a decision that would affect the rest of her life. Likewise, in Act 3, Scene 2, Katherine wants to enjoy her wedding feast, but Petruchio refuses in lines 233–236, telling everyone that Katherine will stay with him, so they

should stop acting angry. He is her master. He owns her. Petruchio unequivocally believes that Katherine is his property, and he now expects complete obedience from her, regardless of her own needs and wants. There is nothing comedic about men continually ignoring a woman's wishes and well-being.

Argument #2

In our second argument, we will explain that *The Taming of the Shrew* should be classified as a tragedy because Katherine is physically and mentally abused in the play. Act 4 of the play contains the most disturbing scenes in the entirety of the script. In lines 188–189 of Scene 1, Petruchio states, "My falcon now is sharp and passing empty, / And, till she stoop, she must not be full-gorged." The falcon's taming is a metaphor for Katherine's taming, and it is despicable that Petruchio refuses to provide food for his wife until she is so weak that she is unable to get up. In this same scene in lines 206–209, he states that if Katherine falls asleep, he'll yell and make so much noise to keep her awake. This is how he will kill his wife with kindness and end her headstrong behavior. It is common sense that not being able to sleep is abusive and cruel, especially to one's wife. The abusive tactics of Petruchio firmly place *The Taming of the Shrew* in the tragedy category.

Argument #3

Thirdly, we will argue that the play should be classified as a tragedy because Katherine's voice is silenced. In Act 4, Petruchio lectures and yells at Katherine so intensely that even his servants comment on the behavior. His servant, Curtis, explains that Petruchio is yelling and raging at Katherine, while she just sits there without a word. She has no idea what to do as he yells at her, and she is unable to speak up. Furthermore, in Act 5, it is clear that Katherine has lost

her voice. Even though she gives a lengthy speech, it is all about how a woman should be obedient to her husband. In lines 173–176, she describes a "froward, peevish, sullen, sour" woman as a "graceless traitor to her loving lord." This is not the bold, honest Katherine from Acts 1 and 2. Her voice has been silenced due to her oppressive husband. These events are tragic, not comedic.

Rebuttal #1

The other team is in favor of classifying *The Taming of the Shrew* as a comedy because the play contains wordplay and puns. While it is true that wordplay and puns can be comedic, these points do not outweigh the fact that Petruchio ignores Katherine's wishes throughout the play. For example, in Act 2, Scene 1, line 192, Katherine corrects Petruchio after he calls her Kate, saying that people call her Katherine, which is her preference. Rather than respect her name, in response, Petruchio makes a pun with "Kate" and "cake" in line 196. A funny nickname that makes Katherine smile would be funny, whereas ignoring her real name is tragic. Furthermore, Petruchio continually calls her "Kate," even though she has explicitly said her name is Katherine. He continues on to say in line 286, "will you, nill you, I will marry you." He plans to marry her, even if she does not consent. Forcing a name on Katherine is the first step in forcing a marriage on her. Therefore, despite comedic elements, the play's content makes it a tragedy.

Rebuttal #2

The other team thinks the play should be classified as a comedy, arguing that disguise makes the play comedic. However, this is false as disguise and deception go hand in hand. One example of this is that Tranio disguises himself as Lucentio, while Lucentio pretends to be a tutor named Cambio. Tranio is just following his master's orders; however, the convoluted plan almost

gets Vincentio arrested. The deception only ends when Lucentio arrives and reveals his true identity. However, the impact of Lucentio's deception still impacts the other characters. Baptista is angry with Lucentio's disguise and deception, saying, "But do you hear, sir, have you married my daughter without asking my goodwill?" (5.1.136). While on the surface the disguise appears light-hearted, in actuality, it leads to Bianca deceiving her father and Lucentio marrying Bianca in secret. This is not how to treat one's partner's family with respect.

Rebuttal #3

In the previous argument, the other team stated that *The Taming of the Shrew* is a comedy because the play ends with all the couples happily married, but this is untrue. The couples are not happily married in Act 5, Scene 2, the final scene of the play. In line 19, Petruchio says to the widow that Hortensio is scared of her, his wife. If a husband or wife is scared of their partner, then they are not happily married. In addition, Katherine gives a speech stating, "Thy husband is thy lord, thy life, thy keeper, / Thy head, thy sovereign, one that cares for thee" (5.2.162–163). She has to speak sarcastically and ironically to get her point across that women should not be subservient to men. If Katherine cannot be her true self and feel like she can speak honestly, then she is not happily married either.

Closing Statement

In today's debate, we argued that *The Taming of the Shrew* is incorrectly classified as a comedy. The play should be reclassified as a tragedy because Katherine is ignored, abused, and silenced in the text. Our first piece of evidence outlined how men, such as Petruchio and Baptista, ignore Katherine's questions, desires, and needs in the play. Secondly, we provided evidence for the abuse Katherine suffers by proving that she is physically and mentally abused by

Petruchio in Act 4, which leads to her losing the ability to freely speak her mind. Her ironic final monologue highlights that she has lost her voice and must resort to sarcasm to truly speak her mind. The other team argued that wordplay and disguise prove that the play is comedic, but simply having comedic elements does not make a play funny. The abuse and silencing far outweigh any clever puns. Therefore, join us in standing up for Katherine and advocating that the play be reclassified as a tragedy.