

## **Comprehending Shakespeare: Shakespeare as a Soap Opera**

**Object:** Make Shakespeare easier to understand by comparing it to a modern form of drama. Encourage students to view Shakespeare as a living story rather than as a dead art form.

**Grade level:** 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup>

**Subject:** English / Drama

**Timeframe:** 2-3 hours

**Materials:** Video: 5-10 minutes recorded from a familiar daytime talk show  
Video: *The Taming of the Shrew* (1967)  
[Worksheet: Shakespeare as a Soap Opera](#)

**Introductory Hook:** As students file into the classroom, the teacher should be watching a recorded sample from a popular daytime talk show (preferably something where angry people are throwing chairs and arguing) Have the students watch the scene for 2-5 minutes before beginning lesson.

**Introduction:** Begin the class by writing the word “Shakespeare” on the board. Lead students in a brainstorming session. What things come to mind when they hear the word “Shakespeare?” Possible answers may include: “classic”, “Romeo and Juliet”, “boring”, etc. Encourage anything they come up with as there are no wrong answers at this point.

Continue with a discussion of the audiences during Shakespeare’s time. Though Shakespeare’s plays were occasionally performed for royalty, most of his audience were of the ale-swilling standing-room-only peasant class. The audience was generally quite raucous and many of the scenes were quite suggestive, pandering to the reality-television crowd.

### **Lesson 1: Shakespeare, the Shrew, and the Talkshow Crowd:**

Begin the lesson by playing a snippet from the wooing scene in William Shakespeare’s *The Taming of the Shrew*. (Act II, Scene 1). Any section where Petruchio is pursuing Katherine through the house should do. After the video, lead a discussion with the class. What parts in the scene struck them as humorous? Who were they rooting for in the scene or did it shift as the scene progressed? What adjectives would they use to describe the two characters? How was this similar to the snippet of the daytime talk show that was playing when they entered the classroom. Encourage them to arrive at the following conclusions:

- (1) The characters are flawed but we watch them anyway because of their unpredictable behavior.
- (2) Battle of the sexes – the same passionate fighting between the sexes that we see on daytime television was used by Shakespeare to catch the attention of his audience.

What kind of audience was Shakespeare trying to reach with this scene? How does this affect the view of Shakespeare as a dry classical author?

## **Lesson 2: Shakespeare and the Soap Opera**

Begin the lesson by dividing the class into groups of 3-5. Give each of the groups a copy of the [worksheet “Shakespeare as a Soap Opera.”](#) The plays summarized in the worksheet are as follows:

- (1) *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*
- (2) *Twelfth Night*
- (3) *Othello, Moor of Venice*
- (4) *The Tempest*
- (5) *Richard III*
- (6) *The Taming of the Shrew*

Have them select one of the scene synopses and create a 2-5 minute soap opera based around the plot. Encourage them to stick with the rules of the soap opera drama (i.e. over-dramatic, serious reactions to ludicrous circumstances, ridiculously huge characters). Give the groups thirty minutes to create their scenes, then have each group perform their scene for the class. Try to make sure that they adhere to the basic premise of the synopsis, but allow plenty of room for expansion, creation of additional characters, or surprise endings.

### **Assessment:**

Have each student write a half-page essay about how their opinion of Shakespeare was changed by this project. Why do they think Shakespeare is often misrepresented in our society?

### **Follow Up Activity:**

Have several of the students take on personas from the scenes that they have performed. Divide the class into a talk show format, select a host, and have the audience ask the characters questions. This activity can be especially effective when opponents are paired on the show (i.e. Othello and Iago, Hamlet and Claudius)