**THEMES TO LOOK OUT FOR**

**Feminism vs. the Patriarchy:** 17th century Europe was a patriarchal society—dominated by men. Women were valued for their beauty, good temper, and silence. A woman belonged to her father until marriage, at which point she became her husband’s property. As we already know, women who were shrewish—loud-mouthed and opinionated—were looked down upon and likened to women of bad moral character (floozies). Katherine’s problem is she’s too smart for any of the guys living in her hometown, and it intimidates them, and as she’s getting older, she’s getting bitter. She doesn’t know how to express herself politely and it only gets worse as her insecurities get worse.

**Feminism vs. Feminine Nature:** Feminism is simply the belief that women deserve the same rights as men. Katherine is frustrated that although she is smarter, it is her sister Bianca who receives all the suitors, because Bianca is the ideal 17th century woman—pretty, sweet, not too smart, and obedient. Katherine has to learn to tap into her feminine to get feminism.

**Rhetoric/Fighting with Words:** We already know from studying Adolf Hitler that words are powerful weapons, and that a person who may lack physical strength can become stronger than a nation when he/she uses rhetoric—persuasive speech. Katherine’s problem is she uses her wit to twist everyone’s sentences into an insult, and she’s never been matched in words, until Petruchio comes along. Petruchio uses rhetoric to create the opposite effect—he poofs things up instead of tearing things down. Katherine and Petruchio (actually, all the main characters of the play) have to figure out how to use their words to get what they want.

**Deeds of Nobility:** This play centers around noble families and their servants, but not all the nobility is equal. Baptista is very rich, and Petruchio is apparently the son of a noble lord, but he’s run out of money and he isn’t a bona fide gentleman. Shakespeare uses “deeds” as a pun in this play, meaning the actions (heroic deeds) and materialistic rights (deeds to property and fortune) of nobility can sometimes not go hand-in-hand; one might chase the other.

**Insecurity:** Similarly to Deeds of Nobility, many of the main characters in this play suffer insecurities, although they won’t say them outright—Shakespeare leaves that up to you to figure out. There are things that Petruchio and Katherine in particular lack and feel insecure, and the way they act might be considered a defense mechanism.

**Disguise:** This one is pretty obvious, and pretty common in a Shakespearean play. Basically, you can’t have that great “wait what’s going on everything has gotten so crazy” comedic gold at the end of a Shakespearean play unless someone dresses up as someone who is above or below their station to get what they want. Disguise also relates to the theme of Fake Love.

**Deeds of the Husband and Wife:** In a patriarchal society, the husband was the head of the household, and the wife looked after the house and supported her husband’s decisions, as well as increased his household by bearing him children. The husband’s responsibility was to take care of and protect the wife; the wife’s responsibility was to be the glory of her husband. Women who were loud-mouthed and bossy shamed their husbands because it made the husbands look like they can’t take care of their house. Some of Petruchio’s actions might seem cruel, but in the 1600’s he would look like a sissy wimp if he let Kate do whatever she wanted.

**Fake Love:** Petruchio fakes being in love with Katherine (at first) and spouts poofy poetry to her to “kill her with kindness,” but *Taming of the Shrew* explores what real love is. Courtly love (pining after your crush and wooing her with heroic deeds and tokens of affection) was extremely popular at the time (think *Romeo and Juliet*) and Shakespeare explores how far courtly love will actually go in a marriage through different couples and how they treat each other.

**Taming:** Who tames whom?