

Merchant of Venice

William Shakespeare

Teacher's Guide

Written By Matthew Jewell

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Synopsis

Act I

Scene 1

Antonio, a Venetian merchant, complains to his friends, Salarino and Solanio, of an inexplicable sadness. They suggest that his investments weigh heavy on his mind or, barring that, that he is in love, both of which explanations Antonio rejects. Bassanio, Antonio's friend and kinsman, arrives with his companions, Lorenzo and Gratiano. After the others depart, Bassanio discloses to his friend a plan to clear his debts, including those owed to Antonio, incurred in his prodigal youth. He is in love with a rich heiress, Portia, from Belmont and asks to borrow a sum of cash from Antonio in order to press his suit. Antonio replies that all his liquid assets are invested in trading expeditions, but gives Bassanio permission to borrow on his name.

Scene 2

At Belmont, Portia and Nerissa, her lady-in-waiting, discuss Portia's discontent with her dead father's will, which stipulates how her husband is to be selected, depriving her of any choice. Suitors much choose between three chests, one gold, one silver, and one lead. If the chosen chest contains her portrait, she must marry them. If it does not, they must leave and never marry. Portia vividly and humorously describes the various personal defects of her present suitors, all of whom leave without risking a choice. She is then informed of the approach of the Prince of Morocco, another suitor.

Scene 3

Bassanio asks Shylock, a Jewish moneylender, for a loan of three thousand ducats for three months, to

be secured in Antonio's name. Shylock is wary of the bond, since Antonio's money is entirely engaged in trading expeditions, which could fail. He asks to speak with Antonio, whom he hates. Under the pretense of a friendly overture, Shylock offers to lend the money to Antonio free of interest. Ostensibly a joke, he adds the stipulation that Antonio must forfeit a pound of his flesh if he cannot repay the loan. Bassanio warns against entering such a contract, but Antonio is confident that his ships will soon return and he will be able to easily repay the sum.

Act II

Scene 1

The Prince of Morocco arrives at Belmont. Portia greets him and reminds him of the terms, which he accepts.

Scene 2

Lancelot Gobbo, Shylock's servant, debates with himself whether to leave his master's service. His father, Old Gobbo, arrives with a present for Shylock. Lancelot asks Gobbo to save the dish of doves for Bassanio, with whom he wishes to take service.

Bassanio accepts their bum-

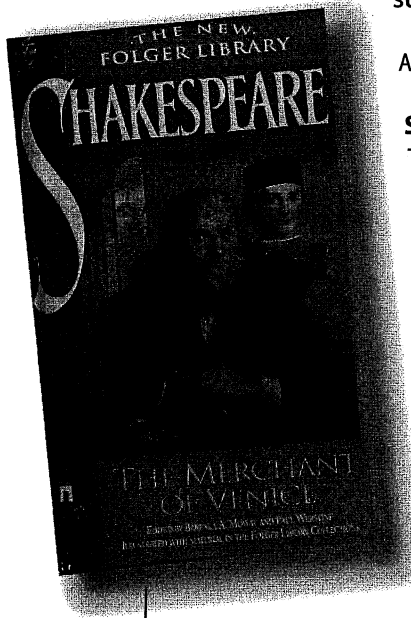
bling, humorous proposition, and Lancelot becomes his servant. Gratiano asks Bassanio to accompany him to Belmont. Bassanio acquiesces, as long as Gratiano agrees to behave himself.

Scene 3

Jessica, Shylock's daughter, bids Lancelot goodbye and gives him a letter for Lorenzo. Speaking to herself, she confesses her plans to marry Lorenzo and convert to Christianity.

Scene 4

Lancelot delivers Jessica's letter to Lorenzo, who is accompanied by Gratiano, Salarino, and Solanio.



The letter tells him that Jessica will rob her father and elope with him that night, disguised as a boy. Lorenzo sends Lancelot to assure Jessica that he will arrive at the appointed time.

Scene 5

Lancelot delivers a dinner invitation to Shylock from Bassanio, who warns him that his new master will not tolerate his various bad habits. Lancelot also surreptitiously assures Jessica of Lorenzo's planned arrival later that night.

Scene 6

Gratiano and Salarino meet Lorenzo at Shylock's house. Jessica, taking her father's gold and gems, leaves with Lorenzo to be married. Antonio seeks out Gratiano to warn him that Bassanio is leaving for Belmont immediately and instructs him to join him.

Scene 7

At Belmont, the Prince of Morocco attempts to choose the correct chest. Each chest bears an inscription. The gold one reads, "Who chooseth me shall gain what many men desire;" the silver chest reads, "Who chooseth me shall get as much as he deserves;" and the lead one reads, "Who chooseth me must give and hazard all he hath." Reasoning that all men desire Portia, the Prince chooses the gold chest, which contains a skull and a note warning, "All that glisters is not gold." He departs, disappointed.

Scene 8

Salarino and Solanio discuss Shylock's public rage at the loss of his daughter and wealth, the rumored loss of a Venetian ship in the English Channel, and Bassanio's departure.

Scene 9

The Prince of Arragon, another suitor, chooses the silver chest, which contains a portrait of a "blinking idiot" and a mocking note. After he departs, a messenger arrives to inform of the approach of another suitor, a young Venetian, whom he praises extravagantly.

Act III

Scene 1

Solanio and Salarino discuss the reputed loss of one of Antonio's ships. Shylock arrives and accuses them of having known about Jessica's intentions to

elope, which they proudly confirm. Shylock announces his determination to collect his bond of flesh and delivers the "Hath not a Jew eyes?" speech. Salarino and Solanio are summoned to Antonio's, and Tubal, a friend of Shylock's, arrives from Genoa, where he has been unsuccessfully searching for Jessica.

Scene 2

Despite Portia's request to delay, Bassanio insists on choosing a chest immediately. He comments on the various inscriptions and eventually chooses the lead chest, which contains a portrait of Portia and a congratulatory note. Portia gives him a ring as a sign of their love, the loss of which would "presage the ruin of your love." Gratiano and Nerissa have also fallen in love and announce their plans to marry. Lorenzo, Jessica, and Salarino arrive with a letter from Antonio, which informs Bassanio that all of Antonio's ships have been lost and that Shylock intends to collect his bond, which will mean Antonio's death. He asks Bassanio to return to Venice for a final meeting. Portia offers to repay the sum many times over, but Jessica warns that Shylock is more interested in vengeance than money.

Scene 3

Antonio tries to speak with Shylock, but he refuses to have discourse, saying only that he will have his bond. Antonio resigns himself to his fate and explains to Solanio that the Duke must allow Shylock to collect the bond because Venice's economy depends on foreign trade, which is dependent upon strict rule of law. As he is escorted to jail, Antonio expresses his hope that Bassanio will arrive in time to see him die.

Scene 4

Portia and Nerissa pretend to retire to a monastery to await the return of their husbands, leaving Lorenzo in charge of the estate. Portia sends Balthazar to Padua to meet her relative, Dr. Bellanio, who will give him documents and clothing, which he is to deliver to them in Venice. She explains to Nerissa that they will travel to Venice disguised as young men.

Scene 5

Lancelot jests with Jessica and Lorenzo.

Act IV

Scene 1

In court, Shylock demands his pound of flesh, despite pleas for mercy from the Duke. Disguised as a young man, Nerissa delivers a letter to the Duke from Dr. Bellanio, introducing Portia as Balthazar, a young but brilliant Doctor of Law. Acting as a lawyer, Portia concludes that Shylock is entitled to his pound of flesh, but that the bond does not specifically entitle him to so much as a drop of blood. Thus Shylock is entitled to the flesh but his life and property are forfeit if he spills a drop of blood in claiming it. When Shylock refuses to attempt to claim his bond, she also finds him guilty of plotting against the life of a Venetian citizen, the penalty of which is death and seizure of all property. The Duke grants Shylock his life, and Antonio intercedes to allow him to retain one half of his property, so long as Shylock agrees to will his remaining wealth to Jessica and Lorenzo.

Afterwards, Bassanio offers Portia/Balthazar three thousand ducats for helping save Antonio's life. She refuses and asks only for the ring with which she has commanded him to never part. He declines, but upon Antonio's urging, sends the ring after her with Gratiano.

Scene 2

Portia instructs Nerissa, still disguised as her assistant, to make sure that Shylock signs the deed willing his property to Jessica and Lorenzo. Gratiano enters and delivers the ring. Portia asks him to accompany Nerissa to Shylock's house. In an aside to Portia, Nerissa plots to acquire Gratiano's ring, as Portia has done to Bassanio.

Act V

Scene 1

Portia and Nerissa arrive at Belmont shortly before Bassanio, Gratiano, Antonio, and their companions. The women harangue their husbands for parting with their rings before revealing that they were Balthazar and his assistant. Antonio receives word that three of his ships, thought lost, have arrived safely in Venice, and Portia informs Lorenzo that he is now Shylock's heir.

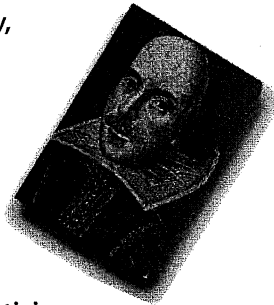
Shakespeare Timeline

- 1558** Coronation of Queen Elizabeth
- 1564** William Shakespeare born on April 23(?) in Stratford-upon-Avon to John and Mary Shakespeare.
- 1570** Queen Elizabeth excommunicated by Pope Pius V.
- 1573** Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton born; later becomes patron to Shakespeare
- 1577** John Shakespeare, William's father, falls into debt and William is withdrawn from school.
- 1582** William Shakespeare marries Anne Hathaway
- 1583** Susanna Shakespeare is born
- 1585** English colonists are sent to Roanoke Island. Hamnet and Judith are born. Shakespeare leaves Stratford-upon-Avon.
- 1587** Queen Elizabeth orders the execution of her half-sister, Mary.
- 1588** The British navy defeats the Spanish Armada
- 1589** *Henry VI, Part I*, Shakespeare's first play, is written and performed.
- 1591** Tea is introduced in England.
- 1592** Theatres are closed because of the bubonic plague.
- 1595** Theatres reopen as the plague eases. Shakespeare becomes a stockholder in the Chamberlain's Men.
- 1596** Shakespeare secures a coat of arms for his family. Hamnet dies and is buried on August 11.
- 1597** A second Spanish Armada is battered by bad weather before it reaches England. Shakespeare purchases a home in Stratford.
- 1598** The Globe Theatre is constructed.
- 1599** The Globe Theatre opens.
- 1601** Essex rebels against Queen Elizabeth. The Earl of Southampton is imprisoned for his part in the plot. John Shakespeare dies.
- 1603** Queen Elizabeth dies. King James of Scotland succeeds her and becomes a patron to the Chamberlain's Men, who change their name to the King's Men.
- 1605** Catesby's Gunpowder Plot to blow up Parliament fails.

- 1607** The colony at Jamestown is established by Captain John Smith. Susanna Shakespeare marries Dr. John Hall on June 5. Edmund Shakespeare, William's youngest brother, dies.
- 1608** Shakespeare's first granddaughter, Elizabeth, is born. Mary, his mother, dies.
- 1609** His *Sonnets* is published without his permission.
- 1610** Shakespeare retires to Stratford-upon-Avon.
- 1611** Shakespeare writes *The Tempest*. The *King James Bible* is published.
- 1612** Gilbert Shakespeare, William's brother, dies.
- 1613** Shakespeare's final brother, Richard, dies.
- 1616** Judith marries Thomas Quincy. Shakespeare becomes ill, revises his will, and dies.
- 1623** Anne dies. *The First Folio* is published.

Author Sketch

Details about the life of William Shakespeare are sketchy at best, mostly deduced from various clerical records. His parents, John and Mary, were married sometime around 1557. William was the eldest son and the third of eight children. He was baptized on April 26, 1564. His supposed birth date of April 23 is based on the Elizabethan custom of baptizing a child three days after its birth. It is generally thought that he attended a local Grammar school, where he studied Latin rhetoric, logic, and literature.



At the age of 18, he married Anne Hathaway, a local farmer's daughter eight years his senior. Some scholars speculate that the marriage was an unhappy one and that Shakespeare was forced to marry Hathaway because she was pregnant. The birth of their first daughter, Susannah, six months after their marriage lends some weight to the claim, as does Shakespeare's leaving her his "second best bed" in his will. Their twins Judith and Hamnet, named after friends, were born in 1585. It is thought that Shakespeare began his theatrical

career in London sometime around 1589. He was already well established when plague closed theatres in 1592. During the two years theatres were closed, he wrote book-length narrative poetry. *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece* were written during this time and were dedicated to the Earl of Southampton, presumed to be a friend and/or benefactor. Shakespeare also began writing *The Sonnets* during this hiatus from the theatre.

Theatres reopened in 1594, and he resumed writing plays. Hamnet died two years later in 1596. Shakespeare appears to have written for and acted with several companies before joining the Chamberlain's Men, with whom he remained for the remainder of his career. In 1599 the Chamberlain's Men built the Globe Theatre with Shakespeare as a partner in the enterprise. When Queen Elizabeth died and was succeeded by King John of Scotland in 1603, the Chamberlain's Men renamed themselves the King's Men.

Shakespeare apparently wrote little after 1612. The Globe Theatre caught fire and burned to the ground during a performance of *Henry VIII* in 1613. Sometime between 1610 and 1613, Shakespeare retired to a large house, properties and moderate wealth in Stratford-upon-Avon. He died in 1616 on what is presumed to be his birthday, April 23, at the exact age of 52. He was buried at Holy Trinity Church, where he was also baptized.

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Wells, Stanley. *Shakespeare for All Time*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003.

Wood, Michael. *Shakespeare*. New York: Basic Books, 2003.

Other Works

Plays

The Comedies

All's Well That Ends Well, ca. 1602-3

As You Like It, ca. 1599

The Comedy of Errors, ca. 1593

Love's Labour's Lost, ca. 1594-95

Measure for Measure, ca. ca. 1604

The Merchant of Venice, ca. 1596-97

The Merry Wives of Windsor, ca. 1597

A Midsummer Night's Dream, ca. 1595-96

Much Ado About Nothing, ca. 1598-99

The Taming of the Shrew, ca. 1593-94

Troilus and Cressida, ca. 1601-2

Twelfth Night, ca. 1601-2

The Two Gentlemen of Verona, ca. 1592-93

The Histories

Henry IV, Part 1, ca. 1596-97

Henry IV, Part 2, ca. 1598

Henry V, ca. 1599

Henry VI, Part 1, ca. 1589-90

Henry VI, Part 2, ca. 1590-91

Henry VI, Part 3, ca. 1590-91

Henry VII, ca. 1612-13

King John, ca. 1594-96

Richard II, ca. 1595

Richard III, ca. 1592-93

The Tragedies

Anthony and Cleopatra, ca. 1606

Coriolanus, ca. 1607-8

Hamlet, ca. 1600-1601

Julius Caesar, ca. 1599

King Lear, ca. 1605

Macbeth, ca. 1606

Othello, ca. 1604

Romeo and Juliet, ca. 1595-96

Timon of Athens, ca. 1607-8

Titus Andronicus, ca. 1593-94

The Romances

Cymbeline, ca. 1609-10

Pericles, ca. 1607-8

The Tempest, ca. 1611

The Winter's Tale, ca. 1610-11

Disputed

Using textual and historical evidence, some critics identify Shakespeare as the author of all or parts of these plays, but there is not a definitive consensus. *The Two Noble Kinsmen's* attribution is the most confident.

The Two Noble Kinsmen, ca. 1613

The Reign of King Edward the Third, c.a. 1596

Sir Thomas Moore, c.a. 1590-1593

Poetry

A Funeral Elegy by W.S., ca. 1612

A Lover's Complaint, c.a. 1591

The Passionate Pilgrim, 1599

The Phoenix and the Turtle, ca. 1601

The Rape of Lucrece, ca. 1593-94

The Sonnets, ca. 1593-1609

Venus and Adonis, ca. 1592-93

Media Versions

Audiocassette

The Merchant of Venice, Harpercollins, 1991

CD

The Merchant of Venice, Audio Partners, 2005

The Merchant of Venice (Stratford Festival), CBC Audio, 2002

DVD/VHS

William Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice, Sony, 2004

The Merchant of Venice, Image Entertainment, 2001

Large Print

The Merchant of Venice, Ulverscroft Large Print, 1991

General Objectives

1. To read a William Shakespeare comedy.
2. To navigate difficult/unfamiliar language.
3. To develop critical reading, thinking, and writing skills.
4. To access multiple readings.
5. To follow and understand divergent thematic threads.
6. To visualize the staging of a play.
7. To track intertextual references.
8. To note and understand various rhetorical devices.
9. To deploy literary terminology.
10. To gain a deeper appreciation of literature through close-reading and analysis.

Specific Objectives

1. To discuss the religious tensions in the play.
2. To compare Antonio and Shylock.
3. To track the webs of obligation between the characters.
4. To analyze the play's presentation of law.
5. To perform significant sections of the play.
6. To contrast the text with the film version.
7. To discuss Portia's significance as a female character.
8. To address Shylock as a problematic character.
9. To track the play's social hierarchy.
10. To locate the play in a socio-temporal context.

Literary Terms and Applications

Iambic Pentameter a meter comprised of five iambs. "Iambic" refers to the metric "feet" or units, each iamb being an unaccented syllable followed by an accented one. "Pentameter" means that each line is comprised of five iambic feet, or ten syllables alternating unaccented/accented. Much of *The Merchant of Venice* is written in iambic pentameter. For example, "Too long a pause for that which you find there" [*italics mine*] (87)

Plot the temporal progression of events throughout a piece of literature or a specific, easily delineated progression of events. *The Merchant of Venice* contains three interlocking plots: the

Antonio/Shylock conflict, the choosing of the caskets, and the ring plot. Taken as a whole, the comprise the plot of the play; taken independently each comprises a plot.

Staging the actual production of a play on stage. Staging involves placement of characters, design of the set and stage, movement of actors, lighting, sound, and costuming. As with other plays, Shakespeare provides very little specific direction for the staging of *The Merchant of Venice*. This ambiguity both frustrates novice readers and encourages inventive productions. Watching clips of a performance of the play should provide ample fodder for a discussion for the performative possibilities inherent in the text.

Cross-Curricular Sources

DVD/VHS

Hamlet, Castle Rock, 1996
Henry V, MGM, 1989
Much Ado About Nothing, MGM, 1993
Othello, Turner Home Entertainment, 1995
Romeo and Juliet, Morningstar, 1993
Romeo + Juliet, 20th Century Fox, 1996
Shakespeare in Love, Miramax, 1999
Twelfth Night, Image Entertainment, 1996

Internet

British Library: Shakespeare in Quarto
<http://prodigi.bl.uk/treasures/shakespeare/search.asp>

Online copies of original quartos.

Folger Shakespeare Library: Lesson Plans Archive
<http://www.folger.edu/eduLesPlanArch.cfm?cid=#47>

Lesson plans, including a study of artistic representations of Shylock

Three Scenes, Three Societies, Three Shylocks
<http://www.shakespearemag.com/spring97/dakin.asp>

A lesson plan

Web English Teacher: *The Merchant of Venice*:
 Lesson Plans and Other Teaching Ideas
<http://www.webenglishteacher.com/merchant.html>

Lessons Plans, including links to historical context

Literature

Apollinius of Rhodes, *Argonautica*

The Bible, Genesis 27, 30:25-43; Luke 8:27-43, 18:9-14; Matthew 5.22; 8.28-32 Cited passages in the play.

Chaucer, *Prioress's Tale*

Dante, *Inferno*, Caantos 5-7

Euripides, *Heracles*

Fred D'Aguiar, "Pyramus and Thisbe," *After Ovid: New Metamorphoses*

Alexandre Dumas, *The Count of Monte Cristo*

Homer, *The Iliad*, *The Odyssey*

Pär Lagerkvist, *Barabbas*

Christopher Marlowe, *The Jew of Malta*

Ovid, "Pyramus and Thisbe," *The Metamorphoses*, Book IV

Thomas Mann, "Death in Venice"

Edmund Waller, "The Story of Phoebus and Daphne Applied Song"

Nonfiction

"Brothers and Others," *The Dyer's Hand*, W.H. Auden

The History of the Jewish People, H.H. Ben-Sasson

Imagining Shakespeare: A history of Text and Visions, Stephen Orgel

Poetics, Aristotle

Reference

The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Film, Ed. Russell Jackson

The Reader's Encyclopedia of Shakespeare, Ed. Oscar James Campbell

Shakespeare's Bawdy, Eric Partridge

The Shakespeare Book of Lists, Michael LoMonico

Shakespeare's Language: A Glossary of Unfamiliar Words in His Plays and Poems, Eugene F. Shewmaker

Teaching

The Chortling Bard!: Caught'ya Grammar with a Giggle for High School, Jane Bell Kiester

Theatre

Secrets of Acting Shakespeare: The Original Approach, Patrick Tucker

Shakespeare: An Illustrated Stage History, Eds. Jonathan Bate and Russell Jackson

Shakespeare in Sable: A History of Black Shakespearean Actors, Errol Hill

Shakespeare's Globe Playhouse: A Modern Reconstruction in Text and Scale Drawings, Irwin Smith

Staging in Shakespeare's Theatres, Andrew Gurr and Mariko Ichikawa

This Wooden 'O': Shakespeare's Globe Reborn, Barry Day

Themes and Motifs

Themes

- love
- greed
- revenge
- legalism
- litigiousness
- fortune
- religion
- prejudice
- friendship
- choice

Motifs

- cross-dressing women
- prodigal sons and daughters
- religious conflict and discrimination
- absent fathers
- binding contracts

Meaning Study

1. In sooth I know not why I am so sad. (p.7)
(Antonio opens the play complaining of an inexplicable sadness. He rejects Solanio and Salarino's suggestion that his mind is burdened by the fate of his trading expeditions. His "Fie, fie!" in response to Solanio's suggestion that he is in love appears to be scornful rejection, but as the play progresses one wonders whether Antonio's sadness is in response to Bassanio's plans to marry Portia. In contrast to other characters, Antonio does not end the play happy. Aside from Shylock, the other main characters end wed, wealthy, and happy.)
2. Who chooseth me must give and hazard all he hath. (p.75)
(This line is the inscription on the lead chest, the one bearing Portia's portrait and thus awarding her hand in marriage. The Prince of Morocco and Arragon both refuse to "give and hazard," while Bassanio chooses this casket with a minimum of deliberation. It is interesting to note that those who reject the chest actually have wealth to give or hazard, while Bassanio has only debts to give. Since Bassanio's net worth is

negative, the inscription, read literally, is a promise of wealth. Bassanio's actual intentions in marrying Portia are often ambiguous, alternating between protestations of love and admiration of her wealth.)

3. I could teach you
How to choose right, but then I am forsworn.
So will I never be. So you may miss me. (103)
(Portia asks Bassanio to delay choosing a casket because she will be deprived of his company, if he chooses incorrectly. Portia's feelings for Bassanio are never as ambiguous as his for her. She contemplates "teaching" him how to choose right, but rejects the notion instantly. This fidelity is another example of the binding nature of contracts in the play. Portia would rather lose the opportunity to marry a man she has affection for than break her dead father's contract. Her strict fidelity to the rules of an agreement here illuminate both her role as Balthazar the lawyer and her displeasure with Bassanio for breaking their agreement by giving away her ring.)

4. We are Jasons, we have won the Fleece!
(p. 119)
(Gratiano celebrates his and Bassanio's fortunes at Belmont and compares their success to Jason's. In the myth, Jason seeks the Golden Fleece, and returns with both the fleece and a wife, Medea. Here, if Portia's wealth may be considered the Fleece, the wife and the fleece are one. This line is not the only comparison of Portia to the Golden Fleece. Bassanio makes a similar comparison: "her sunny locks / Hang on her temples like a golden fleece And many Jasons come in quest of her" (19) and compares her portrait in the lead casket to a "golden mesh" (111) A generous reading would give equal status to wealth and woman in Bassanio's Golden Fleece, while a more jaundiced eye would suppose he values the former over the latter. It is interesting that Portia begins the play completely passive, an object to be pursued, unable to refuse the man who chooses the correct chest, while she later becomes a principal active force, liberating Antonio and chastising Bassanio.)

5. The Duke cannot deny the course of law,
For the commodity that strangers have

With us in Venice, if it be denied,
Will much impeach the justice of the state,
Since that the trade and profit of the city
Consisteth of all nations. (126-7)

(Antonio is here explaining to Solanio why the Duke cannot simply dismiss Shylock's case. Venice is a merchant city, a nexus of trade. Its economy is dependent upon the trust "strangers" have in its legal system. The Duke cannot risk debasing the legal system that appears to be the foundation that guarantees foreign trust and thus trade. Portia makes a similar point in IV:1 when, as Balthazar, she refuses to dismiss the case for fear of setting a bad precedent that would be emulated and thus amplified.)

6. I pray you, think you question with the Jew.
You may as well go stand upon the beach
And bid the main flood bate his usual height;
You may as well question with the wolf
Why he hath made the ewe [bleat] for the lamb;
You may as well forbid the mountain pines
To wag their high tops and to make no noise
When they are fretten with the gusts of heaven;
You may as well do anything most hard
As seek to soften that than which what's
harder?—
His Jewish heart. (p. 145)
(This passage is particularly dependent upon performance for meaning. It hinges on how the word "Jew" is used. It can be 1) a simple description 2) a title or 3) an epithet. If "Jew" here is a description or title, then the rest of the passage primarily indicates Antonio's resignation to Shylock's unrelenting quest for vengeance. It treats Shylock as an individual and his adamant resolution as a personal trait. However, the "Jewish heart" and textual clues elsewhere argue for "Jew" as epithet, a slur. In that light, this passage still reveals Antonio's resignation to his fate, but it is also an example of his anti-semitism, which is a contributing factor to instigating Shylock's thirst for revenge. This read treats Shylock as something other than himself; it transforms him into an example of Jews-in-general, and so the passage claims that Jews generally, and Shylock as a specific Jew, have hard hearts. It also implicitly places them

as something other than human, since the figurative language used to describe the process of reasoning with Shylock uses nonhuman terms of comparison: tides, wolves, pines, wind. Furthermore, the wolf/lamb analogy is particularly powerful in this Jew/Christian context. If Christians consider themselves lambs, while Jesus or God is the Shepard, and Shylock here is a wolf, the implication is that Jews are agents opposed to goodness.)

7. The quality of mercy is not strained.
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath. It is twice blest:
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes ...

Therefore, Jew,
Though justice be thy plea, consider this:
That in the course of justice none of us
Should see salvation. (p. 155)

(Portia, disguised as Balthazar the lawyer, tries to sway Shylock to mercy in court. Several things are happening here. First, on the literal level Portia makes a strange argument. She argues that, since, according to Christian doctrine, salvation is a form of mercy because no human is justly deserving of it, Shylock should emulate the Christian God by granting mercy to Antonio. It is unclear why she thinks that such a line of reasoning would be compelling to a non-Christian. Therefore one assumes that she is speaking primarily for the benefit of 1) the court audience 2) the play's audience or 3) both. Since she knows that Shylock will shortly be at Antonio's mercy, she could also be addressing Antonio.

This passage is also interesting in light of the later ring plot. If Bassanio and Gratiano are essentially on trial in act V for giving away their wives' rings, then Portia's comments here about the necessity of mercy come back to be correct-ed. If Shylock refuses mercy its proper course, then Portia and Nerissa "correct" this error of judgment in their trial of their husbands.)

8. Antonio, I am married to a wife
Which is as dear to me as life itself,
But life itself, my wife, and all the world
Are not with me esteemed above thy life.
I would lose all, ay, sacrifice them all
Here to this devil, to deliver you. (p. 161)
(Bassanio, addressing Antonio, swears that his

wife is less dear to him than Antonio's life. Portia, overhearing this, offers a pointed aside: "You wife would give you little thanks for that / If she were by to hear you make the offer." This exchange may perhaps be seen as the legitimate beginning of the ring plot. Although the rings have been given and promises exchanged earlier, one imagines that Portia here first decides to test Bassanio's devotion to her. Antonio here is a direct threat to Portia. The nature of the "love" between Antonio and Bassanio is ambiguous throughout the play. Whether it is a homoerotic relationship or not, the closeness of their "love" can easily be perceived as a threat to Portia's hold on her husband, as echoed later in act V. The "devil" in reference to Shylock here is reminiscent of Antonio's wolf/lamb analogy.)

9. I am content. (p. 169)
(Shylock has just been forced to give half his wealth to his bitter enemy, will his remaining wealth to the man who stole his daughter, and convert to the religion of those who have persecuted him. The conversion to Christianity is more than the loss of his religious identity; it is also the loss of his occupation, since as a Christian he would not be able to practice usury. In spite of these dire circumstances, Shylock says, "I am content." He is nothing, if not consistent. Earlier he says "My deeds upon my head" in response to Portia's call for mercy. Here, after the roles are reversed, he does not beg for mercy. Instead he accepts the law's decision.)
10. Let not that doctor e'er come near my house!
Since he hath got a jewel that I loved,
And that which you did swear to keep for me,
I will become as liberal as you:
I'll not deny him anything I have (p. 197)
(Here Portia and Nerissa, in a reversal of the previous act, place Bassanio and Gratiano on trial for having given away the rings that they had sworn to keep. If this trial is indeed a reversal of Shylock's, then it illuminates Shylock's intentions in taking Antonio's bond. Nerissa and Portia intentionally solicit the rings from their husbands. In light of this and of Jessica's comments about Shylock's intentions, one assumes that, despite the possible ambiguous readings, Shylock always intended to collect a pound of

Antonio's flesh, despite his insistence that the stipulation is a merry jest. The resolution of the ring trial is twofold. First, Antonio places himself in bond to Portia to exonerate Bassanio, thereby eliminating his threat to their relationship. Second, the women display a form of mercy, returning the rings and resealing the vows, then leading their husbands offstage with sexual promises.)

Comprehension Study

- List significant transformations in the play's characters.
(Each major female character, Portia, Nerissa, and Jessica, become married and also temporarily transform into men. Similarly, Lorenzo, Bassanio, and Gratiano all are wed. Jessica and Bassanio, both prodigals, are cleared of debts and guaranteed wealth. Conversely, the Princes of Morocco and Arragon become bound to be permanent bachelors. Lancelet quits employment with Shylock to become Bassanio's servant and in doing so becomes a clown. Shylock is ruined and forcibly converted to Christianity. Only Antonio is left unchanged.)
- Discuss the roles of fathers in the play.
(The fathers in *The Merchant of Venice* are mostly absent. The most influential father figure is Portia's, who is dead. Old Gobbo, Lancelet's father, fails to recognize him. Shylock, the only other father prominently present in the play, soon becomes a father in absentia when Jessica elopes. It is never clear whether he is more distressed by her elopement or her theft of his gold and jewels. One assumes that the other characters had, at one point, fathers, but they fail to mention them.
The children are little more attentive than their fathers. Lancelet plays tricks on his blind father, Bassanio makes references to his prodigal youth, and Jessica robs her father and confesses shame of him. Portia, however, honors her father's will by adhering to the rules of the chest-game. It is curious that the most conspicuously absent father exerts the most influence on his child and on the play's plot.)
- How is Shylock presented as an outsider?
(As many critics have observed, Shylock is the ultimate outsider in Venice. He is isolated emotionally, socially, and physically. He is differentiated by his

dress, his "Jewish gabardine" that Antonio has been known to spit on. He lives in a different section of Venice. In act I, he refuses to eat with Christians because of Jewish dietary restrictions. None of the other characters recognize him as a full human. They substitute "Jew" for his name in direct address, revile him, and persecute him. Even his daughter emotionally distances herself from him. The text itself differentiates him. While other characters often speak in verse, Shylock's lines are straight prose.)

- List the three main plot lines and how they are connected.
(The three main plots of *The Merchant of Venice* are 1) the pound of flesh plotline 2) Portia's casket plot and 3) the ring plot. None span across the entire play. The pound of flesh plot begins in Act I and is resolved in Act IV. Portia's caskets are introduced in Act I and solved in Act III. The ring plot begins in Act III and is resolved in Act V.)
While the plots are all connected by common characters, the main link is thematic. Each involves a kind of bond. Antonio borrows money from Shylock on Bassanio's behalf, and thereby initiates the events that will culminate with Shylock demanding a pound of flesh as promised in the bond. In the casket plot, both Portia and her suitors are bound by a strict agreement. She must agree to wed whomever opens the correct casket, and they promise to leave the island immediately, never speak of which casket they chose, nor seek to marry again, if they choose incorrectly. In the ring plot, Portia and Nerissa seal the contract of marriage with a binding promise of a ring, which Bassanio and Gratiano promptly break. Only Portia's plot line of the caskets involves no breach of contract. In all of these plots, the contract is elevated above the characters and is presented as inviolable.)
- Compare/contrast Portia with Jessica.
(Jessica is, in many ways, the inverse of Portia. Portia honors her absent father's will by submitting herself to his caskets. Jessica disobeys her present father's will by stealing his caskets. Portia treasures the ring she gives to Bassanio, who gives it away. Jessica squanders the ring that her father treasures on a monkey. Portia's husband is selected by her absent father's will. Jessica chooses her husband in spite of her present father's will.)

6. In Act IV, Scene 1, when Portia first addresses the court, why does she ask, "Which is the merchant here? And which the Jew?"
(On the surface this query can be dismissed as a formality of the proceedings. It seems unlikely that Antonio and Shylock would resemble one another physically, since one assumes that Shylock is garbed in his gabardine. However, this seemingly irrelevant moment of confusion can be read to indicate a more significant similarity between the two men, a closeness of spirit. Both harbor an unreasonable hatred of the other. Both revile the other's occupation and religion. Both have pursued that hatred to unreasonable ends. Neither is particularly admirable, nor innocent. In this light, one wonders to whom her "mercy" speech is directed. Since her appeal to Christian values would have little effect on Shylock, it may be that she is indirectly appealing to Antonio, whom she, and only she, knows will shortly have Shylock at his mercy and would be inclined to seek vengeance.)
7. Contrast the ideas of mercy and justice in the play.
(Generally, "justice" can here refer to the stringent legalism that pervades every portion of the play. Contracts are considered inviolable, greater than their signatories. This is most evident in the pound of flesh plot. Shylock is allowed to pursue his unreasonable request in public and within the law. He sharpens his knife with full intent to cut a pound of flesh from Antonio's chest in a courtroom, and this is allowed because it is in accordance with the letter of the law, though not its spirit. Conversely, Shylock's quest is defeated in the only manner possible in accordance with the play's internal logic: according to the letter of the contract. In this world where the letter of the law is supreme, it is perhaps unsurprising that Shylock, once convinced of the law, accepts his ruin with a minimum of complaint. Mercy, then, is the counterpoint to this exacting justice, the only loophole. This is, in part, a reflection of an understood divine justice tempered by mercy.)
8. Is *The Merchant of Venice* a comedy?
*(The categorization of *The Merchant of Venice* is problematic. It bears the hallmarks of a Shakespearean comedy. The women cross-dress, most everyone gets married, and the ending is, for its principal characters, a happy*

one. However, it is difficult to read Shylock as a comic character. If this is a comedy, then one supposes that Shylock is there to be laughed at, which is impossible with a post-modern sensibility. It has been argued that an Elizabethan audience, steeped in anti-semitic sentiments, would easily have laughed at Shylock's mannerisms and eventual downfall, but this argument is unconvincing because Shylock's counterpart, Antonio, is no more admirable than he. They feed off one another's faults. It is perhaps, then, no wonder that Antonio is largely excluded from the happy ending, unwed, with only the safe arrival of three ships to console him of his ostensible loss of Bassanio's direct affection. If there is a comic foil here, it is a set of characters: Antonio and Shylock.)

9. Why do the female characters cross-dress?
(Dressing as men allows the female characters autonomy in a male-dominated society. When they don men's clothing, they assume male power and privilege. Jessica dresses as a boy to escape her father's sway and to be able to move freely through Venice. Portia's disguise is more daring. Dressed as a young man, she exerts judgment in a court, unthinkable for a woman in that time. Nerissa, one assumes, dresses as a man because Portia does. It is interesting that, though the women begin the play powerless, they exert more influence than the men. Portia begins the play unable to deny her father's will or choose a husband. By the end of the play, she has effected Antonio's salvation, ruined Shylock, and neatly chastised Bassanio.)
10. List the various social, emotional, and contractual obligations of each main character.
(Antonio is contractually bound to Shylock, bound in love to Bassanio, and eventually indebted to Portia both for his deliverance in court and for his insistence that Bassanio give up his ring. Bassanio is indirectly beholden to Shylock, directly beholden to Antonio in both affection and money, married to Portia, friend to Gratiano, and master to Lancelet. As Gratiano is Bassanio's man, he is married to Nerissa, Portia's lady-in-waiting. Portia begins the play obligated to follow her father's precise instructions, then later her wealth and person are merged with Bassanio's in marriage. Shylock begins the play as the master of a contractual bond and ends it being forced to will

his goods to Jessica and Lorenzo. No character escapes the intricate web of obligations, which is, in many ways, the play's main focus.)

How Language Works

1. The Prince of Arragon's arrogance is evident in both his choice of casket and in his reasoning: "I will not choose what many men desire, / Because I will not jump with common spirits / And rank me with the barbarous multitudes" (p. 85).
2. Bassanio dismisses Gratiano: "His reasons are as / two grains of wheat hid in two bushels of chaff" (p. 15). This line, in conjunction with his admonition to Gratiano warning him to behave on Belmont, characterizes Gratiano as much as Gratiano's own lines. While Gratiano does, indeed, speak "an infinite deal of nothing," he also serves as a reflection of Bassanio, just as Nerissa serves as a reflection of Portia.
3. The Prince of Morocco's opening lines to Portia continue the play's theme of Difference: "Mislike me not for my complexion" (p. 43). Portia, however, appears to dislike him for that very reason, just as Antonio dislikes Shylock because he is a Jew.
4. The humor of the interaction between the Gobbos and Bassanio is largely generated by malapropisms, such as "He hath a great infection . . . to serve," "shall fruitify unto you," "the suit is impertinent to myself," (p. 53), and "That is the very defect of the matter" (p. 55). This misuse of language 1) generates humor by incongruity and 2) locates the Gobbos within a less educated class than Bassanio, thus illustrating the master/servant relationship.
5. Dr. Bellanio's letter to the court hints at his full participation in Portia's ruse: "I never knew so young a body with so old a head" (pp.152-3). Ostensibly the line is a metaphor, claiming that "Balthazar" has wisdom beyond his years. However, if Dr. Bellanio has conspired with Portia and supplied her with his legal insight, then the "old" head would be his.
6. Gratiano ends the play with an oft debated line: "Well, while I live, I'll fear no other thing / So sore as keeping safe Nerissa's ring" (p. 203).

At a glance, Gratiano seems to be ruing his chastisement for having lost her ring and plans to keep it safe to avoid like treatment in the future. However, "ring" here could also refer to Nerissa's vagina, in which case Gratiano fears Nerissa's threatened cuckoldry more than her displeasure itself. This line could also be a reference to an earlier story about a man with a magic ring to ensure his wife's fidelity.

DVD Discussion Questions

These discussion questions will help students relate the film to the play and to develop alternate understandings of the text. They are divided by DVD chapter and reference the 2004 *William Shakespeare's Merchant of Venice* edition (Sony). The scenes from the play will be listed; these are not always in the original order.

General Questions

- How does the film's presentation of the play affect your understanding of religious conflicts in the plot?
- Does hearing passages spoken change your understanding of their literal or figurative meaning?
- How does body language interact with the spoken word?
- Does the setting and costuming match your visualization from the play?
- Many scenes are edited, with much text excised. Why? And how does this affect the plot?
- Some lines are changed to be easier to understand. Do you agree with this? Did you notice?
- How do staging and motion affect the literal meaning of the lines?

Chapter 1

- Is this introductory text an apology for or an explanation of the play?
- How does it affect your interpretation of the play and of Shylock?
- Does the "religious fanatics" apply to any of the characters, or is it a general statement about the historical context?
- Why is Antonio shown spitting on Shylock?

Chapter 2 (I:1)

- Why are Jessica and Shylock shown in Synagogue?
- How does this extra visual information affect the plot?
- Note that "ague" is changed to "fever" in I:1:25
- How does the visual information frame the relationship between Antonio and Bassanio?

Chapter 3 (I:1, I:2)

- Does Antonio seem unhappy at Bassanio's intentions to woo a woman?
- What are the implication of their body language?
- Their kiss seems to imply a certain homoeroticism. Is this supported in the text?
- Does Nerissa's delivery of her explanation of Portia's father's reasoning behind the caskets imply humor?
- Note the staging of the suitors with a voiceover. Does this change your experience of Portia's descriptions?

Chapter 4 (I:3)

- Note the word play on "rats" and "pirates" in I:3:23-25.

Chapter 5 (I:3, II:1)

- Does Shylock seem sincere in his offer of friendship? Shylock is holding a package of meat while they speak. Does this imply that his stipulation of a pound of meat in the bond is a whimsical addition, spurred by context? Note the situational humor in II:1:10. How does the presence of Morocco's followers change the context of his lines?

Chapter 6 (II:2)

- Note the changes in chronology. What effect do these have? How is the friendship between Bassanio and Gratiano typified in the performance? How is Gratiano personified visually? Is the humor of the Gobbos' presentation to Bassanio more pronounced when performed? Note examples of concrete comedy, such as plays on Old Gobbo's blindness.

Chapter 7 (II:3, II:5)

- Note the use of the mirror in Jessica's monologue. Does this explain why she is ostensibly speaking to herself? Why does the film skip from II:3 to II:5?

Chapter 8 (II:7)

- Why is II:6 skipped? How is Morocco characterized by his mannerisms and speech patterns? Does the film portray him in a particularly bellicose manner? How does the film dramatize the opening of the chest?

Chapter 9 (II:4, II:6, II:8)

- These scenes have been collapsed. Does that simplify a literal understanding of the plot? Why is Jessica discouraged from dropping the chest of gold from the window? Is that in the play? Note the use of II:8. Speech attributed to Antonio is put directly in his mouth, and lines describing Shylock are used as a voiceover.

Chapter 10 (II:8, II:9)

- How do the Prince of Arragon's mannerisms characterize him? Do they elaborate upon character faults implicit in his lines?

Chapter 11 (III:1)

- Note the changes in Shylock's demeanor. Does this change suggest that his original claim that the bond for a pound of flesh was is good humor? How does the performance of the "Hath not a Jew eyes?" speech affect your understanding of the play and of its attitude towards Jews? Is Shylock presented as a villain or a victim here?

Chapter 12 (III:1)

Does Shylock seem more concerned about his money or Jessica?
The flashes to Jessica seem to confirm Tubal's rumors. Is this implied in the text?

Chapter 13 (II:9, III:2)

Why is Portia's speech to Bassanio changed into a monologue voiceover?
How is music used to set the tone of the scene?
How is the romance between Portia and Bassanio and between Nerissa and Gratiano displayed in body language?

Chapter 14 (III:2)

Note the contextual meaning of "to give and to receive" in III:2:143.
Note how the visual context forefronts the bawdy jest in "stake down" in III:2:221.

Chapter 15 (III:2)

Does Jessica's warning about Shylock imply 1) that she has seen him since she eloped or 2) that Shylock always intended to collect his bond?

Chapter 16 (III:3)

Literally what is happening in this scene? Is Antonio imprisoned?

Chapter 17 (III:4, V:1)

Note the transfer of a pouch as a symbol of Portia's leaving Lorenzo in charge of her estate.
Why is Balthazar excluded from the film and Portia shown meeting directly with Dr. Bellanio?
Why is the chronology of the conversation between Jessica and Lorenzo changed?

Chapter 18 (IV:1)

Discuss the further changes in Shylock's demeanor.
Note the interactions between the crowd and Shylock. Do they set a mood? Do they describe the public's stance on his suit? Do they heighten dramatic tension?
Note the dramatic timing of Bassanio's late arrival. During the entire court scene, note the pronunciation of "Jew." Is it pronounced as a description, a title, or as an epithet?
Does Antonio appear resigned?

Chapter 19 (IV:1)

How is Shylock's knife used as a prop to heighten the tension of the scene?
Note the pronunciation of "dearly bought" from IV:1:101.
Does it make Shylock seem less vicious and more bereaved?
When Nerissa enters disguised as the lawyer's assistant, do

you recognize her?

Chapter 20 (IV:1)

When Portia enters disguised as the lawyer, do you recognize her?
Does the delivery of Portia's "mercy" speech (IV:1:190-212) change your understanding of the passage?

Chapter 21 (IV:1)

Antonio's fainting and being tied down are extra-textual visual insertions. How do they function in this scene?

Chapter 22 (IV:1)

Note the dramatization of timing.

Chapter 23 (IV:1)

Is Shylock's demeanor convincing here? Is he upset because he can't have Antonio's flesh?

Chapter 24 (IV:1)

Does the performance indicate a moment of remorse or introspection on Shylock's part?
Shylock is differentiated from "citizens" as an "alien." Does he look different from other characters? How is he visually set apart?
Someone in a red hat spits on Shylock as he leaves the court. Does the red hat signify that this person is a Jew? And, if so, does this subtle image allow the film to make Shylock an individual, instead of representative of all Jews?

Chapter 25 (IV:1, IV:2)

Does Antonio appear attracted to Portia disguised as a man? From the performance, can you tell why she wants Bassanio's ring?

Chapter 26 (V:1)

Note the lighting. How does it set the scene's mood?
Do Nerissa and Portia appear to be genuinely angry?
How are the actors for Portia/Bassanio and Nerissa/Gratiano paired in appearance and mannerism?

Chapter 27 (V:1)

Note how the performance renders the "mending of highways" comment intelligible (V:1:282-283)
Note how the tension of the women's displeasure creates humor when it is broken. Is this evident in the text?
Are Portia's final lines a sexual invitation?
Is Bassanio's comment about "keeping safe Nerissa's ring" a sexual pun?

Chapter 28

Why is Antonio left alone? Does he appear sad?
Why is Shylock shown outside a Synagogue? What is the symbolism of the doors being closed on him?

Across the Curriculum

Drama

1. Choose one character and read his or her lines aloud. Make a list of defining characteristics and discuss the character in relation to the themes of the play and the other characters.
2. Act out scenes from the play. Discuss the difference between reading the play and experiencing it. Identify elements of the play that seem primarily literary or theatrical. Does hearing the play spoken clarify the meaning of difficult passages?
3. Attend a stage production of *The Merchant of Venice*. Discuss the relationship between the play as read and as performed, specifically the role of text as notes for a performance. Does seeing the play performed change your understanding of the play?
4. Rewrite Shylock's "Hath not a Jew eyes?" to reflect contemporary experience and speech patterns and then perform it in class. Where would the scene be set? Instead of Jews and Christians, what groups would it compare? Does the transformation change the meaning of the passage?
5. Research and make an oral presentation on The Globe Theatre. Explain the Elizabethan theatrical experience, the history of the Globe, its reconstruction, and Elizabethan theatrical practices.

Gender Studies

1. Analyze each character in relation to gender stereotypes. Are they portrayed as stereotypically masculine or feminine. Do any of the characters act in a manner not commonly associated with their biological gender?
2. In a chalk talk, explain the social role of women in Elizabethan England. What were their rights? How were they defined? How was their experience different from men's? Does Juliet conform to Elizabethan expectations of young women?
3. Examine every reference to sexual activity in the play. Are there multiple views on sexuality in the play? What is the dominant view? Is there a power relation implicit in the play's understanding of sexuality?

4. Research cross-dressing in Shakespeare's plays. Which female characters dress as men? For what reasons? Does cross-dressing allow female characters access to certain kinds of power that they would normally be barred from?

Biography

1. Make a timeline of William Shakespeare's life. Present the timelines and discuss the difficulties in dating certain events and time periods of his life.
2. Research and present the various anti-Stratfordian theories, i.e. the theories that claim that William Shakespeare did not author the plays attributed to him. Include the proffered substitute authors, such as Ben Jonson, Christopher Marlowe, The Earl of Derby, The Earl of Rutland, The Earl of Southampton, The Earl of Essex, Sir Walter Raleigh, Francis Bacon, Queen Elizabeth I, King James, El Spar, and Edward De Vere.

Economics

1. Research usury in the Renaissance and present your findings to the class. What exactly is usury? How did religion shape cultural views of usury? Why did Jews practice usury, and why did Christians persecute them for this? How did Christians shape an environment that encouraged Jews to practice usury?
2. Discuss the practice of borrowing money in contemporary American culture? Why do people borrow money? What types of borrowing do people do? Why is borrowing money necessary for most people?

Journalism

1. Create a newspaper-style crossword puzzle using significant names and words from the play.
2. Compose a review of the play. Examine online and print literary reviews and mimic the general format. Include a plot summary, comparisons to other literary works, and a judgment of its literary merit.
3. Summarize the court scene (IV:1) in an informative news article.

Language

1. Using a computer or program, illustrate a glossary of theatre terms. Include act, actor, backstage, baffle, black box, blackout, casting, centre stage, character, comedy, company, dénouement, dues ex machine, dialogue, director, downstage, dramatic irony, dramatis personae, dress rehearsal, ensemble, entrance, epilogue, exit, exeunt, flashback, forestage, groundling, in the round, melodrama, mime, monologue, morality play, offstage, plot, producer, prologue, props, raked stage, repertoire, satire, scene, scenery, set, soliloquy, stage, stage directions, stage hand, stage left, stage right, tragedy, tragic-comedy, upstage, and wings.
2. Keep a reading journal as you read *The Merchant of Venice*. List every phrase that seems important or particularly aesthetically appealing. Discuss your selections with your classmates.
3. Search the play for shifts in the language. Note rhymes that have shifted (ex: prove/love), words the meaning of which have shifted, words no longer used in common usage, and references no longer familiar to most readers. Discuss the significance of these changes. In what way is literature rooted to the time of its creation and in what ways does it transcend its origin?
4. Examine all of Shylock's lines in the play and determine if there is a substantial shift in his character over the course of the play. Does he enter the contract with Antonio in good faith? Does Jessica's elopement act as a catalyst? Does he appear remorseful after the Duke's verdict? Cite specific textual clues.

Composition

1. Compose an English sonnet (iambic pentameter, rhyme scheme of abab cdcd efef gg) about a topic of your choice. Discuss the experience of writing to such a strict form and use your experience to reevaluate the text of *The Merchant of Venice*.
2. Rewrite the ending of the play as you see fit. What do you change? And why? Discuss your alternate endings in class.
3. Choose two characters from the play and write an essay comparing/contrasting them.

Be sure to consider their personalities, relationships with other characters, family affiliations, actions, attitudes, and functions in the plot. Possible pairings include: Antonio/Shylock, Antonio/Bassanio, Shylock/Tubal, Shylock/Jessica, Portia/Nerissa, Portia/Jessica, Portia/Bassanio, Nerissa/Gratiano, and Dr. Bellanio/Portia's father.

4. Select what you consider to be the most significant scene in the play and write an essay explaining it. Incorporate direct quotes, paraphrases, and MLA style citations.
5. Write a short story about Portia's father and his development of the chest riddle. Did he write the notes in the chests? How did he die? How did he explain/justify the process to Portia?
6. Rewrite an act of the play as a short story, following the actual events of the play as closely as possible. Does rewriting the play change your understanding of the events and/or themes? Do you keep the setting the same, or do you make it contemporary? How do your changes affect the meaning of the act?

Social Studies

1. Research and write an essay explaining anti-Semitism in Elizabethan England and relate your findings to an interpretation of the play. How would Shylock have been viewed by an Elizabethan audience?
2. Make an oral report on Elizabethan currency. Describe each denomination's relative value, material, and approximate contemporary value. Include: penny, pence, shilling, pound, sovereign, royal, noble, angel, crown, half crown, sixpence, groat, threepenny piece, threepenny piece, halfpenny piece, and farthing.
3. Make a pamphlet on Elizabethan fashion, either men's or women's. Include labeled illustrations. For men's fashion, include: cod-piece, shirt, doublet, jerkin, sleeves, ruff, hose, girdle, hat, boots, shoes, and drawers. For women's fashion, include: chemise, bodice, stomacher, gown, sleeves, wings, ruffle, corset, bum-roll, farthingale, tippit, gloves, and shoes.

Medicine

1. Renaissance medicine was often based on an understanding of the four humours: choler, blood, phlegm, and black bile. In a chalk talk, describe the theory of the four humours, their corresponding elements, qualities, and personality traits.
2. Make a medicinal glossary for Elizabethan terms for common illnesses. Include: ague, apoplexy, consumption, dropsy, falling sickness, flux, French pox, gaol fever, green sickness, gripping in the guts, planetstruck, pox, scurvey, spleen, and tympany.

Literature

1. Using the British Library's online archives at <http://prodigi.bl.uk/treasures/shakespeare/s_earch.asp> compare a quarto version of *The Merchant of Venice* to the version you have read. Are there substantial differences in content? Reexamine the role of editors in light of your findings.
2. Research and present Aristotle's theory of drama in the *Poetics*. Does *The Merchant of Venice* follow the criteria strictly, or does it diverge in crucial areas?
3. Track and explain the play's classical and Biblical references, including: Jason, the Golden Fleece, Pyramus and Thisbe, Orpheus, Dido, Sibylla, Janus, Diana, Phoebus, Hercules, Lychas, Alcides, The Fates, Jacob, Hagar, Venus, Mars, Midas, Pythagoras, Daniel, Barabbas, Troilus and Cressida, Medea, Cumae, Aeson, and Erebus.
4. Write an essay about the significance of absent characters in the play, most notably Portia's father, Dr. Bellanio, and Antonio's creditors. What influence do these absent characters have on events of the play? How do they effect this influence in absentia?
5. Compose an essay about the role of fathers in the play. Which are absent? Which are present? Of the fathers present in the play, are any exemplary of paternal instincts?
6. Discuss villains and heroes in the play. Is any character clearly one or the other? List positive and negative traits of each major character. Is Antonio a martyr or a bigot? Is Shylock a villain or a victim?

Art

1. As a group, sketch sets for performance of scenes from the play. Include exact dimensions, scenery, and major props. Discuss the importance of the props and setting to the meaning of the play.
2. Sketch drawings of what you consider to be the most significant moments of the play. Indicate the significance of each drawing in its title. Present and discuss the drawings in class.
3. Transform a section of dialogue from *The Merchant of Venice* into a comic strip. Incorporate stage directions into the drawings. Discuss how you perceive the meaning of the selection you chose.
4. With a group, design a poster advertising a performance. Include graphic art, as well as performance information like location, dates, times, a cast list, and admission prices.

Alternate Assessment

1. Read a critical essay on *The Merchant of Venice* from a peer-reviewed journal and present the critic's views to your class. Summarize the main ideas and provide examples from the text. Afterwards, comment on your opinion of the arguments. Support your opinion with evidence.
2. Discuss the nature of Bassanio and Antonio's relationship. Is it pederastic? Cite specific passages in the play and relevant historical facts in your argument.
3. Read another Shakespeare comedy, and compare it to *The Merchant of Venice*. Are its characters less ambiguous? Is humor generated in the same manner? How does the play treat marriage and other social contracts? Other comedies include: *All's Well That Ends Well*, *As You Like It*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *Love's Labors Lost*, *Measure for Measure*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Troilus and Cressida*, *Twelfth Night*, and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*.
4. As a group, modernize *The Merchant of Venice*. Changes should include the setting, legal and financial terms, names, racial/religious groups, means of transportation, gender roles, etc.

5. Make a character list for *The Merchant of Venice*. Include a map of obligations. Draw lines between each character and note their relationship and obligations. For example, Bassanio is beholden to Antonio directly and Shylock indirectly, married to Portia, friend to Gratiano, master to Lancelot, subject to the Duke, and his relationship to Portia is mirrored in Gratiano's to Nerissa.

Standardized Test Prep

Analogies

Using the following list of common analogy patterns, create a test of twenty analogies. Trade tests with a partner, take them, and then switch back to grade.

Action and Meaning (shiver : cold), Age (puppy : dog), Antonyms (large : small), Cause and Effect (explosive decompression : pulmonary embolism), Class and Member (rodent : rat), Defining Characteristic (genius : intelligence), Definition (visage : expression), Degree (angry : livid), Function (keyboard : typing), Group and Member (whale : pod), Location (sunset : west), Manner (laugh : snicker), Part and Whole (lens : glasses), Relation (father : son), Sex (bull : sow), Symbol and Symbolized (heart : love), Synonyms (happy : merry), Time Sequence (incubate : hatch), Tool and Purpose (knife : cut), Worker and Work (engineer : build), Worker and Place (sailor : ship), Worker and Product (photographer : photograph), Worker and Tool (photographer : camera)

ex: Antonio : Merchant

- a) Jessica : Gold
- b) Antonio : Bassanio
- c) Shylock : Moneylender
- d) Portia : Balthazar

The correct answer is c. Antonio is a merchant, as Shylock is a moneylender. The pattern of analogy is Worker and Work.

Vocabulary

Closely read a scene from the play, and record every word that you do not already know. Look up each word, supply a definition, and determine whether the word is 1) unfamiliar because it is no longer used in contemporary English 2) unfamiliar because its meaning has shifted since the play was written or 3) simply a word that you did not know.

Writing

Compose an essay explaining the following passage. Formulate its main point, explain its progression and reasoning, and note the context and its relevance. You should have an introductory paragraph, three supporting paragraphs, and a conclusion. Cite specific examples in the passage to support your argument.

The quality of mercy is not strained.
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath. It is twice blest:
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.
'Tis the mightiest in the mightiest; it becomes
The Thronèd monarch better than his crown.
His scepter shows the force of temporal power,
The attribute to awe and majesty
Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings;
But mercy is above this sceptered sway.
It is enthronèd in the heart of kings;
It is an attribute to God Himself;
And earthly power doth then show likest God's
When mercy seasons justice. Therefore, Jew,
Though justice be thy plea, consider this:

That in the course of justice none of us
Should see salvation. We do pray for mercy,
And that same prayer doth teach us all to render
The deeds of mercy.

Standardized Test Prep (Page 2)

Critical Reading

Read the following section and circle the most appropriate answer for each question.

1 To bait fish withal; if it will feed nothing else,
it will feed my revenge. He hath disgraced me and
hindered me half a million, laughed at my losses,
mocked at my gains, scorned my nation, thwarted
5 my bargains, cooled my friends, heated mine ene-
mies—and what's his reason? I am a Jew. Hath not
a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimen-
sions, sense, affections, passions? Fed with the
same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to
10 the same diseases, healed by the same means,
warmed and cooled by the same winter and sum-
mer as a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not
bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you
poison us, do we not die? And if you wrong us, shall
15 we not revenge? If we are like you in the rest, we will
resemble you in that. If a Jew wrong a Christian,
what is his humility? Revenge. If a Christian wrong
a Jew, what should his sufferance be by Christian
example? Why, revenge! The villainy you teach me I
20 will execute, and it shall go hard but I will better the
instruction.

- ____ 1. The "He" in line 2 refers to
- a) Antonio
 - b) Bassanio
 - c) the Duke
 - d) Solanio
- ____ 2. The "revenge" in line 15 functions as a(n)
- a) noun
 - b) adjective
 - c) verb
 - d) adverb
- ____ 3. All of the following are true about the passage EXCEPT
- a) Shylock claims to have been persecuted.
 - b) Shylock claims that Christians and Jews are exactly the same.
 - c) Shylock claims to have learned revenge from Christians.
 - d) Shylock intimates that he is justified in his actions.

- ____ 4. The main point of the passage is
- a) Christians and Jews have many similarities.
 - b) Shylock has been wronged by a Christian.
 - c) Christians seek revenge.
 - d) Shylock intends to seek revenge and feels justified in doing so.
- ____ 5. Shylock compares Christians and Jews in all these categories EXCEPT
- a) physical attributes
 - b) vulnerabilities
 - c) physical needs
 - d) mental ability
- ____ 6. "Hindered me half a million" in line 3 means
- a) spoken against him half a million times.
 - b) stolen half a million ducats
 - c) prevented him from making half a million ducats
 - d) obstructed his ability to accomplish a task half a million times
- ____ 7. The "villainy" Shylock claims to be taught in line 19 is
- a) revenge
 - b) religious prejudice
 - c) usury
 - d) personal persecution
- ____ 8. The mood of this passage can best be described as
- a) melancholy
 - b) angry
 - c) reflective
 - d) jealous
- ____ 9. The "it" in line 1 refers to
- a) fish bait
 - b) a pound of Antonio's flesh
 - c) three thousand ducats
 - d) Lorenzo's head and genitals
- ____ 10. "Better" in line 20 is used as a(n)
- a) adverb
 - b) noun
 - c) verb
 - d) adjective

Vocabulary

Circle the definition that best matches how the word is used in the novel.

___ 1. visage

- a) ghost or supernatural vision
- b) the act of seeing
- c) face or facial expression
- d) the act of being seen

___ 2. prodigal

- a) very large
- b) wastefully extravagant
- c) missing, away from home
- d) excessively frugal

___ 3. demure

- a) having to do with the sea or water
- b) oblong, awkward
- c) partially blind
- d) modest and reserved

___ 4. nuptial

- a) resembling a seashell
- b) relating to marriage
- c) quiet, silent
- d) gregarious

___ 5. prolixity

- a) wordiness
- b) physical closeness
- c) humor
- d) ill intentions

___ 6. glister

- a) to blister
- b) to sing
- c) to glisten
- d) to drag

___ 7. elope

- a) to run with long strides
- b) to hunt with a bow
- c) to run away with a lover
- d) to steal or swindle

___ 8. abject

- a) inverted, backwards
- b) very wretched
- c) to denounce
- d) off-center, tilted

___ 9. impugn

- a) to engage in word play
- b) to agree
- c) to lie or cheat
- d) to challenge as false

___ 10. predicament

- a) an unpleasant situation
- b) a contract
- c) a business venture
- d) an external wall

___ 11. obdurate

- a) difficult to see
- b) whimsical
- c) foul tasting
- d) hardhearted

___ 12. dulcet

- a) slow witted
- b) melodious
- c) relating to usury
- d) small of stature

___ 13. obscure

- a) to conceal or hide
- b) to speak with vehemence
- c) to lend or give
- d) to embrace with passion

___ 14. immure

- a) to submerge
- b) to value highly
- c) to imprison
- d) to bend or distort

___ 15. peruse

- a) to dismiss
- b) to ask a question
- c) to spend freely
- d) to read or examine

Comprehension Test A

Part I: Character Identification (30 points)

Name the characters who fit these descriptions.

- _____ 1. demands a pound of flesh
- _____ 2. gives a ring to the lawyer
- _____ 3. elopes with Lorenzo
- _____ 4. becomes Bassanio's servant
- _____ 5. Portia's lady-in-waiting
- _____ 6. chooses the gold chest
- _____ 7. chooses the silver chest
- _____ 8. chooses the lead chest
- _____ 9. spares Shylock's life
- _____ 10. devised the system of chests
- _____ 11. heiress from Belmont
- _____ 12. is blind
- _____ 13. searches for Jessica in Genoa
- _____ 14. disguised as Balthazar's assistant
- _____ 15. insists on accompanying Bassanio to Belmont

Part II: Fact or Opinion (20 points)

Mark the following statements either T for True, F for False, or O for Opinion.

- _____ 1. Shylock intends on exacting a pound of flesh from the beginning.
- _____ 2. The first batch of Portia's suitors leave without choosing a chest.
- _____ 3. Antonio blames Bassanio for his predicament.
- _____ 4. The lawyer determines that Shylock is entitled to a pound of flesh.
- _____ 5. Jessica reputedly trades a ring for a monkey.
- _____ 6. All of Antonio's ships are lost at sea.
- _____ 7. Shylock deserves his punishment.
- _____ 8. Rumors of Portia's wealth turn out to be false.
- _____ 9. Lorenzo flees to England.
- _____ 10. Gratiano gives a ring to the lawyer's assistant.

Comprehension Test A (Page 2)

Part III: Reading Comprehension (20 points)

Formulate the following lines from the play in your own words using the space provided.

1. Why, man, I saw Bassanio under sail;
With him is Gratiano gone along;
And in their ship I am sure Lorenzo is not.

2. A substitute shines brightly as a king
Until a king be by, and then his state
Empties itself as doth an inland brook
Into the main of waters.

3. When he is best he is little worse than a man, and when he is worst he is little better
than a beast.

4. Thou art too wild, too rude and bold of voice—
Parts that become thee happily enough,
And in such eyes as ours appear not faults.
But where thou art not known—why, there they show
Something too liberal.

5. I reasoned with a Frenchman yesterday

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Why does the Duke not dismiss Shylock's case against Antonio?
2. In way ways does Shakespeare present Shylock as a sympathetic character?
3. Argue that the play either is or is not anti-semitic.
4. Why is this play classified as a comedy?
5. Discuss the play's poetic elements.

Comprehension Test B

Part I: Quotation Identification (30 points)

Identify speakers of quotations.

- _____ 1. I am never merry when I hear sweet music.
- _____ 2. A pound of that same merchant's flesh is thine: / The court awards it
- _____ 3. I live upon the rack.
- _____ 4. Tis' a fair hand, / And whiter than the paper it writ on
- _____ 5. He hath a great infection, sir, as one would say, to serve—
- _____ 6. The Hebrew will turn Christian; he grows kind.
- _____ 7. Why, this is like the mending of highways / In summer
- _____ 8. I'll have my bond.
- _____ 9. Thou know'st that all my fortunes are at sea
- _____ 10. Here, catch this casket; it is worth the pains.
- _____ 11. I often came where I did hear of her, but cannot find her.
- _____ 12. Mislike me not for my complexion
- _____ 13. Hanging and wiving goes by destiny.
- _____ 14. How shalt thou hope for mercy, rend'ring none?
- _____ 15. If to do were as easy as to know what were good to do, chapels had been churches

Part II: Short Answer (20 points)

Provide an answer to each of these questions:

- _____ 1. Which women disguise themselves as men?
- _____ 2. List each of Portia's chests and their contents.
- _____ 3. How many of Antonio's ships return safely?
- _____ 4. What interest does Shylock charge on his loan to Antonio?
- _____ 5. What trick do Portia and Nerissa play on their husbands?
- _____ 6. What gift does Old Gobbo give Bassanio?
- _____ 7. Which couples get married/engaged?
- _____ 8. Why is Portia displeased with her father?
- _____ 9. Why does the Prince of Arragon pick the chest he chooses?
- _____ 10. How many ducats does Antonio borrow from Shylock?

Comprehension Test B (Page 2)

Part III: Fill-in (20 points)

Fill in the words that complete each quotation.

1. If you _____ us, do we not bleed? If you _____ us, do we not laugh?
2. The quality of _____ is not strained. / It droppeth like the gentle _____ from heaven
3. the _____ of the father are to be laid upon the _____
4. A _____ where every man must play a part, / And mine a _____ one.
5. The devil can _____ _____ for his purpose!

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Discuss the play's theme of legalism.
2. Compare Bassanio and Portia with Gratiano and Nerissa.
3. Argue that Shylock's sentence either is or is not just.
4. Give a full account of how Portia saves Antonio from Shylock.
5. Discuss the significance of the three chests and inscriptions.

Answer Key

Standardized Test Preparation-Critical Reading

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. A | 6. C |
| 2. C | 7. A |
| 3. B | 8. B |
| 4. D | 9. B |
| 5. D | 10. C |

Vocabulary Test

- | | | |
|------|-------|-------|
| 1. C | 6. C | 11. D |
| 2. B | 7. C | 12. B |
| 3. D | 8. B | 13. A |
| 4. B | 9. D | 14. C |
| 5. A | 10. A | 15. B |

COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Character Identification (30 points)

- | | |
|--------------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Shylock | 9. the Duke |
| 2. Bassanio | 10. Portia's father |
| 3. Jessica | 11. Portia |
| 4. Lancelot Gobbo | 12. Old Gobbo |
| 5. Nerissa | 13. Tubal |
| 6. the Prince of Morocco | 14. Nerissa |
| 7. the Prince of Arragon | 15. Gratiano |

Part II: Fact or Opinion (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. O | 6. F |
| 2. T | 7. O |
| 3. F | 8. F |
| 4. T | 9. F |
| 5. T | 10. T |

Part III: Reading Comprehension (20 points)

1. I saw Bassanio on a ship with Gratiano, and Lorenzo was not with them.
2. A substitute appears genuine, until directly compared.
3. At his best, he is worse than most people. At his worst, he is barely better than an animal. or I do not like him very much.
4. Your behavior is uncontrolled. We don't mind because we know you, but it might offend strangers.
5. I spoke with a Frenchman.

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Quotation Identification (30 points)

- | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Jessica | 9. Antonio |
| 2. Portia as Balthazar | 10. Jessica |
| 3. Bassanio | 11. Tubal |
| 4. Lorenzo | 12. Prince of Morocco |
| 5. Old Gobbo | 13. Nerissa |
| 6. Antonio | 14. Duke |
| 7. Gratiano | 15. Portia |
| 8. Shylock | |

Part II: Short Answer (20 points)

1. Jessica, Portia, Nerissa
2. Gold (skull and note), Silver (fool's portrait, note), Lead (Portia's portrait and note)
3. three
4. none
5. They trick them into giving them the rings they've promised to never lose.
6. a dish of doves
7. Jessica and Lorenzo, Portia and Bassanio, Gratiano and Nerissa
8. His will prevents her from choosing her own husband.
9. He is vain and arrogant.
10. three thousand

Part III: Fill-in (20 points)

1. prick, tickle
2. mercy, rain
3. sins, father
4. stage, sad
5. cite, scripture

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.

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