

# THE MERCHANT OF VENICE



## STUDENT WORKSHEET

### THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

By William Shakespeare

#### OVERVIEW OF THE PLAY

**Key themes:** money, mercy, justice

**Key characters:**

- Antonio: A rich merchant of Venice (the merchant of the play's title) who occasionally lends others money.
- Shylock: Shylock is a Jewish moneylender in Venice and one of Shakespeare's most memorable characters. Widely seen as a villain but does have a human side too!
- Bassanio: Antonio's friend who loves Portia and owes money to Shylock.
- Portia: Beautiful, quick-witted and resourceful – the typical Shakespeare heroine.

#### SYNOPSIS

Antonio, the merchant of Venice, lends three thousand ducats (money used at that time) to his friend Bassanio to help him charm the rich and beautiful Portia of Belmont. But Antonio's own money is invested in business projects so he borrows the money from Shylock, a Jewish moneylender. Shylock lends him the money but says that if he does not pay it back at the right time, he can take a pound of Antonio's flesh.

Portia's father has demanded that she marry the man who makes the correct choice when presented with three caskets, made of gold, silver and lead. Bassanio correctly chooses lead. His friend Gratiano marries Portia's lady-in-waiting Nerissa at the same time.

News arrives that Antonio's ships have been lost and he is unable to pay his debt. Shylock takes him to court. Unknown to their husbands, Portia disguises herself as a young male lawyer working for Antonio, Nerissa as a clerk.



Portia's clever defence is that Shylock can have his pound of flesh but cannot take any of Antonio's blood.

The duke pardons Shylock on the condition that he gives half his money to Antonio and half to the state. Antonio agrees to give up his claim if Shylock converts to Christianity and leaves his property to his daughter Jessica, whom he has disinherited for running away with her lover Lorenzo. Portia and Nerissa then assert their power over Bassanio and Gratiano with a trick involving rings that the men have promised never to part with. Finally there is good news about Antonio's ships.



# SHAKESPEARE FOR LIFE

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## 1 IDIOMS TASK 1

Match the idioms below to their definitions.

1. cost an arm and a leg
2. make ends meet
3. cheapskate
4. time is money
5. money doesn't grow on trees
6. money talks
7. loaded
8. make a killing

- A. someone who does not like to spend money
- B. to make a lot of money very quickly
- C. used for saying that time should not be wasted because you lose money as a result
- D. very rich
- E. to cost a lot of money
- F. used for saying that money gives you power
- G. used for telling someone that they should not waste money, as it is not easy to get
- H. to have just enough money to buy the things you need

## ANSWERS

1 ..... 3 ..... 5 ..... 7 .....

2 ..... 4 ..... 6 ..... 8 .....



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## 2 IDIOMS TASK 2

Fill in the gaps using the correct idiom from the list below.

1. Come on hurry up - .....
2. He can definitely afford it, he's .....
3. You're such a....., surely you can afford to buy a new pair of shoes!
4. We're not buying you another skateboard. ....!
5. Of course Donald Trump is powerful, after all.....
6. Her business is very successful, she's .....
7. If we book our holiday in the school holidays it will .....
8. Life is very expensive in London but we're .....

- A. cost an arm and a leg
- B. making ends meet
- C. cheapskate
- D. time is money
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## 3 DECISION-MAKING

*The Merchant of Venice* features a scene that has been compared to a TV game show. In the play, the 'contestants' are men and the 'prize' is to marry to the rich and beautiful Portia. In order to 'win' her, the men must choose one of three caskets: one made of gold, one of silver and one of lead. If they choose the correct one, they will marry Portia.

The decisions they make could change their life forever. Through this scene, Shakespeare teaches us to consider our choices and think before we speak and act.

In real life, we make decisions every day – some more important than others. Discuss with a partner what you would do in the following situations, using **I would + verb**:

1. You arrive at class and realise you have forgotten to do your homework.  
e.g. I would tell my teacher I had left it on the bus, I would tell my teacher the truth and promise to do it for the next day.
2. You are going to be late to meet your friend at the cinema.
3. You find a piece of paper on the floor of your classroom. The paper contains the answers to your next exam.
4. You win £10,000.
5. Your parents have gone away for the weekend and left you in charge of the house.
6. You've been invited to a friend's party but someone who you don't like is going to be there.
7. Your friend has lost weight and started to get obsessed with exercise.
8. You are offered two jobs. One is your dream job but pays only £20,000. The other is a less interesting job but you would earn £30,000.



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## PRONUNCIATION PRACTICE: SYLLABLES

In this activity you will practise reading a speech from *A Merchant of Venice* with your classmates.

Before this, it's time to work on your pronunciation skills!

The number of syllables in each line of text was important in Shakespeare's writing. Understanding the structure of words and how many syllables they contain could help you to improve your pronunciation, so have a go at this task.

For each of the following words:

- Write how many syllables the word it contains
- Underline the syllable that is stressed
- Practise saying it out loud with your classmate

Word	Number of syllables
Gentleman	3 – GEN-TLE-MAN
Embarrassed	
Daughter	
Frightened	
Behaviour	
Awful	
Thieves	
Lawyer	



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## SPEAK SHAKESPEARE

The speech below is an extract from Macmillan Readers adaptation of *The Merchant of Venice*. It shows the original version and the adapted version. It is spoken by Jessica who is standing on a balcony passing a chest to Lorenzo.

### ORIGINAL

Here, catch this casket; it is worth the pains.  
I am glad 'tis night, you do not look on me,  
For I am much asham'd of my exchange:  
But love is blind, and lovers cannot see  
The pretty follies that they themselves commit;  
For if they could, Cupid himself would blush  
To see me thus transformed to a boy.

Casket = chest  
Asham'd = ashamed  
Follies = foolish things  
Blush = to go red in the face with embarrassment  
Thus = in this way

### ADAPTATION

Here, catch this chest. It will be worth the trouble.  
I am glad it is night and you cannot see me,  
for I am embarrassed to be seen in these boys'  
clothes. But love is blind, and lovers cannot see  
how foolish they are. If they could, Cupid himself  
would turn red to see me dressed up as a boy!



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