

11 - IF YOU PRICK US, DO WE NOT BLEED?

What exercises do actors at the RSC do to explore a speech?

WHAT YOU NEED

- Some pieces of paper, or a notebook and something to write with.
- A computer with internet connection, ready to visit [this page](#).

ACTIVITY

- Visit the Shakespeare Learning Zone page on Shylock's speech, [here](#). Read and explore the scene.
- Read Shylock's speech aloud. As you read, make gestures that go with the words, that help you to express what the words mean. Remember to include the pronouns.
- Ask yourself: Why do you think Shylock uses so many words that are about the human body? What is the effect of that imagery? What is Shylock saying about being human? How does emphasizing the pronouns affect your understanding of the speech?
- Read the speech aloud again. As you read aloud, stand up on the first full stop, sit down on the next one, and then continue standing up or sitting down every time you come to a full stop or question mark. When you come to a comma, stamp your foot.
- Actors explore punctuation in this way because the punctuation indicates the characters thoughts moving from one thought to another. Ask yourself: What is the pattern of Shylock's thoughts in this speech? How do you think he is feeling? Why might that be?
- Ask yourself: How many questions are there in this speech? Shylock either answers his own questions or asks questions that have an obvious answer. These are rhetorical questions. What is the effect of Shylock asking so many rhetorical questions in this speech?
- Write a short explanation of what the language of this speech reveals about Shylock, using your answers to the questions you have asked yourself.
- Watch the film of RSC actors performing this scene [here](#).
- Ask yourself: How does Shylock come across in this version? How does this compare with your first impression?

EXTENSION

- Visit the photo gallery of this moment in past RSC productions [here](#).
- Ask yourself: How obvious is Shylock's faith in these images? If you were staging this moment, what might Shylock be wearing, and why?

- Design a costume for Shylock to wear in this scene. Choose carefully what colours, fabrics and design you might use. Label your design with the reasons for your choices.