

13 - PORTIA

What is at stake between Portia and Bassanio?

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](#).
- A copy of Act 3 Scene 2 from The Merchant of Venice, to read either on the page or onscreen.

ACTIVITY

- Visit the Relationships page on the Shakespeare Learning Zone [here](#).
- Working out why Portia helps Bassanio can be key to understanding and interpreting the play. Click on 'View the Information' and read the information about Portia. Note the clues about these characters and their relationship in Act 3 Scene 2.
- Find the place in Act 3 Scene 2 where Portia gives Bassanio a ring. Read aloud from where Portia says "*Myself, and what is mine, to you and yours is now converted*" to the end of her speech.
- Ask yourself: Why does Portia give Bassanio the ring? What does the ring represent?
- Antonio writes to Bassanio from prison to tell him that he has lost his ships, cannot re-pay Shylock and has broken the bond. He will have to pay a pound of flesh to the money lender.
- Imagine you are Antonio and write that letter to Bassanio.
- Find the place in Act 3 Scene 2 where Portia says: "*Is it your dear friend that is thus in trouble?*" Read aloud from there up to where Bassanio reads Antonio's letter to Portia.
- Imagine you are Portia, and you have just heard the contents of the letter. Write down one word which describes Portia's feelings. Write down what Portia would like to say and who she would like to say it to. Write down what Portia would like to do, and why.
- Read the line that Portia says just after she has heard the letter. Put that line into your own words. Ask yourself: Why do you think that Portia says that to Bassanio? How would you describe Portia at this moment? Make notes about this moment and what it reveals about Portia's character.
- Write a few sentences which describe what is at stake between Portia and Bassanio, and why she decides to help him.
- Visit the photo gallery of Portia in past RSC productions on the Shakespeare Learning Zone [here](#). Compare the ways in which Portia is portrayed on stage. Which version is closest to the way in which you are imagining Portia, and why?

EXTENSION

- Visit the Language Analysis page on the Shakespeare Learning Zone [here](#) and click on 'Analysing Portia's language' to fill out the grid and analyse Portia's language in Act 3 Scene 2.