

# 14 - CROSS DRESSING

How do Portia and Nerissa disguise themselves as men?

## 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 4 from *The Merchant of Venice*, to read either on the page or onscreen.

## ACTIVITY

- Find the place in Act 3 Scene 4 where Portia says, “Lorenzo, I commit into your hands.” Read from there until the end of the scene. On a big piece of paper, write lists of what others say about Portia, what Portia says and what she does.
- Read aloud Portia’s speech which starts, “They shall, Nerissa...” As you read, hit your thigh every time you say a word which describes men or male behaviour.
- Choose at least four phrases from the speech which describe male behaviour.
- Speak your chosen phrases and make actions and gestures to go with the words, as if you are Portia teaching Nerissa how to behave like a man.
- At the end of the scene Portia tells Nerissa that she has a plan. Write down what you think the plan is, using the clues in Act 3 Scene 4, including why they need to dress and behave as men.
- Visit the Performance page on the Shakespeare Learning Zone [here](#). Click on ‘gender’ under ‘key decisions to make’, and ask yourself the questions that are there.

## EXTENSION

- Experiment with what you have at home to see if you can cross dress believably. What will you wear? Will you have to do anything to disguise how you usually wear your hair? Can you find anything which you could carry which helps you to pull off your transformation?
- Once you are satisfied with how you have cross dressed, experiment with how you might behave to make the illusion complete.
- Ask yourself: Why do you think Shakespeare chooses for Portia to dress as a man in *The Merchant of Venice*? What effect do you think that cross dressing has on the audience?