

16 - THE TRIAL

How does the language of Act 4 Scene 1 create the atmosphere of the trial before Portia enters?

WHAT YOU NEED

- A big piece of paper, or a notebook and something to write with.
- A copy of Act 4 Scene 1 from *The Merchant of Venice*, to read either on the page or onscreen.

ACTIVITY

- Find Shylock's speech in Act 4 Scene 1 which begins "*I have possessed your grace of what I purpose.*" Read it aloud, breathing only when there is a full stop or a question mark at the end of a sentence. Ask yourself: What pace do you have to speak at? How is Shylock feeling when he speaks this speech and why? Note down your ideas.
- Find Antonio's speech which begins, "*I pray you think you question with the Jew.*" Read it aloud. Ask yourself: What things does Antonio compare Shylock's harshness to? How effective are these comparisons? Who do you think Antonio is talking to during this speech? Bassanio? The Duke? Shylock? The whole court? What might be the reactions of the other characters to Antonio's speech? Note down your ideas.
- Find Gratiano's speech which begins "*O be thou damned, inexecrable dog.*" Read it aloud, emphasising and exaggerating the sounds in the words and growling any words to do with dogs and wolves. Ask yourself: Why does Gratiano compare Shylock to a wolf? How do you think Gratiano is feeling? Note down your ideas.
- Imagine these three moments in the Venetian Court. For each one, make a sketch of the speaker and label it with one or two lines of text from their speech.
- Write a title for each of your sketches.
- Write a couple of sentences to describe how the language of Act 4 Scene 1 creates the atmosphere of the trial before Portia enters.

EXTENSION

- Imagine you are a court reporter, witnessing these events in court. Write a report of what happens, explaining who said what and what effect their words had on the rest of the people in court. You could illustrate your report with appropriate images, either drawn or found online.