

18 - THE RING

What does the ring mean to 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 watch [this clip](#).
- A copy of Act 4 Scene 1 from *The Merchant of Venice*, to read either on the page or onscreen.

ACTIVITY

- In Act 3 Scene 2, Portia gave Bassanio a ring, which he promised never to remove. Ask yourself: What does the ring mean to Portia? What does the ring mean to Bassanio?
- Find the place towards the end of Act 4 Scene 1 where the Duke exits. Read from Bassanio's speech, "Most worthy gentleman, ..." to the end of the scene.
- Bassanio offers Portia, who is in disguise as Balthazar, a tribute for saving Antonio's life. She first requests his gloves, and as he takes them off, she recognizes and requests the ring that he is wearing.
- Imagine you are Bassanio. Take two pieces of paper and put them on opposite sides of the room. On one piece write a list of all the reasons why Bassanio SHOULD NOT give 'Balthazar' the ring. On the other piece, write a list of all the reasons why he SHOULD. Walk between the two pieces of paper as you add to your ideas.
- When you have written down all your ideas, walk between the two pieces of paper as if you are Bassanio, reading aloud each reason. What does this tell you about how Bassanio might be feeling?
- Bassanio does not give 'Balthazar' the ring. How might the audience re-act to this moment?
- Put what Antonio says after Balthazar has gone into your own words.
- Ask yourself: Why does Bassanio decide to give the ring to 'Balthazar' after all?
- Watch this clip [here](#) of Polly Findlay (director) and Patsy Ferran (who played Portia in the RSC 2015 production) discuss her role.
- Ask yourself: What is funny about the end of Act 4 Scene 1? Is it typical of a romantic comedy? Write a couple of sentences to capture your ideas.
- Ask yourself: What does the ring mean to Portia? Why do you think she tests Bassanio by asking for it? How do you think she feels when he sends it to her, thinking she is 'Balthazar'? Write a couple of sentences to capture your ideas.

EXTENSION

- Design the ring that Portia gives Bassanio. Think about what the ring means to her, and what she is offering to Bassanio with it. You could include an engraved inscription inspired by the language of the play. Draw your designs. Label your design to show the materials it is made of and explain why you have made your design choices.