FIRST ENCOUNTERS
SHAKESPEARE FOR YOUNGER AUDIENCES
RESOURCE PACK

THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE
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ROYAL SHAKESPEARE COMPANY
RESOURCES

THE STORY IN TEN SCENES

1. Antonio, the Merchant of Venice, agrees to lend his friend Bassanio three thousand ducats so that Bassanio can woo Portia of Belmont.

   BASSANIO
   To you, Antonio, I owe the most in money and in love,
   And from your love I have a warranty
   To unburden all my plots and purposes
   How to get clear of all the debts I owe.

   ANTONIO
   ... My purse, my person, my extremest means,
   Lie all unlocked to your occasions.

2. Portia, a rich and beautiful young woman, complains to her waiting-woman, Nerissa, that she hates all of the suitors who are seeking to marry her. Portia’s father has decreed that she will marry whichever suitor makes the correct choice when presented with three caskets, made of gold, silver and lead. She tells Nerissa that she is in love with Bassanio.

   NERISSA
   But what warmth is there in your affection towards any of these princely suitors that are already come?

   PORTIA
   ... There is not one among them but I dote on his very absence, and I wish them a fair departure.

3. Antonio can’t access his own money until his ships return safely from sea, so he borrows the money from the Jewish moneylender Shylock, whom he has previously treated very badly. Shylock agrees to lend the money but only on the basis that if the loan is not repaid he will be entitled to a pound of Antonio’s flesh.

   SHYLOCK
   Shall I bend low and in a bondman’s key,
   With bated breath and whisp’ring humbleness,
   Say this: ‘Fair sir, you spat on me on Wednesday last;
   You spurned me such a day; another time
   You called me dog, and for these courtesies
   I’ll lend you thus much moneys’?

   ANTONIO
   I am as like to call thee so again,
   To spit on thee again, to spurn thee too.
   If thou wilt lend this money, lend it not
   As to thy friends, for when did friendship take
   A breed of barren metal of his friend?
   But lend it rather to thine enemy
4. Portia’s suitors The Princes of Morocco and Aragon choose the wrong caskets: gold and silver, but Bassanio chooses the right one: lead. He is overjoyed and so is Portia. They get married, and his friend Gratiano marries Portia’s waiting woman Nerissa at the same time. Nerissa and Portia give their husbands rings, which they promise to keep forever.

**PORTIA**
...This house, these servants and this same myself
Are yours, my lord. I give them with this ring,
Which when you part from, lose or give away,
Let it presage the ruin of your love
And be my vantage to exclaim on you.
Puts a ring on his finger

**BASSANIO**
... when this ring
Parts from this finger, then parts life from hence.

5. Shylock’s daughter Jessica is secretly planning to run away with a Christian, Lorenzo. She dresses as a boy and escapes while her father is out for dinner, stealing Shylock’s money and his jewels, including her dead mother’s ring.

**LORENZO**
So you are, sweet,
Even in the lovely garnish of a boy. But come at once,
For the close night doth play the runaway,
And we are stayed for at Bassanio’s feast.

**JESSICA**
I will make fast the doors and gild myself
With some more ducats, and be with you straight.

6. News arrives that Antonio’s ships have been lost; he is unable to pay his debt. Shylock insists that Antonio be jailed and that he wants to have his bond.

**SALERIO**
The good Antonio, the honest Antonio —
O that I had a title good enough to keep his name company!
— hath lost a ship.
...

**ANTONIO**
Hear me yet, good Shylock.

**SHYLOCK**
I’ll have my bond.
Speak not against my bond,
I have sworn an oath that I will have my bond.
Thou calledst me dog before thou hadst a cause,
But since I am a dog, beware my fangs.
7. Unknown to their husbands, Portia and Nerissa disguise themselves as men in order to defend Antonio in the court case. Portia dresses up as Balthasar, a young lawyer, and Nerissa as his clerk. They travel from Belmont to Venice.

PORTIA
Come on, Nerissa, I have work in hand
That you yet know not of; we’ll see our husbands
Before they think of us.

NERISSA
Shall they see us?

PORTIA
They shall, Nerissa, but in such a habit,
That they shall think we are accomplishèd
With that we lack.

8. Shylock’s claim to his pound of flesh is heard in the law court before the Duke disguised as a man, Portia argues that Shylock is entitled to his pound of flesh but he must not spill a drop of Antonio’s blood, and he must cut exactly one pound of flesh, not an ounce more or less. She then says that Shylock should forfeit his life for having conspired against the life of a Venetian.

PORTIA
Tarry a little, there is something else.
This bond doth give thee here no jot of blood,
The words expressly are ‘a pound of flesh’.

9. The Duke pardons Shylock on condition that he gives half his wealth to Antonio and half to the state. Antonio gives up his half on the condition that Shylock converts to Christianity and leaves all his property to his daughter Jessica and her Christian lover, Lorenzo.

DUKE
For half thy wealth, it is Antonio’s,
The other half comes to the general state,
Which humbleness may drive unto a fine.

SHYLOCK
Nay, take my life and all. Pardon not that.
You take my house when you do take the prop
That doth sustain my house. You take my life
When you do take the means whereby I live.
10. Portia and Nerissa return to Belmont, where they confront their husbands about the rings they gave them, that the men promised to keep forever. Eventually they reveal that ‘Balthasar’ and the clerk were the women in disguise.

**BASSANIO**
Were you the doctor and I knew you not?

**GRATIANO**
Were you the clerk that is to make me cuckold?

**NERISSA**
Ay, but the clerk that never means to do it,
Unless he live until he be a man.
CHARACTER FACTS

ANTONIO
- I am a wealthy merchant
- I am a Christian
- I dislike Jews
- I have many friends, including Gratiano, Lorenzo, Salerio and Solanio – but I am particularly fond of Bassanio
- My friends describe me as kind, honest, and gentle

BASSANIO
- I am a Christian and a nobleman of Venice
- Antonio is my dear friend
- I want to marry Portia, who is beautiful and rich
- I don’t have much money
- Gratiano, Lorenzo, Salerio and Solanio are also my friends

GRATIANO
- I am a proud Christian
- I am a friend of Antonio, Bassanio and Lorenzo, Salerio and Solanio
- I like to talk and make jokes
- I don’t like Jews

LORENZO
- I am in love with Jessica, Shylock’s daughter
- I am a Christian
- Bassanio and Antonio are my friends, along with Gratiano, Salerio and Solanio

SALERIO
- I am a Christian
- I am good friends with Solanio
- I am also friends with Antonio, Bassanio, Lorenzo, and Gratiano
- I like to make fun of Shylock

JESSICA
- I am a Jew
- I am Shylock’s daughter
- My mother is dead
- I don’t like living in my father’s house
- I am in love with Lorenzo who is a Christian, and plan to run away with him
- I enjoy the company of our servant, Launcelot Gobbo

LAUNCELOT GOBBO
- I am a servant
- Shylock is my master
- I want to work for Bassanio
- I am very fond of Jessica
- My father is blind and is called Old Gobbo
- I like to make jokes

NERISSA
- I live in Belmont
- I am a Christian
- I am Portia’s maid
- Portia and I are also good friends
OLD GOBBO
- I am old
- I am blind
- Launcelot is my son

PORTIA
- I am very wealthy and live in Belmont
- I am highly educated
- I am a Christian
- My parents are dead
- My maid is called Nerissa
- My father’s will states that I can only inherit his money if I marry the man who chooses the correct casket—gold, silver or lead
- I want to marry Bassanio

SHYLOCK
- I am a Jew
- I am a moneylender
- I have one child, a daughter called Jessica
- My wife, who was called Leah, is dead
- My good friend is called Tubal
- My servant is called Launcelot Gobbo
- I hate the Christians for how they treat my people
- I especially hate Antonio because he is a Christian and because he lends money without charging interest

THE DUKE OF VENICE
- I rule over Venice
- I am very powerful
- I act as a judge in court cases
- I am a Christian

THE PRINCE OF ARRAGON
- I would like to marry Portia

THE PRINCE OF MOROCCO
- I would like to marry Portia

TUBAL
- I am a Jew
- Shylock is my friend
- I am wealthy
CASKET CLUES

GOLD
Who chooseth me shall gain what many men desire.

SILVER
Who chooseth me shall get as much as he deserves.

LEAD
Who chooseth me must give and hazard all he hath.

CASKET QUESTIONS

GOLD = DESIRE
Questions in this envelope related to the themes of DESIRE, what we want.

› If you had one wish, what would you wish for?
› What’s your main ambition in life?
› Would you rather have lots of money or lots of friends?
› If you won the lottery what is the first thing you would buy?
› If you could buy a house anywhere in the world where would it be?
› If you could have one wish granted, what would it be?
› What do you value more than money?

SILVER = DESERVE
Questions in this envelope related to themes of DESERVING, what we feel we deserve and what we think other people deserve.

› Have you ever treated someone in a way they didn’t deserve?
› If you marked your last piece of homework based on effort, what grade would you give yourself?
› Does everyone deserve to be treated equally?
› Does everybody deserve forgiveness?

LEAD = GIVE AND HAZARD
Questions in this envelope related to themes of HAZARD (or RISK), what are we prepared to risk or what are we prepared to give up.

› Would you give up everything you have to make someone else happy?
› Who or what would you risk your life for?
› You have £100. Do you risk it for the chance to gain £1000, knowing there’s a chance you may lose it all?
› What do you value most?
ACT 1 SCENE 3 EXTRACT (EDITED)

SHYLOCK
Signor Antonio, many a time and oft
You call me misbeliever, cut-throat dog,
And spit upon my Jewish gaberdine.
Well then, it now appears you need my help.
What should I say to you? Should I not say,
‘Hath a dog money? Is it possible
A cur should lend three thousand ducats?’

ANTONIO
I am as like to call thee so again,
To spit on thee again, to spurn thee too.

SHYLOCK
Why, look you how you storm!
I would be friends with you and have your love,
Forget the shames that you have stained me with,
Supply your present wants and take no coin.

ANTONIO
This were kindness.

SHYLOCK
This kindness will I show:
If you repay me not on such a day,
Expressed in the condition, let the forfeit
Be nominated for an equal pound
Of your own flesh, to be cut off and taken
From what part of your body it pleaseth me.

ANTONIO
Content, in faith, I’ll seal to such a bond.
HATH NOT A JEW EYES

SHYLOCK
To bait fish withal. If it will feed nothing else, it will feed my revenge. He hath disgraced me, and hindered me half a million, laughed at my losses, mocked at my gains, scorned my nation, thwarted my bargains, cooled my friends, heated mine enemies, and what’s the reason? I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? Fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer, as a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die? And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge? If we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that. If a Jew wrong a Christian, what is his humility? Revenge. If a Christian wrong a Jew, what should his sufferance be by Christian example? Why, revenge. The villainy you teach me I will execute, and it shall go hard but I will better the instruction.
CASKET POEMS

GOLD CASKET – Act 2, Scene 7
“All that glisters is not gold,
Often have you heard that told;
Many a man his life hath sold
But my outside to behold.
Gilded tombs do worms enfold.
Had you been as wise as bold,
Young in limbs, in judgement old,
Your answer had not been inscrolled:
Fare you well, your suit is cold.”

SILVER CASKET – Act 2, Scene 9
“The fire seven times tried this:
Seven times tried that judgement is
That did never choose amiss.
Some there be that shadows kiss,
Such have but a shadow’s bliss.
There be fools alive, iwis,
Silvered o’er, and so was this.
Take what wife you will to bed,
I will ever be your head.
So begone: you are sped.”

LEAD CASKET – Act 3, Scene 2
“You that choose not by the view
Chance as fair and choose as true.
Since this fortune falls to you,
Be content and seek no new.
If you be well pleased with this
And hold your fortune for your bliss,
Turn you where your lady is
And claim her with a loving kiss.”
THE QUALITY OF MERCY

PORTIA
The quality of mercy is not strain’d,
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath. It is twice blest:
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.
’Tis mightiest in the mightiest, it becomes
The throned monarch better than his crown.
His sceptre shows the force of temporal power,
The attribute to awe and majesty,
Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings:
But mercy is above this sceptred sway,
It is enthroned in the hearts of kings,
It is an attribute to God himself;
And earthly power doth then show likest God’s
When mercy seasons justice: therefore, Jew,
Though justice be thy plea, consider this,
That in the course of justice, none of us
Should see salvation. We do pray for mercy,
And that same prayer doth teach us all to render
The deeds of mercy. I have spoke thus much
To mitigate the justice of thy plea,
Which if thou follow, this strict court of Venice
Must needs give sentence ‘gainst the merchant there.