

### Knowledge Organiser – The Merchant of Venice

<u>Plot</u>		
1	Act One	The play opens with Antonio sad; we are unsure as to what the cause of this is. Bassanio arrives to ask Antonio for money in order to travel to Belmont to win a wealthy lady, Portia's, hand in marriage. Antonio has invested his money in ships so is unable to do so but agrees to take out a loan on Bassanio's behalf. Portia and Nerissa discuss the suitors arriving in Belmont to win her hand in marriage and her detest for them, both secretly hope Bassanio attempts the challenge. The scene ends with Antonio, Bassanio and a Jewish moneylender, Shylock signing a bond. Antonio has to repay 3000 ducats in three months otherwise Shylock can claim a pound of his flesh – this is his revenge for the way that the Christians treat him.
2	Act Two	We are introduced to Jessica and Lancelot – their relationships with Shylock build a negative representation of him. Both Jessica and Lancelot leave Shylock separately, with Jessica converting to Christianity, stealing her mother's wedding ring, and running off with Lorenzo disguised as a man. Many suitors arrive to win Portia's casket challenge. Each suitor can only attempt once to pick from one of three caskets, gold, silver and lead, the correct casket contains Portia's counterfeit (a portrait). If they lose, they may not marry again. The Prince of Morocco attempts first – picks the gold casket which contains a skull with a scroll in its mouth - "all that glisters is not gold". The Prince of Aragon attempts next – picks the silver casket which contains a jester "with one fool's head I came to woo, now I leave with two"
3	Act Three	Whilst Shylock dines with the Christians, Lorenzo helps Jessica, who is disguised as a man, escape from Shylock's house. She steals his money and wedding ring in the process. Meanwhile, Bassanio arrives in Belmont and wins the casket challenge and in turn Portia's hand in marriage. Upon the reveal of his engagement, Gratiano also announces that he is due to wed Nerissa. Both couples marry as Jessica and Lorenzo arrive to announce that Antonio's ships have sunk and has in turn broken the terms of the bond.
4	Act Four	The Court Scene – the culmination of the events and the climax of the play. Shylock is blinded by his pursuit for revenge and justice ignoring the Christian's plea for him to show mercy, even offering double the money in the original bond. Portia arrives in the court disguised as a male lawyer, Balthasar, and inevitably identifies a flaw in the bond – Shylock cannot shed a drop of blood in claiming the pound of flesh otherwise he is committing murder. Shylock has to give up his wealth – half to Venice, half, upon his death, to Jessica and Lorenzo and become Christian. Bassanio and Gratiano part with their wedding rings in payment for saving Antonio, not realizing that they have given the rings to their wives in disguise.
5	Act Five	All the characters return to Belmont. Portia and Nerissa test the loyalty of their husbands having given away the rings. They show mercy and forgive their husbands and all of the couples depart happily together leaving Antonio, whose ships did not sink, alone on stage.
<u>Characters</u>		
6	Antonio	A Christian merchant, the first character that we meet within the play. He begins the play sad and downcast for an unknown reason. Similarly, he ends the play alone as the couples around him leave. He has very strong relationships with the Christian characters, most notably, Bassanio who he has an incredibly strong platonic, although some may infer more romantic, relationship with. He agrees to take out the bond on Bassanio's behalf and enters into a difficult agreement with Shylock who almost claims a pound of Antonio's flesh.
7	Bassanio	A young Christian Venetian. He has gambled away his money and is in debt. At the start of the play Bassanio approaches his close friend, Antonio, to ask for some money to travel to Belmont to win the hand of Portia. Bassanio is successful in completing the casket challenge, having chosen the lead casket and eventually marries Portia. We may doubt the strength of his character as he may be manipulating Antonio's love for his own gain. In addition, he betrays the trust of Portia by giving away his ring but is inevitably forgiven.
8	Portia	A wealthy woman from Belmont who is awaiting potential suitors to win her father's challenge he created as her dowry. The suitor who claims the correct casket containing a picture of Portia, wins her hand in marriage. She is a strong willed female character who takes destiny into her own hands

		by manipulating the results of the casket challenge, playing music with words rhyming with lead to ensure Bassanio wins the challenge. She also disguises herself as a male lawyer in Act 4 Scene 1 and saves Antonio from his destined fate with Shylock.
9	Shylock	Often regarded as the villain of the play. Shylock is a Jewish moneylender who is religiously segregated by the majority of the characters in the play. Before the play starts, Shylock and Antonio have a long standing rivalry due to Antonio lending out “money gratis” (without interest) and for spitting on his face. Shylock is fueled by revenge for the way in which he is treated and creates the bond to ensure Antonio suffers. Shylock’s pursuit for justice alienates him from other characters resulting in Lancelot and Jessica both running away from his house and joining the Christians. Inevitably, the pursuit for justice means Shylock fails to claim his pound of flesh after Portia announces that he cannot shed a drop of blood in the process of claiming the pound of flesh. At the end of the play, Shylock has to give away half of his wealth to Venice, the other half he can keep until his death when it is given to Jessica and Lorenzo under the agreement that he becomes a Christian.
10	Jessica	The daughter of Shylock who becomes frustrated by the way in which her father treats others. Jessica is secretly in love with a Christian by the name of Lorenzo and plans to run away with him while her father is occupied. Jessica flees from Shylock’s house disguised as a page-boy while he is eating with the Christians, converts to Christianity, steals her father’s money and wedding ring and joins forces with the Christians.
11	Gratiano	A comedic companion of Bassanio. He is often mocked by the other characters for “speaking an infinite deal of nothing”. He travels with Bassanio to Belmont where, upon Bassanio’s engagement to Portia, announces that he too will marry but with Nerissa. There is a double wedding that takes place between these two characters.
12	Nerissa	Nerissa is Portia’s maid and best friend. Nerissa often acts as Portia’s conscience reminding her that she needs to respect her father’s wishes and supporting her throughout the play. Nerissa marries Gratiano and disguises herself as Portia’s male clerk in the court scene. Nerissa also secures Gratiano’s wedding ring as payment for saving Antonio as a test of loyalty.

#### Killer Quotes

	<u>Key Quotation</u>	<u>Quotation:</u>	<u>Techniques</u>	<u>Context</u>
13	Antonio – Act 1 Sc 1	“A stage where every man must play his part and mine a sad one”	Dramatic Irony	Repression – potentially of his sexuality
14	Antonio – Act 1 Sc 1	“my purse, my person, my extremist means lie all unlocked to your occasions”	Listing Metaphor Hyperbole	Further hints to the strong connection of their relationship.
15	Bassanio – Act 1 Sc 1	“In Belmont is a lady richly left”	Adverb ‘richly’	Objectification of women in Elizabethan England.
16	Portia – Act 1 Sc 2	“So is the will of a living daughter curb’d by the will of a dead father”	Powerful verb ‘curb’d’ Hyperbole	Fathers have a lot of control over their daughters. Dowry connected to their marriage.
17	Shylock – Act 1 Sc 3	“I hate him for he is a Christian”	Declarative Statement Powerful verb ‘hate’	Religious conflict – Anti-Semitism.
18	Shylock – Act 1 Sc 3	“You call me misbeliever, cut-throat dog”	Animalistic language	Anti-Semitism
19	Shylock – Act 1 Sc 3	“spit upon my Jewish gaberdine”	Violent verb ‘spit’ Extended metaphor	Gaberdine is a Jewish coat – extension of spitting on his religion
20	Shylock – Act 1 Sc 3	“Merry sport”	Metaphor	Villainous stereotypes of Jews

21	Jessica – Act 2 Sc 3	“Our house is hell”	Hyperbole Religious imagery	Religious context – reinforcing the extent of suffering
22	Jessica – Act 2 Sc 3	“ashamed to be my father’s child!”	Exclamative sentence Verb ‘ashamed’ Pronouns	Shocking relationship between father and daughter for time period.
23	Jessica – Act 2 Sc 5	“I have a father, you a daughter lost”	Rhyming couplet Declarative	Empowerment of a woman taking fate into her own hands.
24	Casket – Act 2 Sc 7	“All that glisters is not gold”	Idiomatic phrase	Father’s dowry designed to highlight qualities of potential suitors.
25	Solanio – Act 2 Sc 8	“O my ducats! O my daughter!”	Exclamative Repetition Possessive Pronoun	Forms the stereotypes of Jews as greedy individuals.
26	Shylock – Act 3 Sc 1	“It will feed my revenge”	Metaphor Hyperbole	Jews stereotyped as villains.
27	Shylock - Act 3 Sc 1	“Hath not a Jew hands?”	Rhetorical Question	Anti-Semitic treatment towards Jews
28	Shylock – Act 3 Sc 1	“If you prick us, do we not bleed?”	Rhetorical Question	Anti-Semitic treatment towards Jews.
29	Shylock – Act 3 Sc 1	“The villainy you teach me, I will execute”	Imperative Sentence	Religious conflict – representation of Jews.
30	Shylock – Act 3 Sc 1	“I would my daughter were dead at my foot, and the jewels in her ear”	Metaphor	Money, greed of the Jews, desire for revenge.
31	Shylock – Act 3 Sc 3	“Since I am a dog, beware my fangs”	Metaphor Animalistic Language	Shylock’s desire for revenge
32	Shylock - Act 4 Sc 1	“If you deny me, fie upon your law”	Emotive Language	Injustice in the way Jews are treated.
33	Portia – Act 4 Sc 1	“The quality of mercy is not strained”	Emotive Language	The separation between justice and mercy
34	Shylock - Act 4 Sc 1	“My deeds upon my head! I crave the law”	Exclamative sentence	Shylock’s pursuit for justice.
35	Portia – Act 4 Sc 1	“He shall have merely justice and his bond”	Adverb – ‘merely’ Declarative Sentence	The demand for justice is Shylock’s undoing

### Themes

36	Appearance and reality	The play highlights the danger of only seeing what is on the surface (the gold and silver casket conceal a ‘ <i>death’s head</i> ’ and a ‘ <i>blinking idiot</i> ’ – the unpromising lead casket rewards the one who chooses ‘ <i>not by the view.</i> ’) Characters, consciously or subconsciously, appear to be someone they are not: Portia and Nerissa pretend to be men, as does Jessica. Bassanio pretends to be rich; Shylock pretends to be Antonio’s friend. ‘Masques’ are worn literally in 2.6 to conceal identity.
37	Prejudice and intolerance	Prosperous Venice tolerates private prejudice against Jews. Portia is courteous to her suitors whilst criticizing them in private for their behavior or skin colour (which also fits in with the theme of deception). It seems that the play endorses these prejudices, but Shakespeare <b>may</b> be subtly criticizing the prejudices of his characters; after all, it is hypocritical of the Christians to criticize Shylock for moneylending (see <b>Usury in Context</b> ) and he has ‘ <i>learned</i> ’ his hatred from the Christians. Shylock argues that all people are the same biologically and under the law in 3.1.

38	Justice and Mercy	<p>The idea of revenge surfaces throughout the play, sometimes seriously and at other times more comically: Shylock attempts to kill Antonio; Portia punishes Shylock; Antonio makes Shylock convert; Portia and Nerissa trick their husbands and watch them squirm as they try to explain.</p> <p>Although revenge is illegal, Shylock seeks it by sticking to the letter of the <b>law</b> within the Venetian justice system. In 4.1, both the Duke and Portia present <b>mercy</b> as a better alternative to revenge, but Shylock explicitly refuses, whereas the Christians show him mercy. Therefore, one interpretation of the play's structure is that Shakespeare meant to contrast the mercy of the main Christian characters with the vengefulness of a Jew, who lacks the religious <a href="#">grace</a> to comprehend mercy. The Old Testament portrays a God who is vengeful if his laws and commandments are broken, whereas the New Testament teaches mercy and forgiveness.</p>
39	Love and Friendship	<p>Central romantic relationship of Portia and Bassanio is paralleled by elopement of Jessica with Lorenzo and marriage of Nerissa and Gratiano. Some critics suggest that the strongest friendship in the play, that between Antonio and Bassanio, approaches romantic love. However, close friendships between men were common at the time, and Shakespeare may have intended the audience to see Antonio as a sort of guardian figure for Bassanio.</p> <p>There are strong ties between all the Venetian Christian characters – they all rally round Antonio.</p> <p>But the play also demonstrates how the apparent purity of love can be tainted by economic concerns, beginning with Bassanio borrowing money to woo.</p>
<b>Devices</b>		
40	Dramatic Irony	Audience knows more than the characters
41	Soliloquy	One character, alone on stage, sharing their inner thoughts or feelings, making an audience complicit.
42	Rhyming couplet	Two lines that rhyme, normally used at the end of a scene
43	Antithesis	People or things that oppose each other
44	Hyperbole	Overstatement of exaggeration
45	Repetition	The repetition of words or phrases for deliberate effect
<b>Context</b>		
46	Anti-Semitism	The hatred of Jews, or of their religion
47	Jewish stereotypes	Shakespeare would likely have never met a Jew and therefore Shylock is based on stereotypes. Greedy, bearded, hooked nose, red hats, evil, elderly.
48	The Jew of Malta	A play written by Christopher Marlowe which was popular at the time Shakespeare wrote The Merchant of Venice. Features a villainous Jew called Barabas.
49	Dr Lopez	A Jewish doctor who allegedly tried to poison Queen Elizabeth around the time of Merchant of Venice
50	Usury/Moneylending	Jews were only allowed certain occupations that were deemed 'un-Christian'. Usury meant that Jews were seen as being increasingly greedy and were therefore immensely disliked.
51	Repression	Within society, many aspects of an individual may be repressed in order to conform to societal expectations. Homosexuality as well as attitudes towards religion would have been considered inappropriate and therefore likely not discussed.
52	Women	Women were seen as being inferior within Shakespearian England. Often women were objectified for their beauty or wealth. Shakespeare presented women in a stronger way within his plays, perhaps to appease Queen Elizabeth