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| **Overview of topic:** In this unit, students will read ‘The Merchant of Venice’ by William Shakespeare. They will familiarise themselves with key features of the ploy, key characters, key quotations and key themes applying skills that will ready them for GCSE English Literature. Students will also learn to link key contextual information to the events in the play to show understanding of how Shakespeare’s life, time and theatre influence the performance. | |
| **Key content/ ideas/ concepts**  **Key Themes:**  Love  Marriage  Mercy  Justice  Wealth and Money  Appearance vs. Reality  Racial/ Religious Intolerance  Revenge | **Keywords/ Glossary** |
| |  |  | | --- | --- | | 1 | Bassanio asks Antonio for a loan of 3000 ducats. Antonio has to borrow from Shylock and the bond is a ‘pound of flesh’. Portia complains to Nerissa about the way her father has insisted she find a husband- by choose one of three caskets – and mocks the suitors so far.  **Key characters**  **Shylock**- A Jewish moneylender who is hated because of his greedy nature and because he is Jewish. He is Antonio’s enemy  **Antonio**- A merchant. He is considered a kind and generous man who promises to repay his friend Bassanio’s debt to Shylock  **Bassanio**- A young man who wants to marry Portia. He needs to borrow money from Shylock to impress her  **Portia**- She is in love with Bassanio, but her father has designed an impossible casket test for any suitor. She is beautiful and intelligent and is one of the most important characters in the play.  **Nerissa**- Portia’s lady in waiting, who is in love with Gratiano.  **Gratiano**- a young man with a wild reputation who falls for Nerissa  **Jessica**- Shylock’s daughter, who is in love with Lorenzo. She is ashamed to be his daughter and elopes. | | 2 | The Prince of Morocco arrives and chooses the gold casket and so fails to win Portia’s hand. Jessica steals money and escapes from Shylock with Lorenzo. Shylock is enraged. Some of Antonio’s ships go missing. The Prince of Arragon arrives and chooses the silver casket, so he does not win Portia’s hand either. | | 3  **Key Quotations:**   * ‘”To you, Antonio, I owe the most in money and in love” (Bassanio) * “I will buy with you, sell with you, walk with you , talk with you… but I will not eat with you” (Shylock) * “As the dog Jew did utter in the streets” (Solanio) * “I am a Jew... if you prick us, do we not bleed” (Shylock) * “But love is blind, and lovers cannot see the pretty follies they commit” (Jessica) * “All that glisters is not gold” (morocco) * “I’ll have my bond” (Shylock) * “This bond doth not give thee no jot of blood” (Portia) | More of Antonio’s ships have been lost. Shylock says he will have his ‘pound of flesh’. Bassanio arrives to woo Portia. He chooses the lead casket and is able to marry her- the two declare their love. Nerissa and Gratiano reveal their love too, and both Nerissa and Portia give their lovers a ring. Bassanio hears that Antonio is ruined and leaves to help his friend. Antonio is in prison and Shylock will show no mercy. Portia and Nerissa say they are retiring to a convent but secretly head to Venice to help Antonio.  **Social and Historical Context:**   * ‘The Merchant of Venice’ was written at some point between 1596 and 1599, during the reign of Elizabeth I. This is when Shakespeare wrote most of his comedies, before much darker tragedies during the reign of James I. * The importance of Italy: Shakespeare is believed to have travelled frequently to Italy and uses it as a setting for a number of his plays. At this time, very few had the opportunity to travel and Italy was seen as a centre for art, science and knowledge. People viewed it as a beautiful and advanced place. * Religion: faith in Christianity was an important part of life in Shakespeare’s time, and most of Europe was deeply religious. However, whilst Christian values and practices were widely accepted, most audiences would have never knowingly met a Jewish person because Jews had been expelled from England 300 years before. Elizabethans were hugely anti- Semitic and believed in stereotypes including that Jewish people were greedy, selfish, cold, womanisers and even child killers! * Jewish people were also not allowed to settle in Venice until 1385. Until this point, they were only allowed to visit Venice for money-lending purposes (known as *ursury*). Money lending was a disreputable trade because many Christians believed the Bible forbade it (although many merchants would use money lenders for new investments) * Patriarchal Society: At this time, women were considered to be the property of men (fathers and brothers, then husbands). It was widely understood that women were inferior, so had far fewer rights and opportunities in life, regardless of their skill or intellect. | | 4 | Antonio is on trial. Bassanio begs Shylock to be merciful but he will not rescind his bond. Bassanio offers 6000 ducats to no avail. Balthasar- who is really Portia in disguise- arrives at court and insists that Venecian law must be followed, and Antonio and Bassanio say goodbye. Shylock is about to cut Antonio when Balthasar (Portia) reminds him that the bond did not mention blood so he must not spill a drop. Shylock changes his mind and says that he’ll have the money but Balthasar insists that he have the bond. Shylock then drops the case, and is punished for attempting to take the life of a Venetian. Bassanio wants to give Balthasar a token of appreciation, and happily hands over Portia’s ring back to Balthasar/Portia. Nerissa, also in disguise, also gets Gratiano’s ring. | | 5 | Portia and Nerissa arrive home just before their husbands. Bassanio, Antonio and Gratiano arrive home with the good news, and tell their wives that they ‘gave away’ their rings. The women pretend to be cross at first, but eventually reveal all and return their rings. Antonio learns his ships were not destroyed. Lorenzo learns he will inherit Shylock’s fortune. | | **Genre-**a type or a category of text. The three main genres of Shakespeare are comedy, history and tragedy.  **Problem Play-** a piece of Shakespearean drama that includes features of all three genres and cannot easily be categorised.  **Soliloquy-**a speech delivered by a character, alone on stage, where their deepest feelings and desired are revealed.  **Foreshadowing-**an indication or a warning of a future event  **Dramatic Irony-**when the audience is aware of information that the characters are not  **Iambic Pentameter-** a line of ten syllables (no more or less) which is made up of a pattern of 5 iambic feet (5 pairs of unstressed/stressed syllables)  **Blank Verse-** unrhymed lines written in iambic pentameter  **Prose-** unstructured speech/ writing  **Stage Directions-** instructions given by the playwright  **Merchant-** a person involved in supplying goods or trade  **Prejudice-** preconceived opinion that is not based on reason or actual experience  **Anti-Semitism-** prejudice against Jews  **Disguise-** adopting a different appearance in order to conceal your identity.  **Casket-**a small box containing valuable objects  **Suitor**- someone who pursues another in a romantic way |

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| **Self-Quiz Questions** | **Self-Quiz Questions** | Challenge Self-Quiz Quizzing |
| 1. What is the name of the moneylender in the play? | 1. Why does Antonio believe that his fortune has been destroyed? | 1. Describe the relationship between Antonio and Shylock. |
| 2. List THREE adjectives to describe Antonio’s character. | 2. How does Portia manage to save Antonio from his bond? | 1. Write a definition of *anti- Semitism.* |
| 3. Why does Bassanio ask Antonio for a loan? | 3. Why does Jessica flee from Venice? | 1. What is ‘money-lending’ more traditionally known as? |
| 4. Which choice of casket will reward you with Portia’s hand in marriage? | 4. What gift do Portia and Nerissa give to Bassanio and Gratiano | 1. Write a definition of *soliloquy*. |
| 5. What is the bond for Antonio’s loan? | 5. What is a *merchant*? | 5. Why might Shakespeare have chosen to set so many of his plays in Italy? |
| 6. Who does Nerissa wish to marry? | 6. Why are Portia and Nerissa annoyed with their husbands when they return with Antonio? | 6. List TWO adjectives to describe Portia. How are these demonstrated in the play? |
| 7. Who does Portia disguise herself as? | 7. Why is ‘The Merchant of Venice’ considered to be a *problem play*? | 7. How are ideas about *patriarchy* shown within ‘The Merchant of Venice’? |
| 8. What are the *three* genres of Shakespearean plays? | 8. Write a definition of *iambic pentameter.* | 8. How does Shakespeare make use of *dramatic irony* in ‘The Merchant of Venice’? |
| 9. Write a definition of *foreshadowing* | 9. Describe the relationship between Antonio and Bassanio. | 9. How does *iambic pentameter* differ from *prose*? |
| 10. Complete the following quotation: “all that \_\_\_\_\_ is not \_\_\_\_\_” | 10. What stereotypes might Elizabethan audiences have believed about Jewish people? | 10. Write a brief explantion of the quotation: *“I am a Jew… if you prick us, do we not bleed”* |
| **Total score:** | **Total score:** | **Total score:** |