 Scenes for group task

Getting to know ‘The Merchant of Venice’

Commentary on the play references in the following activities are to Marjorie Garber’s ‘Shakespeare After All’.

The Royal Shakespeare Company [Key moments](file:///C%3A%5CUsers%5Cmishiguro%5CDesktop%5C.%20https%3A%5Cwww.rsc.org.uk%5Cthe-merchant-of-venice%5Cabout-the-play%5Ckey-moments) Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice broken down into eight key scenes’ was also referenced to create this resource.

Act 1 Scene 1

Antonio’s sadness opens the play (Group A):

Antonio is presented as a melancholy character, who seems to have all the riches the world can afford, but nonetheless, is unhappy (Garber)

What lines in this scene communicate Antonio’s sadness? (Provide 3 quotes in your response)

How do his companions respond to this sadness? (Provide 3 quotes in your response)

What observation does Antonio compare the world to? (Provide 1 quote in your response)

What significance does this comparison have?

Brainstorm: What provides human beings with happiness?

Antonio offers to act as Bassanio’s Guarantor (Group B):

What reason does Bassanio provide for needing to lend money? (Provide 3 quotes in your response)

How does Antonio respond to Bassino’s request? (Provide 3 quotes in your response)

Do either of the men make a rationale/sensible decision in regards to borrowing/lending, in the context of their current situations?

What risks do Antonio and Bassanio take in Act 1, Scene 1? (Provide 3 quotes in your response)

Is ‘risk’ central to human experience?

Act 1 Scene 2

Portia and Nerissa (Group C):

Garber has observed that Portia, like Antonio is rich and well attended, and yet her life (like Antonio’s) seems empty.

What evidence in this scene is there that Portia’s life is lacking in some way (Provide 3 quotes in your response)

Brainstorm: What provides human beings with happiness?

How does Portia feel about her father's plan to find her a husband? (Provide 1 quote in your response)

Garber states that ‘The Merchant of Venice is above all Shakespeare’s great play about difference’. How is Portia’s character used to represent/communicate this idea in this scene? (Provide 2 quotes in your response)

Act 1 Scene 3

Antonio and Bassanio negotiate a bond with Shylock (Group D):

Religion is a source of conflict in this scene. How is this communicated by Shylock’s character? (Provide 3 quotes in your response)

Read Shylock’s speech between lines 98-121. How has Antonio treated Shylock in the past? (Provide 3 quotes in your response)

Why has Antonio treated Shylock this way?

If you were in Shylock’s position would you lend Bassanio and Antonio money?

What bond is decided on if the debt cannot be repaid? (Provide 1 quotes in your response)

Act 3 Scene 1 and 2

Shylock is the Victim of Intolerance and Bassanio discovers his fortune (Group E):

How does Shylock position the audience to reflect on the commonalities the humans experience despite cultural and religious differences in line 42-57? (Provide 3 quotes in your response)

Jessica, Shylock’s daughter has eloped. Shylock appears to be more concerned about the riches she has taken, rather than the loss of her person. How does this shape our understanding of Shylock’s character? (Provide 3 quotes in your response)

What does Bassanio’s speech from lines 73-148 communicate about the deceptiveness of appearances? (Provide 3 quotes in your response)

Portia and Bassanio’s exchange after he has opened the casket is riddled with language that has connotations of commerce. Make a list of this vocabulary. How does this position the audience to understand the nature of the engagement between the 2 characters?

How does Portia react to the letter Bassanio receives from Antonio? (Provide 3 quotes in your response)

Act 4 Scene 1

The Courtroom Scene (Group F):

Define mercy (in your own words, without looking it up). How mercy shape our experience as humans?

Define justice (in your own words, without looking it up). Is the desire for justice central to the human experience?

This scene positions the audience to reflect on the relationship between mercy and justice. How does the Duke’s character in his opening address to Shylock between lines 16 - 34 introduce this tension to the audience? (Provide 3 quotes in your response).

Are debts only financial in nature or can they take other forms?

The Duke says ‘How shalt thou hope for mercy, rendering none?’ Explain the ‘mercy’ he is referencing and why Shylock might hope for mercy

Read Portia/Bellario’s speech ‘The quality of mercy is not strained’ in the context of the Act 4, Scene 1. Compare the perspective that Portia/Bellario communicates with Shylock’s perception of the same speech (Provide 4 quotes in your response).

Act 5 Scene 2

A Reconciliation (Group G):

Read the exchange between Jessica and Lorenzo that begins the final act twice. The first time read these lines in a loving way. The second time read them with an irritable tone. How do the different interpretations of these lines shape the audience's perspective of what will occur in the final act? (Provide 3 quotes in your response).

Read from line 142 - 265. Rings are a symbol in the play. What do these symbols (the rings) represent to Nerissa and Portia? (Provide 4 quotes in your response).

At the closing of The Merchant of Venice, we are left with an ‘image of a triumphant heroine, witty and clever, generous to her friends, eloquent and amusing in terms’ (Garber). Find quotes from Act 5 that provide evidence for each of these descriptions of Portia.

Individually make up a question that you wish to ask Portia about what has been going on. Share these questions with the other members of your group. Pick one of these questions and answer it (adapted from Cambridge School Shakespeare ‘The Merchant of Venice’)

Brainstorm: What provides human beings with happiness?