

# THE MERCHANT OF VENICE – THE BIG QUESTION

A Key Stage 3 and 4 PSHE and Citizenship  
Resource



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## Curriculum Links

This KS3/KS4 Citizenship, English and Personal Wellbeing teaching sequence provides a scheme of work to help pupils learn about forming and talking through their opinions. It uses Shakespeare's plays to explore a range of topics including:

- *Personal growth and maturity*
- *Responsibility at different stages of life*
- *The importance of the rule of law*
- *Young people and mental health*
- *The power of political rhetoric*
- *Forgiveness and retribution*
- *Religious and other forms of extremism*
- *Cyberbullying and the pressures of social media*
- *The importance of diversity and of respecting difference*

## From the National Curriculum – Citizenship

### Purpose of study

A high-quality citizenship education helps to provide pupils with knowledge, skills and understanding to prepare them to play a full and active part in society. In particular, citizenship education should foster pupils' keen awareness and understanding of democracy, government and how laws are made and upheld. Teaching should equip pupils with the skills and knowledge to explore political and social issues critically, to weigh evidence, debate and make reasoned arguments. It should also prepare pupils to take their place in society as responsible citizens, manage their money well and make sound financial decisions.

### Aims

The national curriculum for citizenship aims to ensure that all pupils:

- Acquire a sound knowledge and understanding of how the United Kingdom is governed, its political system and how citizens participate actively in its democratic systems of government.

- Develop a sound knowledge and understanding of the role of law and the justice system in our society and how laws are shaped and enforced.
- Develop an interest in, and commitment to, participation in volunteering as well as other forms of responsible activity, that they will take with them into adulthood.
- Are equipped with the skills to think critically and debate political questions, to enable them to manage their money on a day-to-day basis, and plan for future financial needs.

## Subject content

### Key stage 3

Teaching should develop pupils' understanding of democracy, government and the rights and responsibilities of citizens. Pupils should use and apply their knowledge and understanding while developing skills to research and interrogate evidence, debate and evaluate viewpoints, present reasoned arguments and take informed action.

Pupils should be taught about:

- The development of the political system of democratic government in the United Kingdom, including the roles of citizens, Parliament and the monarch.
- The operation of Parliament, including voting and elections, and the role of political parties.
- The functions and uses of money, the importance and practice of budgeting, and managing risk.

### Key stage 4

Pupils should be taught about:

- Parliamentary democracy and the key elements of the constitution of the United Kingdom, including the power of government, the role of citizens and Parliament in holding those in power to account, and the different roles of the executive, legislature and judiciary and a free press.
- The different electoral systems used in and beyond the United Kingdom and actions citizens can take in democratic and electoral processes to influence decisions locally, nationally and beyond.
- Other systems and forms of government, both democratic and non-democratic, beyond the United Kingdom.

- Local, regional and international governance and the United Kingdom's relations with the rest of Europe, the Commonwealth, the United Nations and the wider world.
- Human rights and international law.
- The legal system in the UK, different sources of law and how the law helps society deal with complex problems.
- Diverse national, regional, religious and ethnic identities in the United Kingdom and the need for mutual respect and understanding.
- The different ways in which a citizen can contribute to the improvement of their community, to include the opportunity to participate actively in community volunteering, as well as other forms of responsible activity.
- Income and expenditure, credit and debt, insurance, savings and pensions, financial products and services, and how public money is raised and spent.

## **The Personal Wellbeing Programme of Study – non statutory**

### **The range and content includes:**

#### **Key Stage 3**

- Examples of diverse values encountered in society and the clarification of personal values.
- The knowledge and skills needed for setting realistic targets and personal goals.
- Physical and emotional change and puberty.
- Sexual activity, human reproduction, contraception, pregnancy, and sexually transmitted infections and HIV and how high-risk behaviours affect the health and wellbeing of individuals, families and communities.
- Facts and laws about drug, alcohol and tobacco use and misuse, and the personal and social consequences of misuse for themselves and others.
- How a balanced diet and making choices for being healthy contribute to personal wellbeing, and the importance of balance between work, leisure and exercise.
- Ways of recognising and reducing risk, minimising harm and getting help in emergency and risky situations.
- A knowledge of basic first aid.
- The features of positive and stable relationships, how to deal with a breakdown in a relationship and the effects of loss and bereavement.
- Different types of relationships, including those within families and between older and young people, boys and girls, and people of the same sex, including civil partnerships.

- k. The nature and importance of marriage and of stable relationships for family life and bringing up children.
- l. The roles and responsibilities of parents, carers and children in families.
- m. The similarities, differences and diversity among people of different race, culture, ability, disability, gender, age and sexual orientation and the impact of prejudice, bullying, discrimination and racism on individuals and communities.

#### **Key Stage 4**

- a. The effect of diverse and conflicting values on individuals, families and communities and ways of responding to them.
  - b. How the media portrays young people, body image and health issues.
  - c. The characteristics of emotional and mental health, and the causes, symptoms and treatments of some mental and emotional health disorders.
  - d. The benefits and risks of health and lifestyle choices, including choices relating to sexual activity and substance use and misuse, and the short and long-term consequences for the health and mental and emotional wellbeing of individuals, families and communities.
  - e. Where and how to obtain health information, how to recognise and follow health and safety procedures, ways of reducing risk and minimising harm in risky situations, how to find sources of emergency help and how to use basic and emergency first aid.
  - f. Characteristics of positive relationships, and awareness of exploitation in relationships and of statutory and voluntary organisations that support relationships in crisis.
  - g. The roles and responsibilities of parents, carers, children and other family members.
  - h. Parenting skills and qualities and their central importance to family life.
  - i. The impact of separation, divorce and bereavement on families and the need to adapt to changing circumstances.
- The diversity of ethnic and cultural groups, the power of prejudice, bullying, discrimination and racism, and the need to take the initiative in challenging this and other offensive behaviours and in giving support to victims of abuse.

## The Big Question – The Merchant of Venice

### Learning Objective

Pupils use a range of balanced and persuasive argument techniques across a range of activities to formulate a viewpoint and argument related to the Big Question for this lesson.

Pupils analyse the themes of prejudice in The Merchant of Venice and consider how they can take an active role in challenging this behaviour.

### Success Criteria (including differentiation)

**All** can express an initial opinion on the 'Big Question' and justify their viewpoint.

**Most** can develop their opinion over the course of the lesson sequence by listening and responding to others.

**Some** can articulate a clear balanced argument on the 'Big Question', using sophisticated argument techniques.

### Big Question: How can I challenge prejudice?

**Vocabulary:** prejudice, discrimination, unconscious bias, implicit, values, racism

*To begin: Discover the events of The Merchant of Venice using the SSF 10 Events and the instructions for exploring the story in the Appendix.*

### Lesson Plan

- Look at a few different Shylock speeches and discuss the way he is treated Vs the way he treats others. Begin to discuss the central theme of prejudice in the play.
- What is prejudice and what is discrimination? Define and ask the students to consider if they have ever been a victim of this.
- Using a toy catalogue, students will look at the way toys are advertised.
- Using the following [films](#), as a starting point, work with the students to consider Implicit Bias.
- Written outcome: Write a monologue from the POV of a character from play using Shylock's speech from the beginning of the lesson as inspiration. Consider what other prejudices might be at play within this story and how discrimination could manifest itself in other ways.
- Plenary- Return to the Big Question and ask them students to use everything they have learnt in the lessons to think about how they might challenge prejudice – both in others and in themselves.
- Show the students the implicit bias tests.

**See Teaching and Learning Activities for full details**

### Resources

- **Shylock Speech**
- **Abridged SSF version of Shylock speech**
- **Shylock assorted speeches**
- **Prejudice against Shylock speeches**
- **The Merchant of Venice – 10 events**
- **Instructions for exploring the story in the Appendix**

### National Curriculum Links

- Diverse national, regional, religious and ethnic identities in the United Kingdom and the need for mutual respect and understanding.
- Examples of diverse values encountered in society and the clarification of personal values.
- The diversity of ethnic and cultural groups, the power of prejudice, bullying, discrimination and racism, and the need to take the initiative in challenging this and other offensive behaviours and in giving support to victims of abuse.

# The Merchant of Venice - The Big Question

## Teaching and Learning Activities

### Starter – Exploring prejudice

- Using the **Shylock full speech** or the **SSF abridged version** (depending on your learners) prompt a discussion about how Shylock is feeling at this point, how the others feel about him and the mood he creates with the language he uses.
- Do a quick comprehension check and chat it through. Identify similar words, words that contrast and ideas and themes that are starting to develop already.
- Using the punctuation, ask the students to take the speech for a walk. Whenever they encounter a full stop, a question or exclamation mark, they should turn 180 degrees and continue their walk in another direction. When they reach a comma they should turn at a 90 degree angle, in a zig zag way. Ask for volunteers to show the physicalisation of the speech and talk about what these changes in direction tells them about Shylock's state of mind.
- Show the **Shylock assorted speeches** and discuss his prejudice towards other people. Why do they think he holds these beliefs? Discuss the historical and social context here and compare to other stories that they know.
- Now show them the **Prejudice against Shylock speeches**. These sections of text show others speaking about Shylock
  - It can be helpful to use these assorted speeches to show that discrimination works both ways and to highlight that in this play there are many more Christians than Jews in Venice. Ask your young people with whom the power lies in Venice and begin to discuss the relationship between power and discrimination.
- Both words (prejudice and discrimination) should have been used by this point, if they're not already write them up for the class to see. Ask the students to come up with definitions for them on post it notes and stick them next to the words.
- Clarify meanings and clear up any misconceptions.
  - **Prejudice:** *preconceived opinion that is not based on reason or actual experience.*
  - **Discrimination:** *the unjust or prejudicial treatment of different categories of people, especially on the grounds of race, age, or sex.*
- **Carefully** ask the class if they think that they have ever been subject to prejudicial thoughts? It is likely that as teenagers they will have.
  - Give them the example of thinking that all teenagers are lazy and that all people should cross the road when they see a group of teenagers coming as it is likely that they will cause trouble. Ask for their reactions to this.

## Teaching and Learning Activity One

Using either Argos catalogues or their website [here](#), ask the class what they notice about the children advertising these toys.

- Use the following questions as prompts:
  - Who is being more active (running, jumping, moving) in the ads? (Boys or girls?)
  - Who is being more quiet and calm in these ads?
  - Who is playing outside more?
  - Who is playing in the house/ kitchen more?
  - Who is taking care of babies/ cooking things/ shopping?
  - Who is fixing/ building things?
  - Who is wearing pink/ blue?
  - Who is playing with weapons?
  - Who is making art?
- Ask the class if they think that what is portrayed in the adverts is true for every single boy and girl's tastes? Ask them what they liked to play with when they were younger and if they liked to play with things that we see in the advert is for a specific gender? When they look at all of these ads, does it make them feel like they are allowed to do that/play with that?
- Show the class the sequence of [films](#) about implicit bias. These are a series of six very short films from the New York Times looking at the effects of our unconscious choices and attitudes.
- Take time after each of these films to talk through learnings and any questions that the students might have. Although the main focus of these films is race, these same theories can be and should be applied to any group who could be discriminated against.
- At the end of the six films, ask the students to make a note somewhere of something that they will do to challenge their implicit bias.

## Written Activity

- Pupils write a monologue for a character from The Merchant of Venice, in the style of Shylock's speech they studied at the start of the lesson. The speech should be directed at another character or the audience, highlighting some aspect of discrimination that they have felt in the play. It could be from one of the women, from the Prince of Morocco, who is treated differently because of his race or it could be an interpretation about one of the characters and how they may have been a victim of prejudice.



## Plenary

- Ask the class the Big Question again – **How can I challenge prejudice?** And ask what action they can take to challenge it?
- You could at this point direct your students towards an online implicit bias test for them to complete themselves.

## Useful follow up

- There is a wealth of current information, podcasts, films and articles around this topic. Share any of the below with your students.
  - [The Always 'Like a Girl' campaign](#), built around the loss of self-esteem young women experience during puberty and how we can challenge the term 'like a girl' and it's negative connotations.
  - This [Tedx Talk](#) from Diversity champion, Verna Myers about 'walking boldly towards our biases'.
  - [Invisibilia](#) Podcast: The Culture Inside. An episode about discovering things about ourselves we didn't know existed and would be embarrassed to admit to anyone.

Appendix 1

# THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

THE BIG QUESTION

Resources Pack



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## Shylock Speech

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 his 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.

## Abridged SSF Shylock Speech

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  
cooled my friends, heated mine enemies;  
and what's his reason? I am a Jew. Hath not a  
Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs,  
dimensions, senses, affections, passions?  
If you prick us do we not bleed?  
If you tickle us do we not laugh?  
And if you wrong us shall we not revenge?

## Shylock Assorted Speeches

### ACT 1 SCENE 3/ SCENE 3 SSF ABRIDGEMENT

SHYLOCK

**[aside]** How like a fawning publican he looks!  
I hate him for he is a Christian:  
But more, for that in low simplicity  
He lends out money gratis, and brings down  
The rate of usance here with us in Venice.  
If I can catch him once upon the hip...

### ACT 1 SCENE 3

BASSANIO

If it please you to dine with us.

SHYLOCK

Yes, to smell pork! To eat of the habitation  
which your prophet the Nazarite conjured the  
devil into! I will buy with you, sell with you, talk with you,  
walk with you, and so following; but I will not eat with you,  
drink with you, nor pray with you.

## Prejudice against Shylock Speeches

**LAUNCELOT:**

My master's a very Jew. I am famished in his service.  
You may tell every finger I have with my ribs.  
My conscience will not allow me to run, but the devil is  
at my elbow saying to me "Gobbo, Launcelot Gobbo,  
run away". My conscience says "No, take heed, honest  
Gobbo, do not run." "Budge", says the devil.  
"Budge not", says my conscience.

**DUKE OF VENICE:**

Shylock the world thinks, and I think so too,  
That thou but leadest this fashion of thy malice  
To the last hour of act, and then 'tis thought  
Thou'lt show thy mercy and remorse more strange  
Than is thy strange apparent cruelty;  
We all expect a gentle answer Jew!

**PORTIA:**

Tarry Jew,  
The law hath yet another hold on you.  
It is enacted in the laws of Venice,  
If it be proved against an alien,  
He seek the life of any citizen,  
The party 'gainst the which he doth contrive,  
Shall seize one half his goods, the other half  
Comes to the privy coffer of the state,  
And the offender's life lies in the mercy  
Of the Duke only.  
Down therefore, and beg mercy of the duke.

**DUKE OF VENICE:**

That thou shalt see the difference of our spirit  
I pardon thee thy life before thou ask it:  
For half thy wealth, it is Antonio's,  
The other half comes to the general state.

**SHYLOCK:**

Nay, take my life and all, pardon not that!  
What mercy can you render him, Antonio?

**ANTONIO:**

So please my lord the duke, and all the court,  
To quit the fine for one half of his goods,  
Two things provided more, that for this favour  
He presently become a Christian:  
The other, that he do record a gift  
Unto his son Lorenzo and his daughter  
Of all he dies possess'd.

# The Merchant of Venice

## 10 Events

1. In Venice Bassanio plans with his friend Antonio to raise money to become a suitor to Portia in Belmont.
2. In Belmont, Portia and Nerissa review the caskets of Gold, Silver and Lead where her dead father has left a portrait of her as a guessing game for suitors.
3. Bassanio makes a deal to borrow money from Shylock and Antonio is the guarantor – if he fails to pay up he must forfeit a pound of his own flesh.
4. In Belmont, the Prince of Morocco chooses the wrong casket.
5. Bassanio plans to travel to Belmont with his friend Gratiano and Launcelot who deserts Shylock to serve Bassanio. Jessica, Shylock's daughter, steals her father's money and escapes with her lover Lorenzo.
6. The Prince of Aragon chooses the wrong casket.
7. Shylock hearing of his daughter's escape with his money, takes comfort in the thought of calling up his debt of flesh from Antonio whose fortune has been lost at sea.
8. In Belmont, Bassanio chooses the right casket and Nerissa falls in love with Gratiano. The women give their lovers rings. Just as everyone is celebrating, news arrives of Antonio's predicament.
9. In a court of law in Venice, Shylock demands that the Duke enforce his bond for a pound of Antonio's flesh. Portia, disguised as a legal expert with Nerissa disguised as her clerk, makes the case for mercy which Shylock rejects and then finally tricks him with the detail of the law. The Duke passes sentence that Shylock's bond is equal to plotting murder and that he will pay the death penalty unless he agrees to Antonio's conditions that he give half his fortune to his daughter and be converted to a Christian. Bassanio and Gratiano thank the legal experts by giving them the rings they have been given.
10. Back in Belmont and no longer disguised, Portia and Nerissa demand to see their rings and then reveal their story as they hand back the rings. All the lovers are happy as news arrives that Antonio's fortune is not lost at sea after all

## Exploring the story

**Before you start this lesson and delve into the Big Question in the play, you might want to familiarise yourself with the story first.**

- There are lots of different approaches you could take, including using the 10 point summary.
- If you and/or your students don't know the play, then the following process is a great way to introduce them to the story and some of the main characters.
- As with any lesson, do adapt this to suit the needs of your students.
- This is a great way to get the story on its feet quickly and help your students to understand the story arc.

**Firstly, divide your students into groups and give them copies of the 10 point summary to explore the story order.**

- Cut up and remove the numbers from the 10 point summary.
- Give each group a few minutes to rearrange them into the correct order.
  - You could print a large copy of the 10 point summary so that each one is on an A3 page and when you go through the order with the whole class you can stick them up in the correct order around the room.
  - Ensure that you correct misconceptions as you go through the points and ask your students to justify and clarify the decisions they made.
  - This will support with comprehension work across English as there are some key indicators of the story structure (E.g Romeo and Juliet can only get married once they have met, Macbeth can only become King once he has killed the King).



**Once the correct order has been established, give each group two consecutive story points and ask them to create freeze frames to show this moment. Provide them with two rules**

1. Everyone must be involved.
2. Someone/some people must read out the story point.
  - Give them a strict time limit to create the freeze frame, before moving onto their second one.
    - Ask them to consider what else they could be if there are only a small amount of named characters in the scene - could they create the architecture or double up on characters?
  - After the time limit is up, give them a further two minutes to consider how they would adjust their positions so that the rest of the class can see the whole image – ask them to consider their audience.
  - With the rest of the class watching, move from one group to another, seeing each freeze frame in order and hearing the story point. Then jump into the image to ‘Thought tap’ some (or all ideally) of the characters.
    - It is really encouraging for students if they get to share their ideas, whether they are Juliet or Juliet’s wardrobe, Macbeth or one of his soldiers.
  - Ask them open questions about who they are, what they are doing and how they feel about it. Facilitate this in a light-hearted way to avoid the students feeling under pressure.
  - If they struggle with an answer, throw the question out to the rest of the group and the audience.
    - This is a great opportunity to get some interpretations of characters’ thoughts and actions but do use it to clarify facts about the story and the characters too.
    - It is also a great time to show that you don’t have all of the answers either and that you will all find out more as you delve further into the play and rehearsals.
    - You could do this ‘Thought Tapping’ as a ‘Roving Reporter’, using a prop as a microphone to interview the characters as if live in that moment.

**Once you have done this for each of the 10 images, bring the class back together for a plenary.**

This is a good time to recap on what they have learnt about the characters and/or the story and you could do this in a number of ways. E.g.

1. **Tell the story in a circle.** Everyone sits in a circle and adds a bit more information on the previous person's ideas. This means that those that have a good grasp will be able to share their knowledge and those who are still working towards it, will be able to add whatever they can – such as a character name or a setting for the play.
2. **Provide them with Plenary cards.** Use the following examples and ask them to share their response with someone else.
  - Something they have learnt today; a new word or phrase that they have used today; something that they would like to know more about; something that they are looking forward to in the play; a question that they now have about the play.
3. **Learnt and enjoyed.** Simply ask for them to tell a partner something that they have learnt and something that they have enjoyed in this lesson.