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***The Merchant of Venice***  
BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

  
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Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Pre-reading

### Research

Objective: Researching the stage of Shakespeare's time

#### Activity

Shakespeare's plays were written for both the theatre and for actors to perform on stage. Using the library, the Internet, or both, research how Shakespeare's plays would have been performed in his day. Pay particular attention to the following:

- Were there any famous actors during this time?
- What types of people were actors?
- What types of people went to plays?
- What differences were there between the upper class and the commoners?
- What did the stage look like?
- Where were plays performed?
- What types of props, costumes, and special effects were used?
- What were the social aspects involved in play going?
- What was the history of theater before Shakespeare's time?
- What were the major differences between theater then and now?

Be sure to include at least two of these elements in your research. You may choose other topics if you wish. When you have completed your research, write a summary that is at least four paragraphs long.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Act I****Personal Reflection****Objective:** Identifying your own role**Activity**

In Scene I, Antonio says, "I hold the world but as the world, Gratiano/A stage, where every man must play a part, And mine is a sad one."

If the world is a stage, and we are all actors, what is your role? Think of the activities you participate in, the groups you belong to, and your role in your family. Write two paragraphs that explain your role in the world today and how you feel about it.

Next, think of the role you want to play in the future. How will your role change as you mature? Will you still be doing the same things when you are 25, 45, or older? Why or why not? Write two paragraphs on what you hope your future role will be. End with a concluding paragraph that contrasts your present role with your future. You should write at least five paragraphs.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Act I****Simile and Metaphor****Objective:** Understanding simile and metaphor**Activity**

Shakespeare's drama is full of similes and metaphors. However, we might not recognize what they mean today due to the differences between Shakespeare's language and our own.

From this act, identify five instances where simile or metaphor occur and list them on the **Simile or Metaphor Chart** that follows. Next, interpret their meanings and give a modern example that would carry the same meaning as the original.

The first example has been completed for you.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Act III****Motif****Objective:** Identifying motifs that contribute to theme

*The Merchant of Venice* contains several motifs—recurring structures, ideas, or contrasts that help develop the play's major themes. Among these motifs are: sticking to the letter of law, deception or disguise, and obedience to parents (or the lack thereof). Although these motifs may be seen throughout the play, they are quite visible in Act III.

**Activity**

For each scene listed, at least one example has been quoted that supports one of the above motifs. Look back at Act III and the indicated scenes to refresh your memory of the circumstances, and, in the space provided, determine which motif has been represented. In the next column, explain how this is so. The first has been done for you as an example.



Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Acts I-III****Journal Writing****Objective:** Writing character journals

World history, ancient legends, and archaic literature were frequent sources of inspiration for Shakespeare. Many of his plays are based on historical people, events, or literature. For example, the characters in *Macbeth* and *Julius Caesar* were based on real people, and the tale of *Romeo and Juliet* was based on a romantic tragedy by Chrétien de Troyes.

For this activity, imagine that the characters in *The Merchant of Venice* are based on real people and events, and that they maintained daily journals during the events that inspired the play.

**Activity**

Consider the cast of *The Merchant of Venice*, and then choose the character that appeals most strongly to you. Choose wisely, because you will be writing the personal journal of that character, and your journal must portray your character's thoughts and experiences for the duration of the play.

Guidelines for the journals are as follows:

- Journals should be written in first person.
- Each journal entry should be at least one-half of a page.
- There should be a single entry for each scene of the play for Acts I-III that your character appears in. If you choose a character that does not appear in but a few scenes throughout Acts I-III, pretend that the character is fully aware of events as they unfold and has a perspective on them. Write a minimum of five entries.
- Journals should reflect the thoughts, actions, and words of your chosen character in order to be accurate and believable accounts. Journals should reflect your character's behavior, speech patterns, and personality.
- Try to keep the dialect similar to Shakespeare's Elizabethan English by avoiding modern expressions.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Act IV****Examining Emotions**

**Objective:** Exploring character through examining emotions

*The Merchant of Venice* is a comedy, but it contains many of the same emotions that can be found in one of Shakespeare's tragedies. The inclusion of negative emotions and human fallibilities—even in humorous drama—is one of the many factors that adds to the realism—and thus entertainment value—of Shakespeare's drama.

**Activity**

The **Emotions Chart** on the next page contains a list of quotations from Act IV that are representative of some emotion experienced by the characters. Identify the emotion represented and indicate the character experiencing the emotion.