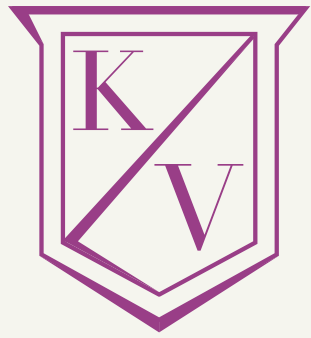


Heroes Who Inspire



TEACHER'S NOTES

The Merchant of Venice

The Merchant of Venice — Introduction

The purpose of this pack is to reaffirm and develop pupils' knowledge and understandings of the character virtues, with particular reference to the virtues of **gratitude** and **self-discipline**.

To accompany these **Teacher's Notes**, **The Merchant of Venice – The Story**, and **The Merchant of Venice – Resources for Pupils** are downloadable via the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues website (www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/knightlyvirtuesresources).

The following supporting documents are also provided online:

- **Knightly Virtues Introduction Materials**
- **Virtues Toolkit** including activities on the following virtues: Self-Discipline, Honesty, Love, Gratitude, Justice, Courage, Service, Humility
- **The Merchant of Venice PowerPoint**
- **Other stories in the programme** including Gareth and Lynette, El Cid, Don Quixote, Robin Hood, Rosa Parks, Beowulf, Joan of Arc and Anne Frank

Background Information for Teachers

This information is to supplement the The Merchant of Venice PowerPoint which provides an introduction to the story, available online (www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/knightlyvirtuesresources)

The story of The Merchant of Venice is a tragic comedy. It has a generally dark theme, though a reasonably light and happy ending.

Lady Portia is a paragon of virtue. The virtues of moral character that stand out in Portia are wisdom and justice. Portia's defence of the virtue of mercy in Act IV, Scene 1 (see below), is one of the most famous and frequently memorised speeches in all of Shakespeare's work. Portia gives Shylock every opportunity to act mercifully at Antonio's trial; offering him several times the repayment of the loan, and is still merciful to him after she has outwitted him and saved Antonio. At this point, Antonio also takes the opportunity to show mercy to Shylock, and we may hope that he has perhaps learned some kind of moral lesson from his close and foolhardy shave with death. Anyway, there should be plenty of scope here for rich discussion with primary pupils about some serious human moral issues.

'The quality of mercy is not strain'd; it droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven upon the place

beneath; it is twice bless'd; it blesseth him that gives and him that takes; 'tis mightiest in the mightiest; it becomes the thron'd monarch better than his crown; his sceptre shows the force of temporal power, the attribute to awe and majesty, wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings; but mercy is above this sceptred sway, -- it is an attribute to God himself; and earthly power doth then show likest God's when mercy seasons justice.'

(Portia to Shylock, Act IV, Scene 1)

The episodes of Portia's suitors opening the gold, silver and lead boxes, and the scrolls inside each speak of wisdom and humility. Bassanio displays these in selecting the lead box over the gold and silver. He admits that he is poor and has had to borrow money from Antonio to visit Portia from Antonio. Whilst all of her suitors put Portia on a pedestal, the two who select the gold and silver boxes do so without thinking truly about the reasons Portia's father has devised this test. Whilst they admirably display humility at being wrong in their choices, they do not show the same level as Bassanio, which is why he is able to pass the test and claim Portia's heart. Again, even when he gives away his wedding ring towards the end of the play, he does so with the best of intentions, as he is so happy that Balthazar (Portia) has defended Antonio so successfully, even if it is farcical that neither he nor Gratiano recognise their wives Portia and Nerissa in the courtroom.

Whilst Antonio, who the play is named after, is initially presented as a kind and generous friend, who is willing to lend any sum of money to Bassanio, his speeches and conduct actually convey a morally challenged character. He is as anti-heroic as Shylock is, for opposing reasons. Whilst being capable of displaying great kindness, generosity and reputation, Antonio is foolish to accept the terms offered by Shylock for the loan. He also shows his bigoted and racist views in condemning Shylock for being Jewish, and only showing mercy and giving Shylock half of his property back if he converts to Christianity.

Shylock, on the other hand, is an anti-heroic character, depicted as a deeply unpleasant and vindictive person in his work as a moneylender, yet he is given one of the most powerful anti-racist speeches ever written (below).

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, heal'd by the same means,
warm'd and cool'd 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.

(Shylock, Act III, scene 1)

Shylock, as a Jew, is a victim of Christian prejudice, intolerance and persecution, and Shakespeare leaves this in little doubt in the text. That said, the portrayal on stage of Shylock in a sympathetic light is said to have only begun during the nineteenth century. Previously, actors often played him as a clown or a villain. Since the early nineteenth century, actors often portray Shylock as being justified in his call for revenge on Antonio for not repaying the debt. As Portia initially indicates in court, Antonio willingly signed the bond agreeing to repay Shylock with a 'pound of flesh', should he be unable to repay the debt on time, and it was Antonio's arrogance and short-sightedness which lead him to believe that his ships would return to Venice on time to allow him to pay the debt.

Shylock had few other opportunities for livelihood than money-lending on interest, which was forbidden to Christians by law.

Whilst Shylock's speech (above) in Act III, Scene I can be commended unreservedly as a man displaying patience and an absence of bigotry and prejudice, Shylock's heart does 'harden' when learning that his daughter Jessica has run off to marry a Christian.

So, whilst these are delicate and controversial topics for the primary classroom, there is clearly much scope here for exploration of different (good and bad) points of view through appreciation of the deeply complex (morally mixed) characters of both Shylock and Antonio.

The Merchant of Venice — Lesson Plan

Title: The Merchant of Venice – Gratitude and Self-Discipline

Year Group 5/6

Curriculum links: Literacy, History

Learning Objectives

1. To understand what the virtues of gratitude and self-discipline mean in the story of The Merchant of Venice;
2. To accurately identify vocabulary which illustrate the virtues of gratitude and self-discipline from the story of The Merchant of Venice;
3. To demonstrate sustained attention to an extended narrative and answer relevant questions accurately;
4. To be able to accurately retrieve information from the narrative which illustrates an answer or point of view.

Learning Outcomes

1. To be able to identify and describe the virtues of gratitude and self-discipline;
2. To begin to be able to relate the virtues of gratitude and self-discipline to our own lives today.

Resources

Related Knightly Virtues resources, including the Virtues Toolkit, are available via www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/knightlyvirtuesresources

Provided: The Merchant of Venice narrative, The Merchant of Venice Teacher's Notes, The Merchant of Venice Resources for Pupils

Not Provided: Interactive White Board, Flipchart, Pens

Introduction (15mins)

Introduce/reaffirm the meaning of character and virtue (Knightly Virtues Introduction PowerPoint). Introduce the Knightly Virtues definitions of gratitude and self-discipline (Virtues Toolkit). Establish open space for pupil engagement principles.

The Story (30-35mins)

Read the story to pupils. Provide pupils with the opportunity to clarify understanding. Provide pupils with access to the Glossary for reference to character names and new vocabulary.

Activity (15-20mins)

Virtue in Focus: Gratitude

Ask the pupils to select, in groups, two acts of gratitude displayed in the story. Who displays the gratitude, and what are they grateful for? There is space provided for them to write their answers. Pupils are asked to consider the character of Antonio. Does he display any virtues?

Plenary (15mins)

Bring the group together to discuss the acts of gratitude found within the story and invite them to share their thoughts on what characters are grateful for and also their thoughts on the character of Antonio. Show and read the self-discipline virtue card (available in the Virtues Toolkit) and introduce the homework task.

Progression/Homework

Virtue in Focus: Humility

Humility task from the Virtues Toolkit found online at www.jubileecentre.ac.uk/knightlyvirtuesresources