

Portia tells Nerissa of her plans. They will see their husbands again, but in disguise as men. In Scene 5, Lancelot fears that Jessica will be damned because she is a Jew's daughter.

1 What men are like (in pairs)

In lines 65–76, as Portia shares her plans to adopt a male disguise with Nerissa, she gives a range of images of typical male behaviour. Work on one or more of the following activities on the lines.

Either each choose one of these images and work out how to mime it for your partner to identify. Then work together on a single image that you will present to the rest of the class. Can the others recognise which image you chose?

Or write a short account of Portia's view of men as revealed in lines 65–76. Show how her words add to your understanding of Portia's attitudes.

Or make a list of five other habits or types of behaviour that the two women might adopt ('A thousand raw tricks . . . / Which I will practise') if they are going to convince other people of their 'manhood'. Your list may be serious or, like Portia's, mocking and satirical. Share your ideas with others in the class. Afterwards, try to rewrite your list in the same style and rhythm as lines 65–76.

2 Is Portia as innocent as she seems? (in pairs)

On two occasions Portia shows that she is fully alert to sexuality. Lines 61–2, 'accomplishèd / With that we lack', mean 'equipped with male genitals'. Then, in response to Nerissa's question (lines 79–80), she deliberately misunderstands the words 'turn to', interpreting them as 'sexually invite'. Talk together about what this adds to your understanding of Portia's character.

Act 3 Scene 3 - Portia's plan

a habit clothes
accoutred dressed
'frays disputes, fights

quaint ingenious
bragging jacks boastful young men
lewd dirty-minded

PORTIA They shall, Nerissa, but in such a habit 60
That they shall think we are accomplishèd
With that we lack. I'll hold thee any wager,
When we are both accoutred like young men
I'll prove the prettier fellow of the two, 65
And wear my dagger with the braver grace,
And speak between the change of man and boy
With a reed voice, and turn two mincing steps
Into a manly stride; and speak of 'frays
Like a fine bragging youth; and tell quaint lies 70
How honourable ladies sought my love,
Which I denying, they fell sick and died –
I could not do withal. Then I'll repent,
And wish for all that that I had not killed them;
And twenty of these puny lies I'll tell, 75
That men shall swear I have discontinued school
Above a twelvemonth. I have within my mind
A thousand raw tricks of these bragging jacks,
Which I will practise.

NERISSA Why, shall we turn to men?
PORTIA Fie, what a question's that, 80
If thou wert near a lewd interpreter!
But come, I'll tell thee all my whole device
When I am in my coach, which stays for us
At the park gate; and therefore haste away,
For we must measure twenty miles today.

Exeunt

Act 3 Scene 5
Belmont Portia's garden

Enter LANCELOT the Clown and JESSICA

LANCELOT Yes truly, for look you, the sins of the father are to be laid 5
upon the children. Therefore I promise you I fear you. I was
always plain with you, and so now I speak my agitation of the
matter. Therefore be o'good cheer, for truly I think you are
damned. There is but one hope in it that can do you any good, and
that is but a kind of bastard hope neither.