

The Duke asks Shylock to show pity. Shylock refuses to give his reasons for wishing to harm Antonio, except that it is his whim, and that he hates him.

**1 The Duke's appeal to Shylock (in small groups)**

Try a group reading of lines 16–34, sharing the lines between you. Look out for clues to the Duke's feelings for Antonio and his attitudes to non-Christians. After your reading, summarise the key points he makes in this opening address.

**2 Shylock's opening statement (in pairs)**

- a **Shylock won't explain** Take turns to read aloud lines 35–62, changing over at the end of each line or at each punctuation mark. Earlier in the play (Act 1 Scene 3, lines 34–43) Shylock expressed his grievances against Antonio; yet now, in the court, he refuses to discuss his feelings, except to confirm his hatred for Antonio (line 60). Talk together about the possible reasons for Shylock's behaviour at this vital point in his revenge plan.
- b **Shylock's curse** Shylock is determined to use the Venetian code of law to press his case against Antonio. If the Duke will not enforce the law, then 'the danger' will result (lines 38–9). Write a paragraph to show what you imagine Shylock wishes might happen to 'your charter and your city's freedom' if the law is not followed.

**3 Bizarre fears (in pairs)**

In lines 47–52 Shylock lists three extraordinary things which some men find disturbing or hateful. First, discuss why you think he uses such peculiar examples, then extend his list by inventing three more outlandish fears. Write them in the same style that Shylock uses.

**And pluck . . . flint** and make even the most hard-hearted feel sorry for him  
**Turks, and Tartars** seen by Christians as heathens (like the Jews)  
**baned** poisoned  
**affection . . . passion** strong feelings often disturb the mind  
**but of . . . offended** but can't help offending others because he himself is so offended

And pluck commiseration of his state 30  
 From brassy bosoms and rough hearts of flint,  
 From stubborn Turks, and Tartars never trained  
 To offices of tender courtesy.  
 We all expect a gentle answer, Jew.  
 SHYLOCK I have possessed your grace of what I purpose, 35  
 And by our holy Sabaoth have I sworn  
 To have the due and forfeit of my bond.  
 If you deny it, let the danger light  
 Upon your charter and your city's freedom!  
 You'll ask me why I rather choose to have 40  
 A weight of carrion flesh than to receive  
 Three thousand ducats. I'll not answer that –  
 But say it is my humour: is it answered?  
 What if my house be troubled with a rat,  
 And I be pleased to give ten thousand ducats 45  
 To have it baned? What, are you answered yet?  
 Some men there are love not a gaping pig;  
 Some that are mad if they behold a cat;  
 And others when the bagpipe sings i'the nose  
 Cannot contain their urine: for affection 50  
 Masters oft passion, sways it to the mood  
 Of what it likes or loathes. Now for your answer:  
 As there is no firm reason to be rendered  
 Why he cannot abide a gaping pig,  
 Why he a harmless necessary cat, 55  
 Why he a woollen bagpipe, but of force  
 Must yield to such inevitable shame  
 As to offend, himself being offended:  
 So can I give no reason, nor I will not,  
 More than a lodged hate and a certain loathing 60  
 I bear Antonio, that I follow thus  
 A losing suit against him. Are you answered?  
 BASSANIO This is no answer, thou unfeeling man,  
 To excuse the current of thy cruelty.

Act 4 scene 1 - Shylock's  
 Opening Statement

Antonio says it's pointless to argue with the pitiless Shylock. Bassanio's offer of six thousand ducats is refused. Shylock demands the pound of flesh as his property, and due to him by law.

**1 Bassanio gets involved – a quick-fire exchange (in pairs)**

Take parts as Bassanio and Shylock and read lines 63–9. Experiment with different ways of presenting the two men sparring verbally with each other.

**2 Shylock: a force of nature (in pairs)**

- a In lines 70–83 Antonio stresses how immovable and stubborn Shylock is. Reasoning with him is like trying to arrest nature itself. It is impossible to stop the waves on the beach or the wolf eating the lamb, or the branches moving in the wind. Perhaps Shakespeare had the story of King Canute in his mind here (especially in lines 71–2). If you don't know the story, research it in the library or on the Internet. Write a paragraph explaining ways in which it mirrors Antonio's comparisons.
- b Make up another futile task to add to Antonio's list. Mime it to the rest of the class. Can they tell what it is?

**3 Give me judgement!**

Lines 89–103 are Shylock's passionate plea for his case to be heard. Try one or more of the following:

- a Learn and rehearse his speech for performance. Bring out Shylock's vehemence and commitment.
- b Shylock speaks out about the abuse of slaves. Does this affect how you respond to him?
- c Write several paragraphs about what Shylock's words tell you about master–slave relationships in Venice, and how that knowledge adds to your understanding of Venetian society.
- d How does the Duke respond as he listens to Shylock's tirade against the masters of Venice? Taking each sentence in turn, write the Duke's unspoken thoughts on what he hears.

<b>Every . . . first</b> not all insults provoke hatred at first	<b>rendering</b> giving
<b>bate</b> reduce	<b>palates</b> mouths
<b>fretten</b> disturbed, blown about	<b>viands</b> food
<b>moe</b> more	<b>fie upon</b> so much for
	<b>decrees</b> laws

SHYLOCK I am not bound to please thee with my answers. 65

BASSANIO Do all men kill the things they do not love?

SHYLOCK Hates any man the thing he would not kill?

BASSANIO Every offence is not a hate at first.

SHYLOCK What, wouldst thou have a serpent sting thee twice? 70

ANTONIO I pray you think you question with the Jew.

You may as well go stand upon the beach  
And bid the main flood bate his usual height;  
You may as well use question with the wolf  
Why he hath made the ewe bleat for the lamb;  
You may as well forbid the mountain pines 75  
To wag their high tops and to make no noise  
When they are fretten with the gusts of heaven;  
You may as well do anything most hard  
As seek to soften that – than which what's harder? –  
His Jewish heart. Therefore I do beseech you 80  
Make no more offers, use no farther means,  
But with all brief and plain conveniency  
Let me have judgement, and the Jew his will.

BASSANIO For thy three thousand ducats here is six.

SHYLOCK If every ducat in six thousand ducats 85  
Were in six parts, and every part a ducat,  
I would not draw them; I would have my bond.

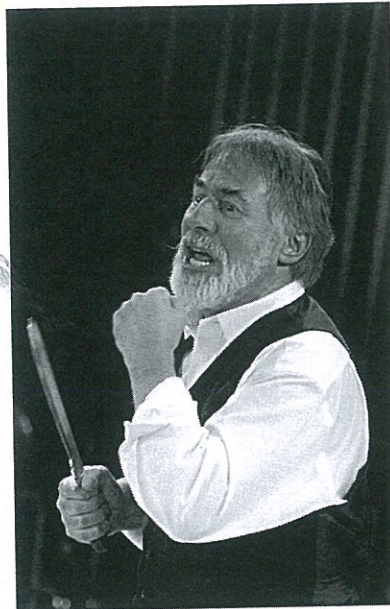
DUKE How shalt thou hope for mercy, rendering none?

SHYLOCK What judgement shall I dread, doing no wrong? 90  
You have among you many a purchased slave,  
Which, like your asses and your dogs and mules,  
You use in abject and in slavish parts  
Because you bought them. Shall I say to you,  
'Let them be free! Marry them to your heirs!  
Why sweat they under burdens? Let their beds 95  
Be made as soft as yours, and let their palates  
Be seasoned with such viands?' You will answer,  
'The slaves are ours.' So do I answer you.  
The pound of flesh which I demand of him  
Is dearly bought; 'tis mine, and I will have it. 100  
If you deny me, fie upon your law:  
There is no force in the decrees of Venice.  
I stand for judgement. Answer: shall I have it?

Nerissa, disguised as a lawyer's clerk, arrives with letters from Bellario, a legal expert. Shylock sharpens his knife on the sole of his shoe, and Gratiano abuses him for his cruel nature.

**1 Shylock sharpens his knife (in pairs)**

Bassanio tries to cheer Antonio (lines 111–13), and offers to take Antonio's place as Shylock pursues his forfeit. But Antonio insists (lines 114–18) that he must be the one to die. Shylock seems to ignore the two men's evident affection for each other, and begins to sharpen his knife. Read the lines aloud, then talk together about your impressions of the two men and their bond to each other.



Which line do you think Shylock is speaking at this moment?

**2 Gratiano attacks (in small groups)**

Gratiano viciously abuses Shylock, saying that a dead wolf's soul entered his body whilst he was still in his mother's womb. One person, as Shylock, sits on a chair. The others speak, shout or sneer lines 128–38 at him, changing over at each punctuation mark. Take turns to be Shylock. Afterwards talk together about:

- how Shylock probably feels
- your understanding of 'Pythagoras' in this context (see gloss below)
- what these lines suggest about Gratiano.

**determine** settle  
**stays without** waits outside  
**Ere** before  
**tainted wether** sick ram  
**Meetest** the most suitable  
**epitaph** words on a tomb or gravestone

**keen** sharp (or sing a funeral song)  
**wit** intelligence  
**inexcrable** utterly cursed  
**Pythagoras** Greek who taught the idea of the transmigration of souls  
**trunks** bodies  
**unhallowed dam** heathen mother

DUKE Upon my power I may dismiss this court,  
 Unless Bellario, a learned doctor 105  
 Whom I have sent for to determine this,  
 Come here today.

SALERIO My lord, here stays without  
 A messenger with letters from the doctor,  
 New come from Padua.

DUKE Bring us the letters. Call the messenger. 110

BASSANIO Good cheer, Antonio! What, man, courage yet!  
 The Jew shall have my flesh, blood, bones, and all,  
 Ere thou shalt lose for me one drop of blood.

ANTONIO I am a tainted wether of the flock,  
 Meetest for death; the weakest kind of fruit 115  
 Drops earliest to the ground, and so let me.  
 You cannot better be employed, Bassanio,  
 Than to live still and write mine epitaph.

*Enter NERISSA [disguised as a lawyer's clerk]*

DUKE Came you from Padua, from Bellario?

NERISSA From both, my lord: [*Presenting letter*] Bellario greets your  
 grace. 120

BASSANIO Why dost thou whet thy knife so earnestly?

SHYLOCK To cut the forfeiture from that bankrupt there.  
 GRATIANO Not on thy sole, but on thy soul, harsh Jew,  
 Thou mak'st thy knife keen. But no metal can, 125  
 No, not the hangman's axe, bear half the keenness  
 Of thy sharp envy. Can no prayers pierce thee?

SHYLOCK No, none that thou hast wit enough to make.

GRATIANO O be thou damned, inexcrable dog,  
 And for thy life let justice be accused!  
 Thou almost mak'st me waver in my faith, 130  
 To hold opinion with Pythagoras  
 That souls of animals infuse themselves  
 Into the trunks of men. Thy currish spirit  
 Governed a wolf, who – hanged for human slaughter –

Even from the gallows did his fell soul fleet, 135  
 And whilst thou layest in thy unhallowed dam  
 Infused itself in thee; for thy desires  
 Are wolfish, bloody, starved, and ravenous.

Antonio requests – and is granted – partial mercy for Shylock: he can keep half his wealth; Antonio will invest the rest. Unwittingly, Bassanio tries to reward Portia with her own money.

### 1 Shylock's punishment: a summary (in pairs)

Use lines 376–86 to make a diagram, illustrating in words and pictures Antonio's suggestions for the punishment of Shylock. Find a clear way of showing the order in which they might rank as humiliations in Shylock's mind.

### 2 Antonio: a merciful Christian? (in small groups)

Talk together about Antonio's treatment of Shylock. Has he given up the vicious prejudice of his past, or are these reduced punishments (lines 376–86) still calculated to inflict misery and humiliation on Shylock? In particular, discuss the demand that Shylock becomes a Christian, an instruction that would be deeply offensive to Shylock (because his religion specifically prohibits such conversion).

### 3 Shylock: the final curtain (in pairs)

A director said that Shylock should speak his last lines 'with all the ruefulness of a man who realises he's made a very silly mistake . . . to take on the establishment and play it at its own game . . .'. The actor playing Shylock must decide how to leave the stage speaking his final, virtually monosyllabic lines (390, 391–3). Sometimes he exits with great dignity, sometimes as a broken man. Laurence Olivier as Shylock made his exit in a dignified manner, but after he'd gone off, a long, agonised scream was heard.

First, explore reading the lines in a variety of ways. Then, as director, write instructions for Shylock about how he should leave the stage.

**have . . . use** invest the other half  
**record a gift** sign a deed of gift  
**of all . . . possessed** everything he owns when he dies  
**Had . . . more** if I'd had my way, you'd have been in front of a jury

**meet** necessary  
**leisure** time  
**gratify** reward  
**bound** in debt  
**in lieu whereof** in place of which  
**cope** give in exchange for

- ANTONIO So please my lord the Duke and all the court  
 To quit the fine for one half of his goods,  
 I am content, so he will let me have  
 The other half in use, to render it  
 Upon his death unto the gentleman  
 That lately stole his daughter. 380  
 Two things provided more: that for this favour  
 He presently become a Christian;  
 The other, that he do record a gift,  
 Here in the court, of all he dies possessed  
 Unto his son Lorenzo and his daughter. 385
- DUKE He shall do this, or else I do recant  
 The pardon that I late pronounced here.
- PORTIA Art thou contented, Jew? What dost thou say?
- SHYLOCK I am content.
- PORTIA Clerk, draw a deed of gift. 390
- SHYLOCK I pray you give me leave to go from hence;  
 I am not well. Send the deed after me  
 And I will sign it.
- DUKE Get thee gone, but do it.
- GRATIANO In christening shalt thou have two godfathers:  
 Had I been judge, thou shouldst have had ten more,  
 To bring thee to the gallows, not to the font. 395
- Exit [Shylock]*
- DUKE Sir, I entreat you home with me to dinner.
- PORTIA I humbly do desire your grace of pardon.  
 I must away this night toward Padua,  
 And it is meet I presently set forth. 400
- DUKE I am sorry that your leisure serves you not.  
 Antonio, gratify this gentleman,  
 For in my mind you are much bound to him.  
*Exit Duke and his train*
- BASSANIO Most worthy gentleman, I and my friend  
 Have by your wisdom been this day acquitted  
 Of grievous penalties, in lieu whereof  
 Three thousand ducats due unto the Jew  
 We freely cope your courteous pains withal. 405
- ANTONIO And stand indebted over and above  
 In love and service to you evermore. 410