

*The Merchant of Venice Study Guide*

2. In scene i, Antonio faces the Duke. He owes a 3,000 ducat debt to Shylock. Bassanio offers to die in place of Antonio. (See lines 113–120.) What was Antonio's reaction? What kind of friend was Bassanio? Read John 15:13.
3. Portia enters the courtroom dressed as a male lawyer and presents legal interpretation of the case to the Duke. Several of the characters refer to her as Daniel. Why would this be appropriate? (See Daniel 2:47; also look up the meaning of the name Daniel.)
4. Is Shylock sorry for trying to hurt Antonio? Why or why not?
5. In the Bible the “letter of the law” means concentrating on the smallest details of religious rules and regulations. Jesus criticized the Pharisees for focusing on a tiny fraction of the law and enforcing it diligently while discarding the law's original purpose (Matthew 23: 23, 24). By doing this they were not following the general principles of justice, mercy, and honor. How did Shylock focus on the letter of the law in his lawsuit?

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6. How does Portia make her judgment according to the “letter of the law”? How does Shylock’s use of the law trap him? (scene i, lines 307–378)
  
7. Does Shylock deserve his punishment? Why or why not? (scene i, lines 379–388)
  
8. What are the conditions Antonio places on Shylock to ensure his pardon? (scene i, lines 396–406)
  
9. Both Portia and Nerissa (in disguise) get their husbands to surrender rings. (scene i, lines 443–472, scene ii, lines 11–18) Later they tease their husbands about it. Use five adjectives to describe Portia and Nerissa.

**Dig Deeper:**

10. When Portia enters the courtroom she first appeals to Shylock to have mercy on Antonio. Read scene i, lines 188–212. Look up the word *mercy* in a dictionary and write the definition.

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**Extra Assignment:**

1. In this act we learn exactly what kind of friendship Antonio and Bassanio have. List 10 adjectives to describe their friendship. What kind of qualities in a friend are important to you? Write a short essay describing the ideal friend.
  
2. Compare the friendship of Antonio and Bassanio to that of David and Jonathan. What qualities of the two friendships are similar? See 1 Samuel 18:1–4; 1 Samuel 20; 1 Samuel 23:16–18.
  
3. Why is it important to find good friends? What are the results of *not* having good friends? See Proverbs 12:26; Proverbs 13:20; 1 Corinthians 15:33.

List 10 qualities of a bad friend. Include these qualities in a paragraph describing a bad friend.

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### Questions:

1. When the women tease the men about the rings what threats do they make? (scene i, lines 155–207).
2. How does Gratiano react when Nerissa teases him about the ring? (scene i, lines 155–329)
3. What happens to Antonio's fortunes at the end of the story?
4. What happens to Shylock's fortunes at the end of the story?
5. *Poetic justice* is when justice reveals itself in a way especially appropriate, as though by chance someone gets what they deserve without anyone serving justice. For instance, if the money stolen by a thief was then stolen by someone else, this would be a kind of poetic or deserved justice. How is poetic justice served in this play?