

## Money in Shakespeare's 'The Merchant of Venice'

### Topic

Money lending

### Learning outcomes

- Read and find key information in formal and informal email messages
- Use a range of words and phrases related to the topic of money and money lending
- Describe some key characters and events in Shakespeare's 'The Merchant of Venice'

### Age and level

Adults (C1)

### Time

45 minutes + 15-minute optional activity

### Materials

- Student worksheet

### Introduction

In this lesson, students will use vocabulary, including informal language and common proverbs, related to the topic of money. They will do this by exploring the theme of money lending in Shakespeare's play 'The Merchant of Venice'. During the lesson, students will practise speaking skills by discussing issues around short-term loans and participating in a role play. They will also practise reading for key information in formal and informal texts. They will have the opportunity to learn more about key events and characters in the play.

**Procedure**

<p><b>1. Lead-in: Payday loans (10 mins)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Refer students to the <b>Lead-in</b> task in the student worksheet. Give them a few moments to read the text, then ask them to say what a payday loan is.  Answer: Payday loans are short-term loans for small amounts of money. They are easy to get, but interest rates are very high. Borrowers have a short amount of time to pay back the money borrowed.</li> <li>In pairs or small groups students discuss questions 1-4. Check the answers for question 1, then open questions 2-4 for class discussion.  Answers and suggestions:             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>feeling the pinch = having difficulty because you have less money than you had before; keep the wolf from the door = have just enough money to be able to eat and live; stay afloat = have just enough money to pay debts</li> <li>They are quick and easy to get (even if you have bad credit history or low income); they can help to cover an unexpected cost (e.g. emergency home repairs or a broken-down car).</li> <li>They are very expensive, and some people can struggle to replay the debt; some lenders target borrowers with a low income / bad credit history; it's easy for people to get trapped in a cycle of debt; some lenders use unethical debt collection techniques e.g. threatening letters.</li> <li>Ask students to justify their opinions. Be aware that some students may have had (positive or negative) experience of these loans. Be sensitive to students' wishes to discuss or not discuss the topic.</li> </ol> </li> <li>During the task, review any unfamiliar vocabulary related to the topic of money e.g. a cycle of debt, have a good / bad credit history.</li> </ul>
<p><b>2. Task 1: Reading for gist (5-10 mins)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Tell students that they are going to hear about one of the most frightening payday loan stories ever told – 'The Merchant of Venice' by Shakespeare.</li> <li>Refer students to <b>Task 1</b> in the student worksheet. Explain that the texts are a number of emails written by characters in the play. They should quickly read the emails and find the answers to questions 1-3.</li> </ul>

	<p>1 Bassanio wants to take out a loan so that he has enough money to impress the rich and beautiful Portia.</p> <p>2 Shylock, a Jewish money lender</p> <p>3 If Bassanio cannot pay Shylock back, Shylock will take a pound (roughly half a kilo) of flesh from Antonio's body.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Many of the emails use informal colloquial language. Students may not be familiar with all these terms: mate = friend; dodgy = untrustworthy; later = see you later; I just don't fancy = I am not physically attracted to; lad = boy / man; a total loser = somebody who is unsuccessful. If necessary, ask them to guess the meanings from the context. They will review words and phrases in bold in Task 3.</li> </ul> <p><b>Note:</b> The phrase 'a pound of flesh' occurs in Shylock's email. He means this literally, but the phrase is used metaphorically nowadays. If someone wants their 'pound of flesh' out of you, it means they make you do a lot for them, or give them what you owe, even if it will cause problems for you. Example: My boss makes me work all day without a break. She really wants her pound of flesh out of me.</p>
<p><b>3. Task 2:</b>  <b>Reading for detail</b>  <b>(10 mins)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Refer students to <b>Task 2</b> in the student worksheet. They read the emails again and match the characters' names with the relevant information.</li> <li>• Allow students to compare their ideas before checking answers with the whole class: 1c, 2f, 3e, 4b, 5d, 6a.</li> </ul>
<p><b>4. Task 3:</b>  <b>Money vocabulary</b>  <b>(10 mins)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Refer students to <b>Task 3</b> in the student worksheet. Explain that 'be in the red' is a word in bold in the first email. Ask students to guess what it means from the context (be in debt / owe money). They write a definition.</li> <li>• In pairs, students complete the table. Check answers either by asking pairs to give definitions, or by asking them to check their definitions in a dictionary. Stress that these words are very informal: in the red, minted, skint, dosh, gold-diggers.</li> </ul> <p><b>Answers:</b> minted = very rich; skint; having no money; dosh; money; gold-diggers = people who are only interested in other people for their money; good credit rating = a score which shows that you can safely borrow money and that you will pay it back; guarantor = a person who guarantees that another person</p>

	<p>will pack back a loan; interest = an extra charge you pay when you borrow money; miserly = mean and not interested in spending money</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If there is time, ask students to use the words in sentences to check meaning and formality e.g. I was always skint when I was a student.</li> </ul>
<p><b>5. Summary of 'The Merchant of Venice' (15 mins) (optional)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Your students may want to know what happens in the play. If so, you can include this optional stage.</li> <li>• In small groups, or as a whole class, students say what they think will happen in the play. They can say what they think will happen to the characters they learned about in Task 2. For example: Will Bassanio borrow the money from Shylock? Will he pay it back? What will happen to his friend Antonio? Will Shylock get his 'pound of flesh'? Will Bassanio marry Portia? Will Jessica and Lorenzo escape with the family jewels?</li> <li>• When students are ready, play a video with a summary of the play (for example: <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g_CaPgFTs7U">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g_CaPgFTs7U</a>), or find a short summary online (for example: <a href="https://www.rsc.org.uk/shakespeare-learning-zone/the-merchant-of-venice/story/plot">https://www.rsc.org.uk/shakespeare-learning-zone/the-merchant-of-venice/story/plot</a>).</li> <li>• Ask students to say if any of their predictions were correct. Invite them to share their thoughts and feelings about the story.</li> </ul>
<p><b>6. Task 4: Proverb role plays (15-20 mins)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Refer students to <b>Task 4</b> in the student worksheet. Ask them to say what they think the proverbs mean: a. someone or something may not be as good or valuable as they seem (these days we say 'all that glitters is not gold'); b. we don't need money for things that are really valuable e.g. love, friendship, health; c. nothing is really free; d. greed causes the world's problems</li> <li>• Organise students into small groups. Each group chooses a proverb and invents a scenario to illustrate it (e.g. a person calls somebody on their mobile phone and pretends that they are from the bank). They practise a role play based on the scenario. Walk around as groups do this and help if necessary.</li> <li>• When groups are ready, they perform their role plays in front of the class, or in front of other groups. Students watching guess which proverb the role play</li> </ul>

	<p>illustrates. You can use this as an opportunity to give feedback regarding language use.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• To end the lesson, ask the class if they agree / disagree with any of the proverbs and to explain why.</li></ul>
<b>7. Homework</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Students research other proverbs related to money.</li></ul>