

**Reading 1**

Read this introduction to “*The Merchant of Venice*” to practise and improve your reading skills and to prepare you for the one-person play you are going to see. Before reading, do the **preparation task** which will help you with the vocabulary. Then read the text and complete the tasks that follow.

Preparation Task: Match the definitions (a –p) with the vocabulary (1-16).

Vocabulary**Definitions**

- | | |
|-----------------------|---|
| 1. to default | a. to feel sorry or compassion for someone |
| 2. a pound | b. worrying or causing concern |
| 3. flesh | c. expulsion or expatriation |
| 4. troubling | d. to fail to pay back, or to make good on a contract or a duty |
| 5. judeophobic | e. objects made by people, not by or with machines. |
| 6. dreadful | f. according to a ceremony, usually religious |
| 7. ritually | g. repeated so often, it has become tired and conventional |
| 8. rife | h. horrible or awful |
| 9. clichéd | i. meat on a body |
| 10. to stem from | j. weak and fragile |
| 11. handicrafts | k. irrationally hating Jews |
| 12. mercy | l. a measure of weight which is not metric |
| 13. to side with | m. widespread or common |
| 14. banishment | n. to have its roots in; to begin with |
| 15. frail | o. to be of the same opinion |
| 16. to pity | p. clemency; forgiveness, compassion |

READING TEXT 1: “An Introduction to “*The Merchant Of Venice*”, a version created by *The LinguaArts Theatre Company*

“The Merchant of Venice” is a late 16th-century play written by William Shakespeare in which a Christian shipping merchant named Antonio fails to pay back a large loan provided by Shylock, a Jewish moneylender, or usurer. While Antonio is central to this play - after all, he is the Merchant of Venice - the most interesting character in the play is Shylock who sues Antonio for a lethal “pound of flesh”, to be cut from Antonio’s body, in return for Antonio defaulting on the loan.

“The Merchant of Venice” is frequently staged in theatres today and has been brought to the big screen and television on numerous occasions, including the beautifully filmed 2004 version starring Al Pacino in the role of Shylock.

Nonetheless, this famous Shakespeare play is potentially troubling to modern audiences because its central themes can easily appear antisemitic. To understand the apparent racist content in the play we need to go back a few hundred years and look at the situation of the Jews in Shakespeare’s times.