
Money in *The Merchant of Venice* by Shakespeare
Lesson plan

Topic: Shakespeare

Level: C1

Time: 80 minutes

Aims

- To develop students' vocabulary on the theme of money
- To give students practice in speaking about their own attitudes to money management
- To familiarise students with the themes, plot and characters in Shakespeare's play *The Merchant of Venice*

Introduction

This lesson is an introduction to Shakespeare's play *The Merchant of Venice*. Students will develop an understanding of the play's plot through reading a series of emails between its main characters and listening to a simplified summary. Finally, students will have the opportunity to discuss and interpret some proverbs relating to the play's theme of money.

Procedure

Warmer – Speaking: different kinds of value (10 minutes)

- Read question 1 aloud to your students. Give them a time limit of one minute to decide what objects they would save if their house were on fire.
- When the time limit is up ask them to compare their notes with a partner.
- Focus students' attention on the phrase *monetary or sentimental value*. Elicit the meaning of both types of value (if something has monetary value it is worth a lot of money; if something is of sentimental value it means that it is worth a lot to us because it reminds us of a special person or event in our lives).
- Conduct a short class discussion in which students say what they would save from the flames and whether their chosen objects are of monetary or sentimental value.

Suggested answers:

Monetary value: your laptop, mobile phone, credit cards, diamond ring, stereo system, designer shoes

Sentimental value: an old photo of your grandmother, love letters from your girl/boyfriend, your cat, your teddy bear

Task 1 – Speaking: talking about money (15 minutes)

- Focus students' attention on the advertisement for payday loans and give them a few moments to read the text.
- Ask students to tell you what they think a payday loan is. (It is a small amount of money which is lent with a very high interest rate. The borrower has to pay the loan back on his/her next payday. These loans have come under a lot of criticism as they force poor people to get into serious debt.)
- Organise students into pairs and ask them to discuss the situations and decide which (if any) would necessitate taking out a payday loan. Conduct class feedback.
- Ask students to continue working in pairs. Give them a couple of minutes to discuss questions 2 and 3 before opening this up into a whole class discussion. Generate as much new language as possible and write it on the board.

Suggested answers

1. a. *feeling the pinch* = having difficulty because you have less money than you had before
b. *keep the wolf from the door* = have enough money in order not to be too poor or hungry
c. *stay afloat* = have enough money to pay what you owe
2. *I might take a payday loan out to feed my family, but only if there was no other option. Perhaps I might take out a payday loan if my landlord was threatening to throw me out of my home too. However, I would try to find another solution first.*
3. *Yes, I think payday loans should be made illegal. The only people they help are the money lenders. / No, I don't think they should be made illegal. They are a good way of borrowing money quickly and easily when you need it.*

Task 2 – Reading: *The Merchant of Venice* in emails (5 minutes)

Tell students that they are going to hear about one of the most frightening payday loan stories ever told by learning about Shakespeare's play *The Merchant of Venice*.

Read the questions aloud to your students. Give them a minute to quickly read the emails and find the answer. Allow them to check their answers with a partner before conducting whole class feedback.

Answers:

- 1 *Bassanio wants to take out a loan so that Bassanio has enough money to impress the rich and beautiful Portia.*
- 2 *Shylock, a Jewish money lender*
- 3 *If Bassanio cannot pay Shylock back, Shylock will take a pound (roughly half a kilo) of flesh from Antonio's body.*

Note – the phrase 'a pound of flesh' nowadays

The phrase occurs in Shylock's email, and is worth drawing students' attention to. You could ask the students if they have ever heard the phrase 'pound of flesh' in another context, as the phrase (from *The Merchant of Venice*) has entered the English language; if someone wants their 'pound of flesh' out of you, it means they make you do or 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.

Task 3 – Reading: checking understanding (10 minutes)

- Students read the emails again more slowly and match the characters' names with the information about them.
- Allow students to compare their ideas with a partner before checking their ideas around the class.

Answers: 1 c 2 f 3 e 4 b 5 d 6 a

Task 4 – Money vocabulary (10 minutes)

- Focus students' attention on the definitions. Ask them to match the words in bold in the text with their meanings.
- Check answers around the class. Stress that the following words and phrases are very informal: *in the red*, *minted*, *skint*, *dosh* and *gold-diggers*.

Answers: 1 a 2 g 3 c 4 d 5 f 6 i 7 h 8 e 9 b

Task 5 – Listening and speaking: ordering events (15 minutes)

- Direct students' attention to the events, and allow the students a few moments to read them. Explain that you are going to read a summary of the plot. Ask students to listen and number the events in the correct order.
- Read the following summary aloud to your students:

Summary of *The Merchant of Venice*

Bassanio has fallen in love with a rich and beautiful woman called Portia. Unfortunately, Bassanio has no money. He asks his friend, Antonio, to lend him some. Antonio wants to help his friend but has put all his money on some ships at sea. He suggests that Bassanio borrows money from Shylock, the money-lender.

Shylock lends the money to Bassanio. He doesn't like Antonio and Bassanio as they have often been very rude to him because of his religion (he is a Jew). He agrees to lend them the money but says that if it is not paid back he will take a pound of flesh from Antonio. Meanwhile, in Shylock's house, his daughter Jessica is planning to run away with Antonio's friend, Lorenzo.

Portia is sad because she doesn't like any of the men who want to marry her. Before he died, Portia's father decided that any man who visited her would have to choose between three caskets (a casket is a small box). The man who chose the correct casket would get to marry Portia. The Prince of Morocco visits Portia and chooses the gold casket. It is the wrong one and he leaves her house disappointed. Another prince visits Portia and chooses the wrong casket. Finally, Bassanio arrives and chooses the correct casket. The young couple are very happy and truly in love with each other. Jessica, Shylock's daughter runs away with Lorenzo and they plan a joint wedding with Bassanio and Portia.

The young couples' happiness does not last long. News comes that Antonio has lost his money and must pay Shylock with his life. Bassanio travels to Venice to save his friend. Portia and her friend Nerissa travel to Venice in secret, dressed up as men.

Shylock will not change his mind and is determined to get his pound of flesh, even when Bassanio offers him twice the money. There is a trial and Portia comes to the trial dressed up as a man of law. She looks at Shylock's contract and says that Shylock can only take his pound of flesh if he does not spill any blood. Shylock cannot do this, so asks for the money instead. Portia then accuses him of trying to murder Antonio. Shylock has to pay a fine and leave his money to Jessica and Lorenzo when he dies.

The young people all celebrate their good luck and happiness at the end of the play.

- Allow students to discuss their answers with a partner before conducting feedback.
- Ask students to work with a partner and see how much they can remember about *The Merchant of Venice*. Circulate, offering support where necessary.

Answers: 1 d 2 h 3 c 4 b 5 f 6 g 7 e 8 a

Task 6 – Speaking: money proverbs (15 minutes)

- Organise students into small groups. Ask them to read and discuss the proverbs about money.
- Open this up into a whole class discussion. Ask students to tell you what the proverbs mean, and whether or not they agree with them.
- Ask students to choose one of the proverbs and prepare a short role play to illustrate it. Circulate as students prepare their role play, offering support where necessary.
- Students perform their role play to the rest of the class, who have to identify the proverb which the play is based on.