

# CHARACTERS Shylock

## Five key things about Shylock

1. Shylock is a **Jewish moneylender** with a **daughter, Jessica**.
2. He is true to his **faith** but uses **biblical references** to justify his **business practices**.
3. He **seeks revenge** through the **bond** for the way he is **treated by Antonio** and **other Christians**.
4. He feels **doubly betrayed** as **Jessica** runs off with a **Christian** and **steals his money**.
5. He **pursues Antonio's death relentlessly** and refuses to accept any other form of repayment.

## What do we learn about Shylock in Act I Scene 3?

- We first see Shylock negotiating the terms of the loan to Antonio with Bassanio.
- He is initially keen to be assured that Antonio can be relied on to repay his debt.
- He doesn't have ready money to lend, but states he will borrow it from another Jew, Tubal.
- He complains openly about how he and other Jews have been treated by Christians, but keeps the depth of his hatred hidden.
- Despite this, he is able to persuade Antonio to sign up to his '**merry sport**'.



## How does Shylock's desire for revenge develop?

- Shylock is reported as being furious about Jessica's flight with a Christian and with his money. (Act II Scene 8)
- He argues forcefully that Jews are as human as Christians, and openly expresses his desire for revenge. (Act III Scene 1)
- In Act III Scene 2, it is reported that '**Twenty merchants**' and the '**duke himself**' failed to persuade him to relent, and that he will start legal action against the state if he does not get justice.
- In Act IV Scene 1, he relishes Antonio's imminent death.
- Once he realises he cannot take his '**pound of flesh**' he asks for financial repayment, but is finally left broken by the punishment he faces.

## Five key quotations

1. Shylock's faith: **'I will not eat with you, drink with you, nor pray with you.'** (I.3.32–3)
2. Shylock's hate: **'If I can catch him once upon the hip,/I will feed fat the ancient grudge I bear him.'** (I.3.41–2)
3. Prejudice towards Shylock – Antonio: **'I am as like .../To spit on thee again, to spurn thee too.'** (I.3.125–6)
4. Shylock's eloquence: **'I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions?'** (III.1.52–3)
5. Jessica's dislike of him: **'Our house is hell'** (II.3.2)

### Note it!

One interesting parallel between Antonio and Shylock is that Shylock, too, has to borrow from someone – Tubal – to lend money to Antonio. It is never explained how Tubal would have got his money back if Antonio had died.

## Exam focus

### How can I write about Shylock at the start? AO1

You can comment on how Shylock is cunning at the beginning of the play.

At the start, **it is possible Antonio misjudges Shylock's depth of hatred.** Shylock reveals in an aside to the audience that **he has an 'ancient grudge' against Antonio** suggesting that the ill-feeling between them has existed for some time. Antonio seems to think that **if it is a purely business transaction then it doesn't matter what they feel about each other.** **This makes him vulnerable to Shylock's clever proposal of a 'merry sport'.**

Topic sentence refers to Shylock at start

Relevant quotation is fluently embedded

Develops idea

Links to new point about Shylock's cleverness

## Now you try!

Finish this paragraph about how others feel about Shylock. Use one of the quotations from the list.

Shakespeare emphasises the dislike for Shylock when Antonio.....

## Five key things about the theme of prejudice

1. The **anti-semitism** Shylock suffers is a **key motive** in driving the play's revenge plot.
2. **Shylock's response** to Christian mistreatment is itself a **form of prejudice**.
3. Crude **racial stereotypes** are seen elsewhere in the play, for example in Portia's suitors.
4. While racial stereotyping in the play may be intended as a **source of humour**, **modern audiences** immediately question such representations.
5. Prejudice **links to other key themes** such as appearance and reality.

## How are ideas about anti-Semitism reflected in the main plot?

- Shylock makes Antonio's mistreatment of him explicit right at the start of the play by reporting how he has spat on his '**Jewish gaberdine**'.
- Jessica's desire to elope with a Christian lover endorses the idea that Shylock's mean nature extends even to his own flesh and blood.
- Stereotypes of Shakespeare's time about Jewish behaviour – greed, refusal to mix with Christian society, sharp business practices – are all embodied in Shylock.



## How is prejudice shown in the casket subplot?

- Portia's light-hearted accounts of her suitors are based on national stereotypes (such as the Duke of Saxony's nephew's drinking and the English lord's inability to speak foreign languages).
- The Prince of Morocco urges Portia not to judge him by his skin colour, but then proves himself guilty of judging things on their appearance by selecting the gold casket.
- Arragon appears not to make the same error as Morocco, but vanity, a form of self-favouring prejudice – believing he deserves more than '**common spirits**', instead leads him to choose wrongly.

## Five key quotations

1. Shylock on anti-semitism: **'suff'rance is the badge of all our tribe'** (1.3.105)
2. Shylock's own prejudice: **'I hate him for he is a Christian'** (1.3.37)
3. Jewish stereotyping in Solanio's report of Shylock's loss of Jessica: **'Find the girl!/She hath the stones upon her and the ducats!'** (2.8.21–2)
4. Comic national stereotypes – Portia about Falconbridge: **'he hath neither Latin, French, nor Italian'** (1.2.64–5)
5. Race and appearance – Portia about Morocco: **'Let all of his complexion choose me so'** (11.7.79)

### Note it!

One of the most intriguing things about the play is that we really don't know how Shakespeare wanted audiences to view Shylock. On the one hand, Shylock embodies all the anti-semitic stereotypes of the time, but conversely Shakespeare gives him some of the most poetic and moving speeches in the play.

## Exam focus

### How does Shakespeare explore ideas about prejudice? AO1

You can explore Antonio's prejudice towards Shylock.

Antonio is not presented in a particularly sympathetic way at the start of the play. When accused of spitting on Shylock's coat, he tells him he is 'as like .../To spit on thee again'. He does not try to flatter Shylock or apologise for his behaviour. The fact that Shylock says 'suff'rance is the badge of all our tribe' also tells the audience that Jews have had to get used to this mistreatment, but raises the question of why they should.

Introduces general idea

Provides supporting quotation

Develops explanation

Offers deeper interpretation

## Now you try!

Finish this paragraph about prejudice. Use one of the quotations from the list.

References in the play to Shylock's behaviour that confirm anti-semitic stereotypes include Solanio's .....