

WebQuest: A Virtual Jewish History Tour: Venice & England

Your goals today: Understand the history and perception of Jewish culture in the play's setting and in Shakespeare's time. Form insights about the portrayal of Shylock and the cultural conflicts in Shakespeare's play. Understand a history of anti-Semitism in Venice and England.

Part I: Pre-research: Answer these questions before you take the Virtual History Tour.

1. What are your thoughts on scene iii. How does Antonio treat Shylock? How does Shylock treat Antonio? What are your thoughts after reading?
2. What year was *The Merchant of Venice* published/first performed? _____
**** Keep this date in mind! You will need to consider it as you develop responses to some of this assignment's key questions!!!

Part II: The setting: Venice: Go to "The Virtual Jewish History Tour: Venice" and complete the following tasks.
<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsourc/vjw/Venice.html>

3. "For Jews, Venice is also a place with a dark history." Why?
4. Define "ghetto." Where did this word originate?

How do we use the word today? What connotations do we attach to it?

5. Scan **Early History**. Provide at least 3 examples of anti-Jewish laws in early Venice.
6. What did the *doges* decide in 1516?
7. What "further restrictions" were placed on Jews in the ghetto?
8. What restrictions were placed on Jews when they traveled outside of the ghetto?
9. How does this information help you understand Shylock's words, actions, and character in Act I, scene iii? Be specific! Use quotes from the scene to inform and support your response.

10. Take a few moments with the visuals. Any impressions?

Part III. Go to “The Virtual Jewish History Tour: England” to complete the next set of tasks

<http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/vjw/England.html>

11. Read the introduction under the map. When were Jews expelled from England? _____. When were they allowed to return? _____

12. Do the math. How many years passed between this date and the date Shakespeare wrote *The Merchant of Venice*? _____

13. What does this suggest about Shakespeare’s audience understanding or perception of Judaism?

14, 15. Read **Entrance and Persecution**. Fill in the blanks.

Jews first worked as _____ England...

“During the middle ages _____ or lending money was considered a _____.”

16. Scan **Rule of Henry III** and list a few examples of increasing hostility towards Jews.

17. Scan **Expulsion** for the next few questions. Why were Jews expelled from England in _____ (see # question 10)?

18. Where did most Jews go at that point? Any thoughts?

19. How long did the expulsion last?

20. Who was Dr. Roderigo Lopez? What happened to him? Why?

21. So, here’s the big question to consider...How familiar would Shakespeare’s audience be with actual Jewish culture or individuals? What stereotypes existed and why?

22. As we continue to read the play, consider the way Shakespeare’s portrayal of Shylock is emblematic of his culture’s perception of Judaism. Consider the restrictions placed on Jews in Venice. With these thoughts in mind, share an insight you have developed through this webquest. Focus on setting (Venice), characters (Antonio and/or Shylock) or conflict. Whatever your focus, show how the information you have just read informs, changes, or adds depth to your understanding of Act I, scene iii. For instance, why would Shylock want a pound of Antonio’s “fair flesh”?

