

Quiz: *The Merchant of Venice*, Act I – Answer Key

1. Explain the conditions of Portia's father's will.

By the terms of her father's will, Portia is forbidden from choosing freely among her many suitors. She must accept the one who makes the right choice among three caskets: one of lead, one of silver and one of gold.

2. Explain the conditions of the loan Shylock makes to Bassanio.

Shylock will lend Bassanio 3000 ducats for three months, with Antonio offering security for the loan. Shylock offers to lend the money with no interest, but "in a merry sport," adds that if Antonio cannot fulfill the conditions of the loan, he must forfeit a pound of his own flesh. Antonio is confident that he will be able to repay the loan, since his ships will be home a month before the money is due.

3. Why does Bassanio need a loan?

Bassanio has been living beyond his means and is in debt, especially to Antonio. He is hoping to make his fortune by courting and winning the hand of Portia, a rich lady whom he loves. However, Portia is courted by many suitors, and Bassanio needs money in order to compete with his rivals.

4. What are Shylock's reasons for hating Antonio?

Shylock hates Antonio because (1) he is a Christian, (2) he spoils Shylock's moneylending business by lending money with no interest, and (3) he hates "our sacred nation."

Specifically, Shylock claims that Antonio has called him a "cutthroat dog" and spit on him in public. He resents Antonio for treating him this way and then coming to him when he needs his money. Antonio does not deny these charges; in fact, he vows to insult and spit on him again, telling him that he is not asking for the money as a friend, but as an enemy.

Who said it and what is he/she talking about?

5. In Belmont is a lady richly left;

...Sometimes from her eyes

I did receive fair speechless messages.

Bassanio is explaining to Antonio that he loves Portia, a lady of considerable wealth who lives in Belmont. He believes that she also communicated her affection for him by the way she looked at him.

6. I will do anything, ere I be married to a sponge.

Portia is discussing her suitors with Nerissa, her gentlewoman. She is making fun of a German, the Duke of Saxony's nephew, complaining that he drinks to excess. She jokes that she can distract him from selecting the right casket by placing a glass of wine nearby. By comparing him to a sponge, she emphasizes his drinking habits.

7. Hath a dog money? Is it possible

A cur can lend three thousand ducats?

When Antonio and Bassanio ask Shylock for a loan, he sarcastically refers to Antonio calling him a cur. He deeply resents the Christians who abuse him and then come to him when they need his help.

8. I am like to call thee so again,

To spit on thee again, to spurn thee too.

When Shylock accuses Antonio of insulting him, Antonio not only doesn't deny it, but admits that he would be likely to insult and spit on him again.