



**SHAKES  
PEARE  
FESTIVAL**

# The Merchant of Venice

## 2022-23 Study Guide

### ABOUT THIS STUDY GUIDE

The Colorado Shakespeare Festival will soon share a Shakespeare & Violence Prevention project with your school. This study guide is a resource for you, whether you are an administrator, counselor, teacher, or student. Our program is most successful when participants have prepared in advance, so we encourage you to use this study guide to connect the material to your curriculum. Shakespeare offers a wonderful opportunity to explore meaningful questions, and we encourage you and your students to engage deeply with those questions.

This study guide was written and edited by Dr. Amanda Giguere, Dr. Heidi Schmidt, and Sarah Schwartzman Ramsey (CU's Program in Jewish Studies), with input from Lulu Buck (Educational Equity & Community Engagement, St. Vrain Valley School District), Georgina Owen (Colorado Office of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Education), Judi Hofmeister (Colorado Department of Education), Dr. Lena Heilmann (Colorado's Office of Suicide Prevention), Dr. Beverly Kingston and Laurie Keith (Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence), Brett Cogswell (Safe2Tell), and Josue Miranda (Spanish translator).



**CU★PRESENTS**



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### 2020 COLORADO CURRICULUM STANDARDS

This program was developed with a standards-based focus in multiple content areas. Content areas addressed by the performances, classroom workshops, and the contents of this study guide include:

- Comprehensive Health
- Drama and Theatre Arts
- Social and Emotional Learning
- Reading, Writing, and Communicating
- Culturally Responsive Teaching



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## **ABOUT SHAKESPEARE & VIOLENCE PREVENTION**

The Colorado Shakespeare Festival (CSF) partners with CU Boulder's Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence (CSPV) and the Department of Theatre & Dance to create an interdisciplinary program that increases awareness of Shakespeare and violence prevention.

Our actors will visit your school to perform an abridged, three-actor version of *The Merchant of Venice* that explores the cycle of violence, using research from the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence. In a 45-minute performance and a 50-minute workshop, we draw parallels between Shakespeare's world and our own. We recommend the performance for grades 6-12.

Theatre is about teamwork, empathy, and change. When your students watch the play, they will observe harmful behavior, including antisemitism, misogyny, and various forms of persecution. They'll see examples of unhealthy and destructive relationships, as well as moments where an "upstander" (someone who takes action to help) could have made a difference. Scratch the surface of Shakespeare's 16th century "comedy," and we see a play that poses questions about the costs of treating others as less than human, the need for active inclusion, and opportunities to interrupt cycles of harm. We hope this production opens up a dialogue about the cycle of violence and mistreatment -- and reminds us all that change is always possible.

The post-show classroom workshops, facilitated by actors from the performance, use theatre activities to increase your students' ability to work as a team and be upstanders. We employ empathy-building and team-building activities, key elements in creating a positive school environment.

Our visit to your school aims to inspire your students with live, professional theatre, but the work does not end when our actors depart. We encourage you to continue this conversation after our visit to create positive change in your own school.

## **ABOUT THE MERCHANT OF VENICE**

When a lovestruck Bassanio borrows money from a close friend, Antonio, to finance a journey to visit the wealthy heiress, Portia, it seems like everything will work out. Sure, Antonio had to take out a loan (with unfavorable rates) from Shylock, the Jewish moneylender he detests, but Antonio has no doubt he'll be able to repay the loan soon enough. Plus, Antonio loves Bassanio, and there is nothing he would not do to make Bassanio happy. Soon enough, thanks to Shylock's loan, Bassanio secures Portia's hand in marriage, and a happy ending seems imminent. Just then, Antonio's investment collapses, and he is unable to pay back Shylock's loan. Antonio has no choice but to return to Shylock to plead for lenity. Now, it's up to Shylock. The man who has treated him like a dog is finally at his mercy. Will Shylock follow through with the hard conditions of his loan to Antonio?

### **Why this play?**

In this play, each of the three central characters (Shylock, Antonio, and Portia) are hurting, and they pass along their pain to others in an endless cycle, without recognizing the full humanity of the people they harm. The play challenges us to explore the myriad ways humans inflict harm on one another and how this perpetual cycle leads to collective trauma. Although written over 400 years ago, *The Merchant of Venice* provides young audiences with the opportunity to grapple with issues relevant to 21st century life, including the effects of antisemitism, racism, homophobia, and misogyny. These systemic issues can feel overwhelming; our post-show classroom workshops provide students with tools to take action on a person-to-person level and reinforce that these empathetic interactions do, in fact, make a difference.

In times of division, the solutions require imagination, creativity, and hope. What if we had the chance to intervene in the moments of harm to steer towards a healing-centered outcome? Empathy and imagination are powerful tools in the theatre and in the classroom; when students feel connected, valued, and respected, they are more likely to watch out for one another as allies and upstanders. Shakespeare's plays ignite imagination, spark creativity, and reveal the hope, empathy, and infinite potential of humanity.



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## Three-Person Cast

Shakespeare's version of this play has more than 25 characters; we combined some roles and eliminated others to focus on five central characters played by three actors. Pay attention to how actors change character along the way.

## Bilingual Shakespeare

This production features Spanish-speaking characters. How does this choice impact the way you hear and experience the play?

## Gender and Casting

In Shakespeare's time, only men were allowed to perform publicly, so Shakespeare's plays feature a LOT of male characters. These restrictions don't make sense in today's world, so in our production, we have changed the gender identity of many of these characters. We hope to carve out new possibilities within these 400-year-old plays, so that the plays reflect our own time.

## CONTENT WARNING

*The Merchant of Venice* is a play about a community filled with antisemitism, misogyny, hatred, bias, and the persecution of people who are seen as different. This content may be triggering to some members of your school community. We encourage you to have conversations with your students prior to the performance, particularly the students who may have been personally impacted by a traumatic experience, including antisemitism. Please work with your students to make the most appropriate decisions for them regarding the in-school performance and post-show workshops. If you are concerned about a student, please use the resources listed below:

### Resources

- **Counseling team** at your school
- **Colorado Crisis Services.** Confidential and immediate support if you are in crisis or need help dealing with one, or if you are looking for additional resources. Colorado Crisis Services also answers Colorado-based calls to the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline. 1-844-493-8255; text "TALK" to 38255; [www.coloradocrisiservices.org](http://www.coloradocrisiservices.org)
- **Ayuda en Español.** Lifeline ofrece 24/7, gratuito servicios en español, no es necesario hablar inglés si usted necesita ayuda. Cuando usted llama al número 1-888-628-9454, su llamada se dirige al centro de ayuda de nuestra red disponible más cercano.
- **Safe2Tell** (anonymous reporting, connects with local law enforcement and other resources): 1-877-542-7233; [www.safe2tell.org](http://www.safe2tell.org)
- **Cyber Bullying Research Center** (resources, research, and presentations about cyberbullying, directed by Dr. Sameer Hinduja and Dr. Justin W. Patchin): [cyberbullying.org](http://cyberbullying.org)
- This study guide also includes information and handouts on Standing up to Cyberbullying (pg. 15) and Mental Health & Suicide Prevention (pg. 16-18).

### Protective Factors

- Sufficient Sleep
- Supportive relationships
- Feeling connected to peers, school, family, and community
- Involvement in prosocial activities
- Having a trusted adult
- Feeling safe at school



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# How Do I Prepare?

## TEACHER CHECKLIST

This might be your students' first exposure to theatre and/or Shakespeare, so we recommend establishing some norms with your students to prepare for this program:

- In theatre, actors are vulnerable onstage; they step into the shoes of another character (metaphorically) and help us see the world from another person's perspective. For actors to do their jobs, they need to know that their audience will respect their work, their bravery, and their honesty.
- Set norms to cultivate mutual respect. We will respect the actors, we will respect one another, and we will respect ourselves. How do we cultivate a classroom of mutual respect?
- Trying new things is hard! When we work with CSF actors, we might be asked to step out of our comfort zone and participate in some activities. Let's support one another for being brave, being honest, and for trying new things.
- The Shakespeare & Violence Prevention post-performance workshops emphasize three key ideas: Teamwork, Empathy, and Change. What do these things have in common? How can we prepare ourselves to work as a team, practice empathy, and rehearse the change we'd like to see in our community?

### How do I prepare my students for the play?

- Review Meet the Characters & Plot Synopsis (pg. 5-6) with your students.
- Use the Anti-Semitism & The Merchant of Venice essay (pg. 7-9), the Mini-Lesson Plan (pg. 10), Taking Perspective activity (pg. 11), and Analyzing Text (pg. 12) to help your students think through some of the big questions presented in *The Merchant of Venice* in advance of the performance.
- Discuss appropriate theatre etiquette with your students. Our performance is frequently interactive (like Shakespeare's original performances). Students are encouraged to laugh and applaud when they enjoy the show, though we ask them not to have private conversations, use cell phones, eat during the performance, or otherwise distract the performers or their fellow students. Remind them that just as they can see and hear the actors, the actors can also see and hear the audience.

### How do I prepare for post-show workshops?

- Be ready to participate and co-facilitate with our teaching artist. The more involved you are, the more your students learn!
- Talk with your class about the upcoming actor-led theatre workshop. Set expectations about trying new things and respecting one another.
- Push desks/chairs to the side of your classroom to create an open, movement-friendly space.
- At the end of the workshop, our teaching artist will step out of the room while you conduct an anonymous, 3-question poll with your students. Don't worry about preparing - they'll give you a card with the questions pre-printed.

### What should I do after the visit?

- Take the 5-minute survey in your thank you email to give us feedback on the program.
- Use the Discussion Questions (pg. 13) to have a follow-up discussion with your students about the performance and the workshops.
- Look for ways to integrate the ideas and questions raised in the Shakespeare & Violence Prevention program into your lesson plans throughout the year.



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# Meet the Characters

(and the actors who play them)



**ANTONIO** (he/him)  
A wealthy Christian merchant,  
in love with Bassanio

*"In sooth I know not why I am so sad"*

In Venice, the wealthy merchant **Antonio** is feeling out of sorts. His business is thriving, but he's not at his best. His beloved, the younger **Bassanio**, asks Antonio to loan him money. Antonio agrees, even though all his money is invested in ships at sea and he doesn't have any available funds at the moment. And even though Bassanio, who Antonio loves, is using the loan to visit Portia, the wealthy heiress Bassanio hopes to marry. Confident his ships are (literally) about to come in, Antonio decides to borrow money from the Jewish moneylender, **Shylock**, for Bassanio's sake.



**BASSANIO** (he/him)  
A young Venetian lord who  
hopes to marry Portia

*"Cursed be my tribe if I forgive him"*

Shylock is really tired of being targeted for being Jewish in the predominantly Christian city of Venice. Antonio makes no secret of his hatred for Shylock; his antisemitic harassment of Shylock has included spitting at him, calling him names, and stealing business opportunities from him. After years of persecution, Antonio now needs something from Shylock. Now in a position of power over someone who has hurt him, Shylock agrees to loan the loathed Antonio the money he needs, on one condition: if Antonio fails to repay the loan in time, the penalty will be one pound of Antonio's flesh. Bassanio begs Antonio not to agree to these unwise terms, but Antonio doesn't see Shylock as a legitimate threat; he agrees to the loan.



**SHYLOCK** (he/him)  
A Jewish moneylender,  
persecuted by Antonio

*"My little body is aweary of this great world"*

In Belmont, **Portia** is forced to marry whatever husband is chosen for her by a lottery her father set up before his death - whether she likes her new husband or not. When Bassanio wins the contest, Portia gives him a ring which he swears he'll never remove from his finger.



**PORTIA** (she/her)  
A young heiress, restricted by  
her dead father's will

*"Have all thy ventures fail'd?"*

Bad news arrives from Venice: Antonio's investments have failed, leaving him unable to repay the loan to Shylock. Bassanio races back to Venice to say goodbye before Shylock cuts out a pound of Antonio's flesh. Portia also goes to Venice - secretly and disguised as a male lawyer.



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# Meet the Characters (cont'd)

*"I stand for judgment: answer; shall I have it?"*

In the **Duke of Venice's** court, the disguised Portia pleads with Shylock to drop the case, but he refuses to show mercy to the man who has harassed him. He insists on justice. Just as he's about to collect a pound of Antonio's flesh, Portia (still disguised) warns him that spilling a single drop of Antonio's blood will have dire consequences. Shylock backtracks, but it's too late; the court strips Shylock of all his property and forces him to become a Christian.



**DUKE OF VENICE**  
(he/him)  
The arbiter of justice in Venice

*"It is almost morning,  
And yet I am sure you are not satisfied  
Of these events at full. Let us go in;  
And we will answer all things faithfully."*

To thank the young lawyer (Portia in disguise), Bassanio reluctantly gives up his ring. Portia races back to Belmont, pretending to know nothing of the trial. When Bassanio returns home with Antonio, Portia rebukes Bassanio for giving away her ring; then she reveals herself as the lawyer who won the case. Antonio then learns that his investments are not lost after all. The play ends with marriage for the happy couple, wealth for the merchant, and deep loss for Shylock.

## During the Performance: Things to Look For

- A power imbalance
- A character attempting to solve a problem with violence
- Moments of hypocrisy or inconsistency - saying one thing and doing another, or failing to live up to the ideals you proclaim
- Mentions of ongoing physical violence
- Treating someone badly because of their religion, race, or ethnicity
- Taking advantage of a friend
- Moments of empathy
- A persuasive speech
- An opportunity to speak up and prevent harm
- Moments of reconciliation
- Words used as weapons
- "Justice" being used as justification for harm



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# Anti-Semitism & The Merchant of Venice

by Sarah Schwartzman Ramsey

*Editor's note: Here at CSF, we believe William Shakespeare was a really smart writer with great insights into human behavior, who was also a product of his time. This means a lot of common beliefs of 1590s England are embedded in his plays. At the time he was writing The Merchant of Venice, antisemitism (hatred or Jewish people or of Judaism) was prevalent throughout Europe and the stereotypes Shakespeare relies on are still visible in contemporary American culture. We encourage you to use this essay from Sarah Schwartzman Ramsey, a consultant on our production of Merchant, to help your students understand the complicated history of this play and learn to identify hurtful Jewish stereotypes when they see them.*

*The Merchant of Venice* is a play that can cause, and has caused, harm to Jews. It overtly invokes a litany of longstanding, dangerous stereotypes that have led to various forms of violence against Jewish people. In some ways, *Merchant* interrogates or questions Christian values; however, it can also perpetuate anti-Jewish stereotypes, make a villain (comic or tragic) of the Jewish character, and obscure the history of structural violence against Jews.

## **First, should we even perform *Merchant*? If so, how?**

This is a topic about which many scholars, theater critics, Jewish advocacy organizations, and Shakespeare fans disagree. Some argue that *The Merchant of Venice* should not be performed or taught in schools anymore, due to its anti-semitism. These voices teach us about the potential for perpetuating violence when performing antisemitic (or racist, transphobic, sexist, etc.) historical work, and to be cautious about how to proceed.

Others argue the play is a cultural touchstone and that throwing it out ignores the potential to learn from or grapple with it in important or meaningful ways. Those who hold this view tend to suggest either a) Shakespeare did something subversive by questioning and disrupting simplistic categories in this play, or b) that Shakespeare wrote an anti-semitic play, but that contemporary readers and theater-goers nonetheless have the tools to evolve and reinterpret the play for modern times.

I propose that we need not minimize the anti-semitism of the play; however, readers, performers, and teachers can exploit the play's many subversive moments to rewrite or rework the text. At the same time, we shouldn't erase or ignore the hyper-stereotypical qualities of the character as written.

The goal, then, might be to point explicitly to the harms of the play, while experimenting with how it can be used to teach anti-violence strategies to young people.

## **So first... what are those harms? Like, how violent is it?**

For starters, let's define anti-semitism as hatred of Jewish people and/or of Judaism. Like the many oppressive -isms, anti-semitism has led to centuries of brutal physical and structural violence. Here are some examples of anti-semitic stereotypes and the physical and systemic violence they led to:

Blood Libel is a centuries-old myth that accuses Jews of murdering Christians, especially children, in order to bake their blood into a bread called matzah. Absurd, right? This led to a stereotype of the bloodthirsty Jew, sometimes depicted with horns and tail like a devil. For centuries in Europe, Jewish communities were accused of killing children or of poisoning wells, which resulted in riots and organized massacres of Jewish communities.

This thinking was mainstream enough that Martin Luther wrote a pamphlet in 1545 urging the murder of Jews because of their bloodthirst.

Greedy Moneylenders. Medieval Christians were not allowed to charge interest when lending money, so money lending was one of few ways for Jews to legally earn money. It is not clear whether many Jews actually worked as moneylenders; however, the powerful myth of the Jewish money lender led to a series of stereotypes of Jews as greedy.

The Anti-Defamation League writes, "As moneylenders, Jews were frequently useful to rulers who used their capital to build cathedrals and outfit armies. As long as Jews benefited the ruler, either through finance or by serving as a convenient scapegoat, they were tolerated."



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## Anti-Semitism & Merchant (cont'd)

However, even prominent Jews frequently faced suspicion of disloyalty, even if they converted to Christianity.

Powerful Secret Cabal. In the 20th century, the stereotype of the greedy moneylender evolved into a fiction about an ultra-wealthy international cabal or secret network of Jewish bankers, media moguls, and elites who secretly control governments. This fiction is popularly associated with an early 20th century propaganda text, *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, which has been repeatedly discredited. The stereotype of a secret group of elite, wealthy Jews orchestrating political schemes continues to circulate in anti-semitic conspiracy theories and, sometimes, in mainstream political talking points. These prejudices against Jews have led to very real forms of discrimination and violence.

### Structural Oppression

Starting as early as 300-400 C.E., Jews were forbidden from marrying Christians, holding high government positions, or bearing witness against a Christian in court. By the Middle Ages, Jews in many places were required to wear distinctive badges or hats, were forbidden from owning land (particularly oppressive in agricultural societies with few other means of subsistence), and were forced to live in set apart sections of town.

In the late 1500s, Jews in Venice were forced to live in a “ghetto nuovo” (the origin of the word “ghetto”), behind gates that were locked and guarded by Christians at night. Venetian Jews could only remain in Venice if legal charters allowing them to live there continued to be renewed. The precarity of being allowed to stay is important: Jews had been expelled from England 300 years prior to Shakespeare’s lifetime. He may have never met a Jewish person. Jews were also expelled from France and Spain. Some lived under suspicion and scrutiny as *conversos* (Jews who converted to Christianity, often under duress or persecution); many others in Western Europe were killed or repeatedly displaced.

### **Just to be clear... these stereotypes are in Merchant?**

Yes. Shylock (identified as “The Jew” throughout the script) wants to cut Christian flesh, and the law prohibits him from spilling a drop of Christian blood. This reinforces the myth that Jews want to kill Christians and cannot be trusted around their blood.

In the unabridged version of the play, Shylock is depicted as so greedy that when he discovers his daughter has run off and married a Christian, he mourns the money she took as much or more than the loss of her.

Additionally, the primary reason that Shylock refuses to show Antonio mercy is because Antonio lends money for free, bringing down the rate of interest for moneylenders. The stereotype is used to contrast Shylock’s merciless greed with Antonio’s selfless generosity.

While Shylock is villainized as a moneylender and “usurer” (someone who charges unfair interest rates on a loan), those *borrowing* money from him (Antonio, Bassanio), are not villainized. Many Christian traders, builders, and government officials used moneylenders to their benefit, though only the (Jewish) lender was morally impugned for the practice. This reinforces the stereotype of Jews as predatory in their financial dealings, and the term “Shylocking” has been used to refer to the charging of excessive interest rates. \*Note: Shylock doesn’t technically charge any interest. However, the court scene still associates him with exorbitant interest rates, as when he is offered double or triple the loan and remains unsatisfied.

*The Merchant of Venice* was staged as a comedy until the 19th century. In the courtroom scene, Shylock is rendered destitute; it is unclear whether he can continue living after being stripped of his livelihood and forced to convert, and thus, presumably denied a community to live with. And yet, the scene closes “I am content,” upon the villainous character receiving his comeuppance. The play then turns its attention to the romantic plotline between Portia and Bassanio.

### **A few additional critiques...**

- Shylock was originally played with red hat and cartoonish or devilish costuming. He was only played as a tragic figure starting in the late 19th century, when the spread of Enlightenment ideals of the “equality of man” made the original representation less acceptable.
- The “if you prick us, do we not bleed?” speech is often read as the most humanizing monologue of the play. However, in it, Shylock seems unavoidably bound to vengeance, seemingly lacking any kind of mercy or free will - virtues then deeply associated with Christianity. This contrasts with Portia. While constrained by her gender and the social and legal barriers that come with her status as a woman, Portia (as a Christian) is a fully humanized character who stretches and subverts those constraints in creative and surprising ways unavailable to Shylock.
- Shylock’s understanding of contracts is also hyper-legalistic; this reflects another stereotype of Jewish religion as unyielding, unmerciful, vengeful and contractual.





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## Anti-Semitism & Merchant (cont'd)

- The emphasis on the body (bleed, laugh, die) in 16th century rhetoric also reiterates that Shylock is not a Christian. Christian rhetoric emphasized spiritual matters over bodily matters, and the emphasis on Shylock's body is juxtaposed to Antonio's spiritual love and kindness to Bassanio.

there are notable contrasts between the admiring language used to describe an off-stage Antonio as compared to the villainizing language used to describe an off-stage Shylock.
- During the Holocaust, Nazis staged frequent productions of *The Merchant of Venice*, emphasizing the villainy of Shylock and placing actors throughout the audience to yell and taunt, encouraging the audience to participate in anti-semitic yelling at Shylock. Pre-existing stereotypes and centuries of scapegoating contributed to the audience's readiness to participate.
- Some scholars have suggested that the audience is primed to hate Shylock based on how other characters speak about him when he is not on stage. In the original play,

### Additional Resources

The Anti-Defamation League (ADL) has created a teaching supplement for educators teaching *The Merchant of Venice*. The document provides helpful information related to the play's historical context and critical reception.

[https://www.adl.org/sites/default/files/Merchant\\_Venice\\_Discussion\\_Guide.pdf](https://www.adl.org/sites/default/files/Merchant_Venice_Discussion_Guide.pdf)



**SARAH SCHWARTZMAN RAMSEY** is a doctoral student in CU Boulder's Department of English and works with the Program in Jewish Studies. She studies 20th century and contemporary Jewish American literature. Informed by her M.A. in Religious Studies from UC Riverside, Sarah examines the role of religion in Jewish American literature and critical theory.

Prior to returning to her doctoral studies, Sarah worked in a liberal arts college interdisciplinary humanities program, in a community college faculty teaching and learning center, and in in-person and online teaching forums as an instructor of English, Religious Studies, and Composition.

### YOUTH VIOLENCE STATISTICS

- 5% of students in this country miss school each day because of bullying. That translates to 160,000 students missing school daily.
- 57% of the time, bullying stops in 10 seconds or less when a bystander becomes an upstander.
- 20-25% of middle school students have been bullied in the past 30 days.
- In 2019, approximately 37% of middle and high school students reported experiencing cyberbullying in their lifetime, and 30% within the last 30 days (Source: Cyberbullying Research Center)
- More info: [stopbullying.gov](http://stopbullying.gov)



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# Mini-Lesson Plan Before the Performance

## INSTRUCTIONS FOR TEACHERS

**Rationale:** This mini-lesson will introduce students to the plot of the Colorado Shakespeare Festival's production of *The Merchant of Venice*, some key ideas of this production, and prepare them to take part in a Shakespeare & Violence Prevention workshop with one of CSF's actors.

**Objective:** Students will be able to discuss and defend their opinions about key characters and ideas related to *The Merchant of Venice* and use personal experience to relate Shakespeare's play to creating positive change in their own school climate.

**Instructions:** Use this study guide to introduce the characters, plot points, and key themes and ideas of *The Merchant of Venice* to your students.

**Taking Perspective:** Use this study guide to introduce your students to the characters of *Merchant*. Host a group discussion about these characters' back stories, reminding your students that there are no right or wrong

answers and it's okay if they imagine something different from their peers. Help them understand the ways that each character's experience may have been shaped by misogyny, antisemitism, and homophobia. Use the worksheet on page 11 to facilitate an individual writing assignment. If it's helpful, use a timer to encourage

After each student has completed their work, lead a class discussion about the responses.

**Analyzing Texts:** Hand out the Analyzing Texts worksheet (pg. 12), which asks the students to analyze and paraphrase a speech from *The Merchant of Venice*. In small or large groups, define unfamiliar words and discuss the overall message of the speech. Ask each student to paraphrase the speech in their own words. After the performance, facilitate a group discussion about the context: Who delivered the speech? Who was listening? Did the characters live up to the ideals of the speech? If not, where's the line between well-meant inconsistency and outright hypocrisy?

### 2020 COLORADO ACADEMIC STANDARDS

<https://www.cde.state.co.us/standardsandinstruction/standards>

#### Drama and Theatre Arts: Standard 3: Critically Respond

- 3.1 Perceive and analyze artistic work
- 3.2 Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work
- 3.4 Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural and historical context to deepen understanding

#### Reading, Writing and Communicating: Standard 1: Oral Expression and Listening

- Prepared Graduates: collaborate effectively as group members or leaders who listen actively and respectfully; pose thoughtful questions, acknowledge the ideas of others; and contribute ideas to further the group's attainment of an objective

#### Reading, Writing and Communicating: Standard 2: Reading for All Purposes

- Prepared Graduates: read a wide range of literary texts to build knowledge and to better understand the human experience

### Comprehensive Health: Standard 4: Prevention and Risk Management

- Prepared Graduates: apply knowledge and skills that promote healthy, violence-free relationships

### SEL (Social and Emotional Learning) Core Competencies <https://casel.org>

- *Self Awareness:* Self confidence
- *Social Awareness:* Perspective-taking, empathy, respect for others
- *Responsible Decision-Making:* analyzing situations, solving problems, reflecting, ethical responsibility
- *Relationship Skills:* Communication, social engagement, relationship building, teamwork

### Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT)

<https://www.understood.org/en/school-learning/for-educators/universal-design-for-learning/what-is-culturally-responsive-teaching>

- Students bring their expertise to the table
- Promote respect for student differences
- Bring real-world issues into the classroom
- Develop and maintain student relationships

**NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_

## **ACTIVITY 1: TAKING PERSPECTIVE (BACK STORY)**

In theatre, the actor's job is to step into a character's shoes and consider the world from that character's specific experience and perspective. This often means imagining a character's "back story," or what their life has been like before the play starts. In this activity, we'll use an actor's approach to character in order to better understand the action of *The Merchant of Venice*.

### **PART 1: GROUP DISCUSSION**

As a group, review the character introductions and plot synopsis on pg. 5-6, focusing primarily on Shylock, Antonio, and Portia. Consider and discuss the choices each character makes, why they might make those choices, and what parts of their back story might be affecting their behavior. Discuss the following questions about these characters.

- What kinds of challenges and difficulties has each character in the play experienced?
- What might their childhoods have been like?
- What are these characters struggling with as the play begins?
- What hopes do these characters have for their future?

### **PART 2: INDIVIDUAL WRITING**

Choose one character from the earlier discussion (Shylock, Antonio, or Portia). Using the previous discussion and your own imagination, answer the following questions for your character. (Use a separate sheet of paper or a computer if you'd like to expand your responses.)

My most vivid childhood memory is \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

A really challenging moment for me in my past was \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

I am currently struggling with \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

I hope that one day \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

I want \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What stands in my way is \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### **PART 3: GROUP SHARE OUT**

As a class, share your responses. make sure to include a few for each character. Notice and discuss if responses for the same character are similar or if they vary a lot? How does it feel to consider the world from the perspective of a character who does unkind things? Does this exercise change your initial thoughts about each character?

### **ALTERNATE ACTIVITY**

Repeat the individual writing for all 3 characters. This will encourage you to think like a director, who must consider the various perspectives of *all* the characters in a play.

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

## ACTIVITY 2: ANALYZING TEXTS

*The Merchant of Venice* contains one of Shakespeare's most famous speeches.

**Before the performance:** Read the speech below together as a class or in small groups. Define any unfamiliar words and discuss the overall meaning. What's the tone (friendly or rude, formal or casual)? What tactics or strategies does the speaker use to persuade those listening? What do the religious references tell you about the world the speaker lives in and who they're speaking to? Does this make the speech more or less compelling to you? Write your own version of the speech, paraphrasing Shakespeare's text.

**During the performance:** Listen for this speech (our version has been edited to be shorter). Who is speaking? Who are they speaking to? What is the goal of the speech? Is it effective?

### SHAKESPEARE'S TEXT:

The quality of mercy is not strained.  
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven  
Upon the place beneath. It is twice blest:  
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.  
'Tis mightiest in the mightiest; it becomes  
The thronèd monarch better than his crown.  
His scepter shows the force of temporal power,  
The attribute to awe and majesty  
Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings;  
But mercy is above this sceptered sway.  
It is enthronèd in the hearts of kings;  
It is an attribute to God Himself;  
And earthly power doth then show likest God's  
When mercy seasons justice. Therefore, Jew,  
Though justice be thy plea, consider this:  
That in the course of justice none of us  
Should see salvation. We do pray for mercy,  
And that same prayer doth teach us all to render  
The deeds of mercy.

### YOUR VERSION:

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**After the performance:** As a class, discuss how the speech functions within the play. Does the speaker's behavior match the ideas expressed in this speech? Why or why not? What is the role of empathy in the speech and in the play as a whole?



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# After the Performance: Discussion Questions

- *The Merchant of Venice* is a play without clear heroes, and the audience is left with no character to root for - just people making mistakes, choosing violence, and getting stuck. What is the value of watching a play in which characters make mistakes? Do you learn more from a play in which characters behave badly, or in which characters behave well?
- What types of mistreatment did you notice in the play?
- What assumptions were made about characters based on their gender, religion, language, etc.?
- Why is Shylock called “the Jew” instead of his name?
- What happens when everyone describes someone like Antonio as a great guy? Are you persuaded that he is a great guy? Why or why not?
- What happens when everyone describes someone like Shylock as a bad guy? Are you persuaded that he is a bad guy? Why or why not?
- “An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind.” What does this mean to you? Can you think of examples of this idea in *The Merchant of Venice*?
- What is empathy? Why is it important? How might empathy have changed the outcomes in the play?
- What were some examples of positive, supportive relationships in the play?
- What were some examples of negative, unsupportive relationships?
- We’re surrounded by stories and media (TV, movies, tiktok, plays), and sometimes these stories reinforce dangerous stereotypes. What can you do when exposed to these stereotypes?
- What about when those stories are celebrated as great art, like Shakespeare? Should we throw it away completely? Keep it as is? Edit or rework it in some way?
- Read the full play, and imagine you will cut the play down to 45 minutes. Discuss what you would leave out and what you would need to keep. What do you see as the heart of the play?
- Actors use teamwork to trust one another when they are onstage. How is teamwork useful in school?
- How can you be an upstander when stereotypes are being repeated or used against someone in school, in our communities, and/or online?
- How could you apply what you’ve learned here in your school? How could you apply this outside of school? If you were aware that someone you know was harming others, how could you safely take action?

## Land Acknowledgment

We honor and acknowledge that the Colorado Shakespeare Festival resides on the traditional territories and ancestral homelands of the Arapaho, Cheyenne, and Ute Nations. We recognize the sophisticated and intricate knowledge systems Indigenous people have developed in relationship to their lands and respect the many diverse Indigenous peoples still connected to this land. You can learn more about the original inhabitants where you live by searching your (or your school's) address at [native-land.ca](http://native-land.ca)



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# Cyberbullying

(from the Cyberbullying Research Center)

Cyberbullying is bullying that takes place over digital devices like cell phones, computers, and tablets. Cyberbullying can occur through SMS, Text, and apps, or online in social media, forums, or gaming where people can view, participate in, or share content. Cyberbullying includes sending, posting, or sharing negative, harmful, false, or mean content about someone else. It can include sharing personal or private information about someone else causing embarrassment or humiliation. Some cyberbullying crosses the line into unlawful or criminal behavior.

Cyberbullying has unique concerns in that it can be:

**Persistent** – Digital devices offer an ability to immediately and continuously communicate 24 hours a day, so it can be difficult for children experiencing cyberbullying to find relief.

**Permanent** – Most information communicated electronically is permanent and public, if not reported and removed. A negative online reputation, including for those who bully, can impact college admissions, employment, and other areas of life.

**Hard to Notice** – Because teachers and parents may not overhear or see cyberbullying taking place, it is harder to recognize.

## Tips from CSPV

### HOW TO BE AN UPSTANDER

- Refuse to join in if someone tries to get you to taunt and torment another person.
- Get a teacher, parent, or other responsible adult to come help. This isn't snitching. You are saying that you don't think bullying is acceptable and don't want anyone to get hurt.
- Try to get the person being bullied to tell a trusted adult. Offer to go with them.
- Tell a trusted adult yourself if the person being bullied is unwilling to report it. Do not let the person behaving as a bully know so that they do not become aggressive toward you.

### SCHOOL CLIMATE SURVEYS

One of the most important components of a safe school is a climate where youth feel secure and supported in their learning environment. As part of the Safe Communities Safe Schools (SCSS) project, the Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence offers school climate surveys, at a low cost, with options for students, staff, and parents. For more information about our surveys or to administer any of the SCSS Surveys at your school, please contact us via email at [cspv@colorado.edu](mailto:cspv@colorado.edu) or by phone at 303-492-1032.

<https://cspv.colorado.edu/what-we-do/surveys/>

## safe<sup>2</sup>tell Colorado

**SAFE2TELL** is an anonymous tool for reporting bullying and other inappropriate behavior. You can use your voice to make the life of someone else better. Sometimes if YOU don't speak up for someone, no one else will. You can make a difference. When you make a call or go online to report bullying, no one will ever be able to know that you are making the report. No names are asked, and phone calls to Safe2Tell cannot be traced. It is completely anonymous.

**HOW TO REPORT: (877) 542-7233 | [safe2tell.org](https://safe2tell.org) | Download the mobile app**



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# Standing up to Cyberbullying

## Top Ten Tips for Teens

Sameer Hinduja, Ph.D. and Justin W. Patchin, Ph.D.

Don't be a bystander -- stand up to cyberbullying when you see it. Take action to stop something that you know is wrong. These **Top Ten Tips** will give you specific ideas of what **you can do** when you witness cyberbullying.

- 1. REPORT TO SCHOOL.** If the person being cyberbullied is someone from your school, report it to your school. Many have anonymous reporting systems to allow you to let them know what you are seeing without disclosing your identity.
- 2. COLLECT EVIDENCE.** Take a screenshot, save the image or message, or screen-record what you see. It will be easier for an adult to help if they can see -- and have proof of -- exactly what was being said.
- 3. REPORT TO SITE / APP / GAME.** All reputable online environments prohibit cyberbullying and provide easy tools to report violations. Don't hesitate to report; those sites/apps will protect your identity and not "out" you.
- 4. TALK TO A TRUSTED ADULT.** Develop relationships with adults you can trust and count on to help when you (or a friend) experience something negative online. This could be a parent, teacher, counselor, coach, or family friend.
- 5. DEMONSTRATE CARE.** Show the person being cyberbullied that they are not alone. Send them an encouraging text or snap. Take them aside at school and let them know that you have their back.
- 6. WORK TOGETHER.** Gather your other friends and organize a full-court press of positivity. Post kind comments on their wall or under a photo they've posted. Encourage others to help report the harm. There is strength in numbers.
- 7. TELL THEM TO STOP.** If you know the person who is doing the cyberbullying, tell them to knock it off. Explain that it's not cool to be a jerk to others. But say something -- if you remain silent, you are basically telling them that it is ok to do it.
- 8. DON'T ENCOURAGE IT.** If you see cyberbullying happening, don't support it in any way. Don't forward it, don't add emojis in the comments, don't gossip about it with your friends, and don't stand on the sidelines.
- 9. STAY SAFE.** Don't put yourself in harm's way. When your emotions are running high, resist posting something that may escalate the situation. Don't hang out online where most people are cruel. Never physically threaten others.
- 10. DON'T GIVE UP.** Think creatively about what can be done to stop cyberbullying. Brainstorm with others and use everyone's talents to do something epic!

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# Mental Health and Suicide Prevention: How to Talk to Children and Youth

Office of Suicide Prevention, Colorado Department of Public Health & Environment

A suicide death is a traumatic and difficult loss, and the impact of suicide can leave grieving individuals and communities with questions. One of the first questions people often ask is: Why? Why did this person die by suicide?

Suicide is always a complex issue: There is never just one reason why someone will attempt or die by suicide. Learning about a young person's death by suicide often evokes complicated feelings and raises an additional question: How should we talk with children and youth about mental health and suicide prevention?

It is important that adults establish open communication with children and youth to ask about their emotions, their worries, and what gives them hope. Being able to talk about complex and challenging emotions is a way to build and strengthen resilience, coping skills, and connections to caring, trusted adults. Although it can be scary, normalizing these conversations and being empathetic listeners can be the most important first step we can take in preventing suicides among children and youth and in supporting good mental health.

## KEY TERMS

Child: those younger than age 12

Youth: those between ages 13 and 18

Young adults: those between 19 and 24

Young people: all of the above

## Understanding youth stressors

As parents, caregivers, and trusted adults, we can support youth and children with the stressors they face on a daily basis, and that, in rare circumstances, may contribute to suicidal behaviors and attempts. For a young person, factors that could contribute to a suicidal crisis might include a combination of the following:

- stress.
- feeling socially isolated.
- lack of sleep or irregular sleeping patterns.
- exposure to bullying.
- mental health conditions.
- adverse childhood experiences and traumatic experiences.
- discrimination about one's identity (gender identity and/or sexual orientation).
- periods of transition.
- economic stressors.

## How to listen and offer support

In order to have open conversations around mental health with young people, it is important to show that we are listening: Ask questions that show we care, validate emotions, help build problem-solving skills (which is different from solving their problems for them), and make space and time for ongoing conversations.





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During these conversations, ask open-ended questions about mental health and listen closely and openly to the responses. Possible questions can be:

- Do you ever get sad or lonely? What do you do to feel better?
- Do you ever feel stressed? What do you do to feel less stressed out?
- Do you or your friends ever talk about hurting yourselves or wanting to die?

Sleep is an often overlooked stressor, and lack of sleep or irregular sleeping patterns can be a risk factor for suicide. Ample sleep can protect young people from many negative health consequences. Adults can support a young person's mental health by creating and maintaining healthy sleeping habits. It is recommended that children between the ages of 7 and 12 get 10-11 hours of sleep each night. Adults can help support a healthy sleeping environment by limiting access to social media at night, or by establishing routines that help ensure that a child or youth is getting the appropriate amount of sleep. Getting enough sleep is important for the mental well-being of people of any age!

### Knowing the warning signs and life-saving resources

Although suicide attempts and suicide deaths among youth and children are rare, even one death by suicide is too many. In order to prevent children and youth suicide attempts and deaths, it is important to be aware of the following potential warning signs that can indicate that the young person is severely depressed or having thoughts of suicide:

- Expressing unbearable emotional pain, feeling trapped, or hopelessness.
- Giving away prized possessions.
- Talking or posting on social media about suicide or wanting to die.
- Suddenly becoming calm or cheerful after a long period of depression.
- Looking for a way to kill themselves.
- Telling people "good-bye."
- Saying they wish they could fall asleep and never wake up, or that everyone would be better off without them.
- Change in sleeping patterns (including sleeping too much or too little).

If you are concerned about possible suicide risk for anyone, including a young person, please ask that person if they are thinking of hurting themselves or are having thoughts of suicide. Research clearly shows that talking or asking about suicide will not put the idea of suicide in their head. It shows that you are concerned about them and willing to help. Direct questions like, "Are you having thoughts or suicide?" or "Are you thinking of killing yourself?" are straightforward and ask for a clear yes/no answer.

If someone responds "yes," it is important to listen to their emotions and for information about a possible plan, including if the individual has identified how, where, and when they may attempt suicide. When an individual has specific plans regarding suicide, this can indicate a higher risk. No matter the level of specificity, it is important to connect an individual who is considering suicide with a mental health provider or mental health resources as soon as possible.



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**If you are concerned that a loved one is struggling with a mental health crisis, is having thoughts of suicide, or if you just have a gut feeling that something is off, please call Colorado Crisis Services, available 24/7/365 at 1-844-493-8255. A trained crisis counselor will answer your call and help you navigate your situation.**

### **Safer Environments Reduce Suicide Risk**

When we consider how to reduce suicide risk, especially when someone is in a mental health crisis, a crucial first step is to reduce access to lethal means. Many suicide attempts occur with little planning during a short-term crisis, and ensuring that an environment is as safe as possible is essential in preventing potential suicide deaths.

Suicide attempts by firearms are particularly lethal. The majority of firearms used in youth suicides belong to a parent. Securing firearms or temporarily storing them away from the home greatly reduces the risk of a child or youth dying by suicide using a firearm. Safely and securely storing medications and substances also reduces risk. It is also important to continue to be aware of the individual and their environment. If an individual has shared that they are thinking about suicide, learning more about this despair and if they have a plan can also provide important information on how to keep an environment as safe as possible for that individual and everyone else.

### **In It Together**

The best suicide prevention is comprehensive and collaborative. The more that people, organizations, and communities work together to support positive mental health, coping skills, resiliency, and openness around discussing suicide and mental health, the better the result for everyone, including young people. Talking about suicide with those we care about can feel scary, but there are resources in Colorado to help support you, your family, and your community.

### **Helpful Resources:**

**Colorado Office of Suicide Prevention: [www.coosp.org](http://www.coosp.org)**

**Colorado Crisis Services: 1-844-493-8255, [www.coloradocrisiservices.org](http://www.coloradocrisiservices.org).  
Text TALK to 38255. The Trevor Project: [www.thetrevorproject.org](http://www.thetrevorproject.org) (for LGBTQ+ youth)**

**Colorado School Safety Resource Center: [www.colorado.gov/cssrc](http://www.colorado.gov/cssrc) The  
Second Wind Fund: [www.thesecondwindfund.org](http://www.thesecondwindfund.org)**

**National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Colorado: [www.namicolorado.org](http://www.namicolorado.org)**

**The Suicide Prevention Coalition of Colorado: [www.suicidepreventioncolorado.org](http://www.suicidepreventioncolorado.org)**

**American Foundation for Suicide Prevention-CO Chapter: [www.afsp.org/  
chapter/afsp-colorado](http://www.afsp.org/chapter/afsp-colorado) Mental Health Colorado: [www.mentalhealthcolorado.org](http://www.mentalhealthcolorado.org)**

**The Colorado Behavioral Healthcare Council: [www.cbhc.org](http://www.cbhc.org) Youth Mental  
Health First Aid: [www.MHFACO.org](http://www.MHFACO.org)**

For more information, please contact:

Lena Heilmann, Ph.D., M.N.M.

Director, Colorado Office of Suicide Prevention

[lena.heilmann@state.co.us](mailto:lena.heilmann@state.co.us), 303.692.6366



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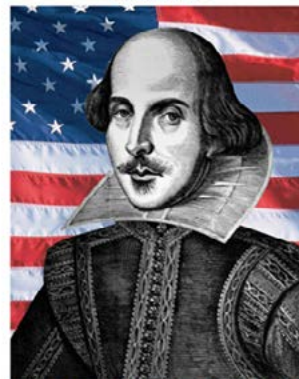
"I can no other answer make but thanks, and thanks, and ever thanks."

*-Twelfth Night*

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