

The Royal  
**Lyceum**  
Edinburgh

**EDUCATION PACK**

PREPARING FOR THE PRODUCTION

THE ROYAL LYCEUM EDINBURGH PRESENTS THE THEATRE FOR A NEW AUDIENCE PRODUCTION  
FEATURING **JOHN DOUGLAS THOMPSON** AS SHYLOCK

# THE MERCHANT OF VENICE

EDINBURGH  
THE CITY OF EDINBURGH COUNCIL



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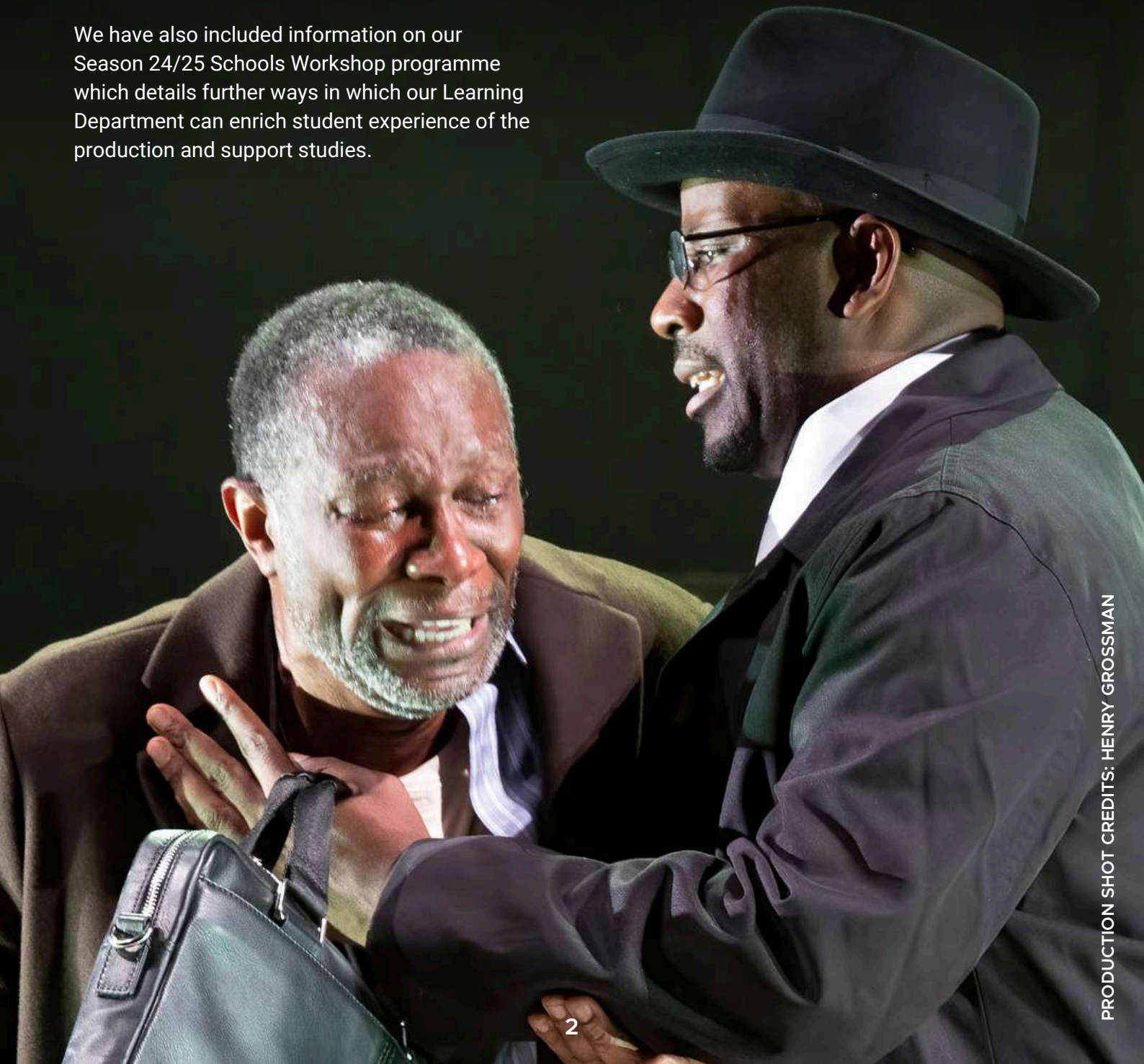
# ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

The Royal Lyceum Theatre Edinburgh is delighted to present this pack to accompany the production of *The Merchant of Venice*. The text of the play depicts a very divided society, featuring themes of antisemitism, racism, misogyny and inequity. The aim of this pack is to support educators in preparing students to encounter these by:

- Providing information about what you will see on stage
- Facilitating empathetic conversation around discrimination, racial equity, diversity and inclusion
- Creating a safe and supportive environment for these conversations to happen
- Providing practical exercises to explore the key themes of bonds and values
- Signposting sources of additional information and support

We have suggested a range of articles, exercises, discussion points and links to external sources that can be used before seeing the production to promote understanding and facilitate sympathetic discussion.

We have also included information on our Season 24/25 Schools Workshop programme which details further ways in which our Learning Department can enrich student experience of the production and support studies.



# A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR

A medieval centre of trade and an early mercantile state, Venice is often considered a birthplace of capitalism.

Perhaps not coincidentally, it's also the birthplace of the original ghetto. Within the world of Shakespeare's predominantly Christian Venice, as a Jew, Shylock is treated as a second-class citizen or worse. In 16th-century Venice, Jews were prohibited from practicing most professions. They were required to wear Jewish signifiers on their clothing. They were not allowed to own land, but rather had to rent homes within the gated ghetto that was locked every evening from 6pm to 12pm. *The Merchant of Venice* depicts a divided society saturated with hate and inequity. The world boils with anti-Semitism, racism, xenophobia, misogyny, classism, and homophobia. In private, even Portia—the ingénue—makes overtly racist jokes about the colour of the Prince of Morocco's skin. In this deeply stratified society laws enforce inequity. The societal systems enable certain groups of people to have power and ensure that others don't. In Shakespeare's Venice, there's predatory lending, a biased justice system, discriminatory practices in housing and commercial markets...any of that sound familiar? By casting a black man as Shylock in America, one becomes painfully aware of the connections between Shakespeare's 16th-century Venice and our world now. *The Merchant of Venice* has a lot to say to us. I'm interested in directing a *Merchant* with a diverse group of artists, for a diverse audience. Theatrical meaning is created not just by the story being told, but through the bodies telling it. And with a diverse company and creative team, I want to discover what this play means to us in the here and now.



PHOTO CREDIT: AMIR HAMJA

## ARIN ARBUS, DIRECTOR

# A NOTE FROM JEFFREY HOROWITZ

Many brilliant actors have played Shylock, including Richard Burbage in the original production in the 1590s and, over the next 400 years, such celebrated performers as Charles Macklin, Henry Irving, Laurence Olivier, Jacob Adler, F. Murray Abraham\*, George C. Scott, Al Pacino, Jonathan Pryce, and Patrick Stewart. Ira Aldridge, the first great American Shakespearean, left New York City for Britain in 1824 due to racial discrimination.

Aldridge is rightly celebrated for his Othello, the first by a Black actor (though he could not play the role in America, only in Britain and Europe). In 1831, Aldridge became the first Black actor to play Shylock and three decades later was followed in the role in Britain by another African American actor, Samuel Morgan Smith.

Black actors who went on to play Shylock in the United States include Paul Butler at Chicago's Goodman Theatre in 1994 and Johnny Lee Davenport in 2005 at the Milwaukee Shakespeare Theatre. Nearly 200 years after Aldridge first starred in the role, John Douglas Thompson will be the first Black actor to play Shylock in New York City for Theatre for a New Audience.

\*In 2007, TFANA produced *The Merchant of Venice* with F. Murray Abraham as Shylock, directed by Darko Tresnjak in repertory with Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta* directed by David Herskovits, exploring the two Elizabethan authors' treatment of Jewish characters. TFANA's 2007 production of *Merchant* toured to the RSC as part of the Complete Works Festival and in 2011 toured nationally.

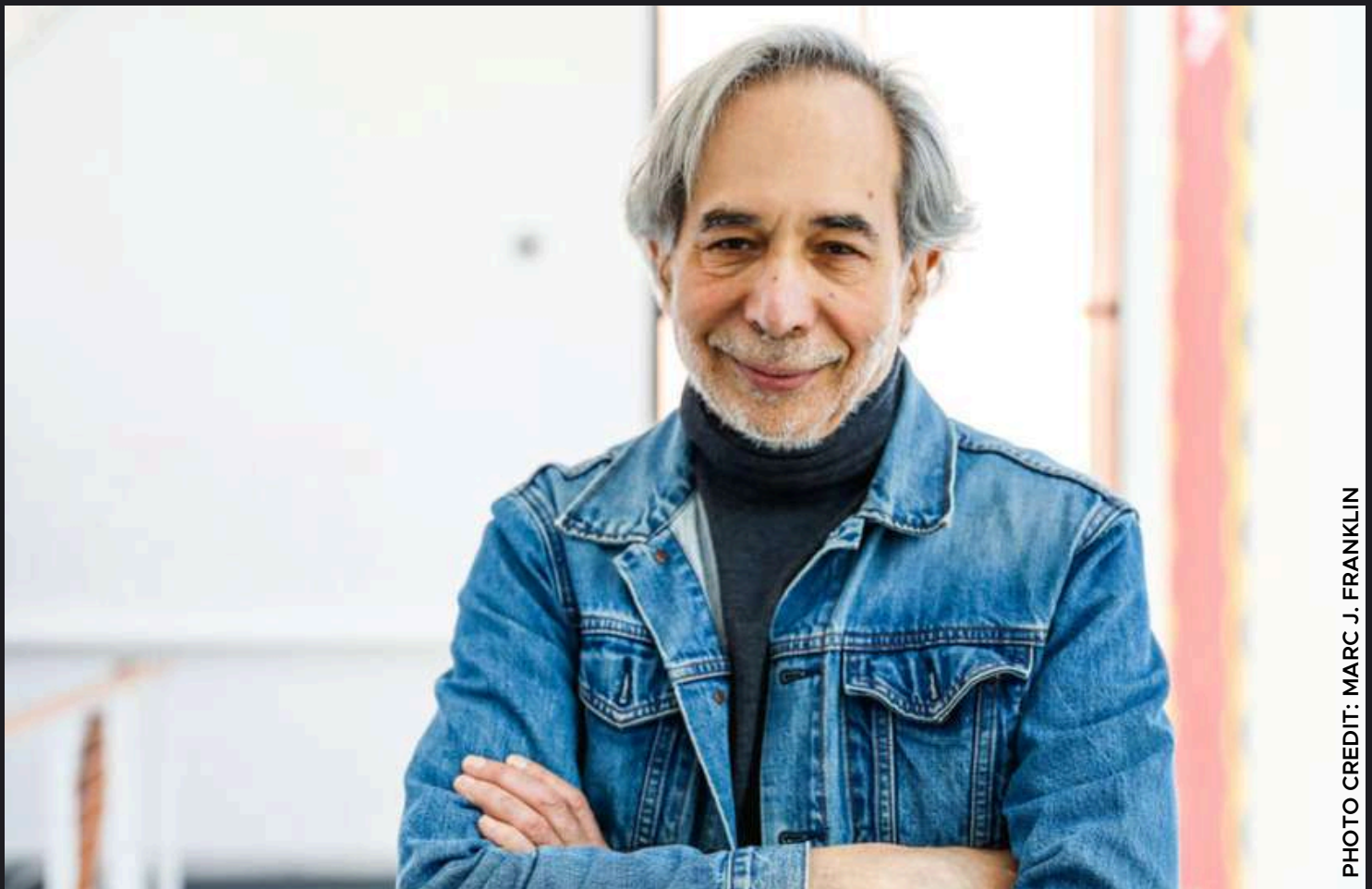


PHOTO CREDIT: MARC J. FRANKLIN

**JEFFREY HOROWITZ,  
TFANA'S FOUNDING ARTISTIC DIRECTOR**

# WHAT YOU WILL SEE ON STAGE:

*The Merchant of Venice* depicts a very divided society, featuring themes of antisemitism, racism, misogyny and inequity. As well as being evident in the text, there are certain actions, acts and visual elements relating to these themes that students will see on stage. We have collated the below information so that you are aware of these in advance and can make an informed decision about how you prepare your students to see the show.

·In Act IV, the courtroom scene, Shylock sharpens a long dagger. At the point in the script where it is ruled that Shylock can collect his bond of “a pound of flesh”, Bassanio is tied to a chair with his shirt open and chest bared. Shylock approaches Bassanio and brings the dagger up to his face. He draws it back and makes a move to drive it into Bassanio’s chest, but is stopped by a shout from Balthazar. The dagger never touches Bassanio’s flesh throughout this exchange, but the scene is threatening.

·In Act V, we see Lorenzo and Jessica alone at Portia’s estate. They enter the stage, kissing. He lifts her and lays her on the floor, before removing his shirt and loosely wrapping it around her neck in a gesture of sexual play. He slaps her bottom. She is initially willing in these exchanges but eventually responds by kicking him away.

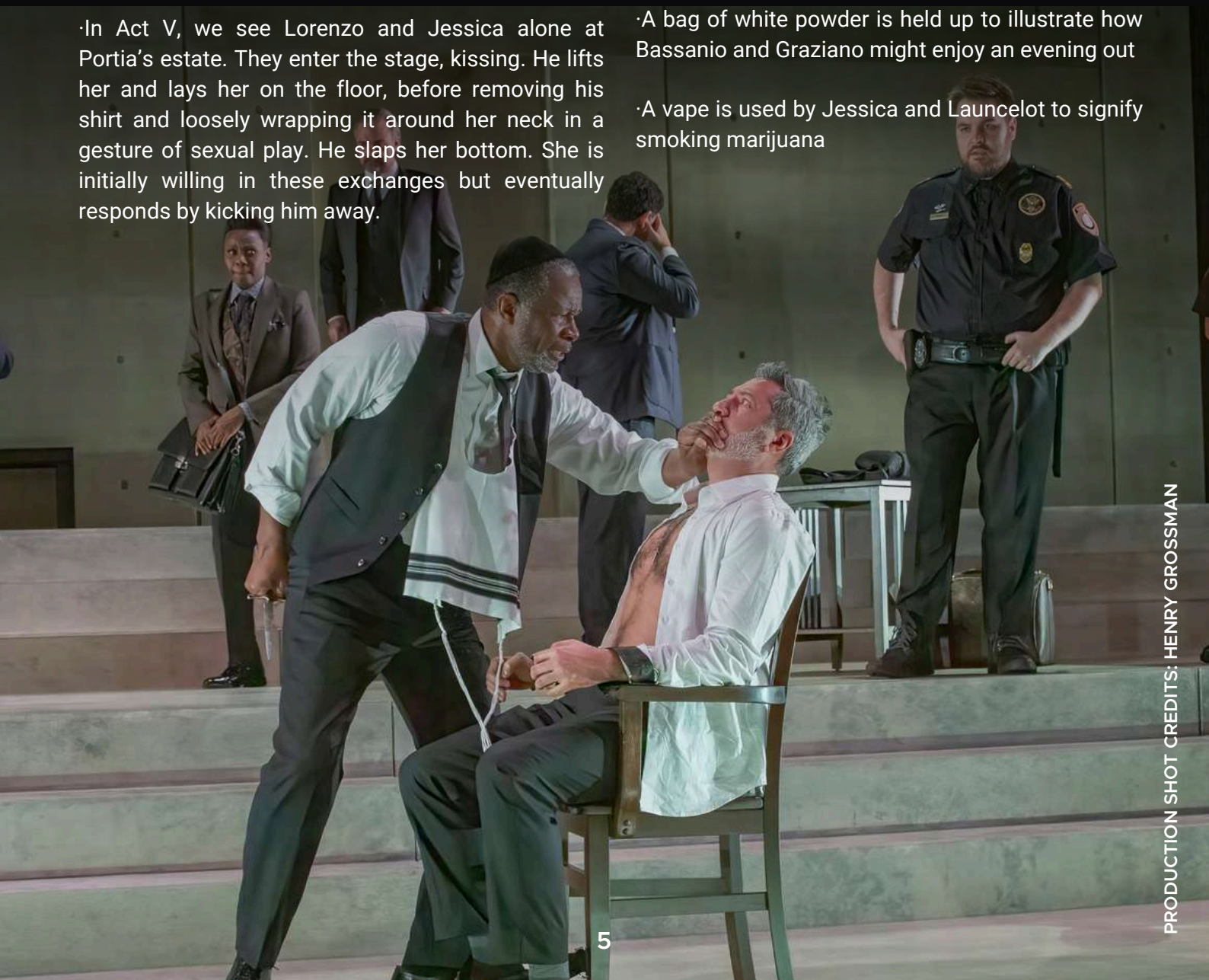
·Shylock is repeatedly referred to as a “devil” by Solanio, and is unflatteringly imitated as a caricature with an evil voice and horns indicated by fingers held to his forehead

·Salerio spits at Shylock and kisses his teeth at Tubal in an act intended to offensively dismiss

·Bassanio slaps Shylocks outstretched hands away when he is knelt in an act of suppliance

·A bag of white powder is held up to illustrate how Bassanio and Graziano might enjoy an evening out

·A vape is used by Jessica and Launcelot to signify smoking marijuana



# CREATING A CLASS AGREEMENT

Group agreements are a useful tool for getting discussions off to the right start and keeping them on track. They can also be a good starting point for getting students to think about what they need in order to create a safe space for discussions - this could be personal qualities, but also the kind of environment they would like to create. Helping your class come to an agreement on how they will work together respectfully and effectively at the beginning of discussions will enable them to interact more cooperatively and provide a tool to be referred back to if needed. This exercise from Training for Change takes you through the process.

[www.seedsforchange.org.uk/groupagree](http://www.seedsforchange.org.uk/groupagree)

## Some prompt questions for students:

- What kind of atmosphere would you like to create?
- How would you like to make people feel about themselves?
- What kind of conversations do you want to have?

## Things to keep in mind:

- Be aware of how intellectual debate and discussion, and even attempts to find a 'quick fix' or 'solve' may impact students with different experiences of discrimination, to different extents
- Acknowledge that people can have feelings of awkwardness, different levels of comfort/discomfort when talking about difficult subjects
- Pay attention to the access needs of all students – ask what makes them feel respected, included and able to participate fully. Help students to make explicit what their access needs are



# SYMPATHY VS EMPATHY



Dr. Brené Brown is a best-selling author, speaker and research professor who has spent the past decade studying vulnerability, courage, worthiness and shame. In this short video animated by Katy Davis, she explains the difference between sympathy and empathy, and how we can create a genuine empathic connection with someone.

[www.theresa.org/video/shorts/2013/12/brene-brown-on-empathy](http://www.theresa.org/video/shorts/2013/12/brene-brown-on-empathy)



# SAFE DISCUSSIONS

Individuals who experience discrimination often have their experience minimised or dismissed instead of being heard, acknowledged and shown empathy. In groups, students can decide which statements are likely to increase feelings of safety and which are likely to decrease feelings of safety in conversation or in group discussion.

Ways in which people's experience can be dismissed

"People are just people to me."

"Speaking about race and religion is just being divisive."

"We're all the same."

"I always treat everyone the same way, so I don't need to pay attention to race or religion."

"Can't we all just get along?"

"I'm open to listening to your perspective."

"I can't believe anyone thinks that way these days."

"I don't see you as less-than anyone else."

Ways you can recognise people's experiences:

"Some people's experience includes not being accepted, and not being safe because of their skin colour, race, religion or beliefs"

"I want to understand people's unique experiences."

"I want to address discrimination. I can't do that if I don't see cultural difference."

"Discrimination is not a central part of my experience"

"Discrimination is a central part of the experience of some people."

"I invite you to be open with me, when I say things you are uncomfortable"

# IDEALS

- Everyone has the same opportunities to participate fully in society
- Everyone feels valued
- Everyone feels as if they belong
- Everyone recognises and celebrates the differences between people
- Everyone recognises the existence of discriminatory practices, and challenges discrimination
- Individuals and groups are protected against acts of discrimination by law



## DISCUSSION POINTS

The below questions may be useful to use with your students before seeing the production.

- What are the challenges of retelling historic stories in a contemporary context?
- What do we have to be conscious of when doing so?
- What types of discrimination are present in society today?
- Have you ever felt discriminated against?
- When Shakespeare wrote *The Merchant of Venice* at the very end of the 1590s, Jews had officially been expelled from England for over 300 years. Therefore, Shakespeare likely had little to no personal experience with Jewish people as he created his characters. When we are ignorant of another people based on lack of first-hand knowledge and experience, it is very easy to see them through age-old stereotypes to or to treat them badly, and this message is as true today as it was in the 1590s. Who is "the other" in society today? Which marginalized groups do you know very little about?
- What is the first thing you could do, personally, to get to know a marginalized group a little better?

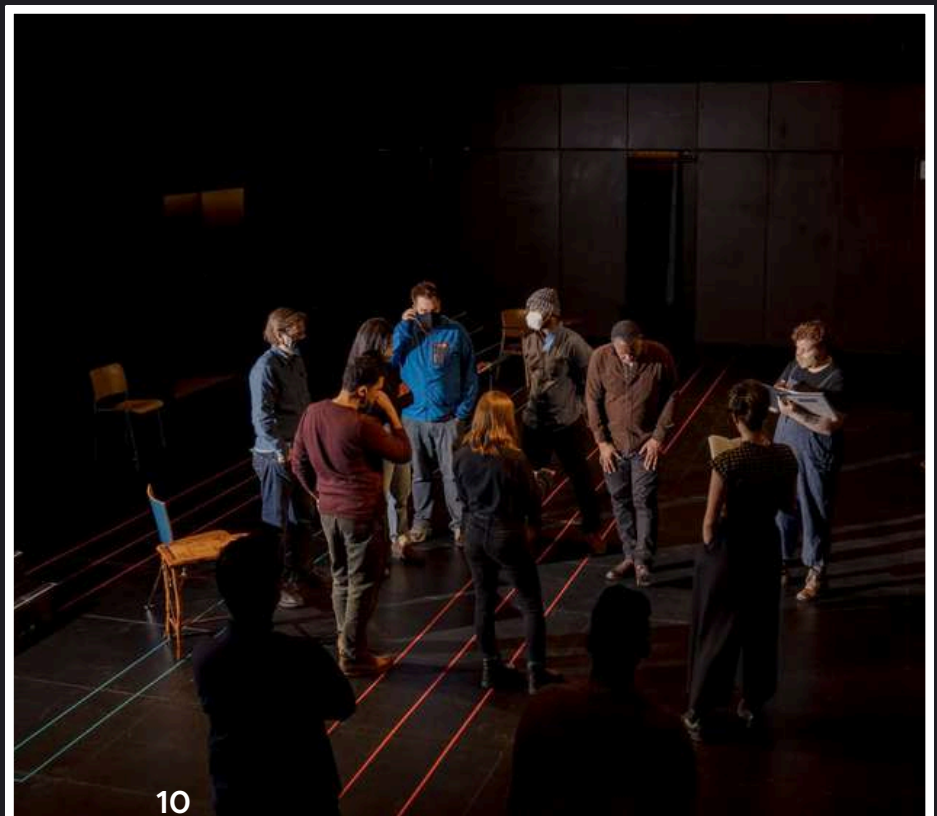




**"In Arin Arbus' provocative production... John Douglas Thompson as Shylock [is] perhaps the greatest Shakespeare interpreter in contemporary America"**

*The New York Times*

**The show's uniquely diverse company evoke a deeply stratified Venice. Its connections to our own grievously fractured world are vivid, stark and startling.**



# LESSON OUTLINE: INTRODUCING KEY THEMES: BONDS AND VALUES

This lesson was created by TFANA as part of their World Theatre Project, a 12-week in-school residency program that combines the experience of seeing a live performance of a Shakespeare (or other classical) play with in-depth classroom work for students and professional development for teachers. Information on the full programme can be found [online here](#).

## Essential Questions

How do the values held by the characters in *The Merchant of Venice* inform what happens in the play? How does what we value inform the way we interpret and draw connections between the texts we read, the history we study, and the lives we lead?

## Lesson Aims

Students will:

- Explore major themes from the play *The Merchant of Venice*, including the central question, “What do you value?”
- Compare and contrast context-dependent definitions of the words “BOND” and “VALUE”
- Consider the ways that value systems are constructed in different contexts – and how that process can impact individuals, relationships, and societies

## Lesson Context

*The Merchant of Venice* depicts a sharply divided society where powerful systems enforce inequity based on religion, race, gender, sexuality, and class. The Venice in the play is a capital of commerce where financial transactions form the foundation of every kind of relationship and a biased justice system makes sure the powerful stay in power. The play asks audiences to consider the essential question: “What do you value?”

In this lesson, students will consider the varied meanings of the words “bonds” and “value/values” to understand the ways that worth is constructed in the harsh world of the play. Which people, relationships, kinds of faith, and understandings of justice are deemed to have “value” in this Venice? And which are not?

Multiple options are provided to accommodate classrooms that may be ready for varying levels of engagement with this vocabulary.



## Vocabulary

Theme	An idea that occurs throughout a work of literature, art, music, etc
Context	The circumstances that help explain why things happen the way they do
Bond	A force used to hold something or to fasten things together
Bond (in friendship)	A force or feeling that unites people
Bond (in finance)	A financial commitment or agreement indicating that a debt is owed
Value	The worth or importance of something (measured monetarily or otherwise)
Values	A set of principles or beliefs about what is most important in life



PRODUCTION SHOT CREDITS: HENRY GROSSMAN

# LESSON ACTIVITIES

## INTRODUCTION: WHAT IS A 'BOND'

1. Gauge student's existing knowledge of *The Merchant of Venice*. Is anyone familiar with the play / any Shakespeare play / any play?
  2. The plot of *The Merchant of Venice* centres around different kinds of bonds, so let's explore what that means.
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### **a. For groups who have some familiarity with the word "bond"**

i. Invite students to move randomly around the classroom. When you call out a number, they must sort themselves into groups of that size as quickly as possible (ie, you call out "three!" and they get into groups of 3). Play several rounds of this, calling out different numbers each time. Ask students to consider what they do when someone is left out because the groups are uneven: do they follow instructions and leave someone out, or ignore the prompt and include an extra person in their group?

ii. Call out "four!" and students get into groups of 4. They have 1 minute to come up with a one-sentence definition of the word "bond," which they all write down for themselves.

iii. Call out "six!" and students get into groups of 6. They have two minutes to share the definitions they made with their prior group, and come up with a new definition together.

iv. Come back together as a full class and share out all the different definitions in the room. Are there any meanings that were left out? Discuss that words can have multiple meanings and review the multiple definitions of "bond" (see Vocabulary above)

v. Reflect: What was difficult about coming up with a group definition? What determines how we define this word as individuals? As a group?

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### **a. For groups who have minimal/no familiarity with the word "bond"**

i. As a full class, brainstorm to generate a list of possible definitions of the word "bond" (see Vocabulary above). If not brought up by a student, introduce the idea of a bond as a contract and/or representation of an agreement to pay a debt.

ii. Place different definitions of the word "bond" around the room (ie, "bond of love," "bond of friendship," "bond of debt," "physical bond tying two things together," "legal bond/contract")

iii. Ask students to place themselves around the room in response to prompts: "Place yourself near...the kind of bond that you think is strongest" | "The bond that you think is easiest to break" | "The bond that [character from a recent classroom text] wishes they had" | "The bond that you would want if you were trying to be popular in school" | "The bond you would want if you were trying to gain power in our society" | "The bond you would want if you were trying to gain power in [society in recent classroom text]"

iv. Ask volunteers to discuss why they placed themselves in different locations (there are no right/wrong answers; the point is to illuminate how different perspectives inform different responses).

## Main Activity: “Values” in Society

1. The central conflicts in *The Merchant of Venice* centre around different kinds of value & values
2. Brainstorm with students to generate possible definitions of the word “value” and examples of “values” that we can hold as individuals, groups, and societies
3. Invite students to individually free-write on what they value most/their top 5 personal values (to be kept private).
4. Explain that some of the values held by the characters in *Merchant* include: Wealth, Law, Justice, Love, Faith, and Identity. Place each of these values on a piece of chart paper around the room.

OPTION 1: Invite students to organize these values in order of importance to them personally. Underneath each chart paper heading, list 6 slots where students can record how they personally ranked that value in importance.

OPTION 2: Ask students to place themselves around the room in response to prompts: “The value you think is most important is...” | “The value you would most like to live in a society informed by...” | “The value that contributes most to inequality...” | “The value you think our school views as most important” | “The value you think our society holds most important”

5. Divide students into groups and assign each group to one of 6 values listed on the chart papers. Groups work together to create a visual - either a drawing, an infographic, or a tableau (a frozen statue involving everyone in the group) - of a society informed by that value above all others.

6. Discuss how similar or different these depictions of societies are to one another; to our society; and to other societies, real or fictional, that they have studied. How could these values be used to divide people? How could they be used to unite people?

**Reflection Questions:** What kinds of connections can students make between the two exercises they just participated in and the meanings of the words “bond” and “value”? How could the different definitions of these words lead to conflict for characters in a story?



## Sources of further information and support - clickable links

### Anti-Defamation League – Guide for Educators

This resource is a tool for teachers presenting *The Merchant of Venice* to their students. It is not intended as an exhaustive study of the play, but is a supplement intended to guide an exploration of the problematic issue of anti-Semitism as part of the broader discussion of the play.

### Educate against hate

A website developed by the Department for Education and the Home Office featuring practical advice, support and resources to protect children from extremism and radicalisation.

### Equality and Rights Network

The Equality and Rights Network (EaRN) enables any group, forum, organisation or individual to work in partnership with public services to advance equality, promote human rights, and to tackle inequality and poverty. The aim is to bring people together to have their voice heard.

### Jewish Small Communities Network

A charity registered in 2016, serving and advocating for 100 small Jewish communities across 72 towns and remote families around the UK that fall outside the main Jewish conurbations. A variety of resources for understanding and teaching are offered on their website.





# LYCEUM EDUCATION PROGRAMME 24/25

As part of our Creative Learning programme, we offer a range of opportunities for schools and teachers to engage with our work and season shows. Designed for Primary, Secondary and Higher levels, our workshops, tours and education packs support the Curriculum for Excellence and offer creative ways to support and enhance your existing curriculum.

## Workshops

Specifically designed to support Higher and Advanced Higher Drama studies, these workshops will give your pupils the opportunity to delve deeper into our productions of *The Merchant of Venice*. All workshops are delivered by one of our experienced facilitators and come with a Lyceum production resource pack.

- Development of characters
- Design concept
- Collaboration and dramatic impact

We also offer custom-designed workshops for Primary and Secondary classes on request. These aim to support studies across the curriculum and can cover anything from general performance skills to a more in-depth topic or subject that you are studying. They can be designed on a one-off basis or as a programme across several weeks.

Visit [our website](#) to find out more.

## Backstage tours

So much happens behind the scenes at the Lyceum and we'd love to give you special access! Our tours allow you to get up close to our work by exploring spaces not usually open to members of the public. Tours of the Theatre or our Production workshop at Roseburn can be arranged.

## CLPL

Our CLPL sessions aim to support teachers and educators in using drama in the classroom by developing confidence and equipping them with a range of drama techniques so that this form of teaching and learning can be embedded within their day-to-day practice. CLPL sessions can be tailored to any learning area.



# GET IN TOUCH

If you have questions about the production or how to use this pack, or would like to make an enquiry about booking a workshop or tour, get in touch with our Creative Learning Department at

[learning@lyceum.org.uk](mailto:learning@lyceum.org.uk)

