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ACT 1

Central Quote:

PRE-GRAMMAR | Preparation

Prepare the student for understanding by drawing upon his or her prior knowledge or experience.

1. In one or two sentences, give a synopsis of "Little Red Riding Hood."

Little Red Riding Hood disregards her mother's advice to hurry straightaway to Grandmother's.

Instead she visits with a wolf, who discovers her destination, runs ahead of Red, and disguises himself as Grandma. Dressed in Grandma's bed clothes and lying in her bed, the wolf gobbles up Little Red Riding Hood upon her arrival.

2. Though the story seems fantastic on some level, what truth about life does the tale communicate?

Do not talk with strangers OR Always listen to your parents: they know best!

GRAMMAR | Presentation

The student is presented with and discovers essential facts, elements, and features of the play.

READING NOTES

1. **Antonio** – a merchant of Venice; friend of Bassanio
2. **Bassanio** – an Italian lord; suitor to Portia
3. **Salerio, Solanio, Lorenzo, Gratiano** – all are gentlemen of Venice; friends of Bassanio
4. **Portia** – a rich Italian lady
5. **Nerissa** – lady-in-waiting to Portia
6. **Shylock** – a wealthy Jewish man; a moneylender
7. **simile** – a figure of speech comparing two unlike things using “like” or “as”
8. **setting** – the time and place in which a story takes place
9. **conflict** – the established problem that gives rise to dramatic action in a drama or fiction
10. **plot** – the series of events in a literary work
11. **sub-plot** – a secondary story line in a literary work
12. **prose** – writing that corresponds closely to the patterns of everyday speech and that is distinctly not poetic verse
13. **character** – an artistically rendered person of a literary work
14. **pun** – a play on words
15. **metaphor** – a comparison of two terms that uses neither “like” nor “as”
Ex: My daughter is an angel.

WORDS TO BE DEFINED

Definitions Bank

accusation	free	massive building
carelessly spending money	gladness or gaiety	reject with disdain
a charge for borrowed money	inferior dog	repay; offer in return
a depression of spirits; gloominess	journey	risk
former European gold coins	language intended to encourage	trouble

1. I have much **ado** to know myself (1.1.7) _____ trouble
2. And see the holy **edifice** of stone (1.1.30) _____ massive building
3. With **mirth** and laughter let old wrinkles come (1.1.80) _____ gladness or gaiety
4. But fish not with this **melancholy** bait (1.1.101) _____ a depression of spirits; gloominess
5. I'll end my **exhortation** after dinner (1.1.104) _____ language intended to encourage
6. you swore a secret **pilgrimage** (1.1.120) _____ journey
7. Wherein my time something too **prodigal** (1.1.129) _____ carelessly spending money
8. Or bring your latter **hazard** back again (1.1.151) _____ risk
9. if he love me to madness, I shall never **requite** him (1.2.65) _____ repay; offer in return
10. Three thousand **ducats** for three months (1.3.9) _____ former European gold coins
11. Have you heard any **imputation** to the contrary? (1.3.13) _____ accusation
12. He lends out money **gratis** (1.3.44) _____ free
13. [Antonio] brings down the rate of **usance** ... in Venice (1.3.45) _____ a charge for borrowed money
14. And foot me as you **spurn** a stranger cur (1.3.118) _____ reject with disdain
15. And foot me as you spurn a stranger **cur** (1.3.118) _____ inferior dog

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

Act 1, scene 1

1. How do Salerio and Solanio explain Antonio's melancholy state?

The gentlemen assume Antonio worries about the welfare of his ships at sea (1.1.15-40). When Antonio rejects their assumptions, Solanio wonders if Antonio is in love (1.1.46).

2. Why do Salerio and Solanio leave Antonio?

Salerio and Solanio leave when Antonio's closest friend, Bassanio, arrives (1.1.57-59).

3. Describe Bassanio's financial condition and how it came to be.

Bassanio admits to economic distress. He has lived lavishly without the means to support his lifestyle. He refers to his lifestyle as "**prodigal**," a Biblical allusion to the prodigal son. He speaks all this to Antonio because they are good friends and because Bassanio has already borrowed a sum of money from Antonio. (1.1.122-134)

4. Why does Bassanio want to borrow again from Antonio?

Now Bassanio is in love and believes he may have a chance to win Portia's heart. Courtship, however, requires money. Bassanio needs a loan so that he may follow his heart. (1.1.161-176)

5. How does Antonio respond to Bassanio's plan?

Antonio tells his friend that his money is tied up at sea, but Bassanio may go into Venice and use his name as a guarantee on a loan. Antonio will also seek a loan for his friend.

Act 1, scene 2

6. Why is Portia upset about choosing a husband? Explain the test devised by her deceased father.

Because of the **“casket test”** devised by her deceased father, Portia is upset about the possibility of ending up with a husband she would not choose. She cannot pick who she wants, nor can she decline someone she would not love. Her father’s test requires the suitor to choose amongst three caskets: one of gold, one of silver, and one of lead.

7. Who are the suitors Nerissa names, and, in a sentence, what does Portia conclude about each man?

a. The Neapolitan prince is obsessed with horsemanship.

b. Count Palatine displays an **“unmannerly sadness.”**

c. Monsieur Le Bon imitates everyone and seems to lack his own personality.

d. Falconbridge has no class. He has no command of language and poor taste in dress.

e. The Scottish lord lacks common sense.

f. The Duke of Saxony is a drunk.

(1.2.40-91)

8. What do readers learn about Bassanio when Nerissa speaks about him to Portia?

Nerissa calls Bassanio **“a scholar and soldier”** and declares he is the only man her eyes have looked upon that is deserving of Portia. (1.2.112-114 and 1.2.117-119)

Act 1, scene 3

9. What does Bassanio ask of Shylock?

Bassanio asks to borrow 3,000 ducats and wants three months to repay the loan.

10. Explain why Shylock feels justified in disliking Antonio.

At first Shylocks says he hates Antonio because he is a Christian. Then he says that what he dislikes more than Antonio’s Christianity is Antonio’s policy not to charge interest on loans. Antonio not charging for loans drives down the interest Shylock can charge when he lends money.

Shylock then elaborates on his first grudge against the merchant: Antonio hates Jewish people and he speaks unkindly about Shylock to the other merchants.

Shylock says forgiving Antonio would be a betrayal of the Jewish nation. (1.3.42-51)

11. Antonio reiterates that he does not pay interest when he borrows or charge interest when he lends, but he will break with his own policy on this occasion? Why?

Because he so values their friendship, Antonio is willing to pay interest in order to help Bassanio.

(1.3.61-64)

12. When asked what the terms will be on Bassanio’s loan, what does Shylock say?

Shylock claims he would like to be friends and forget the past, **“supply your present wants, and take no doit”** (1.3.140), but if the loan is not paid, the balance must be paid by an equal amount of flesh (1.3.149-150).

13. Bassanio does not want Antonio to commit to the loan. Why does Antonio accept the terms despite Bassanio’s hesitation?

Antonio is certain of his investments. He expects to earn three times the loan within two months, a full month before the 3,000 ducats must be repaid. (1.3.156-159)

LOGIC | Dialectic

The student reasons with the facts, elements, and features of the play.

SOCRATIC DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What is the point of Gratiano's pond and fishing **metaphors** (1.1.79-104)?

Gratiano encourages Antonio to cheer up and interact with the people around him. Just as standing water allows for the buildup of scum and algae, so, too, a man with limited human interaction becomes stagnant.

In his chatty way, Gratiano prattles on to say some men are purposely reticent because they want to be thought of as intelligent. These folks are wise to stay quiet because when they do speak up, their thoughts tend to be foolish.

Gratiano concludes Antonio should stop **"fishing"** for attention. He calls himself a fish that is easily caught, which means he sees himself as too willing to pay attention to Antonio's melancholy.

2. What is the **simile** Bassanio uses to comment upon Gratiano's dialogue in 1.1.116? The simile makes what point about this garrulous character?

Finding logic or wisdom in Gratiano's conversation is like hunting for grains of wheat amongst chaff: it takes all day to find the two grains and they end up not being worth the search.

3. Does Bassanio love Portia? Use specific lines from the play to support your opinion thus far.

Bassanio says his chief concern is paying off his debt (1.1.127-128) but because he would like to court a woman (Portia), he now needs a second loan. It seems that if Bassanio did not love Portia, he would not be asking for more money.

In lines 1.1.161-176, Bassanio speaks highly of Portia. She is **"richly left"** and she is beautiful, but **"fairer than that word, /Of wondrous virtues"** (1.1.162-163). He acknowledges her beauty but more importantly that her beauty is her inner virtue.

**Students may have differing opinions, but they need to use what the play has presented thus far in order to support their conclusions.*

4. Identify the two **settings** established by Act 1, and the conflict established for each setting.

The main plot is set in Venice. Bassanio is in debt but would like the means to court a virtuous lady, so he asks his friend, Antonio, for another loan. This second loan puts Antonio's life in danger.

Belmont, a fictional place out in the country, is the setting for the sub-plot. Eligible bachelors flock to Portia. Any man wanting to wed her must adhere to the wishes of her deceased father by selecting one of three caskets.

5. The primary tool of Shakespeare's art is words! Using **puns**, he is able to take a single word and employ its multiple definitions. Puns create a surplus of meaning that can be directed toward deepening our understanding of a moment within a scene. Consider the pun with the word *kind/kindness* that begins on 1.3.142 (the term is used at least four subsequent times). How do the meanings of "kind" and "kindness" (generosity/natural inclination; type) shed light on the interaction between Shylock and Antonio?

The two definitions of "**kind**," considered interchangeably at the end of scene 3, suggest each man wonders of what the other is capable. Is kindness an option, or does a "**natural inclination**" (whatever pre-conceived notion that may be) determine character?

6. Should readers rely on Nerissa's good opinion of Bassanio?

Though the two ladies enjoy some humorous "**girl talk**," Nerissa presents herself in scene 2 as a motherly or wise figure in Portia's life. When Portia complains she is tired of the world, Nerissa reminds her that she would have a right to complain if the many blessings in her life were hardships instead (1.2.3-5). She defends Portia's father's character and claims his casket test will result in a man who will love her rightly and deserve her love in return (1.2.27-33).

Because of the wisdom and friendship expressed by Nerissa throughout scene 2, Nerissa's claim that Bassanio is "**the best deserving a fair lady**" (1.2.118-119) is worth noting.

RHETORIC | Expression

The student uses his or her own words to express understanding of the play as he or she moves toward the Central One Idea.

① CENTRAL ONE IDEA

1. In a sentence or two, **summarize** each scene in Act 1.

Scene 1: _____

Scene 2: _____

Scene 3: _____

2. Act 1 introduces many characters. Thus far, what do you think of each **character**? List two or three features from Act 1 that helped you to draw your first impression of the following:

Antonio is _____.

Proof #1: _____

Proof #2: _____

Portia is _____.

Proof #1: _____

Proof #2: _____

Shylock is _____.

Proof #1: _____

Proof #2: _____

ESSAY OPTION

Choose a topic below and respond with a 3-paragraph essay that includes an Introduction with a clear thesis; a Body with organized, logical, and specific support of the thesis; and a Conclusion that discusses the significance of the thesis.

The essay should feature appropriate tone, voice, and point of view; correct grammar, usage, and mechanics; a variety of sentence structures enhanced by subordination and parallelism; a balance of general and specific detail; and enhanced rhetorical effect through transition words, appropriate diction, strong verbs, descriptive adjectives, and other rhetorical devices.

1. One of the primary sources from which Shakespeare drew inspiration for this play was a fairy tale. Write a 3-paragraph essay where you explain how *The Merchant of Venice* is like a fairy tale in this first act.
2. During Shakespeare's time, few Jewish people lived in London, and the majority of theater-goers would not have known anyone from the Jewish faith. Write a 3-paragraph essay about how Shylock's character embodies the stereotype of a Jewish person.
3. Bassanio compares himself to the prodigal son. Write a 3-paragraph essay about the **character** of Bassanio that uses support from the first act to illustrate the accuracy of the comparison.
4. Which **plot** do you find most compelling, the main plot that takes place in Venice or the sub-plot in Belmont? Support your thesis with thoughtful reasons for your preference in a 3-paragraph response essay.