



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative
2015 Volume II: Explaining Character in Shakespeare

Fate or Action: Character Agency & What the 21st Century Student Gains from *The Merchant of Venice*

Guide for Curriculum Unit 15.02.03, published September 2015
by Christina Cancelli

This unit focuses on scaffolding instruction to eliminate any intimidation by Shakespeare and focuses on creating real world connection and relevance to the lives of the modern eleventh or twelfth grader. Concentration is placed on creating student centered, active learning that will encourage each child to be investigative and think critically about the changing world he or she lives in through the lens of Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*. The unit is organized in four major sections structured chronologically. Stage one addresses censorship and controversial literature, with attention paid to the vocabulary and rationale needed when teaching a controversial text. Stage two systematically familiarizes students with Shakespearean language, with tiered activities to build their confidence. Stage three features the actual reading of *The Merchant of Venice*, with student, teacher, and group reading activities. In stage four, students will be investigating, analyzing, and connecting the text to today's world. In this section, students will examine today's justice system as it relates to the defense of disenfranchised groups or individuals. Also, students will do a cross-curricular study involving interest rates with credit cards and student loans, so they can begin to understand the nuisances of predatory lending. Additionally, they will look at the destructive power of stereotypes and the platform of social media in relation to cyber bullying.

(Developed for English 12/British Studies, grade 12; recommended for Economics, Debate, and Reading Enrichment, grades 9-12)

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