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Vocabulary Power Through Shakespeare

**Essential Words for Reading Comprehension,
Writing, Speech, and Standardized Examinations**

David Popkin

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8. The Merchant of Venice

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temporal
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precedent
mercenary
concord
stratagem
paltry
vehement
zeal

Learn these words from *The Merchant of Venice*: Set I

1. mortify (MOR tuh fy) v. humiliate, shame; discipline one's body and desires through self-denial and self-inflicted punishment

"Mortify" derives from Latin "mors" meaning "death." Indeed, when we are mortified by an embarrassing mistake we wish we were dead. "Mortify" also means "punish the flesh" as when Arthur Dimmesdale, the minister in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, wears a hair shirt or bristly garment that scratches his skin to atone for his sins. However, Dimmesdale through most of the novel would rather mortify his flesh than make the mortifying or extremely shameful public confession that in an adulterous affair he fathered the child of Hester Prynne, who alone bears the mortification of public exposure. However, the "mortifying groans" that cool the heart in *The Merchant of Venice* illustrate the Elizabethan belief that groans or sighs weakened the heart by depleting it of blood. Shakespeare thus uses "mortifying" in the archaic sense of "killing" that stems from the word's Latin origin meaning "death."

2. reputed (rih PEW tid—middle syllable rhymes with "cue") adj. generally supposed, thought of, considered

I once discussed with my father Benjamin Franklin's adage that "early to bed and early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise." I asked my father, a gentle scholar who had never manifested any desire for material gain, which of the three attributes—health, wealth, or wisdom—is most important. To my surprise, he said wealth because if you have money it's easier to be healthy and because of your wealth you will be reputed to be wise.

3. prodigal (PROD ih gul) adj. wastefully or recklessly extravagant, profuse, lavish; n. wastefully extravagant person, spendthrift

Jesus tells the story of the prodigal son, a younger son who demands his inheritance from his father, goes to a foreign land, squanders his wealth, and returns to his father who forgives and welcomes him. The screen star was famous for his prodigal spending on luxury cars, yachts, and private planes. The opposite of a prodigal would be a miser like Scrooge.

4. fawn (FAWN) v. exhibit affection and show friendliness in the manner of a dog; hence, to seek favor by acting humble, flattering, cringing, and groveling; behaving servilely and obsequiously

The celebrity's wife hated when women fawned over him. Fawning people swarm to the rich, famous, and powerful.

5. gratis (GRAT us) adj. & adv. without charge or payment; free

Professors receive gratis copies of textbooks to consider for use in their courses. The idealistic lawyer sometimes worked gratis when she believed in her client's cause and knew that the client could not afford her fee. Banks do not lend money gratis but charge interest.

6. spurn (SPURN) v. scornfully refuse or reject

The rebel leader spurned any peace offering that did not grant his people full freedom and independence. Before Romeo met Juliet, he was spurned by Rosaline. When Joseph was a slave in Egypt, he spurned the advances of Potiphar's wife who then falsely accused him of rape

7. hue (HEW, rhymes with "few") n. color,

Her colorful dress had all the hues of a rainbow.

8. incarnate (in KAR nit) adj. having bodily form; being a living example of; personified, typified; incarnate (in KAR nayt) v. embody in flesh, be living example of

The brutal slave dealer Simon Legree in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* seemed the devil incarnate. Saints incarnate the virtues of their religion. For many, Adolph Hitler is the incarnation (in KAR nayt) of evil. Hindus believe in reincarnation—that after physical death the soul is reborn in another body.

9. impertinent (im PUR tin unt) adj. rude, disrespectful, insolent, impudent; irrelevant

"Pertinent" means "relevant, to the point." In *The Merchant of Venice* the comic character Launcelot Gobbo uses the word "impertinent" when he means to say "pertinent." Thus, instead of claiming that his petition is relevant, he actually says that it is irrelevant, or even worse, impudent and disrespectful. Of course, showing impertinence will not help the granting of one's petition or request. Such a ridiculous or humorous misuse of words is a "malapropism" (MAL uh prop iz um). "Malapropism" derives from the character Mrs. Malaprop in Richard Sheridan's play *The Rivals* (1775). She said such things as "Illiterate [for 'obliterate'] him, I say, quite from your memory." Shakespeare frequently used this comic device long before the word "malapropism" ever entered the English language.

10. demure (dih MEWR, rhymes with "pure") adj. shy, modest, reserved, coy

Some men find the allure of an innocent, demure woman more seductive than that of someone bolder, more experienced and sophisticated. Of course, "demure" can also mean "pretending to be shy and modest." Only the context of a sentence can tell you whether "demure" conveys true or false modesty.

Working With Words

Complete the following sentences by using each of the following words only once: mortify, reputed, prodigal, fawn, gratis, spurn, hue, incarnate, impertinent, demure.

1. The kindly doctor treated _____ any patient who could not afford a fee.
2. Show some dignity and do not _____ over your boss; he will respect you more.
3. Our coach would never _____ or shame us publicly; he would, however, make us cringe for our mistakes in private conference.
4. When I told the speaker that his remarks were _____ or irrelevant to the topic under discussion, he rudely or impertinently questioned my intelligence and sanity.
5. Grandmother told us that in her day _____ young ladies dressed and acted much differently than today's assertive women.
6. The miser Ebenezer Scrooge in *A Christmas Carol* is Charles Dickens's version of greed _____.
7. The master of the plantation was the _____ father of the great African American abolitionist Frederick Douglass (1817-1895).
8. Even during hard times, the proud couple would _____ offers of charity.
9. We must curb our _____ spending or we will go bankrupt.
10. When Martin Luther King, Jr. said we must judge people by the content of their character and not the color of their skin, he meant that human worth and dignity should not be equated with _____.

Match the word on the left with its definition.

- | | |
|-------------------|---|
| ___1. gratis | a. modest |
| ___2. hue | b. generally supposed |
| ___3. fawn | c. having bodily form |
| ___4. mortify | d. reject |
| ___5. prodigal | e. free |
| ___6. impertinent | f. color |
| ___7. reputed | g. disrespectful; irrelevant |
| ___8. incarnate | h. spendthrift |
| ___9. spurn | i. humiliate |
| ___10. demure | j. gain favor by flattering and acting humble |

Words in context of *The Merchant of Venice*

Set in Italy in Venice and the nearby imaginary city of Belmont, *The Merchant of Venice* is a love story, a portrayal of religious stereotyping, and an exploration of the relationship between justice and mercy. Bassanio asks his best friend Antonio, a wealthy merchant of Venice, for money so that Bassanio can win Portia, an heiress in Belmont. Antonio, his money tied up in overseas ventures, does not have ready cash. To help his friend, the merchant borrows the money from his enemy Shylock, a Jewish moneylender. England had expelled the Jews in 1290. In Shakespeare's time, there were probably less than a few hundred Jews dwelling in England. Therefore, *The Merchant of Venice* illustrates Christian religious prejudices during the Elizabethan period. The outcome of the loan from the Jewish moneylender to the Christian merchant culminates in the most famous courtroom scene in English drama.

As the play opens, Antonio is melancholy but his sadness cannot be attributed to any specific cause. His friend Gratiano tries to cheer him by saying,

And let my liver rather heat with wine
Than my heart cool with **mortifying** groans.

Elizabethans believed that the liver warmed by wine would improve the quality of blood and thus make one happy and energetic. Therefore, Gratiano tells Antonio that it is better to have a warm and cheerful flow of blood to keep healthy than to allow oneself to groan which was thought to drain blood away from the heart. Thus, the **mortifying** groans destroy the vitality and can result in death ("**mortifying**" is used here in an old sense of "deadly" rather than in the sense "humiliating"). Gratiano then goes on to say that some men "are **reputed** wise" for keeping silent though they would be revealed as fools if they spoke. They are **reputed** or considered wise only because of their posture of silence. Do not, he tells Antonio, pose as melancholy to be **reputed** thoughtful and profound.

After Gratiano leaves, Bassanio explains that he has been too **prodigal** or wastefully extravagant in his youth and has amassed great debts, mostly to Antonio. If Antonio can just lend him money once more, Bassanio assures the merchant that this time all debts will be paid off. Bassanio feels confident that these funds will enable him successfully to woo Portia—a beautiful, virtuous, and rich lady in Belmont. Only too willing to help his best friend, Antonio says that his entire wealth is on the sea in his merchant ships, but Bassanio can borrow as much as he likes using the merchant's assets as security for a loan.

Bassanio then asks the moneylender Shylock for an enormous loan to be secured by Antonio. As they are talking, the merchant joins them. In an aside, Shylock mutters that Antonio looks "like a **fawning**" or groveling innkeeper and explains that he hates Antonio because "he lends out money **gratis**" or free of interest thus lowering Venetian loan rates. Shylock then asks the merchant why he should lend money to him—a man who has insulted Shylock because of his religion, spit in his face, and kicked him as "you **spurn** a stranger cur" or unfamiliar, worthless dog. The force of the last phrase comes through when one realizes that "**spurn**" literally meant "kick" (as used here) in addition to "scornfully reject." When Antonio says that he is just as likely to spit on and kick Shylock again and Shylock should therefore lend the money as to an enemy rather than a friend so he can feel better about demanding his penalty if the loan is not repaid, Shylock quickly tries to calm the merchant by saying that he would like to be friends and therefore will lend the money without interest. Just for a joke, he asks Antonio to sign a bond

that says,

If you repay me not on such a day,
In such a place, such sum or sums as are
Expressed in the condition, let the forfeit
Be nominated for [stipulated as] an equal [exact] pound
Of your fair flesh, to be cut off and taken
In what part of your body pleaseth me.

Bassanio tells his friend not to agree to this bond, but Antonio, confident that his ships will return well before payment is due, willingly seals the bond.

Before Bassanio leaves Venice to reach Portia in Belmont, Portia interviews a suitor, the Prince of Morocco. The prince asks Portia not to dislike him because of his dark complexion. He proudly declares that he "would not change this **hue**" or color of his skin. Portia replies that he stands as fair in her eyes as any suitor that she has yet seen. However, she adds that she has not the power to choose her husband. According to her father's will, a suitor will be presented with gold, silver, and lead caskets. One of these three caskets contains a picture of her. The suitor who chooses the correct casket will marry her.

While Portia leads the Prince of Morocco to the caskets, the scene switches to Venice where Shylock's servant Launcelot tries to decide if he should run away from the moneylender. He reasons that his master "the Jew is the very devil **incarnation**." Launcelot commonly misuses words for comic effect. Here he means to say that Shylock is the devil **incarnate** or the devil embodied in flesh. Having come to this conclusion, he decides to run away.

At this point, Launcelot meets his father who has brought a present for Shylock to insure good relations between his son and the moneylender. Launcelot explains his decision to leave Shylock. When Bassanio comes walking along, Launcelot asks his father to help him get a position with Bassanio. As the father offers his present to Bassanio and starts to plead for his son, Launcelot interrupts and says that his father's request "is **impertinent** to myself," in other words irrelevant and disrespectful. Launcelot, ever the bungler with words, means to say that his father's request is pertinent or relevant to Launcelot himself. However, Bassanio soon understands the request and, because he knows Launcelot well, agrees to hire him.

As Bassanio prepares to travel to Belmont, his friend Gratiano asks to come along. Bassanio says that Gratiano is too wild and unruly; therefore, strangers will find faults in him that his friends overlook. Gratiano promises that he will talk respectfully, carry a prayer book, and "look **demurely**" or modestly when blessings are made at meals. Bassanio agrees that they will go together to Belmont.

Learn these words from *The Merchant of Venice*: Set II

1. drone (DRONE, rhymes with "phone") n. male bee; loafer, idler; v. speak in a monotonous, dull tone

The non-working male honeybee or drone makes no honey, is stingless, and serves only a reproductive purpose. Hence, we call a parasitic loafer a drone. Since all the idle drone does is buzz, "drone" has also assumed the meaning of dull, monotonous speech or sound. When professors drone, students doze. Excellent teachers who engage in research and constantly hone their communication skills are the antithesis of drones.

2. injunction (in JUNK shun) n. command or order, especially of a court requiring or prohibiting a specified act

The corporation got an injunction from the court forbidding the workers to go on strike. Portia's suitors in *The Merchant of Venice* must abide by the injunctions laid down by her deceased father before they can be eligible to participate in a guessing game to win her.

3. prolix (pro LIX) adj. wordy, long-winded, tedious, verbose

The droning of prolix professors induces slumber. Ironically, the prolix Polonius (the Lord Chamberlain in *Hamlet*) says that "brevity is the soul of wit." The editor pruned the prolix writer's sprawling manuscript of one thousand pages to a concise one hundred.

4. usurer (YOO zur ur) n. one who lends money at an excessive or illegal rate of interest

Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice* is literature's most famous usurer. Medieval Christians regarded lending money at interest as the sin of usury (YOO zoor ee). The Koran, Islam's sacred text, prohibits the taking of interest. Our modern banking system takes interest for granted; the modern financial world considers only excessive or exorbitant interest as usury.

5. thwart (THWORT) v. block, hinder, frustrate, obstruct

In *The Merchant of Venice* Portia thwarts the moneylender Shylock's plans to cut off a pound of the debtor Antonio's flesh.

6. gaudy (GAW dee) adj. tastelessly colorful and showy; garish

When Tod showed up for his first day at work at the funeral home, the director told him that his gaudy outfit better suited a circus, Mardi Gras, or Halloween.

7. lewd (LOOD)) adj. obscene, indecent, lustful

The censor deleted lewd passages from the book. Puritans think nude is lewd; nudists don't.

8. **obdurate** (OB doo rat) adj. stubborn, unyielding, hardhearted

Neither reason nor tears could alter the views of the obdurate bigot. We associate lions with bravery, deer with speed, and mules with obduracy (OB door uh see) or obdurateness.

9. **commiserate** (kuh MIZ uh rayt) v. feel, express, or show sorrow, sympathy, or pity for; sympathize, condole

Having lost my wife in a car accident, I could commiserate with my neighbor when her husband died of a heart attack. The doctor expressed his commiseration (kuh miz uh RAY shun) when he told me that my mother died. During war we express commiseration and compassion for the losses of our fellow citizens but savor vengeance rather than commiserate with our enemies' sufferings.

10. **inexorable** (in EK sur uh bul) adj. unchangeable or unstoppable by pleading or begging; unyielding

No one can stop the inexorable march of time. Some claim our genes inexorably determine our fate.

Working With Words

Complete the following sentences by using each of the following words only once: drone, injunction, prolix, usurer, thwart, gaudy, lewd, obdurate, commiserate, inexorable.

1. Overprotective parents _____ their children's attempts at independence.
2. To reverse the prodigal and inefficient practices of the company, the new manager began by firing every _____.
3. The bright hues of his _____ outfit contrasted sharply with his fellow workers' conservative gray suits.
4. A word that means "stubborn" and rhymes with "accurate" is _____.
5. Disobeying the coach's _____ meant immediate dismissal from the team.
6. When I offered to lend my cousin money above the current rate of interest, he called me a _____.
7. The librarian held a meeting to discuss children's access to _____ material.
8. Although slow to make up his mind, once my father reached a decision he was _____, unmoved by tears or threats.
9. The _____ speaker droned on and on.
10. Neighbors _____ with each other over their losses of cherished possessions and loved ones during the recent earthquake.

Match the word on the left with its definition.

- | | |
|-------------------|---|
| ___1. thwart | a. loafer |
| ___2. lewd | b. moneylender who charges excessive interest |
| ___3. inexorably | c. tastelessly colorful and showy |
| ___4. usurer | d. wordy, tedious, verbose |
| ___5. drone | e. command or order |
| ___6. commiserate | f. obscene, indecent, lustful |
| ___7. prolix | g. unyieldingly |
| ___8. obdurate | h. block, obstruct |
| ___9. injunction | i. stubborn |
| ___10. gaudy | j. sympathize, condole |

Words in context of *The Merchant of Venice*

Shylock learns that Launcelot has left to serve Bassanio. The moneylender says that Launcelot eats too much, works too slowly, and sleeps during the day. Shylock states that "**drones** hive not with me." In other words, good riddance to idlers.

Back in Belmont the Prince of Morocco has chosen the gold casket and finds no picture of Portia. He departs. Portia then shows the caskets to her next suitor, the Prince of Arragon. She explains that before selecting a casket the prince must agree to three **injunctions** or commands. He swears to observe:

First, never to unfold to any one
Which casket 'twas I chose; next, if I fail
Of the right casket, never in my life
To woo a maid in way of marriage; lastly,
If I do fail in fortune of my choice,
Immediately to leave you and be gone.

He chooses the silver casket, does not find Portia's portrait, and complies with the third **injunction** by leaving.

In Venice two friends of Antonio discuss the merchant's business ventures. When one of them says he heard the rumor that Antonio lost a ship carrying rich cargo, the other replies, "But it is true—without any slips of **prolixity**...he hath lost a ship." The speaker says he will not be **prolix** or wordy as he confirms the rumor.

At this point Shylock appears. He is distraught, having learned that his daughter Jessica stole his money and jewels and eloped with a Christian named Lorenzo. Shylock's only consolation is Antonio's misfortune: "Let him look to his bond! He was wont to call me **usurer**. Let him look to his bond!" Antonio had called Shylock a **usurer** or one who lends money at an excessive rate of interest. Shylock now threatens that he will demand his pound of flesh if Antonio does not fulfill the conditions of their bond. (An historical note can help us better understand this situation

concerning **usury**. Throughout the Middle Ages, Jews had often been excluded from owning land and entering the guilds or professional trade organizations in Christian Europe. Also, the Church during this period regarded the lending of money for interest as immoral. Jewish tradition permitted Jews to lend money at interest to non-Jews. Therefore, since respectable Christians did not lend money for profit and since moneylending was one of the limited opportunities available to Jews for making a living, Jews began to be associated with moneylending and **usury**. By Shakespeare's time, moneylending for profit was in reality also engaged in by Christians, but by now the Jews had been branded with the stigma of usurer).

When asked why he would take someone's flesh, Shylock vents his hatred for Antonio,

He hath disgraced me, and hindered me [stopped me making] half a million, laughed at my losses, mocked at my gains, scorned my nation, **thwarted** my bargains, cooled my friends, heated mine enemies; and what's his reason? I am a Jew. Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? Fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer, as a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die? And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge?

Antonio has spoiled Shylock's personal relationships, despised his religion, and **thwarted** or blocked his business deals. But Shylock's speech is more than a list of the merchant's abuses toward him. Shylock also asserts his humanity. Clearly, however, he is the villain of the play. When a Jewish friend informs him that Antonio has lost another ship, Shylock gleefully speculates, "I will have the heart of him, if he forfeit," for with Antonio out of the way, the moneylender's profits will soar.

While Shylock contemplates revenge, Bassanio arrives in Belmont. Portia presents him with the three caskets. Bassanio reasons that attractive ornament often deceptively covers corrupt law, religious error, and imperfections in physical beauty. He concludes that "therefore, thou **gaudy** gold...I will none of thee." He rejects gold and silver as **gaudy** or vulgarly showy coverings that hide defects and selects the lead casket. Portia gives him a ring that she says will preserve their love as long as he keeps it. Gratiano then happily announces that he has successfully wooed Portia's maid Nerissa. Nerissa also gives Gratiano a ring with conditions similar to Portia's. The couples plan to have a joint wedding.

Lorenzo and Jessica then arrive at this blissful scene at the same time as does a letter that dampens the joy. Antonio writes that his ships have all sunk, that Shylock seeks his life to pay the bond, and that Bassanio should come back to Venice to see him before he dies. Portia urges Bassanio to hurry to his friend.

After Bassanio leaves, Portia tells Lorenzo that she and Nerissa will go to a monastery until her future husband returns. Portia asks that Lorenzo manage her house while they are gone. Privately, Portia tells her maid that they will go to Venice disguised as men so that their fiances will not recognize them. When Nerissa asks,

Why, shall we turn to men?

Portia answers,

Fie, what a question's that,
If thou wert near a **lewd** interpreter!

Portia playfully suggests that Nerissa's remark "shall we turn to men" can mean not only "change into men" but also "sexually approach men" if one gives the phrase a **lewd** or dirty-minded interpretation.

Lightheartedness changes to gravity as Antonio's trial begins in a Venice courtroom. The merchant resignedly prepares to forfeit his life since he knows that Shylock "stands **obdurate**" or unyieldingly hardhearted. The Duke of Venice, who presides over the court, tells Shylock that Antonio's condition would elicit **commiseration** or sympathy from the stoniest of hearts. Surely, the duke thinks, Shylock will not exact the pound of flesh and, considering the merchant's financial losses, will even accept less money than was borrowed. Shylock remains **inexorable**, unmoved by any pleas.

Learn these words from *The Merchant of Venice*: Set III

1. impugn (im PUNE—rhymes with "immune") v. challenge as false; cast doubt upon; discredit, gainsay

The prosecuting attorney attempted to impugn the character of witnesses friendly to the defendant in order to cast doubt on their testimony.

2. temporal (TEM puh rul) adj. pertaining to time; of earthly life, not eternal or spiritual; worldly, secular

The rich businessman astounded everyone by giving away all his temporal possessions and entering a monastery to devote his life to spiritual concerns. Everything material—our bodies, our monuments, even our planet and solar system—is subject to temporal decay and destruction. In the midst of their temporal existence, many human beings long for the infinite and eternal.

3. mitigate (MIT ih gayt) v. make less severe, intense, or painful; moderate, alleviate, mollify, appease

Judge Loopneck, known as the hanging judge, would never mitigate a sentence no matter how ardently one pleaded for mercy. My employer excused my lateness due to the mitigating circumstances of my sick child, my burglarized home, and my car accident on the way to work.

4. precedent (PRES ih dunt) n. something said or done earlier that serves as an example, guide, or justification for future action; established practice, custom, convention

When George Washington retired from the Presidency after two terms in office, he set a precedent that no President would run for a consecutive third term; this precedent was upheld until Franklin Delano Roosevelt was reelected for a third and fourth term during World War II. Being the oldest child in my family, I was always told to set a good precedent for my brothers and sisters. The corresponding adjective "precedent" (prih SEED unt) meaning "coming before"

is spelled the same but pronounced differently. Dinosaurs, precedent to human beings, ruled the earth.

5. mercenary (MUR suh ner ee) adj. serving only for money or material reward; n. professional soldier hired to serve in a foreign army

During the Revolutionary War, the British hired German mercenaries called Hessians to fight in America. Of my two close friends, one chose a profession for purely mercenary reasons, disliked it, and left it after a few years. The other friend, not mercenary at all, devoted himself to sculpture and painting—which he loved—became famous and amassed a fortune.

6. concord (KON kord) n. agreement or harmony; peace, amity

The United Nations strives for concord among the countries of the world. Our committee rarely reaches a unanimous decision since our members are seldom in complete concord.

7. stratagem (STRAT uh jum) n. deceptive scheme; trick, ruse

When they see a predator near their nest, some mother birds employ the stratagem of feigning an injured wing, tricking the predator to chase them as they draw it away from their nest, always being careful to stay just out of reach. A strategy is a carefully laid out plan, not necessarily employing tricks or deception. However, some strategies do use stratagems, especially in war, to fool the enemy.

8. paltry (PAWL tree) adj. ridiculously small, trivial, insignificant, petty, trifling, worthless, contemptible

Quietly under his breath, the waiter cursed the customer—who had pestered him all evening—for leaving such a paltry tip. Many people spend too much time worrying over paltry matters. "Penny wise, pound foolish" means being overly concerned about paltry financial transactions like saving on toothpicks and not giving sufficient thought to large ones like purchasing a car or home.

9. vehement (VEE uh munt) adj. showing intense, energetic feeling; passionate, impassioned, ardent, fervid

The congressman's suggestion to raise taxes was met with vehement protest. The angry crowd expressed such vehemence that we feared a riot.

10. zeal (ZEEL) n. extreme activity, eagerness, devotion

Young enthusiastic volunteers worked with zeal to get their candidate elected. The zealous (ZEL us) businessman devoted so much time and energy to his company that his neglected wife became jealous. While eagerness and devotion are good, excessive amounts lead to fanaticism, making one a zealot (ZEL ut).

Working With Words

Complete the following sentences by using each of the following words only once: impugn, temporal, mitigate, precedent, mercenary, concord, stratagem, paltry, vehement, zeal.

1. The doctor gave Marilyn some medicine to _____ her migraine headaches.
2. When Charles Dickinson made remarks to _____ the honor of Andrew Jackson and his wife Rachel, Jackson killed him in a pistol duel.
3. When fined \$250,000, the billionaire dismissed the penalty as if it were merely a _____ sum.
4. I can appreciate her _____, but I wish her energy and enthusiasm were devoted to a better cause.
5. Although the lawyer did not like the client or the case, she accepted for purely _____ reasons.
6. Only after Romeo and Juliet die do their families belatedly end their feud and finally live in _____.
7. In *The Merchant of Venice*, Portia declares that the spiritual power of God surpasses the _____ power of kings.
8. Is there any previous example or _____ that justifies your action?
9. I used the _____ of burying my son's pill in a spoonful of lime sherbet to get him to swallow his medicine.
10. His reaction was _____ when he stepped in the excrement.

Match the word on the left with its definition

- ___1. mercenary
- ___2. paltry
- ___3. zeal
- ___4. vehement
- ___5. impugn
- ___6. concord
- ___7. temporal
- ___8. precedent
- ___9. stratagem
- ___10. mitigate

- a. pertaining to time; worldly, secular
- b. cast doubt upon; discredit
- c. deceptive scheme
- d. serving only for money
- e. extreme activity, eagerness, devotion
- f. insignificant, worthless, trivial
- g. example
- h. harmony; peace
- i. make less severe; moderate, alleviate
- j. passionate

Words in context of *The Merchant of Venice*

Portia, disguised in the manly garb of a lawyer, now enters to defend Antonio. Having studied Shylock's lawsuit, she tells the money lender that "the Venetian law cannot **impugn** you as you do proceed." His suit cannot be legally **impugned** or challenged and faulted. She asks Antonio if he agreed to the bond, and he admits it. Therefore, says Portia, Shylock must be merciful. When the moneylender asks what compels him to be so, she replies,

The quality of mercy is not strained
[cannot be constrained or compelled];
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath.

She goes on to say that monarchs execute **temporal** or worldly power but that mercy is a quality belonging to God. Therefore, earthly rulers act most like God when they temper justice with mercy. Portia concludes that she has spoken at length "to **mitigate** the justice of thy plea" or soften Shylock's demand for justice. Shylock remains adamant.

Bassanio appeals to the court to make an exception to the law and let him pay the loan amount to release Antonio from the fatal forfeit penalty. Portia says,

It must not be. There is no power in Venice
Can alter a decree established.
'T will be recorded for a **precedent**,
And many an error by the same example
Will rush into the state. It cannot be.

If the court bends the law in this case, the act will become a **precedent** or example that will ultimately undermine the Venetian legal system. She once again entreats Shylock to be merciful and offers three times the amount of the loan if Shylock will tear up the bond. Shylock still remains adamant.

Portia then tells Antonio that he must bare his bosom for Shylock's knife. Shylock prepares to cut. But Portia has laid a trap. She points out that the bond says nothing about taking blood. If Shylock draws blood, then everything he owns will be taken by the state according to the law. Shylock now is willing to take Portia's offer of three times the loan amount and let Antonio live. However, Portia will not let him off the hook. He wanted justice so Portia gives him justice. He must take his pound of flesh.

But just a pound of flesh. If thou tak'st more,
Or less, than a just [exact] pound...
Thou diest, and all thy goods are confiscate[d].

Faced with the alternative of either his own death and the confiscation of everything he owns or tearing up the bond, Shylock gives up his lawsuit. However, Portia still does not let him off the hook of the law. She points out that if a foreigner like Shylock has been shown to seek the life of a Venetian citizen—directly or indirectly—the injured party gets half his possessions, the government gets the other half, and the offender dies.

The duke then shows mercy to Shylock by pardoning his life. Antonio also shows mercy by asking the state to return its half of Shylock's wealth and instead let the moneylender pay a mere fine. Furthermore, Antonio says he will give his half to Shylock's daughter Jessica and her

Christian husband Lorenzo when Shylock dies. Antonio adds that for Shylock to receive this mercy he must first convert to Christianity and record a document that upon his death Lorenzo and Jessica get all his possessions. Shylock complies.

Bassanio then offers in gratitude to Portia a sum of money equivalent to Antonio's loan. She refuses by saying that her "mind was never...**mercenary**"; she never served only for money. However, she asks Bassanio for the ring that she gave him as a token of her love. Bassanio, not knowing that Portia is the lawyer, at first refuses. When Portia leaves in feigned resentment at the denial of her request, Antonio begs his friend to give her the ring. Bassanio sends Gratiano to give her the ring. When Gratiano presents Portia with the ring, Nerissa, still disguised as the lawyer's male clerk, contrives to get her own ring back from Gratiano.

Back in Belmont on a moonlit night as they await the return of Portia and Nerissa, Lorenzo and Jessica engage in romantic dialogue. Lorenzo extols the power of music on all living things and says,

The man that hath no music in himself,
Nor is not moved with **concord** of sweet sounds,
Is fit for treasons, **stratagems**, and spoils [plundering].

Anyone not responsive to the **concord** or harmony of music is fit for treasonous **stratagems** or schemes and destruction.

Portia and Nerissa then return to Belmont, followed a little later by Bassanio, Gratiano, and Antonio. Nerissa and Gratiano soon quarrel. In answer to Portia's question as to the cause, Gratiano says,

About a hoop of gold, a **paltry** ring
That she did give me.

This **paltry** or insignificant ring is the ring that Nerissa gave Gratiano to signify their love. Nerissa says that Gratiano swore with "**vehement** oaths" or passionate promises that he would wear the ring until his death and be buried with it in his grave. Gratiano explains to the others how he gave it to the lawyer's clerk and how Bassanio gave his ring to the lawyer who saved Antonio. Now Portia feigns anger as she tells Bassanio that if had refused the lawyer's request with **zeal** or devotion and determination, surely the lawyer would not have insisted on taking the ring. Portia and Nerissa accuse Bassanio and Gratiano of giving the rings to women. Portia and her maid then say that they will sleep with this lawyer and his clerk. Antonio intervenes and pledges his life that Bassanio will never again break faith with Portia. The two women then return the rings to their suitors to the men's amazement. Portia reveals that she was the lawyer, Nerissa the clerk, and adds the happy news that three of Antonio's ships rich with cargo have come safely to harbor.

REVIEW EXERCISE

Select the definition closest in meaning.

1. mitigate (a) moderate (b) intensify (c) criticize (d) prevent
2. gratis (a) free (b) painful (c) expensive (d) pleasing
3. obdurate (a) happy (b) heavy (c) unconcerned (d) stubborn
4. concord (a) irritation (b) excitement (c) agreement (d) debt
5. zeal (a) protection (b) eagerness (c) joke (d) mistake
6. incarnate (a) having bodily form (b) lost (c) loving (d) final
7. demure (a) flashy (b) expensive (c) modest (d) ungrateful
8. paltry (a) insignificant (b) hateful (c) affectionate (d) wise
9. impugn (a) praise (b) support (c) frighten (d) discredit
10. mortify (a) laugh (b) prevent (c) humiliate (d) deny
11. drone (a) master (b) servant (c) loafer (d) manual laborer
12. reputed (a) neglected (b) supposed (c) imprisoned (d) intense
13. vehement (a) mild (b) cowardly (c) greedy (d) passionate
14. inexorable (a) unyielding (b) mistaken (c) private (d) angry
15. prolix (a) concise (b) wordy (c) nervous (d) courageous
16. commiserate (a) denounce (b) shame (c) sympathize (d) reject
17. impertinent (a) disrespectful (b) necessary (c) polite (d) hungry
18. mercenary (a) cold (b) hot (c) serving only for money (d) eternal
19. stratagem (a) battlefield (b) business (c) community (d) trick
20. injunction (a) trash (b) gift (c) command (d) nourishment
21. precedent (a) example (b) lie (c) wise saying (d) administrator
22. fawn (a) behave servilely (b) run (c) sleep (d) relax
23. prodigal (a) artist (b) spendthrift (c) athlete (d) pet
24. temporal (a) happy (b) worldly (c) extravagant (d) passionate
25. spurn (a) reject (b) accept (c) penetrate (d) lessen a pain
26. usurer (a) overcharging moneylender (b) cook (c) pet (d) poet
27. thwart (a) assist (b) excite (c) moderate (d) hinder
28. gaudy (a) tastelessly colorful (b) kind (c) shy (d) necessary
29. hue (a) stick (b) color (c) friend (d) poison
30. lewd (a) natural (b) comic (c) obscene (d) tragic