[Please read the chapter from your text book and the attached notes. Work out the exercises neatly in your literature (Drama) notebooks (64 pages) henceforth. Make a contents page first with columns under the heads: date, chapter number, chapter name and teacher’s signature as shown below. Use black ink. Ensure neat and tidy work.]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CONTENTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DATE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

THE MERCHANT OF VENICE – WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

**About the Dramatist**

William Shakespeare (1564 – 1616) was an English poet, playwright, and actor, widely regarded as the greatest writer in the English language and the world’s greatest dramatist. He is often called England’s national poet and the “Bard of Avon”.

Parts of a Drama

A drama is divided into **five parts or acts**, which some refer to as a dramatic arc:
1. **Exposition** (introduction)
2. **Rising action**
3. **Climax** – the highest point of tension
4. **Falling action**
5. **Resolution or Catastrophe** (conclusion)

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The Merchant of Venice – A Tragicomedy

**Tragicomedy** is a genre that blends elements of both tragedy and comedy. It can either be a serious play with a happy ending or a tragic play interspersed with moments of humour in order to lighten the mood. *The Merchant of Venice* can be regarded as a tragi-comedy as the play has a comic structure but there is also a powerful tragic story. It ends in a tragedy for Shylock who loses everything and a comedy for the other characters.

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**Plot**

**Plot** is a literary term used to describe the events that make up a story, or the main part of a story. These events relate to each other in a pattern or a sequence. *The Merchant of Venice* consists of four plots (two major and two minor) that are intricately interwoven to form one whole integrated story.

**Two Main Plots**
- **Bond Story**
- **The Lottery of Caskets**

**Two Minor Plots**
- **The Ring Episode**
- **Jessica – Lorenzo Love Episode**
**CHARACTER LIST**

**Antonio**: He is the title character, the merchant of Venice. He is a wealthy but melancholic merchant who lends money to the needy without charging any interest. He is prepared to do anything, even sacrifice his life, for his dear friend Bassanio.

**Salanio and Salarino**: Friends of Antonio and Bassanio, minor characters, almost indistinguishable from each other who comment on the action and who inform the audience about the action that has occurred offstage.

**Bassanio**: A young man with expensive tastes and rich friends who borrows money from Antonio in order to court the rich, intelligent and beautiful Portia.

**Gratiano**: Bassanio’s friend with a bawdy and clownish attitude. He accompanies Bassanio to Belmont and falls in love with Portia’s servant Nerissa.

**Lorenzo**: Bassanio’s friend who falls in love with Shylock’s daughter Jessica.

**Leonardo**: Servant to Bassanio.

**Portia**: Widely pursued noblewoman who is as intelligent as she is rich and beautiful. Her father’s will demands that her husband be selected through a test involving three caskets. Portia’s wit enables her to find loopholes in legal matters, thus rescuing her husband’s friend from his bond.

**Nerissa**: Portia’s handmaid who falls in love with Gratiano, Bassanio’s friend.

**Shylock**: The Jewish merchant who lends Antonio the money on Bassanio’s behalf. He is a dark humourist, a moral absolutist, a religious bigot and a sentimentalist. He serves as both the villain and the most tragic figure of the play.

**Prince of Morocco**: Portia’s suitor and the only dark skinned character in the drama. He is an egoist who proudly speaks about his courage and conquests.

**Launcelot Gobbo**: Shylock’s comic servant who leaves Shylock’s service to serve Bassanio.

**Old Gobbo**: Launcelot’s blind father who has not encountered his son in years.
Jessica: Shylock’s daughter, who escapes from her father’s house in order to marry Lorenzo.

Prince of Arragon: Another suitor of Portia who represents pride and arrogance.

Tubal: Shylock’s friend, the only other Jew in the play, who provides information regarding Jessica’s escape and her consequent activities.

Balthazar and Stephano: Servants to Portia.

The Duke of Venice: The reigning official of Venice who presides over the court and tries to resolve the case between Antonio and Shylock.