

A discussion of the  
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essay sampl...



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## **A discussion of the themes and characters in “ The Merchant of Venice” Essay Sample**

“ The most important factor in the enduring popularity of Shakespeare’s plays is that his drama presents timeless themes and memorable characters that continue to speak to modern audiences.” How true is this statement of the Shakespeare play you studied in class? What were the main themes? Were these themes ‘ timeless’? (must provide examples from the modern day)Who were the main characters? Were they memorable and why?

ESSAYShakespeare’s play ‘ The Merchant of Venice’ captures timeless theme’s of society woven into the story of a wealthy merchant in Venice. The themes can be found throughout the entire play formed mostly between the diverse relationships of the characters. Though the play is set in a different era many of the basic themes of the play still affect the world and are relevant to the modern day reader. The intricate ways Shakespeare has incorporated these themes into his play give the themes a dramatic and timeless feeling, highlighting their importance.

The theme of prejudice is woven as a solid theme throughout Shakespeare’s play ‘ The Merchant of Venice’. The theme is accentuated through relationships and interaction between the characters in the play, mainly between the characters of Antonio, the Merchant, and Shylock, the Jewish money lender. Throughout the play the character of Shylock is belittled and undermined with the established profile that he is a Jew. Dialogue often occurs in the play that indicates prejudice towards Shylock for his religious faith implying that the Christian character of Antonio is of higher moral and social value.

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Throughout the entire play it is implied that Antonio as a Christian is the protagonist, standing for everything good, while Shylock as a Jew is the antagonist, portraying everything evil and is usually unjustly held responsible for the conflicts that occur throughout the play. Antonio bears a biased prejudice towards Shylock merely because he is Jewish, insults him and his faith, spits upon him and abuses his practice of money lending. Shylock however is just attempting to run a business and it is fair therefore that he would be concerned with his money. However in the play what would be caution in a Christian is shown as greed in a Jew. The conflict between the characters of Antonio and Shylock is the main symbolism of prejudice in the form of Anti-Semitism.

“ Signor Antonio, many a time and oft in the Rialto you have rated me about my moneys and my usances. Still have I borne it with a patient shrug, for sufferance is the badge of all our tribe. You call me misbeliever, cut-throat dog, and spit upon my Jewish gaberdine, and all for use of that which is mine own. Well then, it now appears you need my help...What should I say to you? Should I not say, ‘ Hath a dog money? Is it possible a cur can lend three thousand ducats?’ ...Say this: ‘ Fair sir, you spat on me on Wednesday last, you spurned me such a day, another time you called me dog, and for these courtesies I’ll lend you thus much moneys’? (p. 83, I. 3)

This quote shows the strained and hostile relationship between Antonio and Shylock and shows Shylock’s hesitance and resentment of the idea of helping Antonio. It is evident in this quote that Antonio bears prejudice towards Shylock based on the fact that he is of a different faith. This form of prejudice is a solid theme in ‘ The Merchant of Venice’ and is still common <https://assignbuster.com/a-discussion-of-the-themes-and-characters-in-the-merchant-of-venice-essay-sample/>

today. The major modern example would be the Holocaust of the Jews in World War 2. This was the mass killing and hatred of people based solely on their faith. Still today many people are discriminated against based on their faith. There are forms of prejudice found everywhere in this modern day.

The theme of prejudice is also accentuated by the role of Portia in the play. There is feminist prejudice against Portia stressed by the fact that to be taken seriously or to play "an important role" in the play, Portia must first disguise herself as a man. Shakespeare emphasises the fact that Portia is not able to do anything worthwhile until she undertakes the appearance and connotations of a man. This form of prejudice against women is still very relevant to today's audience as women are still battling for the same rights as men. Despite the fact that there has been a lot of progress, prejudice against women and the assumption that they are of a lesser status than men is still a strong issue in the modern world today.

Loyalty is another strong theme in 'The Merchant of Venice'. It appears in two main forms throughout the play. Firstly it is raised as an issue between Shylock the Jewish moneylender and his daughter Jessica. Jessica falls in love with a Christian and decides to abandon her lifestyle with her father and become a Christian. There is the clash of priorities of loyalty, loyalty to ones family and traditions or loyalty to ones own heart. In the following quote Jessica expresses her shame at being her fathers daughter;" Farewell, good Launcelot. Alack, what heinous sin is it in me to be ashamed to be my father's child. But though i am a daughter to his blood, i am not to his manners. O Lorenzo, if thou keep promise, i shall end this strife, become a Christian and thy loving wife." (pg 94, ll. 3-4)

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Jessica eventually decides she must be loyal to her own wishes not her fathers and she leaves with Lorenzo. The issue is an important one in the play as it raises the dilemmas of loyalty. It is still very relevant today as it often happens that too many commitments that then clash with each other and one must decide where ones loyalties lie. Shakespeare recognised this common problem amongst people that causes tension and can drive a story. He highlighted the importance and power of loyalty between the relationship of Jessica and her father Shylock in the play ' The Merchant of Venice'.

The second time the theme of loyalty is raised in the play it is between the characters of Portia, Nerissa, Bassanio and Gratiano. They are two couples soon to be wed and as a symbol of their loyalty to one another the women present the two men with a ring each. The men's loyalty is tested when a series of events unfold that lead to them being pressured into giving their rings away. They ultimately fold and give away the rings thus abandoning to symbol of loyalty to their partners. The form of loyalty to ones partner is still relevant today and the symbol of exchanging rings to represent this loyalty is still used today in marriage. The abdication of the loyalties that accompany the ring was raised in the play ' The Merchant of Venice' to effectively drive the tension in the plot.

The main characters in the play were Antonio; a merchant in Venice, Portia; the lady of Belmont and Shylock; a Jewish moneylender in Venice. These were the characters the plot was based directly around and their role in the play drove the tension and conflict to create an effective and interesting plot. Shakespeare intricately crafted memorable and believable characters in this play. They were well developed throughout the play, and Shakespeare's skill <https://assignbuster.com/a-discussion-of-the-themes-and-characters-in-the-merchant-of-venice-essay-sample/>

in depicting this made them truly unique. They emphasised the timeless themes of the play which gave them a strong and memorable appearance in the play.

Shakespeare's play 'The Merchant of Venice' was truly a memorable and masterfully written play that captured timeless themes of humanity. His themes continue to be depicted in many novels to drive plots and are still relevant in society to this day. His intricate weaving of the themes with his well crafted characters made this play very effective and unique. To this day the play 'The Merchant of Venice' continues to be a revered and respected piece of literature that will always be held as one of Shakespeare's finest works.

Bibliography:

Text; The Merchant of Venice, William Shakespeare