

WELLAND GOULDSMITH SCHOOL

Class 8.

English Literature

Answers

Question 1) Write about the theme of the play 'The Merchant of Venice'

Answer 1) The main theme of the play 'The Merchant of Venice' is the conflict between self-interest and love. On the surface level, the major difference between Shylock, the Jew and the Christian characters is their level of comparison. It deals with the theme of justice and the need of mercy in the dispensation of justice and also the need of mercy in all human relations. It deals with the theme of appearance versus reality. It deals with the theme of contrast between Venice and Belmont. It deals with the theme of wealth and usury. The play also conveys to us certain moral ideas of great value: for instance, sincerity in friendship and need for religious toleration. It is indeed a very rich and wide ranging play, which is highly entertaining and also highly instructive.

Question 2) What religious antagonism do we notice between Shylock and Antonio at the very beginning of the play?

Answer 2) A very important aspect of this play is the antagonism that existed in those days between the Jews and the Christians. The Christians of that time harboured many prejudices against the Jews, who in their opinion, were not only great misers but also merciless usurers. One other point of conflict between the two religious communities was the fact that the Jews did not, and still do not, eat pork while pork was, and continues to be, the staple and favourite meat, and a delicacy for Christians.

Antonio is a Christian, a native of the State of Venice, and a wealthy merchant. Shylock, is a foreigner settled in Venice. He is a Jew and a money-lender by profession. He is in the habit of charging a high rate of interest on the loans which he provides. In fact, he may be rightly described as a 'usurer'. Antonio detests Shylock because Shylock is a Jew and because he is also a usurer. And Shylock in turn hates Antonio because Antonio cannot stand the Jewish religion and also because he brings down the rate of interest in Venice by lending money to the needy without charging any rate of interest. This hatred between the Jews and Christians forms the very basis of the bond story.