



Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*
Joseph Burke, Wasatch Range Writing Project

Burning Question:

Students will have an in-depth understanding of the play *The Merchant of Venice* by looking at the theme of relationships as well as by analyzing the symbol of the rings in the play.

Objective:

Students will use critical reading (close reading) skills to analyze the play by looking specifically for the theme of relationships and how this gives meaning to the text.

Context:

A high school English/Language Arts class, designed for grades 11-12, yet easily adaptable to any secondary grade levels.

Materials:

- Shakespeare's play *The Merchant of Venice*
- Interviewing: An Overview (handout)
- Ten Basic Rules for Asking Questions (handout)
- Conversational Roundtable graphic organizer (handout)
- Pyramid of Hate infographic (handout)
- The Decision Tree (handout)
- *The Merchant of Venice: The Rings* (handout)
- FODP Writing Rubric (handout)

Time Span:

One month at 20-30 minutes each day.

Procedures:

1. Introduce the play *The Merchant of Venice* and spend time reading sections of it every day. The following activities supplement the play readings.
2. Introduce the class to reporters' questions: 5w-how, open-ended, in-depth, and follow-up type questions.
3. Pass out and review together as a class Jim Burke's *Interviewing: An Overview* handout from his book *What's the Big Idea*.
 - a. The question the students will be interviewing about is this unit's essential question about relationships: How do relationships affect our lives? Have the students work on **questions 1-3** on their *Interviewing Overview*.
 - b. Once each student has their **list of 6-7 interview questions** on the topic, have the students get together with a partner or in groups of no more than four. Have them share, compare, and revise or add to their list of interview questions.
 - c. Once the groups are finished and all students are back in their correct seats, **review** as a class some of the interview questions they were able to come up with. Discuss these questions as a class. Are they open-ended? Are they interesting? Are they in-depth or have follow-up questions?
 - d. Now have the students do numbers 4-5 on their *Interviewing Overview* handout.



4. Pass out and review as a class the handout *Ten Basic Rules for Asking Questions*.
 - a. Have the class as a group practice interviewing you, the teacher. While various students ask their questions, you can **model** and teach better interview questions and techniques. Everyone needs to be taking notes as well during this practice interview process. Students need to remember to abbreviate their notes during the interview so that they can maintain eye contact and then fill in the notes with more details right after the interview is complete and the answers are fresh in their mind.
 - b. Now complete step 6 on the *Interviewing: An Overview* handout by finding someone to interview and taking notes on the **interview**. Interviews can be done through email or phone as well as in person.
5. Leave the last step on the *Interviewing: An Overview* handout for later and have the students first discuss different types of relationships on a *Conversational Roundtable* handout. Pass out this handout and review together as a class. To do this, the students list four primary relationships in their own lives similar to those of the characters in the play *The Merchant of Venice* that we are currently reading together as a class. Each relationship is placed in one of the four boxes of the *Conversational Roundtable*. Types of relationships might include (1) romantic, (2) parent-child, (3) friends, (4) law/government. In the center circle of the handout should be placed the title "Rules for Relationships."
 - a. Now have the students complete the *Conversational Roundtable* by having the students list rules under each category of relationship that apply to that type of relationship, e.g., for romantic relationships, rules would be to be honest with each other, to trust each other, and to love each other, etc.
 - b. Have the students write a **paragraph** response to their many relationships in life based on the information gathered and organized on their *Conversational Roundtable*.
 - c. Discuss as a class the rules of relationships for **enemies**. How are they different from other relationships? Relate this to the text of *The Merchant of Venice*. How is there hate between the Christians and the Jews? Between Shylock and Antonio?
6. Introduce the Anti-Defamation League's (ADL) *Pyramid of Hate* and review it as a class. Connect the parts of the pyramid to their lives, to the play *The Merchant of Venice*, and to the realities of the world, both historical and current. Discuss as a class. The pyramid makes an abstract concept such as hate more concrete, showing the students levels, steps, and details that allow them to see how such a relationship develops. This Pyramid of Hate will ultimately need to be incorporated into their final essay writing project as they discuss the themes of the text in their essay, such as hate.
7. Pass out and review *The Decision Tree* handout as a class.
 - a. Have the students create a Decision Tree on themselves. (1) Have them think of an important decision that they will need to be making sometime soon. From some of the different decisions possible, have them choose just one to focus on. Then have them write this major decision in the large horizontal box on their Decision Tree. (2) Have them think of some of the different options they can choose from when making their decision. These should be placed on the diagonal lines leading to the vertical lines. (3) Then for each option, have them choose a major consequence or two that would follow that option. The consequences are written on the vertical lines leading to the outcome boxes on the bottom of the page. (4) Finally, have them show what the ultimate outcome would be for each decision and each decision's consequences by predicting the possible outcome in each outcome box.
 - b. **Review** as a class some the answers that the students were able to come up with. Discuss.
 - c. **Pass out** a new *Decision Tree* handout for each student to now use on the text.
 - d. Have the students fill out their new *Decision Tree* handout by: (1) choosing one character in the play and writing his or her name in the horizontal box. (2) Showing some of the options that character has based on his or her dilemma and writing them out on the



diagonal lines. (3) Next, writing out some of the consequences (good or bad) that each option inherently carries with it. (4) Identifying what outcome these choices ultimately lead that character to.

- e. **Review** as a class some of the characters, their dilemmas, options, consequences, and outcomes the students were able to come up with on their *Decision Tree*.
8. Pass out the *Ring Analysis* activity and review as a class.
 - a. Have the students get with a partner or two and find the relevant passages of the play listed on the handout and together analyze what they think the rings symbolize. The handout is for keeping their notes on.
 - b. **Discuss** as a class how the symbol of the rings in the play can provide insight into the importance of relationships.
 - c. Have each student do a **text analysis paragraph** where he or she uses examples and quotes from the text to support a conclusion about what the student believes the rings symbolize.
 - d. Finish with having the students write a **personal response paragraph** explaining what they learned from this activity about the importance of relationships.
9. Review as a class how to use **quotation marks** appropriately. Also, review how to cite sources and introduce quotes and comment on quotes in an essay. Model. Show examples on the overhead. Discuss as a class.
10. Review Jim Burke's writing rubric **FODP** and what the acronym stands for.
11. Pass out the **final exam essay writing prompt** handout. Review together as a class. Remember, this paper must be written and typed in class, not at home. Teacher can choose either the standard or the advanced writing rubric that best fits the students.
12. Have students use their notes, the text of the play, and their handouts to write a **rough draft** of an essay: (1) that looks at either the relationships within the play *The Merchant of Venice* (this could include looking at the rings and their symbolism for friendship and a covenant of marriage), or (2) that looks at a central theme to the play (such as hate, mercy, religion, law, justice, etc.).
13. Have students **type** their essays using whatever style guide the teacher has selected. They can also revise and edit their papers as they type it from their handwritten rough draft.
14. Use typed drafts for student-teacher **writing conference**.
15. Have students complete a **final draft** of their formal essay.
16. Have students write a feedback **reflection journal** paragraph on *The Merchant of Venice* unit reading, the concepts learned and discussed in class, and feedback on the assignments.

Extensions:

- Readers' Theater with selected scenes in the play
- Socratic Seminars discussing themes in the play
- FODP Peer Evaluation Writing Rubrics
- Graphic novel of the play for ELL, special ed. students, or struggling readers
- Discuss other themes in the play, such as tolerance, racism, sexism, forgiveness, mercy, etc.
- Vocabulary extras for students struggling with Shakespeare's language
- Video clips and pictures that supplement the text of the play

Rationale:

Students will practice their critical thinking, critical reading, and critical writing skills through an analysis of the Shakespeare play *The Merchant of Venice* through scaffolded activities looking at a major theme.



Resources:

Burke, Jim. *What's the Big Idea*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2010. Print.

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Interviewing: An Overview

Mr. Burke

Overview

This assignment asks you to interview one or more people about a topic we will be discussing in class in the weeks ahead. For your interview to be successful, you must prepare for it. When you finish, you will write a short synthesis paper about what you learned.

Goals

This assignment will teach you how to:

- Generate and ask effective interview questions.
- Arrange the questions in the best order.
- Pose follow-up questions for more detailed answers.
- Take notes while others respond to your questions.
- Synthesize your notes and respond to the details in a short paper.

Step 1 Generate a list of possible people to interview for this subject. Choose the people who will give the best information and be easiest to interview.

Step 2 Make a list of questions to ask these people. The questions should all be related to the topic you are investigating and should yield *interesting* and relevant information.

Step 3 Decide which questions to ask; you should ask no more than six or seven.

Step 4 Arrange your questions in the order in which you will ask them.

Step 5 Format your note-taking page: Write your questions in the left margin, leaving room between them for answers.

Step 6 Conduct your interview(s). If interviewing more than one person, consider interviewing them separately so one person's answers do not influence the other person's. As you conduct each interview, take notes in short phrases, jotting down both key ideas and memorable phrases. Also, ask follow-up questions when the subject says something interesting or is not forthcoming. For example, if your subject says, "My family was not in favor of me marrying your mother," ask a follow-up question like, "What did that feel like?" or "How did you respond to that?" or "Why did they feel that way?" After you finish, go back over your notes and add any details that you didn't have time to write down or that you remembered after you finished.

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Remember to thank the people you interview for taking time to answer your questions!

Step 7 Write a response (1–2 pages) to the interviews, in which you synthesize (make connections between) the different details and discuss what they mean and why they are important. Include in your synthesis paper your own thoughts about what you learned from these people. What surprised you? What interested you most? Why? How do their comments correspond with what you thought *before* you interviewed them?

Ten Basic Rules for Asking Questions

1. Be direct.
2. Make eye contact.
3. Use plain language.
4. Use simple sentence structure.
5. Be brief.
6. Maintain focus on the interview topic.
7. Make sure the purpose of each question is clear.
8. The questions must be appropriate for the situation and the person.
9. The manner of asking the questions should reflect your intent.
10. Know what to do with the answer.

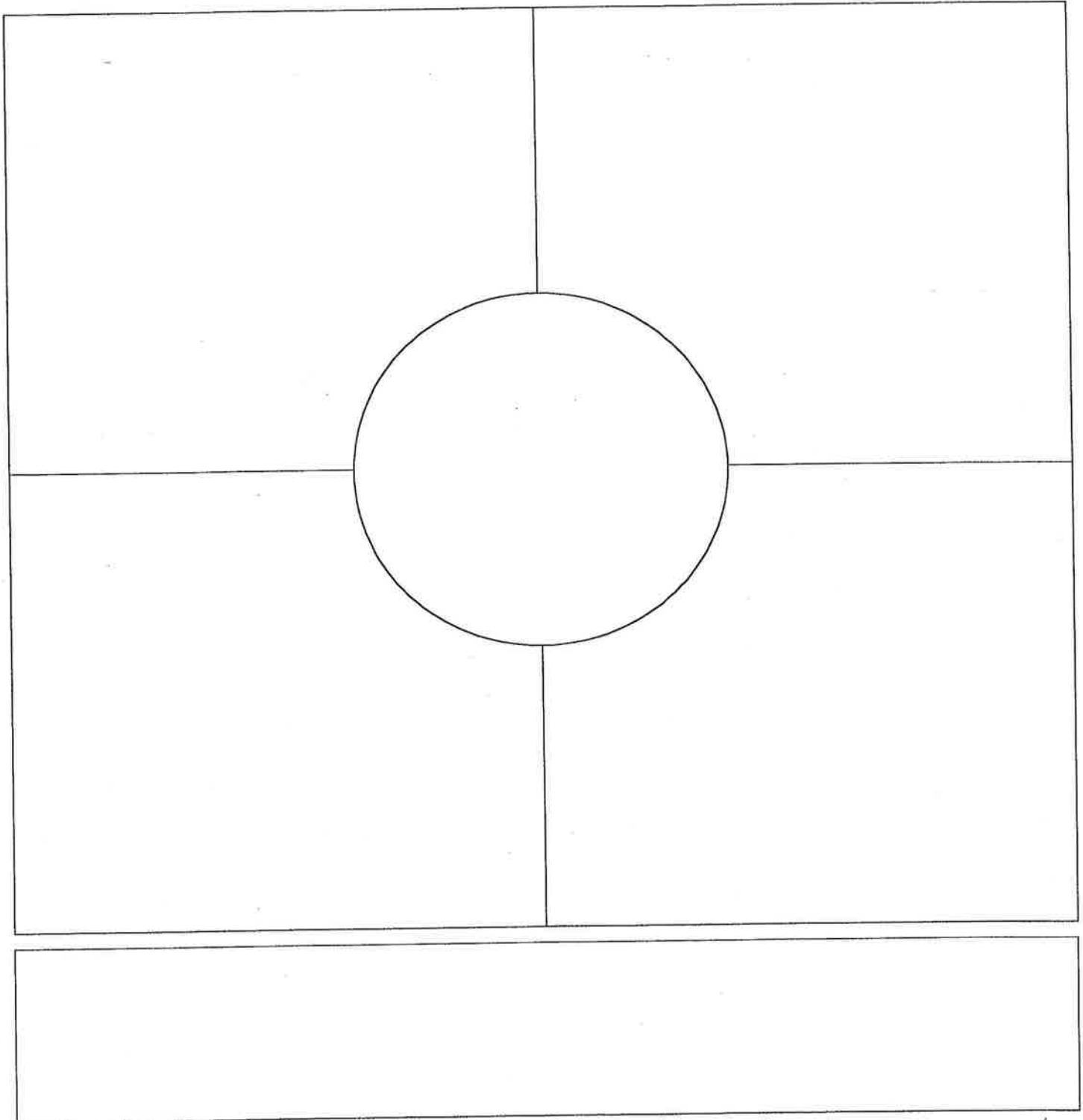
Name: _____ Period: _____ Date: _____

Conversation Roundtable

Topic: _____

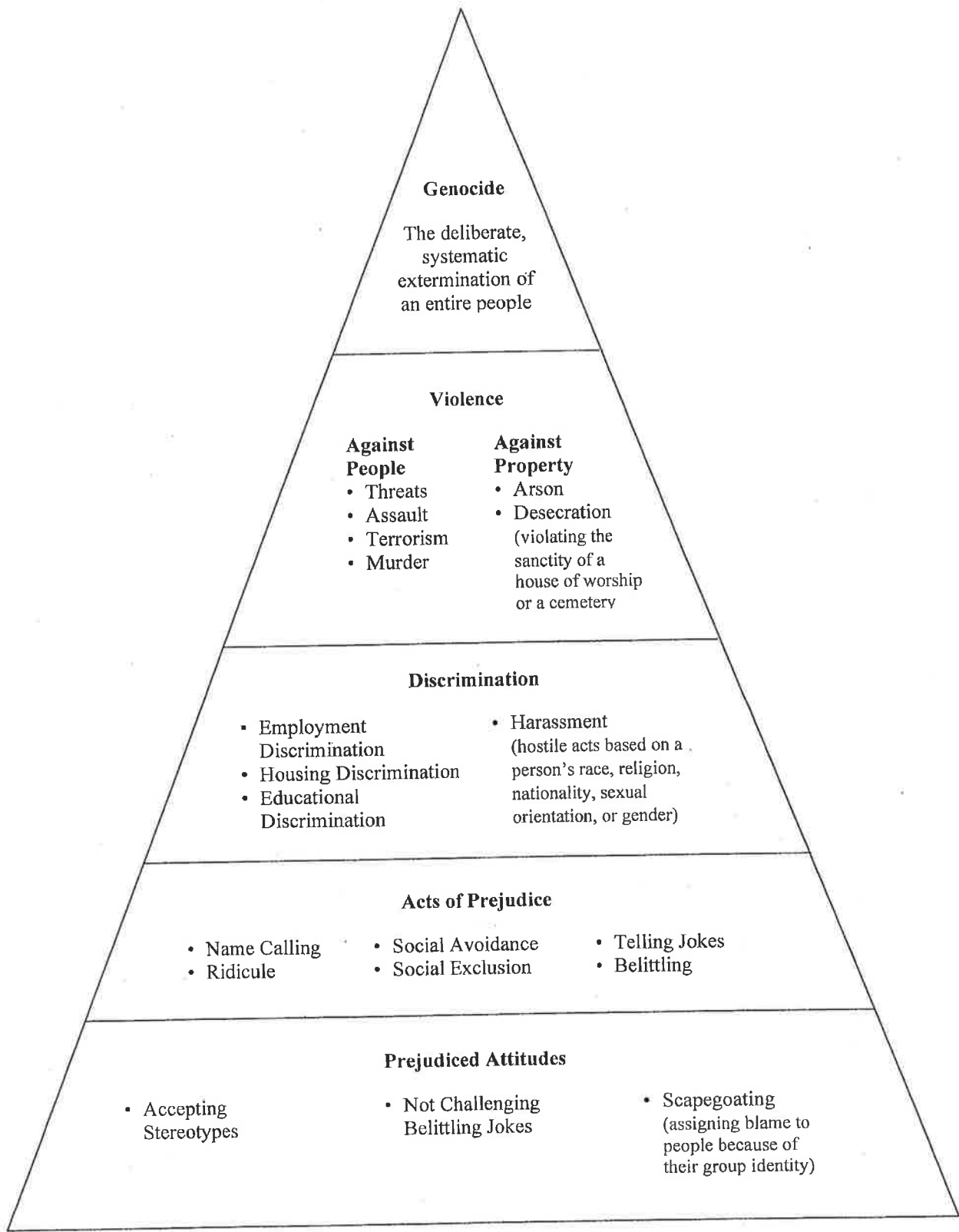
DIRECTIONS

Ask yourself what the focus of your paper, discussion, or inquiry is. Is it a character, a theme, an idea, a trend, or a place? Then examine it from four different perspectives, or identify four different aspects of the topic. Once you have identified the four areas, find and list any appropriate quotations, examples, evidence, or details.



The form consists of a large rectangular area divided into four quadrants by a central circle. The circle is positioned in the center of the rectangle, and its diameter is equal to the height of the rectangle. The four quadrants are empty, intended for students to write their perspectives. Below this large area is a separate, empty rectangular box, likely for a concluding statement or additional notes.

Pyramid of Hate



Source: © 2003 Anti-Defamation League and Survivors of the Shoah Visual History Foundation. Used with permission.

May be photocopied for classroom use. © 2010 by Jim Burke from *What's the Big Idea?* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Decision Tree

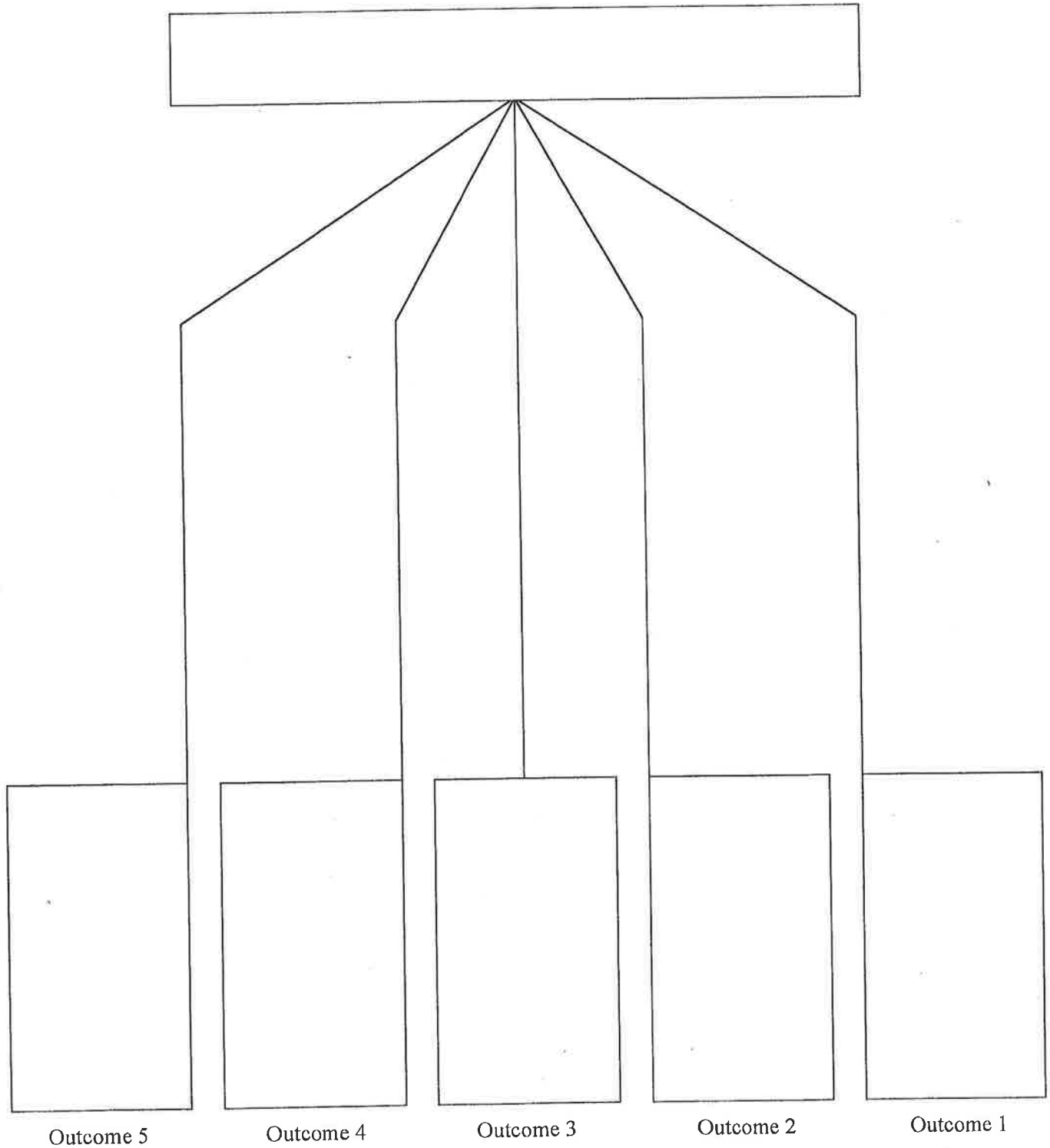
Name: _____

Date: _____

Topic: _____

Period: _____

Suggestions for Use: Use this Decision Tree diagram to examine the possible outcomes of different decisions. You might consider the different consequences of a character's possible choices, or you might consider how it would change the story to tell it from different points of view. In Health, History, or Business, you might consider the ramifications of different choices. Provide arguments for and against each decision.



The Merchant of Venice: The Rings

Overview We have been examining different types of relationships in this play as well as in our own lives. Examine the three different texts that discuss the importance of rings and what they represent. (1) Act III, scene i, lines 79-130—Shylock and Jessica’s ring; (2) Act IV, scene i, lines 405-457, & scene ii, lines 5-19—Portia & Bassanio’s ring; (3) Act V, scene i, lines 127-307—Nerissa & Gratiano’s ring. This assignment asks you to interpret the meaning of the rings in each of these three scenes within the context of relationships while also working on your writing skills.

Step One Gather Details and Examples

Use the following organizer to help you find, organize, and analyze details from the text about the rings and what they symbolize, especially within the context of relationships.

What They Do or Say (quotations or examples)	What It Means (interpretations)	Why It's Important (discussion and analysis)
•	•	•

Step Two Text Analysis Paragraph

Using the quotations and examples from step one, write a paragraph about the different rings in *The Merchant of Venice* and what these rings symbolize and tell us about relationships. You must include in your paragraph at least three specific examples or quotations, one for each ring (properly cited with act, scene, and line numbers). Be sure to introduce your examples and quotations before citing them as well as to comment on them after you use them in your paragraph.

Step Three Personal Response Paragraph

Jot down your thoughts about relationships in this play and the actions of the characters. Do you agree with or understand what they are doing? What do you think—and why do you think it?

Final Exam: *The Merchant of Venice*

Overview

Write an essay that shows you have:

- Read and understood *The Merchant of Venice*.
- Learned and can use FODP by including in each essay:
 - **Focus:** A clear, compelling claim about the subject
 - **Organization:** Organize ideas into and within paragraphs using transition words and other organizational strategies we have studied (e.g., compare/contrast, persuasion, etc.)
 - **Development:** Examples, quotations, and explanation of their meaning and importance
 - **Purpose:** Specific purpose you are trying to achieve in each paper and within each paragraph
- Learned to properly choose, introduce, comment on, format, and cite **quotations** to support and illustrate your ideas.

Preparation

You are allowed to use the notes you have taken as we read the play together as a class and use a copy of the play for reference. No other outside sources should be used for this essay.

Prompt

The Merchant of Venice: Analyzing the Role of Relationships in Life and Literature

- Write an essay in which you either discuss the following types of relationships in relation to life in general and to the play *The Merchant of Venice* in particular: romantic partner/spouse, friends (best friend and regular friends), mentor(s), authorities, parents, enemies, and yourself.
- Or choose an important theme to play and analyze it with personal comments and insights as appropriate.
- Make sure your paper and each paragraph show good FODP about these different types of relationships.
- Include examples and quotations from *The Merchant of Venice* as well as from life in general to support and illustrate the points you want to make about each type of relationship or to support your analysis of an important theme from the play.

Name: _____ Period: _____ Date: _____

Introduction Evaluation

- 1 2 3 4 5 Establishes a compelling focus you must prove
- 1 2 3 4 5 Establishes your credibility to the reader
- 1 2 3 4 5 Every sentence serves a specific purpose: no fluff!
- 1 2 3 4 5 Connects the topic to your reader in a meaningful way
- 1 2 3 4 5 Conveys the importance of the topic
- 1 2 3 4 5 Implies or creates an organizational structure for the essay
- 1 2 3 4 5 Provides an effective transition at the end to subsequent divisions
- 1 2 3 4 5 Addresses the writing prompt (or shows that it clearly will do so)

F
O
D
P

Comments

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- General subject about which you make an obvious point
- Vague subject about which you attempt to make a point
- No subject; your writing lacks any clear point

Organization

- Shows clear, effective organization
- Shows general, basic organization
- Lacks effective or consistent organization
- Lacks any evidence of organization

Development

- Provides compelling, effective examples, details, quotations, and commentary
- Includes basic or obvious examples, details, quotations, and commentary
- Offers inconsistent or ineffective examples, details, quotations, and commentary
- Lacks examples, details, quotations, or commentary

Purpose

- Demonstrates a clear rhetorical purpose in sentences, paragraphs, or paper
- Establishes a general purpose that undermines effectiveness of writing
- Shows a flawed or inconsistent purpose that undermines the writing
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Name: _____

Block: _____ Date: _____

Writing a One-page Response

What is FODP?

When you write any academic assignment, you need to have **focus**, your paper should have **organization**, your ideas should have gone through a couple stages of **development**, and you should have a **purpose** in mind.

What are the goals of a brief one-page response?

The goals of these types of assignments are:

- Establish a focus for your paper and each paragraph.
- Organize your ideas effectively to communicate them.
- Develop your ideas by providing examples and quotations, then explain how these relate to your main focus.
- Show that you read and understood the book.

How will I be graded?

You will be assessed based on how well you accomplish the above objectives. You will also be graded based on basic grammatical mistakes like:

- Comma Splices
- Improper use of a semi-colon/colon/comma
- Random Capitalization
- Misspelled words (within reason; use a dictionary)

Rubric:

	Focus	Organization	Development	Purpose	Grammar
4	The paper has a clear focus; any paragraphs have clear topic sentences.	Ideas are organized in the most effective manner.	The paper provides relevant examples and quotations; the author explains the connection between the examples and the main idea.	The author communicates for a clear purpose throughout the paper.	Few and minor grammatical mistakes throughout the paper.
3	The paper has a focus, though it is not as clear as a 4; most paragraphs have clear topic sentences.	Ideas are organized, though not optimally.	The paper provides some relevant examples and quotations; the author adequately explains the connection between the relevant examples and the main idea.	The author suggests a purpose for the paper, but the purpose is not as clear as a 4.	Few and only a couple major grammatical mistakes throughout the paper.
2	The paper lacks a clear focus, though a main idea seems to run through the piece; few paragraphs have clear topic sentences.	Ideas are not organized well, but still relate.	The paper provides seemingly unconnected examples and quotations; the author tentatively explains the connection between the examples and the main idea.	The author tries to communicate a clear purpose but is generally unsuccessful.	Many and minor grammatical mistakes throughout the paper.
1	The paper has no clear focus; paragraphs have unclear topic sentences.	Ideas are unorganized and unrelated.	The paper provides no examples and quotations.	No clear purpose is apparent.	Many and major grammatical mistakes throughout that cloud the purpose and focus of the paper.

Merchant of Venice

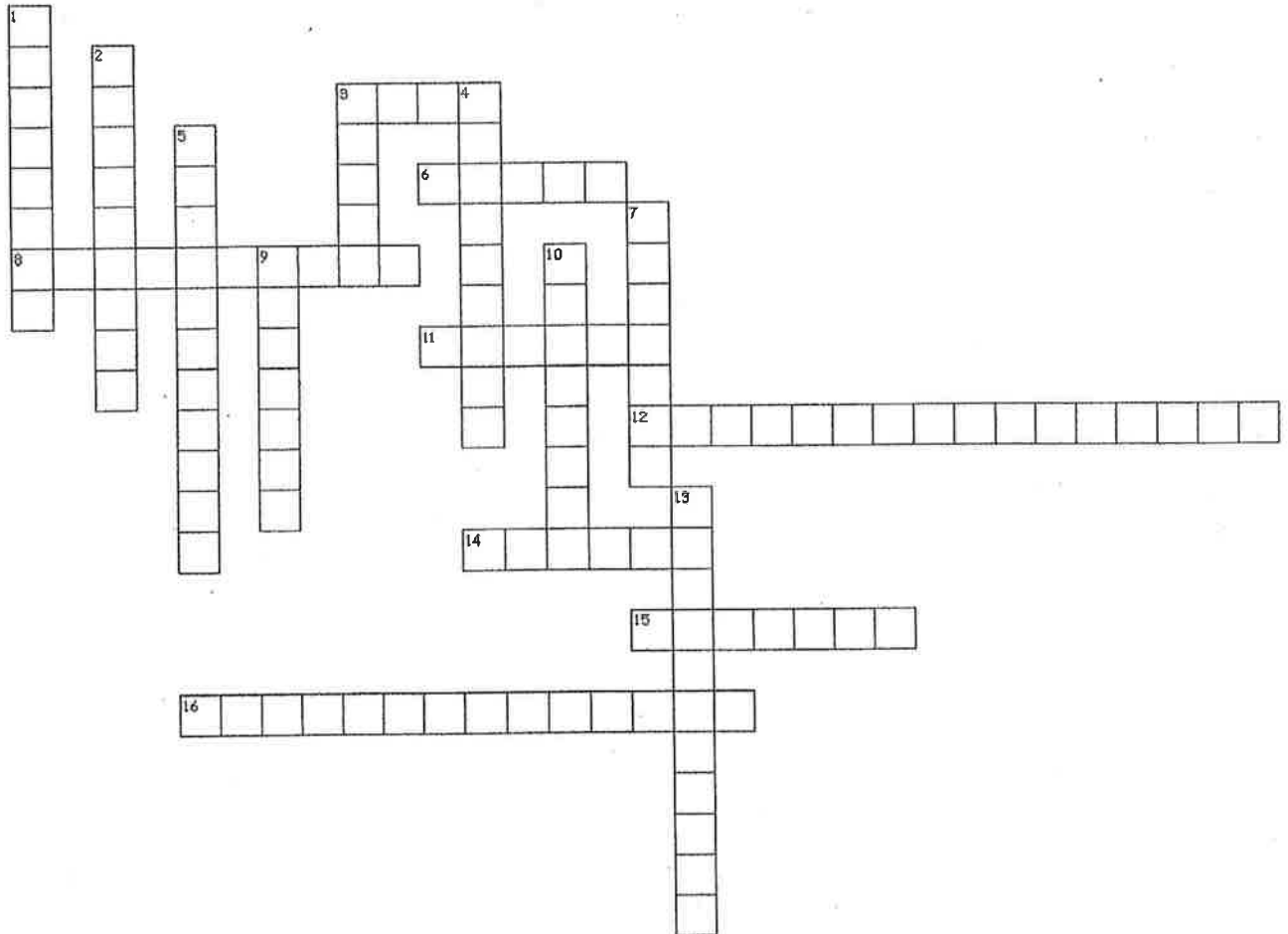
S P O R T I A O P P S X M S Y
F S V N A C T M I D S R Q H P
S I E R Q T M P H M W N H Y E
D F O N E R T L S W E X W L C
A T N H E C C I D H J P S O I
D E G L U V E C N E A K E C N
P R E J U D I C E T C T Y K E
I Z R I M O J G I E E X R Q V
T F S E I E F O R T A R U E T
A B R Z S K M W F O S L E N D
L C D S V H P P S L F U O S L
Y J I K T I S M X N H L J E T
K C W L H X J G V J A H V U M
A U C S Y T L A Y O L O I H R
F D N Y R U S U Z H L V L X T

FORGIVENESS
HATRED
JESSICA
LOANS
MERCY
SHIPWRECKS
VENICE

FRIENDSHIP
INTEREST
JEWS
LOVE
PORTIA
SHYLOCK

GHETTO
ITALY
JUSTICE
LOYALTY
PREJUDICE
USURY

Shakespeare



Across

3. A clever play on words and their various meanings.
6. Unrhymed, unmetetered narrative
8. Unrhymed Iambic Pentameter
11. Poem written in iambic pentameter
12. The natural meter for English
14. The city where Shakespeare wrote his plays
15. Where Shakespeare perfozmed his plays
16. The queen of England during Shakespeare's time

Down

1. Shakespeare's "Wooden O" Theater
2. The king of England during Shakespeare's time.
3. When not writing sonnets, Shakespeare wrote these.
4. The city where Shakespeare was born and died.
5. The most famous writer in the English language.
7. The name of England after King James took the throne.
9. The country where Shakespeare lived.
10. The name of the group of Thespians Shakespeare belonged to after Queen Elizabeth's death.
13. Shakespeare's wife

