

One of the most disheartening aspects of our world is the rampant hatred and intolerance of people. A militant group in Iraq attacks our soldiers daily, celebrating the loss of American life and not seeming to care that two innocent Iraqi children are also killed. A couple of young men tie a gay man to a fence and beat him to death. An African-American family discovers their vehicle has been painted with the letters KKK and set on fire. Sadly, these acts of hatred and intolerance are not something new to our society. In Renaissance England, nearly 500 years ago, the Jews were persecuted on a daily basis by the citizens of London. In *The Merchant of Venice*, Shakespeare clearly portrays his society's prejudice toward Jews through references to blood libel, comparisons to the devil, and an unusually dark ending for a play that is considered a comedy.

Start general.  
Become more specific. Narrow focus to your specific topic.

**BRIDGE**  
A sentence or two that moves from your generalizations to your specific topic and thesis sentence.

**THESIS**  
A sentence that includes the author, title, and your main argument

Through the dialog of both the Christian characters and Shylock himself, Shakespeare makes references to the Renaissance rumors of blood libel. In England, there were stories of the Jews kidnapping and sacrificing a young Christian boy for their own religious ceremonies. They believed that the Jews actually ate Christian flesh and drank Christian blood during the Seder dinner of Passover. Although the rumors illustrate the Jewish rituals as being almost Satanic, it seems few Christians during Shakespeare's time questioned the absurdity of these lies. Prior to meeting Antonio for dinner, Shylock comments that he is going to feed upon the Christian. Furthermore, the fact that Shylock demands a pound of Antonio's flesh suggests the morbid blood libel of the rumored cannibalism. Even more alarmingly, Shakespeare illustrates this prejudice when Shylock says to Antonio, "If I can catch him once upon the hip, I will feed fat the ancient grudge I bear him" (Shakespeare 12). In this quote, Shylock claims that given the opportunity, he

**TOPIC SENTENCE**

You might include some discussion and background before the quote.

**EVIDENCE #1 FROM THE TEXT**

**EVIDENCE #2 FROM THE TEXT**

**EVIDENCE #3 - QUOTE**  
If fewer than 3 lines, type in body of paragraph. Cite page number.

**INTERPRET**  
What does the quote mean?

will exact revenge upon Antonio because he has been treated so poorly by the merchant for so long. Shakespeare uses the words “feed fat” to specifically remind his audience of the libelous stories of Jews eating Christian flesh. He drives home this point when Shylock demands a pound of flesh as the penalty from Antonio.

**LINK** quote to thesis

A second illustration of the persecution of Jews in Renaissance England occurs throughout the play as he is compared to a devil. When Salanio sees him in the Rialto, he accuses the devil of walking the street dressed as Shylock. Even the Duke accuses him of being inhuman. When Shylock quotes the book of Genesis to try to justify why he collects interest on loans to Venetian citizens, Antonio criticizes him. He says,

**TOPIC SENTENCE**

**EVIDENCE #1 -**  
From the text

**EVIDENCE #2 -**  
From the text

**SET UP THE QUOTE** and describe the scene.

“Mark you this, Bassanio,  
The devil can cite Scripture for his purpose.  
An evil soul, producing holy witness,  
Is like a villain with a smiling cheek;  
A goodly apple rotten at the heart” (Shakespeare 13).

**EVIDENCE #3 - QUOTE**  
If more than 3 lines, type exactly as in book. Then single space and indent the left and right margins a half inch. Cite page number.

Antonio begins by comparing Shylock to the devil. He also accuses him of using the holy text of the Bible to defend his villainy. He ends the quote by comparing Shylock to an apple that appears tasty but is actually rotten inside. Shylock is hardly evil, nor is he a villain. He charges interest in order to make a living; and there is hardly a crime in that. Furthermore, it is not so unusual for Shylock to quote Scripture, since the particular passage he cites is from Genesis, which is also part of the Jewish canon of literature. This particular quote shows Antonio’s hatred toward the Jewish moneylender. The fact that Antonio is written as a kind-hearted and generous Christian victim, however, reveals that Shakespeare’s audience would have sympathized with Antonio, not Shylock. Clearly, they would have cheered Antonio for openly berating the Jew in this scene.

**INTERPRET**  
What does the quote mean?

**LINK** quote to thesis

The audience would have cheered even more wildly when Portia and Antonio finally reduce Shylock to nothing by the end of the play...