

London Nautical **English**

The Merchant of Venice

Lesson 1 - Antonio's Woe



Learning Objectives

Throughout this lesson, you should be working towards the following:

1

I understand the importance of trade to the city of Venice.

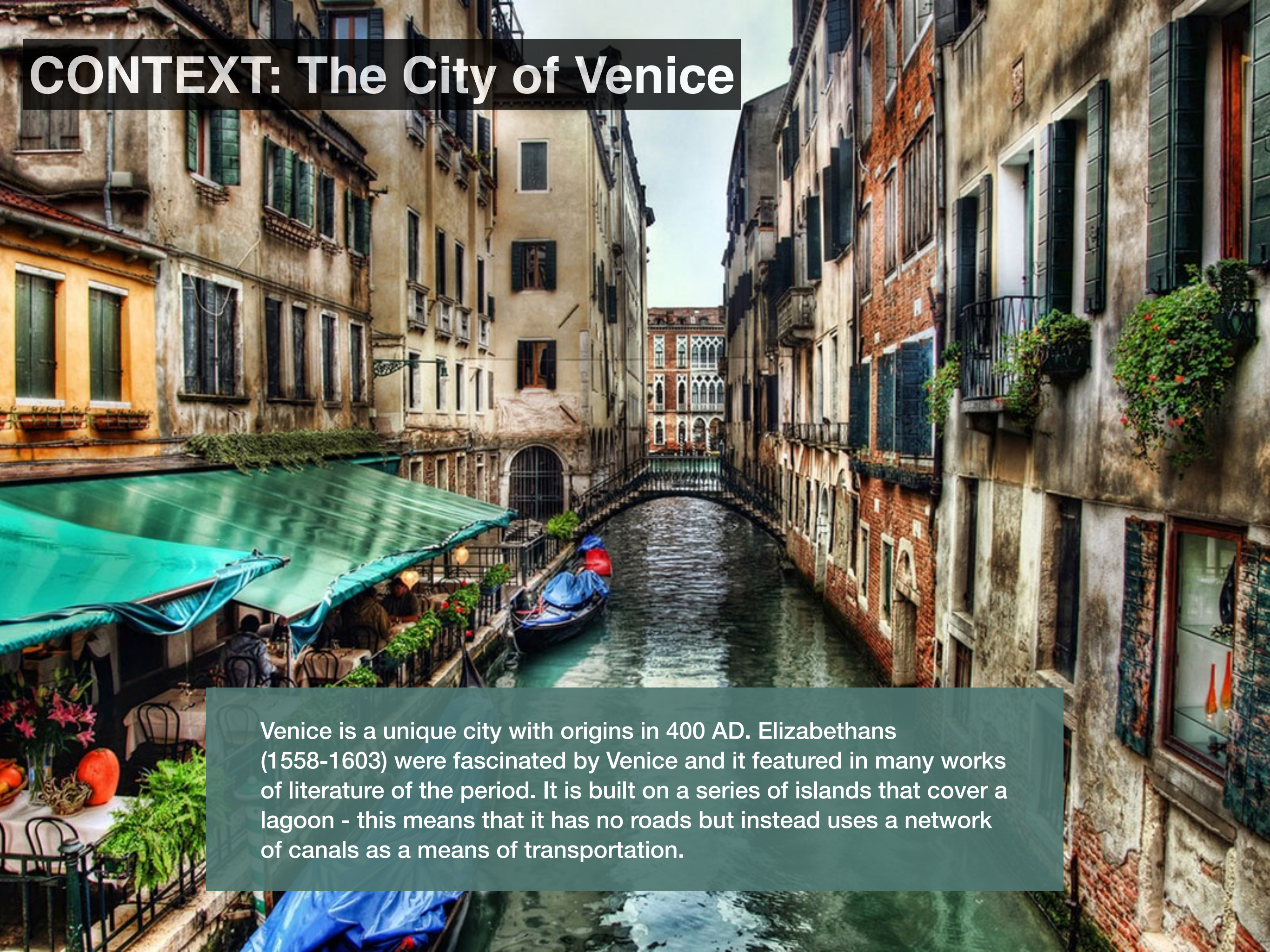
2

I understand that Shakespeare presents Antonio as troubled at the opening of the play.

3

I understand the nature of Antonio and Bassanio's relationship.

CONTEXT: The City of Venice

A narrow canal in Venice, Italy, with a small bridge crossing it. The canal is flanked by multi-story buildings with windows and balconies. A boat is visible in the water. The scene is captured from a low angle, looking down the canal towards the bridge.

Venice is a unique city with origins in 400 AD. Elizabethans (1558-1603) were fascinated by Venice and it featured in many works of literature of the period. It is built on a series of islands that cover a lagoon - this means that it has no roads but instead uses a network of canals as a means of transportation.

Understanding Setting

In order to understand the events of the play fully, you must have an understanding of the CONTEXT of the place in which the events are set.



Centre of Finance and Commerce

Venice was famous for its Rialto - a world centre for trade and commerce built over and around the Grand Canal. It was known as the 'Port to the East' and its merchants became extremely wealthy.



Dependent on Sea Borne Trade

Venice is an insular country that depended on the sea for the transportation of goods.



Good Credit

Venice enjoyed a strong reputation throughout the world for strictly enforcing its laws. It enjoyed good credit as a result.

Understanding Character

Before you read the play, be sure that you know the basic identities of each of the characters in the scene.



1

ANTONIO

THE MERCHANT OF
VENICE



2

BASSANIO

YOUNGER FRIEND OF
ANTONIO



3

GRATIANO

FRIEND OF BASSANIO

Understanding Character

Before you read the play, be sure that you know the basic identities of each of the characters in the scene.



1

SOLANIO

FRIEND OF ANTONIO



2

SALERIO

FRIEND OF ANTONIO



3

LORENZO

FRIEND OF BASSANIO

Understanding Plot

TASK

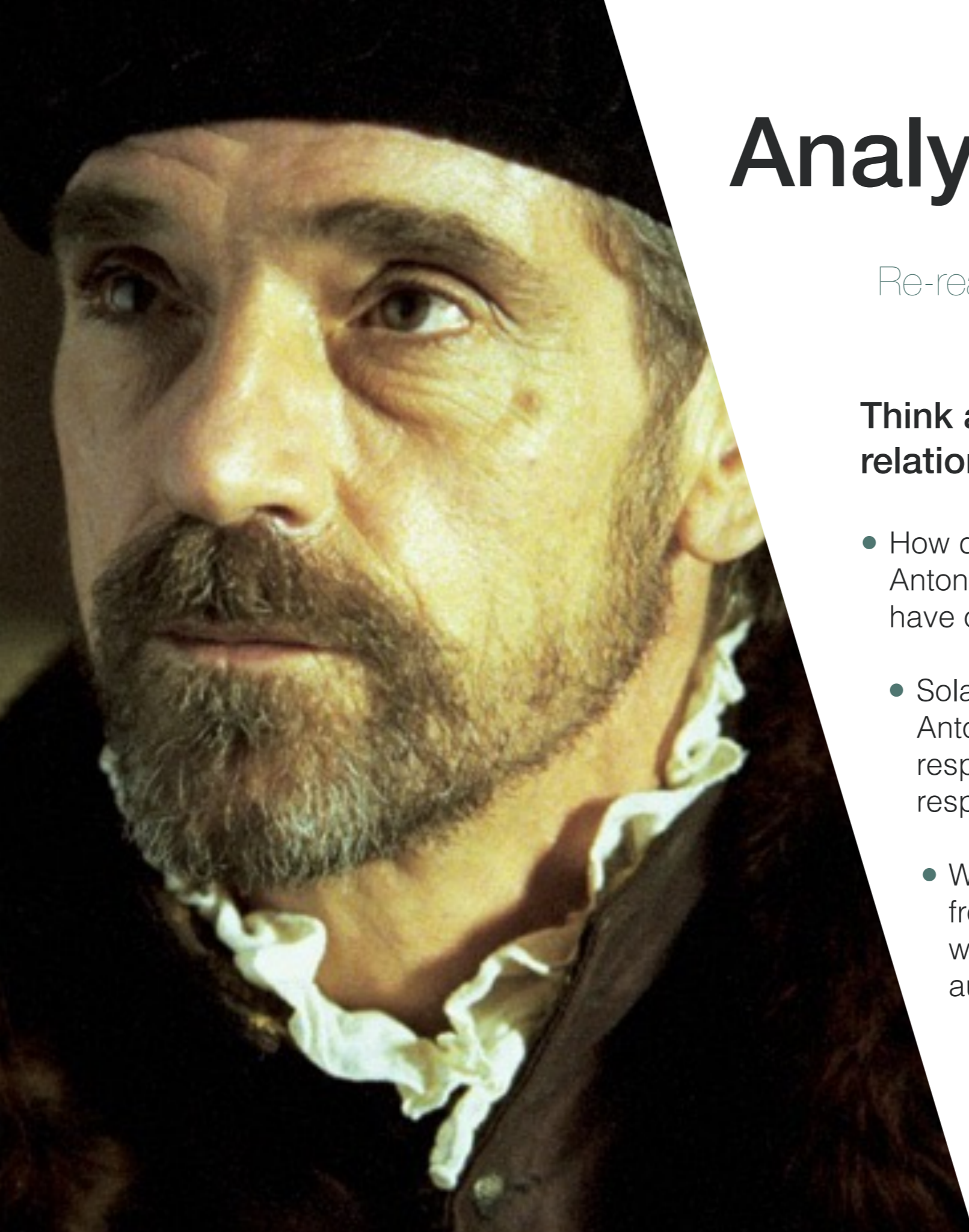
With a partner, try reading out the following lines from Antonio and Solanio.
How might the delivery of the lines change meaning?



ANTONIO: In sooth, I know not why I am so sad.

SALERIO: Why, then you are in love.

ANTONIO: Fie, fie!



Analysing Character

Re-read the opening of the script.

Think about the following questions in relation to the character of Antonio:

- How does Antonio's opening line present Antonio as troubled? Why might Shakespeare have opened the play with these lines?
- Solanio and Salerio exaggerate the dangers Antonio's ships face at sea. How does this response affect Antonio? How might this response affect the audience?
- Why might Antonio be hiding his problems from his friends? Why might Shakespeare withhold this information from the audience?

Analysing Relationship

Re-read the second half of Act 1, Scene 1.

Think about the following questions to help you analyse the relationship between Antonio and Bassanio:

- How does Shakespeare make it clear that Bassanio is younger than Antonio? How does this affect our understanding of their relationship?
- If Bassanio is already in debt with Antonio, why might Antonio agree to give Bassanio yet more money?
- How does Bassanio describe Portia? How might this influence Antonio's response? What might this tell us about the relationship between Antonio and Bassanio?
 - What might Antonio's language tell us about the way he feels about Bassanio?



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REFLECT:

Learning Objectives

Answer the following questions to demonstrate your understanding:

1

List 1 way in which trade was important to Venice.

2

List 2 ways in which Shakespeare presents Antonio and troubled.

3

List 3 things the audience finds out about Antonio and Bassanio's relationship in the opening scene.