The Little Businessman

Written by Harper Weissburg & illustrated by Aleksa Kirsteins
Project Introduction

Throughout the course of our Shakespeare Seminar we have read many plays and critical essays, and practiced applying the value and meaning in a modern context. Although at first glance the lessons in the Merchant of Venice seem too mature for a grade school audience; however, we thought differently. Woven into the mature themes of sexuality and religious hypocrisy lays the theme of tolerance. For our children’s story, we have selectively focused the play to make the value of accepting differences the central theme, enhancing its relevance for our younger audience.

We believe that this creative adaptation of The Merchant of Venice for a younger audience will use the genius of Shakespeare to communicate the universal value of acceptance. Shylock’s exist all around us. Centering our story on Shylock’s alienation from a society who rejected him for his religious identity, we hope to illustrate for our grade school readers that changing yourself to please others doesn’t achieve tolerance. Children should not be asked to choose between accepting who they are and belonging to their community. Shakespeare’s tales offer an entertaining and memorable vehicle through which we may foster a more welcoming and inclusive Greensboro Day School community.
Act I

Antonio slouched in his desk, wondering where his smile disappeared to. Three full days had passed and he just couldn’t figure out why he was feeling so gloomy. When his friends asked “Ay Tony, why are you so sad?” He only shook his head and shrugged, keeping his eyes on the ground. He just wasn’t feeling right.

Out of everyone in the third grade, Antonio was Mrs. Stein’s best student. Ever since first grade, he spent the summers running lemonade stands around town. There was one in his neighborhood, one by the library, and one by the grocery store. Everyone knew about his lemonade because it was the best. It was crisp, refreshing, and only fifty cents a glass! Everybody loved it so much that Tony became the wealthiest third grader in his elementary school.

Everything was going fine until a few days ago when he got a letter in the mail. It said that his lemonade made some of customers sick, and they wanted their money back.

Later at lunch, his friends kept asking him, “Does your frown have to do with the rumor about your lemonade stand because you made people sick?” But Antonio shook his head.

“Money is just money – I wish it was just the money making me sad, but I can tell that it’s something different, and I don’t know what it is.”

Everyone kept asking him the same question over and over, and Tony felt exhausted because this was the third day in a row people kept asking him. He said goodbye to his friends and found a picnic table further away from everyone where it was quiet. He leaned his head against the cool, splintered wood.

Suddenly, someone sat next to him and squeezed him in a tight hug before Tony could say anything. Without having to look up, he already knew it as Bassanio, his best friend since Kindergarten. Tony wrapped an arm around his best friend’s shoulder. With Bassanio, Tony didn’t need to explain himself. A minute later, Bassanio released him from the hug.

Bassanio’s face was lit up with a huge smile as he tried to catch his breath.

“Tony! I need your help!” he panted.

Tony laughed at his friend, “You’re really excited – what’s the matter?”

“Tony, I’m in love!” Bassanio exclaimed, “Or... at least I think I am! Yesterday my mom drove me to the playground by her office after school, and standing under the monkey bars was Portia...”
“Who’s - ?”

“She’s perfect,” Bassanio whispered as he began to daydream about her, completely forgetting that Antonio was next to him.

Tony giggled and tapped his shoulder. “Bassanio... Bassanio... earth to Bassanio!”

“Wait, what was I saying? Oh yeah, Portia!” Bassanio stopped smiling and turned to Antonio with a serious expression. “Tony, I need your help”

“Help – with what?” Antonio asked confused.

“Well, in order to see her again I need $30 to take four different busses so I can return to the park. Tony, I really need to see her again so I can tell her how I feel!”

Antonio grinned, “Of course I’ll lend you the money! What are best friends for?”

“Thank you, thank you, and thank you!” Bassanio exclaimed as he smothered Tony in another bone-crushing hug.

Antonio gasped for breath as he wiggled out of the hug. “Bas-Bassanio!” he squeaked, “one second! Because of all the rumors about my lemonade, people haven’t been buying any which means I don’t have any money right now! We’re gonna need to borrow some from Shylock!”

Shylock was the only Jewish boy in Mrs. Stein’s class, and his only friends were the kids he would lend milk money to when they forgot. Sometimes he would lend money to other people though, as long as they paid him back.

Bassanio and Tony hurried inside to find Shylock sitting alone at his desk eating lunch. He ignored them as they approached.

“What do you want?” Shylock muttered without looking at them.

“Hi Shylock... can we... can we borrow some money?” Bassanio asked hopefully.

Shylock raised an eyebrow curiously. “Oh look how the tables have turned! I will lend you the money, but first you need to be my friend.”

Tony crossed his arms, feeling frustrated. “Shylock, we need thirty dollars. Not a Jewish friend.”

Shylock sighed and looked away. “Fine, I will bring the $30 to school tomorrow and you will have exactly one month to repay me... or else.”
“Or else what?” Tony questioned.

“If you break our deal, I get your entire baseball card collection” Shylock declared with a triumphant glare in his eye.

“Shylock, I will shake on the deal because I know I will be able to pay you back, but I have to say this is strictly business.”

Shylock and Tony shook firmly on their agreement.

As they shook, Shylock thought about what Antonio said. “Strictly business...?” Shylock thought to himself “STRICTLY BUSINESS? How dare he say those words to me? Only two months ago Tony spat on me, during recess! Then he took my yarmulke from my head and walked around saying ‘look at me now I’m Jewish too!’”

Disgusted, Shylock gripped Tony’s hand harder and harder until Tony frowned and let go. Shylock sat down, all alone again as the classroom door closed behind Tony and Bassanio.

Act II

Meanwhile, Portia sat at home nestled against her bedroom window as the sunlight kissed her hair. Two months ago, her father sat beside her and told her that there would come a time when she’d meet a boy who would become her husband, and that he would take care of her instead of her father.
That time came faster than Portia expected. Her father grew ill soon after their conversation. He died a few days later, leaving poor Portia alone with her maid and three treasure chests that held her fate.

Although Portia hadn’t known it, her father knew that he wouldn’t live long enough to see her marry the right boy. He was a man of great wealth and power, so he left his daughter with three treasure chests: one filled with gold, one with silver, and one with lead, but only one of the three chests contained a picture of Portia in it. Her father was very smart, so to make sure that his beloved Portia dated the right boy, the only boy that would be allowed to date her had to guess which treasure chest held her picture. Since his death, many boys had tried and failed to pick the one that held her picture.

Portia was secretly thankful that none of them guessed correctly because there was only one boy she wanted to choose the right chest, and she had met him at the playground yesterday. Portia smiled to herself, and sighed happily against the window.

---

Like Portia, Jessica also longed for a boy in the other third grade class.

Jessica was Shylock’s twin sister, but they never got along. They always fought over who had to wash the dishes or who loved their parents more. Although Jessica knew that Shylock loved her, she also knew that he couldn’t stand her.

She wore long sleeve shirts to school every day to hide the Jewish star charm bracelet that belonged to their mother before she died. Jessica not only felt ashamed to be Jewish, but also wished Shylock wasn’t her brother. No one liked Shylock, especially not the Christian kids. Jessica wanted to be liked by the Christian kids more than she wanted to be Jewish.
Today, Jessica’s friends had spotted her dropping a pink post-it note into Lorenzo’s locker. They all knew Jessica had the biggest crush on Lorenzo because he played soccer, got straight A’s on his spelling tests, and smiled at her every day from across the lunchroom. However, without a cross around her neck, Lorenzo would only remain a crush because no one wanted to date a Jewish girl.

Jessica’s friends watched her hurry away, but before they could catch up to her, they spied Lorenzo. As he unfolded the note from his locker, he smiled and stuffed it into his backpack after looking around cautiously to make sure no one saw what it was or who it was from. Her friends squealed and tried to chase her, but Jessica was faster and hid in the bathroom before they could catch her.

Jessica slammed the stall door and hid her face in her hands as she began to cry, wondering if the note she had given him was a mistake.

“Why me?” she cried. “I’m nothing like Shylock! I don’t want to be Jewish. I... I... I want to be Christian.” She whispered.

Jessica sniffed and made herself stop crying. As she hurried out of the bathroom, she slammed straight into someone who caught her before she could fall.

“Lorenzo!” She gasped, but he held up a finger.

“Jessica,” he whispered, “I really like you too, and I want to be your boyfriend but we need to keep it a secret. Don’t worry, we’ll figure something out. Our friends will help.”

He winked and hurried off, leaving Jessica speechless.
At lunch, Jessica and Lorenzo’s friends cleared their mac and cheeses off the table and drew up a plan. They considered hiding Lorenzo in the bushes in front of Jessica’s house, or planning secret dates for them after school on the playground, but none of their ideas worked. Jessica would really have to distance herself from Shylock because if Shylock ever found out she was dating a Christian boy, he’d beat Lorenzo up.

Finally, Jessica came up with an idea. After school, she called her aunt and asked if she could live with her. Her aunt was her mom’s Christian stepsister, who also happened to go to the same church as Lorenzo’s family. Not only would she be able to see Lorenzo, but she would actually be able to become a Christian too!

---

That afternoon while Jessica was taking the dog out, Shylock heard someone leave a voicemail. Curious, he replayed it.

“Jessica sweetie, just in case I don’t talk to you before I pick you up, don’t forget to pack clothes you can wear to church with me Sunday morning!”

Stunned and furious, Shylock pushed the ‘end’ button so hard on the answering machine that it got stuck. His head was spinning, so he got up and walked to the playground, slamming the door behind him.

Shylock almost made it to the swing set, but accidentally tripped over the curb. Before he could get up, some boys from school laughed and hurried over.

“Hey Shylock, did you hear about Tony’s big business bust?”

“Wait—What are you talking about?” Shylock declared, brushing the dirt off his hands.

“Well, it seems like Mr. Money-Man isn’t so rich anymore. Good luck getting your money back from him!” They jeered.

Shylock looked up from his scraped knees, but before he could question them further the boys turned their backs on him and walked away laughing.
Act III

Before Shylock could hurry home and make sure Jessica didn’t leave with their aunt, he was confronted by Solanio and Salarino, who seemed to appear out of nowhere. They weren’t in his class, but he knew them because he lent milk money to them before.

“Hey Shylock!” They said at the same time.

“Hi,” Shylock muttered, trying to scoot past them.

“Where do you think you’re going?” Solanio asked, blocking his path.

“Home.” Shylock growled. “Now let me go!”

“I don’t think so!” Salarino teased, holding him back. “We want to talk!”

Shylock huffed. “About what?”

“Uhhh….” Solanio gave a strange glance at Salarino.

“Money,” Salarino shrugged, raising his eyebrows.

“Why do you care about money?” Shylock spat, trying to loosen Salarino’s grip. “I’m not even friends with you guys! Why—“

Shylock suddenly gasped and stared at them, eyes flashing.

“You,” he hissed, pointing at Solanio, “you two are here to distract me aren’t you?”

Solanio and Salarino glanced nervously at each other.

“You’re here to make sure I can’t get home in time to prevent Jessica from going to live with our Christian aunt!” Shylock shouted. “Let GO of me!”

He twisted violently and slipped out of Salarino’s grip, cursing at them. He heard them both gasp, but he didn’t care as he began sprinting as fast as he could.

Ten minutes later he exploded through the front door, gasping for breath.

“JESSICA!” he cried hoarsely. “Jessica!”

He listened desperately for a response.

“Jessica?” He whispered.

By now, he knew he was too late, and that Solanio and Salarino distracted him long enough so that Jessica could leave with their aunt.

The cold, cruel silence overwhelmed him as Shylock curled up in the middle of his bed. Tears crept down his cheek, but he didn’t care.

He was truly alone now.
“Did you hear that Antonio’s lemonade is making people sick?”

“Yeah I did! But I can’t believe it!”

“Me neither! It’s so good that I can hardly believe people are getting sick from it.”

“Well, maybe it’s not making people sick!”

The third graders around the lunch table gasped at the little girl who had spoken.

“What do you mean?” another girl asked.

“What if Antonio’s lemonade has nothing to do with making the people sick?”

There was a murmur of approval that rippled down the lunch table. In no time at all, there were many theories. Some wondered whether a bad guy was going around poisoning the lemonade, while others wondered if maybe people were just getting sick because that’s what people do.

“Well, he’s lost a lot of money no matter whose fault it is!” A boy piped up.

“Yeah! He’s going to owe Shylock big time!”

“I heard they made a bet.” Another boy said.

There was an immediate chorus demanding “what was the bet on?”

“Antonio’s entire baseball card collection.” The knowledgeable boy stated smugly. “The really old one that he brought in for show ‘n’ tell last year. The one that his great, great grandfather gave him! He says it’s worth millions but would never sell it because it means so much to him!”

Questions broke out from all sides of the lunch table and it grew so loud that no one could hear what anyone else was saying.

“Shylock wouldn’t take that away from Antonio, would he?”

“Is it really worth millions?”

“What happens if Antonio won’t give it to him? Are they gonna fight?”

There were more and more questions and the noise in the lunchroom became deafening. Then all at once, everyone was dead silent.

All eyes focused on the slim brown haired boy who had arrived late, with tear streaked red eyes.

“Of course I’m going to make sure he pays.” Shylock said hoarsely. His voice echoed around the silent lunchroom.

A lunch tray hit the linoleum with a loud crack!, making everyone jump. Shylock spun around, nearly face to face with Antonio, who was staring at him with a wounded expression. Chocolate milk flooded the floor, pooling around their feet.
“This is what I get for trying to help my best friend?” Antonio whispered coldly so that only Shylock could hear him.

“Are you kidding me?!” Antonio’s voice rose to a shout. “Jewish kids,” he exclaimed to the lunchroom, “are the meanest kind!”

“Antonio!” Shylock cried. “You--!”

“No Shylock!” Antonio shouted, cutting him off “listen to me! Shylock! SHYLOCK!”

But Shylock fled into the hallway, eyes glued to the floor. Without warning, he ran smack into someone. Shylock recognized his teacher’s magenta silk blouse, but was too scared to look up because he was afraid he might start to cry. Mrs. Stein hurried Shylock into her classroom and sat him down in the front desk as she kneeled to look at him face-to-face.

“Shylock, what’s wrong?”

Refusing to make direct eye contact, Shylock stood on top of his desk clenched his fist by his side and tried to make her understand.

“Mrs. Stein, this baseball card collect will feed my revenge. Antonio has been mean to me time and time again. He laughs when I trip instead of helping me up. He mocks me when I get an A on tests, joking that it’s because I’m good at guessing. He shook on a deal and is making me look like a baby when he’s the chicken! And what’s his reason for treating me like this? That I am a Jew. Doesn’t a Jew have eyes? Doesn’t a Jew have hands, organs, senses, affections, passions? Don’t I eat the same Peanut Butter and Jelly sandwiches for lunch like everyone else? And don’t I miss school when I have the flu like everyone else? Don’t I also wear shorts in the summer and a coat in the winter just like a Christian would? If you tickle me, won’t I laugh? If he wrongs me why can’t I have revenge? Why can a Christian be mean and make it funny but when a Jew is mean everyone says he’s a bully? Christians like Antonio have taught me what it means to be a bully.”

Breathing hard, he finally looked at Mrs. Stein. She was watching him with a strange expression, and her hands covered her mouth. Her eyes seemed to be holding back tears.

“…Oh my,” Mrs. Stein exhaled, amazed at everything she just heard. “Shylock, maybe we should talk to Principal Allan about Antonio’s behavior.” She suggested quietly.

Shylock clenched his jaw. “Please Mrs. Stein, do NOT tell the Principal! I’m begging you! Meeting with Principal Allan will just give Tony further reason to bully me.”

Mrs. Stein looked at him sadly before sighing. “Okay, Shylock. We will keep this between you and I, but if the problem persists I’ll tell him. No excuses. Alright?”
After a moment, Shylock nodded and finally climbed down from the table. “Alright.” He whispered.

Antonio swallowed, trying to get rid of the lump in his throat, and backed away from the door before Mrs. Stein or Shylock could see him.

--

Shylock left Mrs. Stein’s room feeling slightly better, hurrying to art class to make up for lost time, but he was halted by his friend Tubal.

“Hey, are you doing okay?” Tubal asked, patting Shylock’s shoulder.

Shylock shook his head. “No…” he sighed. Suddenly he clenched his fist. “No. I’m not doing okay even a little bit. This is all Antonio’s fault!” He snarled.

“I thought Antonio didn’t have anything to do with Jessica moving out.” Tubal said, confused.

“He doesn’t! Well, he does! I don’t know! Everything’s his fault somehow!” Shylock said, raising his voice.

“Whoa, take it easy!” Tubal said, stopping Shylock. “If it makes you feel any better, I meant to tell you that I saw Jessica yesterday night.”

“What?! Where? When?”

“My family and I went out to eat at the mall last night, and I saw her there with your aunt. They had a bunch of bags of clothes with them. They looked really happy.”

Shylock grabbed Tubal by the shoulders. “TUBAL! Think hard! Did you… did you see a bracelet on her wrist?”

Tubal shook his head. “I didn’t see anything but luckily…” he trailed off.

Shylock nodded. “Show me.”

Tubal opened his fist to show the gold Jewish star charm bracelet in his hand.

“I found it on the sidewalk outside of school. I’m really sorry, Shylock.” He dropped the charm bracelet gently into Shylock’s palm.

Shylock stared at the bracelet. “I can’t believe her! That was our mother’s and she treats it like a piece of trash. One day, being Jewish will mean something to her, but when that day comes it will be too late.” He safely tucked the bracelet away.

---

After school, Bassanio used the money borrowed from Shylock to buy bus fare and went to the playground, hoping to find Portia.
At first he went to the monkey bars where he first saw her, but there was no one there. Feeling disheartened, Bassanio turned around, and there standing next to the big blue slide was Portia.

He hesitated for a moment before going up to her—what would he say? What would she do?

“Come on, Bassanio, man up!” he muttered to himself.

He took a deep breath and walked up to her.

“Hi Portia we met yesterday – I’m Bassanio.”

“Don’t be silly! Of course I remember who you are!” She smiled. “In fact yesterday, you left before I could ask you to come over for a play date. Is it too late to ask now?”

Bassanio could hardly contain his excitement. “Yeah! I would love to!” he exclaimed.

“Follow me!” She laughed, skipping backwards.

Bassanio and Portia walked beside each other through the neighborhood towards Portia’s house. Whenever their hands would accidentally brush against each other’s they’d start giggling and smile at one another.

After two hours of playing soccer in Portia’s backyard Bassanio was both exhausted and nervous. They sat at Portia’s kitchen table, snacking on some goldfish.

“Bassanio, why are you so quiet? You’ve gone from being a chatterbox to a mute.”

Bassanio fidgeted nervously, avoiding eye contact with her.

“Portia, I... I... I have to stop pretending. I want to be your boyfriend... a lot.” He didn’t dare look at her because he was afraid of her reaction.

“Oh Bassanio! I want that too but sadly it’s not as easy for me to say “yes” as it is for other girls.”

Bassanio looked at her, confused but hopeful. “You want to? Why can’t you then?”

Portia seemed very sad. She turned away from him to stare out the window.

“My father died two months ago,” she said softly. “When he passed away, he left me with three treasure chests, and one of the three contains my picture. Whoever picked the chest with my picture in it would be allowed to date me. It was my dad’s special way of leaving this world knowing I’d end up with the right person by fate.”

---

After art class was recess, and for once Shylock was sitting on a picnic bench by the playground rather than alone in Ms. Stein’s classroom. He was occupying himself with breaking woodchips and stacking them like linkin logs on the table.

“Hey Shylock, how’re ya holding up?” Tubal asked, sitting next to him.

Shylock shrugged. “’m alright... I guess,” He mumbled.
Suddenly, Solanio and Salarino ran up and leaped on the table, making both Tubal and Shylock jump.

“Hey guys!” they panted at the same time. “Guess what?”

Shylock rolled his eyes and turned to them. “What?”

“You’re gonna be so mad!” said Solanio.

“Antonio’s lemonade made even more people sick!” exclaimed Salarino.

“That’s like, twelve whole people now!” Solanio added.

“Really?” Shylock asked.

“I swear on it.” Salarino grinned as he tried to catch his breath.

“Hmm…” Shylock leaned back against the table, rubbing his chin. “Actually, I’m not mad at all. Thanks for the info guys.”

“No problem!” Solanio and Salarino said at the same time. They high-fived each other and jumped off the table, making the wood shake as they sprinted back to the playground.

“Shylock, why doesn’t it make you mad anymore?” Tubal asked. “I thought you’d be furious!”

“Not anymore, Tubal,” Shylock said. “Because this means that I can start planning my revenge.”

“Revenge?” Tubal questioned, raising his eyebrows.

Shylock narrowed his eyes. “Precisely.”

“What are you going to do? You’re not actually going to hurt him are you?” Tubal whispered, looking around to make sure no one heard them.

---

Meanwhile, at Portia’s house, Bassanio couldn’t figure out why she wouldn’t let him go ahead and pick one of the treasure chests.

“C’mon Portia! At least let me see them!” Bassanio exclaimed.

Portia crossed her arms over her chest as she blocked him. “No.” she stated.

They were standing in front of two, huge old oak doors.

“Why not?” Bassanio whined, trying to reach past her to grab the door handle.

Portia smacked his arm away “Because... because I want to spend time with you first!”
“But we just spent a lot of time playing soccer in the backyard! I want to be your boyfriend now!” Bassanio exclaimed.

“No! Bassanio—“

“What, Portia?”

Bassanio stopped trying to grab at the door handle, noticing that Portia suddenly looked upset. “What, Portia?” he asked again, softer.

“What if you choose the wrong one?” she asked.

“So what if I do?”

“I’ll never be allowed to see you again,” she whispered.

Bassanio’s heart plummeted as the new information sunk in.

“So... If I choose the wrong one, I’ll never get to see you again?”

“Yes.” Portia nodded, “that’s why I want us to spend more time together, because it might be the last time I ever get to see you if you choose the wrong treasure chest.”

Bassanio sighed, but then smiled as Portia grabbed his hand.

“Let’s play soccer!” she said.

---

What Shylock’s classmates didn’t know was that time had run out for Antonio to pay Shylock back. With a devious grin painted on his face, Shylock knocked on the intimidating wooden door leading to Principal Allan’s office.

Shylock heard a low-toned “enter” from inside. Shylock straightened up and walked into his office where he confidently made himself comfortable in the chair facing Principal Allan.

“Principal Allan, I was scared to come to you at first but the situation has changed and I need your help. Antonio has bullied me since he set his sights on believing Jews and Christians are two completely different breed of people. It’s just not fair!”

Shocked Principal Allan asks: “What would you like me to do?”

“Help me make things right. Recently Antonio and I made a deal, and now Antonio isn’t living up to his end.”

Confused the Principal investigates further: “What does Antonio owe you exactly?”

Satisfied Shylock retorts: “His baseball card collection.”

“Hmmm... well Shylock before we can proceed you, Antonio, and I are going to need to sit down and lay out what comes next.”
“Perfect.”

On Shylock’s way back to class he stopped by Antonio’s locker glancing over his right shoulder then his left to see if anyone was watching. He slipped a note for Antonio that simply read: “time has run out.”

Despite Portia’s pleas to play outside longer, the time had come. Dinner was approaching quickly, and Bassanio knew his mother would be growing worried and launching a search party to go look for him.

“Portia, pretty please—lead me to the treasure chests. I can’t wait any longer,” he begged, picking up the soccer ball at his feet.

The wind picked up in the afternoon sun, making her hair tangle across her face before she could answer. Portia brushed it out of her eyes with a sad smile. “Fine Bassanio, follow me.”

She led him inside down a dark, glossy hallway. Together, they pushed two heavy wooden doors open that revealed a small room with three different chests placed in front of a massive window.

“Oh I can’t watch…” Portia whispered anxiously, “I’ll wait here.”

“Wish me luck…” Bassanio muttered.

Portia gave him a shy thumbs up and curled up in the far corner of the room.

With a deep breath, Bassanio steadied himself and stepped up to the treasure chests. They were very beautiful, and each had its own inscription.

The chest made with gold read: “who chooses me shall gain what many men desire.”

The chest made with silver read: “who chooses me shall get as much as he deserves.”

The last chest was made with lead, and it read: “who chooses me must give and risk all he hath.”

Before making the greatest decision Bassanio had yet to face in his nine-year old life, he took a careful step back and thought deeply.

“If I had Portia then I would be the wealthiest boy in the world – there would be no need for gold. If I had Portia I would have more than I could ever deserve – there would be no need for silver. However, lead... lead would be a risk. But love is a risk!” Bassanio realized “and therefore I will choose the lead-filled chest!” he said out loud.
Carefully Bassanio opened the lid, and with complete joy, lifted Portia’s beautiful portrait from inside the chest. Bassanio gripped the portrait with both hands and lifted the picture above his head as if to say: “Portia was worth the risk.” There was a burst of laughter from the corner of the room where Portia had curled up.

“Bassanio!” Portia cried happily, “You chose the right one!” she wrapped her arms around him and hugged him tight.

“Portia I’m so happy!” Bassanio exclaimed. “You are totally worth the risk!”

“Come! Let’s feast!” She laughed as the maids began cooking a great feast.

It was a feast to end all feasts, but unfortunately the happy couple’s joyous occasion was quickly interrupted by a messenger.

One of Bassanio’s friends burst through Portia’s front door sweating and gasping hard for breath.

“Bassanio... something... bad... has happened!” He panted as he doubled over.

Fear clenched at Bassanio’s heart instantly. He kneeled beside his exhausted friend to hear him better.

“What – what is it? Tell me!”

“Antonio told me where you are, because he is in great trouble. He asked me to give you this letter.”

The tired boy dropped a piece of notebook paper onto Bassanio’s palm. It crumpled and warm from being squeezed tightly in the messenger’s hand.

Bassanio reached for Portia’s hand before he reached for the letter. He looked at her and explained: “Although you are my girlfriend, Antonio has been my best friend since Kindergarten. He means a lot to me, so I might need your help.”

In response, Portia squeezed Bassanio’s hand tighter and nodded for him to read the letter aloud. Bassanio cleared his throat.

“Dear Bassanio,

Hopefully you are reading this standing next to Portia and everything has worked out in your favor. I hope that’s the case because it would mean what’s about to happen was worth it. It seems Shylock has turned me in to Principal Allan, and the three of us are meeting tomorrow. Shylock thinks I went sour on my deal and have no way of repaying him because of the rumors floating about school about my business going bad. But the problem is that Shylock doesn’t realize is that the rumors aren’t true! It turns out my lemonade wasn’t what was causing the illness – it was the cookies sold at my neighbor’s bake sale which are next to my lemonade stands. Regardless, I don’t think money will be enough to quench Shylock’s thirst for revenge. I’m scared Bassanio. My baseball card collection is all I have other than your friendship.”
Quietly Bassanio paused when he finished reading and stared at the page in his hand. He was afraid to look up and meet Portia’s eyes.

He looked up when Portia gently let go of his hand and turned to face him.

“Bassanio, what are you waiting for? GO! Help your friend! I’ll take care of the messenger. When everything works out I’ll be right here waiting for you, but your best friend needs you right now. If Antonio means a lot to you then by golly he means a lot to me too!” With that she grabbed him by the shoulders and made him stand up straight.

Bassanio couldn’t believe what he was hearing, but he didn’t have time to lose. With a quick kiss on Portia’s cheek he threw his backpack over his shoulder and rushed home.

Act IV

The next day came much too soon.

Tension built up in the office, becoming nearly unbearable as Principal Allen and Shylock waited for Antonio to arrive. The only sound beating louder than the impatient tapping of the Principal’s foot was the creaky wall clock. When Antonio knocked on the office door, they both jerked, startled at the loud noise.

“Come in, Antonio,” he called. “You’ve kept us waiting.”

Antonio entered slowly and cautiously, staring from Shylock to Principal Allan in order to assess the situation. Before he could read either’s feelings, Principal Allan asked him to take the seat beside Shylock’s in front of his desk.

Principal Allan broke the painful silence.

“Antonio, it has come to my attention that you have been bullying Shylock here. I have also been informed that you recently made a deal with him as well, and that you took advantage of his favor to you. What do you have to say for yourself?”

Antonio gripped the leather armrests of the chair, struggling to find the right words to say.

“Sir, in all due respect, the rumors are not true,” He declared calmly. “I can pay Shylock back. He’s being stubborn just like all the other Jewish kids and refusing the money. He’s the one causing trouble by insisting that I hand over MY baseball card collection. And he knows how much it means to me!”

Before Shylock had the chance to argue, someone burst through the Principal’s door.

To Antonio’s disbelief, Bassanio rushed between their chairs and grabbed the Principal’s desk.
“Sir it was all my fault Antonio did nothing!” He gasped all in one breath. “And—and—I won’t let Shylock have Antonio’s baseball card collection! I just won’t! If money isn’t good enough for Shylock then maybe my poster signed by Michael Jordan is!"

With that, Bassanio knelt beside Antonio’s seat, and tried to catch his breath.

Under his breath Bassanio whispered “Tony, I got you into this mess, and as your best friend, I’ll help you out of it.”

Even quieter, Antonio replied “Thank you, but it’s too late...”

To Antonio’s annoyance, Shylock noticed their quiet exchange.

“What about ME?” Shylock cried. “Hello? Why does no one ever come to my rescue? You think this is all about me being greedy. You think this is about the money. Well, you are all wrong. Hate is the reason I feel and act this way. Every single time you look down on me or call me a gross Jew, revenge becomes sweeter and sweeter. You taught me what it means to be a bully Antonio!”

“Alright, alright... Please calm down Shylock.” Principal Allen rose from his chair to gain their attention. “We all understand the situation at hand.”

“Thank you,” Antonio interrupted sarcastically.

“Nevertheless,” Principal Allan continued, “Antonio, you did make a deal with another student, and this school has an honor code which means no students are allowed to lie, cheat or steal. If you do not hand over your baseball card collection then I will expel you for stealing what is rightfully Shylock’s.”

“Yes!” Shylock suddenly exclaimed, happily rushing over to hug the surprised principal. “Finally somebody is on my side! Justice has been served today!”

Principal Allen peeled Shylock carefully off his waist. “Okay now... Antonio, do you have the baseball card collection?”

“No, it’s in the special glass case I keep it in at home.” Antonio mumbled as Bassanio patted him on the back sadly.

“Please call someone to bring it over.”

As Antonio rummaged through his backpack for his cellphone, the door to the principal’s office burst open again, and they all turned to look at the new boy in surprise.

Little did they know that the new boy was Portia in disguise.

“Excuse me sir, can I please have a word with you?” Portia asked in her deep, boy voice.

“I’m sorry, but this is a private meeting between myself and these three. Goodbye.”

Principal Allan stood up to walk Portia out of his office, but in the blink of an eye she ducked under his arm and walked further into the office.
“Sir, I know something that no one in this room knows, so please let me stay.” She stated. The principal glared at her, but reluctantly let her stay. “So be it.” He said.

Portia shuffled closer to Shylock, trying to keep her basketball shorts from falling. She adjusted the baseball cap she had borrowed to make sure it was hiding all her hair. Then she cleared her throat.

“Shylock, mercy is not overrated. This school is a better place because of mercy. Mercy leads to justice. Therefore, Jew, although you asked for justice, you don’t really know what it means! Shylock, please just say you’re sorry already! Take some of the blame so that you can move on without a heart weighed down by hatred—”

“I will never forgive a bully!” Shylock shouted, interrupting her.

“Oh oh, I wish you hadn’t said that Shylock…” Portia said shaking her head. “Principal Allan, before you force Antonio to hand over his baseball card collection, please take a look at page ten of the school handbook and read rule number forty-seven aloud.”

Principal Allan raised his eyebrows at the request but opened a drawer, shuffling some papers aside before pulling out a copy of the handbook. He opened it to page ten.

“Rule number forty-seven: students are not allowed to lend money on school grounds without a signed note from their parents.”

No one spoke.

All eyes looked towards Shylock.

Portia took advantage of the silent shock and snuck out of the room without anyone noticing, quietly congratulating herself. After Bassanio had abruptly left last night, she tried with all her might to do her math homework but she just couldn’t. All she could think about was how scared Bassanio looked when he left her house with the messenger’s note in his hand. Without thinking twice, she had thrown on her brother’s clothing and bolted out the door with a copy of the school’s rulebook in hand.

Back in the principal’s office the tables had turned, and Shylock found himself at Antonio’s mercy. His heart sunk to his feet in anticipation of what Antonio could possible do to him after everything Shylock had just put him through.

Shylock could feel them staring at him as he waited in the painful silence for Antonio to say something. He heard Antonio take a sharp breath.

“Well, clearly I’m not happy,” Antonio stated carefully, “but then again I’m also not Shylock. I won’t sink to his level. Principal Allan— for what it’s worth, I forgive Shylock, so please do
not put him in detention or expel him for violating this school rule. I can tell he didn’t know anything about it.”

Shylock felt his jaw drop, and his head snapped up to meet Antonio’s steady gaze. He looked at Principal Allen, who looked equally startled as well.

“Wait… Antonio… You forgive him?” asked the principal sounding confused, “As your Principal I will respect your request, but…” the principal leaned over the desk and stared at the two boys straight in the eye, “I never want to see either of you in this office again. Understood?”

“Deal!” Antonio and Shylock clamored simultaneously.

Shylock threw his backpack over his shoulder and raced out the door with Antonio, neither of them looking back.

Once they were clear of the principal’s office, Antonio stopped abruptly and blocked his path. Shylock immediately clenched his jaw, expecting the worst.

“Look Shylock, maybe I have forgiven you in front of Principal Allan, but I will never truly forgive you so long as you are a Jew.”

Shylock narrowed his eyes in confusion. “Are you… asking me to become a Christian?” he stuttered quietly.

Antonio shook his head. “Shylock, I’m not asking you to, I’m telling you to. If you do not, you will always be worth less than a piece of trash in my mind.”

Shylock sighed, long and heavily. He bowed his head, wondering what to do.

After a minute, he looked up.

Antonio caught his eye smiled and nodded approvingly. He gave Shylock a friendly pat on the shoulder as he walked off to class with a confident stride.

Shylock watched Antonio’s retreating figure until he disappeared down the hall. As soon as Antonio was out of sight, his knees became weak, and he leaned against a wall until he couldn’t stand anymore. When his legs gave out, he let himself slide down the brick wall and onto the floor, hugging his knees tight to his chest. Drained of energy and free will, Shylock gave a small sob, unable to keep from crying any longer. Hot tears streaked down his cheeks—tears for his sister and tears for the fear of what life would be like if he wasn’t Jewish.

Even before the last tear fell, he decided that on his way home he would stop at a nearby church and ask for a baptism. Shylock never wanted to be a Christian, unlike Jessica, but he had to be.

In the silence of the dim, dingy hallway, Shylock waited for his tears to dry before heaving himself up. He reached into his pocket and pulled something out, smiling sadly.

“Well…Maybe…just maybe I won’t be alone anymore.” He whispered as he dropped a tiny, warm Jewish star charm, listening to it roll away as he walked to class alone.