

Jessica's first appearance

Look at the lines below which are all spoken by Jessica, in Act 2, Scene 3: the first four are to Lancelot and the last four are after he's left.

1	Our house is hell
2	... and thou a merry devil
3	Didst rob it of some taste of tediousness.
4	And so farewell: I would not have my father See me in talk with thee.
5	Alack, what heinous sin is it in me To be ashamed to be my father's child!
6	I am not to his manners.
7	... I shall end this strife,
8	Become a Christian and thy loving wife.

Now discuss the questions below, each of which corresponds to the lines above:

1. What does the word 'hell' suggest about what Jessica thinks of her home life?
2. Look up the word 'oxymoron' and then decide whether you think the phrase 'merry devil' fits the definition of oxymoron. What might it mean that Jessica calls Lancelot a 'devil'?
3. Think about what the word 'rob' means: is it something good or bad? Why does Jessica use the word 'taste' to describe her boredom?
4. Why do you think Shakespeare has separated the sentence 'I would not have my father / See me in talk with thee'? Does it possibly imply a pause at the end of the line to reveal two meanings?
5. How does Jessica feel about her unhappiness? What words highlight the depth of her anguish? Consider the importance of religion in Shakespeare's time.
6. What is it that Jessica doesn't like? You need to write more than that it is Shylock's 'manners'.
7. Which word shows that Jessica has been suffering for a while with this unhappiness? How does the audience know that this is more than an afternoon's mood?
8. Why are these two plans of Jessica's so shocking? Think both about Shakespeare's audience and a modern day one.

**Extension activity:**

Explore the themes of family; religion; love that are becoming prominent through the play. Try to create an illustrated diagram of these themes with quotations. Leave room to add more as you study the play.