Character list

*2 Main Characters*

 **Antonio:** The wealthy and respected merchant of Venice. Best friends with Bassanio and often supports him with loans. At the start of the play, all of his money is tied up with his 5 ships which are at sea. Because of this, he must take a loan of 3,000 ducats from Shylock, a Jewish money leader, who he has mistreated in the past. Antonio is considered a “good Christian”. He is something of a mercurial figure, often inexplicably melancholy, generous and “merciful”.

**Shylock:** A highly intelligent Jewish moneylender in Venice. Hated by Christians because Shylock is seen as an inhuman monster who’s obsessed with money and trusts almost no one with his possessions. He confounds money with love. He loans Antonio money with a serious condition (3 months to pay or he owes him a pound of flesh). He’s angry at his daughter for her betrayal.

*2 Central Characters*

**Bassanio:** A gentleman of Venice, and a kinsman and dear friend to Antonio. He is honourable, honest and faithful to friends. Bassanio’s love for the wealthy Portia leads this spendthrift to borrow money from Shylock with Antonio as his guarantor. Bassanio proves himself a worthy suitor, correctly identifying the casket that contains Portia’s portrait

**Portia:** A wealthy heiress from Belmont. Portia’s beauty is matched only by her intelligence and humour. Bound by a clause in her father’s will that forces her to marry whichever suitor chooses correctly among three caskets (gold, silver, lead). Portia longs to marry her true love, Bassanio. The clever and sound judgement Portia disguises herself as a young male law clerk in an attempt to save Antonio from Shylock’s knife.

*4 Secondary characters*

***Balthasar:*** *Portia’s servant, whom she dispatches (disguises as a lawyer – her foil) to get the appropriate materials from Doctor Bellario.*

 **Jessica:** She is a very beautiful, wise, and a charming girl with a strong sense of humour and poetical nature. Although she is Shylock’s daughter, Jessica hates life in her father’s house, and elopes with the young Christian gentleman, Lorenzo. The fate of her soul is often in doubt: rebels against her father and her religion. The sale of a ring given to her father by her mother is excessively callous.

 **Lorenzo:** Lorenzo is a rather passive character. He is a Christian, and in love with Jessica. He is friends of Bassanio and Antonio. He is careless with money. He schemes to help Jessica escape from her father’s house, and he eventually elopes with her to Belmont.

 **Gratiano:** Friends of Antonio, Lorenzo and Bassanio. He accompanies Bassanio to Belmont. A very talkative and witty young man, Gratiano is Shylock’s most vocal and insulting critic during the trial. While Bassanio courts Portia, Gratiano falls in love with and eventually weds Portia’s lady-in-waiting, Nerissa.

** Nerissa:** Portia’s lady-in-waiting (maid) and confidante (companion). She is intuitive, intelligent, quick witted and sharp-tongued who marries Gratiano.

**Stephano:** Nerissa's disguise as 'Balthazar's law clerk while escorting Portia.

**Old Gobbo:**  Launcelot’s father, also a servant in Venice (shows poverty and humour).

**Launcelot Gobbo:** Bassanio’s servant. A comical, clownish figure who is especially adept at making puns. Launcelot leaves Shylock’s service in order to work for Bassanio.

**The three Sallies - Salarino, Solanio, Salerio:**

Salarino and Solanio are Venetian gentlemen, and friends to Antonio, Bassanio, and Lorenzo. Salarino escorts the newlyweds Jessica and Lorenzo to Belmont, and returns with Bassanio and Gratiano for Antonio’s trial. He is often almost indistinguishable from his companion Solanio. Salerio is a messenger from Venice. Some scholars believe Salarino and Salerio are the same person.

**Prince of Morocco:** A Moorish prince who seeks Portia’s hand in marriage. The prince of Morocco asks Portia to ignore his dark countenance and seeks to win her by picking one of the three caskets. Certain that the casket reflects Portia’s beauty and stature, the prince of Morocco picks the gold chest, which proves to be incorrect (suitor to Portia).

**Prince of Arragon:** An arrogant Spanish nobleman who also attempts to win Portia’s hand by picking a casket. Like the prince of Morocco, however, the prince of Arragon chooses unwisely. He picks the silver casket, which gives him a message calling him an idiot instead of Portia’s hand (suitor to Portia).

**The duke of Venice:** The ruler of Venice, who presides over Antonio’s trial. Although a powerful man, the duke’s state is built on respect for the law, and he is unable to help Antonio.

**Tubal:** A Jew in Venice, and one of Shylock’s friends.

**Doctor Bellario:** A wealthy Paduan lawyer and Portia’s cousin. Doctor Bellario never appears in the play, but he gives Portia’s servant the letters of introduction needed for her to make her appearance in court.

*Source:* [*http://www.sparknotes.com/shakespeare/merchant/characters.html*](http://www.sparknotes.com/shakespeare/merchant/characters.html)*, modified by Mme Lagrandeur*