

These notes are for:

- Upper Secondary
- 13+ years

Key Learning Areas:

- English
- Drama
- History

Example of:

- imaginative text
- fiction (graphic novel)
- aesthetic use of language
- multi-modal communication

Experience of:

- visual literacy
- the canon
- adaptation
- social, gender & cultural perspectives

Values addressed:

- understanding, tolerance & inclusion
- justice
- honesty & trustworthiness
- romantic love

*Notes may be downloaded and printed for regular classroom use only.

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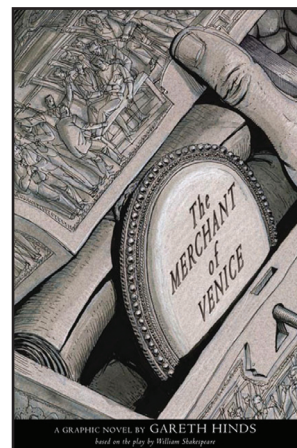
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"Of late, there have been many unsuccessful attempts to adapt Shakespeare into the graphic novel format; Hind's beautiful new offering now sets the standard that others will strive to meet." *Kirkus Reviews*

The Merchant of Venice: Graphic Novel

The Merchant of Venice: Graphic Novel

By Gareth Hinds
ISBN: 978 0 763630 25 6
ARRP: \$19.95
NZRRP \$24.99
No. of Pages: 80



Outline:

This is the familiar tale of young Bassanio, who, to win the love of fair Portia, entangles his dearest friend, Antonio, in a dangerous bargain with the moneylender Shylock. Only Bassanio's heartfelt efforts – and a clever intervention by Portia – will save Antonio.

Told in graphic novel format, Gareth Hinds transports the story into contemporary Venice, providing readers with a fresh way to view the characters and events, while maintaining the tension and playfulness of Shakespeare's original story. Through clever staging, Hinds retains much of the Elizabethan flavour of the language, and the dynamic visuals suggest that we are watching a performance rather than just reading words on a page.

Author/Illustrator information – Gareth Hinds

Gareth Hinds is the creator of *Beowulf: Graphic Novel* and other graphic novels based on classic works. Of *The Merchant of Venice: Graphic Novel*, he says "I find the fairytale symbolism and ethical dilemmas of this play compelling, and I wanted to use the graphic novel form to present them to a modern audience."

Gareth Hinds has a BFA in illustration from the Parsons School of Design and also has over 10 years experience in the video game industry, having worked on games such as *Ratatouille* and *The Incredibles*. He currently lives in Massachusetts, USA.

Notes prepared by – Lindsay Williams

Lindsay Williams taught in state and private schools for 25 years, 16 of those as a Head of English. He has been involved in a range of committees providing advice on the development of national and state English curriculums. He has written classroom activities on *The Red Shoe* for the National Reading Day website in 2007, online resources for Film Australia's digital learning site and the curriculum package for the ACTF's *Lockie Leonard* series. Lindsay lectures pre-service English teachers at Griffith University and, in 2003, the ETAQ presented him with the Peter Botsman Memorial Award for contributions to English. He has presented workshops at many seminars and conferences, including the State Conference of the English Teachers' Association (NSW).

How to use these notes:

These teachers' notes assume that the graphic novel will be studied in connection with a close reading of the original Shakespearean text. To appeal to a broad curriculum, notes have also been categorised into the areas Before Reading the Text, Reading and Viewing, Listening and Speaking, and Writing and Representing.

Outcomes & Activities

Before Reading the Text

- A student responds critically and personally to a text.
- A student analyses and describes language features and forms, and how the structure of texts shape meaning and influence responses.
- A student analyses the effect of medium and technology on meaning.

- Read and discuss the original Shakespearean play, *The Merchant of Venice*.

- Carry out research:

- (a) What is a graphic novel?
- (b) How is reading a graphic novel similar to and different from reading a play script? For example, how can you tell when one scene finishes and another begins? How does the reader know who is talking and in what order? How is the passing of time marked?
- (c) Compose a short piece of dialogue in script form. Re-create this in a one page graphic novel style. How has the dialogue and description changed? What has been discovered from this process?

Reading and Viewing

- A student analyses and describes language features and forms, and how the structure of texts shape meaning and influence responses.
- To respond critically and personally a student engages with the details of the text.
- A student demonstrates knowledge and understanding of the relationships among texts.

- *The Merchant of Venice* is a play meant to be performed rather than read. In what ways is reading this graphic novel like watching a performance?
- In most graphic novels (and comics), there is usually a white space between the panels called the gutter. According to comic expert Scott McCloud, 'the gutter plays host to much of the magic and mystery' of comics. He continues: 'Here in the limbo of the gutter, human imagination takes two separate images and transforms them into a single idea.' And yet, Hinds has his frames butting tight up against each other. What effect does this have? Copy a page of the text, cut out the frames and paste them on to a white piece of paper with a half centimetre gutter between each frame. What difference does this make to our readings?
- What techniques does Hinds use to make the transition between scenes easy to identify? Were these effective?
- How does Hinds use visual design elements to influence the readers' interpretation of characters and events? (Look at such features as: costuming, gesture, facial expression, space, (camera) angle, 'shot type' and lines/vectors.) Compare the use of visual features in different scenes – see the worksheet attached.

- Students read the author's note on page 69. How successful was Hinds's gradual shift from 'more modern prose to unedited Shakespearean verse'?
- Compare the dramatic personae of the original play and Hinds's version. What scenes and characters has Hinds cut? What are the effects of these cuts?
- Many of the speeches have been reduced in length. How do these changes to the textual context of lines influence your interpretations?
- What effect does the use of greyscale rather than colour have on readers and their interpretations?
- The geographical setting for the play (Venice) is the same but the time has changed. When is Hinds's version set? How do you know – what are the visual clues? What effect does this change have on readers' reactions to the events and characters? What effect does this have on our readings of such aspects of the play as references to slavery and the treatments of Shylock and the Prince of Morocco?
- Venice is a spectacular city and could overwhelm the story and characters. How successful has Hinds been in maintaining our focus on the latter?
- Students examine the courtroom scenes (pages 39-58) in detail. What is the effect of the transition from the detailed drawing of the street scene, to the narrow, crowded passageways and entry into the courtroom itself? Why are the officers of the Court of Justice masked? After the establishing scenes, how does Hinds return the reader's focus to the human drama being played out in the court?
- Students study the diagram on page 70. Working in small groups, they work out the significance of this representation of the play and discuss how this might have influenced the shape of Hinds's graphic novel.

Outcomes & Activities

Reading and Viewing Continued . . .

- View a film version of *The Merchant of Venice* (for example, the 2004 version directed by Michael Radford – see websites over the page). What are the additional elements which this was able to draw on in order to communicate the interpretations of the director, actors, sound and artistic designers etc.?
- Students discuss the following: In your judgement, which was more satisfying and why – reading the play script of *The Merchant of Venice*, reading a graphic novel, or viewing a film/stage production? Alternatively, were there particular advantages and disadvantages of each format?
- Compare *The Merchant of Venice* with Gareth Hinds's previous graphic novel, an adaptation of *Beowulf*. What similarities and differences in technique can you identify? What might be the effect of the differences in approach and technique?



Listening & Speaking

- A student uses the imagination to develop ideas and experience into text, demonstrating a control of language.
 - A student demonstrates knowledge and understanding of the relationships among texts.
 - A student analyses and describes language features and forms, and how the structure of texts shape meaning and influence responses.
 - A student represents own ideas in imaginative, critical and interpretive media, from a range of perspectives.
 - A student develops own ideas into sustained and logical arguments for a range of audiences.
- Read *The Merchant of Venice: Graphic Novel* in Reader's Theatre style.
 - Students are split into groups to perform scenes from the play and graphic novel. One group should perform the scene using the original play script as their source; another group should use the graphic novel as the source of their performance. After watching the performances, discuss similarities and differences that emerged.
 - Students select one or more frames from the graphic novel to perform. They try saying the dialogue in different ways, noting and discussing the different effects achieved.
 - In order to explore the possible subtext of the story, have students work in groups of four to act out one or more frames from the graphic novel. Two students should speak the lines as they are written and use the gestures, facial expression etc. as drawn. The other two students can be the actors who posed for Hinds (see Acknowledgments, page 70). After the characters from the graphic novel have spoken, these 'alter egos' tell the audience what the character was actually thinking as they spoke; why, as actors, they chose particular stances, facial expressions, gestures etc.
 - Students take on role of various 'experts' (e.g. Shakespeare, Gareth Hinds, literature professor, feminist, Jewish historian etc) and take part in a panel discussion of *The Merchant of Venice*. After an initial brief speech, panel members should question and challenge other panellists. Audience members can be enrolled as journalists, make notes and ask questions.
 - Working in groups of five (one moderator and four panellists), students produce a vodcast in the style of *First Tuesday Bookclub* (ABC television; see websites below). Discuss various reactions to *The Merchant of Venice: Graphic Novel* by Gareth Hinds.
 - Students debate one of the following topics:
 - (1) The graphic novel is a legitimate art form for the interpretation of Shakespeare.
 - (2) Graphic novels help make Shakespeare relevant to modern teenagers.

Outcomes & Activities

Writing & Representing

- A student represents own ideas in imaginative, critical and interpretive media, from a range of perspectives.
 - A student uses the imagination to develop ideas and experience into text, demonstrating a control of language.
 - A student develops own ideas into sustained and logical arguments for a range of audiences.
- Individually, students write a blog in role as one of the characters in Gareth Hinds's version of the play. While some recounting of events may be necessary, students should focus on the thoughts and motivations of the character and their reactions to events. Variation: a number of students (in role as different characters) could reflect on the same scene. The different versions could then be compared and discussed.
 - Working in groups or individually, students transfer the events of the graphic novel to an Australian city or town. Re-draw a number of frames to illustrate the changes that you would make visually and to the dialogue.
 - Working in groups, students re-work the graphic novel, re-inserting missing characters and/or scenes. Alternatively, students can produce freeze frames, take digital photos of these and produce an electronic presentation (e.g. using PowerPoint or MovieMaker). Individually then, students write an explanation and evaluation of the effect of those changes.
- Individually, students write a review of *The Merchant of Venice: Graphic Novel* by Gareth Hinds and post it on your school's website, publish it in your school newspaper, or submit it to your local paper for publication.
 - Use the text in order for students to practise questions from past exam papers. For example:
 - (a) In what ways does Hinds draw you into the world of *The Merchant of Venice*?
 - (b) What aspects of *The Merchant of Venice: Graphic Novel* by Gareth Hinds had the greatest impact on you? In your response, you should reflect on both the ideas and narrative/artistic techniques used in the text.
 - (c) Identify a key scene in *The Merchant of Venice: Graphic Novel* by Gareth Hinds. Analyse the ways in which this scene reflects both the ideas and characteristics of the texts as a whole. Produce this as a speech or an online resource.
 - (d) On the basis of the distinctive features of *The Merchant of Venice: Graphic Novel* by Gareth Hinds, argue for its inclusion in a 'Top Books' list.

Note: These questions are adapted from actual HSC English questions on past papers available from the Board of Studies website: www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/hsc_exams/.

Cross-curricular Activities

Film and Television:

Using *The Merchant of Venice: Graphic Novel* by Gareth Hinds as a storyboard, students film a segment of the story.

Art:

Compare and discuss the illustration techniques used by Hinds across a range of his works.

History:

Students research the historical origins and consequences of slavery and anti-Semitism. Evaluate the historical significance of *The Merchant of Venice*.

Music:

Working individually or in groups, students scan key frames from the graphic novel and place them into an electronic presentation. Choose music to accompany the events and characters in the scenes. Play these to the class and discuss the choices made.

Science:

Students investigate whether or not a person could survive losing a 'pound of flesh'. What would have been the particular problems of surviving such an incident in Elizabethan times?

ICT – Websites

- <http://www.garethhinds.com/>
Gareth Hinds's official website.
- <http://www.sequentialart.com/archive/july00/hinds.shtml>
While not about *Merchant of Venice* specifically, this interview contains interesting background on Hinds's views of the value and challenges of the graphic novel medium.
- <http://www.sonypictures.com/classics/merchantofvenice/flash.html>
This site contains resources related to the 2004 film version directed by Michael Radford and starring Al Pacino and Jeremy Irons. Included on the site are clips, stills, story synopsis, press kit and well-researched study guide. The latter contains many valuable insights that can be applied to a reading of the graphic novel also.
- <http://www.abc.net.au/tv/firsttuesday/>
View a vodcast of an episode.

Ideas for the Library

- Set up a display of graphic novels by Gareth Hinds, including *Beowulf: Graphic Novel* and *The Merchant of Venice: Graphic Novel*. Direct students to Hinds's website.
- Display various ways that Shakespeare has been interpreted: play scripts, graphic novels, short stories, DVDs etc.
- Display other adaptations of stories, e.g. the *Alex Rider* novels by Anthony Horowitz, in novel, graphic novel, audiobook and feature film format. Hold a lunchtime forum on adaptation and the strengths of each format.

Further Reading

Other Walker Books Graphic Novels

- Horowitz, A. & Johnston, A.; illustrated by Kanako & Yuzuru (2006). *Stormbreaker: The Graphic Novel*. London: Walker Books Ltd.
- Horowitz, A. & Johnston, A.; illustrated by Kanako & Yuzuru (2007). *Point Blanc: The Graphic Novel*. London: Walker Books Ltd.
- Hinds, G. (2007). *Beowulf: Graphic Novel*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Candlewick Press.



Graphic Novel Reference Books

- Carter, J.B. (2007). *Building literacy connections with graphic novels: page by page, panel by panel*. Urbana, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English.
[Teachers explain how graphic novels can be used in the classroom to enhance literacy teaching. Of particular relevance is a chapter by Allen Webb and Brandon Guisgand, 'A multimodal approach to addressing anti-Semitism: Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist* and Will Eisner's *Fagin the Jew*'.]
- McCloud, S. (1993). *Understanding comics*. New York, New York: HarperCollins Publishers.
[This is an excellent introduction to the art and distinctive features of the graphic novel. Regarded as a classic by aficionados.]

Worksheet

Visual analysis worksheet for *The Merchant of Venice: Graphic Novel* by Gareth Hinds

Use this retrieval chart to compare the use of visual features across various scenes in the graphic novel.

Visual Elements	Act: Scene:	Act: Scene:	Act: Scene:
Objects What objects and people can you see?			
Size What size are the objects in relation to each other?			
Setting Is a setting obvious? If yes, what is it?			
Colours What are the predominant colours used?			
Position Where are objects in relation to each other? Are they in the fore-, middle- or background etc.			
'Camera' angle From what angle do the pictures appear to be drawn: high, eye level, low, bird's-eye view?			
'Shot' type What type of 'shot' has been used: close-up, medium, long, very long etc.?			
Depth of field What is and isn't in focus?			
Light Is the picture bright or dark? Is it the same all over?			
Lines and vectors In what direction do lines in the picture lead the eye?			
Body language & clothing What facial expressions, gestures, use of space can you see? What is being worn?			