



The Merchant of Venice Puns

A **pun** is a play on words that uses the multiple meanings of a word or of similar-sounding words to create an effect or add meaning, usually a humorous one.

Shakespeare uses puns throughout *The Merchant of Venice* to bring a dash of humor to the serious nature of the play and lighten the mood of the darker scenes and ideas. Yet some of the puns are not specifically humorous but instead are used as poetic devices that help engage the audience more deeply.

In column 1: Read the lines from the play that contain puns. The word(s) in bold is (are) the key term(s) in the pun.

In column 2: Record the first meaning of the pun.

In column 3: Record the second meaning of the pun.

Note that sometimes the bold word appears only once, while at other times Shakespeare uses the word twice, each time with a different meaning. You may need to refer back to the play to get enough context or consult a dictionary to “translate” the puns.

Pun	First Meaning	Second Meaning
Portia: I may neither chose whom I would nor refuse whom I dislike—so is the will of a living daughter curbed by the will of a dead father. (No Fear: 1.2.22–24)	<i>what someone wants to do, how a person make decisions</i>	<i>a legal document that states what a person wants to happen to his or her property after death</i>
Portia: Ay, that's a colt indeed, for he doth nothing but talk of his horse, and he makes it a great appropriation to his own good parts that he can shoe him himself. (No Fear: 1.2.38–40)		
Lorenzo: If e'er the Jew her father come to Heaven, It will be for his gentle daughter's sake, (No Fear: 2.4.35–36)		

Gratiano: We are the Jasons; we have won the fleece. Salerio: I would you had won the fleece that he hath lost. (No Fear: 3.2.248–249)		
Launcelot: It is much that the Moor should be more than reason. But if she be less than an honest woman, she is indeed more than I took her for. (No Fear: 3.5.35–37)		
Lorenzo: Go in, sirrah. Bid them prepare for dinner. Launcelot: That is done, sir. They have all stomachs. (No Fear: 3.5.42–43)		
Gratiano: Not on thy sole, but on thy soul, harsh Jew, Thou makest thy knife keen. (No Fear: 4.1.125–126)		
Portia: Let me give light but let me not be light, For a light wife doth make a heavy husband, And never be Bassanio so for me. (No Fear: 5.1.128–130)		

RL.9–10.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone).

L.9–10.5 Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.