Merchant of Venice Reading Questions

Directions: Find passages that relate to the following questions. Be aware that interpretive questions have many possible answers, so look for more than one passage. As you find relevant passages, write the page and line numbers on this page, along with a very brief statement summarizing the idea(s) found in the passage.

1. What appears to be Shakespeare's attitude towards Jews in this play? Justify your opinion.

2. In general for the entire play: how does money control the destiny of characters in this play, in particular, Bassanio, Lorenzo, Antonio, Jessica, Shylock and Portia?

3. What is Bassanio's situation, as shown in Act I, sc.1? Why does he need money?

4. What does the conversation in Act I, sc. 2 show you about Portia?

5. What are the terms of the loan in Act I, sc. 3? Why does Shylock refuse to eat with Antonio?

6. What kind of relationship exists between Shylock and Antonio? In the past? Now? Why is Shylock entering into this deal in the first place?

7 At the end of Act II, almost all of the characters are in flux. Explain.

8.   "Therefore, Jew,
        Though justice be thy plea, consider this,-
        That, in the course of justice, none of us
        Should see salvation: we do pray for mercy;"

a) Put the above passage (from Act IV) in your own words. b) How could this apply to Shylock?

9. By all rights, the play should end at the end of Act IV. With the exception of the ring game, all of the main parts of this play have been dealt with. Shakespeare's genius lies in adding this act, however. Imagine that you're paying for the publication of this work. Argue for Act V's inclusion based on what effect it has on the play as a whole.

10. One critic (Northrop Frye) says that all Shakespearean plays use the same basic plot. At the beginning of that plot, the hero and heroine are placed in a restrictive, urban situation where their lives are constricted. Then, they escape to the woods and nature, where rules are inverted. How is that true in the Merchant of Venice?