
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

Shakespeare Speaks

All that glisters is not gold



Narrator

It was a sunny afternoon. William Shakespeare is working on his play *The Merchant of Venice*. His daughter comes to see him.

Daughter

Father, look at my new ring! Isn't it lovely, gold and shiny...

Will

Dear daughter, it is very beautiful. Where did you get such a pretty thing?

Daughter

From the market. It was much cheaper than the gold merchant!

Will

Is it real gold?

Daughter

Yes, of course!

Will

So, my dear daughter, why is your finger green?

Daughter

Oohhhh!

Will

My dear daughter, you have a lot to learn... sit with me while I work. *The Merchant of Venice*. The Prince of Morocco wants to marry the beautiful Portia. But first, he must choose between three boxes: one made of gold, the second of silver, and the third, of cheap lead. Only one of the boxes contains a picture of Portia, and if the Prince chooses the wrong one, he cannot marry her. So, dear daughter, which box does he choose?

Daughter

The gold box! Is it real gold?

Will

He chooses the gold box indeed, and indeed it is real gold. The Prince believes that only the most beautiful box can hold the painting of the beautiful Portia. But in fact, it holds not a picture, but a scroll with these words: All that glisters is not gold...

Robert Harley as The Prince of Morocco

All that glisters is not gold;
Often have you heard that told:
Many a man his life hath sold
But my outside to behold:

Daughter

He thought that because the box is beautiful on the outside, something beautiful must be inside... he was wrong.

Narrator

We'll leave them there for now. The Merchant of Venice is a play about money, money, money, and the phrase **all that glisters is not gold** warns us not to be fooled by people or things that look good - because they might not be as good as they look on the surface! In modern English, the word **glisters** is often changed to **glistens** or **glitters**.

Clip 1

Well that car looks fantastic, but all that glitters is not gold. Check the engine before you buy it.

Daughter

Oh father, will you buy me a real gold ring? Pleeeeease?

Will

Hmmm... to buy, or not to buy: that is the question.