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WHAT'S ON STAGE



THE STAGE



LONDON THEATRE

ENGLISH TOURING THEATRE, OXFORD PLAYHOUSE AND SHAKESPEARE AT THE TOBACCO FACTORY PRESENT

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Introduction

Welcome to the teachers' notes and resource pack for *Othello*, directed by Richard Twyman and brought to the stage by English Touring Theatre, Oxford Playhouse and Shakespeare at the Tobacco Factory.

One of Shakespeare's most startling contemporary plays. *Othello* is a masterful depiction of a life torn apart by racism and the destructive nature of prejudice.

Richard Twyman's critically acclaimed reimagining of *Othello* is a co-production with Oxford Playhouse and Shakespeare at the Tobacco Factory. The play was produced first by Shakespeare at the Tobacco Factory, Tobacco Factory Theatres and English Touring Theatre and toured in 2017 to Tobacco Factory Theatres, Exeter Northcott Theatre, Wilton's Music Hall and Neuss Globe Germany.

All information provided has been designed to give you an insight into the production, as well as practical ideas for leading pre or post-production workshops and discussions for students to benefit the most from their visit.

This resource pack touches on the themes of the play including *What is a Tragedy*, *Othello's Moorish Identity*, *Women in Othello*, *The Role of the Audience* and *The Settings in Venice and Cyprus*.



Original 2017 company. Credit: The Other Richard

The Production

Othello is one of Shakespeare's most startling contemporary plays. It's both an engaging thriller and a masterful depiction of a world where racism and prejudice is allowed to flourish. Every new production of *Othello* has the power to speak afresh to each society watching and this production's relevance to the world today feels particularly important.

"Richard Twyman's *Othello* breaks new ground by demonstrating how disturbingly relevant and profound the play is to our times. It shows us the political, social, cultural and religious fault lines that we are contending with today and offers a searing critique of xenophobia and patriarchy, empire and privilege".

Abdul-Rehman Malik, journalist and educator



Original 2017 company. Credit: The Other Richard

"We came to see *Othello* last night with a large group of 6th Form students.

We were utterly amazed!

The production is faultless: dynamic, modern, respectful of the language and crystal clear.

The students were buzzing after the performance, it absolutely unlocked sections of the language and the performances were **unanimously fantastic.**" *Teacher, Clifton High School*

"This performance was my first time seeing *Othello*, and I was **totally blown away.** The audience reflected the accessibility of Twyman's production – a range of ages, but all were captivated throughout.

Fresh, unaffected performances brought to life Shakespeare's genius: a play which was piercingly topical, yet as profoundly timeless as it was when it was first performed." *Annabelle Brand, Student at Redmaids' High School*

What an amazing production of #*Othello* from @ShakespeareatTF. Felt the weight of Desdemona's 'these men!' tonight. *Tweet from the English Department at Kings Bruton School, Somerset*

Shakespeare and *Othello*

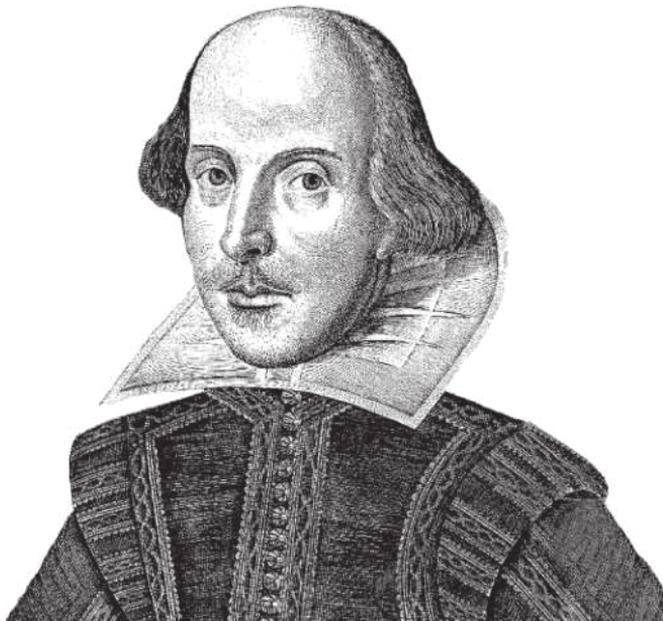
The most influential writer in all of English literature, William Shakespeare was born in 1564 to a successful middle-class glove-maker in Stratford-upon-Avon, England. After grammar school, in 1582 he married an older woman, Anne Hathaway, and had three children with her. This was the end of his formal education and 8 years later he left his family behind and travelled to London to work as an actor and playwright.

He was publicly and critically acclaimed and Shakespeare eventually became the most popular playwright in England and part-owner of the Globe Theatre. He was favored by both monarchs that ruled during his time, Elizabeth I (ruled 1558–1603) and James I (ruled 1603–1625), the latter granting Shakespeare's company the greatest possible compliment by bestowing upon its members the title of King's Men.

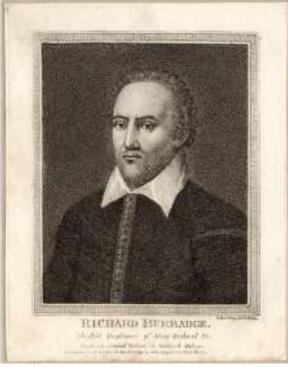
He died in 1616, wealthy and renowned, at the age of fifty-two.

Written around 1604, *Othello* was first performed by the King's Men at the court of King James I on 1 November, of the same year. In total, Shakespeare wrote eight tragedies, and this period also saw him compose four more of those; *Hamlet* (1600), *King Lear* (1604–5), *Macbeth* (1606), and *Antony and Cleopatra* (1606–7). It is thought that he wrote *Othello* after *Hamlet* and before *King Lear*.

It was not published in Shakespeare's own lifetime but appeared in one of his short publications (a Quarto) in 1622, his First Folio in 1623, and a second Quarto in 1630.



Previous productions of *Othello*



Richard Burbage as Othello

The first actor to play the title role in *Othello* was Richard Burbage, who along with William Shakespeare, was a leading member of the King's Men theatre company. After the Restoration and the re-opening of the theatres, Margaret Hughes became the first recorded woman to perform on the English stage, when she played Desdemona on 8 December 1660.

It wasn't until the 1830s that a black actor played the title role, when Ira Aldridge toured Europe to great acclaim. Nearly 100 years later, black singer, activist and actor Paul Robeson was a memorable Othello, a role he repeated at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon in 1959. Notable recent productions have cast Chiwetel Ejiofor, David Oyelowo and Lenny Henry as *Othello*.



Paul Robeson as Othello, 1943



Ira Aldridge, the first black actor to play Othello, in 1826, shown here in costume for his 1833 Covent Garden performance.



David Oyelowo playing Othello in 2017 at the New York Theatre Workshop.

Shakespeare's inspirations for *Othello*

Othello is set against the backdrop of the wars between Venice and Turkey that raged in the latter part of the sixteenth century. Cyprus, which is the setting for most of the action, was a Venetian outpost attacked by the Turks in 1570 and conquered the following year.

The story of *Othello* is also derived from an Italian prose tale written in 1565 by Giovanni Battista Giraldi Cinzio (Cinthio). The original story contains the bare bones of Shakespeare's plot: a Moorish general is deceived by his ensign into believing his wife is unfaithful.

To Cinthio's story Shakespeare added supporting characters such as the rich young dupe Roderigo and the outraged and grief-stricken Brabantio, Desdemona's father. Shakespeare compressed the action into the space of a few days and set it against the backdrop of a war.



Original 2017 company. Credit: The Other Richard

Othello; A Tragedy

Othello is considered to be one of the great Shakespearean tragedies, along with *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, *King Lear* and *Romeo and Juliet*.

But what is a tragedy?

Oxford Dictionary defines a tragedy as *a play dealing with tragic events and having an unhappy ending, especially one concerning the downfall of the main character.*

Shakespeare's tragedies, like our own lives, are stories that juxtapose happiness and sadness, love and harsh reality. By focusing on the characters' relationships with one another, Shakespeare is able to create a microcosm of his society and highlight the complexities surrounding the social structures of Elizabethan times.

In her book *Othello as Tragedy: Some Problems of Judgement and Feeling*, author Jane Adamson says: "The power and stature of *Othello* as a tragedy are founded in its power to make us recognize, very painfully, how much we share as human beings with each and every character - even the worst - because of this fundamental link between our needs and our fallibility."



Othello; A Tragedy

In other words, *Othello* is a powerful tragedy because we, as an audience, are made to see there is a version of us all that is capable of carrying out the actions of each of the characters on stage, even the darkest of acts.

Though we are all capable of such deeds, it can be argued that Othello's driving force to ultimately kill Desdemona stems from Iago's deception and plotted misunderstandings. Throughout the play Iago manipulates the events by asking probing questions and concealing information. By making Othello question Desdemona's love, by making him suspect she is having an affair with Cassio, he weaves a web of lies, suspicion and mistrust, that eventually enmeshes them all.

But Iago is not the only force at work...

The weight of Iago's words is grounded in the world and society in which he exists. Shakespeare highlights how the structure of Elizabethan society allows for racism and prejudice to flourish. This contemporary production explicitly focuses on **cultural identity**, portraying Othello as a Muslim; **the fear of the 'other' and the challenges of assimilation**, showing how those issues are in fact still prevalent in today's world. Similarly, it also depicts a patriarchal world where **toxic masculinity** is given free reign. The combination of the two makes it a very fertile environment for hatred and chaos to breed; **an urgent and articulate warning for us today**.

SUPPORTING MATERIAL

The Othello Project short version [documentary](#) from ETT has members of the original acting company explaining the plot of the play.

The English Touring Theatre podcast '[A transcendent patriarchy](#)' explores the role of women in this production of *Othello* with members of the original company and Assistant Director.

Lesson 1: 'Good Cop/ Bad Cop'- Iago and Othello

Learning objective:

To explore how Shakespeare uses language and structure to develop the character of Iago.

Starter:

Divide the class into pairs and give them each a copy of Iago's Act 1 scene 3 soliloquy below. In their pairs ask them to create a brainstorm with what we can glean from the text about Iago's character. How much does this text reveal Iago's intentions and desires? What does he think about other characters he mentions?

e.g. Othello, Cassio and Roderigo?

Ask students to draw an outline of him and annotate with quotes from his speech about other characters. Inside the outline, add the characteristics they have thought about.

Main:

After brainstorming Iago's characteristics, choose a section of the speech, and ask students to take turns to say it in their own words. In pairs, think about how to show both his villainous nature and get the audience on his side.

Do you make a choice to play him as charming and playful or serious etc.?

Now ask students to take turns being the audience and Iago - Iago's task is to woo the audience member and the pupil acting as the audience has to watch Iago's performance and decide if Iago succeeded at getting them on his side or not.

Ask the audience member to colour-code the speech as their partner performs it. Use three colours for 'serious', 'charming' or 'villainous'. Or get students to think of their own contrasting characteristics to colour-code.

The performer can also colour-code their speech and the pair can compare their colours at the end to see if they portrayed the characteristics convincingly.

Extension:

When delivering this speech how can we give the impression that Iago is coming up with a plan on the spot? Which lines of the text sound spontaneous and how can that be delivered to an audience?

Lesson 1: ACT 1 SCENE 3:

IAGO

Thus do I ever make my fool my purse.
For I mine own gained knowledge should profane
If I would time expend with such a snipe
But for my sport and profit. I hate the Moor,
And it is thought abroad that 'twixt my sheets
He's done my office. I know not if 't be true,
But I, for mere suspicion in that kind,
Will do as if for surety. He holds me well.
The better shall my purpose work on him.
Cassio's a proper man. Let me see now:
To get his place and to plume up my will
In double knavery. How? How? Let's see.
After some time, to abuse Othello's ear
That he is too familiar with his wife.
He hath a person and a smooth dispose
To be suspected, framed to make women false.
The Moor is of a free and open nature
That thinks men honest that but seem to be so,
And will as tenderly be led by th' nose
As asses are.
I have 't. It is engendered! Hell and night
Must bring this monstrous birth to the world's light.

(He exits.)

Character Descriptions

Othello A general in the defense forces of the city state of Venice. Also, a Moor (from Arabic of African descent). His profession brings him high status in Venice, but his foreign origins and colour separate him from those with whom he lives and works. He is a military man, with a reputation for courage in battle and good judgment in military matters.

Iago Othello's ancient (captain) in the Venetian defense forces. He had hoped for promotion, but Othello favoured Cassio over him. For this production Richard Twyman felt Iago needed to be 'charismatic and likeable, capable of humour and unbelievable psychotic darkness'

Desdemona A noble Venetian lady, daughter of Brabantio, who falls in love with and marries Othello. She organises her life intelligently and shows courage, love, and loyalty in following her husband into danger. Twyman was keen that Desdemona show 'real bravery, strength and idealism'.

Brabantio A Venetian Senator, Desdemona's father. He is angry at his daughter's choice of husband but can do nothing once the marriage has taken place, and the Venetian Senate has accepted it. He warns Othello that Desdemona is a clever deceiver.

Roderigo A Venetian nobleman in love with Desdemona. He has more money than sense and pays Iago to court Desdemona on his behalf. Iago, playing on Roderigo's hopes and gullibility, continues to help himself to Roderigo's money, and Roderigo never gets his heart's desire. Iago involves Roderigo in an attack on Cassio, for which Roderigo pays with his life, as Iago kills him to ensure his silence.

Emilia Desdemona's lady-in-waiting and Iago's wife. She knows Iago better than anybody else and is suspicious of his actions and motives. She does not realize until too late that it is her own husband who has poisoned Othello against Desdemona.

Character Descriptions

Cassio Othello's lieutenant in the Venetian defense forces. Cassio accompanied Othello as his friend when he was courting Desdemona. He is popular, he speaks well, and he is lively and trusting. Iago eventually convinces Othello that Cassio is Desdemona's paramour. Cassio is appointed governor of Cyprus after Othello's death.

Bianca A courtesan (prostitute), in love with Cassio. She is skilled in needlework and agrees to copy the handkerchief that Cassio gives her; then she throws it back at him, believing it is the token of his new love. Twyman felt this character needed an actress who could be 'emotionally volatile and powerful but also be funny with maximum impact in a few short scenes'

The Duke of Venice The leader of the governing body of the city state of Venice. The Duke appoints Othello to lead the forces defending Venice against the Turkish attack on Cyprus; he also urges Brabantio to accept his daughter's marriage.

Gratiano Brabantio's brother. He and Lodovico find Cassio wounded after Roderigo stabs him in the drunken brawl.

Lodovico Desdemona's cousin. After the death of Desdemona, Lodovico questions Othello and Cassio together, thus revealing the truth.

Montano Othello's predecessor as the governor of Cyprus. He is Othello's friend and loyal supporter.

SUPPORTING MATERIAL

For more detailed character descriptions see [here](#)



Lesson 2: FRIEND OR FOE? A character study

Written task:

Students work in groups or pairs to produce a comprehensive summary of the main characters in order to present these to the class.

Encourage them to use the characteristics emphasized in the drama game as examples, focusing on body language, movement and facial expression.



Original 2017 company. Credit: The Other Richard

Lesson 2: FRIEND OR FOE?

A character study

Learning objective: To revise knowledge of the characters and consider the characters' relationships with each other.

Starter:

Participants space themselves around the room.

Without saying anything, each person must think of one person in the room who (for the purpose of the game only) frightens him.

Everyone moves around the room, trying to keep as far away from that person who frightens them as possible, but also not letting that person be aware of the fact that they have chosen them as the one they fear.

After a 1-2 minutes ask everyone to think of another person who is their protector (who should also not be able to tell that he has been chosen as such). Now everyone moves round again, trying to keep their protector between them and the person they fear.

Eventually, give the class a countdown and everyone must freeze where they are - then the players find out who has succeeded in evading the one they fear.

Main:

After completing this warm up exercise read through the character descriptions in this resources, as well as the play's synopsis here: <http://www.sparknotes.com/shakespeare/othello/summary/>

Play the game again with a smaller number of participants, this time assigning different characters to each 'player'. The rest of the class make up the audience and have to guess which player is which character.

Ask the volunteers to play the game in their role, silently choosing two other characters (one character that frightens them and another who is their protector). Ask the audience to observe the character's choices and whether they were able to succeed.

This is to get the class thinking about the characters' relationships, which characters form alliances etc. Consider why each person chose the characters that frightens them and protects them- does the story support their choices? Did an interesting relationship dynamic come out of the game?

Othello's Moorish Identity Unpacked

In Scene 1, Roderigo dismisses Othello as
“an extravagant and wheeling stranger of here and everywhere.”
(Act 1, Scene 1)

Shakespeare was writing at a time when Europe had long engaged in economic exchanges with North Africa, but fears surrounding religion and the cultural unknown were prevalent. Othello was considered an outsider of Venetian society because of his Moorish Identity.

It is important to note that a 'Moor' could not be defined in one way: Moors could be from multiple ethnicities (African, Arabian and even Spanish) and could have different religions (Christian, Pagan and Muslim).

Othello was born in Mauretania, which in Shakespeare's day referred to the Mediterranean coast of Morocco in North West Africa.

Jerry Broom, Professor of Renaissance Studies at Queen Mary University of London, suggests 'For Shakespeare, the term 'Moor' carried both religious and what we would call today 'racial' associations, although 'race' and certainly 'racism' was not a term used as we understand it in Tudor times. The confusion over what Shakespeare meant when he referred to Moors emerges from a conflation of the term referring to black people and Muslims. John Pory, in his translation of Leo Africanus' *History and Description of Africa* (1600) often believed to be one of the sources for Othello, claims that Moors 'are of two kinds, namely white or tawny Moors, and Negroes or black mirrors'. As a result, although a Moor was invariably a Muslim, he was not necessarily black. It is this ambiguity that Shakespeare exploits in his portrayal of both Othello's ethnic and religious origins'



Original 2017 company. Credit: The Other Richard

Othello's Moorish Identity Unpacked

Othello had been a child soldier **“sold into slavery”** (Act 1, Scene 1). There is a suggestion that Othello converted from Islam to Christianity but we don't know if this is true or if he is saying this to assimilate himself into the society he is now in.

Despite Othello reaching the status of Army General and ruler of Cyprus, his Moorish identity placed him in a precarious position within Venetian society.

From the outset of the play his integrity is questioned, first and most notably by Brabantio who refuses to believe his daughter could fall in love with **“what she feared to look on.”** (Act 1, Scene 2)

Brabantio is so enraged he pleads with the senate to put a stop to Othello and Desdemona's wedding.

Othello has to assimilate to survive, hiding his Islamic faith, and adhering to the Venetian way of life, but between him and Desdemona there exists true cultural exchange.

In this production the opening wedding scene, in which both Desdemona and Othello share their wedding vows in Arabic, we see their love form a dual identity that they have formed together.

SUPPORTING MATERIAL

Episode 4 of English Touring Theatre's podcast explores [‘The Secret History of the Moors’](#)



Original 2017 company. Credit: The Other Richard

Making the Audience Culpable

Shakespeare is known for holding up a mirror to society by opening a dialogue with his audience. Watching plays was an integral part of popular culture in Elizabethan England, for the whole spectrum of society.

The playhouses, such as The Globe, had three tier seating with roofed seating around the sides of the theatre, and in an open, unroofed area in front of the stage, known as the yard or PIT.

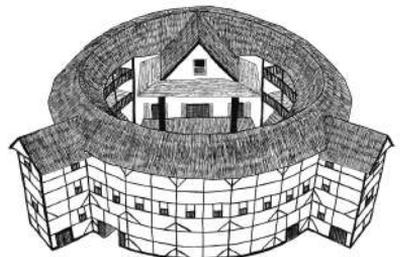
The poorest of the audience were known as Groundlings and paid a penny to watch a show, whilst the more expensive seats in the galleries would be twice the price. (Source 2, p.21)

Audience interaction and rowdy participation was a regular occurrence during the shows, with fruit, nuts and stones often pelted at the stage by a displeased audience.

Similarly, this production of Othello was staged to speak directly to the audience, inviting them to be a part of the journey.

Director Richard Twyman made some very conscious decisions when staging the play to make this happen. One of the ways this was done was by introducing the notion of the audience becoming part of the public sphere within the world of the play.

The Senate scene (Act 1, Scene 3) is one example of this. The audience members are placed in the position of the public forum and addressed as Senators by Ludovico, who uses the microphone to announce intelligence given to him by his messengers about the Turkish Fleets heading towards Cyprus. Similarly, when both Othello and Desdemona are making their plea and pledge of love to one another they are thrust into the public realm. The actors make their case to the audience as much as they do to the other characters on stage.



Making the Audience Culpable

Other instances of speaking directly to the audience are already written in to the play by Shakespeare's use of asides. Iago uses a series of asides (speaking directly to the audience) along with his characterful charm to get the audience on his side.

Bringing the audience into the action of the play allows them to actively engage with the story. In this way the audience become the outward reflection of society and holders of the predominant view, their reactions to what happens on stage can, among many things, either condone or condemn the action. They are made to question what they think about the topics the play raises, such as jealousy, murder, adultery and betrayal. In some sense, they too become responsible for the outcomes of the play as they were there and allowed it to happen.



Original 2017 company. Credit: The Other Richard

Two Distinct Places: Venice and Cyprus

The play begins in Venice, but the main events take place in Cyprus. The two places, despite both being part of the Venetian state, have very different civic structures.

Venice is a place with strict Christian order, harmony, control and mercantile wealth, Cyprus on the other hand is portrayed as an island where anarchy, violence and disorder are allowed to reign.

Cyprus is a military garrison successfully defended by Othello. However, as the play unravels and Othello loses his grip on reality, all hell breaks loose on the island.

One significant difference between the Senate scene in Venice and the party scene in Cyprus in this production of *Othello* is the lighting.

The designer, Georgia Lowe, had created the set to have five rows of lights above the stage. The lighting designer, Mathew Graham, was then able to contrast quite cold and stark lighting for the Senate against beaming warm light for Cyprus.

Richard Twyman chose to highlight the difference in codes and conventions of behaviour in the two places by juxtaposing the orderliness of the Senate with a chaotic party scene in Cyprus (Act 2, Scenes 2 & 3).

Othello and Desdemona's wedding celebration begins with Bianca announcing it is **“the celebration of his nuptial”** and that there is **“full liberty of feasting”** to celebrate.



Two Distinct Places: Venice and Cyprus

This too is a choice made by Richard Twyman, as Shakespeare originally wrote the part to be played by a Herald.

The island then comes alive with a dance scene first led by Othello and Desdemona, with music and whooping from the characters on stage. This scene highlights the cultural differences between Venice and Cyprus and what is allowed to happen.

Once in Cyprus, the newly wedded couple celebrate their marriage by dancing in a style infused by traditional West-African dance, which came from the actors own background. This was a choice to show Othello's heritage and how Desdemona was keenly taking on aspects of his inherited culture.

This display of shared cultural experience, along with Montano playing percussion and signing in Arabic, is worlds away from what was considered to be acceptable in Venetian society.



Original 2017 company. Credit: The Other Richard

Lesson 3: 'First Encounter' Othello and Desdemona's relationship

Learning objective: To use the text and your imagination to understand Othello and Desdemona's relationship developments.

Starter:

Divide the class into pairs, give them each a copy of Othello's speech in Act 1 Scene 3 (excerpt included in this document). Ask them to read the text focusing on how Othello describes how he wooed Desdemona.

How did their relationship unfold? In pairs discuss Othello and Desdemona's first encounter at her father's house. Think about the setting, how formal was it? Who else was in their company? How long were they able to talk to each other for? They should be prepared to talk about their imagined scene in the next stage.

Whilst they are discussing, prepare a song for the next stage of the exercise. Then ask each pair to label themselves A and B - A is Othello and B is Desdemona.

Main:

Bring the class back together and ask them, when the music begins, to walk around the room as their character (either Othello or Desdemona), changing direction and filling the space.

When the music stops ask them to freeze, locate their partner with their eyes and hold their gaze. Walk through the class, choosing several people to tap on the shoulder and hot seat them about their first encounter. Ask them where they are, what time of day is it and how do they feel etc.: students should answer in first person as their character.

Written activity:

Ask all A's (Othello) to form one group and B's (Desdemona) to form another. Then set them the task of coming up with an activity that represents an aspect of their character's culture. For example, do they go to church or mosque, dance a traditional dance or eat a particular dish?

Ask students to write an invitation, in character, inviting either Desdemona or Othello to their event. They need to explain the activity and what it represents. Also, which location, time/ date and if it is in hiding, (and what the repercussions are if they were to be caught.)

Lesson 3 script: Act 1 Scene 3

OTHELLO

Her father loved me, oft invited me,
Still questioned me the story of my life
From year to year -the (battles), sieges, (fortunes)
That I have passed.
I ran it through, even from my boyish days
To th' very moment that he bade me tell it,
Wherein I spoke of most disastrous chances:
Of moving accidents by flood and field,
Of hairbreadth 'scopes i' th' imminent deadly breach,
Of being taken by the insolent foe
And sold to slavery, of my redemption thence,
And portance in my traveler's history,
Wherein of antres vast and deserts idle,
Rough quarries, rocks, (and) hills whos (heads) touch heaven,
It was my hint to speak-such was my process
And of the cannibals that each (other) eat,
The Anthropophagi, and men whose heads
(Do grow) beneath their shoulders. These things to hear
Would Desdemona seriously incline.
But still the house affairs would draw her (thence),
Which ever as she could with haste dispatch She'd come again,
and with a greedy ear
Devour up my discourse. Which I, observing,
Took once a pliant hour, and found good means
To draw from her a prayer of earnest heart
That I would all my pilgrimage dilate,
Whereof by parcels she had something heard,
But not (intently.) I did consent,
And often did beguile her of her tears
When I did speak of some distressful stroke
That my youth suffered. My story being done,
She gave me for my pains a world of (sighs).
She swore, in faith, 'twas strange,
'twas passing strange,
'Twas pitiful, 'twas wondrous pitiful.
She wished she had not heard it, yet she wished
That heaven had made her such a man. She thanked me,
And bade me, if I had a friend that loved her, I should but teach
him how to tell my story,
And that would woo her. Upon this hint I spake.
She loved me for the dangers I had passed, And I loved her that
she did pity them.
This only is the witchcraft I have used.
Here comes the lady. Let her witness it.

Lesson 4: 'Defiant Desdemona'- looking at the role of women in Othello

Learning objective:

To use the text to analyse female empowerment or oppression in the play.

Starter:

Refresh the class of Desdemona, Bianca and Emilia's character breakdowns.

Read through the 'Women in Othello' section and scripts in this resource pack with the class and then divide them into three groups A (Emilia), B (Bianca) and C (Desdemona).

Main:

Using the scenes ask each group to choose a section in which their character is considered to be either defiant and goes against Elizabethan expectations of women, or is silenced by a male character.

In groups, consider how to depict the conflicting situation in a freeze frame. For example, one situation from the text above could be Iago accusing Bianca of being involved in Cassia's attack. How could this be shown in tableaux?

Pick a line from the text that emphasises or embodies one of the female characters being silenced by patriarchy or going against it. This line should be repeated by the character over and over again when the freeze frames are being performed.

Once the freeze frames have been shown, ask the class to write a short reflection/diary entry for the female protagonist - how did she feel during that act of defiance of being silenced? Did they feel exhilarated, fearful, anxious, elated etc.?

Extension:

Create another diary entry focusing on the female characters' hopes, dreams and expectations outside of their relationships with the men. What is their favourite childhood memory, favourite food? Which influential women from history are they inspired by?



Lesson 5: 'Party games' – playing with setting

Learning objective:

To use visual codes (setting and atmosphere) to design a new setting for a scene in Othello.

Starter:

Read over Act 2, scenes 2 & 3, as well as the 'two distinct places' section of this resource pack.

Main:

Divide the class into groups to discuss what a version of the party scene could look like in Venice. Ask the pupils to imagine they are a director pitching this innovative idea to the Artistic Director of a theatre venue. In this scenario, if the Artistic Director likes the idea, you may get to stage your adaptation of Othello on the main stage but there can only be one show.

Setting the play today but with the conventions of Elizabethan society, each group must consider the following:

- Lighting - how is lighting used to denote place or mood?
- Sound - what kind of music would be heard? Would Arabic be included?
- Movement - what kind of dancing would be allowed? Would men and women dance together or separate?
- Costume - what would Othello and Desdemona be wearing? Would there be party hats or a black-tie dress code?

Each group must present their pitch to the rest of the group - a class vote will decide which group gets a yes from the Artistic Director.

Written extension tasks

Written extension tasks:

- Write a diary entry from the perspective of a minor character from the play. How do they feel about what is happening?
- Write a short epilogue for the play. Where will the main characters be a few months or years after the main action of the play?
- Research the context of the play. What would life have been like at the time Shakespeare was writing? How would the play have been performed?
- Imagine that you are Desdemona's father, Brabantio. Write a letter to your daughter, persuading her to leave Othello and come home
- Imagine that you are a journalist in the city of Venice. Write a newspaper article about the scandalous relationship between Othello and Desdemona
- How could you adapt the play further for modern audiences? Explain your ideas in detail. Any changes you make should help audiences to better understand the meaning of the play. not just changing the language to be more modern!
- Research what happened in Ferguson, Missouri in the USA in 2016 and what caused this. How can you link this to key themes in 'Othello'?

Sources and Further Information

The Othello Project: Short films made in partnership with the original ETT production from April 2017

Full version: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q8hbjTgSeLE>

Shorter version, with plot summary from actors:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BD1BenEIJYE>

Podcasts: Discussions led by director Richard Twyman, with special guests:

<https://player.fm/series/the-othello-project>

Source 1: *Othello As Tragedy: Some Problems of Judgement and Feeling* by Jane Adamson

Source 2: *Dictionary of Shakespeare* by Louise McConnell

Source 3: London Theatre Record, Volume 6, Issues 1-13, Page 9

Character descriptions:

<http://www.sparknotes.com/shakespeare/othello/characters>