**OTHELLO SYNOPSIS**

It is evening in Venice, Italy. A lowly ensign, Iago, complains to a gentleman, Roderigo, of his hatred for his General, Othello. Othello has promoted Michael Cassio to Lieutenant, and Iago, feeling he has been overlooked, desires revenge.

Othello, a Moor, has secretly married Desdemona, the daughter of Senator Brabantio. As Roderigo is in love with Desdemona, Iago recruits him to tell Brabantio of his daughter’s marriage. Brabantio is outraged. He protests in the Senate chamber before the Duke of Venice, accusing Othello of using sorcery to entrap his daughter. Othello and Desdemona defend their genuine courtship, winning over the Duke who gives the marriage his blessing. Brabantio warns Othello that as Desdemona has deceived her father, she may do the same to her husband.

Othello is called to Cyprus to defend the island against the Turkish forces. He entrusts Desdemona to Iago and Iago’s wife, Emilia, and they journey together to Cyprus. Meanwhile, Iago convinces Roderigo that if he travels to Cyprus with lots of money, he will secure Desdemona’s heart. Iago notes Cassio’s courteous treatment of Desdemona on her arrival, and realises that he can use this to his advantage. News arrives that the Turkish fleet has been lost in a storm, and the battle is over before it has begun. Othello calls for a night of revels to celebrate the victory, as well as his recent marriage. During the celebrations, Iago convinces Cassio to drink, knowing his low tolerance for alcohol, and has Roderigo pick a fight with him. Montano, the Governor of the island, gets wounded in the fray. Othello is roused from his bed and he berates Cassio, stripping him of his role and reputation.

Feigning support, Iago advises Cassio that he should regain favour with Othello through Desdemona. Now Iago’s plan begins to unfold. When Desdemona defends Cassio, his gives Iago the idea to convince Othello that his wife is having an affair with Cassio. The next morning, after Iago sees Cassio rush away from Desdemona, he plants the seed in Othello’s mind that the two are having an affair. Othello is grateful for Iago’s “honesty”, but needs evidence before he condemns his wife.

Desdemona drops a handkerchief, her first cherished gift from Othello. Emilia finds it and unwittingly gives it to Iago, who plants it in Cassio’s room. Iago informs Othello that he has not only seen Cassio with the handkerchief, but he has heard him talk of Desdemona in his sleep. Othello promotes Iago because of his perceived loyalty. Cassio, ignorant of who owns the handkerchief, gives it to his girlfriend, Bianca. Othello’s suspicion grows when he asks Desdemona to present the handkerchief, but she cannot. Iago has Othello observe a conversation between himself and Cassio regarding the affair, but Iago actually discusses Bianca. As Cassio laughs dismissively about Bianca, Othello’s rage grows. Bianca then arrives to return the handkerchief to Cassio and Othello is convinced of Desdemona’s guilt.

Othello is now mad with jealousy. He orders Iago to kill Cassio and takes Iago’s advice to strangle Desdemona in their marriage bed. Othello strikes Desdemona in public, in front of her kinsman Lodovico, and refuses to hear Emilia’s plea of Desdemona’s innocence. He directly accuses Desdemona of infidelity.

Meanwhile, Iago convinces Roderigo that he must fight and kill Cassio in order to win Desdemona, but Cassio wounds Roderigo instead. Iago interferes and wounds Cassio from behind. Overhearing the fight, Othello is pleased, convinced that Cassio is dead. Iago then kills the wounded Roderigo to cover his tracks.

Sensing Othello’s shift in affections and suspecting her fate, Desdemona retires to her bed chamber. Emilia dresses her for bed and they discuss the fraught relationships between men and women. Emilia leaves and Othello arrives. He asks Desdemona to confess her sins and despite Desdemona’s pleas of innocence, he smothers her in their bed. Emilia discovers this and tells Othello that Desdemona was innocent and that Iago lied. Iago kills Emilia for exposing him. Letters are found in Roderigo’s pocket regarding Iago’s plot to kill Cassio. Othello finally realises the truth, and he wounds Iago in anger. Lamenting his terrible mistake and actions, Othello then takes his own life. Venice is informed or the terrible events and Cassio takes power of Cyprus.
BACKGROUND TO THE PLAY

Most scholars believe that Othello, one of Shakespeare’s most popular and powerful tragedies was written between 1602 and 1604. According to the Master of the Revels’ records it was first performed on Hallowmas Day (1 November) 1604 for King James I in the banqueting hall at Whitehall Palace.

Unlike the majority of Shakespeare’s plays there is much evidence of Othello’s early performance history. Records show performances at the Globe, Blackfriars, Hampton Court and, most notably, at the wedding of King James’s daughter Elizabeth. Apart from the theatres closing between 1635 and 1660 due to Puritan rule, scholars have records of the play being performed every decade for 400 years.

The famous early modern actor Richard Burbage played Othello in the original production, and the first recorded performance of Iago was Joseph Taylor, a member of the King’s Men in 1616. After the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, Othello was one of the first plays performed when the theatres were reopened. It was a new era. King Charles II proclaimed that women could legally perform and a December production of Othello that year at the Vere Street Theatre, starring Margaret Hughes as Desdemona, marks the first recorded performance of a woman treading the boards of the English stage.

The play was first published by bookseller Thomas Walkley in quarto format in 1622, before it was included in the publication of the First Folio the following year by Shakespeare’s fellow actors John Heminges and Henry Condell. The differences between the two publications have caused much scholarly contention. The Folio version contains around 160 lines that are not in the Quarto, and it lacks about a dozen lines found in the original publication. The Quarto is likely to be a dictated version due to its peculiar punctuation and profanities, whereas the Folio is most likely from a licensed copy of the script that had been reviewed by the Master of the Revels, as it adheres to the 1606 ‘Act to Restrain Abuses of Players’; the profanities have been removed.

Othello was hugely popular throughout the 17th and 18th century and is one of the few Shakespearean plays never altered during the Restoration period. However, over the 19th and 20th centuries various interpretations of the play emerged in response to changing notions of race and sexuality. In 1826, Ira Aldridge was the first African-American to play the role of Othello in London. He played the role many times on European stages. In 1938, Royal Shakespeare Company director Tyrone Guthrie consulted the Freudian psychologist Ernest Jones about the relationship between Iago and Othello. As a result Laurence Olivier’s Iago was portrayed as repressing his sexual attraction to the Moor. In 1985 Ben Kingsley and David Suchet’s depiction of Othello and Iago also stressed the latter’s unrequited homosexual longing. This was the last RSC production to cast a white actor in the role of Othello. In 1997 Jude Kelly and the Folger Library produced a version of Othello in which British actor Patrick Stewart played the title role as a white actor in a cast of 22 African-American performers. This production is referred to as the ‘photo negative’ production and certainly shone a fresh light on the notions of race and minority.
SHAKESPEARE’S SOURCES FOR OTHELLO

Shakespeare’s *Othello* is an adaptation of the Italian *Un Capitano Moro*, “A Moorish Captain” by Giovanni Giraldi, a writer more commonly known as Cinthio. It is from his 1565 collection of *One Hundred Tales* in the style of Boccaccio’s *Decameron*. It is believed that Cinthio’s sources were either ‘The Three Apples’ tale from Arabian Nights or actual tragic events that took place in Venice in 1508. Amazingly, no known English translation of the story existed during Shakespeare’s lifetime, and although it is believed that Shakespeare most likely read from the French translation, Shakespeare’s lines most closely echo the Italian original.

There are numerous differences between the two texts and many of Shakespeare’s alterations depart from Cinthio’s moral instruction and provide a much deeper study of the human condition. In the original text the only named character is Desdemona, and several of the minor characters and sub-plots (such as Roderigo and his plight) were added by Shakespeare. Shakespeare’s addition of the very tender scene where Emilia prepares Desdemona for bed adds a stronger female voice to the play and heightens audience empathy for the doomed female lead. Although Shakespeare mostly adheres to Cinthio’s plot, his most important departure is undoubtedly in Desdemona’s death. Cinthio’s ‘Ensign’ (Iago), is given the task of bludgeoning Desdemona to death. He and Othello then move her body to the bed and escape, disguising the crime scene as an accident. There is little sign of true affection or remorse. In Shakespeare’s adaptation, Othello performs the tragic act himself, in a less melodramatic fashion, and regrets it instantly. Shakespeare’s version makes great use of dramatic timing and irony and focuses less on the macabre act and more on the relationships and social framework it affects. The original is considered a racist warning to European women about the dangers of interracial marriages, whereas Shakespeare’s text places the central couple as victims of both mindless villainy and inherent human flaws.

Other sources include Pliny’s *Natural History*. It is thought by many scholars that Othello’s speech in Act 1, in which he argues that he didn’t obtain Desdemona’s love by sorcery, is Shakespeare’s reading of Pliny’s work. As *Natural History* was translated into English in 1601, scholars have been better able to date Shakespeare’s composition of *Othello*.

Shakespeare biographer Peter Ackroyd hails *Othello* as a very modern drama for its day and notes that the play, like many of Shakespeare’s works, draws on Jacobean cultural and political concerns. It is known that James I had a sympathy for and interest in the kingdom of Spain. Shakespeare’s company, The King’s Men, were acting courtiers for the Ambassador Extraordinary of Spain during the time *Othello* was created and are believed to have performed the production in his honour, at great expense to James. This perhaps explains why Shakespeare incorporated so many Spanish elements into *Othello*. Although the Moor’s race is ambiguous, many scholars believe him to be of Spanish origin, and Iago and Roderigo are recognisably Spanish names. It was also well known that the previous king of Spain, Philip II, was rumoured to have been a jealous husband who strangled his wife in bed, and that his suspicions were aroused by his wife dropping a handkerchief. This correlation must be more than coincidence. It is also important to note that during Shakespeare’s lifetime the Spanish had made a concerted effort to expel a very large population of Moors from their country. Ackroyd believes the “…Moors, like the Jews, were the victims of European racial prejudice.” Shakespeare would also have known of and seen the community of Moors who had taken residence in London as refugees from Spanish oppression.

That Cyprus becomes the scene of the tragic action of *Othello* can also be seen as Shakespeare recognising his sovereign’s interest in Spain. At the time of the first production the previously Venetian controlled island of Cyprus had been occupied by the Turks for thirty years and thus posed a threat to Spanish interests in the Mediterranean. King James I had even composed a poem on this subject. During the reign of the current king, Philip III, Spain was in conflict with Venice and some commentators have even claimed that the characters of Desdemona and Othello represent the conflict between the two powers.
FAMOUS ANECDOTES FROM STAGE

• In 1833 in London a famous production of Othello cast father and son to play the two lead male roles: Edmund Kean as the trusting Othello and his son Charles as the villainous Iago. Tragically, during one of the performances Edmund collapsed on stage into the arms of his son, and died only a few weeks later.

• In the 1880’s Henry Irving and Edwin Booth attracted audiences by alternating the roles of Iago and Othello. This has been a common approach to producing the play. Richard Burton and John Neville also swapped the roles in 1955.

• The famous actor and theatre practitioner Constantin Stanislavsky played the role of Othello in 1896.

• Laurence Olivier played the role of Othello in 1964 for the Royal Shakespeare Company. He had been reluctant to take the role for fear of being upstaged by the actor playing Iago, Frank Finlay. However, he apparently suffered such immense stage fright when alone on stage that he requested Finlay stand just off stage, in Olivier’s view, to comfort him.

• African-American actor Paul Robeson was the first black actor since Ira Aldridge (1860) to perform the role of Othello in a major production, marking a turning point for the casting of this character. Robeson first played the role in England in 1930 and was the first black actor to play Othello in America (Broadway) in an “all-white cast” in 1943 (there had previously been all-black productions). Robeson had refused to tour the role in America in the 1930’s as he believed that racial prejudice was rampant. Rightly so – in 1930 the New York Times ran an article reporting on Robeson’s English production, entitled “Negro who kisses white girl on London stage would expect protest in America”.

• Although Robeson’s 1943 Broadway production was successful and ran for 296 performances, American audiences were in no way wholly converted. In 1979 African American actor Paul Winfield received hate mail during a run of the production for kissing “a white Desdemona”.

• White actors played Othello in blackface well into the twentieth century. The last major production cast like this was in 1990 with Michael Gambon’s performance of the title role at the Stephan Joseph Theatre, Scarborough.

• In 1999 Ray Fearon was the first black British actor to play the role of Othello for the Royal Shakespeare Company.

• Ewan McGregor played Iago in a 2007 London production at the Donmar. Despite negative reviews tickets sold for as much as £2,000.
AUDIENCE RESPONSES TO OTHELLO

American writer and activist Susan Sontag famously said ‘Real art has the capacity to make us nervous’. Othello has a history of doing just that, and here are some of the more famous examples.

- In 1610, Jacobean letter writer Henry Jackson described audience responses to an Othello production at Oxford, stating that the ‘truly celebrated Desdemona… moved the audience to tears’.
- In 1660, Diarist Samuel Pepys noted that during a production ‘A very pretty lady sat by me and called out to see Desdemona smothered.’
- Dr Samuel Johnson, the author of the famous 1755 English dictionary, was a great lover and critic of Shakespeare, and confessed that he found Othello so tragic that he could not bear to read or see the last act performed.
- In 1776, German director Schroeder’s adaptation of Othello made its audience very ‘uneasy’, according to records. There were ‘swoons followed upon swoons’ and people left the theatre, or were ‘carried out’ during the closing scene.
- On recalling the Edmund Kean performance of Othello in the early 1800s, renowned poet John Keats said it was ‘direful and slaughterous to the deepest degree’.
- In an 1882 production of Othello in Baltimore, a guard on duty at the theatre during a performance shouted “It will never be said that in my presence a confounded Negro has killed a white woman”, then he ‘fired his gun and broke the arm of the actor who was playing Othello’.
- In a Russian production in the early 20th century, when Alexander Ostuzhev performed Othello’s final speech, an audience member stood up and shouted “It wasn’t his fault: his kind of love could burn up a city.”
1. Othello, 1922 (Silent, Germany), directed by Dimitri Buchowetzki, starring Emil Jannings as Othello.
2. Othello, 1952 (Morocco/Italy), directed by Orson Welles, starring Michael MacLiammoir as Othello.
3. Othello, 1955 (Russia), directed by Sergei Yutkevich, starring Sergei Bondarchuk as Othello.
4. Othello 1965 (UK) Film of the Royal National Theatre’s stage production. Director Stuart Burge, starring Laurence Olivier as Othello, Frank Finlay as Iago and Maggie Smith as Desdemona. The film holds the record for the most Oscar nominations for acting ever given to a Shakespearean film.
6. Othello, 1995, directed by Oliver Parker starring Laurence Fishburne as Othello, Kenneth Branagh as Iago and Irene Jacob as Desdemona.

ADAPTATIONS:

THEMATIC CONCERNS AND MOTIFS

APPEARANCE AND REALITY / TRUTH AND PERFORMANCE

Many critics have commented that one of Shakespeare’s great contributions to Western literature is his dramatic exploration of the idea and implications of the difference between appearance and reality. It is thoroughly explored in Macbeth, King Lear, Richard III, Romeo And Juliet, and almost all of his tragedies. It works at the heart of the misidentification and masking of identity in his comedies and is masterfully explored in Othello. Elizabethan and Jacobean society were highly fascinated by, and suspicious of, the notion of performance, and the gap between the private and public persona. Public life in England had become a performance of sorts, a process of constructing one’s identity through clothing, display of rhetoric, education and a strict focus on generally composing oneself. In 1980, Stephen Greenblatt termed this renaissance trend the art of Self-fashioning. 16th century Puritans were revolted onlookers, finding this new arena a false vulgarity, and in their quest for someone to blame they found the theatre. Pamphleteers at the time, such as Stephen Gosson, felt that the melodrama of the theatre was encouraging London society to adopt characteristics other than their own and he labeled the playhouses a ‘whore’s fair’. Ironically the theatre and Shakespeare’s plays went beyond encouraging the trend. Rather, they had become the perfect place to deconstruct, explore and reflect on this behaviour.

Shakespeare’s use of the soliloquy or aside was a revolution in dramatic function, allowing the audience to be privy to a character’s inner thoughts whilst observing their public behavior. In Othello, the discrepancy between Iago’s public and private face is startlingly obvious and he opening and proudly acknowledges it. Iago states ‘I am not what I am’ (Act 1, Scene 1), and admits to Cassio that he thinks that ‘reputation is an idle and most false imposition, oft got without merit’ (Act 2, Scene 3). Iago is aware of reputation’s fickle nature as he has gained it not through deserving means, but rather by sheer performance. He is also aware of the power of it, and works meticulously to maintain his own. In Act 3, scene 3 Iago ironically proclaims to Othello that ‘Men should be what they seem’, even though he is in the very act of deceiving him and has already proven to the audience on numerous occasions that he is certainly not what he seems. Iago is extremely successful in his deceptions. What is extraordinary is that almost all the other characters view him in a positive light, as ‘honest’, and Othello even goes as far as to humbly thank Iago, ‘I am bound to thee forever.’ (Act 3, Scene 3) (Note: The epithet ‘honest’ has also been seen as a term of condescending praise used in reference to someone of a lower rank.) Iago manages to appear as a genuine and concerned citizen and gains other’s confidence by consistently offering assistance. He also carefully places himself in the position of defending the victim, whilst simultaneously drawing attention to them, ‘I had rather have this tongue cut from my mouth than it should do offense to Michael Cassio’. (Act 2, Scene 3) Iago is careful to be seen to defend Othello when he appears charged before the Senate, which is soon after the audience has watched him blatantly incriminate Othello. Iago maintains his reputation through discretion and when questioned for information he tells Lodovico that ‘it is not honesty in me to speak what I have seen and known’. (Act 4, Scene 1)

However, Iago is not the only character to present an alternative public persona. Desdemona states in Act 2 that she must ‘beguile’ the thing she is ‘seeming otherwise’ (Act 2, Scene 1), and Emilia states that she wouldn’t do a deceptive act in the ‘heavenly light’, but she would willingly do it ‘in th’ dark’. (Act 4, 3) Roderigo willingly performs for Brabantio in the pursuit of Desdemona and Cassio teases Bianca with his affections calling her ‘sweet’ and ‘fair’, yet in private he degrades her as a mere ‘customer’. (Act 4, Scene 1) It is public performance that Othello fears, perhaps because he is naïve to the social customs of a culture he sits outside of. When he confronts Desdemona in front of Senator Lodovico he states, ‘if the earth could teem with women’s tears, each drop she falls would prove a crocodile’. (Act 4, Scene 1) Shakespeare explores this art of public performance and the anxieties surrounding it by contrasting Othello, the naïve outsider, with Venetian Iago who is the master manipulator of it.
MANHOOD AND THE FATHER FIGURE

It is important to consider Stephen Greenblatt’s theory of Renaissance Self-fashioning when analyzing the masculine identity of this period. He notes that the ideological traits embedded in the portrayal of manhood were authority and power, hence the reason why male rulers of the time depicted themselves in armour, whether they were active in military or not. This is very much the world of Othello. Our title character is aware that there is currency in his masculine, military skillset and this is the only way he knows how to define himself. In fact he seems to equate his success in love and society with his success as a soldier. In recalling his wooing of Desdemona he states; ‘She loved me for the dangers I had passed and I loved her that she did pity them.’ (Act 1, Scene 3)

Othello recalls Desdemona proclaiming that she wished ‘That heaven had made her such a man.’ (Act 1, Scene 3) This could be read in multiple ways. Desdemona could be simply praising Othello as a heavenly being, however we can also assume that Desdemona wishes she had access to the male realm of prestige and power. This is likely considering her bold choice to travel to the harsh environment of Cyprus. Perhaps it is her strength that Othello fears as it trespasses on the masculine. With the Turks at rest and Othello now an idle soldier he has lost the male arena in which he defines himself and feels most uneasy in the private, intimate or internal. As jealousy consumes him he farewells his sanity using the only vernacular afforded to him, military imagery; ‘Farewell the plum’d troops and the big wars that make ambition virtue.’ (Act 3, Scene 3) Othello completely confuses the two realms and he even attempts to convert his death bed into a military shrine; he farewells his audience with a reminder of the ‘service’ (Act 5, Scene 2) he has done the state. He must remain in the masculine realm and as literary theorist Frank Kermode notes in his publication Shakespeare’s Language, Othello cannot even confess to weeping in his final hour ‘without explaining that it isn’t his usual practice’.

The director of this production, Peter Evans, notes that many of Shakespeare’s texts present complex father/daughter relationships, in which the daughter must escape her father, marrying in order to find herself. This occurs in The Merchant of Venice, Romeo And Juliet, and A Midsummer Night’s Dream. Conversely, in Hamlet, Ophelia fails to achieve independence and by following her father wishes she ultimately perishes. It is certainly the inciting event in Othello, and Desdemona’s public proclamation of love proves her to be more defiant than many of Shakespeare’s young females. What interests Director Peter Evans is the men that these honourable heroines choose, who rarely prove worthy of their female counterpart. Desdemona shifts from a father that misunderstands and underestimates her, to a husband that mistrusts and eventually kills her.

SEXUALITY

During the 20th and 21st century, a number of critics have focused on the relationship between Othello and Iago as possessing a subtext of repressed homosexuality. Particular focus has been given by David Somerton, Linford S. Haines and J.P. Doolan York (Notes for Literature Students on the Tragedy of Othello, 1996) to the analysis of Act 3, Scene 3. The vows, declarations and oaths between Iago and Othello have been seen as a dark parody of a heterosexual marriage ceremony. They point out that at this point in the play, Iago replaces Desdemona in Othello’s affections and loyalty. They have also contended that the unrequited nature of Iago’s love for Othello could help to explain his otherwise motiveless but passionate loathing. It is worth noting that such views of the play are held by a minority of critics and there are other aspects of human sexuality in the play that have drawn the attention of commentators.

Disgust, horror and the perversity of female sexuality is apparent in many of Shakespeare’s plays, including King Lear, Mercutio in Romeo And Juliet and most certainly Iago in Othello. He uses a range of pejorative images to describe women, such as ‘guinea hen’ (Act 1, Scene 3) and ‘wildcat’ (Act 2, Scene 1) and appears to distrust their sexuality in general. Iago is hasty to brand Bianca as a prostitute and Cassio’s arrogance and amusement at his manipulation of Bianca perhaps reflects a wider misogyny and belief that the sexuality of women, is intended for the benefit of men. A number of critics have pondered whether Othello’s idealistic notion of female virtue is symptomatic of his sexual innocence. Elizabethan and Jacobean society considered the Venetian woman to be both beautiful and licentious and Othello, unversed in Venetian society is perhaps fearful of this. In general, the men in Othello struggle to define women outside the pure or the promiscuous, yet the women prove more complex and work against this reductive binary. Emilia will only commit adultery to earn her independence, Bianca is labelled a ‘customer’ but proves loyal and determined, and Desdemona can’t even comprehend adultery despite the Venetian stereotype.

Cassio, who appears to be the most sexually aware character in the play, refers to Desdemona as a ‘maid’ (Act 2, Scene 1). There has been much analysis of whether Desdemona and Othello’s relationship is ever consummated. Given the very narrow time frame of the play (the Venetians disembark on Saturday and Desdemona dies on Sunday) and night time interruptions, such as Cassio’s drunken brawling, it is possible that both characters die without consummating their marriage.
RACE AND THE OUTSIDER

In his essay ‘Blackness made Visible’ (Othello: New Critical Essays, 2010), Kolin discusses how the play centres around one of the ‘most inflammatory issues confronting early and late modern audiences alike: miscegenation – a black man marrying a white woman’. Shakespeare and Elizabethan audiences would have been well accustomed to Moors and their plight due to high immigration and common place racial vilification. Elizabeth I deported eighty nine Moors from London in an edict against ‘the great number of negars and blackamoors which are crept into the realm since the troubles between Her Highness and the King of Spain’. Conversely, in 1600, the Moorish Ambassador of the King of Barbary visited the English court and Shakespeare acted before him during the Christmas season.

There is much contention over Othello’s ethnic origin. Ackroyd believes it is a mistake to consider Othello to be of African or West Indian origin, as is often the case in modern productions. However, it is believed that Moor was an ambiguous, general term used to describe ‘black-skinned people of ‘African, Arab or Indian descent. Theorist Russ McDonald maintains that in twenty-first century terms, Othello is not black, but to the Elizabethans he might be considered so. The Elizabethan ideal of human beauty was what was called ‘fair’, or light-skinned with light brown or blonde hair; its opposite, the brunette, or person with darker skin or darker hair, was known as ‘black’ or ‘dark’. So simply by not being white-skinned or fair, Othello could be considered black.

In Act I Scene 1, Iago and Roderigo’s racist and insulting descriptions of Othello, ‘thick-lips’, ‘old black ram’ and ‘Barbary horse’ are believed to be stereotypes or caricatures that emerge from hatred and therefore should be questioned as an accurate guide to his appearance. Ackroyd argues that Othello is of Moorish stock and so is olive skinned. He believes Shakespeare presents Othello as black in contrast to the ‘fair’ Desdemona for the purposes of theatrical emphasis and symbolism. The two characters are constantly defined against each other by this dichotomy. In the opening scene, Iago announces that ‘an old black ram is tupping your white ewe.’ Desdemona skin is described as white as ‘snow’ (Act 5, Scene 2) and Othello’s bosom as ‘sooty’ (Act 1, Scene 2). In trying to rectify Brabantio’s disapproval of the marriage of these two opposites being united, the Duke tells him that Othello ‘is far more fair than black’ (Act 1, Scene 3).

The terms ‘black’ and ‘fair’ for Elizabethans were encoded with strong culture presumptions. To be black was to be evil, ugly, ‘lascivious’ (Act 1, Scene 1, as Othello is deemed), untrustworthy, primitive and associated with the devil. To be white was to be beautiful, intelligent, civilised and pure. At the start of Act 2, Desdemona muses on the two opposites in regards to women’s intelligence and beauty. She asks what success a woman would have ‘if she be black and witty’ (Act 2, Scene 1), black meaning brunette and ugly. Iago responds that she can use her intelligence to fool men into accepting her. Even Othello’s language is tainted with this simplistic, dichotomous way of thought. When in full doubt of Desdemona’s purity, he can’t help but say that her name is ‘now as black as my own face’. (Act 3, Scene 3) As black and white denote the simple division between good and bad, religious imagery often comes in to play. As Desdemona shares her dying words, Emilia scorns Othello, exclaiming that, ‘O, the more angel she, and you the blacker devil!’. (Act 5, Scene 2)

Kolin believes that class warfare sits at the ‘emotional centre’ of this play. Venetian nobleman and characters such a Cassio or Desdemona sit at the top. Iago is the ‘underdog’ and, although lauded for his military prowess, Othello actually sits outside this completely. As discussed earlier in regards to notions of manhood, Othello defines his identity by his position as a soldier and so do the society around him. He is only accepted by Brabantio for his ‘sieges’ (Act 1, Scene 3), and the Duke possibly disregards his secret marriage to Desdemona because he is required in battle against the Turks. As discussed earlier with regards to race there is much evidence that Othello’s ethnicity prohibits him from being truly accepted and his social and relationship anxieties and insecurities are bound up in this. Perhaps Kolin’s notion of Othello and Iago as citizens extricated from the inner circle can help to give Iago motivation and explain Othello’s rashness. One wreaks havoc because he has been somewhat devalued and the other destroys himself over insecurities of his otherness.
UNITY OF PLOT AND DUALITY OF TIME

Othello has virtually a single plot with very little in the way of sub-plot; even the minor character Roderigo is linked to Desdemona as a failed suitor and fulfills the role of sounding board for Iago’s plotting. The plot is also somewhat simple to follow, with only sixteen characters, when compared with Richard III that has over 50. The two tragedies written on either side of Othello – Hamlet and King Lear – are said to be two of Shakespeare’s greatest, however both are notoriously hard to stage. They are less action driven, are steeped in philosophy about mortality, religion and humanistic pursuits, and present great soliloquies that are incidental to the narrative drive of the plot. Othello on the other hand is a tightly woven story full of forward-moving action. The only moment Shakespeare steers off course is when Emilia prepares Desdemona for her inevitable death. This brief, contemplative scene perfectly pauses the narrative to allow the audience to properly ponder what has passed, and what will proceed.

Time in the play, however, works in two schemes, side by side, as many of Shakespeare’s works do. The director of this production, Peter Evans, is interested in the tension that is created by Shakespeare condensing action that in its reality would happen over a few months, into a mere 36 hours. This places the character’s decisions and mental/emotional clarity under immense pressure, whilst heightening the dramatic rise of the narrative. The theatre space becomes a pressure cooker for both the audience and characters.

THE QUESTION OF THE MAIN CHARACTER

Who is the ‘main’ character? Who do we follow in the play? Although thematically Iago is the antagonist, to a certain extent he is actually the protagonist – he is the one that tells us his ambitions and is fighting to achieve them. It is Othello who is given the greater emotional range, but Iago who is truly active in the play, manipulating the other characters and going after what he wants. Apart from having more lines in the play than Othello – 1,097 to be exact – audiences are taken through the narrative by Iago, and are complicit with his ideas and decisions through soliloquies and asides. Iago somewhat complicates the role of the protagonist as the audience are repulsed by him and in awe of his mental agility, yet never able to escape their alliance with him.

The question to ask when considering this contentious issue is, can a character be considered the protagonist if they do not change throughout the story?
OTHELLO, THE MOOR

‘One that loved not wisely, but too well’ (Act 5, Scene 2)

Othello is a Moor, born of royal blood. He was sold into slavery at a very young age and spent his youth living in army camps. This harsh, adventurous, and eventful past shaped him into a ‘Valiant’ (Act 1, Scene 3), ‘Brave’ (Act 2, Scene 1) and level-headed soldier, and he is now revered as a General in the Venetian Army. Although an outsider, as a Moor in a white society, Othello is now accepted as a Christian. His military talents have earned him respect and valuable alliances and he has even won the affections and hand of the ‘most exquisite’ (Act 2, Scene 3) and prized Desdemona.

Othello’s fate however takes a turn when Desdemona’s father does not accept him, and his manipulative ensign Iago proves untrustworthy, convincing Othello that his wife is unfaithful. He is undone.

Othello’s tragic demise is commonly perceived to derive from his most undesired character trait, jealousy, which A.C. Bradley famously termed his ‘fatal flaw’. However, it is important to go beyond this and investigate Othello’s downfall as a result of a more complex persona. Firstly, Othello was very much accepted and applauded by Brabantio as a soldier and invited into his home, but as a son-in-law he is violently rejected and labeled an ‘extravagant and wheeling stranger’ (Act 1, Scene 1). Othello is a man of heroic status with impressive gifts who begins the play with great confidence that his ‘service’ will ‘out-tongue’ (Act 1, Scene 2) any complaints against him. However, he is still aware that his decisive and strict military upbringing renders him ignorant to society’s ways and the company of women. He himself states ‘little of this great world can I speak’ (Act 1, Scene 1). His confidence often seems paired with insecurity over his foreign past and the question of being accepted. Othello has a great command over language (many critics have described it as a ‘musicality’) and a vast imagination, yet describes himself as ‘rude’ in his speech and ‘little blessed with the soft phrase of peace’. Ironically, despite being an outsider of ‘Moorship’ (Act 1, Scene 1), his speech is much grander than that of his white ‘ancient’ Iago who pleads superiority.

Iago cleverly leans on Othello’s trust for rank and allegiance and his habits of command that favour frenetic and absolute decisions. Othello tells us that, ‘To be once in doubt/ Is once to be resolved’ (Act 3, Scene 3). Iago uses this to his advantage and exploits Othello’s grand imagination, knowing how potent a seed of doubt it will be once it is planted. Iago is also aware that Othello’s inexperience with internal reflection and relationships make him ill-equipped to resolve emotional issues. Bearing in mind Othello’s social inexperience, resolute nature, trust in rank and his insecurities over his colour, his vulnerability becomes much more apparent.

As Othello declines his language begins to mirror the baseness of his tormentor, from poetic verse and complex imagery to repetitive, limited prose: from ‘she gave me for my pains a world of kisses’ (Act 1, Scene 3), to the monosyllabic repetition of ‘O, blood, blood, blood’ (Act 3, Scene 3). Only on his deathbed, when he realises Desdemona’s innocence and his own ignorance is Othello’s poetry restored, and he is again differentiated from the foul Iago: ‘I kissed thee, ere I killed thee’ (Act 5, Scene 2). All at once his multiple flaws or insecurities are exposed in his own remorse. He confirms himself as a ‘base Indian/Judean’ (Act 5, Scene 2) who has always been an outsider, he still asks for respect for his military achievements (the true source of his confidence) and talks of Desdemona as a ‘pearl’ (Act 5, Scene 2), something always more perfect than himself.

To the end of the play, Othello still believes that he is ‘not easily jealous’ (Act 5, Scene 2). Perhaps, this is the case or has he underestimated the delicacy of the human mind when dealing with matters of the heart. Is he still unaware even in his most honest hour?

IAGO

‘I am not what I am’ (Act 1, Scene 1)

Iago is a young Venetian career soldier, with advanced military experience that has earned him the senior position of ‘ancient’ or sword bearer to the General Othello. He is infamously ambiguous in motivation and reveals little humanity to help the audience to perceive him as anything but evil. Initially he seems resentful of Cassio’s promotion above him, but mentions this briefly and swiftly shifts his focus to criticism of Othello. He repetitively refers to Othello’s ‘Moorship’ (Act 1, Scene 1) revealing a racial bias, is revolted by Othello’s ‘pride and purposes’ (Act 1, Scene 1), states that he only follows him to ‘serve his turn upon him’ (Act 1, Scene 1) and blatantly announces that he hates the Moor. However Iago never gives a clear reason for his hatred of Othello. He does speak of rumours that Othello has committed adultery with Iago’s wife Emilia, but then suspiciously attributes the same act to Cassio who has little dealings with Emilia. Iago is certainly motivated by self interest and greed as he extorts large sums of money from Roderigo: ‘Thus do I ever make my fool my purse.’ (Act 1, Scene 3)
Iago is married to Emilia and although she seems loyal to him, her very harsh notions of love in the close of Act 4 are not evidence of a happy marriage. Iago shows little respect, trust or understanding of women, who he labels ‘wildcats’ (Act 2, Scene 1). He appears to be paranoid of his own wife’s adulterous behavior, yet at the same time seems somewhat unaffected by it. As Kermode notes, Iago’s interest in sex ‘is to watch other’s doing it, or at least to think about it;’ he reveals little evidence of his own engagement in the act. He continually reduces sexual relationships to something base, physical or perverse; to him sex is ‘merely a lust of the blood’ or ‘the beast with two backs’ (Act 1, Scene 1). Every relationship Iago maintains is for his own gain, he is relentlessly manipulative and there appears to be no limit to his malice.

A striking feature of Iago is his rhetorical flexibility and skill. Kermode describes this in Shakespeare’s Language as ‘lexical resourcefulness’. He moves from verse to prose easily and appears to adjust his language to suit his audience. His language is often shockingly base and he begins the play with a cacophony of profanities and sexual innuendoes, ‘Zounds’, and ‘an old black ram is tupping your white ewe’. (Act 1, Scene 1). Iago has the skill to contaminate Othello’s mind with filthy and degrading images, and is able to plant notions in Othello’s head using seemingly harmless questions. He often plays the opposite role to his true intentions. For instance, Iago stirs Othello to jealousy but gives the appearance of placating, ‘Why how now General? No more of that?’ (3:3) He is ironically described as ‘honest’ several times throughout the play by Othello, Cassio and even once by Desdemona.

Iago is even defiant at the end of the play when he is caught and accused of his masterplan. He refuses to justify his actions, saying ‘From this time forth I never will speak a word.’ (Act 5, Scene 2) The characters and audience will remain blind to Iago’s true intentions.

DESDEMONA
‘my noble Moor is true of mind, and made of no such baseness as jealous creatures are.’ (Act 3, Scene 4)

Desdemona is the daughter of the Venetian nobleman Brabantio and at the beginning of the play, has secretly married Othello. Desdemona is a complex character as her true nature often seems quite contrary to how others perceive her. Her father describes her as pure, meek and subservient, ‘a maiden never bold’ (Act 1, Scene 3), yet when confronted by him she promptly defends her choices in a public forum, and says she will ‘trumpet them to the world’ (Act 1, Scene 3) and willingly follows Othello to Cyprus. Her decision to marry Othello is highly unconventional, and she knowingly disregards her father’s wishes and even describes her actions as ‘downright violence’ (Act 1, Scene 3) against acceptable codes of behavior. In striking contrast to Emilia, Desdemona does appear naïve and innocent, and argues that she is incapable of committing adultery, no matter the price. However, Desdemona does jest quite bawdily with Iago at the start of Act 2, and in an aside reveals that she is capable of deception. She discloses to the audience that she is actually not merry but is merely presenting a contrived public face, ‘I do beguile the thing I am by seeming otherwise’ (Act 2, Scene 1). She shows great strength in her perseverance to defend Cassio and when her husband strikes her in public she responds abruptly in defense, ‘I have not deserved this.’ (Act 4, Scene 1) Desdemona does underestimate her husband’s capacity for jealousy or insecurity and assumes she possesses a deep understanding of a man she has only been married to for a few days.

Arguably, Desdemona’s strongest and most dignified moments are in death and her anticipation of it. When Emilia prepares her for bed and the end of Act 4, she is not only perceptive enough to know what awaits her but prepares for it with quiet strength. She forthrightly defends her honour to Othello and argues for her life and reputation right up until her death. Even in her last breath she maintains integrity, defending her husband’s honour and refusing to incriminate him – ‘Farewell. Commend me to my kind lord’ (Act 5, Scene 2).

EMILIA
‘The world’s a huge thing; it is a great price for a small vice.’ (Act 4, Scene 3)

Emilia is Iago’s wife and Desdemona’s companion or ‘ladies maid’ when she travels to Cyprus. She shows loyalty to her husband by retrieving the handkerchief for him, yet there is little sign of affection in their interaction. There is no exchange between them until Act 3 and even then it is brief. Iago firstly addresses her as a ‘foolish wife’ (Act 3, Scene 3) and even when she pleases him he only manages to raise his praise to ‘good wench’ (Act 3, Scene 3). Perhaps, due to this, Emilia is worldly, practical, cynical and shrewd. She is often considered an early feminist voice and argues for gender equality, maintaining that men and women have the same desires of attraction and potential for infidelity. She states that women share the same ‘affections, desires for sports, and frailty’ as men do and even goes as far as to claim that ‘it is their husband’s faults if wives do fall.’ (Act 4, Scene 3) Emilia even admits to Desdemona that she would commit adultery for the right price.

She is fiercely loyal to Desdemona, strongly attacks Othello for his accusations and easily hands her husband
over as the guilty party when she realises the truth. She shows incredible courage when she discovers that Othello has killed Desdemona – ‘I care not for thy sword.’ (Act 5, Scene 1) Although she was unaware of her husband’s intentions, Emilia evidently harbours some guilt for the part she played with the handkerchief. In disgust of Iago’s plot, she immediately defies her husband and ultimately lays down her life in Desdemona’s honour.

CASSIO

‘I have lost the immortal part of myself, and what remains is bestial.’ (Act 2, Scene 3)

Cassio is a highly educated young Florentine and has recently been promoted to Othello’s lieutenant, or second-in-command. He is, however, young and inexperienced in the field and Iago scorns him as an ‘arithmetician’ (Act 1, Scene 1), someone who has theoretical rather than practical knowledge. He is also described by Iago as a ‘proper man’ (Act 1, Scene 3) who is handsome and well made. Iago uses this to his advantage by making Othello jealous of Cassio’s relationship with Desdemona. Observing Cassio, Iago states that ‘the knife is handsome, young and has all those requisites in him that folly and green (jealous) minds look after.’ (Act 2, Scene 1) Cassio is very aware that he has ‘unhappy brains for drinking’ (Act 2, Scene 3) or a low tolerance for alcohol and is careful to restrain from it as reputation is of the highest importance to him. Iago exploits this weakness and convinces Cassio to drink, after which he loses his dignity and favour with Othello. Cassio laments, ‘I have lost the immortal part of myself and what remains is bestial.’ (Act 3, Scene 3) Cassio can also be proud and arrogant, and alcohol seems to heighten these qualities. He goes to great pains to reinstate his reputation and struggles to be in the presence of Othello after his misdoings, due to shame. He shows varied respect for women. Although he talks of Desdemona as ‘perfection’ (Act 2, Scene 3), he is very quick to mock her when she suspects ill-treatment and infidelity. It is important to note the symbolism of her name meaning ‘notable strumpet’ (5:1), yet she seems to dedicate herself solely to Cassio and even has the dignity to reject him when she suspects ill-treatment and infidelity. Cassio, who is beguiled by Iago’s skilled rhetoric, so much so that his responses are rarely longer than a line. Cassio wills to battle Cassio twice in pursuit of his love and he is not the only character fooled by Iago. In most of their private meetings, Iago speaks far more lines than Roderigo, who is beguiled by Iago’s skilled rhetoric, so much so that his responses are rarely longer than a line. Cassio does however muster up the strength to challenge Iago in Act 4, questions his truthfulness and threatens to opt out of their dealings. Cassio is also the only character to be truly exposed to Iago’s base and vile philosophies and is the only one to challenge him directly before the final scene unfolds. He eventually, and quite ironically, dies at the hand of Iago.

BIANCA

‘This is some token from a newer friend.’ (Act 3, Scene 4)

Bianca is Cassio’s mistress or lover and she is described in the text as a courtesan or prostitute. Writer and feminist activist Sian Norris states that although Bianca is a minor character she ‘reflects the angers and hurts of many of the characters and the problematic status of women in this period’. She is also an actual illustration of the imagined jealousies that sit at the heart of the play. Bianca shows a genuine love for Cassio, yet for him she comes second to his career. He teases her with affection and marriage proposals, yet keeps her at a fair distance and mocks her in private. In Shakespeare’s era the Venetian courtesan had a notorious reputation in England, often associated with sophistication and potential treachery. Iago refers to Bianca as a ‘whore’ and a ‘notable strumpet’ (5:1), yet she needs to dedicate herself solely to Cassio and even has the dignity to reject him when she suspects ill-treatment and infidelity. It is important to note the symbolism of her name meaning white, which works against her archetype and that Shakespeare affords her lines in her own defence. She protests to Emilia that she is ‘no strumpet but of life as honest as you that thus abuse me’ (Act 5, Scene 1). In a traditional dramatic sense, Bianca should be the literal representation of the whore or “fair devil” (Act 3, Scene 3) that Othello assumes Desdemona to be and yet her true and faithful nature works to prove this archetype untrue.
THE DUKE OF VENICE

‘If virtue no delighted beauty lack,
Your son-in-law is far more fair than black.’ (Act 1, Scene 3)

The Duke is the ruler of Venice and the highest authority. He has great respect for Othello as an employee of the Venetian state, and addresses him as ‘valiant’ (Act 1, Scene 3). He initially supports Brabantio’s plight to punish the man who Brabantio says has ‘beguiled’ (Act 1, Scene 3) Desdemona, but on finding the felon to be Othello he withdraws, patiently hears him out and dismisses the case. The Duke tells Brabantio to let his grief rest and states that Othello’s tales ‘would have won’ (Act 1, Scene 3) his daughter too. He eagerly sends Othello to attack the invading Turkish fleets as he knows he is the most experienced and capable commander. The Duke is often seen to back Othello because of his own invested interest, however the fact that he shows public and genuine affection for him does not go unnoticed.

BRABANTIO

‘If thou has eyes to see: She has deceived her father, and may thee’ (Act 1, Scene 3)

Brabantio is a Venetian Nobleman, a Senator and the father of Desdemona. He is a public voice for the complex racial issues that exist within the world of the play, and represents beliefs that Elizabethan audiences would have readily recognised. He serves the role of the disapproving father, a dramatic function that dates back to Plautus. Although previously supporting Othello’s military prowess and often inviting him into to his home to regale heroic tales, Brabantio, on hearing the news that the Moor has secretly married his daughter, is horrified and reveals his true prejudice. He assumes his daughter innocent, and thinks that Othello must have enchanted her with ‘drugs’, ‘foul charms’ or the ‘chains of magic’ (Act 1, Scene 2), and refuses to believe she would willingly expose herself to ‘general mock’ (Act 1, Scene 2). He denounces the marriage as evil, feels that his life and ‘time’ (Act 1, Scene 2) spent with Desdemona is now a waste and gathers officers to confront Othello. He then brings the matter before the Duke but when Desdemona defends her love for Othello he turns cold and rejects her, stating that it is lucky she is an only child as he would scorn the others after witnessing her behavior. He warns Othello strongly of Desdemona’s deception and plants the seed that she may one day deceive Othello. He eventually dies of heart ache over his daughter’s so called betrayal.

MONTANO

‘It were well the general were put in mind of it.’ (Act 2, Scene 3)

Montano is the Governor of Cyprus prior to Othello’s arrival. His first appearance is at the beginning at Act 2, when the play’s action shifts to the island of Cyprus. He announces that the Turkish fleets have been destroyed by a storm and that the threat of invasion is passed. Iago pollutes Montano’s opinion of Cassio, saying that he is often consumed by the vice of drinking and could prove disloyal. When Montano stumbles across a brawl between Cassio and Roderigo he intercedes and is wounded by Cassio, but does not give Cassio’s name over when Othello enquires as to who started it.

LODOVICO

‘Is this the nature whom passion could not shake?’ (Act 4, Scene 1)

Lodovico is a Venetian nobleman and a kinsman of Brabantio. He travels to Cyprus as a messenger and brings news that Othello must return to Venice and Cassio is to take his place as Governor. He is witness to Othello striking his wife in Act 4, the fight between Cassio and Roderigo in Act V and adopts the role of adjudicator in the final scene reporting the letter found in Roderigo’s pocket, the evidence that finally incriminates Iago.

GRATIANO

‘Thy match was mortal to him, and pure grief shore his old thread in twain.’ (Act 5, Scene 2)

Gratiano is a Venetian nobleman and a kinsman and brother of Brabantio. He accompanies Lodovico to Cyprus. He is present after the brawl between Cassio and Roderigo in Act V and is shocked by Iago’s report that Roderigo is the culprit. He also brings news during the tragic conclusion of the play that Brabantio has died, due to heartbreak from Desdemona’s betrayal of him, in marrying Othello.
# OTHHELLO 2016 COMPANY LIST

## CAST

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<td>Iago</td>
<td>Yalin Ozucelik</td>
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<tr>
<td>Desdemona</td>
<td>Elizabeth Nabben</td>
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<td>Brabantio/Lodovico</td>
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<td>Cassio</td>
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<td>Roderigo</td>
<td>Edmund Lembke-Hogan</td>
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<td>Emilia</td>
<td>Joanna Downing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bianca</td>
<td>Alice Keohavong</td>
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<td>Duke/Montano</td>
<td>Huw McKinnon</td>
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## CREATIVES

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<tr>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Peter Evans</td>
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<tr>
<td>Designer</td>
<td>Michael Hankin</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lighting Designer</td>
<td>Paul Jackson</td>
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<tr>
<td>Composer &amp; Sound Designer</td>
<td>Steve Toulmin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fight Director / Assistant Director</td>
<td>Nigel Poulton</td>
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<td>Voice Coach</td>
<td>Jess Chambers</td>
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## CREW

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<thead>
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<tr>
<td>Company Stage Manager</td>
<td>Sarah Stait</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deputy Stage Manager</td>
<td>Bridget Samuel</td>
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<td>Assistant Stage Manager</td>
<td>Grace Nye-Butler</td>
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<td>Production Assistant</td>
<td>Roni Wilkinson</td>
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<td>Head Electrician</td>
<td>Nick Toll</td>
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<td>Head Mechanist</td>
<td>Stephen Bancroft</td>
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<tr>
<td>Head of Audio</td>
<td>Robin McCarthy</td>
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<tr>
<td>Head of Costume</td>
<td>Rosie Hodge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costume Supervisor</td>
<td>Amanda Carr</td>
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DESIGN

In his various discussions with the production’s designer Michael Hankin, Director Peter Evans found there were elements of the play that consistently seized his attention. The play opens in the lavish world of Venice and despite the fact that the action then travels to the harsh island of Cyprus for the remaining four acts, it is still a colony of Venice and thus the Venetian manor of opulence and excess must always be present. Venice has forever been associated with the majestic, a notion Jacobean audiences were well aware of, and Evans and Hankin wish to capture this in the design. This excess follows the Venetians to Cyprus and is forever present. It is important to note that Venetian life and the world Evans wishes to create is also very public. Desdemona and Othello’s relationship becomes public property and its fate lies at the hands of the Senate. Almost all the characters in Othello are highly aware of how they are perceived publically and consider their reputation of the upmost importance. Thus, the playing space of the production will be something like a town-square or piazza that is consistently and knowingly public.

Evans and Hankin also found that they kept returning to the dark and desperately tragic nature of Othello, a play in which time constraints and an action-driven narrative mean the audience are afforded little relief. For Evans, the world Shakespeare creates is something of a ‘dream space’ or ‘nightmare’, and the characters are shrouded in impending doom. Shakespeare’s dramatic use of time places pressure on the action and blurs the boundaries between dream and reality. The characters in Othello rarely sleep, and sometimes never sleep. The play opens with Brabantio being awoken in the middle of the night to find his worst nightmare realised and Othello is awoken twice in the play from his own marriage bed only to return there to complete his final tragic act.

Evans’ key question in approaching the set was how to create this public, opulent and yet intimate and psychological world on tour. He felt that the parameters of the world Shakespeare presents certainly inform the idea of the play, just as the design parameters will inform the world of this production.

SET

The show will travel to approximately 30 venues across Australia, all varying in floor size and shape, so Evans and Hankin knew early on that the design had to be flexible, yet simple and consistent enough for the actors. Evans was always interested in the space being a room or box that is dream-like in nature or somewhat strange or ‘weird’. All the objects and the people inside it are real and naturalistic just as they play itself is, with a high use of prose and quick and easy dialogue, yet it sits inside something very unreal. Just like a dream, everything seems concrete, but we know the framework isn’t. To achieve this Evans decided that the dominant design feature would be a deep green velvet material that will cover every surface of the set. Velvet conveys many things: money, grandeur, and theatricality. With several 1m thick and 5m high pillions that will line either side of the stage, the effect of the material will seem both dream-like and continuous. Velvet is a material usually preserved for curtains or adornments, yet by covering everything in it the space is instantly strange or unreal. The use of coloured lights on the varied velvet surfaces will also help to produce a rather ominous and nightmarish atmosphere. Evans will also use extensive movement work with the aid of choreographer Nigel Poulton to create a ‘floating’ or abstracted quality at times, yet the movement within the set will be mostly realistic.

The set was built in Sydney and uses 300 metres or 500 square metres of imported velvet. A patch of the green velvet was even placed in the foyer of Bell Shakespeare’s office over a number of weeks, for testing how it stood up to foot traffic. Originally Evans would have preferred to steer clear of the colour green as it is so obviously aligns with one of the classic themes of Othello, jealousy. However, with further exploration, the colour, despite its symbolic significance, worked perfectly to create the desired atmosphere. As a simple set it has great dramatic flexibility and by keeping the basic frame of the set consistent throughout the play, Evans is adhering to Aristotle’s rules of classic tragedy, unified time and space.
COSTUME

Michael Hankin’s costumes however work against the opulence of the velvet set in many ways. They are
generic, simple, contemporary, military and of no particular nation. Director Peter Evans felt that the military
element was important but did not want it to be attached to any specific current war state or army. Symbolically
the uniform works in two ways; it ‘unifies’ the men whilst at the same time highlights their differences; it
denotes their rank but makes us focus on how their race or personality work for and against it.

The tones of the costumes are quite earthy, somewhat sepia and subdued, as Evans did not want any complex
costume changes to ensure elegant and simple storytelling. The only colour Hankin and Evans have chosen
to use is given to Bianca, a touch of red, for Bianca is unable to escape the preconceived notions of her lower
status and position as an ‘employee’ or courtesan. The feel of the costuming is certainly recognisable and
authentically Australian. Evans wants his characters to be realistic, contemporary people existing within a
dream-like setting. He wants to create a tension between the two main design elements, set and costume. For
Elizabethan and Jacobean England costume and dress certainly reflected rank and status, yet the subtleties
of difference might go amiss to the eye of someone from the 21st century, just as elements of today’s fashion
would be completely unfathomable to Shakespeare and his contemporaries. According to Evans, Desdemona’s
costuming is clever as she adorns a ‘smart casual that only really wealthy people can pull off. She is completely
comfortable with having money, yet is able to be relaxed in a military base. Evans believes ‘this helps our
understanding of Othello better than anything else.’ Whilst Desdemona is honest, open, well-educated,
empowered and comfortable in her own skin (and clothes) it becomes very apparent that Othello is not. In fact
Othello’s security and sense of self lies in his costuming; his uniform. In a sense, Othello is always wearing
costume, something that allows his ‘otherness’ to be acceptable to Venetian society, yet he is not comfortable
in his own skin.
INTERVIEW WITH DIRECTOR
PETER EVANS

THE TEXT
Like any Director, Evans’ exploration of Othello begins with Shakespeare’s words. Evans notes that around the time he wrote Othello, Shakespeare had adopted the habit of hammering away at certain words and playing with the power of repetition. In Macbeth, the word man is repeated constantly whereas in Othello Shakespeare repeats the words bed, lie, honest and see. More importantly, Shakespeare plays with the double meaning of lying (as to deceive) and lie (as to lie with) over 25 times, psychologically pressing on the audience’s awareness of the deceptive innuendoes that Iago is placing in Othello’s mind. It is no surprise then that the line Evans finds most fascinating in Othello is Iago’s own unapologetic confession to Roderigo in the very first scene of the play, ‘I am not what I am.’ This simple antithetical statement sets up the kind of the language and themes that will carry the whole play.

FRAGILITY AND IRRATIONALITY
When he began work on Othello, Evans approached the theme of jealousy with a critical and investigatory eye. Although he found at times it lessened in importance for him, jealousy would constantly return as a central idea. Evans’ interest lies in the power of jealousy and how fragile the human mind can be, ‘how easily jealousy conquers it’. Evans states that with Othello, ‘Shakespeare goes out of his way to give us someone so ordered and rational in his thinking, someone military and fair-minded who is not led by emotion. Shakespeare stacks the deck up only to show how easily Iago can topple it over. Iago poisons it so quickly.’ At the end of the play Othello finds himself arguing that he is not one prone to jealousy, because that is how he defined himself. As an audience we too were presented with an unshakable man at the opening of the play, yet we have witnessed how easily jealousy consumed him. For Evans, Shakespeare’s text reveals the power of irrationality; how quickly one can lose their mind, and he believes Othello does just this. As humans we have a ‘capacity for fixation’, and ‘Shakespeare’s genius is that he drops an image into Othello’s head and presses it, not allowing for any space.’ Othello certainly loses power, position and respect, but for Evans what he truly loses is his capacity for rationality, and the ease with which this happens is truly frightening.

OTHERNESS AND INSECURITY
Every human being has weaknesses and from a dramatic perspective, Evans feels that Shakespeare has inserted Othello’s insecurity over his otherness into the play in order to allow for his downfall. It is his Achilles heel, the crack that Iago leans on to expose Othello’s fragility. Evans states that ‘Othello is central to society, yet isolated.’ He is essential to the war effort, yet not completely accepted in society, and this is what makes him vulnerable. Evans feels that for men (and possibly women alike) humiliation, or ‘being made a fool of,’ is a huge fear. Iago presses this insecurity within Othello, having Othello think that he has been hoodwinked by Desdemona because he doesn’t understand Venetian women; his ‘otherness’ or cultural differences have allowed her to ‘take him for a ride’. For Evans this insecurity is an essential part of Othello’s character and ego, and therefore his downfall.

AUDIENCE AS IMPLICATED CONSPIRATORS
Peter Evans discusses Shakespeare’s use of dramatic irony within the play in a clear and simple fashion. He describes it as a central narrative technique in which the audience knows more than the lead character. In a comedy, this technique gives the audience much enjoyment as they watch a character stumble through the unknown. However in tragedy, the audience feels somewhat implicated or complicit in the events. For Evans this is central when considering an Othello audience member’s experience, as they are unavoidably troubled by it. As opposed to Hamlet, where the audience are working out the facts alongside the title character, in Othello we know from the very start that our protagonist is being led and manipulated and we are ‘forced to go through it, with no relief.’ Evans notes that at times Shakespeare even slows down the action to make it more agonising for the audience. For him this play is almost a study in torture, it is painful to watch, yet also ‘troublingly delightful’ to observe and be part of Iago’s workings.

WOMEN IN OTHELLO
Evans notes that Desdemona is commonly perceived by audiences as naive, and he feels that this is in many ways unfair. There is a preconceived idea that ‘women should be careful’ and when Desdemona doesn’t act with caution around Othello, audiences often blame her for not being aware of his decline or shift in opinion. However, if we track her journey, there is no reason for her to pre-empt Othello’s suspicions. In fact, we should
afford her the right to sit in the trust of their original union. Evans states that 'she thinks Othello is being over-sensitive when he scolds her in public and asks repeatedly for the handkerchief and she has every right to do so’. Ironically, it is her belief in Othello and their relationship and her own self-assurance that cause her own downfall. For Evans, Desdemona’s best qualities are actually, and quite unfortunately, used against her.

With regards to Emilia, Evans feels that she is actually the easiest female character of Shakespeare’s to contemperate; as her notions of women, their position and desires, fit so well into our current thinking. Emilia quite openly states that women are the same as men and men are troubled by this. However, both her theatrical journey and functionality, in delivering the handkerchief to her husband, tend to pose a problem. She so easily and blindly hands it over, yet in the closing scenes her character is so wise and protective of Desdemona. How does a director solve this? This is something Evans will explore in the rehearsal room as it requires an actor’s perspective or take on character. However, he has considered Emilia’s lower status and possibly an abusive marriage as driving forces behind her neglectful actions. Evans is also interested in Emilia’s treatment of Bianca in the play, for Emilia clearly supports females, yet chides Bianca’s lowly role as the courtesan. This reveals something intrinsic to Emilia, she is very aware and critical of her own lower status and yet is even quicker to recognise those below her and treat them just so.

RACE AND ETHNICITY

The issue of race in society has obviously changed over the 400 years that Othello has been performed. However, Peter Evans laments that it is still very much an issue in our society and therefore it is important to keep the conversation around this issue going. Evans draws parallels between Othello’s rank and the sporting prowess and position of Australian Indigenous football players, namely Adam Goodes. He believes that racial stereotypes still exist and although these sportsman are lauded and accepted, society still make sure they ‘know their place’. Peter Evans recalls the violent reactions to Adam Goodes Indigenous war dance, and views them as a sign of latent racism that is still very alive under the surface of our community; just as racism sits under the surface of Othello’s Venetian society and only rears its ugly head when Othello steps out of place by marrying a white woman. As Evans says, Othello ‘is not about race, but at the same time it is absolutely about race’.

Although Evans will not change any of the original Shakespeare text he does wish to have Ray Chong Nee’s Samoan ethnicity very present within his production. According to Evans, Othello (Chong Nee) will very much be a familiar figure, an Australian Islander, rich in natural comedy and charm. That way the audiences are very aware of the history of this 400-year-old text in its original form and watch it ‘vibrate against the contemporary’ world and characters that they see before them.

STORYTELLING

Evans is very interested in the layered storytelling that functions within Othello. He states, ‘The characters don’t know what play they are in. Bianca feels she is in a troubled story of unrequited love with a handsome soldier Cassio, but Cassio’s story is something very different again. The play is a series of plays within plays, and each story is controlled by a very unreliable narrator, Iago.’ Iago uses characters against themselves, manipulating their reality to suit his needs. When Cassio bawdily mocks Bianca, he thinks he is in a ‘restoration comedy’ engaging in friendly male banter, when he is actually part of something much more sinister. For Evans, Othello is ‘all about stories; the lies we tell, our obsessions, the realities we create for ourselves and how we replay them to alter reality.’ Othello wins Desdemona through storytelling and ironically loses her in the same fashion. Iago plants a story about Desdemona in Othello’s mind and for him it becomes reality. As an audience we watch history change before our eyes through the power of Iago’s storytelling and the other characters’ belief in it.

THE RISK OF THE IDLE SOLDIER

Evans tells an anecdote of a discussion he had with a former senior member of the Australian armed forces who said he was well aware of Othello and from experience, understands the danger of soldiers being idle, cooped up on base and lacking purpose. Evans is very interested in exploring the volatility of contained masculinity in the theatrical space as he feels it is central to the play’s conflict. He asks the question, ‘When the threat of battle has subsided where does the energy go?’ He finds it fascinating that Shakespeare builds the stakes for battle in Othello and has the characters travel through a tempest all to arrive at ‘nothing’ on the other side. According to Evans, this ‘lays a bed for mischief’ as the characters are emotionally geared up with nothing to spend their energy on. He feels that this potential and dangerous energy is very present in the drinking scene in Act Two and works to drive the action for the rest of the play.
THE VOYEURISTIC AND THE EROTIC

Othello deals a lot with sexuality and sexual relations. It is constantly discussed but we are never actually witness to it, or even present in the bedroom until the tragic death of Desdemona at Othello’s hand, in their wedding bed. As an audience we are privy to many varied male and female interactions and the characters take much interest in inferring conclusions from observing heterosexual relations. For Othello, the adultery between Cassio and Desdemona is fleshe out so thoroughly in his mind that it takes on the shape of reality. In fact, so much of the play’s sexuality lives and cultivates in the character’s minds. The audience becomes a voyeur into a society that is both obsessed with, and paranoid of, the sexual. The audience are forced into a complicit relationship with Iago for five acts and then in the final scene they are ‘made to watch’ the fruits of his labour, Desdemona’s death. As Evans notes, many of Shakespeare’s great deaths occur off stage, but with Othello the audience are forced to go through it. According to Evans, ‘we shouldn’t be watching’; we are voyeurs into a very private moment. Evans draws on Alfred Hitchcock’s theory that there is some strange pleasure in this temporary pain. We wish we could turn away yet we are drawn to watching it.

THE CHILD

For Evans, Othello falls further than we think. In the final scene of the play he becomes like a child, trying to excuse his actions, or as Peter says ‘he tries to get out of it’. Evans sees this as a total loss of dignity, a complete fall from grace, not just in position and power, but in personal strength and decorum. Perhaps in the Elizabethan era this sort of ‘honour killing’ had a place, and somewhat justified Othello’s actions, but society’s opinion of violence has luckily shifted. As Evans rightly notes, it is no longer acceptable and so our view of Othello has forever changed.
ADDITIONAL RESOURCES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

RECOMMENDED VERSIONS OF THE PLAY:
The best version of Othello for school students to use is the Cambridge School: New Edition:

However, the Arden edition is more thorough and appropriate for higher learning, but it is challenging as the support material is both dense and academic.

BOOKS WITH GOOD EXERCISES FOR TEACHERS TO USE TO INTRODUCE SHAKESPEARE:
Gibson, Rex, Stepping Into Shakespeare, Cambridge University Press, 2000
Gibson, Rex, Discovering Shakespeare’s Language, Cambridge University Press, 1998
Winston, Joe and Miles Tandy, Beginning Shakespeare, Routledge, 2012

BIBLIOGRAPHY:
http://www.shakespeare-online.com/plays/othello/stagehistoryothello.html


Peter Ackroyd, Shakespeare: The Biography, Chatto and Windus Publishers, 2005
Russ McDonald, Introduction to The Pelican Shakespeare edition of Othello, 2001
Stephan Greenblatt, Renaissance Self-Fashioning, University of Chicago Press, 2005

BOOKS WITH EXERCISES AND MATERIALS FOR TEACHERS:
Arden have released a series of critical readers or ‘Early Modern Drama Guides’ for all of Shakespeare’s plays. They are quite advanced and full of current theory and analysis, plus performance history, language charts and essays on pedagogical approaches to Shakespeare.

Penguin have Teacher’s Guides to accompany all of their classic editions of Shakespeare’s texts. These cover a range of materials from basic to advanced whilst also providing exercises for teachers.

Routledge also have Literary Sourcebooks on all of Shakespeare’s plays, which are quite advanced.

GENERAL INFORMATION ON SHAKESPEARE:
SOME WEBSITES (BESIDES OURS!) WITH GREAT RESOURCES:

Bell Shakespeare collaborated with ABC Splash on a series of high quality videos featuring performances and commentary, including key scenes from Othello:
http://splash.abc.net.au/home#!/search/Othello

Shakespeare Uncovered has a full episode on their website: Othello with David Harewood. David was the first black actor to play the role at London’s National theatre.
http://www.pbs.org/wnet/shakespeare-uncovered/uncategorized/othello-david-harewood-preview/

Shakespeare Online is a commercial website, but the information is reliable:
http://www.shakespeare-online.com

The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust has some fun blogs and other bits and pieces:
http://shakespeare.org.uk/explore-shakespeare/students-and-enthusiasts.html

Shakespeare’s Globe in London has a very comprehensive Education section:
http://www.shakespearesglobe.com/education/teachers/teaching-resources

The Royal Shakespeare Company has plot summaries and records of previous productions:
http://www.rsc.org.uk/education/

The Folger Library has education guides and thorough resources for both students and teachers:
http://www.folger.edu

For Drama teachers who are interested in adaptations: Frantic Assembly, the British Physical theatre group have great notes, interviews and analysis of their very unique take on Shakespeare’s Othello (Production 2014/15). You can even download a resource pack:
http://www.franticassembly.co.uk

TES English This website is a great place to start building ideas for classroom exercises and worksheets:
http://www.tes.com
PRE-PERFORMANCE ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY ONE

CHARACTER STUDY: APPEARANCE AND REALITY (ENGLISH)

Often a character’s true nature may differ from the face they present to other characters on stage. For instance, Iago shares his plots and prejudices with the audience (and Roderigo) who are made aware of his evil intentions whereas all the other characters on stage see him in a much more positive light. This technique where the audience are given a different perspective than those on stage, is called dramatic irony. It also aids suspense, as the audience are aware of what lies ahead for the characters, yet they must watch the action play out, powerless to stop it.

INDIVIDUAL TASK:

1. Firstly go through the play and make a list of all of the lines you can find that are either a description of Iago or that give us an insight into his character.

2. Then organise them into two categories:
   - What Iago says about himself
   - What other characters say about him

A suggested graph template is shown below, or create your own.

3. Then fill out the rest of the graph: Was the line said to the audience or to another character/s? Do you believe the statement is true or false? Remember even when a character is talking to the audience they might not be telling the truth. In the second graph, make sure you fill in the second column so we know who said it.

(NOTE: Always put the act and scene the quote is from next to it for your recall, as below)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What they say about themselves</th>
<th>To the audience (A) or to other characters (C)?</th>
<th>True (T) Or False (F)?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘I hate the Moor’ (Act 1, Sc 1)</td>
<td>To Roderigo</td>
<td>T</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What others say about him?</th>
<th>Who said it?</th>
<th>To the audience (A) or to other characters (C)?</th>
<th>True (T) Or False (F)?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>‘Iago is most honest’ (Act 2, Scene 3)</td>
<td>Othello</td>
<td>To Iago</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

EXTENSION ACTIVITY:

Once complete, take a good look at your graph and the information about Iago. Considering this, what is your personal opinion of the character? Write a character description to conclude your findings.

Now continue this exercise for other main characters in the play. How different are they to each other? Which characters are more truthful? Which characters are misconstrued, or viewed differently to how they truly are? In which instances are characters blind to someone’s true nature? Which characters lie the most? Which characters are fooled easily?
PRE-PERFORMANCE ACTIVITIES
ACTIVITY TWO

WHAT WOULD YOU DO? (ENGLISH)

Performing, writing or understanding dramatic literature is largely about putting yourself in the character’s shoes. Many theorists believe Shakespeare was brilliant at this and that is why he was such a great writer. Have you ever heard the expression that someone is ‘green’ with jealousy?

Iago: ‘O beware, my lord of jealousy. It is the green eyed monster, which doth mock the meat it feeds on.’ (Act 3, Scene 3)

This is one of the many expressions that Shakespeare has introduced to common usage in English. Othello is sometimes seen as a play about jealousy. Jealousy is often seen as the source of the conflict that drives the action of the play.

INDIVIDUAL TASK:
Choose ONE of the following scenarios and begin by brainstorming how jealousy might be evident. Make notes on how each character might respond to your chosen scenario or dilemma, using the following prompts:

• How might they act?
• How should they act?
• Should they act at all?

1. A young man is very respected by his boss. The boss invites him over for dinner frequently and is very interested in his life. As soon as the young man shows interest in the boss’ daughter, the boss rejects him, calls him horrible names and won’t have anything to do with him.

2. A long serving employee has been passed over for job promotion. Their boss has given the job to someone who is less experienced but has all the right social connections.

3. A father has only one child, a daughter in her 20’s. His close friend and colleague secretly marries his only daughter. The friend is much older than the daughter. The father discovers this information through gossip in the town. They didn’t confess it to him themselves.

4. A woman’s boyfriend gives her a gift, but she has suspicions about where he got it. She suspects that her boyfriend has simply passed on an unwanted present from another girl.

5. An individual has overheard gossip that his partner/wife/husband is having an affair with an attractive friend and colleague. The suspicious individual sees his partner deep in conversation with his colleague. When he/she approaches them, the colleague seems embarrassed and leaves quickly. However the partner and the colleague were only talking about work.

GROUP TASK:
Find two other people in your class who have chosen your scenario.

• Share your ideas with each other. How are they different/similar? Write a short diary entry together from the character’s perspective. Show their inner thoughts and feelings and a justification for it.
PRE-PERFORMANCE ACTIVITIES

ACTIVITY THREE

OBJECTIVES AND ACTS OF PERSUASION (DRAMA/ENGLISH)

Actors often approach a scene for performance by thinking about what a character wants from the scene. In acting terminology this is called a character’s ‘objective’.

In Othello, Iago’s wants are quite clear – to destroy Othello and Cassio – and he informs the audience of this. The play’s plot is driven by Iago’s attempts to persuade others to adopt the action or point of view that he desires. But how does he achieve this? In acting, different types of persuasive techniques are called ‘actions’.

So what actions does Iago use: does he flatter them, make them feel foolish, etc.

PREPARATION:

Firstly, read the text and make a list of all the techniques or ‘actions’ that Iago uses.

In a group of four people: Think carefully about the approaches that other characters might use to persuade someone to do as they wish. Brainstorm a list of possibilities, e.g:

- flattery
- bullying
- inspiring guilt or a sense of obligation
- offering a reward
- presenting evidence in either a rational or highly emotive manner

IMPROVISATION:

Next, two members of the group improvise a scene in which a character seeks to persuade another to a particular course of action or way of thinking.

For example: to get someone to give you their lunch, to convince someone to do a speech even though they are nervous.

The other two should take notes on the types of techniques or ‘actions’ that are used. Then swap so the other pair can have a go at the improvisation with a different scenario.

ACTIVITY:

In your group, choose from one of the following scenarios that are similar to Othello:

1. A person is attempting to persuade a friend and colleague that they should break up with their boyfriend/girlfriend, as they think are unfaithful.
2. A person is attempting to gain a promotion after they have already been told their first application was unsuccessful.
3. A person is attempting to persuade their current partner that they should trust them even though their partner is extremely jealous.
4. A woman is trying to convince her friend that she would commit a crime to be rich. She is convincing her friend to agree.

As a group, choose one scenario. Improvise the scenario using different actions to achieve the objective. The pair watching should direct, and offer different tactics for the performers to try and take notes. Swap and have the other pair try the same scenario. Compare the two improvisations: which approaches tend to be the most effective? Why do they work for that particular scenario?
PRE-PERFORMANCE ACTIVITIES
ACTIVITY FOUR

WHERE DID THE IDEAS COME FROM? (ENGLISH)

Shakespeare often drew his ideas for his plays from other well-known stories. This was the fashion during the time he was writing, and if we think about it many writers still do it today.

However, Shakespeare always changed the stories dramatically to make them more realistic and the characters more human. For example, Shakespeare’s famous tragedy, Romeo And Juliet, is based on a poem by Arthur Brooke. The original poem is a warning to children not to disobey their parents. Shakespeare’s version empowers the young lovers and reveals them to be more perceptive than their parents, who are blinded by hatred.

RESEARCH:

The history of Othello and find out what story Shakespeare got his inspiration from. Who was the author of this play, where is it from and what is the basic storyline? (Note: it is not necessary to read the whole original play, simply find a synopsis and it will become clear). Make a list of the differences between Shakespeare’s text and the original:

- The character names
- Plot
- The ending
- Character intentions
- Character relationships

INFERRING:

Answer the following questions considering your findings:

1. Why do you think Shakespeare chose to give all the characters in his play names, unlike the original?
2. Shakespeare added a certain character to the play that was not in the original. Who was it and why do you think he did this? What purpose does this character serve?
3. Shakespeare changed the path of the title character Othello, why did he do this? Do you think you would feel differently about Othello if he behaved like the main character in the original?
4. Shakespeare added a scene with two female characters at the end of Act 4 that was not in the original. Why is this scene important? How does the added scene change the audience’s opinion of the two female characters?
5. Shakespeare is regarded as quite a modern writer for his time. Considering the difference between these two plays, why do you think this is so? How and why does he change dramatic scripts and do you think we connect with his version more? Explain your reasons.

CREATIVE WRITING:

It is the early 1600’s and you are a local reporter with an assignment from your editor.

Write a newspaper article or ‘pamphlet’ (as they called them in those days) for the ‘Jacobean Times’ reporting how popular Shakespeare’s plays are with the London locals and how he has changed the face of playwriting. Imagine Othello has just hit the local stages. What might the audience response be to the play? Use examples from Othello in comparison to the original source as evidence in your article. You can even make up quotes from locals or Shakespeare himself to flesh out your piece.
PRE-PERFORMANCE ACTIVITIES
ACTIVITY FIVE

INSIDE THE DESIGNER’S MIND (ENGLISH/DRAMA)

ACTIVITY:
Before looking at Designer Michael Hankin’s set and costume designs for Othello, have a think about how you might stage the play if you were designer.

Write brief information, and provide image inspiration or your own drawings, to explain your choices for:

1. Set design
2. Costume design
3. Props design
4. Sound design (including music)
5. Lighting design

ANALYSIS:
Take a look at the set and costume images for the production by Designer Michael Hankin, and answer the following questions.

SET DESIGN
Look at the set design diagram and model box image/s.

1. What is your first impression of the set?
2. What elements or features of the set design stand out?
3. What mood do you think the designer is trying to create with this set?
4. How do you think a director might tell the story of Othello on this set? Choose one section of the story and write your thoughts on how you might stage it using the design.
5. Describe the textures and features of the design in model box form.
6. Think about the world of Othello. What different settings and locations are in the play? How do you think the set design might achieve this?

COSTUME DESIGN
Look at the costume designs.

1. Looking at the designs, list all the elements of a costume that designers must take into account.
2. What colours and textures do you see in the costumes? Why do you think the designer has made these decisions?
3. For each of the characters in the designs:
   • Describe the character making reference to social status, personality traits, personal relationships, their role in the story, and any other important aspects.
   • Analyse the costume design for each character. How do you think the character’s costume will communicate these aspects
   • What skills do actors use to transform into a character? Describe as many as you can think of.
   • How would you expect the actors performing as the characters in the designs to embody their characters, using these skills?
4. What do you think the Director’s interpretation of the characters might be, based on the costume designs shown?