



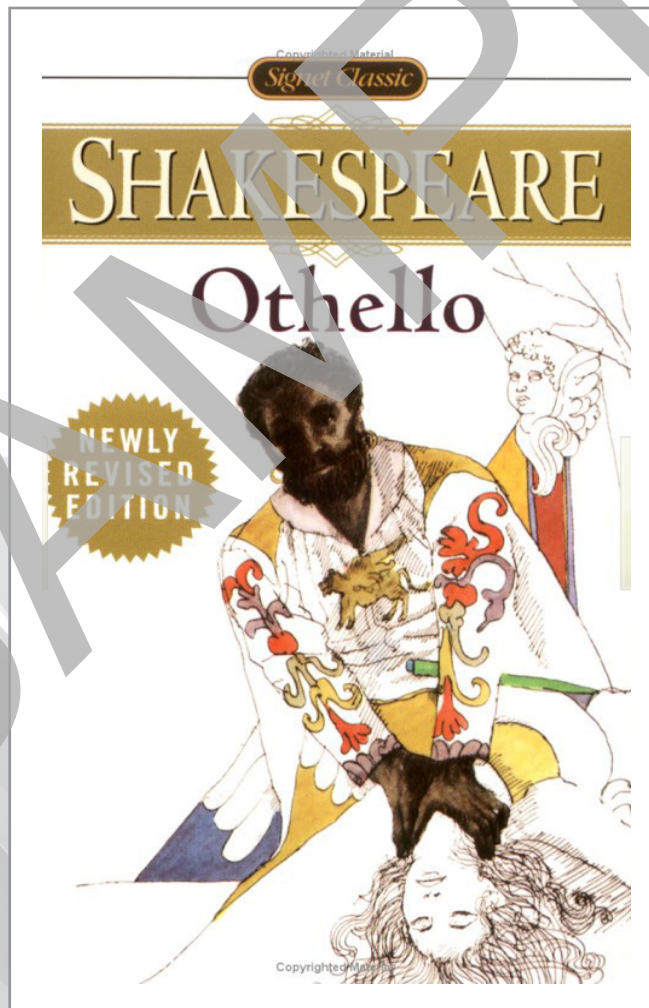
TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 9-12

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

Othello

William Shakespeare



READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

Othello

William Shakespeare

TEACHER GUIDE

NOTE:

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Plot Summary

Act I

The curtains open on a street in Venice. Roderigo, a gentleman, is upset with Iago (Othello's ensign) because Iago did not tell him sooner that Desdemona (whom Roderigo wanted to marry) had eloped with Othello—referred to as "the Moor." When Roderigo accuses Iago of loyalty to Othello, Iago protests, saying that he hates Othello, the general who has just passed Iago up for a promotion that Iago feels he deserved. Instead, Othello promoted Cassio, whom Iago scorns as a military strategist who knows what he knows only through books—not, like Iago, through lengthy experience in the field. Iago and Roderigo go to the home of Desdemona's father, Brabantio, and announce the elopement, an announcement replete with racial slurs and sexual vulgarity. Then, before the furious Brabantio comes out, Iago quickly leaves without identifying himself (so that Othello will not learn of Iago's treachery) and takes off with Roderigo in search of Othello and Desdemona.

Meanwhile, Cassio informs Othello that he has been summoned by the Duke of Venice to go off to Cyprus on a military maneuver against the Turks. Brabantio and Roderigo barge in, ready for a fight; Brabantio is aghast that his daughter has shunned "the wealthy curled darlings of our nation" and chosen to cling to the "sooty bosom" of Othello. When Brabantio accuses Othello of having used supernatural powers to bewitch his daughter, Othello calmly explains that the two fell in love while he was a guest of her father's. The Duke tells Othello that he must leave that night for Cyprus. Desdemona's father refuses to allow her to return home and Othello arranges for his "honest" friend, Iago, to escort her to Cyprus. Iago, meanwhile, has settled on a plan for destroying Othello by convincing him that Desdemona is having an affair with Cassio.

Act II

Several weeks pass, and the scene shifts to Cyprus. Due to a violent storm, the Turkish fleet has been defeated and Iago has arrived in Cyprus with Desdemona ahead of Othello. To keep her from worrying about her new husband, Cassio chats with Desdemona. Seeing this, Iago decides that it will be easy to spread rumors about an affair between the two of them. To Desdemona's delight, Othello shows up and bears her away. Iago then gets Roderigo to believe that Desdemona has her eye on Cassio. To himself, Iago muses paranoically about whether Cassio and Othello have both had affairs with his own wife, Emilia. In celebration of the victory over the Turks as well as the wedding of Othello and Desdemona, there is night-long partying. Although Cassio is supposed to be on watch, Iago plies him with wine and gets him drunk. Under Iago's direction, Roderigo starts a fight with Cassio, and Governor Montano intervenes. When the governor is wounded by Cassio, Roderigo sounds the alarm. Othello shows up, orders Cassio demoted, and sends Montano off to see his (Othello's) personal physician. Cassio is distraught with remorse and shame, and Iago easily convinces him that he should ask Desdemona to plead his case to Othello.

Vocabulary List

Vocabulary words are grouped by scene, with line numbers given after each word. After reading each scene, so that students are introduced to terms in context, have students “translate” into modern-day English the lines in which the vocabulary words are found. Encourage students to use the notes at the bottom of each page. Mention that Shakespeare’s word order is often the reverse of today’s, e.g. “did she make” instead of “she did make.” Next, have students create their own sentences for some of the words. Discuss which words are used today (e.g., expostulate, censure), which ones are archaic (e.g., strumpet), and which ones have acquired a different meaning in modern-day usage (e.g., spinster).

Act I

Scene 1:

bombast 14
provender 50
distempering 102
taper 145

epithets 15
homage 56
grange 108

prattle 27
incense 71
jennets 116

obsequious 48
timorous 77
lascivious 129

Scene 2:

iniquity 3
promulgate 21
pagans 101

yerked 5
demerits 22

prated 7
galley 40

forbear 10
palpable 77

Scene 3:

assay 20
conjunction 94
equivocal 220
indign 276
carnal 333
sequestration 348
cuckold 370

facile 25
dram 107
slubber 229
incontinently 308
scion 335
coloquintida 352
traverse 372

mountebanks 63
antres 142
bereft 260
corrigible 328
perdurable 341
sated 353
snipe 386

mandate 74
dilate 155
wanton 272
sensuality 330
usurped 343
conjunctive 369
engendered 404

Act III

Scene 1

1. What is the setting of this scene? What is the mood? (before the chamber of Othello and Desdemona; festive)
2. How does Iago get Desdemona and Cassio together? (He promises to send Emilia to Cassio to arrange a meeting with Desdemona.)
3. What is ironic about Cassio's comment to Cassio that he will "devise a means to draw the Moor/Out of the way, that your converse and business/May be more free"? (Actually, he makes sure that the Moor is nearby to witness the meeting.)
4. How does Cassio know that Desdemona has already spoken to Othello in his behalf? Why do you think he arranges to meet Desdemona, then? In his position, would you "sit tight"—or do as he does? (Emilia tells Cassio that Desdemona has already been speaking of him; Cassio seems impatient to patch things up with Othello.)

Scene 2

1. How does this scene show you that Othello is a busy man? (Othello makes it clear that the letters he has Iago send must go out immediately and that he himself must take care of business.)
2. Why is this a good time for Iago to act? (Othello has his mind on other things.)

Scene 3

1. Why does Cassio leave Desdemona in such a hurry? Why does Iago point that out to Othello? (Cassio still feels uncomfortable about what has happened between him and his general; Iago wants Othello to become suspicious that Cassio is evading him because of a relationship with Desdemona.)
2. Why is Desdemona so willing to speak up for Cassio? Do you think she goes too far? (Desdemona sincerely believes that both Cassio and Othello would be better off if the rift between them were mended.)
3. When does Othello first begin to doubt Desdemona? Do you think most newly married husbands would be as easy to fool? (Othello gets uneasy when Iago starts talking about how long Cassio and Desdemona have known each other and how Desdemona deceived her father.)