Prestwick House

Activity Pack

OTHELLO

BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Name: _____   Date:_____

Pre-Reading

Setting and History

Objective: Researching the historical setting of the play

Activity

Venice, the initial setting of *Othello*, was once a European center of art and beauty; however, much of Europe was a hostile place in which kings and generals, like Othello, viciously battled opposing armies—hand to hand—to dispel enemies and to provide security for the state.

Using the library, the Internet, or both, research the setting of *Othello*. Your research should include not only facts about Venice, but also facts about the world at the approximate time that *Othello* takes place. Use this research to complete the **Setting Chart** on the next page.

Name: _____   Date:_____

Act I

<u>Alliteration</u>

Objective: Recognizing alliteration

Activity

Alliteration is one of several poetic devices found in Shakespeare's drama. It may occur in several different forms, but in *Othello,* it usually occurs in two successive words or two words separated by one word. In Act I, we find "coursers for cousins, and gennets for germans."

Read through Act I carefully and identify as many instances of alliteration as you can (at least ten). List each instance and cite the scene in which it appears. When you finish, write ten of your own alliterative phrases.

Examples:

- Act I, Scene 1   "prattle without practice"
- Act I, Scene 3   "bloody book"

Name: _____   Date:_____

CHARACTER CHART (ACT I)

Character	Trade/Title	Moral Alignment/ Personality Traits	Concerns, Goals	Major Character?
Roderigo	Venetian gentleman	Could be evil/devious, but emotional; easily swayed	Hates Othello; in love with Desdemona	No
Iago				
Brabantio				
Othello				
Cassio				
Desdemona				
Duke				
First Senator				

Reproducible Student Worksheet

Name: _____   Date:_____

Act II

Newspaper Reporting

Objective: Writing a news story about the play

Activity

Good news reporters must be keen observers of the events that they cover, especially when the information they distribute has the potential to influence the general public. Mass distribution of bad information can potentially disrupt an entire nation, endangering life, property, and relations. If used improperly, the media can cause nationwide panic and unjustly destroy reputations. To prevent the release of misinformation, news must be carefully screened to ensure that it is factual, objective, and not otherwise damaging.

You are now a reporter who has been transported through time and fiction in order to compile a story on the tragic events of *Othello*. Choose a single newsworthy event from each act to report. Observe what you can from the characters involved with the event and record the answers to the fundamental questions of a reporter: who, what, when, where, how, and why? Once you've acquired those answers, write an article covering the event. Be sure to include a headline.

Below is an example as to how your article might begin:

TURKISH FLEET APPROACHES CYPRUS

    VENICE. According to state officials, as many as 200 Ottoman ships have been spotted on a course for Cyprus. Assumed to be an invasion force, the fleet stopped at the isle of Rhodes to meet a reinforcement fleet of approximately 30 ships. The Duke was unavailable for comment, but sources in the marina have reported the departure of several Venetian army officials, including General Othello, his ensign, Iago, and his lieutenant, Cassio. The ships appeared to have set course for Cyprus.

Name: _____   Date:_____

Act III

<u>Emotions</u>

Objective: Finding quotes that portray emotions

Activity

Iago's dirty work inspires a cascade of emotions throughout *Othello*. The **Emotion Chart** on the next page contains a list of emotions depicted in the text. The general location of each emotion is provided for you. Using the locations, find the source of each emotion. Identify the corresponding characters and quote them on the chart.

Name: _____   Date:_____

Acts I – III

<u>Simile</u>

Objective: Recognizing a simile

Activity

Shakespeare's drama is laden with literary devices, one of which is the use of simile. Most of Shakespeare's similes are still easily interpretable, but some similes are combined with allusions, which creates difficulty for modern readers. In Act III, Scene III, Othello describes Desdemona's good standing as "as fresh / As Dian's visage." The context of the simile makes it easy to decipher, but if it stood alone, a reader would need to know that Diane ("Dian") is the mythical goddess of the moon; thus, "as fresh [pure] as the face of the moon."

Identify eight instances of simile in Acts I – III. List them on the **Simile Chart** that follows and then interpret them. For each interpretation, try to include a modern simile that carries the same message as the original.

The first example has been completed for you.

Name: _____   Date:_____

Act IV

Plot and Characterization

Objective: Inferring character traits

Activity

Worried about Othello's jealousy and hostile behavior, Desdemona has opted to hire a private investigator to identify the source of Othello's trouble. You are the detective, and it is your job to learn, though questioning and deductive reasoning, who is perpetrating the scandal surrounding Othello.

You will have full access to the royal court of Cyprus, and you may question any character at any time, though you should control your questioning technique in order to protect your relationship with your suspects.

Students who have the role of characters should review their roles while the detectives create questions for each of the characters. The questions must vary to match the personality and knowledge of each character, and the goal is to catch the suspect by disproving an answer. Each of the characters must receive at least five questions, and the detectives will have a maximum of five minutes per character for questioning.

During the questioning, all student detectives should be taking notes in order to record the relationships among the characters. After the questioning, the detectives will compare trends in their notes and the whole class should discuss any discrepancies.

Two example questions are provided for you below:

Example Questions:

- (to Iago) Iago, in your opinion, why is Othello acting in such a strange manner?
- (to Bianca) Bianca, have you received anything unusual from anyone?

Name: _____   Date:_____

Act V

Communicating

Objectives: Writing a speech
                    Speaking effectively

Activity

Cassio gains command of Cyprus amidst considerable controversy. The public, who supported the deceased Othello, might question Cassio's allegiance due to the scandalous murders that resulted in his promotion.

Each group will act as Cassio's staff, including speechwriters. Consult the text and each other to come up with the topics that Cassio will need to address when he speaks to the people of Cyprus. Have one person list these topics. Using the list, each group should prepare a short speech for Cassio (no more than three minutes).

While compiling the speech, remember to address the recent tragedy. Create and reveal Cassio's personality in the speech based on your observations of him in the text. When the speeches are complete, each group should have a volunteer stand up and read the speech to the class.

Name: _____   Date:_____

Acts I – V

Motif

Objective: Identifying motifs

Activity

Othello contains several motifs. One example is the recurring reference to plants:

> "Our / bodies are gardens; to the which our wills are gardeners"

> "Though other things grow fair against the sun, / Yet fruits that blossom first will first be ripe"

> "As if he pluck'd up kisses by the roots, / That grew upon my lips"

The **Motif Chart** supplies you with *Othello* motifs and the scenes in which they occur. Use the reference to find the occurrence of each motif, and then quote the text in which it occurs. Remember, motifs are recurring, so each motif will have more than one reference. The first motif has been started for you.