

Synopsis of 'Othello'

Othello is a respected and successful soldier of Moorish (African or Arabic) origin. He falls in love with, and marries, Desdemona, the beautiful daughter of a Venetian nobleman. Iago, one of Othello's trusted lieutenants, is passed over for promotion by Othello. To get his revenge, he persuades Othello that Desdemona has been unfaithful. At first, Othello does not believe this, but Iago presents 'evidence' of her infidelity.

Driven mad with jealousy, Othello kills Desdemona. It is then revealed that Iago invented the story of her love affair. Othello realises, too late, that Desdemona was innocent all along.

'Othello' for children and young people

The following versions of 'Othello' are designed to be read and enjoyed by a younger audience:

'Manga Shakespeare: Othello' by Ryuta Osada, William Shakespeare, and Richard Appignanesi
Published by SelfMadeHero, 2008
ISBN-13: 978-0955816956

'Othello (Shakespeare Stories)' by Andrew Matthews and Tony Ross
Published by Orchard, 2007
ISBN-13: 978-1846161841

'Othello' (Graphic Shakespeare) by Vincent Goodwin and Chris Allen
Published by Graphic Planet, 2008
ISBN-13: 978-1602701922

Looking at pictures: Othello

The online resource includes three images of Othello. Two of them are book illustrations, and one is a photograph of an actor playing the part of Othello at the Citizens Theatre in Glasgow.

You might like to use the following questions as prompts for introducing the character of Othello, and his role in Shakespeare's play of the same name. The questions are also designed to encourage pupils to start analysing visual sources to gather information. After using the prompt questions with your class, discuss what kind of character Othello might be, and what qualities and emotions he represents.

Image 1: Othello by Ludovic Marchetti, 1893

Question 1

Choose three words that best describe the person in this picture.

Question 2

Look at what Othello is wearing, and also at the objects to the right of the picture.

What do the clothes and objects suggest about Othello's job and status?

Question 3

Where is this scene taking place?

Image 2: Othello and Desdemona by Sir Francis Bernard Dicksee, 1890

Question 1

Look at what Othello is wearing.

Do his clothes tell you anything about his job and his character?

Question 2

What do you think is the relationship between Othello and Desdemona?

Question 3

Think of a title for this picture

Question 4

What is happening in the background of this picture?

Image 3: Actor Jude Akuwudike playing Othello at the Citizens Theatre in Glasgow, 2009

Used with kind permission of the Citizens Theatre. Photographer: Eamon McGoldrick.

Question 1

How is this picture similar or different to the other two pictures of Othello?

Question 2

What do you think that Othello might be thinking or feeling in this picture?

Ideas for creative writing: Othello

- Jealousy is one of the key themes in Shakespeare's 'Othello'. Iago is jealous because someone else was given the job that he felt he deserved. Othello is jealous because he believes that his wife Desdemona has been unfaithful.

Work with the class to discuss what the word 'jealousy' means, and what other feelings might be associated with it, for example: anger, sadness, fear
You might like to use Image 3 to help with this exercise.

Ask the children to think of a time when they might have felt jealous, or to think of a book or a film where a character has acted out of jealousy.

Encourage the children to write a poem or short story exploring this theme.

- Discuss the basic plot of 'Othello' with your class, perhaps using one of the suggested books above.
- Ask the pupils to imagine that they are a newspaper reporter writing an account of what happened leading up to Desdemona's death. Encourage the pupils to think about this style of writing, and the intended audience. They might like to include eye-witness accounts or quotes from different characters in the play.

Ideas for drama: Othello

- Building on the theme of jealousy, ask the pupils to think of a time when they have felt jealous. What was the setting, and who were the other people involved? Why were they feeling jealous?

Ask the pupils to imagine and develop a monster character which personifies the feelings associated with jealousy. Encourage them to think about appropriate colours, shapes, and textures to describe this emotion.

We also talk about people being 'green with envy'. As a class, think about other colours that are linked with specific emotions, for example: red for anger, bright yellow for happiness, black for sadness. Discuss why some of these associations between colour and feelings might have come about.

Encourage the pupils to create a mood picture for a selected number of emotions. You might like to use reproductions of famous paintings as a starting point for thinking about colour and mood. Ask the pupils what mood or emotion they associate with the following paintings:

Van Gogh, 'Sunflowers', 1888 (National Gallery London)
Mark Rothko, 'Light Red Over Black', 1957 (Tate Gallery)
Pablo Picasso, 'Girl in a Chemise', 1905 (Tate Gallery)
Ben Nicolson, 'June 1937', 1937 (Tate Gallery)