

SYNOPSIS

Iago, an ensign in the Venetian army, is passed over for a promotion. He vows revenge against Othello, the Moorish commander who preferred young, inexperienced Michael Cassio. Iago and his friend Roderigo, who was a rival of Othello for the affections of Desdemona, awaken Brabantio, Senator of Venice. They report that Brabantio's daughter, Desdemona, is secretly wed to Othello. Brabantio is alarmed that his daughter, a noble Venetian, has married a Moor.

Brabantio and Othello confer at the Senate after Othello is summoned to lead the army to Cyprus in a war with the Turks. Brabantio, expecting sympathy from the Duke of Venice, informs him that Othello drugged or beguiled his daughter and asks if the marriage can be annulled. Othello and Desdemona leap to the defensive. The Duke sides with Othello. Brabantio, dismayed at his daughter's choice of a husband, rejects her utterly. She begs to accompany Othello to Cyprus.

As he departs to war, Othello places Desdemona in the care of Emilia, Iago's wife. After the navy arrives safely at Cyprus, Othello and his wife are reunited. Iago initiates a second ploy by telling Roderigo that Desdemona loves Cassio. Following a victory banquet, Iago lures Roderigo into fighting Cassio while Cassio is on guard duty. Iago then gets Cassio drunk so that he will lose control when Roderigo provokes him.

When cries of violence reach Montano, Governor of Cyprus, he intercedes and is wounded. Othello, next to arrive, investigates and dismisses Cassio for brawling. Iago offers to aid Cassio, promising to petition Desdemona to speak on Cassio's behalf so that Othello will restore him to his rank. Desdemona naively agrees to speak for Cassio.

At a prearranged spot, Cassio confers with Desdemona. Iago escorts Othello to the place to see the two together. To build a case against Desdemona, Iago implies that she and Cassio are lovers. From this meeting, Othello conceives distrust against his wife.

While they are alone, Desdemona offers to bind his aching head with her embroidered handkerchief, which was Othello's first gift. She drops it; Emilia retrieves it after the couple depart and passes it on to Iago, who has been urging her to steal it. When Othello returns and demands proof of Desdemona's infidelity, Iago claims that, while sleeping in Cassio's room, he overheard the lieutenant calling her name in his sleep. Also, he claims to have seen Cassio wipe his beard with Desdemona's handkerchief. Othello, convinced of Desdemona's unfaithfulness, commands Iago to kill Cassio and promises to promote Iago to lieutenant.

In the next scene, Othello, supposedly suffering from a cold, demands the handkerchief. Desdemona is unable to produce it. He berates her. Totally innocent, she is dazed by the change in his behavior and believes that he is overburdened with affairs of state. In the meantime, Cassio gives the handkerchief to

Bianca and asks her to copy it.

Meanwhile, Othello overhears a conversation between Iago and Cassio in which Cassio displays the handkerchief, which he found and gave to Bianca, his courtesan. Othello, overwhelmed with jealousy, asks Iago to buy poison to use against Desdemona; Iago suggests that he strangle her in her bed. Lodovico, observing the unrest in Othello's mind, is amazed at the change in so stable a man.

Meanwhile, Iago persuades Roderigo to waylay Cassio a second time. During their fight, Roderigo receives a leg wound. Othello overhears their struggle and believes that Iago has killed Cassio, as planned. Iago, who lurks nearby, kills Roderigo to prevent him from informing and calls for aid for Cassio.

When Emilia runs to report Roderigo's murder, she finds Desdemona near death from suffocation. Othello tells Emilia that Iago is responsible for opening his eyes to Desdemona's infidelity. Emilia is thunderstruck by Iago's deed. When he arrives, Emilia confronts him with his wickedness. He stabs her.

Lodovico conveys incriminating letters found in Roderigo's pocket. Cassio explains how the handkerchief got into his chamber. Overcome with grief at his rash deed, Othello plunges a dagger into his own body and falls upon Desdemona's corpse. Cassio takes over Othello's command. Lodovico declares the Iago will be tortured.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

William Shakespeare (ca. April 23, 1564-April 23, 1616) attended a Latin grammar school in his hometown of Stratford-on-Avon. At eighteen, he married Anne Hathaway of Shottery, eight years his senior, and fathered a daughter, Susanna, and twins, Judith and Hamnet. He moved to London at the age of 23 or 24, joined the Lord Chamberlain's company, later known as the King's Men, and remained active in theater until 1611. Much about his early adulthood is a mystery, but it is clear that he obtained a thorough knowledge of his chosen field—acting—and was well-known by 1592.

Shakespeare gained the approval of Elizabeth I and James I, both regular theater-goers. His success as an actor-playwright enabled him to invest in real estate and to purchase a coat of arms for his father, John Shakespeare, a glover and bailiff in Stratford. Having written and produced thirty-seven plays, a sonnet sequence, and two long poems, Shakespeare retired to a large house in Stratford. As a country gentleman, he lived out his life in gentility and was buried in the chancel of Holy Trinity Church.

CRITIC'S CORNER

With consummate skill, Shakespeare crafted the plot of *Othello* on a single premise—that an uncontrolled emotion is a deadly force. The only one of Shakespeare's plays to be published between the playwright's death and the appearance

OTHELLO

of the first folio in 1623, *Othello* bears the marks of stage use in that many oaths were removed from the stage copy, possibly in response to a 1606 law banning profane language on the stage. The play, opening the season at King James' court on November 1, 1604, was an immediate success.

The plotline resembles a trivia melodrama in Giraldi Cinthio's *Hecatommithi* (1565), but Shakespeare adds the fullness of character to sustain a complex drama. An outgrowth of the popularity of *Othello* is the widespread use of "Iago" as a common term for despicable behavior. In Shakespeare's time, the lead was played by Richard Burbage, who established his expertise by playing Macbeth, Hamlet, and Lear.

The play has undergone various revivals. To its honor, when the theaters reopened in 1660, Desdemona was the first role on the English stage to be enacted by a female. In 1761, an American company presented *Othello* in Newport, Rhode Island. A German version from the eighteenth century, adapted by Friedrich Schroeder, had a happy ending. In 1829, Alfred de Vigny braved public outcry and presented the play at the prestigious Comédie Française. One of the most notable foreign Othellos was Tommaso Salvini (1829-1916), who terrified audiences with his ferocity. A 1942 production cast José Ferrer as Iago, Paul Robeson as Othello, and Uta Hagen as Desdemona.

GENERAL OBJECTIVES

1. To experience a Shakespearean tragedy
2. To identify dramatic conventions and explain their purpose
3. To place *Othello* in the Shakespeare canon
4. To envision the staging of a complicated play
5. To experience the beauty of Elizabethan poetry
6. To isolate and explain examples of Elizabethan language in context
7. To set the play in its social and geographical context
8. To comprehend the power of jealousy as a motivator
9. To evaluate the Elizabethan concept of fidelity
10. To discuss innocence as a unifying factor

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

1. To determine why Othello is so gullible
2. To analyze the importance of the handkerchief to the plot
3. To discuss the importance of Emilia as a secondary character
4. To account for racist conflict between Moors and Venetians
5. To discuss Shakespeare's concept of woman's place in society
6. To analyze the martial milieu in which the story takes place
7. To enumerate poetic devices that play a major role in the dialogue, such as parallelism, assonance, allusion, simile, metaphor, and alliteration
8. To discuss the nature of infighting among competitors
9. To describe the effect of the denouement

MEANING STUDY

Below are words, phrases, or sentences that have a particular meaning in the story. Explain the meaning each has in this play. Act, scene, line, and page numbers are provided so that you can re-read the passage from which the item is taken.

1. He (in good time!) must his lieutenant be, and I (God bless the mark!) his Moorship's ancient. (I, i, 34-35)

(Iago regrets that Cassio, who has less seniority and experience, is promoted to the rank of lieutenant, while Iago is the standard-bearer or ensign, a rank below that of lieutenant. This statement contains the motivation which creates multiple carnage.)

2. But I beseech you, [if't be your pleasure and most wise consent—as partly I find it is—that your fair daughter, at this odd-even and dull watch o' th' night, transported with no worse nor better guard but with a knave of common hire, a gondolier, to the gross clasps of a lascivious Moor: if this be known to you, and your allowance, we then have done you bold and saucy wrongs. But if you know not this, my manners tell me we have your wrong rebuke. (I, i, 135-145) (Roderigo brutally breaks the news of Desdemona's marriage. Her father, just awakened from sleep, hears the crude language, which says that his daughter is being ferried by a rascal, a hireling who ferries passengers through the canals of Venice, to a lustful black. Roderigo, without mentioning Othello's name, continues with his insults, adding vagrant to the list.)
3. That you shall surely find him, lead to the Sagittary the raised search; and there will I be with him. (I, i, 176-177) (Eager to maintain a good relationship with Othello, Iago leaves Roderigo to deliver the rest of the bad news to Brabantio. The Sagittary is probably an alehouse or inn. In English style, the place is named for a concrete noun, the centaur or bowman of mythology who serves as the ninth sign of the Zodiac. Because few people could read, inns chose easily recognizable symbols, just as Shakespeare's theater used the globe as its symbol. Two other theaters of Shakespeare's time were the Rose and Blackfriars, both concrete nouns easily represented by a drawing.)
4. The Turkish preparation makes for Rhodes. (I, iii, 18) (The crescent-shaped island of Rhodes lies halfway between the Troad and the island of Cyprus to the east. Conflicting information leaves some question about the size of the Turkish fleet, but a later report assures the Venetian council that the Turks plan to rendezvous with reinforcements at Rhodes and continue en masse toward Cyprus.

Because of its strategic location as the crossroads between East and West and its sizable shipping trade, Venice was a choice location coveted by several foreign conquerors, notably Attila the Hun, the Lombards, Franks, and pirates. Throughout its history, Venice struggled to halt invasions by the Ottoman Empire. During Shakespeare's time, the advance of the Ottoman Empire was checked at the Battle of Lepanto in 1571.)

5. Dangerous conceits are, in their natures, poisons, which at the first are scarce found to distaste, but with a little act upon the blood, burn like the mines of sulphur. (III, iii, 374-377) (With Desdemona's handkerchief in hand, Iago is ready to spring the trap. Like Cassius in Julius Caesar, he knows that Othello is nearly his and requires tangible evidence to complete the transformation. A consummate villain, he recognizes in others the weakness that leads to corruption. Ironically, the image links corruption with burning sulfur, a substance traditionally connected with purification. It was used during times of pestilence as a cleanser of plague-ridden houses.)

OTHELLO

Venice, the opening setting of the story, was one of the most seriously infected cities of Europe. Even today, Venetian gondolas are painted black as reminders of the era in which they served as hearses for victims of the bubonic plague.)

6. I took you for that cunning whore of Venice that married with Othello.—You, mistress, that have the office opposite to Saint Peter keep the gate of hell—you, you, ay, you! (IV, ii, 104-107)

(In his cruel interrogation, Othello places Desdemona at the gate of hell opposite Saint Peter, whom Christ designated as the keeper of the keys to heaven in Matthew 16:18-19: "And I say also unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.")

7. Some of your function, mistress. Leave procreants alone, and shut the door. Cough or cry "hem," if anybody come. (IV, ii, 33-35)

(Othello's words imply multiple degradation: that Emilia is the lookout who keeps watch by the door while Othello consorts with his prostitute, Desdemona.)

8. He goes into Mauritania and (takes) away with him the fair Desdemona, unless his abode be lingered here by some accident—wherein none can be so determinate as the removing of Cassio. (IV, ii, 257-260)

(Roderigo, chafing at the thought of losing Desdemona and anxious to see his bribes of gold and jewels bear fruit, pushes Iago for action. Iago creates a plausible story to keep Roderigo on the hook. He declares that a special commission from Venice is going to place Cassio in Othello's place. If that eventuality should occur, Othello and Desdemona would go to northwest Africa. To prevent the loss of his love, Roderigo must therefore take immediate action and murder Cassio.)

9. Had she been true, if heaven would make me such another world of one entire and perfect chrysolite, I'd not have sold her for it. (V, ii, 174-177)

(As the truth of Iago's complicity dawns on Emilia, Othello hammers out his crime with deepening vengeance. He idealistically envisions a world of precious stone, which could not compare with her worth when he first met her. Chrysolite, also known as olivine or peridot, is a greenish mineral, which brings to mind the "green-eyed monster" which caused Othello to commit murder.)

10. Then must you speak of one that loved not wisely, but too well; of one not easily jealous, but being wrought, perplexed in the extreme; of one whose hand, like the base Judian, threw a pearl away richer than all his tribe; of one whose subdued eyes, albeit unused to the melting mood, drop tears as fast as the Arabian tree their medicinable gum. (V, ii, 403-412)

(Castigating himself for destroying a worthy and innocent wife, Othello compares himself to a Judian who threw away a valuable pearl. Likewise, unlike a man who seldom cries, Othello duplicates the dropping of gum from the acacia tree, from which medicines are made.)

COMPREHENSION STUDY

Answer the following questions in your own words. There is not always a right answer. Your judgment is important and you should be ready to defend your answers by referring to passages in the play.

Questions 1 - 5 Literal Level

1. Discuss the information Othello reveals about his past life. (In explaining his former relationship with Brabantio to the Duke of Venice, Othello, a seven-year veteran, describes how he was often invited to tell the story of his life year by year, including battles, sieges, and luck that made up his past. In mentioning this sequence of events, Othello adds memorable facts, such as disastrous bad fortune, "moving accidents by flood and field," "hairbreadth scapes," capture "by the insolent foe," enslavement, redemption, and travels among caves, deserts, "quarries, rocks, and hills.")

Othello's tales of cannibalism were so graphic that Desdemona leaned forward to hear them better. Hurrying through her domestic chores, she returned to hear more "with a greedy ear." Their romance, an outgrowth of Othello's narrations, results when "she loved me for the dangers I had passed, and I loved her that she did pity them.")

2. How does Iago describe Michael Cassio's abilities? (In the opening scene, Iago, stung by Othello's choice of an inexperienced soldier for a promotion to lieutenant, sneers at Michael Cassio, "a Florentine . . . that never set a squadron in the field." He compares Cassio to a spinster, who knows little of the "division of a battle." Cassio, he maintains, has book learning only and lacks frontline experience. Such expertise is "mere prattle, without practice." He grouses with an age-old military complaint, that "preferment goes by letter and affection, and not by old gradation, where each second stood heir to the first.")

3. What is Desdemona's opinion of Othello's temperament? (Desdemona, blinded by love for her husband, sees no faults in his makeup. After losing the handkerchief, Desdemona asks Emilia where it could be. Emilia, covering for her own part in the crime, pretends not to know. Desdemona emphasizes that she "had rather had lost my purse full of crusadoes" than to have lost the handkerchief that Othello gave her.

Yet, she takes comfort in the knowledge that he is "true of mind" and lacking in "baseness as jealous creatures are." Emilia questions her mistress's conclusions; Desdemona assures her, "the sun where he was born drew all such humors from him.")

4. How does Othello describe the handkerchief? (As a means of mental torture, Othello improvises on the worth of the missing handkerchief. He claims that an Egyptian visionary gave it to his mother. The handkerchief supposedly had magic power to "make her amiable and subdue my father entirely to her love." Once lost or given away, however, his father would loathe her and "hunt after new fancies.")

On his mother's deathbed, she gave the handkerchief to Othello as a gift for his future bride. He warns Desdemona that the gift should be "like your precious eye." It was woven with magic by a sibyl. The silkworms that spun the threads "were hallowed." The dye that colored it was made from embalming fluid from "maidens' hearts.")

OTHELLO

5. What is Bianca's response to the handkerchief?
(At first jealous that Cassio might have gotten the handkerchief from another girl friend, Bianca thinks over his proposition that she copy the needlework and returns with curses. Angry that he has a "hobbyhorse," she challenges him to appear at supper that night or never.)

Questions 6 - 8 Interpretive Level

6. How does Othello describe his love of career?
(In bewailing his loss of trust in Desdemona, Othello equates his situation to the loss of his career. Set into a military frame of mind when he imagines the whole camp enjoying Desdemona's sexual favors, he regrets the loss of "tranquil mind" and contentment. The high moments of his life — plumed troops, "big wars that make ambition virtue," neighing war horses, blaring trumpets, "spirit-stirring drum," shrill fife, and waving banners. He concludes that "pride, pomp, and circumstance of glorious war" is gone.)
7. How does the willow song portend Desdemona's death?
(The song that her mother's maid sang on the day of her death haunts Desdemona's mind as she prepares for bed. Because the song was inauspicious to Barbary, whose lover "proved mad and did forsake her," Desdemona feels driven to drop everything and sing it.
Desdemona and Emilia turn back to casual topics, but Desdemona begins to sing about a "poor soul" in grief-struck pose who sighs by a sycamore. A false set of rhymes creeps in concerning approval of the lover's scorn. Desdemona begins again and sings a verse about infidelity. The mournful theme of the song causes itching in her eyes, which she fears portends weeping.
The two women discuss adultery. Emilia appears of easier virtue than Desdemona. Emilia assures her mistress that husbands are at fault for wives' failings. Desdemona bids her maid good night with a pious comment that she would rather learn from her mistakes than to have to select between two evils.)
8. How does Iago indicate that he is at a turning point?
(Having maneuvered well by killing Roderigo and blaming Cassio for the crime, but failing to get rid of Cassio, his rival, Iago goes to see Cassio's wounds dressed. Turning to the audience, he remarks that this night either makes him or leads to his destruction. At this point in his machinations, Iago has little to lose by pursuing an evil plot. If he can convince Othello that Desdemona and Cassio are lovers, he can earn twice — the gratitude of his superior officer and a promotion to Cassio's place.)

Questions 9 and 10 Critical Level

9. How does Othello explain his flaw?
(One of the great questions concerning the motivation of this play is how a man of such bearing and greatness as Othello could be so easily duped. After Lodovico replaces Othello as ruler in Cyprus and arranges for Iago's torture, Othello asks for a chance to speak. In his modest manner, he downplays his service to Venice and quickly puts career behind him. As a man, a husband, a human being, he examines his crime. He asks in particular that Lodovico write an honest report, devoid of malice or mercy for extenuating circumstance.

Othello's explanation of the bizarre circumstances that cause his wife's death along with those of Roderigo and Emilia follows Aristotle's concept of tragic flaw: "Then must you speak of one that loved not wisely, but too well; of one not easily jealous, but, being wrought, perplexed in the extreme . . ." His method of atonement is likewise extreme. Referring to himself as a "malignant and a turbaned Turk" and a "circumcised dog," he stabs himself. In partial recompense for his wife's murder, he is able to speak a short explanation: "I kissed thee ere I killed thee. No way but this — killing myself, to die upon a kiss." Cassio appends a proper epitaph to so noble and idealistic a lover: "he was great of heart."

Othello's tragedy reflects the result of idealism gone awry. A noble and high-minded man, he marries a woman influenced by noble and high-minded deeds. Together, they lack realism, an essential ingredient to assure the match a sound basis. They fail to take human concerns into account, such as Brabantio's reaction to an interracial marriage. Othello overlooks the effect of Cassio's promotion. A wiser head would have been alert to mutterings among those in line for the job. With their eyes set on lofty horizons, Othello and Desdemona innocently overlook the existence of evil in the universe, which is their undoing.)

10. What does this play say to young readers?
(Shakespeare's Othello is a mature offering, but not without worthwhile modeling for young readers. The play demonstrates, first of all, that love does not conquer all. Jealousy, which takes its strength from love and possessiveness, can interfere with even the loftiest of goals. In Othello's case, he kills with love as a motive. As he rationalizes to Desdemona, "O perjured woman! thou dost stone my heart, and makest me call what I intend to do a murder, which I thought a sacrifice."

A second valuable lesson to be gained from the play is an emphasis on character study. Othello, swept up in his career, fails to note weaknesses in his command on the lowest level — that of discontent among his staff. By assuming that everyone shares his noble ideals, he shuts his eyes to emotions that are all too common in most people. In his final confrontation with Iago, whom he wounds with his sword, Othello is still asking of the devil, "why he hath thus ensnared my soul and body." Iago leaves the question to Othello's own conscience: "Demand me nothing. What you know, you know.")

Questions 11 and 12 Creative Level

11. Write an honest description of jealousy as you see it. Explain how jealousy distorts logic and leads people to jump to conclusions about the motives and actions of others. Suggest ways that jealousy can be controlled.
12. Discuss whether Othello and Desdemona would have been happy if they had survived. Would Brabantio's disapproval have destroyed their marriage? Would Othello's military success have strengthened their relationship?

OTHELLO

ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

Math

1. Compute the distance from Venice to Rhodes, Verona, Mauritania, Florence, and Cyprus. Use estimated speeds of Elizabethan military vessels to determine how long it took Othello to make the passage to Cyprus.
2. Use historical data to determine the height, width, and depth of the Globe Theater. Include figures on how many people could stand or sit to view a play. Contrast these figures to copies of the Globe, particularly the Elizabethan stage in the Folger Library, Washington, D. C.

Economics

Make a comparative chart of monies used in England and Venice during Shakespeare's day, particularly pounds and ducats.

Social Studies

Compose a list of Shakespeare's plays and long poems and their settings, as with *The Tempest* in Bermuda and *Hamlet* in Denmark. Note whether the places are real or imaginary, particularly Venice and Cyprus. Locate real settings on a map along with the names of the plays. Place a star on Shakespeare's birthplace.

Psychology

1. Discuss the psychological problems faced by couples in a racially mixed marriage. Compose advice to Desdemona concerning Othello's great ego and his need to maintain professional honor. Discuss how these emotional drives place stress on their marriage vows.
2. Using Iago as a model, create an extended definition of evil. Explain how he corrupts a superior officer by the placement of small clues. Note whether Iago's punishment is sufficient to compensate for the violence he causes.

Cinema

1. Make a list of dramatic scenes from the novel which would require intense use of lighting, costume, makeup, music, props, and stunts, particularly the suffocation of Desdemona, the theft of the handkerchief, Cassio's fight with Roderigo, the eavesdropping scenes, Othello's suicide, and Emilia's murder.
2. Name current movie versions of Shakespeare's plays which capture the sense of time and place along with his poetry, notably *Hamlet*, *As You Like It*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, and *Henry V*.

Science and Health

1. Explain why Desdemona recovers briefly from suffocation.
2. Give an oral report on the racial characteristics of Moors, Turks, and Venetians. Emphasize the physical differences in Othello and Desdemona.
3. List simples mentioned in the play, especially poppy, nettles, hyssop and mandragora, which were used as medication or sedatives. Discuss their effects on the body.

Language Arts

1. Choose a series of lines from the play which illustrate the playwright's skill with poetry, as with Othello's dying words,

"I kissed thee ere I killed thee." Post the phrases on the bulletin board and lead a discussion of their significance. If you have questions about how the words have changed since the English Renaissance, refer to the *Oxford English Dictionary*.

2. List and explain mythological, literary, and historical and geographical allusions in the play. For example, refer to comments about the Muse, King Stephen, Justice, the Burning Bear, Janus, Sagittary, Olympus, Dian, the green-eyed monster, Turks, and Aleppo.

Art and Music

1. Use desktop publishing or other artistic forms to create a handbill which will catch the eye of prospective audiences. Use an illustration which intrigues the reader to see the play and learn how it ends. Emphasize action and contrast in your drawing.
2. Select music to delineate the contrast between love scenes, suicides and violence, and other somber or fearful subjects.

STUDENT INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES

1. Sketch the layout of the last scene. Emphasize the placement of the corpses. Complete a list of props to accompany the furniture. Suggest appropriate costumes for the cast.
2. Write a report on Shakespeare's method of presenting tragedy. Include the use of different stage levels and trapdoors, dancers, musical instruments, and special effects, such as cannon fire and thunder. Comment on his use of men to play the role of female characters. Explain the purpose of the flag on top of the theater.
3. Write a diary entry describing a presentation of *Othello* as seen from the point of view of an orange-seller or groundling. Stress the parts of the play which would impress a poorly educated but thoroughly experienced playgoer.
4. Interview both Othello and Brabantio in order to elaborate on their views concerning Desdemona's marriage. Emphasize the importance of racial differences to husband and father. Explain Desdemona's opinion on the subject.
5. Write a paragraph in which you summarize Shakespeare's idea of the nature and purpose of tragedy. Contrast his methods with those described in Aristotle's *Poetics*.
6. Compose a short congratulatory telegram to Shakespeare from Ben Jonson, John Fletcher, or Christopher Marlowe upon the success of this tragedy.
7. Write a note to James I in which you invite him to the opening night of *Othello*. Narrate the highlights of the plot.
8. Compose an extended definition of drama in which you explain the following aspects: character, setting, plot, theme, tone, mood, aside, soliloquy, monologue, climax, literary foils, and denouement.
9. Apply the term "coming to knowledge" to the final scene. Explain the price paid by Emilia and Desdemona for Othello's education in human nature.
10. Locate historical evidence that audiences from Shakespeare's time until the present have enjoyed *Othello*. Name actors who have ennobled the roles of Iago, Desdemona, and Othello.

OTHELLO

ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT

1. List in chronological order significant events in Desdemona's life, particularly her farewell to Othello, justification of her choice of husband, meeting Othello, Othello's stories about his past, Cassio's attentions, and the loss of the handkerchief.
2. Make a list of scenes from the play which express strong attitudes toward loyalty, honesty, friendship, self-esteem, loss, valiance, love, race, responsibility, deception, and heroism. Indicate what you think is Shakespeare's personal philosophy on each subject.
3. Compose brief definitions of devotion and truth as they apply to Emilia, Iago, Brabantio, Desdemona, Othello, Bianca, and Cassio.
4. List scenes which depict conflict, particularly Othello's call to war, the announcement of the marriage, Emilia's discovery of Desdemona's murder, and Iago's claims that Emilia is lying about the handkerchief.

SHAKESPEARE'S WORKS

Titus Andronicus, ca. 1588-1594
Henry VI, Part I, ca. 1589-1592
Comedy of Errors, ca. 1580s-1594
The Taming of the Shrew, ca. 1589
Richard III, ca. 1589
Henry VI, ca. 1589
King John, 1590
Henry VI, Part 1, ca. 1590-1591
Henry VI, Part 3, ca. 1590-1591
Shakespeare's Sonnets, ca. 1592-1598
Venus and Adonis, 1593
A Midsummer Night's Dream, ca. 1593-1595
Romeo and Juliet, ca. 1593-1595
Love's Labours Lost, ca. 1593-1595
The Rape of Lucrece, 1594
Richard II, ca. 1595-1596
Henry IV, Part I, ca. 1596
The Merchant of Venice, summer 1596 to summer 1598
The Merry Wives of Windsor, ca. 1597
Henry IV, Part II, ca. 1597-1598
Much Ado About Nothing, ca. 1598
Henry V, 1599
Julius Caesar, ca. early 1599
As You Like It, ca. 1599
Hamlet, ca. 1599-1600
Twelfth Night, ca. 1599 to 1601
Troilus and Cressida, ca. 1602
Othello, ca. 1603-1604
King Lear, ca. 1603-1606
Measure for Measure, spring or summer, 1604
All's Well That Ends Well, ca. 1604
Macbeth, ca. 1603-1606
Antony and Cleopatra, ca. 1605
Coriolanus, ca. 1605-1609
Pericles, ca. 1606-1608
Timon of Athens, ca. 1606-1608
Cymbeline, ca. 1608-1610
The Winter's Tale, ca. 1610-1611
The Tempest, ca. 1610-1611
Henry VIII, ca. 1612-1613
Two Gentlemen of Verona, ca. 1613

Two Noble Kinsmen, possibly written by Shakespeare and John Fletcher in 1613

RELATED READING

Harold Bloom's *Iago*, *William Shakespeare's Othello*, and *William Shakespeare: The Tragedies*
Sandra Caruso's *Actor's Book of Improvisation*
Joseph Papp's *Shakespeare Alive!*
Stefan Rudnicki's *Actor's Book of Classical Monologues and Actor's Book of Monologues for Women*
Michael Schulman's *Actor's Scenebook*
James A. Steffenson's *Moving Parts: Monologues from Contemporary Plays and Great Scenes from the World Theater, Volumes I and II*

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Adamson, Jane. *Othello As Tragedy: Some Problems of Judgment and Feeling*. New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1980.
Bentley, Gerald E. *Shakespeare: A Biographical Handbook*. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1961.
Boyce, Charles. *Shakespeare A to Z*. New York: Facts on File, 1990.
Brown, John Russell. *Shakespeare and His Comedies*. 2nd ed. Methuen: Princeton Univ. Press, 1962.
Carey, Gary. *Othello Notes*. Omaha: Cliffs Notes, 1980.
Chute, Marchette. *An Introduction to Shakespeare*. New York: E. P. Dutton, 1951.
———. *Shakespeare of London*. New York: E. P. Dutton, 1949.
Muir, Kenneth and Samuel Schoenbaum. *A New Companion to Shakespearean Studies*. Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1971.
Sandler, Robert, ed. *Northrop Frye on Shakespeare*. New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1986.
Tillyard, E. M. W., and Elizabeth Tillyard. *The Elizabethan World Picture*. New York: MacMillan, 1943.

OTHELLO

VOCABULARY TEST

Match the underlined words or phrases in each item at left with a synonym from the list at right. Place the letter of your response in the blank.

- | | |
|--|-----------------|
| _____ 1. <u>catechize</u> the world | A. accustomed |
| _____ 2. this <u>rash</u> and most unfortunate man | B. adores |
| _____ 3. to <u>heave the gorge</u> | C. contemptible |
| _____ 4. <u>soliciting</u> his wife | D. curse |
| _____ 5. <u>dotes on</u> Cassio | E. dines |
| _____ 6. some <u>scurvy</u> fellow | F. harlot |
| _____ 7. the <u>seamy</u> side | G. hasty |
| _____ 8. the devil and his <u>dam</u> | H. holiness |
| _____ 9. give it your <u>hobbyhorse</u> | I. hurry |
| _____ 10. there's <u>mettle</u> in thee | J. immediately |
| _____ 11. he <u>supps</u> tonight | K. instruct |
| _____ 12. prithee <u>dispatch</u> | L. lower |
| _____ 13. in such gross <u>kind</u> | M. luring |
| _____ 14. <u>beshrew</u> me | N. manner |
| _____ 15. <u>palates</u> both for sweet and sour | O. mother |
| _____ 16. wear thy good <u>rapier</u> | P. plan |
| _____ 17. I am no <u>strumpet</u> | Q. plaything |
| _____ 18. you <u>chaste</u> stars | R. pure |
| _____ 19. your <u>nether</u> lip | S. repairable |
| _____ 20. than she was <u>wont</u> | T. sordid |
| _____ 21. I will <u>incontinently</u> drown | U. spirit |
| _____ 22. power and <u>corrigible</u> authority | V. straying |
| _____ 23. <u>sanctimony</u> and a frail vow | W. sword |
| _____ 24. an <u>erring</u> barbarian | X. tastes |
| _____ 25. their <u>designment</u> halts | Y. vomit |

OTHELLO

COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Quotation Identification (20 points)

Match each quotation with the name of a speaker. Place the letter of your response in the blank provided at left.

- _____ 1. Most potent, grave, and reverend signiors, my very noble and approved good masters: that I have ta'en away this old man's daughter, it is most true; true I have married her.
- _____ 2. . . . I know my price, and I am worth no worse a place.
- _____ 3. I have but an hour of love, of (worldly matters,) and direction to spend with thee. We must obey the time.
- _____ 4. Moor, she was chaste. She did love thee, cruel Moor.
- _____ 5. I saw Othello's visage in his mind, and to his honors and his valiant parts did I my soul and fortunes consecrate
- _____ 6. She is abused, stol'n from me, and corrupted by spells and medicines bought of mountebanks . . .
- _____ 7. I think this tale would win my daughter, too.
- _____ 8. Reputation, reputation, reputation! O, I have lost my reputation.
- _____ 9. If't be your pleasure and most wise consent . . . that your fair daughter, at this odd-even and dull watch o' th' night, transported with no worse nor better guard but with a knave of common hire, a gondolier, to the gross clasps of a lascivious Moor . . .
- _____ 10. I pray you bring me on the way a little, and say if I shall see you soon at night.

- A. Bianca
- B. Othello
- C. Duke of Venice
- D. Montano
- E. Cassio

- F. Emilia
- G. Roderigo
- H. Desdemona
- I. Iago
- J. Brabantio

Part II: Matching (20 points)

Complete each of the following descriptions with a name from the list that follows. Place the letter of your answer in the blank provided at left.

- _____ 1. locates letters on Roderigo's body indicating Iago's guilt.
- _____ 2. finds the handkerchief in his room after Iago put it there.
- _____ 3. calls himself a "circumcised dog."
- _____ 4. calls Othello "far more fair than black."
- _____ 5. warns Othello that Desdemona has deceived her father and may deceive her husband as well.
- _____ 6. walks a street in Venice and discusses Cassio's appointment with Iago.
- _____ 7. plans to tell Othello that Cassio was drunk on duty.
- _____ 8. sings the willow song at bedtime.
- _____ 9. accuses Iago of telling a wicked lie.
- _____ 10. takes over Othello's military command in Cyprus.

- A. Othello
- B. Cassio
- C. Emilia
- D. Desdemona
- E. Bianca

- F. Roderigo
- G. Lodovico
- H. Duke of Venice
- I. Brabantio
- J. Montano

OTHELLO

Part III: True/False (30 points)

Mark the following statements either T for true or F if any part is false.

- _____ 1. Othello tries to hide the fact that he was sold into slavery.
- _____ 2. Othello asks Iago to get poison so he can kill Desdemona that very night.
- _____ 3. Emilia assures Othello that she has heard Desdemona whispering to Cassio.
- _____ 4. Iago promises to convince Roderigo of the need to kill Cassio.
- _____ 5. Desdemona learned the willow song from her mother, who sang it to Barbary, her maid, when Desdemona was a child.
- _____ 6. As Iago stabs Cassio, Othello creeps up in the dark and finishes Roderigo with a fatal stab wound.
- _____ 7. Gratiano is left in charge of Othello's house, fortune, and the torture of Iago.
- _____ 8. On its way to attack Cyprus, the Turkish fleet is destroyed by a storm.
- _____ 9. Emilia is happy to find the lost handkerchief, on which she embroidered strawberries.
- _____ 10. Roderigo threatens to drown himself because Othello married Desdemona.
- _____ 11. Othello's suspicions grow when he spots Cassio leaving a meeting with Desdemona.
- _____ 12. Desdemona pleads in Cassio's behalf and asserts that he has an honest face and truly loves his superior officer.
- _____ 13. To Iago, Othello confirms that Cassio knew of his courtship of Desdemona.
- _____ 14. When Desdemona attests to her honor, she remarks that her good name is more valuable than her purse.
- _____ 15. The Duke selects Othello to defend Cyprus because of the good opinion people have of Othello.

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

In a paragraph, discuss the significance of the following passages.

1. O, beware, my lord, of jealousy! It is the green-eyed monster which doth mock the meat it feeds on.

2. O, now, forever farewell the tranquil mind! Farewell content!

3. Heaven truly knows that thou art false as hell.

4. O, the more angel she, and you the blacker devil!

OTHELLO

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Identifying Locations (20 points)

Name the locations where these events take place.

- _____ 1. Iago and Roderigo discuss Cassio's qualifications.
- _____ 2. Othello wounds Iago.
- _____ 3. Desdemona begs Othello to recall Cassio that very night at supper.
- _____ 4. Roderigo dies of a stab wound.
- _____ 5. The Duke of Venice discusses the size of the Turkish fleet with senators.
- _____ 6. Othello is summoned to appear before the Duke of Venice.
- _____ 7. Montano observes the effects of the storm on the Turkish fleet.
- _____ 8. Othello assigns Michael to guard duty.
- _____ 9. Desdemona drops her handkerchief.
- _____ 10. The Governor is put in charge of torturing the prisoner.

a seaport in Cyprus
a street in Cyprus
a street in Venice
before the Sagittary
Brabantio's bedchamber

castle in Cyprus
garden
Mauritania
Othello's bedchamber
Senate House

Part II: Short Answer (20 points)

Supply a word or phrase in answer to each of the following questions. Place your response in the blank provided at left.

- _____ 1. Who gives Iago gold and jewels as gifts for Desdemona?
- _____ 2. Who promises to bind Cassio's leg with his shirt?
- _____ 3. What is Gratiano's relationship to Desdemona?
- _____ 4. Which character claims to have a cold?
- _____ 5. Who haunts Cassio everywhere he goes?
- _____ 6. What was Barbary doing when she died?
- _____ 7. Who fears that itching eyes predict weeping?
- _____ 8. Who never led a squadron in the field?
- _____ 9. Whom do Iago and Roderigo awaken?
- _____ 10. Who asks Iago to fetch poison?

OTHELLO

Part III: Fill-in (30 points)

Supply a word or phrase from the list below to complete each of the following statements.

- _____ 1. Now art thou my _____.
- _____ 2. Put out the light, and then put out the _____.
- _____ 3. Have you prayed tonight, _____?
- _____ 4. Sweet soul, take heed, take heed of _____. Thou are on thy deathbed.
- _____ 5. By heaven, I saw my _____ in 's hand.
- _____ 6. Help! Help, ho! Help! The _____ hath killed my mistress! Murder, murder!
- _____ 7. She false with _____?
- _____ 8. I will play the _____ and die in music.
- _____ 9. There is besides, in Roderigo's _____, how he upbraids Iago, that he made him brave me upon the watch, whereon it came that I was cast.
- _____ 10. You shall close prisoner rest, till that the nature of your fault be known to the _____ state.
- _____ 11. _____ catch my soul but I do love thee.
- _____ 12. _____? A fig! 'Tis in ourselves that we are thus or thus.
- _____ 13. O, thou foul thief, where has thou stowed my _____?
- _____ 14. The _____ with a most mighty preparation makes for Cyprus.
- _____ 15. And, noble signior, if virtue no delighted beauty lack, your _____ is far more fair than black.

Bianca	Desdemona	gold	light	pilot	strumpet
Cassio	Egyptian	handkerchief	Moor	purse	swan
chaos	Emilia	Iago	napkin	rheum	Turk
cuckold	epilepsy	jewels	officer	Roderigo	Venetian
dagger	feasting	letter	perdition	son-in-law	virtue
daughter	fleet	lieutenant	perjury	strawberries	wedding sheets

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Explain the part Emilia plays in the final scene.
2. Discuss how Iago successfully manipulates others.
3. Discuss the characteristics that lead to Othello's success as a leader.
4. Analyze the discussions that Emilia and Desdemona have about men, infidelity, and jealousy.

OTHELLO

ANSWER KEY

Vocabulary Test

- | | | |
|------|-------|-------|
| 1. K | 10. U | 18. R |
| 2. G | 11. E | 19. L |
| 3. Y | 12. I | 20. A |
| 4. M | 13. N | 21. J |
| 5. B | 14. D | 22. S |
| 6. C | 15. X | 23. H |
| 7. T | 16. W | 24. V |
| 8. O | 17. F | 25. P |
| 9. Q | | |

Comprehension Test A

Part I: Quotation Identification (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. B | 6. J |
| 2. I | 7. C |
| 3. B | 8. E |
| 4. F | 9. G |
| 5. H | 10. A |

Part II: Matching (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. G | 6. F |
| 2. B | 7. J |
| 3. A | 8. D |
| 4. H | 9. C |
| 5. I | 10. B |

Part III: True/False (30 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. F | 9. F |
| 2. T | 10. T |
| 3. F | 11. T |
| 4. T | 12. T |
| 5. F | 13. T |
| 6. F | 14. F |
| 7. F | 15. T |
| 8. T | |

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.

Comprehension Test B

Part I: Identifying Locations (20 points)

1. a street in Venice
2. Othello's bedchamber
3. garden
4. a street in Cyprus
5. Senate House
6. before the Sagittary
7. a seaport in Cyprus
8. castle in Cyprus
9. garden
10. Othello's bedchamber

Part II: Short Answer (20 points)

1. Roderigo
2. Iago
3. uncle
4. Othello
5. Bianca
6. singing the willow song
7. Desdemona
8. Michael Cassio
9. Brabantio
10. Othello

Part III: Fill-In (30 points)

- | | |
|-----------------|----------------|
| 1. lieutenant | 9. letter |
| 2. light | 10. Venetian |
| 3. Desdemona | 11. perdition |
| 4. perjury | 12. virtue |
| 5. handkerchief | 13. daughter |
| 6. Moor | 14. Turk |
| 7. Cassio | 15. son-in-law |
| 8. swan | |

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.



Vandalia Road • Jacksonville, Illinois 62650
Toll free 1-800-637-6581 • Fax 1-800-551-1169
PERMA-BOUND CANADA • Box 517, Station A • Willowdale, Ontario M2N 5T1
Toll free 1-800-461-1999 • Fax 1-705-876-9703