

# William Shakespeare: *Othello* – Focus on Iago, Othello and Desdemona

by Rita Reinheimer-Wolf



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In dieser Einheit analysieren die Schülerinnen und Schüler Auszüge aus der Tragödie *Othello* und ordnen diese in dramatische Kontexte ein (z. B. *jealousy*, *love*, *racism*). Zudem setzen sie sich explizit mit den Figuren Iago, Othello und Desdemona auseinander. Mithilfe unterschiedlicher Methoden werden inhaltliche und emotionale Zugänge zu der Tragödie für junge Schülerinnen und Leser geschaffen. Hierbei erarbeiten die Lernenden auch, wie sich Aussagen des Stückes auf die Gegenwart übertragen lassen und bewerten das Drama.

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## Competences and skills:

By working with the materials on the play *Othello*, students enhance their **reading skills**. Furthermore, they practice their competences in **explaining and analysing texts** when working closely with extracts from the drama. Students' **speaking skills** are improved by holding short presentations/speeches, engaging in a discussion and a hot seat activity as well as staging a trial at court. Finally, students' **writing competence** is enhanced by writing two comments.

## Overview:

List of abbreviations:

**C** Comment

**D** Discussion/debate

**MC** Multiple choice

**RC** Reading comprehension

**W** Writing

**CH** Characterisation

**G** Group work

**PM** Placemat

**RP** Role play

**CT** Creative task

**IN** Interview

**PR** Presentation

**T** Working with a text

Topic	Material	Method	Skills
1: What do I think of Shakespeare and his work?	M1–M5	C, MC, PR, T	
2: Who is Iago – A misogynist, a jealous man or merely a sociopath?	M6	CH, D, T, W	
3: Who is Othello – Just a lovesick outsider?	M7–M8	C, G, IN, PM, T, W	
4: Who is Desdemona – Just a victim of Othello's aggressiveness?	M9–M10	C, PM, T, W	
5: Shakespeare, <i>Othello</i> and me	M11–M13	MC, RP, W	
Exam: William Shakespeare: <i>Othello</i>		CT, RC, T	

## Worksheet – The plot of *Othello*

M3



1. Use the information from the grid (M2) to prepare a short speech on the content of *Othello*.
2. Which details of the plot of *Othello* do you remember? Tick the correct answers. Then get together with a classmate and compare your results.
  - a) How is the Turkish fleet destroyed?
    - By Othello
    - By Cassio
    - By a storm
  - b) Which position does Brabantio hold in Venice?
    - Duke
    - Colonel
    - Senator
  - c) From whom did Othello inherit the handkerchief?
    - His mother
    - His grandmother
    - His godmother
  - d) Why did Desdemona first fall in love with Othello?
    - Because of his wealth
    - Because of his physical strength
    - Because of the stories he told about his past
  - e) Which of the following adjectives are most commonly applied to Iago throughout the play?
    - Brave
    - Honest
    - Intelligent
  - f) How is Desdemona killed by her husband?
    - He smothered her.
    - He smothered her.
    - He smothered her.
  - g) What is the “green-eyed monster”?
    - Greed
    - Hate
    - Jealousy
  - h) Who will replace Othello as governor of Cyprus?
    - Iago
    - Cassio
    - Lodovico

## Worksheet – Who is Othello?

M8

### Pre-reading activity

1. In a placemat activity, decide on possible consequences for an individual who is being an outsider. 

### Working with the extracts

2. Referring to the extracts, answer the following questions in full sentences.
  - A: Which state of mind is Othello in when he utters these sentences?
  - B: What is an adequate paraphrase of “Perdition catch my soul [...].”?
  - C: Outline the message Othello conveys in this quotation.
  - D: Why does Othello start to question his decision to marry?
  - E: Which conclusion does Othello draw concerning his wife’s alleged infidelity?
  - F: What has changed in Othello’s emotional life?
  - G: Why does Othello find his situation unbearable?
  - H: What does Othello accuse himself of?

### Creative task

3. In a group of three students, prepare questions for a hot seat with Othello. Two students interview Othello, who is represented by the third student in your group.   


### Comment

4. Write a comment on the following statement: *Racism as portrayed in William Shakespeare’s Othello has been overcome by our society nowadays.* 

## M12 Worksheet – A trial at court



Prepare a trial at court in which Othello is charged with responsibility for the death of his wife Desdemona. Use the following role cards.

### Defending lawyer

You make your speech giving reasons for Othello's innocence. You describe how Othello was pushed into jealousy. You also stress the main misunderstanding about the handkerchief. You emphasise the bravery and outstanding skill of Othello in the war. You also emphasise how difficult Othello's social life must have been because he was marginalised.

### Prosecutor

You accuse Othello of being guilty and of having killed his wife on purpose. You question Othello during the trial and try to prove his guilt and responsibility.

### Judge

You listen to everyone and only ask questions occasionally. At the end of the hearing, you come to a conclusion and pronounce the verdict.

### Witnesses: for example Iago, Desdemona's father

(Note: the witnesses can include both living and dead characters.)

**Iago:** You accuse Othello of being an extremely jealous sociopath. You emphasise that Othello has fought in a war, and you think him to be used to killing people. You have heard Othello talking about killing Desdemona. You do not consider Othello fit to adapt to the Western culture because he is still African in his heart.

**Desdemona's father:** You are still angry because your daughter has disobeyed you. You have stopped believing in your daughter and do not believe in her innocence in the tragedy. You consider Desdemona to be responsible for her own death. You are convinced that Othello is a brave man not to be blamed but who has become insane by the infidelities of his wife. You do not see Othello as a murderer.

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