



RSC ACTIVITY TOOLKIT



OTHELLO

1 - THE SETUP

What kind of relationship do Iago and Roderigo have?

WHAT YOU NEED

- A piece of note paper, or a notebook and something to write with.
- A computer with internet connection, ready to visit [this page](#) and watch [this clip](#).
- A copy of Act 1 Scene 1, to read either on the page or onscreen.

ACTIVITY

- Watch the excerpt of Act 1 Scene 1 being performed by RSC actors on stage [here](#).
- As you watch, write down any words that stand out or that you find interesting. These might not be words that you understand in context just yet.
- Based on the words you wrote down, complete the following sentence: "I think *Othello* will be a play about..."
- Now visit [this page](#) on the RSC Learning Zone. Click 'Read the Scene and Explore.' You can click on the highlighted text to familiarise yourself further.
- Read the whole scene from Line 1 to Line 82 (Brabantio's entrance). Ask yourself: what is the relationship like between Roderigo and Iago? Who has control, or the upper hand? Does one character lead, and the other follow? Does this ever change? Think about why this might be.
- Shakespeare opens the play without the title character Othello; instead, we hear him being talked about by Iago and Roderigo. Why has the playwright chosen to do this?
- Think again on the sentence "I think *Othello* will be a play about...". Has your definition changed?

EXTENSION

- The scene begins with Iago and Roderigo in mid-conversation. Speculate what Iago may have said to Roderigo for him to reply '*Tush, never tell me! ...*' Write the conversation that went before in your own words.

2 - THE STORY

What kind of journey does this play take the audience on?

WHAT YOU NEED

- A piece of note paper, or a notebook and something to write with.
- (Optional: PostIT Notes)
- A computer with internet connection, ready to visit [this page](#).

ACTIVITY

- Load this page on the Plot Overview from the RSC Learning Zone [here](#).
- Read through the 10 sections of the Plot Overview. Notice the new characters we are yet to meet.
- Click 'Test Yourself' and try and re-arrange the plot in the correct order.
- Imagine you are now a journalist from Venice, who is commissioned to write a short 150 word article summarising this story. What are the essential facts? Also notice when writing your article: is anything you are saying speculation? We can often base the retelling of stories on assumptions.
- The plot summary on this page is very straightforward. As a journalist, what more would you like to know to better report the story? Write these questions down.

EXTENSION

- For a more in-depth synopsis, take a look at this 'Scene-by-Scene' page on the RSC Learning Zone, [here](#).
- Browse the breakdown of each scene, potentially trying to find some answers to your questions from the above activity.
- Modern playwrights and screenwriters sometimes use what is known as a storyboard to 'see' the overall arc of their story. Using Post-it notes, summarise each scene into one short sentence, and lay out the play on a wall or board. Perhaps you may want to colour code the scenes depending on a particular theme or character thread that links them for you?
- Take a look at the Othello timeline on the RSC Learning Zone [here](#) and compare your scene titles with ours.
- Evaluate: Does even the act of writing a synopsis or scene breakdown involve artistic interpretation and/or bias from the author?

3 - THE CHARACTERS

Who are the main protagonists of this story?

WHAT YOU NEED

- A piece of paper, landscape (minimum size A4) or a large notebook and something to write with.
- A computer with internet connection, ready to visit [this page](#).

ACTIVITY

- Take a landscape piece of paper, and divide the page into 5 columns. At the top of each column write the following characters: Othello, Desdemona, Iago, Emilia, Cassio. Underneath give each character a one-line summary (from the point at which we first meet them): i.e. *Othello: a Venetian General, recently married Desdemona in secret.*
- Go to the Character page on the RSC Learning Zone [here](#). Click 'Test Yourself' and play the game of Who's Who.
- For each of your five characters, think about what they want the most at the moment when we first meet them in the play. Write in the form '*Iago wants...*' It can be as simple as '*Iago wants a promotion.*'
- Actors sometimes use this exercise to explore the emotional journey their character goes through in the course of the play. Ask yourself: Does each character ever get what they want? How do their wants clash with the wants of other characters?
- Do the same activity but this time for a moment in Act 5. What are the wants of your five characters now? Write them at the bottom of the column.
- Think about the journey of the characters - where do they begin and where do they end up? The actions of which characters affect the others most?

EXTENSION

- Fill in the middle sections of the columns by 'mapping' the character's wants as the story progresses. Maybe choose 2 or 3 pivotal moments between Act 1 and Act 5 for each character and write what you believe their greatest wants to be at these pivotal points. Keep the sentences simple.
- Give each of the five characters another one-line summary, this time describing them at the end of the play. Notice any emotive adjectives or descriptions that you use when describing them i.e. Desdemona: a **wronged** wife, **cruelly** murdered. Why did you choose these words?
- Write a speech justifying these one-line summaries. Members of an audience may all respond differently to the story and the actions of the characters based on their own experiences. Pretend

now it is your job to convince the whole audience at the end of the play. Are your statements based on fact, or opinion?

- Do the exercise again, this time pretending you are the character presenting themselves. Do the summaries change when speaking in the first person? Which characters are better 'convincers'? What are the character's own impressions of themselves?

4 - TRAGEDY

What makes this play a tragedy?

WHAT YOU NEED

- A piece of note paper, or a notebook and something to write with.
- A computer with internet connection, ready to watch [this clip](#).
- A copy of Act 5 Scene 2, to read either on the page or onscreen.

ACTIVITY

- Have a think about the word Tragedy and what it means in a dramatic context. Have a go at writing a definition of Tragedy. Look up a definition online: how well do your definitions match?
- Think of other Shakespeare Tragedies you may know. Take a piece of paper and divide the sheet in half: 'Similarities' and 'Differences'. From what you know about *Othello*, and anything you know about any other Tragedies, write down any similarities and differences you notice in the plays. This can be anything: relating to their plots, character types, structures, titles etc. An example for a similarity could be: '*Characters die in Act 5.*'
- Watch an excerpt of the final scene, Act 5 Scene 2, in performance [here](#).
- Read the rest of the scene. How did the characters get to this point?
- Put yourself in the mind of our hero Othello at the beginning of Act 5 Scene 2. Write the following statement '*Desdemona must die because...*' - finish this sentence. Repeat twice. (Or more if you want!).
- A 'Tragic Flaw' can be defined as the trait in a literary character leading to their downfall. From what you know about the play so far, write down any aspects of Othello's personality that contribute to his tragic flaw. Keep these to hand: we will explore these again later.

EXTENSION

- Look at Othello's first entrance, in Act 1 Scene 2. Read Othello's first speech "*Let him do his spite.*" What do we learn about Othello here? Even though Othello admits he doesn't like to boast, why does Shakespeare tell us that he fetches his "*life and being from men of royal siege*"? Notice too how is Iago different here from the previous scene?
- Take a small notebook, or notecards, Post-it notes etc. Start collecting quotes which help summarise Othello's tragic demise. Begin by finding three quotes from Act 1 Scene 2 which present Othello as 'a hero'.

5 - THE WORLDS OF THE PLAY (PART 1)

Why does Shakespeare set Othello in Venice and Cyprus?

WHAT YOU NEED

- A piece of note paper, or a notebook and something to write with.

ACTIVITY

- Take a piece of paper, landscape. Near the left hand edge write Venice, and near the right hand edge Cyprus. Draw a line down the middle to divide the two worlds.
- Shakespeare sets most of the play in Cyprus: a fortified military outpost on the edge of Christian territory. Venice is a republic controlled by the wealthy merchant classes; a place where capitalism thrives.
- Choose five adjectives that describe these worlds. How different are they? The words could be describing what you might expect the location to feel like. Do these words match with the action of the play?
- Take the five characters Othello, Iago, Desdemona, Cassio and Emilia. From your descriptions of the two worlds, think about where they most 'feel at home'. Write their name somewhere that feels logical on the paper. The position of their name might be definitely 'in Venice', but it also might be close to the adjective 'civilised' for instance.
- On a new page, develop these thoughts by finishing the sentence '*Othello feels most at home when...*' Do the same for the remaining four characters.
- Evaluate your five statements in light of what you know happens in the play. Answer the question: To what extent does setting the play in a Cypriot outpost contribute to its tragic events?

EXTENSION

- Think about times where you have felt 'out of your comfort zone.' Speculate the one place or situation where you might feel **the most** out of your comfort zone.
- Turn your thoughts to our five characters and write down the place or situation you think they would feel **the most** out of their comfort zone.
- Think again about our initial question for this activity: '*Why does Shakespeare set Othello in Venice and Cyprus?*' To what extent does the setting serve or hinder the characters and does the setting have a significant effect both on the actions of these characters?

6 - THE WORLDS OF THE PLAY (PART 2)

How have previous directors staged Othello?

WHAT YOU NEED

- A piece of note paper, or a notebook and something to write with.
- A computer with internet connection, ready to visit the following pages on [Setting](#) and [Productions](#).
- (Optional: access to an online pinboard e.g. Pinterest or an offline app).
- (Optional: A large sheet, and materials to create a Mood board).

ACTIVITY

- Load the 'Setting' page on the Shakespeare Learning Zone, [here](#).
- Take a look at the gallery and notice the various interpretations of Venice and Cyprus in past productions of *Othello*.
- Directors and designers work together to come up with a concept of how they want the set to look and feel. Some Directors base their interpretations of Venice and Cyprus on places we don't know in the real world today.
- If you have completed 'The Worlds of The Play Part 1' find the adjectives you came up with to describe the two worlds.
- You now have the task of designing the sets. Begin to think about how these two contrasting worlds may look.
- Create a 'mood board' for Venice and Cyprus, either digitally or as a collage using your own drawings or old newspapers and magazines. A mood board can help a designer to think about the overall impression they want the audience to have of a place. This can be a collection of colours, textures, fabrics, styles of clothing, buildings, art work and anything else that you see which inspires you. In your mood board, try to label the things you add to help you remember your thought process.

EXTENSION

- Load [this page](#) on 'Staging Othello' in the Shakespeare Learning Zone.
- Go through the 'Key decisions to make' tab and read all the questions under the subcategories: 'Military', 'Race and Belonging', and 'Gender'.
- Do further research into past productions of *Othello*: find images or reviews to discover that director's interpretation.
- Begin to answer the questions on the page yourself, basing your decisions on the mood board you have just created.

7 - THE SECRET MARRIAGE

Why did Othello and Desdemona marry in secret?

WHAT YOU NEED

- A piece of note paper, or a notebook and something to write with.
- A copy of Act 1 Scene 1 to read either on the page or onscreen.

ACTIVITY

- Read Act 1 Scene 1, from Brabantio's entrance to Iago's exit (~lines 83-153). Pick out and write down any phrases or words used by Iago, Roderigo or Brabantio that refer to Othello and Desdemona.
- Notice the style of language that is used: what does this reveal about the characters in the scene, and the societal norms in this world?
- Read Brabantio's speech aloud from lines ~154-161: *"It is too true an evil; gone she is"*.
- Stand up in your room and read the speech again, but this time turn sharply and face a different wall every time you reach a punctuation mark. Notice how this accentuates the 'broken' feeling of the text. How does this structure reflect Brabantio's current state of mind?
- Although it is only Roderigo stood in person with Brabantio at this moment, it could be argued there are other absent 'audiences' Brabantio is directing his thoughts to. Actors and directors can sometimes help make sense of a monologue like this by imagining who (or what) the character is speaking to. From the suggestions below, separate the speech so that each thought is directed to the appropriate audience:

RODERIGO - DESDEMONA - FATHERS - GOD - HIMSELF

- Stand in the middle of the room again. With your body representing HIMSELF, imagine and fix in place the other 4 audiences around you. Speak the speech again, turn and point to the audiences you have decided for each line. (Perhaps point inwards when Brabantio is talking to HIMSELF).
- Read the speech one final time forgetting all the rules, and see if your opinion or understanding of it has changed. As an actor reciting the lines, is there now more clarity? How do we feel about Brabantio at this point?

EXTENSION

- As Brabantio, write a letter to Desdemona outlining what you have heard and how you feel about this. Allow the emotion to be reflected in the writing style too, thinking about what we noticed from the exercise above.
- Write another letter, this time to Othello. How is the tone and language different?
- Evaluate the reasons why Othello and Desdemona felt they needed to keep the marriage secret.

8 - OTHELLO'S STORY

How does Othello use words to convince the court?

WHAT YOU NEED

- A piece of note paper, or a notebook and something to write with.
- A computer with internet connection with the following clips loaded: **to be added**
- A copy of Act 1 Scene 3, to read either on the page or onscreen.

ACTIVITY

- Read aloud Othello's speech beginning '*Most grave potent signiors*' (Act 1 Scene 3, ~Line 76). Write down on a separate piece of paper any words or phrases that stand out to you. These could be those you don't understand.
- Write your answer to the question: '*What is Othello's main aim?*'
- Go back to the speech and underline or highlight any part of the text where you think Othello is succeeding at 'winning round' his audience. This could be the use of a particular word, or a tactic he employs (e.g. flattery). Do you think his language is successful?
- Research the term 'Rhetoric' - or watch this [short video](#) of RSC Artistic Director Gregory Doran explaining what rhetoric is.
- Using highlighters, go back to the speech and pick out any examples of rhetoric in action. Notice if certain moments match with your underlined text from the exercise above.
- Othello is the tragic hero in our play. Having read the whole of this scene, now analyse what your opinion of the character is now. Has **your** opinion changed?
- Find 2-3 quotes that are perfect examples of Othello in this scene.

EXTENSION

- Read Othello's speech '*Her father lov'd me, oft invited me*'. (~Line 128)
- Track Othello's story beat-by-beat, up to this point, and then re-write the story from Desdemona's point of view. How do their journeys and reactions to events differ?

9 - DESDEMONA AND 'DUTY'

What is the role of Desdemona in this world?

WHAT YOU NEED

- A piece of note paper, or a notebook and something to write with.
- A computer with internet connection, ready to visit [this page](#) and watch [this clip](#).
- A copy of Act 1 Scene 3 to read either on the page or onscreen.

ACTIVITY

- From the work we have done so far, we realise we have been told a lot about Desdemona by *report*.
- Consider if we know any **FACTS** about Desdemona. If we are seeing the play for the first time, think of **OPINIONS** you have of her from what we have learnt up to this point. What type of person do we anticipate?
- Familiarise yourself again with Act 1 Scene 3, and the moment of Desdemona's first entrance. (See Activity 8).
- Here Desdemona speaks of 'divided duty'. Duty is a broad term that can be applied to many areas of life. e.g. military duty, filial duty etc. Think about the role of women in this society and how this definition of 'duty' may contrast depending on gender.
- Answer the question: Does Desdemona believe what she says to her father in front of the court?
- Go to the Character Analysis page for Desdemona on the Shakespeare Learning Zone [here](#).
- Work through the activity 'Why does Desdemona love Othello?'

EXTENSION

- Watch the Trailer for the 2015 production [here](#).
- What is Desdemona's role here? Think about the creative decisions for this piece. Does it highlight the drama and issues of the play in a minute? Watching this trailer, what do you think the issues and key events are?

10 – IAGO'S FIRST SOLILOQUY

What effect does direct address to the audience have?

WHAT YOU NEED

- A piece of note paper, or a notebook and something to write with.
- A computer with internet connection, ready to watch these clips: [Exploring a Soliloquy](#) and [Iago's Soliloquy in Performance](#).
- A copy of Act 1 Scene 3 to read, either on the page or onscreen.

ACTIVITY

- Research the definition of 'Soliloquy.'
- Watch the video [Exploring a Soliloquy](#). (This is of the actor Pappa Essiedu talking about *Hamlet*, but his points can be applied to other soliloquies.)
- Read through Iago's speech at the end of Act 1 Scene 3, beginning '*Thus do I ever make my fool my purse.*' This is the first time in the play Iago, or indeed any character, directly addresses the audience.
- Think about the three topics that were explored in the video: Punctuation, Sounds and Line Endings. Circle or make a note of examples in Iago's speech where these elements seem interesting to you. What effects do these interesting moments have on the listener?
- Watch the soliloquy in performance [here](#), performed by Lucian Msamati.
- Notice moments where the actor has decided to engage directly with the audience. What effect does this have?
- What position does it put the audience in, hearing first-hand from the villain of the play and their intentions?

EXTENSION

- Samuel Taylor Coleridge claims that Iago's soliloquies reveal '*the motive-hunting of motiveless malignity.*' Summarise if you agree with this statement or not.
- To what extent do you agree that Iago makes up the plan to 'abuse Othello's ear' on the spot? What effect does the audience seeing this have?

11 – IAGO'S MOTIVES

What are Iago's motives?

WHAT YOU NEED

- A piece of note paper, or a notebook and something to write with.
- A computer with internet connection, ready to watch [this clip](#).
- A copy of Act 1 Scene 1, and Act 1 Scene 3, to read either on the page or onscreen.

ACTIVITY

- Familiarise yourself with Act 1 Scene 1, and write down any motives you find for Iago's intended behaviour to Othello. Why does he profess to 'hate' him?
- Watch Iago's soliloquy in Act 1 Scene 3 in performance [here](#).
- Read the speech and pick out any new motives we learn here. Do you believe Iago?
- Re-write the speech in the form of a text message to a close friend. Use your own words and think about how much detail you feel you need to go into.
- Your message has been found by the authorities. Now justify your actions in a written statement.
- Analyse how easy this was to do. Reflect back on Iago's motives, and what you know about his actions in the play. Is Iago 'motiveless'? To what extent do you agree that his actions spiral out of control?

EXTENSION

- You receive the message from Iago. What would your reply be? Write it back. Are you for or against Iago's plot? Excited to see what happens? Or horrified already at this cold-hearted soldier?
- Repeat the same exercises on this page with Iago's soliloquy at the end of Act 2 Scene 1.

12 - THE ARMY AND CASSIO

Does Cassio fit in?

WHAT YOU NEED

- A piece of note paper, or a notebook and something to write with.
- A computer with internet connection with the following clips loaded: **to be added**
- A copy of Act 1 Scene 2 to read either on the page or onscreen.
- A camera (optional: a mirror and a printer).

ACTIVITY

- Imagine you are a lieutenant in the army - recently promoted to serve an important general. Get ready to take a photo of yourself in a mirror, or on a smartphone. We are going to pretend this is your headshot that will go in your army file. (Use props or costume if you think appropriate!)
- If possible, print the image. Study the photo and analyse the character that you see. Annotate and circle traits and expressions you notice in the image. Write words that describe the character, how they might behave. What is a 'model soldier' in your eyes?
- Read Act 2 Scene 1 up to Cassio's entrance. Find and write down any mentions of Cassio.
- Go to this page on Relationships in Othello on the RSC Learning Zone [here](#) and select Cassio's icon. Look through Cassio's profile, including various past-production shots and the quotes he and others speak about him.
- Retake the photo, this time pretending to be Cassio. Notice the differences in your expressions and demeanour. What opinions have you made of the man? Do you have any expectations? Does Cassio meet these expectations?
- Ask yourself: Is Cassio your typical soldier? To what extent does he fit in to this world?

EXTENSION

- By the time we arrive in Cyprus, we learn that the Turkish have already been defeated. There is no longer a threat and the army does not need to engage in a battle. Ask yourself: Why does Shakespeare decide not to stage the war?
- Write diary excerpts for Cassio, Iago and Othello for their journey from Venice to Cyprus. Include in the entry the answer to the question: 'What does the army and military service mean to me?'
- If you have time, do the same for Desdemona and Emilia. What kind of world are they entering? How do they feel about it?

13 - THE PARTY

What happens at the party?

WHAT YOU NEED

- A large piece of paper, or a notebook and something to write with.
- A computer with internet connection, ready to visit [this page](#).
- A copy of Act 2 Scene 3 to read either on the page or onscreen.

ACTIVITY

- Go to the 'Scene by Scene' page on the RSC Learning Zone [here](#).
- Read the summary of Act 2 Scene 3, to familiarise yourself with the scene, and then read it in full.
- Divide a large piece of paper, or notepad into squares, or take a stack of PostIT notes.
- Summarise the plot of the scene in brief statements; focusing on key 'beats' (e.g. *Othello leaves the party*). Create a storyboard in the order of what happens in the scene.
- How few beats do we need to understand what is happening? Experiment with removing or merging beats to see if the story can still make sense.

EXTENSION

- Now think of the scene visually: create your own storyboard of the scene's plot for a comic book or graphic novel.
- Divide your paper into squares or panels so that you have one for each thing on your list. Draw a picture within each square until you have your story complete. Be as bold as you like!
- Add quotes from the play in speech bubbles or characters thoughts and reactions.

14 - IAGO REELS IN OTHELLO

How does Iago finally convince Othello?

WHAT YOU NEED

- A piece of note paper, or a notebook and something to write with.
- A computer with internet connection, ready to watch [this clip](#).
- A copy of Act 3 Scene 3 to read either on the page or onscreen.
- A small ball.

ACTIVITY

- Look at the duologue between Iago and Othello in Act 3 Scene 3, from Lines 90 - 117. (“Excellent wretch!” to “My lord you know I love you.”)
- Read the scene aloud and click your fingers each time a word is quickly repeated by either character? Which words are ‘passed’ between them to and fro? e.g.
 - IAGO: But for a satisfaction of my thought, No further harm.
 - OTHELLO: Why of thy ***thought*** Iago.
- Read the scene again, and this time throw or roll a ball from one hand to the other when it feels like either character is ‘**passing back the energy**’. Notice as you read whether you pass the ball whilst speaking a word, or after the sentence is over. Also notice when there are frenetic moments of back and forth, or moments of stillness.
- Ask yourself: How is Iago forcing Othello to ask questions? What is the main tactic Iago is using to get what he wants?
- Watch a later excerpt in the same scene [here](#).
- How ‘at ease’ is Iago with Othello? Does this deception seem to come naturally to him, or do we notice moments when he is ‘thinking on his feet?’

EXTENSION

- How sorry do you feel for Othello in this scene? We - the audience - are privy to Iago’s true intent. But, to what extent is Othello somewhat to blame? Identify some quotes which example Othello’s naivety.
- “Perdition catch my soul But I do love thee! And when I love thee not, Chaos is come again.” Notice how Chaos is capitalised. Who is Chaos? Research Greek mythology.

15 - POWER AND STATUS

Who has the power?

WHAT YOU NEED

- A piece of note paper, or a notebook and something to write with.
- A computer with internet connection, ready to watch [this clip](#).
- A mirror and a camera.
- A copy of Act 3 Scene 3 to read either on the page or onscreen.

ACTIVITY

- Stand in front of the mirror pretending to be a character with extremely high power, or high social status. Take a photo. Then do the same exercise for a person with very low status.
- Look at the photos side-by-side: what do you notice? What have you instinctively chosen to do with your body? Look out for things like the body language, facial expression, arm and hand positions. Write some notes explaining what you notice.
- It may seem obvious from looking at these two photos, but sometimes when reading or studying a play we can forget that interactions between the characters (and therefore some of the story) can also be communicated by just looks or movement in live performance. Communication is not solely restricted to the choice of words spoken. It is an actor's job to interpret the language written in the text, and characterise the complex goings-on of human behaviour.
- Take Act 3 Scene 3 as an example: a scene where Iago is employing every trick he can muster to falsely convince Othello of his wife's dishonesty. Load [this video](#), which shows this scene in performance.
- **Don't allow the video to play.** Instead, click along the timeline every 30 seconds. At each freeze-frame write down observations about the positions of the two actors on stage in relation to each other, and their body language. What story does this tell?
- Go back to the text and pick out some key quotes where you feel there is a POWER SHIFT (i.e. a moment when Othello pulls rank against Iago, or Iago successfully gets Othello's attention.)

EXTENSION

- Compare the conversations between Othello and Desdemona in Act 3 Scene 3, before and after this conversation with Iago.
- Think about it in terms of body language and status. How might you notice the difference before and after? Draw a sketch of the two characters at the beginning of Act 3 Scene 3, and again at the end.

16 - VERSE AND PROSE

What are the dramatic effects of verse and prose?

WHAT YOU NEED

- A piece of note paper, or a notebook and something to write with.
- A computer with internet connection, ready to watch [this clip](#).
- A copy of Act 4 Scene 1, to read either on the page or onscreen.

ACTIVITY

- Watch [this video](#), explaining the rhythm (Iambic Pentameter) behind Shakespeare's verse.
- Read the beginning of Act 4 Scene 1 and determine if the characters are speaking in verse or prose. Tap out the rhythm whilst reading the words.
NB Notice that sometimes characters may share a line of regular iambic pentameter; as is the case with the first three lines of this scene.
- In *Othello*, Shakespeare intermingles the two styles verse and prose frequently, often using this shift to represent a shift in emotions.
- Keep reading the scene. Where does the verse form begin to break down into prose? Why?
- Notice what happens to Othello's language specifically during the course of the scene. How does his pattern of speech reflect his emotional state? Early on, Othello uses verse to create a metaphor "As doth the raven o'er the infectious house" - compare this to his speech moments later before he falls down, overcome with rage. What effect does 'devolving' from verse to prose have?
- Find and write down some quotes that best example this for Othello in this scene.

EXTENSION

- Find examples of Iago switching back and forth between verse and prose. Why may this be?
- Iago seems to move between each form intentionally and with ease. What does this indicate? Think back to activities 8 and 14 when we looked at *rhetoric* and *manipulation*.

17 - THE WILLOW SCENE

What kind of relationship do Emilia and Desdemona have?

WHAT YOU NEED

- A piece of note paper, or a notebook and something to write with.
- A computer with internet connection, ready to watch [this clip](#).
- A copy of Act 4 Scene 3 to read either on the page or onscreen.

ACTIVITY

- Watch the video of two actors rehearsing Act 4 Scene 3, [here](#).
- Notice the variety of choices available to the actors, and how they collaborate with the director Iqbal Khan in moments of discussion.
- In Act 4 Scene 3 after Othello furiously exits after demanding Desdemona produce the handkerchief, Emilia and Desdemona have the following dialogue:

Emilia: Is not this man jealous?

Desdemona: I nev’r saw this before. / Sure there’s some wonder in this handkerchief;
/ I am most unhappy in the loss of it.

Emilia: ‘Tis not a year or two shows us a man: / They are all but stomachs, and we
are all food’ / They eat us hungrily, and when they are full / They belch us.

- Notice how the two women come to different conclusions about Othello’s behaviour. There is an awareness about the treatment of women by men, especially by Emilia.*
- Read Act 4 Scene 3, how are these opinions continued here? What are both character’s outlooks? Where do they disagree? Who has the status? Does it change? (A key moment in the rehearsal video for example is when Desdemona chooses to throw water over Emilia.)
- Read the scene from Line 24 “My mother had a maid call’d Barbary” until the end of the song: “Let nobody blame him, his scorn I approve”. What significance does this song have? How much does the song predict what is to come?

EXTENSION

- Think further about the relationship between Desdemona and Emilia. Decide on the top three qualities of each character from what you know about them.
- Create your own directorial notes. If you were directing two actors, what would you ask them? What would you be interested to see played in this scene?
- Watch the 2015 production version in performance, remembering the choices that were being discussed in the rehearsal video. Is the final performance version different? What choices were clear, and which were new to you?

*(Remember too, we have heard that Iago suspects Emilia and Othello to have had an affair).

18 - CASSIO STABBED / RODERIGO'S DEATH

How does Iago control the action?

WHAT YOU NEED

- A piece of note paper, or a notebook and something to write with.
- Labels and a variety of objects to represent characters in the scene (e.g. counters, playing pieces etc)
- A copy of Act 5 Scene 1 to read either on the page or onscreen.

ACTIVITY

- Read Iago's aside at the start of Act 5 Scene 1. Make a bullet point summary of his thought process. What do he need to happen, and what is his ideal outcome?
- Create a model stage for you to plot the action of the scene. You decide! Suggestions could be to draw a rectangle on a piece of paper, to construct a 3D model box of the stage, or to use the whole of your room.
- Using any labelled objects, plot where the characters are on the stage during the scene and where their movements take them.
- Ask yourself: how well does Iago think on his feet, and how successfully he is able to steer the action?

EXTENSION

- What more should Iago have done to succeed? Make a new plan that might have worked, thinking about all the ways in which his plan failed and why. Using your new plan, think about how Iago might deliver this as an aside or soliloquy.
- If you have time, film the scene playing out. This might be as a stop motion or as a dramatic reading of your imagined plan.

19 - OTHELLO'S LANGUAGE

How much is Othello in control by the end of the play?

WHAT YOU NEED

- A piece of note paper, or a notebook and something to write with.
- A computer with internet connection, ready to visit [this page](#).
- A copy of Act 5 Scene 2 to read either on the page or onscreen.

ACTIVITY

- Load the Language Analysis Page of the Shakespeare Learning Zone [here](#).
- Click on 'Analysing Othello's Language,' and begin by watching 'The Role of Othello.' Think about what the actor Hugh Quarshie says about Othello's identity and belonging. Ask yourself: to what extent do you believe intimate relationships 'complete' or 'define' a person?
- Stand up and read Othello's speech in Act 5 Scene 2, beginning "*It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul.*" Change direction every time you reach a punctuation mark. Notice if these changes in direction match up with a change of thought, or intention.
- Othello seems to be arguing with himself. Highlight the text in two different colours. One when you believe he is INTENT on killing Desdemona, and the other when he is NOT INTENT. Notice if your speech is more heavily coloured with one colour. What is Othello's through process? Does he have a coherent train of thought? Has he already made his decision?
- *Optional: If you have been working through all the activities, you will have collected quotes along the way that summarise Othello during the story. Have these quotes to hand.*
- From everything we have looked at regarding the 'deterioration' of Othello's language – both rhythmically and poetically (See activity 16) – ask yourself the question: to what extent is Othello in control of himself at the moment of Desdemona's death? Is he a blameless victim, or an overly-proud, egotistical murderer?

EXTENSION

- Complete the table 'Questions to Consider' on the Language Analysis [page](#). Fill in the missing Point, Evidence, Explanation boxes.
- Watch the video 'Exploring a Monologue' on the same page. (This is of the actor Mark Quartley exploring a speech from *The Tempest*).
- Read Othello's speeches:

- Act 1 Scene 3 ~Line 76 '*Most potent, grave, and reverend signiors*'
 - Act 4 Scene 1 ~Line 35 '*Lie with her? Lie on her?*'
 - Act 5 Scene 2 Line 1 '*It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul.*'
- Compare and contrast these three speeches. What differences and similarities do you notice between each speech's imagery, metre and word choice? Explain what significance these differences and similarities have.

20 - THE DEATH SCENE

Are the deaths of Desdemona and Othello inevitable?

WHAT YOU NEED

- A piece of note paper, or a notebook and something to write with.
- A computer with internet connection, ready to visit [this page](#).
- A copy of Act 5 Scene 2 to read either on the page or onscreen.

ACTIVITY

- Watch the clip of the final scene in rehearsal in the link above. Think about the director Iqbal Khan's point at 0:40 '*People aren't in control of how their ends happen.*'
- Read Act 5 Scene 2 up to the point of Desdemona's death.
- Draw a simple outline of Othello and Desdemona on two pieces of paper. There needs to be space to write both inside the body and around the outside.
- For both characters, write their own faults inside the body, and the faults of others around the outside.
- If you completed activity 4, compare this work with the personality traits you wrote down while exploring Othello's tragic flaw.
- Evaluate *Othello* as a tragedy – *Othello*, in terms of scale, begins quite wide and far-reaching. (Othello and Desdemona's marriage concerns the whole of the Venetian court, and there is the threat of a foreign enemy: The Turkish fleet.) The play ends in an incredibly intimate and domestic setting (the bedroom). Othello as our protagonist also begins the play as an 'outsider.' Most tragedies seem to be the opposite of this: they begin on a small domestic scale with the protagonist in harmony with their community and, as the plot unravels, the scale expands (into whole countries divided, or outright war).
- How does *Othello* subvert the genre of tragedy and what effect does this have on the audience?

EXTENSION

- Is *Othello* a racist play? Watch the debate hosted at the RSC in 2015 [here](#).
- Ask yourself: to what extent do I believe Othello's fate is linked to his race?