

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?