

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.