

OTHELLO

PRIMARY TEACHER PACK

ABOUT THIS PACK

This Primary Teachers' pack will support Primary teachers and pupils participating in the broadcast of *Othello* to UK schools on **Thursday 17 March 2016**. The RSC's 2015 production of *Othello*, directed by Iqbal Khan, opened on 4 June 2015 at the Royal Shakespeare Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon.

Primary Schools:

- We strongly recommend that you view the production from 9am until 10.15am only. This is due to content in some of the later scenes which younger students may find disturbing.

This pack is organised into three sections.

- **Section 1** provides background and activities that will prepare pupils for watching the first part of the broadcast (9am-10.15am).
- **Section 2** offers activities that can be used between 10.15am and 1.18pm for those who stop watching but want to rejoin the broadcast for the Q&A.
- **Section 3** includes information which might help you to prepare your students if you do chose to watch the whole broadcast, including scenes that contain some violence in them.

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These symbols are used throughout the pack:



READ

Notes from the production, background info or extracts



ACTIVITY

An active classroom or open space activity



WRITE

A discussion or writing activity



LINKS

Useful web addresses and research activities

PART 1: PREPARING FOR THE BROADCAST

KNOWING THE STORY



ACTIVITY 1: THE STORY IN IMAGES

The following activity will help pupils to understand what happens to Othello and Iago as the play begins and they are called to go off to war in Cyprus, taking Desdemona with them.

Organise pupils into groups of four or five.

- Provide each group of pupils with one of the descriptions and pictures from the visual storyboard at the end of the Resource materials.
 - If you only want to cover the story as far as you will be watching in the broadcast, you might want to focus on images 1-4.
- Ask each group to go away and create a freeze frame for what happens in their part of the story.
- Invite each group to show their freeze frame as you read through each of the 10 stages of the story.
- Reflect with pupils on what has happened in the play, looking at the whole storyboard.



ACTIVITY 2: LOYALTY

Explain to pupils that the whole story of Othello is really about two men, Othello and Iago. Both men are experienced soldiers and Othello is General of the Venetian army.

When the story starts, two really important things have just happened:

- Othello has promoted one of his officers to be his second-in-command, but instead of choosing his old friend Iago he has chosen Cassio who is younger and less experienced than Iago.
- Othello has also just secretly married Desdemona, who is the daughter of a really important man in Venice: Brabantio, without her Father's permission.

Othello is treated as an outsider by lots of other characters in the play and some of them use racist language to talk about him, including Iago. The fact that Othello is a 'Moor' also seems to be one of the reasons that Desdemona's Father, Brabantio, is upset about Othello marrying his daughter.

Ask pupils to think about a situation where they think someone has been given a job or privilege that they think they deserved to get instead.

- How do they think Iago might feel at the start of the play, when Othello has chosen to give someone else the important role in the army that he wanted?
- Do you think it would change Iago's attitude to Othello, or to Cassio?

In the production they will see Iago is played by Lucian Msamati and Othello by Hugh Quarshie (see picture opposite). In this production, what kind of relationship do you think these two might have had before the play starts?



THE SETTING OF THE PLAY

Othello is set in two places: Venice and Cyprus. Venice is a European court and Cyprus is a strange country to most of the characters, who go there to fight against the Turkish army.

To help them get a sense of the two places and how different they are you could ask pupils to create freeze frames or images of:

- A busy and important court
- A foreign war zone

It's really important that pupils understand that Cyprus is a place of violence, where the characters' attitudes and behavior really changes.

- Invite pupils to take a look at the images of the two sets used in the RSC production and see what differences they can see.
 - How have we tried to show the difference between the important court of Venice and the war zone of Cyprus?



What do they think might happen to Othello and Iago in the war zone of Cyprus?

EXPLORING THE CHARACTERS

The following activities are designed to help you and your pupils become more familiar with the characters of Othello and Iago and their relationship at the beginning of the play.



OTHELLO AND IAGO

- Organise pupils into pairs and provide them with the list of facts about Iago and Othello in the Resource materials.
- Ask each pair to look at the facts and to imagine what the relationship between these two men might be at the start of the play.
- Encourage each pair to create a short speech in which Othello and Iago each explain how they feel about the other.
 - Their speeches should not be long, but should try to imagine all the things that they would feel.
- Explain to pupils that in Shakespeare's plays speeches like these, called Soliloquies, are often used to help the audience understand how the character feels and in this play both Othello and Iago use Soliloquies.

PART 2: DURING THE BROADCAST

We suggest that you watch up to part 1 of the broadcast (which finishes at 10.15am) and then re-join us for the Q&A at 1.18pm.

The following section provides activities to do with pupils during the remainder of the broadcast. The activities are designed to help pupils think about what happens in the rest of the play and also to maximise their experience of the Q&A.

CONFUSION AND JEALOUSY

In the play Iago is able to make Othello very angry, so that he acts differently and even kills Desdemona whom he loved very much at the beginning of the play. He does this by convincing Othello that Desdemona is lying to him and that she actually loves someone else, Cassio. This brings out the worst in Othello.



THE HANDKERCHIEF

One of the things Iago is very good at doing in this play is controlling other people. He even manages to make Othello think Desdemona has stopped loving him and is in love with Cassio.

One of the reasons Othello starts to believe this is because of a handkerchief. The following activity will explore why and how the handkerchief is used in Iago's scheme.

- Organise pupils into groups of three or four and provide them with the lines or 'scenes' about the handkerchief in the Resource materials.
 - Explain that the first two scenes use lines which come from Othello and describe how he was given the handkerchief and then why he gave it to Desdemona.
- Ask pupils to read the lines aloud in their groups and to try and to create two short scenes using the lines from the play which show:
 - Othello being given the handkerchief
 - Othello giving Desdemona the handkerchief
- Allow one or two of the groups to share their short scenes and ask pupils to reflect on what they think the handkerchief means to Othello. How do they think he would feel if Desdemona lost it? Or, if she gave it to someone else? What might that mean?
- Ask pupils to look at the next three lines from the resource and explain that Desdemona does lose, or drop, the handkerchief and that these lines look at what happens to it next.
- Ask pupils to work in their groups, reading the lines aloud and creating three short scenes which show what happens to the handkerchief next, showing:
 - Emilia finding the handkerchief and taking it to Iago
 - Iago deciding to use the handkerchief to set Cassio up
 - Othello seeing Cassio with the handkerchief
- Invite one or two of the groups to share their short scenes, showing what happens to the handkerchief next.



- Reflect with pupils on what Othello might think when he sees Cassio with the handkerchief. As Iago is trying to make Othello believe that Desdemona is now in love with Cassio, why would this plan help to convince him? What does it show us about Iago? What does it show us about Emilia?

PART 3: WATCHING THE FULL BROADCAST?



THE CONSEQUENCES OF WAR

Both of the scenes which we have alerted you to take place in Part 2 of the broadcast and are from Act 3 Scene 3.

If you do chose to watch these parts with your pupils it will be really important that they understand how and why these things are happening. Below are some points that it might be helpful to work through with them beforehand.

- The beginning of the scene sees Othello and the other soldiers torturing someone. This reminds us that we are in a violent war zone and we even see Othello behaving very differently here to the way he behaves in the court at the beginning of the play reminding us he is a soldier as well.



As they will know from looking at the story, Othello and Iago are both soldiers. In Act 3 Scene 3 Iago is finally able to convince Othello that Desdemona could be betraying him and succeeds in turning Othello against Desdemona. Because he was such a sensible and clever character at the start, this can be quite hard to believe.

- One of the ways that the actors and director of our play have made this more believable is to make this scene quite violent. In it, you will see Othello torture and hurt Iago to force him to tell the truth. Even though we (the audience) know that Iago is still lying, this can help to understand why Othello might believe his friend and fellow soldier.

TEACHER NOTE

Before looking at Othello with your pupils it might be helpful to explain to them that the play is often talked about as being 'about race' or even 'racist' which leads to lots of discussion and debates whenever it is performed.

One of the central characters, Othello, is described as being a 'Moor'. This word is used a lot in the play and you will hear it throughout the first part of the broadcast. In Shakespeare's lifetime the word 'Moor' was a general term for people of African or Arabic descent.

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RESOURCES

OTHELLO AND IAGO

Facts about Iago	Facts about Othello
Iago has served in the army with Othello for years and thinks he should be promoted soon	Othello has just promoted the young Michael Cassio to be his lieutenant
Iago is married to Emilia but suspects her of keeping secrets with Othello	Othello has married the daughter of an important Senator, Desdemona, without her Father's permission
Iago is friends with Roderigo and Roderigo gives him money to get information about Desdemona, who he is in love with	Othello trusts Iago a lot, calling him 'honest'. He has even told him about his secret marriage
Iago knows about Othello's secret marriage but is planning to tell Desdemona's Father about it at the start of the play	Othello is the General of the Venetian army and a very important man in Venice.

THE HANDKERCHIEF

SCENE 1

Othello is given the handkerchief by his Mother and he describes how she got it

'That handkerchief

Did an Egyptian to my mother give:

...she told her, while she kept it,

'Twould make her amiable and subdue my Father

Entirely to her love...

...she, dying, gave it me'

SCENE 2

Desdemona is given the handkerchief by Othello and he describes how his Mother told him to give it to his wife

'she... bid me, when my fate would have me wived,

To give it her: I did so; and take heed on't

...To lose't or give't away were such perdition

As nothing else could match'

Desdemona drops the handkerchief

SCENE 3

Emilia finds the handkerchief Desdemona has dropped and decides to give it to Iago

'I am glad I have found this napkin:

This was her first remembrance from the Moor:

...I'll have the work ta'en out,

And give't Iago'

SCENE 4

Iago plots how he can use the handkerchief to make Othello think Cassio and Desdemona are in love

'I will in Cassio's lodging loose this napkin

And let him find it.'

SCENE 5

Othello, spying with Iago, sees Cassio with the handkerchief

'By heaven that should be my handkerchief!

...How shall I murder him Iago

Visual Storyboard



One night in Venice Iago meets Roderigo. Iago is in a bad mood because Othello has promoted a man called Cassio to be his second in command, a job which Iago wanted. Roderigo is also in a bad mood because he is in love with Desdemona, but she has just married Othello. Roderigo and Iago promise to help each other get what they want. They start by going to see Desdemona's Father and telling him that she has run away with Othello. Her father, Brabantio is really angry.



Othello and Brabantio both go to the Senate or Court in Venice, where Brabantio complains to the Duke about Othello marrying his daughter. The Duke allows Othello and Desdemona to explain and supports them, even though Brabantio is still really angry at Desdemona. The Duke then sends Othello and Iago to Cyprus to fight against the Turks. Desdemona asks to go with them and Othello chooses Emilia – Iago's wife – to be her maid and come too.



On the journey to Cyprus their ships are blown around in the storm but it passes and they all arrive safely. As everyone lands Iago sees Cassio kiss Desdemona's hand, and starts to think he can get his own back on Othello and Cassio at the same time by making Othello think they are in love. Iago starts his plan by telling Roderigo and encouraging him to pick a fight with Cassio.



The enemy ships were all destroyed in the storm so the soldiers have a party at the camp to celebrate. During the party Iago makes Cassio drink too much and then Roderigo fights with him. Other people try to break up the fight and Cassio behaves really badly. When Othello finds Cassio drunk and fighting he takes away his new promotion.



Cassio is upset about losing his promotion, so he goes to see Iago. Iago tells him it will be okay and says he should go and talk to Desdemona about it, because she might be able to help. Once he's gone Iago tells the audience that this is part of his plan to try and make Othello think that Cassio and Desdemona are in love.



Iago tells Othello that he thinks Desdemona is in love with Cassio. After a while Othello starts to believe Iago might be right but says that he needs proof. Othello gets more and more angry and he pushes Desdemona away as she is trying to work out what is wrong. She drops her handkerchief and Emilia picks it up. Emilia then gives the handkerchief to Iago.



Iago tells Othello he has seen Cassio with the handkerchief, so Othello asks Desdemona about it. When she does not have it he starts to believe that Iago might be right. Iago then persuades Othello to spy on Cassio while he is with someone. Iago manages to convince Othello that Cassio is talking about Desdemona rather than Bianca, who is the girl he has been talking to.



Lodovico arrives from Venice and orders Othello to return, leaving Cassio in charge. Desdemona is really pleased to hear that Cassio will get his job back which upsets Othello and he hits her. Seeing this shocks Lodovico. Roderigo is also upset with Iago and wants to go home as he is not getting Desdemona back. Iago persuades him to kill Cassio.



Roderigo and Iago set a trap for Cassio at night and Roderigo attacks him. Iago watches and does not help as Roderigo wounds Cassio and Cassio then kills Roderigo. Othello then gets there to find Iago with the wounded Cassio and thinks Iago has done it. Othello then goes to find Desdemona to finish what Iago has started. When he arrives at their bedroom he strangles Desdemona.



Emilia arrives and sees what Othello has done, as Desdemona wakes for a moment and says she has 'done this deed' herself. Lodovico, the governor and Iago arrive and Emilia tells them that she took the handkerchief. Iago stabs Emilia to keep her quiet and is taken prisoner before Othello kills himself, realising what he has done.