

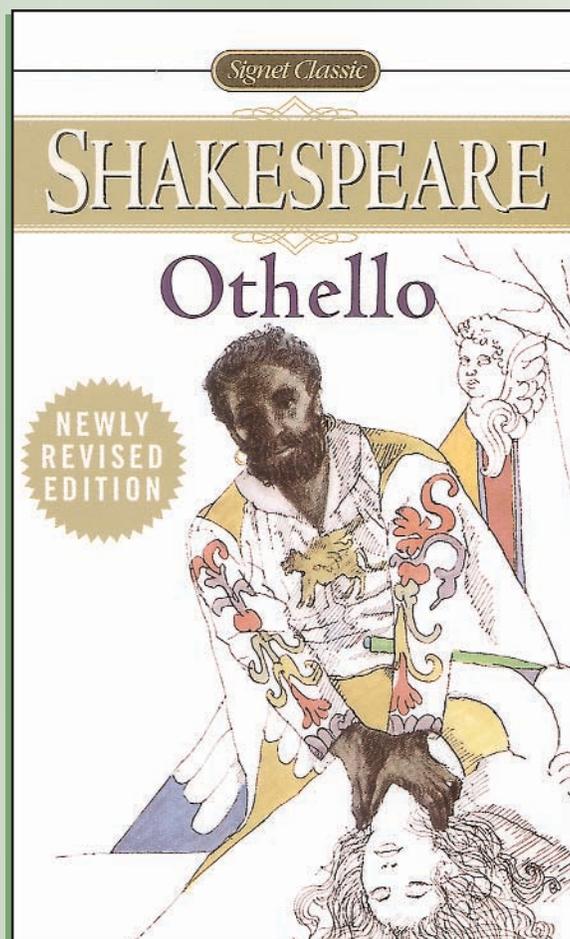


A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO THE SIGNET CLASSIC EDITION OF

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S

OTHELLO

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S E R I E S E D I T O R S :

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INTRODUCTION

Othello, like all of Shakespeare's plays, particularly the tragedies, is complex and subtly nuanced. Through its complexities and subtleties, Shakespeare makes us care about the characters who people this story. We understand their weaknesses and their strengths, their passions and their nobility. In our engagement in their lives and our pondering over what has gone wrong and why, we are given the opportunity to analyze human life both in the abstract and in the particular of our own lives. Shakespeare's ability to involve us in the lives and fortunes of his characters is one of the best reasons for reading, rereading, and teaching *Othello*.

Othello has particular gifts to offer to teenagers. It is a play about passion and reason. Intense feelings are exhibited here: love, hate, jealousy, envy, even lust. Teenagers struggling with their own passions can empathize with both Roderigo's and Othello's plight. It is also a play that examines, as do Shakespeare's other works, human relationships and interactions. For teenagers in the first rush of attempting to understand how romantic relationships work and when and why they might fail, this text provides much to ponder. In addition, studying the play gives young people a rich literary vehicle for developing their critical thinking and analytical reading skills. The closer they examine this work, the richer they find it.

This teacher's guide is intended to assist you by providing a variety of ideas and activities to serve as a springboard to enrich student learning. It is divided into several parts: (1) a brief literary overview, including a synopsis and a commentary on the play; (2) suggestions for teaching the play, including activities, discussion questions, and essay topics to be used before, during, and after reading the play; (3) ideas to extend the students' learning beyond the play, including ways to address its themes, ideas for teaching literary analysis, techniques for using the play as a bridge to other works, and ways to use the play as part of interdisciplinary study and; (4) bibliographies and other resources.

Throughout this guide activities are suggested for students of varying ability levels. You will need to select those that are most appropriate for your classroom.

OVERVIEW

SYNOPSIS

The play is set primarily in Cyprus. However, the opening act takes place in Venice, providing us with an understanding of the authoritarian government controlled by the Venetian senators. Also, we begin to understand Othello's tenuous standing in Venice, as well as Desdemona's privileged background.

The first scenes introduce the primary plot, beginning outside Brabantio's house with Iago already intent upon manipulation and trouble-making. He encourages Roderigo to rouse Brabantio, Desdemona's father, and tell him of her elopement with Othello. Iago makes the announcement as alarming and disruptive as possible. Both Iago and Roderigo reveal their motivation: Roderigo's passion for Desdemona and Iago's appetite for revenge on Othello for choosing Michael Cassio over him as his second in command. Although Brabantio and Othello had been friends, or at least amiable acquaintances, Brabantio's first thought is that his daughter would never have done this of her own free will—Othello must have used witchcraft and potions.

The secondary plot, introduced in the following scene, is that the Turks have taken a fleet to Cyprus, and the senators want to send Othello as the best and most experienced general to defend it. The Turks' threat to Venetian civilization echoes Brabantio's concerns about what he interprets as Othello's barbarian threat to his civilized daughter; he wants the powerful senators to condemn Othello for wooing her. However, Desdemona declares that her love for the Moor is free of any external influence.

After Desdemona's declaration all attention is returned to the attack on Cyprus. Othello is ordered to leave Venice immediately. Ironically, he commends Desdemona into Iago's keeping and requests that she be allowed to come to him in Cyprus. Brabantio warns Othello that if Desdemona deceived her father she could also be false to her husband. At the end of the act, Iago persuades Roderigo to abandon his plans to kill himself over Desdemona and come to Cyprus disguised and ready seek revenge on Cassio and Othello.

The next act opens with a conversation that tells of the Turks' drowning in a storm, thus ending their threat to Cyprus. Cassio arrives, and we learn that Othello's ship is still at sea. Desdemona and her entourage, including Iago, appear shortly thereafter; all await news of Othello. Othello appears and a tender moment of reunion with Desdemona ensues. Iago is

ordered to take over the watch of the city. He seeks Roderigo's help in his plot to undo Cassio. The plan works smoothly—Cassio gets drunk and fights with Roderigo and one of the Cypriot leaders. The fight arouses Othello. Based on Iago's explanation, Othello dismisses Cassio and names Iago his replacement. Iago, encouraging Cassio to seek Desdemona's assistance in returning to Othello's favor, begins slowly poisoning Othello's mind by making him think that Desdemona is illicitly involved with Cassio.

In Act III Iago's plot progresses. Cassio asks Desdemona to plead his case to Othello. She freely and happily accepts his suit and pledges herself to urge his case relentlessly. In the meantime Iago continues to poison Othello's mind. Othello demands visual proof:

Villain, be sure thou prove my love a whore
 Be sure of it; give me ocular proof;
 Or, by the worth of mine eternal soul,
 Thou hadst been better have been born a dog
 Than answer my naked wrath.
 (III, iii, 356-360)

Iago quickly seizes the opportunity. Othello has given Desdemona a special handkerchief, a family heirloom passed down from his mother to his bride. Iago gets the handkerchief from Emilia, his wife and Desdemona's attendant. Emilia is unaware of her husband's intent. Iago plants the handkerchief in Cassio's rooms. At Iago's urging Othello asks Desdemona for it. Worried because it seems to mean so much to her husband, Desdemona lies and says she doesn't have it at the moment. This arouses Othello's doubt and distrust.

The next act opens with Iago plotting with Roderigo to kill Cassio. Iago continues to manipulate both Othello and Roderigo, pushing each of them to murder—even persuading Othello to strangle rather than poison Desdemona. An overwrought Othello has a seizure that Cassio witnesses. Iago uses this as an opportunity to call Othello's reason into question with visitors from Venice, one of whom is Desdemona's relative. Othello can no longer contain his passionate anger towards Desdemona and publicly chides her and strikes her. Unable to get an admission of guilt from his wife, he turns to her attendant. When Othello questions Emilia about her mistress's habits, she staunchly defends Desdemona's virtue, but Othello will not accept her testimony.

The final act climaxes in the revelation of Iago's multi-faceted scheme. Emilia, Roderigo, and Desdemona are its early casualties. Cassio, though intended to die, survives. Othello finally confronts the truth about Iago's manipulation and Desdemona's innocence and kills himself. The story ends with the witnesses contemplating the tragic tale they must tell the Venetian court.

COMMENTARY

Because *Othello* is considered by many to be one of Shakespeare's major tragedies, criticism of it is as complex as the play itself. Some call it a modernized Morality play in which the characters are primarily symbolic. This criticism centers on the characters' fall from innocence—the snake fouling the Garden—caused by Iago's manipulation of Othello. Other critics examine the play in terms of the clash of cultures: military vs. civilian, Moorish vs. Venetian, barbaric vs. civil. Likewise, the themes of prejudice and of unbridled jealousy are the focus of commentary about the play. Others view the play as a story of human frailty — the story of the fall of a man of noble bearing and sincere passion and the destruction of an innocent and real love.

Othello is equally, however, a story of malevolence and manipulation. One of the most intriguing characters in Shakespeare's roll call of villains is Iago. From the beginning of the play until the final scenes, Iago plots and maneuvers to bring the people around him, especially Othello, to doom and destruction. Iago's tactics are revealed in the opening scene as he draws first Roderigo and then Brabantio into his service. By presenting the relationship between Othello and Desdemona in the crudest sexual terms, he rouses Brabantio and Roderigo to become willing workers in his scheme to revenge himself on the Moor. Just as clearly he enjoys each man's alarm and anguish. His subsequent conversations with Roderigo, in which he draws him ever deeper into his plot, prepare us for the cunning with which he begins his cruel work on Othello.

By contrast, Othello is clearly not a dissembler. He is forthright with the senators when asked about his relationship with Desdemona. Instead of claiming that she was attracted by his noble bearing and grace, he tells them that she was first caught by his stories of the true adventures of his life and then drawn on to love through her pity for the trials he had endured. He is not a man who plays games. He accurately sums up his own character:

...Then must you speak
Of one that loved not wisely, but too well;
Of one not easily jealous, but being wrought,
Perplexed in the extreme; of one whose hand,
Like the base Judean, threw a pearl away
Richer than all his tribe.
(V,ii, 339-344)

Othello and Iago, then, are the two characters at the crux of the play. The major action of the play is the tightening of Iago's net around the noble Moor and the decay of the Moor's nobility. It is this clash and the vulnerabilities of the humans involved that many critics agree provide the basis for the continuing interest and compelling attraction of *Othello*.

BEFORE READING

This guide combines literary, dramatic, and cultural approaches to the teaching of *Othello*. The suggested activities engage students with the language and formal elements of the play: plot, character, setting, and theme. They also help bring the play to life for students by involving them in its dramatic action. In addition, they assist students in understanding the cultural and social context of the play. An array of ideas for visualizing, acting out, reading aloud, and reinterpreting the roles are included. An effort has been made, too, to keep students involved in thinking, reading, writing, listening, and speaking about various aspects of the play. Students become a part of the Venetian scene and compare the world of *Othello* to their own contemporary world. Finally, the activities show how teachers in subjects other than the language arts can address the play in their classrooms. Materials included in the bibliography provide a wealth of teaching ideas to supplement those in this guide. They also direct teachers to other literature that can be used in thematic units.

UNDERSTANDING THE CULTURAL CONTEXT

These activities are designed for the language arts classroom, but can be equally effective in social studies. They help students understand the cultural and social context of the play.

1. In order for students to understand the subtleties of the play, they should understand something about the culture about which it was written and in which it was produced. Pair or divide students into groups of three to do mini-research projects, primarily from encyclopedias and specialized reference texts. A quick turn around time, 24 to 48 hours, will keep students from bogging down in this preliminary activity and allow them to focus on the play itself. Students can report orally on the material they gather. The topics should all originate from the play. More than one group can tackle the same topic:
 - Who were the Moors?
 - Who were the Venetians?
 - How were the Moors/Venetians regarded in Shakespeare's day?
 - What were the military duties of ranked officers?
 - What was the military hierarchy?
 - What was the role of women?
 - What was expected of a daughter?
 - What was expected of a bride?
 - What relationships between men and women were considered above reproach?
 - What rules for getting married existed at the time of the play?
 - What were the rules of courtship?

2. Have students examine cultural rules by which they live and compare and contrast these rules to the ones of Othello's time. Have them think and/or write about the following topics before discussing them:
 - What rules dictate the behavior of young men and women in relationships today?
 - Name a situation in which the rules have clearly been violated. That is, what are things "nice girls" just don't do? What are things "nice boys" just don't do?
 - Why do these rules exist? Do you think they just apply locally or even just in your school? What are the possible consequences of breaking these rules?
 3. Divide students into groups to brainstorm situations in which cultural rules were unclear or were very different from what they expected. Each group should come up with one or two situations and list:
 - the actual rule,
 - the rule as interpreted incorrectly, and
 - where help could be found.
 4. Show one scene from the Lawrence Fishburne video of the play (perhaps the scene where Othello strikes Desdemona). Have students analyze:
 - the rule that seems to be operating or
 - the rule that seems to have been broken.
- Have them compare what they have observed in the video with incidents they have observed in real life.

DECODING THE LANGUAGE

One of the difficulties some students have in reading Shakespeare is trying to decode the language. The suggestions included here and later in the section of ideas to use during the reading of the play are intended to help students check their understanding of what is being said and better appreciate how it is being said.

1. Select or have students select scenes from the play and perform them using their own language. Limit the time for the performance to 2-3 minutes.
2. Select for the students an important scene from the play. Have them rewrite the scene as if a similar incident is occurring today. Contemporary interpretations of scenes should have a clear beginning, middle, and end. They should be clearly focused on demonstrating one important incident from the play. For example:
 - Friend A and Friend B enter a public place where Friend A is to meet his girlfriend. As they enter, she is laughing and talking with Friend C. Friend B begins to call attention to them; he suggests that Friend C is trying to take away Friend A's girl.
 - Friend A and Friend C have been good friends but have quarreled. Friend A, who was in the wrong, tries to get the girlfriend or boyfriend of Friend C to make peace between them.

Students should perform the scene for the class.

3. Have students write a brief monologue about themselves or someone they know well, telling one important thing about who he/she is and one thing about what he/she wants (e.g.: to be a starter for the basketball team, to get a car, to attend a special school for math or science, to win the lottery). The monologues can be recorded on audio or video tape, and selected monologues can be performed for the class.
 4. Have students watch the scene in a video (i.e.: the 1989 BBC/Time Life production, the Lawrence Fishburne/Kenneth Branagh, or the Orson Welles version) where Othello asks Desdemona about the handkerchief. Ask each student, pair, or group to focus on one of the characters. Have them analyze what that character wants most in the scene. Tell them that as they read the play they should think about how the character's desire in the scene they watched compares or contrasts with what he/she wants in the rest of the play.
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DECODING THE LANGUAGE

1. If you are comfortable reading Shakespeare orally, read sections of each act to the class. Or if you have a student who reads/acts well, have her/him do so.
2. In a variation on the previous suggestion, ask for volunteers or choose several students from the class who read well. Have the class select a scene they find difficult to understand. Allow this group of volunteers some time to prepare the scene in reader's theater style under your direction or the direction of some of the students in the group. After their performance, have the class and the actors discuss the ways in which the actors made the language more understandable.
3. Choose several key scenes. Sample ones might include:
 - Act I, scene iii, the scene in front of the senators in which Othello tells how he wooed Desdemona and she declares she loves him freely.
 - Act II, scene iii, the scene in which Cassio is drawn by Iago first into drinking then brawling. Othello relieves Cassio of his duties after hearing Iago's "reluctant" testimony.
 - Act III, scene iii, the second part of the scene in which Iago begins to poison Othello's view of Desdemona.
 - Act IV, scene i, the scene in which Othello is hidden listening to Cassio talk to Iago about Bianca, but Othello thinks he is talking about Desdemona.
 - Act IV, scene iii, the part of the scene between Emilia and Desdemona, in which the two women discuss their different responses to the temptations to betray their marriage vows.
 - Act V, scene ii, the scene in which Othello murders Desdemona.

Divide the class into groups; assign scenes and have them "update" the scene. Demonstrate using the *Twisted Tales From Shakespeare* by Richard Armour. Allow the students latitude to make the scenes funny or serious as long as the update adheres to some ground rules such as the following:

- The update must convey the major plot points of the scene and maintain Shakespeare's "take" on the characters.
- It must have a clear beginning, middle, and end.
- The story of that scene must be conveyed in the updated dialogue.

Complete the translation circle by having students take everyday situations and create Shakespearean dialogue to communicate them.

FOCUSING ON READING

A useful activity in studying literature is the dialogue journal. By tracking individual responses students develop the ability to make independent interpretations.

1. Have individual students take notes about their reading on the right-hand page of a notebook, especially noting when their understanding changes or they encounter problems. Then on the facing page of the notebook, have them reread their entries and look for patterns in their own reading. For example, ask and have them respond to these questions:
 - Are you more attentive to character or plot?
 - Do you bog down whenever background information is being supplied ?
 2. Allow students to periodically and selectively share their entries with classmates and with you. Instead of having students look for patterns in their own entries, have them share journals with a partner who writes questions and makes responses on the left-hand page to what they have written on the right-hand page. Listening to and/or reading the responses of their partners provides students with multiple interpretations.
 3. After students have shared a few of their written responses, have them write about how their own ideas are affected by hearing and reading their classmates' responses. (For more ideas and more detail about how to creatively use journals with literary works see Toby Fulwiler's *The Journal Book*).
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CHARACTER

Students should examine Shakespeare's careful crafting of his characters. One way in which Shakespeare develops characters is through their speech—not only what they say, but how they say it.

1. Have students look at forms of dramatic speech (i.e.: dialogue and monologue) and discuss the differing purposes and functions of each.

For example, have them brainstorm monologues from other plays they have read. Discuss:

- Which character recites the monologues?
 - When?
 - Why?
 - What does the monologue reveal about that character? Then have them choose one from *Othello* to compare and contrast to the monologues the class has discussed.
2. Focus the students' attention on the construction and content of several individual speeches in *Othello*. Help them understand how what is said and how it is said develops character. For example, Othello's final speech is an important index of his character. It is an address to the political leaders who commissioned him, rather than a diatribe against Iago—a public speech, rather than an anguished private monologue. It tells us about who he was and who he has become through his unchecked passion. It reveals what he feels in the aftermath of slaying Desdemona. Iago's speeches, on the other hand, are most often in the form of monologues; he talks to himself about his plans and his evaluation of the other characters. This tendency to talk to himself may be an indication of both his madness and his malevolence. Read this example to the students:

I have rubbed this young quat (Roderigo) almost to the sense,
 And he grows angry. Now whether he kill Cassio,
 Or Cassio him, or each do kill the other,
 Every way makes my gain. Live Roderigo,
 He calls me to a restitution large
 Of gold and jewels that I bobbed from him
 As gifts to Desdemona.
 It must not be. If Cassio do remain,
 He hath a daily beauty in his life
 That makes me ugly; and besides, the Moor
 May unfold me to him; there I stand in much peril.
 No he must die. But so, I hear him coming.
 (V, i, 11-21)

Desdemona, on the other hand, is only heard talking naturally with other people. Yet, she too is developed through both the content and form of her speech. For example, Desdemona's conversations with Emilia, particularly at the end of the play (IV, iii), reveal aspects of her character as well as Emilia's character. Have students look at these and discuss what they reveal about each of the characters.

3. Once students are aware of how speech reveals character, divide the class into small groups. Have each group draw the name of one of the major characters and an act number. From this act the group should select one speech and discuss what its content and form reveals about the character. Then the group should dramatically read or recite the speech to the class and discuss with the class how the character is developed through the speech.
 4. Through each character's speech and actions, we learn about the character's desires, intentions, motivations, and dreams. Divide the class into groups and assign each group an act. Allow the group to select one major character who appears frequently in that act. Have them analyze the speech and actions of the character and list on chart paper what each speech and/or action tells us about the character's motivation and desires. They should divide the chart paper in half and list in the left column the lines in the act or behavior that reveals the character's desires. In the right hand column, they should list what this tells us about the character's desires. After each group has completed this exercise, have them create an internal monologue based on one or more of the speeches of the character in the act they have selected. In this internal monologue the character speaks directly to the audience about her/his desires and motivations. The group should present this internal monologue to the class either as a dramatic reading or recitation.
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5. Understanding the “minor” characters and the roles they play leads students to a clearer sense of how to analyze characters in general. The following exercise helps students think about the minor characters and what they add to the understanding of the play.

Instructions:

- Choose one of the secondary characters—not Desdemona, Othello, or Iago.
- Write a diary entry in the voice of the minor character after s/he encounters one of the three main characters.
- Explain what happened in the encounter and how you, the character, feel about it. This should be based on what you know about that character from the play. For example, choose the scene in which Emilia finds the handkerchief and gives it to Iago. As Emilia, write about that encounter in your diary.
- Ask and try to answer in the entry questions such as: Why don't you (Emilia) stand up to Iago? Why don't you just tell Desdemona? Use only information from earlier in the play in your diary entry. Now select a scene from later in the play to contrast or compare with the earlier one. For example, write from Emilia's perspective about her confrontation with Iago at the end of the play. Has your behavior toward him changed? Have you changed or grown? If so, how and why?
- Quote Emilia's lines from the play in the entry to support her belief.

THEME

Many of the play's themes can be used as a foundation for reading and analysis. The difference between appearance and reality is frequently explored by Shakespeare and easily understood by adolescents. Students can relate to discussions about how friendship can ultimately be destructive. Likewise, the play gives students the opportunity to examine other themes that relate to their contemporary world: loyalty vs. treachery; truth vs. falsehood; parental love vs. parental control.

Another equally accessible theme is Othello's cultural and gender confusion. He is a military man who understands soldiering and politics, but is easily confused in his dealings with Desdemona and Iago. He is uncertain about interpreting the actions and words of women and of all people from different cultures. Cassio has acted as a cultural interpreter as he has helped Othello woo Desdemona. Iago, whom he understands even less than he understands Desdemona, usurps the interpreter's role from Cassio, taking full advantage of Othello's confusion:

Look to your wife; observe her well with Cassio;
 ...
 I know our country disposition well:
 In Venice they do let heaven see the pranks
 They dare not show their husbands; their best con-
 science
 Is not to leave't undone, but kept unknown.
 (III, iii, 197, 201-204)

Othello accepts Iago's interpretations as “insider” knowledge of the culture.

1. Students can trace Othello's growing dependence on Iago's cultural interpretations as the play unfolds.
 2. Students can explore the following theme-related questions orally or in writing:
 - What does the play say about friendship and loyalty? Who remains loyal? How is friendship shown?
 - What types of betrayal occur in the play? What is the penalty for betrayal?
 - What definitions of honor do you find in the play, and why is honor so important? Are there modern equivalents of honor? What equivalents are there among you and your friends?
 - Peer pressure occurs when Cassio gives in to drinking because Iago persuades him it is the right thing to do. What other forms of peer pressure are presented in the play? How does Shakespeare's portrayal compare with situations where you or your friends feel pressured by peers?
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CONFLICT

Understanding conflict is central to understanding the plot.

1. Have students answer these questions orally in small groups at various points during the reading of the play:
 - What are the central conflicts at this point in the play?
 - How do these conflicts compare with those you have identified earlier in the play? Has anything changed about them? Why?
 - What are Othello's internal conflicts? What are his external conflicts?
 - What are Roderigo's internal and external conflicts? Do they change as the play progresses?
 - Do the minor characters have both internal and external conflicts? If they do, identify some of them. If not, identify the characters without conflicts.
2. After students have addressed the above questions orally, have them respond to one or more of them individually in their dialogue journals. Using the dialogue journal techniques discussed previously, a partner can then comment on each student's written response. In this way several interpretations to a single question can be revealed to the students.

LITERARY DEVICES

The following activities are designed to help students become literary device detectives and develop literary analysis skills they can employ when attacking other works. Provide students with one good example of symbol, foreshadowing, and irony from the play. Have the students explain why it is an example of the device and search for and find other examples from the play. Award "prizes" to the students or groups who find the best examples. Have them share the examples with the class.

SYMBOL

Provide students with this example: Desdemona's handkerchief, given to her as a wedding present, is a symbol of something precious between Desdemona and Othello. It is carelessly mislaid and then used by Iago for his own evil purposes.

1. Have students identify other symbols they find in the play. They can list these in their dialogue journals or they can be brainstormed, placed on chart paper, and shared with the class.
2. Students can design a prop or some piece of furniture or stage business that has a symbolic relationship to the play.

FORESHADOWING

Help students understand foreshadowing by giving them this example:

Othello:...If it were now to die,
 Twere now to be most happy; for I fear
 My soul hath her content so absolute
 That not another comfort like to this
 Succeeds in unknown fate.
 (II, i, 187-191)

1. Have students search for other examples of foreshadowing and note them in their dialogue journals or list them, as a class, on chart paper or the chalk board.
 2. Discuss how we can recognize foreshadowing even before we know the climax of the play.
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IRONY

Read this to students and have them explain why it is ironic:

Iago: O, beware, my lord, of jealousy!
It is the green-eyed monster, which doth mock
The meat it feeds on.
(III, iii, 165-167)

1. After providing definitions for verbal irony and dramatic or tragic irony, the two most common types, have students identify where the example above fits. Remind them that verbal irony occurs when the attitude of the writer or speaker is opposite what is literally stated (i.e.: when Hamlet suggests to Horatio that the reason for his mother's hasty marriage to his uncle was economy. Hamlet: "Thrift, thrift, Horatio! The funeral bak'd meats/ Did coldly furnish forth the marriage tables."). Dramatic or tragic irony, on the other hand, occurs when the reader or audience understands that a character's words have a double meaning. Likewise, dramatic irony may arise from the structure of the play (i.e.: In *Oedipus Rex* Oedipus's ironic search for his father is actually the plot of the play). Have the students search for other examples of irony including examples of all the types you have defined.
2. Have students search for and share irony they find in contemporary television programs, videos, or movies.
3. Divide students into groups. Have them script an ironic scene from real life or from the play and present it to the class.

AFTER READING

After the class has finished reading the play, direct the students to one or more of the following activities. They are designed to check students' understanding of the basic elements of plot and character. In addition, suggestions are made to assist more advanced students in learning about literary criticism and becoming literary critics.

PLOT

1. To begin to understand something about the way the play works, have students examine its overall structure. Divide the class into groups, assigning one act per group. Have each group look closely at the structure of the assigned act. At the end of this exercise, piece together on chart paper or the chalk board what each act contributes to the structure of the play and to the audience's interpretation. To help students in this process, have them discuss and attempt to answer the following questions:
 - What is the major event that occurs in this act?
 - What information is provided in this act?
 - What new information do we learn about each of the characters in this act?
 - How do we learn this? From whom?
 - What do the character's monologues/speeches tell us about him/her?
 - What does the manner in which they speak and to whom tell us?
 - What seems to be the focus and major function of the act?
 - How else might Shakespeare have accomplished this? What would be the effect, for instance, of beginning with the wooing of Desdemona? What if there had been an opening scene with Roderigo being turned away by Desdemona?
 2. Have the class compare notes on the overall structure of the play. As a class, small group, or individually in their dialogue journals, students can discuss and attempt to answer these questions:
 - How does the beginning of the act "match" the closing? Have them, for example, compare Othello's closing speech with the opening speech he makes to the senators. How do Iago's final actions compare with his beginning ones?
 - What about setting? What is the setting (both time and place) of the opening act? What is the setting at the end of the closing act? How do these compare?
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3. Have students individually create a visual version of the essential story (e.g.: sketches, collage, paintings). Ask them to present this to the class. Have them put their art work together to create a story board for a new series of classical cartoons of Shakespearean plays.
4. If students have computer skills, they can draw elements of the essential parts of the story on the computer and animate them using a software program with this capability. If the school has the equipment, students can present these computer animations to the class or can print them and post them on a bulletin board.
5. Students should change the ending to the play. Have them make it end as a classical comedy where the “good guys” and the “bad guys” get their just rewards. Tell the students to respond to this question: What other aspects of the play will have to be changed to make a happy ending believable?
6. Ask students to create a reduced script for telling the tale. If they had to find a way to tell the story on stage in thirty minutes, what would they edit, rearrange, or add?
7. Have students rewrite the play as a contemporary soap opera, perhaps through a week of episodes. After the script has been drafted, they might perform and videotape it. The videotape can be shown to the class or placed in a classroom videotape checkout library.

CHARACTER

1. Have students select a speech that expresses an important personality trait of the character. Have them memorize it or rehearse it so that it can be read flawlessly and presented to the class. They should be prepared to write and/or discuss what it reveals about the character and why.
2. Have students design, either by hand or on the computer, costumes for each of the characters. The costumes should reveal knowledge of the historical period and analysis of the personality of the character. These ‘sketches’ can be presented to the class or posted.
3. Have students chart Othello’s changes from the beginning to the end of the play. They can place a chart of these changes in the dialogue journals, create a chart to display on a single sheet of chart paper, develop a time line of these changes, or create a sketched or computer generated story board of these changes. However students display these changes, they must document the scenes that reveal them.
4. As a class, examine how Iago’s plans work. Identify the devices or strategies he uses in each scene with Roderigo. These plans can also be documented creatively as in number 3 above.
5. Have students identify villains they know from television, videos, movies, or contemporary novels. Have them answer this question: What are some of the common characteristics of these villains?
6. Have students choose a key speech of one of the major characters. Have them develop two different ways of presenting the speech based on different interpretations of the play. After students present these to the class, have the class discuss which interpretations seemed most effective and why.

LITERARY CRITICISM

1. Have students individually, in pairs, or in groups, locate different critical sources about the play. After they have read these, have the class pool resources about the varied approaches critics have taken to the play over time. (For example, have them note the concern in the 19th century that Othello not be played as an African but rather as an Arab).
 2. Have students read one critical study of *Othello*, in addition to those in the Signet Classic edition. (Maynard Mack’s essay on *Othello* in *Everybody’s Shakespeare* is an excellent choice.) In small groups, the students should talk about the critic’s approach and how reading the essay affects their thinking about the play. In their dialogue journals, students can write about what they learned from reading the essay or what surprised them in this critic’s response to the play. Students might also use the critical essay as a model for one they write on some aspect of the play.
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EXTENDED LEARNING

Following are suggestions for ways to connect the literary study of the play with other disciplines and to help students see elements of the play through different lenses. Some of these suggestions ask the students to go beyond the text. All of them are intended to extend the students' consideration of the various concepts the play presents.

THE ARTS

1. After reading the play and seeing a video version of the stage play (i.e.: The BBC and Time/Life 1989 version is especially useful here because the aim of the producers was to recreate as "authentic" a production as possible.) or, if possible, a live production, have students view parts of a film version of it (i.e.: The Lawrence Fishburne/Kenneth Branagh 1995 version is good. Likewise the Orson Welles black-and-white version is useful.) Discuss with the students differences between stage versions and film. They can respond to these questions:
 - What can a movie do that is not possible on the stage?
 - What can you experience in a live performance that is not possible in a film? (Do not let students forget that in a live performance, seeing and responding to the actors provides a kind of community reaction and interaction with the actors that is not possible in watching films).
2. Choose at least two video versions of *Othello* and contrast how the directors staged the opening and closing scenes or other pivotal scenes. (e.g.: The BBC and Time/Life production of 1989 begins with Roderigo and Iago making their way to Brabantio's house, preparing to rouse him. The Lawrence Fishburne/Kenneth Branagh version begins, on the other hand, with night shots of the Venetian canals and a montage that includes scenes from the elopement. [Oliver Parker's screenplay is available on the internet.] The earlier Orson Welles film begins with the funeral procession of Desdemona and Othello. Iago appears in an iron cage.) Ask:
 - Why did each director make his choices?
 - What were they emphasizing?
 - What was gained or lost?
3. Actors use objects (props) to help communicate aspects of their characters to the audience. Students can select an object they believe reveals something about a character they select.
4. Allow students to choose a piece of music that could be used effectively in staging one of the scenes. They should explain (orally or in writing) why the music is appropriate.

LANGUAGE ARTS

1. Divide students into pairs or small groups. Have them jot down names of three stories they have read, seen on television, in the movies, or on the stage that focus on one of the major themes of the play (i.e.: jealousy, loyalty, betrayal, domestic violence, peer pressure). Have them share their lists. As they share invite them to make connections between their reading of *Othello* and their experience with the treatment of these themes in other plots.
 2. Encourage students to search local newspapers for stories with one of the themes. Have them bring the story to class and compare/contrast the news or feature story with the play. Have students write a scene depicting something reported in the news story.
 3. Have students write a news or feature story about the play or an article about a specific incident in the play. Creating a class newspaper, 'published' in Venice at the time of *Othello*, is an interesting activity that can serve as a good organizing technique for teaching the play.
 4. Have students write Lodovico's letter to the Venetian governors explaining what he found in Cyprus.
 5. Students can write a letter from Othello, Desdemona, Cassio, or Roderigo to Dear Abby or some other advice columnist. Another student should write a reply from the columnist.
 6. Have students stage an episode of a daytime talk show on which Iago confronts Othello, Desdemona, Cassio, Roderigo, and Emilia. Who appears and in which order? What is the headline for that day's show? What questions does the host ask? What questions do members of the audience ask?
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LANGUAGE ARTS AND SOCIAL STUDIES

1. Have students research an “evil” character in history or literature. They can search history texts or literature anthologies to find other characters like Iago who caused destruction. Encourage students to explore that character’s motives. Have them compare the researched character with Iago.
2. Students can stage Iago’s trial. They should be careful to determine the specific charges against him. Remind them to include a defense, a prosecution, a judge, and a jury. Remind them also to pay attention to what the play itself says.
3. Suggest to the students: Desdemona, Emilia, and Bianca are in a women’s workshop on assertiveness training. They are learning the difference between assertion and aggression. Tell the students to create the scene using incidents from the play to illustrate important points.
4. Have students create this scenario: You have been called in to do conflict resolution between Iago and Othello. Ask: What are the issues between them by the end of the play? How can they be resolved? How could they have been resolved at an earlier point in the play? When?
5. The play raises issues about inter-racial marriage and relationships. Have students investigate American laws on miscegenation. Did these laws exist in their home state? If so, when and how long ago were these laws set aside? What was the legal justification of these laws? Students might compare that reasoning to the legal discussions about same-sex marriages today. Have them set up a mock court with a prosecution, a defense, a judge, and a jury to debate these issues and render a judgment.

SOCIAL STUDIES

1. Have students create this scenario: Brabantio and Desdemona attend family counseling in order to reconcile. Ask:
 - What does Desdemona need to do in order to help her father understand?
 - What does Brabantio need to say to his daughter?
 - What advice would the counselor give?
 2. Have students research historical or contemporary courtship customs in different parts of the world. They can present findings to the class.
 3. Have students answer this question: How have courtship and marriage customs changed in the United States? Students should interview someone from their parents’ generation and someone from their grandparents’ generation and compare what they say to what contemporary young people think. For example, students can ask:
 - At what age could young people begin dating?
 - Where was it usual to take a date? At what age did young people get married?
 - Students can report their findings to the class.
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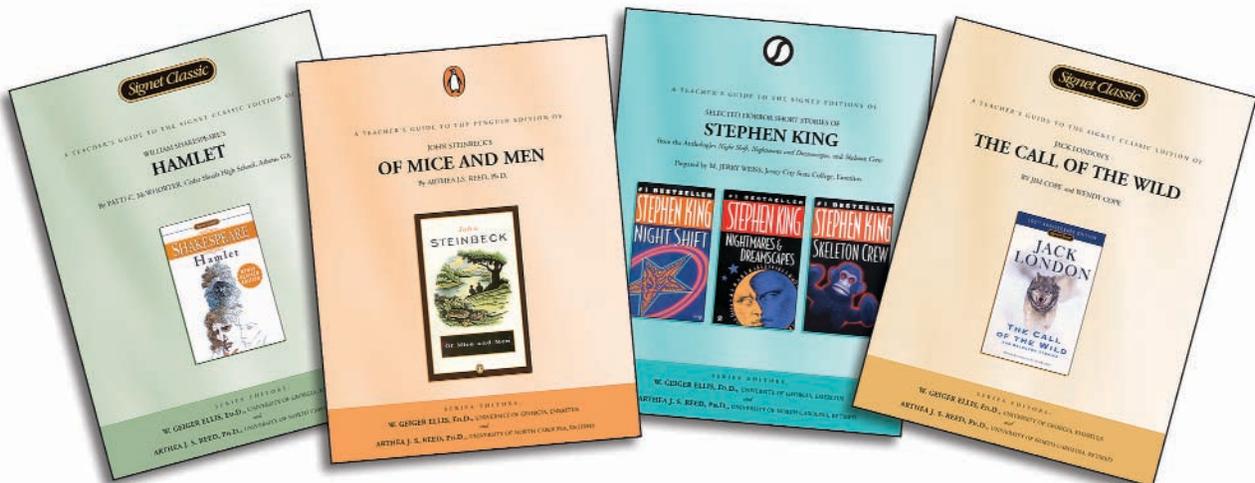
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