



American Players Theatre  
Presents



William Shakespeare's  
**OTHELLO**  
**2015 STUDY GUIDE**

American Players Theatre / PO Box 819 / Spring Green, WI 53588  
[www.americanplayers.org](http://www.americanplayers.org)

***OTHELLO* BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE**

**2015 STUDY GUIDE**

Cover photo: James Ridge and Chiké Johnson.

All photos by Carissa Dixon.

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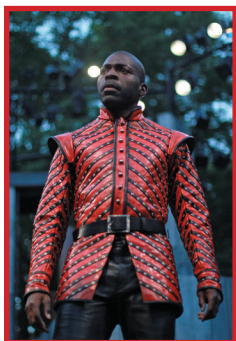
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**If you have any questions or comments regarding the exercises or the information within this study guide, please contact Emily Beck, Education Coordinator, at 608-588-9207, or [ebeck@americanplayers.org](mailto:ebeck@americanplayers.org).**

# Who's Who in *Othello*

Character descriptions from *The Essential Shakespeare Handbook*

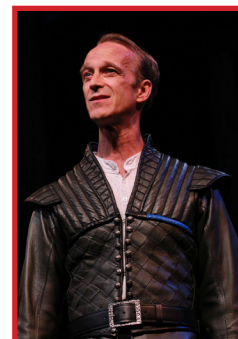


## Othello (Chiké Johnson)

“The Moor,” an honest man and outstanding military general. He battles invading Turks, but jealousy and the scheming Iago bring his downfall; he becomes convinced that Desdemona is untrue.

## Iago (James Ridge)

A villain, and Othello’s ensign (or “ancient”). By his own admission his methods are subtle: “I told him what I thought, and told no more/ Than what he found himself was apt and true”; he sows and nurtures the seeds of jealousy and suspicion in Othello.



## Cassio (Nate Burger)

An honorable lieutenant of Othello’s. He gains promotion to the post Iago hoped to win.

## Desdemona (Laura Rook)

Wife to Othello. She loves and honors him even when he begins to act strangely and suspect her of adultery.



## Roderigo (Marcus Truschinski)

A gullible Venetian man. He aims to win Desdemona and is easily manipulated by Iago.

## Brabantio (Brian Mani)

Father to Desdemona, he disapproves of his daughter’s marriage to Othello.

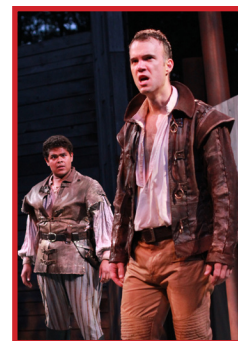


## Emilia (Colleen Madden)

Wife to Iago, he convinces her to steal the handkerchief that seals Desdemona’s fate. Emilia dies at the hand of Iago while defending Desdemona’s integrity.

## Montano (Eric Parks)

The governor of Cyprus, Othello’s predecessor. He is to decide Iago’s fate after his infamy has been revealed to all.



# Who's Who in *Othello*



**Duke of Venice (David Daniel)**  
A great admirer of Othello's, he finds in Desdemona and Othello's favor when Brabantio challenges their marriage.

**Bianca (Melisa Pereyra)**  
Mistress to Cassio. She adores him while he merely enjoys her company.



**Gratiano (Tim Gittings)**  
A noble Venetian, brother of Brabantio. He arrives in Cyprus with Lodovico.

**Lodovico (Jeb Burris)**  
A noble Venetian, kinsman to Brabantio.



Othello and Desdemona's wedding is the happy precursor to the tragic events to come.

# About the Play

The word **MOOR** now is understood to refer to the Islamic Arabic inhabitants of North Africa who conquered Spain in the eighth century. The term was used rather broadly in Shakespeare's day, and was sometimes applied to people from other regions of Africa.

Othello, a **MOOR** and immigrant to Venice, is the Venetian republic's most admired military commander. Enchanted by his stoic heroism and mysterious past, Desdemona has fallen in love with him and they've eloped. As the play begins, Venice is preparing to defend itself from threatened naval attacks by the **OTTOMAN** Turks. As in the past, the leaders of Venice call upon Othello to lead their forces. The play's military context however, is short-lived, serving mainly as a framework for the intense private and interpersonal battles that follow.

During the time *Othello* was written, the **OTTOMAN** Empire was expanding so rapidly that the Europeans saw them as a dangerous military threat.

Iago, "dear friend" to Othello, complains to Roderigo that Othello, his Commander, has passed him over to promote the handsome young Cassio to be his Lieutenant. He vows to get revenge. Roderigo, who was hoping to court **DESDEMONA** himself, is only too happy to go along with Iago's plans to seek revenge.

**DESDEMONA** means "misery and bad luck" in Greek. Despite the fact that the word "demon" appears in her name, she is portrayed as symbol of good within the play.

Iago first asks Roderigo to tell Desdemona's father, Brabantio, that his daughter has left to marry Othello, a marriage Brabantio opposes because Othello is a Moor. He claims Othello trapped his daughter using **WITCHCRAFT**. Brabantio confronts Othello, and they take their argument to the Duke, who has summoned Othello to ask him to sail to Cyprus to stop a Turkish invasion. Convinced by Othello and Desdemona

During Queen Elizabeth I's reign in England, 270 people were tried for **WITCHCRAFT**. Only 23 of those were men.

that they love each other deeply despite their differences, the Duke gives Desdemona permission to travel to Cyprus to meet Othello, but a storm sinks the Turkish army before they arrive.

Celebration ensues, which Iago uses to continue his machinations. He tells Roderigo that Desdemona is in love with Cassio, driving him into a jealous rage and convincing him to draw Cassio into a street fight. Iago then begins trying to get Cassio drunk. Cassio, who isn't a drinker, denies Iago repeatedly before finally caving and drinking to excess. The fight occurs as planned, and when Othello arrives and sees the state of his newly appointed lieutenant, he strips Cassio of his rank for misbehavior.

But Cassio's **MILITARY** undoing is just the beginning of Iago's plan. Next, Iago begins his plot to make Othello believe his wife is unfaithful. He begins by encouraging Cassio to ask Desdemona to plead with Othello on his behalf. Before she can do so, Iago begins to subtly suggest to Othello that Desdemona is Cassio's lover. Trusting Iago, Othello goes mad with jealousy. He promotes Iago and asks him to help kill Cassio.

The Elizabethan **MILITARY** would still have used swords for hand-to-hand combat, while distance fighting would be beginning to move to gun powder-based weapons like cannons and very early muskets.

Iago then turns to his own wife, Emilia, to steal Desdemona's **HANDKERCHIEF**, which was a treasured gift to Desdemona from Othello. He then plants it in Cassio's room and upon finding it, Cassio presents

the handkerchief to his mistress, Bianca, so she can duplicate it. Othello overhears Cassio mocking Bianca and believes that he's talking about Desdemona, which he takes as proof that Desdemona and Cassio are lovers. He verbally abuses his wife in front of others, who are shocked at the change in the once noble and powerful man.

In Medieval and Renaissance poetry, a **HANDKERCHIEF** is a symbol of a woman's romantic favor. So while Desdemona's is originally representative of Othello's love for her, it eventually shifts to a symbol of his jealousy when he believes she's given it to another man.

Iago has manipulated Roderigo into trying to kill Cassio. The attempt

goes wrong, and Cassio wounds Roderigo, while Iago stabs Cassio in the leg. Othello hears Cassio cry out and thinks Iago killed him. He returns home, ready to kill Desdemona. Meanwhile, Iago “finds” the wounded Cassio and accuses Bianca of causing Cassio’s injury. Iago quietly kills Roderigo and sends Emilia to Desdemona with news of what has happened.

Othello reaches the sleeping Desdemona first. He kisses her, wakes her and accuses her again of being unfaithful. Over her protests that she loves him and is innocent, he smothers her. Emilia enters and finds Desdemona unresponsive, with Othello standing over her.

**IAGO** and others enter, and Emilia defends Desdemona’s innocence, recognizing that Iago is behind the tragedy. Othello sees the truth and tries to kill Iago, but only wounds him. Emilia tells the room that it was Iago who asked her to steal Desdemona’s handkerchief, and Iago stabs and kills her. When Othello asks Iago for an explanation of his actions, Iago refuses and tells them he’ll never speak again.

Othello condemns himself and commits suicide with a hidden blade, falling over the body of his wife and leaving the others to contemplate his demise.

**IAGO** is one of Shakespeare’s most complex villains. Throughout the play, it’s hard to know if he even believes some of his own rationale for his hatred of Othello. While it’s true that Othello promotes Cassio to lieutenant instead of Iago, there’s little evidence within the play that Othello had an affair with Iago’s wife, Emilia (nor does Iago seem to care much for Emilia himself). Perhaps it’s only fair that it is Emilia who turns out to be Iago’s undoing. Even Iago’s final moments in the play are unique. His unwillingness to reveal his true motives denies Othello - and the audience - the tidy ending that tragedies have typically offered throughout literature. And he is carted off (presumably to jail) still alive, whereas most Shakespearean villains have breathed their last breath before the story ends.

To be able to play a villain of Iago’s caliber is the dream of many actors. He has the most lines in the play - more even than Othello. In fact, the size of the part is only second only to Hamlet in Shakespeare’s canon. Actors who’ve played Iago on stage and screen include: Sir Ian McKellen, Kenneth Brannagh, Bob Hoskins, Ewan McGregor and Josh Hartnett (in the 2001 film adaptation *O*).

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## American Players Theatre's *Othello*



Iago (James Ridge) and Othello (Chiké Johnson) face off at last in this great Shakespearean tragedy.

Shakespeare's *Othello* may seem like a simple story at first glance. Basically, you have one man (Iago) who tricks another man (Othello) into believing his wife (Desdemona) is unfaithful, and that man's jealousy eventually leads him to murder her. But on closer inspection, we find that it's also a story about love and beauty. It's very poetic - 81% of *Othello* is written in verse. And it's clear that, at least in the beginning, Othello and Desdemona love each other, and that love is beautifully expressed. As Othello describes it: "But that I love the gentle Desdemona, / I would not my unhoused free condition / Put into circumscription and confine / For the sea's worth," essentially saying nothing could convince him to give up his love for her.

As lovely as that sentiment may be, Othello's love for his wife is what provides Iago the inlet to his inner demons. The conflict between the different parts of humanity – the "good" versus the "bad" – is a central theme in *Othello*. But what we find in the play is mostly that people are flawed, and the challenge of being human is to not let those flaws take control of your actions. That is, of course, part of what makes it a tragedy – if things had just gone just a little differently, maybe everyone would have lived happily ever after.

To bring this conflict home to the audience, Director John Langs wanted to start this production by portraying some of Othello and Desdemona's best moments. Though it's not how Shakespeare began his play, John chose to start APT's production of *Othello* with their wedding, to bring some of the light and love from their relationship to the forefront. This serves the dual purpose of illustrating how far Othello falls over the course of the play, while making his murderous actions that much harder to understand.

To shed some light on that subject, James Ridge, who plays Iago in APT's production, says: "Our production starts with the wedding ceremony of Othello and Desdemona. And what John's trying to do is add more of the beauty and love they feel for each other into the play, so that at some point, hopefully, audience members will wonder: Why didn't Othello just ask her? Why does he only listen to Iago? And however you answer that question, I think it leads you to why it's 'The Tragedy of Othello'. There's some flaw in his character, whether it's pride that keeps him from asking his wife, or whether it's a deep-seated insecurity. And as human beings, how many of us can relate to being right on the brink and not being able to open our mouths and ask the question? Or to say I'm sorry? And a relationship suffers. It becomes fractured, sometimes irreparably. Because we didn't have the bravery to say it, or to ask it."



Desdemona (Laura Rook, far left) and Othello's (Chiké Johnson, 3rd from right) wedding starts APT's production, though not Shakespeare's play.

Chiké Johnson, who plays Othello in APT's production, has some similar thoughts about his character's flaws. He says he actually never wanted to play Othello, and before working on this production, really disliked the character for never talking to Desdemona about his concerns. He was also concerned that the character plays into stereotypes about black men and violence.



“Why doesn't he just ask?”  
- Wonders everyone who's ever seen *Othello*.

Chiké says “I didn't like the character of Othello much. Being a black man in America is not always easy, and so when I first read *Othello*, I thought this is the dumbest guy in the play. Why doesn't he ask? Why doesn't he go and ask Desdemona? And I didn't think he was interesting because of that. I love doing the play and I don't dislike Othello as much as I did before. I think I understand him better now in terms of his struggles with very real human emotions. Jealousy is something that plays on all of us, I think. But I had always said I would never play Othello because of his character flaws.”

What changed for Chiké was meeting Director John Langs and having conversations with him about his vision of the story, and where Chiké's own vision of the character fits into that story. “After meeting John and telling him how I felt about the character, and having him be so interested in my response to the play even though it was initially negative, that was the reason I decided to play Othello. Because of APT and everything that is associated with APT, from the actors on up.”

In his *Othello* Director's Notes, John wrote: “This play is about all of life: love, jealousy, racism, pride, honor, loyalty - but all against the backdrop of a history of violence and war. The question: ‘How does a warrior re-enter a life of peace?’ has guided me on this journey.”

So John began his vision of *Othello* with the idea that the characters – Othello and Iago first and foremost – are soldiers who had been at war for a long time, and may even be suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (defined as a condition of persistent mental and emotional stress due to injury or severe psychological shock, typically involving disturbance of sleep and constant vivid recall of the experience, resulting in dulled responses to others and to the outside world).



Even during peacetime, Othello and Iago practice fighting.

John says “Othello and Iago are warriors. They have been to many battlefields. Othello is now looking for peace, but brings his scars of war to Desdemona's loving hand. Iago, addicted to adrenaline, can't let go of what he learned on the battlefield. He fights at all cost and by any means necessary to stay alive and on top of the heap, feeding his appetite for revenge with anything that keeps the war within him raging. What Othello and Iago have seen, and what they have been asked to do by way of country, honor and reputation has left these warriors scarred and vulnerable. I could not read this play without thinking about the men and women who we put into harm's way - without thinking about terms like ‘shell shock’, ‘the thousand-yard stare’ and “post-traumatic stress”.





Cassio (Nate Burger) has no idea about the trouble Iago is brewing.

Chiké, who was in the U.S. Marines for four years, doesn't feel like he made a conscious decision to bring his military experience to the character of Othello, but says that he does take the Marines with him wherever he goes.

"It's a part of me," Chiké said. "I never had to go to combat, but you create a camaraderie with your fellow marines. They become family. You would lay down your life for family. And in the play, Iago is family. I have him around me because he's more than just another soldier. It *seems like* he always has my best interest at heart. Othello makes Cassio his lieutenant and not Iago, but if you look through the play, it's Iago who Othello always turns to. I think Othello believes business is one thing and family is another, and that's the reason he promotes Cassio over Iago."

James believes Iago sees the appointment of Cassio as Othello's lieutenant as a huge betrayal, even though the decision itself makes sense. Cassio is more politically deft, and Iago isn't a suitable leader off the battlefield. But leaving him without a role in peacetime life turns out to be very dangerous. James speculates that maybe that was the catalyst Shakespeare needed to ask these questions about the darker side of humanity.

"Iago has been passed over for advancement for someone who's maybe more fitting to be a leader in peacetime. And so he doesn't really have a place. Doesn't have a place within society, doesn't have a place within the military," says James. "And so he turns to the thing that he knows best, and he starts creating chaos. And manipulating that to his own ends. I think that's really close to what Shakespeare maybe had in mind. He was using other words, but there are these words all through the text about hell and darkness and devils. So I think Shakespeare was really dwelling on and considering the question of, what are those darker aspects of human nature? Why do we give into those impulses?"

\* \* \* \* \*

John Langs refers to the aesthetic of APT's production of *AfZWA* as "an elemental world of water and fire, chaos and aching beauty." The set's most prominent feature is a moat that borders the stage. An enormous amount of planning went into that moat on the part of Scenic Designer Andrew Boyce, and the entire production team. Questions like: How wide can it be? How deep? What happens if it rains? Can the actors walk through it? – all had to be asked and answered months before the play ever took the stage. The moat serves



A model of the *Othello* set by Andrew Boyce.



A costume rendering of Othello by Mathew LeFebvre.

many purposes in the play. In Shakespeare, water often represents cleansing of sins. And maybe it does here, too, though it also represents more concrete ideas like the Venetian canals and the Grecian coast. It also serves in this production as the instrument Iago uses to murder Roderigo. It reflects the action on stage, and keeps the audience at a safe distance. On an outdoor stage like APT's, the set (and the lights, the costumes and the sound design) has to both serve the show's theme, and be able to mesh with the natural surroundings of the outdoor amphitheater, and the audience can literally see those surroundings reflected in the water.

Mathew LeFebvre, who designed the *Othello* costumes, says: "There are a great number of variables to consider. Visually, there is always a certain amount of the permanent structure of the stage that is visible, and it's wise to consider this when developing the look of the show. Andrew did an excellent job creating a design that was unique to the world of *Othello*, yet harmonious with the existing structure. Likewise, I feel the costumes are more suggestive than complete, with the goal of the design not getting in the way of the story. So we really wanted a visual vocabulary that would

resonate while honoring Shakespeare's language and maintaining harmony with the elements of that outdoor stage."

Like the set, costumes on the APT stage have to be beautiful, but also practical. Due to the unpredictable nature of the weather, costumes are built with heat and cold plans, which may include removing layers on very hot days, as well as pockets for ice and heat packs built right into the costumes. And then there are choices about the way they look – what colors or fabrics to use, and even what time of day it will be when the audience sees them. These all play important roles in the design decisions.

"Often when the performance of a production in the outdoor theater begins, the stage is mostly illuminated in daylight. But by the end of the performance, the stage is bathed in stage lighting," says Mathew. "The costume designer has to think about how the costumes will read under the varying conditions. Similarly, the designer has to strike a balance between the perception of the audience members who are in the first three rows, with the perception of audience members at the back of the house, and try to provide everyone with an equally enjoyable experience."

Time period is another consideration in theater design. For the most part, all of Shakespeare's plays were written to be played in costumes contemporary to his era (the 1500s). Shakespearean traditionalists often believe this means that all Shakespearean plays should be set in the Elizabethan period. But APT prefers to allow more fluidity in the time period so that it serves the vision of the artists helping the production. Mathew says he combined classic and modern elements for this production.

"We developed this world that combined Renaissance elements with more contemporary elements resulting (we hope) in a gesture that addresses much of what Shakespeare explores in this play – passion, jealousy, hatred, revenge – without getting bogged down in specificity. I really wanted this design to aid the actors' development of their characterizations and the audiences' understanding of the story, without getting in the way. Had we gone full-out Renaissance with the design, there is a danger of that look weighing down the action. For a Shakespeare play, *Othello* is lean and mean, and I think our design is an effective reflection of that essence. It was a thrill to work on this project."



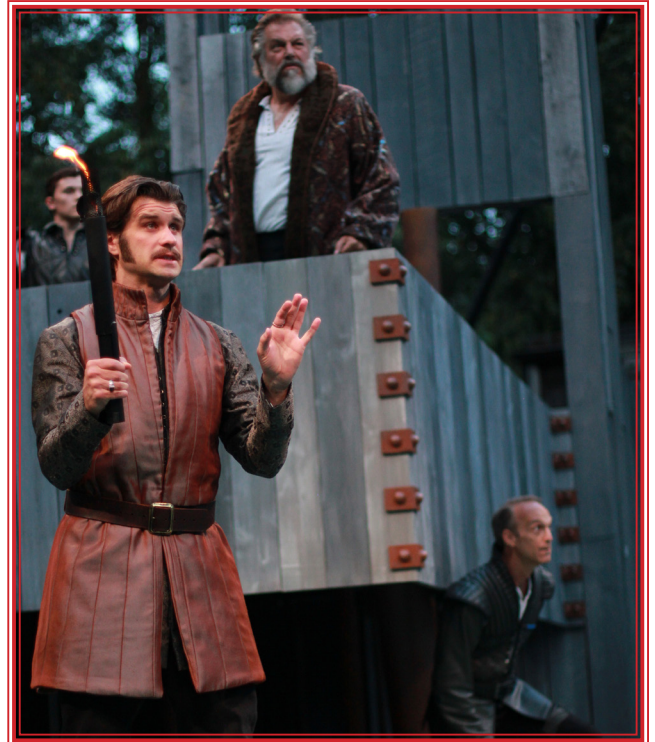
The final costume worn by Chiké Johnson.

# Othello Photo Summary

1. Before the play begins, Desdemona and Othello are secretly married.



2. Othello's ensign, Iago, is angry that he was passed over for promotion when Cassio was made lieutenant. His cohort Roderigo is also unhappy, as he is in love with Desdemona. Iago advises him to tell Desdemona's father, Brabantio, about the elopement.



3. After selling him out to Desdemona's father, Iago "warns" Othello that Brabantio will challenge the marriage. Othello isn't worried, though.



Roderigo: As partly I find it is, that your fair daughter, at this odd-even and dull watch o' the night, transported, with no worse nor better guard but with a knave of common hire, a gondolier, to the gross clasps of a lascivious Moor - if this be known to you and your allowance, we then have done you bold and saucy wrongs; but if you know not this, my manners tell me we have your wrong rebuke.

- Act I scene 1



Iago: He will divorce you or put upon you what restraint or grievance the law, with all his might to enforce on it, will give him cable.

Othello: Let him do his spite; my services, which I have done the signiory, shall out-tongue his complaints.

- Act I scene 2

4. Brabantio takes Othello before the Duke to end the marriage, but Othello explains that Desdemona fell in love with him because of the stories he told her about his life. Desdemona supports this claim, and the Duke believes them.



5. Othello is to leave immediately for Cyprus to prevent the Turks from invading. Desdemona wants to go with him, but it's decided she'll travel separately to Cyprus with Iago.

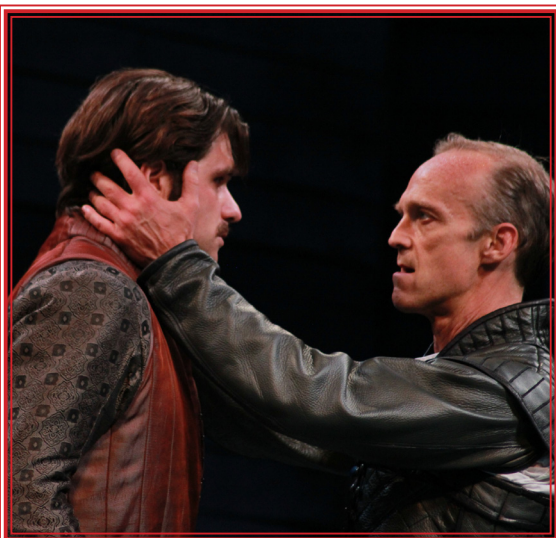


⤵

Othello: She thanked me and bade me, if I had a friend that loved her, I should but teach him how to tell my story and that would woo her. Upon this hint I spake: she loved me for the dangers I had passed and I loved her that she did pity them. This only is the witchcraft I have used.  
- Act I scene 3

⤵

Othello: So please your grace, my ancient: a man he is of honesty and trust. To his conveyance I assign my wife, with what else needful your good grace shall think to be sent after me.  
- Act I scene 3



6. Iago claims to believe that Othello had an affair with his wife, Emilia, in addition to his passing Iago up for promotion. So he proposes to Roderigo that they work together to destroy Othello because they both hate him. The plan is to get Othello to believe that Desdemona is in love with Cassio, Othello's new lieutenant.

⤵

Iago: Cassio's a proper man: let me see now, to get his place, and to plume up my will in double knavery. How? How? Let's see: after some time to abuse Othello's ear that he is too familiar with his wife. He hath a person and a smooth dispose to be suspected, framed to make women false. The Moor is of a free and open nature that thinks men honest that but seem to be so, and will as tenderly be led by th' nose as asses are. I hav't, it is engendered! Hell and night must bring this monstrous birth to the world's light.  
- Act I Scene 3



7. A storm prevents the Turkish fleet from attacking, but Othello is still at sea. Iago and Desdemona land at Cyprus. When they disembark, Cassio kisses Desdemona in greeting, and Iago is embarrassed and angered by Cassio's "higher breeding," but determines that it furthers his plan to make it look like Cassio and Desdemona are having an affair.

❖ Iago: He takes her by the palm; ay, well said, whisper.  
With as little a web as this will I ensnare as great a fly  
as Cassio.  
- Act II scene 1

8. Othello arrives in Cyprus, and is overjoyed to be reunited with his wife.

Othello: It gives me wonder great as my content to see  
you here before me! O my soul's joy, if after every tempest  
come such calms may the winds blow till they have  
wakened death, and let the labouring bark climb hiss of  
seas.  
- Act II scene 1



9. Iago revises his plot and tells Roderigo that Desdemona is actually in love with Cassio. Roderigo is shocked and furious and they plot to set up a fight between Roderigo and Cassio, who Iago says has a short temper.



❖ Iago: Sir, he's rash and very sudden in choler, and  
haply with his truncheon may strike at you: provoke  
him that he may, for even out of that will I cause these  
of Cyprus to mutiny, whose qualification shall come  
into no true trust again but by the  
displanting of Cassio.  
- Act II scene 2



10. Othello announces that there will be a celebration of his marriage and the sinking of the Turkish fleet. Iago uses the party as an excuse to get Cassio drunk.

Cassio: Is your Englishman so exquisite in his drinking?

➤ Iago: Why, he drinks you with facility your Dane dead drunk; he sweats not to overthrow your Almain; he gives your Hollander a vomit ere the next pottle can be filled.

Cassio: To the health of our general!

- Act II scene 2

11. Iago's plan works, and Cassio and Roderigo fight, which turns into a brawl including other attendants. Othello arrives and reluctantly strips Cassio of his lieutenant rank. Iago, claiming to want to help Cassio get his position back, tells him to appeal to Desdemona, and ask her to speak to Othello on his behalf. Iago plans to use this to make Othello believe Desdemona and Cassio are having an affair.

Iago: Whiles this honest fool plies Desdemona to repair his fortune, and she for him pleads strongly to the Moor, I'll pour this pestilence into his ear: that she repeals him for her body's lust.

- Act II scene 2



12. Desdemona agrees to help Cassio. Othello sees them together, and Cassio quickly leaves before Desdemona begins to plead for him to her husband. Paired with Iago's whispers, this causes the beginning of Othello's suspicions, even though he claims that he thinks it's normal for Cassio to praise Desdemona, because she is worthy of praise.

➤ Othello: 'Tis not to make me jealous to say my wife is fair, feeds well, loves company, is free of speech, sings, plays and dances well: where virtue is, these are more virtuous.

- Act III scene 2



13. Othello angrily sends Iago away for disparaging Desdemona. But when Iago returns and (insincerely) apologizes, Othello begins to take his suspicion more seriously, believing Iago to be an honest friend.



Othello: This fellow's of exceeding honesty and knows all qualities, with a learned spirit of human dealings. If I do prove her haggard, though that her jesses were my dear heart-strings, I'd whistle her off and let her down the winds to prey at fortune.

- Act III scene 2



14. Desdemona arrives and sees her husband is upset. When she tries to soothe him with her beloved handkerchief (a gift from Othello), he knocks it away. Emilia picks it up after Desdemona and Othello leave. Iago arrives and asks for it, and Emilia reluctantly gives it to him.

Emilia: If it not be for some purpose of import give't me again. Poor lady, she'll run mad when she shall lack it.

Iago: Be not acknown on't, I have use for it. Go, leave me.

- Act III scene 3

15. Othello and Iago meet again. Iago tells Othello that when he shared a room with Cassio, he talked about Desdemona in his sleep. Iago also claims that he saw Cassio use Desdemona's handkerchief. Othello initially doesn't know what to believe, but is convinced of the affair by the end of the conversation and tells Iago to kill Cassio. Iago agrees, and pretends to plead for Desdemona's life.



Iago: My friend is dead, 'tis done at your request. But let her live.

Othello: Damn her, lewd minx: O damn her, damn her! Come, go with me apart; I will withdraw to furnish me with some swift means of death for the fair devil. Now you are my lieutenant.

- Act III scene 3



16. Othello returns to Desdemona, who pleads with him to reinstate Cassio. This spurs Othello's jealousy, and he asks to see her handkerchief, which Iago has dropped in Cassio's room. When she can't produce it, Othello tells her it has magical powers and demands that she find it at once.

❖ Othello: That handkerchief did an Egyptian to my mother give, she was a charmer and could almost read the thoughts of people. She told her, while she kept it, 'twould make her amiable and subdue my father entirely to her love; but if she lost it or made gift of it, my father's eye should hold her loathed and his spirit should hunt after new fancies.

- Act III scene 4

17. Cassio finds the handkerchief and thinks it's pretty. He asks his mistress, Bianca, to copy the embroidery onto her own handkerchief. She is jealous, but relents.

Bianca: Why, whose is it?

Cassio: I know not neither, I found it in my chamber. I like the work well: ere it be demanded, as like enough it will, I'd have it copied. Take it, and do't, and leave me for this time.

- Act III scene 4



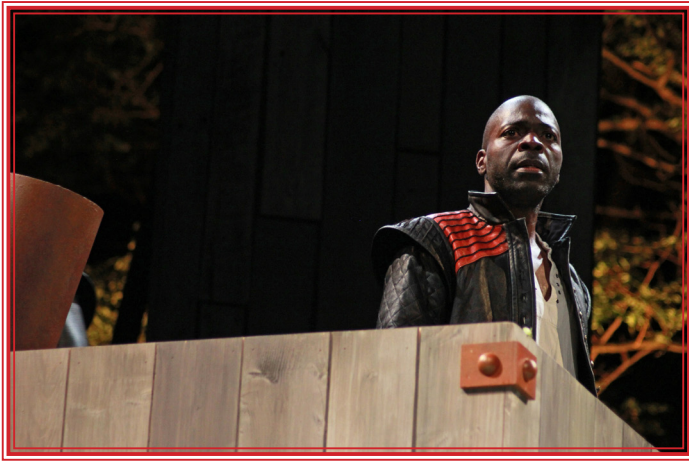
18. Othello is so upset by Iago describing Desdemona's "affair" that he falls into a trance. Iago is thrilled with the progress of his plan.

❖ Iago: Work on, my medicine, work! Thus credulous fools are caught, and many worthy and chaste dames even thus, all guiltless, meet reproach.

- Act IV scene 1







19. Iago arranges for Othello to spy on Cassio. Cassio is making fun of Bianca. Othello, thinking that he's talking about Desdemona, and seeing Bianca with what appears to be his wife's handkerchief, plots to murder Desdemona.

➤ Othello: Get me some poison, Iago, this night. I'll not  
expostulate with her, lest her body and beauty  
unprovide my mind again. This night, Iago.  
Iago: Do it not with poison, strangle her in her bed -  
even the bed she hath contaminated.  
- Act IV scene 1

20. The nobleman Lodovico arrives from Venice and requests Othello's immediate return, naming Cassio to Othello's post. He notices Othello's odd behavior, though.

Lodovico: Are his wits safe? Is he not light of brain?  
- Act IV scene 1



21. Othello confronts Emilia about whether Desdemona is faithful, and she swears that she is. Othello does not believe her, and tells her to send Desdemona to him.

➤ Othello: She says enough; yet she's a simple bawd that  
cannot say as much. This is a subtle whore, a closet,  
lock and key, of villainous secrets.  
- Act IV scene 1





22. Desdemona is confused and heartbroken after a fight with Othello. She turns to Iago for advice. He pretends to comfort her, saying work has put Othello in a bad mood, and he's taking it out on her.

Iago: I pray you, be content, 'tis but his humour; the business of the state does him offence and he does chide with you.  
- Act IV scene 1



23. Roderigo confronts Iago, saying he's not fulfilling his promise of bringing gifts from Desdemona. Iago wins him back over, though, and convinces him to murder Cassio as he leaves Bianca's house that night.

Roderigo: How do you mean, removing of him?  
Iago: Why by making him incapable of Othello's place: knocking out his brains.  
- Act IV scene 2



24. Othello banishes Desdemona to her bedroom, where she tells Emilia a story of a woman who fell in love with a madman and died singing a song called "Willow". She then asks Emilia if she would ever be unfaithful to Iago, and she says she might, and believes other women might, too, but not Desdemona.

Desdemona: Wouldst thou do such a deed for all the world.



Emilia: Why, would not you?  
Desdemona: No, by this heavenly light!  
- Act IV scene 3



25. Roderigo attacks Cassio that night as planned, but is wounded in the scuffle. When he cries for help, Iago takes the opportunity to murder him. Cassio is also injured, but survives. Iago pins the attack on Bianca and pretends to be surprised that Roderigo is dead.

❖ Iago: Gentleman all, I do suspect this trash to be a party in this injury. Patience awhile, good Cassio. Come, come, lend me a light. Know we this face, or no? Alas, my friend and my dear countryman, Roderigo? No - yes sure! - O heaven, Roderigo!  
- Act V scene 1

26. Othello goes to Desdemona's chamber and asks her to confess to the affair. When she maintains her innocence, he murders her. Emilia realizes now why Iago made her steal Desdemona's handkerchief, and when the other noblemen arrive, she tells them about it. Furious, Iago stabs her, and is arrested.

Othello: Think on thy sins.  
Desdemona: They are loves I bear to you.  
Othello: Ay, and for that thou diest.  
- Act V scene 1



❖ 27: Othello wants to kill Iago, but only wounds him and believes he is the devil. After hearing Cassio's explanation of all Iago's plotting, Othello asks Iago why he's done this. Iago refuses to answer, saying he'll never speak again. Othello commits suicide.

Othello: When you shall these unlucky deeds relate, speak of me as I am. Nothing extenuate, nor set down aught in malice. 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 Indian, threw a pearl away richer than all his tribe. Of one whose subdued eyes, albeit unused to the melting mood, drop tears as fast as the Arabian trees their medicinal gum. Set you down this, where a malignant and a turbanned Turk beat a Venetian and traduced the state, I took by th' throat the circumcised dog and smote him - thus!  
- Act V scene 1



# ***The Truth Of It***

*Classroom activity for Othello and The Merry Wives of Windsor.*

## **Summary**

This exercise is designed to parallel the search and desperate need for truth that both Othello (*Othello*) and Master Ford (*The Merry Wives of Windsor*) experience as potential cuckolds as well as the submersive fun that comes from the lies and manipulation of Iago, and (arguably) Mistress Ford and Page.

In essence you will divide your class in half. The first half will know 'the answer' while the second half asks their classmates who may respond truthfully or not.

## **Specifics**

Separate your class into three groups. For the sake of ease, I will name these three groups Writers (group 1), Questioners (group 2), and Witnesses (group 3). If there are 'extra' students place them in the Witness group only. Once the class has been divided, approach each group and give instructions secretly. We have found the exercise works best when each group understands only their function.

Instructions to Writer (group 1):

*In a moment I will ask you to get a piece of paper and place a mark on it. The mark can either be an "X" or an "O". The mark can **only** be one of these two letters. Once the mark has been made, please fold the paper so there is no indication from the outside to help identify the mark. You will then be assigned to a partner in the second group (Questioners). With the piece of paper between you, the Questioners will then ask you questions to try to identify what it is you have written. You may respond truthfully, you may lie, and you may change your answer at any time. The paper is not to be revealed or touched during exercise. Are there any questions? Please retrieve a piece of paper, secretly make your mark, fold it up, and wait for instructions.*

Instructions to Questioner (group 2):

*In a moment I will pair you up with someone from the first group. They will have a piece of paper with them. Inside this piece of paper they have made a mark. It will be your job to determine the mark by asking questions and observing their behavior. At no time will you be allowed to touch the paper or see what is inside. You may ask any question you care to, and as often as you wish until either you are satisfied you know the answer or I indicate time is up.*

Instructions to Witness (group 3):

*After some time I will partner you up with someone from the second group. There will be a piece of paper in front of them. Without letting your partner see what is inside, open the paper and look at the mark. Once you have seen the mark, please fold the paper again and place it between you. Your partner will then ask you what is written on the paper. You may tell them the truth, you may lie, and you may change your answer at any time. Are there any questions? Please wait for a few minutes while the other groups complete their part.*

Once all three groups have received their separate instructions the exercise is ready to get underway. Pair individuals from Writer (group 1) with Questioner (group 2). Instruct the groups to keep the folded paper between them. Group 2 (Questioner) may now begin to ask questions. Questioning can take 3-5 minutes or more as needed.

When time is called, ask the first group (Writer) to move to another area where they may observe the next phase. Pair the third group (Witness) with someone from the second group (Questioner). Once everyone is settled, ask the second group (Questioner) to look away as the Witness (group 3) looks inside the paper. Once the Witness (group 3) has seen the mark, ask them to fold the paper again and place it between them. Group 2 (Questioner) may now ask questions of the Witness (group 3). Questioning can take 3-5 minutes or more as needed.

Once the questioning has been completed, separate group 2 (Questioners) from the rest of the class. Ensure that they keep the folded paper with them, but are still not peeking. Questioners may stand at the front of the class or grouped in the center of the classroom.

Ask each Questioner for the percentage of their surety in their answer (0% - 100%). Ask each questioner what is written on the paper. Ask them how or why they arrived at their answer. Choose one of the Questioners and ask them for their answer again. Ask for the folded paper, open it, and look inside without letting them see the mark. Ask them for their answer. Ask them if they would like to see the answer. If the answer is “no” then give them back the paper to hold. If a Questioner says “yes”, begin to hand them the paper and then take it back before they can have it. Tell them you will not let them see the answer. Then give them back the paper.

## **The Heart of the Matter**

At this moment, most students will be desperate to see what is inside the paper. Keeping the answer within their reach (literally, in their hands) heightens the tension, desperation and desire to know the truth.

Ask the Questioner how they feel about not knowing the truth....especially when it is so close. Draw their attention to the fact that this is an exercise of “X’s” and “O’s”. Ask them to imagine if it was about theft, cheating on a test, cheating on a boyfriend or girlfriend. Ask the Writer and Witness how they felt either, as they spoke the truth but weren’t believed, or as they lied and were trusted. Was it fun? Powerful? Hurtful?

These questions, and more of the like, deepen the emotional connection between the student and the themes of the play. This emotional connection can be referenced and explored as it appears within the play.

Othello (Act 3, Scene 3):     By the world,  
                                  I think my wife be honest, and think she is not;  
                                  I think that thou art just, and think thou art not.

So many of Shakespeare’s characters search for truth. At APT, we strive to create educational experiences that stimulate and increase the depth of connection between a student’s own life experiences and those of Shakespeare’s works.

Personal, practical, and provocative.