

## 1: Othello: characters

- **Othello:** The protagonist and tragic hero. The general of the armies of Venice. He is married to Desdemona. Othello is an eloquent and physically powerful figure, respected by most of those around him.
- **Desdemona:** Othello's wife. The daughter of the Venetian senator Brabantio. Desdemona and Othello are secretly married before the play begins.
- **Brabantio:** Desdemona's father. A rich and important Venetian politician. Accuses Othello of 'stealing' his daughter at the start of the play.
- **Iago:** The antagonist. He works for Othello and wants to lead Othello to his downfall because Othello didn't promote him. He is a manipulative and destructive character.
- **Michael Cassio:** Othello's lieutenant. Cassio is a young and inexperienced soldier, whose high position is much resented by Iago. Iago uses Cassio's youth, good looks, and friendship with Desdemona to play on Othello's insecurities about Desdemona's fidelity.
- **Emilia:** Iago's wife and Desdemona's attendant. A cynical, worldly woman, she is deeply attached to her mistress and distrustful of her husband.
- **Roderigo:** A jealous suitor of Desdemona. Young, rich, and foolish, Roderigo is convinced that if he gives Iago all of his money, Iago will help him win Desdemona's hand.

## 2: Key vocabulary 1

- **Soliloquy:** an act of speaking one's thoughts and feelings aloud when by oneself or regardless of any hearers, especially by a character in a play. A character is speaking to themselves. *Iago uses a soliloquy at the end of scenes in Othello.*
- **Monologue:** a long speech by one actor in a play or film, delivered to the audience. *A monologue differs to a soliloquy because...*
- **Antagonist:** a person who opposes someone, usually the protagonist in a book or a play. *Iago is the antagonist in Othello*
- **Dramatic irony:** the audience are aware of something that other characters are not. *Shakespeare uses dramatic irony in Othello when Iago's hatred for Othello is hidden when speaking to him.*
- **Duplicious:** deceitful, pretending to have feelings that actions contradict. *Iago is a duplicious character as he lies to various characters.*
- **Machiavellian:** cunning, scheming and devious. *Iago is a Machiavellian character.*
- **Manipulation:** to control or influence someone. *Iago employs various manipulation tactics across the play.*
- **Patriarchal:** male controlled and dominated. *A patriarchal society may involve women appearing inferior to men.*

## 3: Key vocabulary 2

- **Tragic hero:** a character of distinction who is destined for downfall, suffering or defeat. *Othello is a tragic hero.*
- **Aside:** a remark or passage in a play that is intended to be heard by the audience but unheard by the other characters in the play. *Iago uses an aside in Act 1.*
- **Theme:** an idea that recurs in a piece of literature. *Appearance vs Reality is a theme within Othello.*
- **Symbolism:** a word or object that represents something e.g *Within Othello, the handkerchief may symbolise love.*
- **Downfall:** a loss of power, prosperity, or status e.g *Othello's jealousy leads him to his tragic downfall.*
- **Archetypal:** very typical of a certain kind of person or thing e.g *Othello was an archetypal soldier at the start of the play.*
- **Stereotypical:** relating to a widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing. *Women were seen as stereotypically weak in the Jacobean era.*
- **Defies:** to go against. *In Act 1, Desdemona defies the stereotypes of a woman.*

## 4: Context: Jacobean England

- Shakespeare wrote his plays during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I and after her death, King James I. We call these time periods the Elizabethan(1558-1603) and Jacobean(1603-1625) eras. Othello was written in 1604.
- Othello is set against the backdrop of the wars between Venice and Turkey that raged in the latter part of the sixteenth century. Cyprus, which is the setting for most of the action, was a Venetian outpost attacked by the Turks in 1570 and conquered the following year.
- The 'Moors' were Muslim people who lived in Northern Africa. These people had mixed heritage. The term Moor was often used broadly, to refer to any person with dark or black skin, including black Africans. In Shakespearean times, Africans were seen as strange, exotic and enemies of Christianity who practiced witchcraft and voodoo. They were viewed with suspicion and hostility by the English; almost seen as an 'unknown'.
- Women were seen as unequal to men. Society was patriarchal (male-dominated) as men were superior compared to women.
- The Great Chain of Being is a hierarchical structure of all matter of life that Elizabethans believed God had set out. God and angels were at the top, humans, animals and plants followed below. Elizabethans believed there would be punishment by God for disrupting the chain or trying to move your position.

## 5: Conventions of a tragic hero

- **Anagnorisis:** The moment when the hero makes an important discovery. Aristotle considered anagnorisis, leading to peripeteia, the mark of a superior tragedy. *In Othello, anagnorisis occurs when...*
- **Catharsis:** The audience's feelings of pity and fear after the hero's fall. *The audience experience catharsis at the end of Othello as...*
- **Hamartia:** The hero's fatal flaw that leads to his tragic downfall. *Othello's hamartia may have been...*
- **Hubris:** A hero's extreme pride and disrespect for the natural order of the world. *Othello portrays/exhibits hubris when...*
- **Nemesis:** The unavoidable fate of the hero. *Othello's nemesis was...*
- **Peripeteia:** The hero's experience of a reversal of fate or fortune. *The peripeteia in Othello occurs when...*

## 6: Othello as a tragic hero

**Othello fulfills Aristotle's conventions of a tragic hero in the following ways:**

- **Anagnorisis:** In Act 5 Othello realises he should not have trusted Iago. Othello's knowledge (anagnorisis) comes too late for him to change the events that have happened..
- **Catharsis:** In Act 5 Othello punishes himself for the crimes he has committed against Desdemona and others by killing himself. The audience experiences a sense of relief as he is punished for his actions and they have learnt a moral from his story.
- **Hamartia:** Othello is too trusting of Iago, and becomes consumed with jealousy around Desdemona.
- **Hubris:** Othello is arrogant and demonstrates a lack of humility in his treatment of others as the play progresses.
- **Nemesis:** Othello reaches the 'point of no return' when he believes Iago and publicly 'strikes' Desdemona.
- **Peripeteia:** Othello transforms from the "valiant" General to the jealous husband who murders his innocent wife.