Helen Murray

EXPLORING THEMES OF DECEIT AND JEALOUSY IN

OTHELLO

BY WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

LESSON PLAN LENGTH: 60 MINUTES

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of this lesson, students will be able to:

- Identify themes and examples from the play

- Make connections between the play and students' own contexts

- Understand characters and their motivations, and manipulate combinations of the elements of drama to develop and convey the physical and psychological aspects of characters

- Understand how language devices and persuasive techniques create meaning in the text, and demonstrate knowledge in script annotations

- Improvise with the elements of drama and narrative structure to develop ideas, and explore subtext

- Practise and refine the expressive capacity of voice and movement to communicate ideas and dramatic action

- Perform devised and scripted drama making deliberate artistic choices.

To teach this lesson, you will need the following resources found in your toolkit:

- **In Rehearsal: *Othello* Act 3, Scene 3**

- **On *Othello*: An Interview with Paul McEwan**

- ***Othello* practical workshop guide by Sarah Stanton**

- Handout 1: Iago quotes

- Handout 2: Jealousy script excerpts

- Handout 3: Act 3, Scene 3 excerpt

Plus:

- For the entire lesson – a video conference link for your chosen platform

- For Exercise 2 – a prepared Google Doc, a list of students' names in pairs and **Handout 1** to email to the group

- For Exercise 4 – an email sharing **Handout 2**

- For Exercise 5 – a prepared Google Doc and access to a word cloud generator

- For Exercise 6 – an email sharing **Handout 3**

For further resources to help you teach *Othello*, including a **full-length production**, and **practical guide**, visit **www.digitaltheatreplus.com.**

EXERCISE 1

DECEIT – WOULD I LIE TO YOU?

- Hold a video conference on your chosen platform. Assign consecutive numbers to each student in the group.

- Going in numerical order, ask each student to introduce themselves and share a 'fact' about their lives. They can choose whether it is true or not.

- All the other students in the call should guess whether each 'fact' is true or false. If they think it's true, they should put their hands to their ears as if listening. If they think it's false, they should cover their mouths. Then the student who made the statement should say whether it was true or false.

- Ask students to pay attention to how many people they managed to deceive.

Discussion:

- What makes a convincing lie?

- What behavioural cues might give a lie away?

- How does it feel to be lied to?

ESTIMATED TIME:
5 MINUTES

The aim of this exercise is for students to experience using their voice and movement to deceive, as a way in to exploring the character of Iago.

EXERCISE 2

DECEIT – IAGO APPEARANCE AND REALITY

ESTIMATED TIME:
10 MINUTES

The aim of this exercise is for students to use the elements of drama to develop and convey the physical and psychological aspects of Iago.

- Before the lesson begins, send an email to the entire class. In it, share Handout 1 and a link to a shared Google Doc called 'Iago's diary'. Additionally, tell students which pairs they will be working in in a later activity.

- In your group video call, read the synopsis below aloud:
  Iago, a soldier, is mad because his General, Othello, promoted Michael Cassio to the rank of lieutenant instead of him. Iago lies to Othello and tricks him into believing that his wife, Desdemona, has been unfaithful with Michael Cassio. Consumed with jealousy, Othello murders Desdemona, and then kills himself.

Discussion:

- What are some adjectives you might use to describe Iago?

Activity:

- Ask students to meet in a separate video call or chat.

- In each pair, have students choose who will be person A and person B.

- A and B alternate reading out the Iago quotes on Handout 1: A reads what other people say about Iago, while B reads what Iago says about himself.

- Ask students to choose one or two adjectives which were shared and to also choose one or two lines which describe Iago.

- Using the words and quotes they have chosen, tell students they have five minutes to compose a short diary entry as Iago where he discusses his choice to manipulate Othello and what has prompted him to make that choice.

Discussion:

- What aspects of Iago did the groups choose to focus on?

- Which lines did they choose and why?

- Why do you think Iago does what he does?

This task is taken from the **Practical Workshop Guide for *Othello*** by Sarah Stanton.

EXERCISE 3
DECEIT – EVIDENCE

ESTIMATED TIME:
10 MINUTES

The aim of this exercise is for students to analyse the text from differing viewpoints and make connections between the play and their contemporary contexts.

Activity:

- Give students a few minutes to discuss what 'evidence' Othello accepts as proof of Desdemona's infidelity.

- After a few minutes, come back together and, working in numerical order again, ask students to share their evidence.

Discussion:

- Why did Othello accept this evidence?

- What makes us accept evidence as true?

- When is evidence deemed 'not important' in changing someone's opinion? Students might discuss contemporary examples, such as climate change denial, and sexual harassment cases.

Extension Activity:

- In their own time, encourage your students to improvise some of the scenarios you have just discussed. They can film themselves and share with the rest of the class or just with you if they would like to.

- Students should bear the following question in mind: How can you use language and action to deceive but still maintain an air of trust and integrity?

EXERCISE 4

JEALOUSY – INSIDE THE MIND

- Email **Handout 2** to the class.

- Have students watch a section from
  In Rehearsal: *Othello* Act 3, Scene 3 (0:16:05-0:17:30).

- Ask them to identify one comment that resonates with them from the video.

- Divide the class into small groups of 3-4 students and ask them to work together to complete the next activity before reconvening on the class video call at an agreed time.

- Allocate each group a script excerpt mentioning 'jealousy' from **Handout 2**.

- Have the groups discuss different ways they could present the line on stage. Encourage them to be imaginative and abstract.

Discussion:

- How do we depict a mental state like jealousy on stage?

- How does Shakespeare use language to show jealousy?

- Unpack the 'green-eyed monster' metaphor, and discuss its persistence.

Extension Activity:

- Invite students to bring their scene to life by recording their group video call while performing it.

- You can ask students to share their recordings with the rest of the group or just with you.

**ESTIMATED TIME:
10 MINUTES**

The aim of this exercise is for students to structure drama to engage an audience through manipulation of forms. Students use the expressive capacity of movement to communicate jealousy.

EXERCISE 5

JEALOUSY – WHAT IS IT MADE OF?

ESTIMATED TIME:
10 MINUTES

The aim of this exercise is for students to explore subtext in the play, and reflect on how dramatic elements can be used to convey the psychological aspects of a character. Students relate their own experiences to that of the characters and consider the perspectives of their peers.

- Share a Google Doc link with the class and identify a free online word cloud generator.

- Watch another section from
  In Rehearsal: _Othello_ Act 3, Scene 3 (0:25:13-0:26:34).

- As a class, discuss what jealousy is, and what other emotions/beliefs/values underpin it.

- Ask students to write down three words or phrases from this discussion in the shared Google Doc. Add all the words to your chosen word cloud generator and share it with the group.

Discussion:

- What connections can you identify between the word cloud, the text, and what the cast and creative team said in the video?

- Reflect on when you've felt jealous. How does this feeling manifest in your body and behaviour?

For further resources to help you teach _Othello_, including a **full-length production**, and **practical guide**, visit **www.digitaltheatreplus.com.**

EXERCISE 6

JEALOUSY – JEALOUS MEN

- Email Handout 3 to your students.

- Ask students to watch a section from **On *Othello*: An Interview with Paul McEwan (0:02.48-0:05.10).**

- Debate the topic: jealousy is the ultimate form of procrastination. To chair the discussion, ask anybody who would like to speak to put their hands on their heads and wait until you say their name.

- Is there an overall consensus?

- Give students time to read through Handout 3 (an excerpt from Act 3, Scene 3) and closely analyse the excerpt individually:

  - Make a note of interruptions to iambic pentameter with an *

  - Underline assonance

  - Circle 'O's and 'Ah's

  - Highlight the last word in each sentence and see if you can identify an overall theme/ atmosphere/intention.

If a student is unable to download and print the text, they can mark it in an Online program such as Google Docs or Microsoft Word. All noted markings can be done in these programs, though you can make whatever adjustments are necessary to work for you.

ESTIMATED TIME:
15 MINUTES + **ADDITIONAL TIME AS HOMEWORK IF NOT COMPLETED IN CLASS**

The aim of this exercise is for students to analyse an excerpt from the play in detail, to explore differing viewpoints and enrich their theatre making. Students perform scripted drama and make deliberate artistic choices to unify dramatic meaning for an audience.
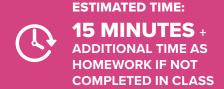
Discussion:

- Discuss McEwan's comments on Iago from the video. Is Iago Machiavellian?

- How does Shakespeare use persuasive language in this excerpt?

Extension Activity:

- Tell students to meet in pairs to compare their notes on the script.

- In these same pairs, ask students to think about how they would present the scene.

Discussion:

- How did your analysis of the text inform the artistic choices you made in your performance?

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