

DIGITAL THEATRE+

VIRTUAL LEARNING LESSON PLAN
ENGLISH

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EXPLORING THEMES OF
MASCULINITY AND TRUST 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
- Use narrative structure to develop ideas, and explore subtext
- Write original narratives exploring character, themes and motivation.

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

- [English Touring Theatre production of *Othello*](#)
- [On *Othello*: An Interview with Kitty Archer](#)
- [On *Othello*: An Interview with Richard Twyman](#)
- [*Othello* practical workshop guide](#) by Sarah Stanton
- **Handout 1:** Excerpt from Act 4, Scene 3

Plus:

- For the entire lesson – a video conference link for your chosen platform
- For Exercises 1 and 4 – prepared Google Sheets
- For Exercise 2 – an email sharing **Handout 1**

EXERCISE 1

MASCULINITY – A ‘GOOD’ MAN



ESTIMATED TIME:
8 MINUTES

The aim of this exercise is for students to analyse the text and consider the perspective of various characters. Students will also make connections between the play and their own context.

- Hold a video conference on your chosen platform.
- Pose the question, ‘What is a good man?’
- Students should write their responses (in Column 2) next to their own name (in Column 1) in a prepared Google Sheet. They should then read each other's responses and add a tick (in Column 3) next to the response they think is best.
- Next, students should take it in turns to read the response with the most votes ("A good man is ...") as either Othello, Iago or Desdemona for other students to guess which character they think is being portrayed by making an 'O', 'I' or 'D' with their hands.
- They should use intonation to suggest confidence, sarcasm, or hope etc. according to which character they're in role as.
- Then watch [On Othello: An Interview with Kitty Archer](#) (00:00:00-02:19:00). Archer suggests Othello is about what makes a 'good man'.

Discussion:

- Do you agree with Archer’s comments?
- Do people agree on what makes a good man? Why or why not?
- How has the definition of a ‘good man’ changed?
- Who are people you would describe as ‘good men’? Why?

EXERCISE 2

MASCULINITY – “THESE
MEN, THESE MEN”

- Email a copy of **Handout 1** (excerpt from Act 4, Scene 3).
- As a class, read the text from where Desdemona says “these men, these men” to the end of the scene.
- After reading this excerpt, have students write their initial response to the text in the group chat feature.
- Watch [On *Othello*: Interview with Richard Twyman](#) (0:12:41-0:13:20), where Twyman discusses this line and we see the actors perform a moment of the scene.
- Ask students to watch this scene from the [ETT production of *Othello*](#) (01:58:50-02:02:08).
- Direct your students to write their own lines for Emilia to precede the line “these men, these men.”

Discussion:

- Why does Shakespeare repeat “these men” here?
- Discuss Twyman’s comments about this line and this scene.
- What does Desdemona mean by this phrase? What is the context?

ESTIMATED TIME:
12 MINUTES

The aim of this exercise is for students to analyse the text and improvise with the elements of drama and narrative structure.

EXERCISE 3

MASCULINITY – ANALYSE AND INTERPRET



ESTIMATED TIME:
10 MINUTES

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

- Divide the class into pairs and ask them to work together on a separate video call.
- Refer students to **Handout 1**.
- Looking at this scene, ask them to analyse:
 - End Words: Focusing only on the last word of each line, what clues do we get to the subtext?
 - Assonance: Discuss the effect of the use of assonance.
 - Identify lines with 11 beats – or lines which do not adhere to the traditional form of iambic pentameter. Discuss the effect of these lines and how any changes to the structure impact the storytelling.
 - Locate any Os and Ahs – discuss the effect of this heightened language.

Discussion:

- What literary or language devices can you identify in this scene?
- How does your interpretation of those devices affect your artistic choices in performance?

EXERCISE 4

TRUST – BEING BELIEVED



ESTIMATED TIME:
5 MINUTES

The aim of this exercise is for students to explore subtext and analyse the themes in the script.

- Prepare a Google Sheet titled 'Who do we trust, and why?' with cells A1 to K30 highlighted. Write the word 'TRUST' in cell F14 in bold letters.
- Create a mind map by having students add their own responses in an available highlighted cell – everyone can participate and add as much to the mind map as they choose. After a minute, have everyone look at what the class created. Ask students to share a few thoughts on what they see and what they contributed to the mind map.
- Continue the class discussion and explore why Desdemona isn't believed by Othello. Use the questions below to prompt discussions.

Discussion:

- Why doesn't Othello believe Desdemona at the end? Is there anything Desdemona could have said to convince Othello?
- Expand conversation to how women are often not believed, e.g. sexual harassment allegations, female doctors being perceived less of an authority etc

Extension Activity:

- Ask students to write a monologue as someone is not believed.
- Research Cassandra from Greek mythology and make connections between the women in *Othello*.

EXERCISE 5

TRUST – DESDEMONA'S INTENSE AUTONOMY



ESTIMATED TIME:
15 MINUTES

The aim of this exercise is for students to analyse the text and explore how the themes interrelate with the characters and their actions.

- Watch [On Othello: Interview with Kitty Archer](#) (00:04.53-00: 07:19). Archer discusses how she looks at what her character does in the first scene of the play for clues to her motivation and character.
- Watch [Othello – Key Scene – Act 1, Scene 3](#) (00:19:22-00:28:10) and identify Desdemona's actions.

Discussion:

- Discuss your impressions of Desdemona.
- How does Desdemona challenge preconceptions of female 'damsel' characters?

EXERCISE 6

TRUST – WRITE A PROLOGUE

- Ask students, in role as Desdemona, to write a prologue where she tells the audience from the outset what her fate will be, who is responsible in her opinion, and what she wants us – the audience – to remember as they watch this play unfold.
- Get students to annotate their script with notes for performance, e.g. blocking, dynamics, pauses etc.
- Ask students to perform and record their prologue.

Discussion:

- How did you use the elements of drama to manipulate the audience?
- What performance style did you apply and why?
- What language did you choose and why?

Extension activity:

In role, ask students to write a reflection or diary entry as Iago reflecting on how he has manipulated Othello or as Desdemona talking about how people won't believe her.



ESTIMATED TIME:
10 MINUTES

The aim of this exercise is for students to apply their knowledge of character and themes in their own creative work. Students will also evaluate their work and identify dramatic elements.

For further resources to help you teach Othello, including a [full-length production](#), and [practical guide](#), visit www.digitaltheatreplus.com.

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