National Theatre

Othello

Learning Guide

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About

This learning guide supports the National Theatre's production of **Othello**, directed by **Clint Dyer**, which opened on **23 November, 2022** at the **National Theatre.**

Our packs are designed to support viewing the recording on the **National Theatre Collection**. This pack provides links to the UK school curriculum and other productions in the Collection. It also has a plot synopsis with timecodes to allow you to jump to specific sections of the play.

Here you'll find all the information you need to enable you to study the production and write about it in detail. This includes notes about all the key elements from performance style to design. You'll also find pointers for further research.

Background Information

Recording Date – 18 January, 2023

Location – Olivier, National Theatre

Age Recommendation – 12+

Cast:

Roderigo / System .....Jack Bardoe

Messenger / System..... Joe Bolland

System..... Peter Eastland

Cassio / System.....Rory Fleck Byrne

Bianca / System..... Kirsty J Curtis

Emilia / System..... Tanya Franks

Gentleman / Officer / System .....Colm Gormley

Iago ..... Paul Hilton

Montano / System..... Gareth Kennerley

Lodovico / System .....Joshua Lacey

Desdemona ..... Rosy McEwen

Duke of Venice / System..... Martin Marquez

System .....Katie Matsell

System..... Amy Newton

System..... Sabi Perez

Gentleman / Senator / System.....Steffan Rizzi

Brabantio / Gratiano / System ..... Jay Simpson

Othello ..... Giles Terera

Voice / System..... Ryan Whittle

Creative Team:

Director ..... Clint Dyer

Set Designer..... Chloe Lamford

Costume Designer ..... Michael Vale

Lighting Designer ..... Jai Morjaria

Sound Design and Composition..... Pete Malkin, Benjamin Grant

Co-Composer..... Sola Akingbola

Movement Director ..... Lucie Pankhurst

Co-Video Designers..... Nina Dunn, Gino Ricardo Green

Fight Director..... Kev McCurdy

Teaching Information

This production is particularly suitable for:

- English Literature students who are studying the play as part of a GCSE or A Level course.
- Drama and theatre students who are studying the play as part of an A Level course.
- Anyone with an interest in contemporary staging of Shakespeare's plays.

In particular you might like to explore:

- How director Clint Dyer uses the play to explore racial tension and the black experience for a contemporary audience.
- This production in relation to the performance history of the play, including Nicholas Hytner's 2013 National Theatre production of Othello, which is also available on the NT Collection.

Production Notes

The following notes have been compiled to help guide you through the significant design and performance aspects as you watch the production, or to remind you of them after you have watched it. You may also want to make your own notes and form your own opinions on the effectiveness of these aspects as you explore the production.

Contextual Information:

- Clint Dyer is the first Black director to direct Othello at the National Theatre
- The production makes explicit reference to previous productions of Othello, several of them by and at the National Theatre, in the projections at the beginning of the production. Not only does it highlight the importance of the play to modern society, it also questions its production history which is sometimes problematic. For example, one of the images is of Laurence Olivier as Othello (National Theatre, 1964). Olivier was a white man, using blackface to play this role. Other images include Adrian Lester and Rory Kinnear in the NT's production in 2013.
- Hugh Quarshie and Adrian Lester have both written extensively on the problematic elements of the play, including its presentation of the Black experience and the stereotypes that, it may be argued, mean that the play should not be performed in the 21st century. Dyer's production examines those ideas.

Production Notes

Key design Elements: Set

- The set allows full use of the cyclorama on to which video is projected at key moments during the play.
- The most striking element of the set is the sense of a forum or a military parade ground – steeply raked steps that form the full width of upstage, and stage left and right. These create a variety of levels upon which scenes can take place, those spaces being defined by lighting to make them appear bigger or smaller. There is also an entrance/exit point upstage centre, at the top of the highest level. This point is also where key intimate moments, or moments of mime take place.
- The floor level of the stage is left clear, and is light coloured to give some relief against the dark steps. However, at certain moments, an additional level is created by a shallow section of the floor being raised, for example to create Desdemona's bed upon which she dies.
- The set is black and grey which creates an intimidating and foreboding atmosphere, and allows for the creation of shadow.
- In the opening moments of the play, the years since the play was first performed (1604) and 2022/2023 (when this production was at the NT) are projected in a rapid sequence.
- Brabantio's balcony is created by using one of the auditorium balconies, to create the height and distance from street level in Act 1 scene 1.
- The lack of items of furniture enables the transitions between scenes and locations to be swift. Because of the darkness of the set, actors can appear from various points when lit to direct the audience's attention and create a sense of location through lighting rather than solid furniture.

Production Notes

Key design Elements: Costume

- The costume palette is limited to very dark navy and black, with a few military khaki shades at some points. This choice insists that the audience considers the various connotations of blackness throughout the production.
- Many of the costumes (the military uniform and those worn by the System) remind us of the Blackshirts – Fascist organisations associated with the 1930s. When large numbers of those characters are gathered, it makes them seem even more intimidating.
- Costume items include black raincoats, khaki military jackets and black shirts and trousers for most of the male actors.
- Desdemona's costume is also black: wide legged black trousers, and a V neck sleeveless top is her basic costume, worn with black shoes. She wears a long black cardigan during the Willow scene, which Emilia helps her unpin.
- Othello wears a black shalwar kameez, consisting of a black tunic and trousers. Desdemona wears a matching costume in the early parts of the play, but hers is a rich navy blue.
- During his bōjutso training, Othello wears a slim fitting long-sleeved athletics top, and black trousers.
- Emilia wears the same black military short sleeved shirt (with ID number on the sleeve in white) and a black skirt with a front box pleat, black socks and shoes. She wears a silver cross on a matching chain, which is visible over the collar of her shirt.
- Bianca's costume is very similar to that of Emilia: a black box pleated skirt, a black long-sleeved shirt worn open over a white slip (to suggest her courtesan character, perhaps), she is bare legged and wears black shoes.
- From Act 4 onwards, Roderigo wears a non-military jacket with a mandarin collar. It's important we're reminded of his non-military status among the characters.

Production Notes

Key design Elements: Lighting

- The high angle lighting upstage often casts an eerie blue-white light on to the stage. The effect is that the action seems exposed at some points, but as the intensity dims at key moments, shadows begin to inhabit the stage. It is unsettling for the audience, and creates an atmosphere of distrust. With the presence of the System in a lot of the scenes, these shadows seem to lurk everywhere.
- Follow spots are utilized in the production, particularly when Iago is delivering his soliloquies to the audience/to the assembled System behind him. This is particularly important when the set and the costumes are so dark. However, the use of the follow spot also ensures that the audience's attention is directed solely on Iago as he speaks.
- Wide, soft spotlights are used on the downstage inner corners of the steps to allow Iago to have private conversations – it also heightens the sense of entrapment that he creates. Notice how the opposite sides of the stage are lit in this way when Cassio and Desdemona are watched by Othello on the other side of the stage, for example. Iago's victims are illuminated within a small space.
- Vertical LED lighting strips define a central spot upstage centre on the highest level in which we see Desdemona and Othello early in the play, but also forms an entrance/exit point for various characters.
- The lighting has to be carefully balanced so that the projections on the cyclorama (images from previous productions, suggestions of news footage, and heavy rain/storms) can be seen clearly from the auditorium.
- Notice the harsh white hue of the lighting as Othello begins to experience doubt when he says 'why did I marry?' (Act 3 scene 3).
- Notice how Act 3 scene 4 onwards has much dimmer lighting at points, for example around 01.51.35 when Iago instructs Roderigo. More action takes place under cover of darkness, requiring narrower spots of light to highlight solo characters.
- In Act 4, the darkness of the set and the dim intensity of the lights allows for the brightness of the flaming torch (02.09.50).

Production Notes

Key design Elements: Sound

- As the years are projected at the start of the play, the sound of distorted voices (and lines from the play) and the suggestion of a radio being tuned, can be heard. As the counter goes up, a ticking sound can be heard, like that of a clock.
- At key moments, the sound of drone notes, and high-pitched squeals are used which cause discomfort and create tension for the audience. At the end of Act 1, when Iago's deception begins to have its malevolent effect on Othello's state of mind, banging sounds accompany the flashing lights that are used and the sound of static (like white noise) is played to suggest the rapid unravelling of Othello's sanity. This also happens in Act 2 when Iago suggests to Othello that Cassio 'lies with her, on her'.
- String music is played at the beginning of Act 2, and the sounds of an organ and percussion are also used.

Production Notes

Key Design Elements: Wigs, Hair and Make-up

- Othello has a number of scars on his face, shoulders and back. The scars on his back suggests his life in slavery, which he mentions briefly in Act 1 scene 3. The symmetrical scars under his eyes suggest membership of a tribe for whom facial scarring is a rite of passage. The scars on his shoulders may be from previous battles, or an additional reminder of his time as an enslaved man.
- Emilia has severe bruising on her right cheek and temple. In this production, there is a strong suggestion that Iago physically abuses Emilia. We see him do so on stage and the bruising, along with the white bandage that she wears on her right arm, suggests that this is a common occurrence.

Production Notes

Performance Style

- This interpretation includes a chorus, or a 'System' as they are credited in the programme. This use of a chorus device can be interpreted as the intrusive thoughts of key characters (Iago, Othello), but also the constant observation and criticism that society might direct towards Othello. When Iago delivers his soliloquies, the choral movement also may suggest the deranged or evil frame of mind of Iago, becoming increasingly gleeful/malevolent as his plot progresses. Watch how the System responds to key speeches with gesture – some of them in unison, others in canon or with slight variations on the movements of others. They become more unpredictable as the play reaches its climax.
- This production can be interpreted as being particularly interested in Iago's influence. The opening lines of the play, which are usually spoken by Roderigo, have been cut, and the performance starts with Iago saying, 'what ho, Brabantio?'. This immediately places Iago at the centre of the action, which he also has complete control over.
- The production draws attention to elements that in the script might simply be assumed. This includes seeing Othello executing martial arts-style moves, and using a punchbag. We are also shown, through the medium of mime, the moment where Othello gives Desdemona the handkerchief. In this production, the handkerchief is black, with a complex pattern as well as the strawberries suggested in the script. This perhaps responds to the debate about the handkerchief's 'whiteness' and what it represents. You can find out more about this in the 'Further Research' section of these notes. At the beginning of Act 2 Brabantio's funeral is shown: we only usually hear about it later in the play in Act 5.

- The presence of various weapons – a small, curved knife like a Gurkha kukri knife for Roderigo and a staff used by Othello in what appears to be Japanese bōjutsu (the martial art involving stick fighting) – creates a threatening undertone of violence throughout the production which contrasts with other productions in which weapons are seen less frequently despite the military setting of Cyprus.

Production Notes

Key Moments

- Othello's speech in Act 1 scene 3 which begins 'Most potent, grave, and reverend signiors...' begins at 00.15 41. Watch how this speech is delivered using vocal skills in order to impress Othello's assembled audience and deny the charges of witchcraft that Brabantio is bringing against him. Desdemona enters at 00.20.57 and the scene ends at 00.27.05. Note the use of the members of the System in this scene, who shout racial slurs whilst Othello is speaking. This is a departure from most productions, where the meeting is held behind closed doors and without external interference.
- The reunion between Othello and Desdemona takes place at 00.35.46. Shortly afterwards (00.37/14) we see interaction between Roderigo and Iago, followed by Iago's soliloquy. Notice, again, how the System become part of Iago's audience.
- Iago's Act 2 scene 3 soliloquy ('what's he that says I play the villain?') follows his interaction with Cassio, who mourns his "reputation, reputation, reputation", which begins at 00.50.39 and ends 00.54.29. The way in which Iago appears to be friendly and helpful is of particular interest here.
- Iago's full deception in Act 3 scene 3 takes place from 00.57.46 with 'I like not that'. The closing moments of the scene (from 01.10.36 until 01.12.32) show the unravelling of Othello's mind after Iago has thoroughly poisoned Othello's mind against Desdemona. The closing of the horizontal curtains, the accompanying sound and visual effects, as well as the performance by Giles Terera, suggest the rapidly declining mental state of Othello, and his feeling of claustrophobia and helplessness he feels within Cyprus. It ends Act 1 in a state of high tension.
- Iago's soliloquy in which he tells the audience 'I will in Cassio's lodging lose (the handkerchief)' begins at 01.17.09. This scene also includes Iago admonishing Othello for his response to the suggestions of Desdemona's infidelity, and the two men become 'blood brothers' in this extract – something that is not suggested within the script, although kneeling together is. This extract ends at 01.25.23

- Act 4 scene 2 ('Is he not jealous?') demonstrates the relationship between Desdemona and Emilia. (01.25.40-01.30.48).
- You can evaluate the use of the System in this production, from 01.44.18-01.51.18 when they respond with choral movement to Iago's speech, and where we also see the fracturing relationship between Othello and Desdemona.
- Othello's final speech in Act 5 scene 2 begins at 02.25.22. As well as observing how the lighting adds mood and atmosphere to Othello's speech, consider how the voices that react also colour our reception of the speech.

Plot Synopsis with Timecodes

Act 1, Scene 1: 00:00:00

Venice, 2023.

A stark, staired stage like an amphitheatre. Newspaper and media articles are projected on the stairs, and hundreds of sound clips play in fragmented unison. Onto the stage runs Othello. He is praised by the masses for his skills as a warrior, but he foresees that this will soon turn sour against him. Desdemona, Othello's wife, looks on over the scene.

The stage clears.

It is night. Roderigo and Iago enter the stage, manically calling for Senator Brabantio, waking all those too in the surrounding area. They claim and swear upon themselves publicly that Brabantio's daughter (Desdemona) has made away with a stranger (Othello). Brabantio confirms she is not within her chamber and calls a search party. Roderigo confirms that they have secretly married, and Brabantio grows increasingly furious at her deception. Roderigo leads search party to where they will find the pair.

Act 1, Scene 2 00:08:40

Iago has run to Othello to tell him the news of the search party and the furious Brabantio making their way to him. Despite Iago's warning, Othello is not afraid. He will explain to them that he loves Desdemona, and he will willingly be found.
Before Brabantio and his followers arrive, the Duke of Venice's guards have also been sent to seek and summon Othello to the Duke. As Brabantio and his party enter, Othello is protected by the Duke of Venice's guards, and Othello attempts to reason with Brabantio, who is not satisfied. They all leave to seek the Duke.

Act 1, Scene 3 00:13:10

The Duke and his senators have news that a Turkish fleet by sea are moving to attack Cyprus. The Duke requires Othello to advise and take command to defeat this advancement. However, Brabantio interrupts and claims that Othello has bewitched his daughter with witchcraft and demands the Duke's action. Othello defends himself against Brabantio and the crowd who shout racist remarks and cry for him to be hanged. Othello confirms that he and Desdemona are married, and explains how he has won her love fairly through his stories of all his suffering, slavery and his redemption in combat, and he in turn fell for her caring and sympathetic nature. Othello summons Desdemona to speak in the court before her father, Othello and the Duke. Desdemona confirms that she loves Othello, and she stands by her husband and against her father's claims. The Duke is satisfied and Brabantio angrily dismisses his followers. The Duke swiftly moves his attentions back to the impending war at hand. Othello accepts the Duke's commands, on the condition that he and Desdemona go together to this war campaign. Brabantio disowns his daughter, and warns Othello of her deception.

> **BRABANTIO**: Look to her, Moor, if thou hast eyes to see: She has deceived her father and may thee.

To travel, Othello leaves Desdemona in Iago's care.

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Roderigo, defeated, sits despairingly with Iago and dramatically threatens to drown himself. Iago convinces him otherwise, and tells him that once Desdemona's lust is satisfied, she will come back to her senses. He confesses that he hates Othello, and he will help Roderigo in his pursuit of Desdemona, for the simple pleasure of spiting Othello.

Iago soliloquises that he hates Othello as he has promoted the aristocrat Cassio above him, who he considers to be a less capable soldier than himself, and vows revenge.

Act 2, Scene1 00:31:30

Heavy rain and stormy seas. Cassio confirms to Montano and the other soldiers that the Turkish fleets have been destroyed by the storm. Cassio and Othello were separated during the storm, and the soldiers, including Desdemona, are anxiously awaiting his return.

Iago enters, with his obedient wife, Emelia, who give Cassio and Desdemona a frosty reception. Desdemona makes clear her loathing of Iago, and Iago schemes of how he shall plot against Cassio and Desdemona together. Othello returns from battle and declares a night of celebration.

Iago summons Roderigo from Venice and convinces him that Desdemona is in love with Cassio and persuades him to draw Cassio into a fight.

Iago dreams of sparking Othello into a jealousy so strong that it destroys him, in the same way Iago's jealousy caused by Othello is eating away at him now.

Act 2, Scene 2 00:41:20

Othello calls the celebration to commence, and Othello's followers bless their noble general, now the leader of Cyprus.

Act 2, Scene 3: 00:41:45

Othello instructs Cassio to take the watch of the guard, while he and Desdemona go off to finally consummate their marriage.

Iago and Cassio take the watch together, and Iago prompts Cassio to speak of his feelings for Desdemona. Iago tries to convince Cassio to drink with him, though Cassio says that drink does not agree with him, and his behaviour cannot be controlled. Cassio is convinced to drink, and Iago secretly spikes Cassio's drink with more alcohol.

Cut forward to the celebrations, and Cassio is wildly drunk and rowdy. Roderigo runs in and bites Cassio's ear. Cassio starts a fight with Montano, which leads him to then stab Montano. Othello enters and the fight is broken apart. Othello demands to know what has gone on and who has started this fight, but none will tell him. Othello orders Iago to tell him, who reports it was Cassio, but who says it is also within the nature of all men to fight, to soften the blow. Othello strips Cassio of his rank to make an example of him. Cassio is distraught at losing his rank and damaging his reputation. Iago consoles him and convinces him to speak with Desdemona to help him regain his ranking.

> **Iago:** I'll tell you what you shall do. Our general's wife is now the general. Confess yourself freely to her, importune her help to put you in your place again.

Iago in a soliloquy tells us that he will frame Cassio and Desdemona to make Othello jealous.

Roderigo enters, with a nosebleed from the fight. He wishes to give up and return to Venice. Iago tells him to be patient and wait the course.

Act 3, Scene 1: 00:56:00

Emilia approaches the sorrowful Cassio and reassures him that all will be well, for she has overheard the General and his wife talking and though Othello has stripped him of his ranks, she still loves him. Cassio asks Emilia if she will grant him a private conversation with Desdemona, and she takes him to her.

Act 3, Scene 2: 00:57:00

Cassio has spoken with Desdemona, and she promises to him that she will do everything she can to convince Othello to restore his rankings. Cassio is ashamed, and in his embarrassment leaves when he sees Othello approaching, without speaking with him. Here, Iago lays the seeds of jealousy, by suggesting that Cassio has slunk away guiltily.

Desdemona enters and asks Othello to call Cassio back and forgive him. Othello delays but says that he will not deny her anything she asks of him. Othello declares his love again for Desdemona.

To counteract this, Iago again plants further doubts in Othello's mind of Cassio's honesty and pauses to give Othello room for his doubt and jealousy to grow. Iago advises Othello, as his close friend and ally, to observe Desdemona when she is with Cassio. For as she had deceived her father, she may also deceive Othello. Iago leaves.

Othello descends into his paranoia.

INTERVAL

Part 2

Act 3, Scene 3: 01:12:40

A funeral. The Duke of Venice comforts a grieving Ludovico and hands him a message to pass to Othello.
-
Cyprus.

Othello sees Desdemona and Emilia approaching, and Othello tries to cast the doubt from his mind. Desdemona notices that he is acting strangely and questions him. He tells her he is not feeling well, and she takes him off to rest. On their way, Desdemona drops her handkerchief. This handkerchief was the first gift Othello had ever given her, and she carries it with her always. Emilia picks it up and contemplates what to do with it. Her husband Iago has asked her to take it from Desdemona a hundred times, but she knows how much she loves this handkerchief as a symbol of her love for Othello. She decides to take it for Iago, unaware of his intentions.

Iago violently snatches the handkerchief from Emilia, and bids she leave, without telling her of his intentions. In soliloquy, Iago tells the audience that he plans to "lose" the handkerchief in Cassio's lodgings, to further confirm Othello's jealous doubts.

Enter Othello. He is being driven mad with confusion and doubt, and he threatens Iago's life for casting such confusion upon him. He demands that Iago give him proof of his suspicions. Iago tells him that he has heard Cassio muttering of his affair in his sleep and tells him he saw Cassio wipe his beard with Desdemona's handkerchief earlier that day. Iago has convinced Othello, and in his rage, they make a blood pact to kill Cassio and Desdemona within three days. Othello promotes Iago to be his lieutenant.

Act 3, Scene 4: 01:25:20

Desdemona and Emilia are looking for her handkerchief, Desdemona is distressed to be without it. Emilia says nothing, knowing it was she who took it. Othello enters and is acting peculiarly and is sharp with Desdemona. She has arranged for Cassio to speak with Othello, for his pardon. He demands to see her handkerchief, which was his mother's. Desdemona cannot produce it, but she also will not admit that it is lost. He flies into a rage and exits. Emilia notes his jealousy and speaks of how men feed upon women until they have had their fill, and then discard them.

Iago enters, talking with Cassio of his lover, Bianca. Desdemona must break the news that Othello will not see him, as he is in a monstrous mood. Emilia speaks of how jealousy is a monster that feeds itself.

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Cassio is met by Bianca, his lover. He gives her the handkerchief, which he has found in his chamber, so that it is out of his lodgings.

Act 4, Scene 1: 01:32:45

Iago continues to stoke the flames of Othello's confusion, doubt and jealousy, to the point where Othello is overcome and begins to seizure. Cassio enters and tries to help, but Iago tells him to stand back and to not be seen by Othello when he comes around. Othello, coming around from his seizure, sees Cassio exit. Iago says that he shall prove to Othello of Cassio's betrayal. Iago bids Othello stays hidden and watch Cassio's reactions while he talks with him. Out of earshot, Iago encourages Cassio to talk of his lover, Bianca, though Othello believes they are talking and laughing of his affair with Desdemona. Overseen by Othello, Bianca enters and gives him back his handkerchief,

suspecting it to be a second-hand gift from another lover. Othello recognises it, further confirming his suspicions.

Othello cries his murderous revenge upon Desdemona's cuckold and betrayal. Iago persuades him to allow him to murder Cassio, and for Othello to murder Desdemona.

Enter Ludovico with Desdemona, with a note on the Duke's orders, to summon Othello back to Venice, leaving Cassio in command of Cyprus. Desdemona and Ludovico speak of Othello and Cassio's disagreement in which Desdemona defends Cassio which provokes Othello further. He verbally abuses her and physically strikes her in front of her Ludovico, and whistles her to him, like a dog.

Ludovico is appalled by what he sees. Iago tells him that Othello's behaviour is becoming increasingly alarming.

Act 4, Scene 2: 01:44:30

Othello visits Emilia to question her about the relationship between Desdemona and Cassio. She denies all his claims, but he is not satisfied, and bids Emilia to bring Desdemona to him.

Desdemona pleads her innocence and tells him she does not understand what it is she has done to deserve his treatment. Othello berates her, calls her a whore and a strumpet. In his confusion and anger, he leaves.

Desdemona asks Emilia to lay her wedding sheets out on her bed tonight, and to call Othello to Desdemona's chamber. Emilia brings Iago to see Desdemona, for they cannot understand what has caused Othello's conspiracy. It is here that Emilia begins to realise Iago's deception, and her part in it.

> **EMILIA**: I will be hang'd if some eternal villain
> Some busy and insinuating rogue,
> Some cogging, cozening slave, to get some office,
> Have not devis'd this slander, I'll be hang'd else!

Desdemona begs Iago for his advice and counsel. However, he dismisses them both.

> **IAGO**: Go in, and weep not; all things shall be well.

While he is alone, Roderigo confronts Iago on the lack of progress made towards Desdemona on Iago's instruction, despite all the jewellery he has given to Iago to give to her. Iago manages to convince Roderigo that he must kill Cassio to prevent Othello and Desdemona returning to Venice, as ordered by the Duke.

> **IAGO**: O no, he goes into Mauretania and taketh away with him the fair Desdemona, unless his abode be lingered here by some accident – wherein none can be so determinate as the removing of Cassio.
>
> **RODERIGO**: How do you mean, removing of him?
>
> **IAGO**: Why, by making him uncapable of Othello's place: knocking out his brains.

Act 4, Scene 3: 01:55:50

Desdemona and Othello bid Ludovico good night, and Othello asks him to walk with him for a little while. He bids Desdemona go to bed, and to dismiss Emilia for the night. Desdemona and Emilia are uncertain of Othello's intentions, and suspect that Othello may kill Desdemona that night. Desdemona recounts a familiar song her mother's maid sang, of her lover who went mad and killed her. They are frightened of what may happen next. They reflect upon the abuse they suffer at the will and the hands of the men in their lives. Desdemona cannot believe that any woman would abuse a man in the same way, but Emilia can, explaining that this is because of men's abuse and ignorance of the fact that women have the same feelings, emotions and desires that they do. Therefore, these husbands have brought such revenge upon themselves.

> **EMILIA**: Then let them use us well: else let them know,
> The ills we do, their ills instruct us so.

Desdemona dismisses Emilia for the evening, and the pair embrace before they part.

Act 5, Scene 1: 02:05:20

Iago brings Roderigo to a dark, secluded area where they know they will find Cassio. He tells Roderigo to hide and wait for Cassio, and not to fear, for he will help him should his ambush not go to plan.

Iago speaks to the audience and tells them whatever happens: if Roderigo kills Cassio, Cassio kills Roderigo; or they kill each other, any outcome is to his own gain.
Cassio enters, and Roderigo moves to attack, however Cassio fights him, and with his own weapon, stabs Roderigo. In the darkness and disguised, Iago stabs Cassio in the leg and disappears into the darkness. Cassio cries out for help and is soon attended by those in the nearby area, including Iago, who acts as though he is new to the scene, and finishes off Roderigo as an honourable act of catching an attempted murderer. Bianca, having heard Cassio's cries for help, arrives on the scene, but Iago intercepts, and has her arrested as a conspirator to this crime. Emilia and Ludovico, hearing the commotion arrive at the scene, and Iago bids Emilia to run to the citadel to tell Othello and Desdemona of what has happened.

Iago delights in his plan coming to fruition, though notes there is still high risk.

> **IAGO**: "This is the night that either makes me or fordoes me quite."

Act 5, Scene 2: 02:10:15

Othello enters the sleeping Desdemona's chamber, and kisses her three times, before she wakes. He reflects on how tonight he will kill her, and the bittersweet tears he will cry for her when she is dead. She wakes, and he asks her if she has prayed tonight. She begs him for mercy, for she has done nothing wrong. He reveals his conspiracy of the handkerchief, and she asks him to call Cassio to explain where he found it. Othello tells her that his friend Iago has killed him, and he plans to kill her too. She begs him to spare her life, for even just an hour longer, but it is too late. He strangles her, and lays her down on her bed, though unbeknownst to him, she is not yet dead. Before he can harm himself, Emilia knocks on the door and calls him. In a panicked moment, he lets her in.

She tells him that Cassio has killed Roderigo, and that Cassio lives, much to Othello's confusion.
Emilia hears Desdemona cry out from her bed and attends to her. Desdemona says that she dies "a guiltless death" and that she has done this to herself, and she dies. Emilia knows the truth, and forces Othello to confess to her murder. He reveals that it was Iago who told him of Desdemona's and Cassio's affair, and of the handkerchief. Emilia realises the full truth of her husband's deception, and she tells Othello that he has been lied to.

Emilia cries for help and of murder. Montano, Gratiano and Iago rush into the scene, and capture Othello. Emilia confronts Iago, who admits he told Othello that Desdemona was unfaithful with Cassio and tries to stop her talking, but she refuses to remain silent.

Othello attempts to defend his crimes through relaying Desdemona's adultery.

> **OTHELLO**: Tis pitiful, but yet Iago knows that she with Cassio hath the act of shame a thousand times committed.

He says he saw his handkerchief in Cassio's hand. Emilia reveals that it was she who unknowingly gave the fallen handkerchief to Iago, who had asked her to steal it for him. Othello realises the truth and attempts to run at Iago. Iago breaks free and stabs Emilia, before he escapes. Montano chases after him. Emilia, ever Desdemona's maid, dies at her mistress' side. In her final words, she tells Othello that Desdemona loved him.

> **EMILIA**: So come my soul to bliss as I speak true! – Moor, she loved thee, cruel Moor.

Othello realises the full extent of this deception and asks the devils of hell to treat him accordingly for his actions.

Lodovico, Montano and the wounded Cassio return with Iago as their prisoner. In a swift moment, Othello wounds Iago. Othello admits to his crimes, and Cassio confirms that the handkerchief has been planted in Iago's web. Othello is arrested. Lodovico tells Othello his command is stripped, and Cassio now rules over Cyprus.

Othello asks Iago why he has ensnared him in his deception. However, Iago refuses to speak from this moment forward.

In one final moment, Othello stabs himself and begins to bleed out. Ludovico tells the men that this event is to be hidden, and grants Gratiano the censure of Iago's fate. As Othello dies, Iago tells the men, and the audience, that he will never confess.

IAGO
What you know, you know.
What you know, you know.
What you know, you know

End.

Suggestions of Further Activity

- Watch this video of Clint Dyer explaining his interpretation of the play, and the characters within it: youtube.com/watch?v=BXlwmt1UbTE. Follow that with this video about the dramatherapy that took place during rehearsals in order to ensure the safety of the actors working on the play: youtube.com/watch?v=okoE7naqrn0

- This production shows Desdemona as much more assertive than many previous productions, as noted by Nick Curtis in the Evening Standard review of the production. Discuss the interpretation here, and compare it with your own ideas and those shown in Nicholas Hytner's 2013 production of Othello which is also available on the NT Collection (Collection 1) and has a full learning guide to accompany it.

- Watch the full 2013 NT production, and create a compare/contrast document in which you examine key scenes. These might include: Act 1 scene 1, Act 2 scene 1, Act 3 scene 3 and Act 5 scene 2. Alternatively, you may wish to create other, more specific comparisons, such as Iago's soliloquies, the set design, the costume design, and sound design throughout the production and analyse why those different artistic decisions have been made.

- Create a timeline of iconic productions of Othello, both in the UK and further afield. Consider the different interpretations in the light of Clint Dyer's statement that the narrative of the play has always been presented as about jealousy to distract from the use of blackface.

- Read Farah Karim-Cooper's chapters on Othello in her book The Great White Bard (2023). Discuss how this production deals with the concepts raised by her discussions.

Suggestions of Further Activity

- David Harewood was the first Black Othello at the National Theatre in 1997. Clint Dyer is the first Black director at the NT to direct Othello. Watch these videos by Harewood to widen your understanding: weta.org/watch/shows/shakespeare-uncovered/shakespeare-uncovered-david-harewood-racial-prejudice-othello and weta.org/watch/shows/shakespeare-uncovered/shakespeare-uncovered-david-harewood-white-actors-playing-othello. Research productions of Othello in the UK and further afield. What issues are raised by your findings? Discuss your findings with your peers.

- Watch this video from the RSC, 'Is Othello a racist play?' and hear from several actors involved in productions of Othello to deepen your understanding of the issues: youtube.com/watch?v=zAcmVH8vqZw

- Using JSTOR.org, access Ian Smith's article, 'Othello's Black Handkerchief', Shakespeare Quarterly Vol. 64, No. 1 (Spring 2013), pp. 1–25. Read it and discuss your response to the ideas within it. How have other productions interpreted this key symbol within the play? Do you think it's of particular importance?

- In the Guardian's review of the production, we're told 'The women are not reduced to victims here while the men, including Othello, are controlling, toxic abusers'. Discuss this statement and compare this approach with other productions that you may have seen.

Find out More

Watch:

How We Made It | Dramatherapy in the Othello Rehearsal Room | National Theatre

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=okoE7naqrn0

Clint Dyer explores his groundbreaking vision for Othello at the National Theatre

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BXIwmt1UbTE

Explore:

Learning Hub

You can find more resources for schools and teachers on the National Theatre's Learning Hub. Search by key stage, subject, theatrical style or practitioner and discover an ever-growing library of short films, learning guides and digital exhibitions.

Find out more: https://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/learn-explore/schools/teacher-resources/

National Theatre Archive

More materials relating to the production including the costume bible, poster, prompt scripts, programme, stage management reports and more are held at the National Theatre Archive, which is free to visit.

Find out more: https://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/archive

We hope that you have enjoyed watching and studying **Othello**. Don't forget that there are many more fantastic productions to explore as part of the NT Collection. We hope that watching this recorded production has made you feel inspired to see and make live theatre. Why not find out what's happening at your local theatre and how you can get involved?

National Theatre

Thank you