Othello – Learning Resources

Understanding persuasion in Othello (up to 60 mins)

This learning resource is designed to help students explore the themes of persuasion, manipulation and love in Othello through a close analysis of the persuasive language in Act III, Scene 3.

This resource will encourage students of Literature in particular to analyse Shakespeare's use of language, structure and form in terms of persuasion. Students of Drama and Theatre will also be able to explore and apply theatrical skills and consider how meaning is communicated in their work and that of others.

Who is it for?

This resource is designed for A-Level students of English Literature, English Language and Drama who are studying Shakespeare and the use of persuasive language. It is not necessary for students to be familiar with the story of Othello to use this resource, but it may be of particular benefit to those who are.

Learning outcomes

Learners will:

- Analyse the different uses of persuasive language in Act III, Scene 3.
- Discuss as a group how the characters' physical actions, through the staging of the scene, may contribute to these persuasive techniques.
- Perform a short extract from the scene while articulating its subtext.

You will need

- Access to the clip 'lago and Desdemona persuade Othello' in the 'On Demand' player.
- Copies of the full text of Othello.

Activities

1.

Show the clip 'lago and Desdemona persuade Othello' using the 'On Demand' player. Ask the class to take notes about the language and tactics Desdemona uses to try and persuade Othello.

2.

Pause the clip after Desdemona leaves Othello and lago alone. Ask the class to share their observations about Desdemona's attempts to persuade Othello to reconcile with Cassio. What does she do? What kind of language does she use? How successful is she, and why?

3.

Referring to the text from the scene, ask the class to consider Desdemona's strength in this scene. How strong and confident does she seem in this performance? How is this communicated through language and through action? Could this scene be played in a different way?



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4.

Continue to show the clip using the 'On Demand' player. As before, ask the class to share their observations about lago's attempts to persuade Othello that Desdemona might have been unfaithful to him.

5.

Pause the clip after lago leaves Othello alone for the second time. Ask the class to share their observations about his persuasive techniques, comparing and contrasting them to the techniques Desdemona used. Whose are more effective, and why?

6.

Divide the class into groups of four, and assign them each a different section of the scene between lago and Othello. Within their groups, they should choose one person to be lago, one to be Othello, one to be lago's thoughts, and one to be Othello's thoughts.

7.

Ask each group to read their section of the script to the rest of the class. After each of lago and Othello's lines, the character representing their thoughts should express what they are really thinking or feeling.

8.

Discuss the results of each read-through with the rest of the class, encouraging them to think about how and why lago succeeds in persuading Othello.