



Year 8 English - Othello



Essential Knowledge

Race in Renaissance England: at a time when global exploration and slavery were in their infancy, racism was rife in England (Elizabeth I ordered that black people should be exiled). People from any part of Africa were called 'Moors'. Othello's racial origin is not clear – perhaps purposefully so. Other characters use derogatory terms to describe him because of his race, but his rank earns him some respect.

Setting: Written in England around 1604, but set in Venice and Cyprus. Venice was considered a civilised and cosmopolitan society whilst Cyprus was considered the end of the civilised world.

Context and themes

Gender and the patriarchy: Renaissance women were expected to be subservient to men and did not have many rights. Many were consigned to the **domestic sphere** and were expected to provide a stable point of morality and innocence in a chaotic, corrupt world.

Beliefs: People were often superstitious and had a thorough knowledge of classical myths and legends. The church had a lot of power and authority. Some women and outsiders were often treated with suspicion and were associated with witchcraft and devil worshipping.

Purpose of Tragedy

To hold up a mirror to society and show audiences how fragile humans can be.

Key Terms	Definition
Tragic Hero	High status at the beginning but has a fatal flaw that leads to his downfall.
Hamartia	The hero's fatal flaw that leads to his tragic downfall.
Peripeteia	A sudden reversal of fortune.
Anagnorisis	The moment when the hero realises that he is to blame for his downfall.
Catharsis	The audience reacts to the tragedy with pathos (pity) and fear and so is cleansed.

Sophisticated Vocabulary	Definition
Contemptuous (adj.)	disgusted, dismissive (esp. of people below them)
Complicit (adj.)	helping to do wrong
Embittered (adj.)	filled with resentment
Embodiment (n.)	a clear form or representation of an idea or quality
Misogynistic (adj.)	describes a person who hates women
Machiavellian (adj.)	cunning and scheming, deceptive in particular for power
Malevolent (adj.)	evil, immoral.
Meritocracy (n.)	a system of power based on ability, not wealth.
Opportunistic (adj.)	taking opportunities as they arise without a prior plan
Xenophobia (n.)	dislike or prejudice against people from other countries

Grammar Focus - Developing embedded quotations

Rather than using long quotations in their entirety, you can "chop up" quotations to include only the key words needed. For example, rather than writing out: "Desdemona says: 'but my noble Moor / Is true of mind and made of no such baseness / As jealous creatures are, it were enough / To put him to ill thinking.'" You can write: "Desdemona says that her 'noble Moor' is 'true of mind' and does not have the 'baseness' that jealous people have."

When you feel confident, you can also use different quotations throughout the text to support your points within one paragraph. See the WAGOLL for a simple example of this.

Writing structure & sentence starters

What – What impression does the writer create?

- [Writer's name] *has created the impression that...*

How 1 – How do you know this?

- *This is clear when the writer states...* [quotation]

How 2 – How can you explore this quotation?

- *This suggests...* [explain what the quotation means/implies]
- *The use of the* [word/ word class/ technique] *conveys that...*

Why – Why does the writer give us this impression?

- [Writer's name] *has presented* [the topic] *in this way in order to...*

WAGOLL

Shakespeare has created the impression that Iago is an embittered, Machiavellian character. This is clear when Iago says: 'I follow him to serve my turn upon him'. This suggests that from the very beginning of the play, Iago is plotting his revenge but will pretend to be loyal to do so. The use of the phrase 'serve my turn' conveys that Iago believes that Othello has already had his 'turn' against him and so he is justified, but Shakespeare makes the audience feel that Iago's scheming is villainous and unjust. Shakespeare has presented Iago in this way in order to make us feel greater sympathy for Othello through dramatic irony, as he is completely unaware of how his 'honest Iago' is cunningly plotting to destroy him.