

August 6, 2003
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Lesson Plan for *Othello*, Act III: Scene iii

Theme: Jealousy and Manipulation

Intended Age Group: Grade 11 or 12 (senior)

Learning Outcomes: Students will be able to...

- 1) discuss the main themes of jealousy and manipulation in *Othello*.
- 2) make personal connections with the text and their own lives
- 3) compare and contrast different film interpretations of the text
- 4) explore media conventions and its effect on persuasion, interpretation
- 5) analyze the interrelated roles of Othello and Iago and how this relationship brings about the final tragedy

Prior to class: have on chalkboard the breakdown of groups

1. sound/music
2. lighting
3. camera shots/cutaways/framing—also how much time passes in the scene?
4. scenery/setting
5. what's left out of the text, what's included

Introduction:

- Mike and Anna—stories of jealousy
- students think of a time when they were jealous—jot down some notes
- students form five groups
- share stories in groups

Transition:

One of the major themes in *Othello* is jealousy. Let's look at some film interpretations of a key scene in the play, Act III, Scene iii. (Assign tasks as above to the groups.)

- A question to frame your observations: How does manipulation foster jealousy?
- in the story (play, text)
 - in the interpretation (2 film versions)
 - is the interpretation effective/believable?

Students view clip from “Othello” (Laurence Fishburne, Kenneth Branagh):

- discuss in groups
- discuss as a whole class

Students view clip from “O” (Mekhi Phifer, Josh Hartnett):

- Since this version doesn't follow the original text, group 5 should look at how closely it follows the storyline of the play.
- discuss in groups—compared to first clip, is this modern version effective?
- discuss as a class

Conclusion: Possible extension ideas.

--write a paragraph about what you think Othello could have done to avoid being manipulated by Iago (or structure this as a dialogue between the characters where Othello recognizes Iago's manipulation and stands up to him)

--move to a critique of "O" as a movie explicitly marketed at teens—if students recognize that it's actually quite badly done, does it make them more suspicious of other 'teen' movies?

--Shakespeare's Iago has been called a "motiveless malignity" (Samuel Taylor Coleridge) because he doesn't explicitly reveal his motive for what he does in the play—both directors had to decide on a motive for Iago that is shown to the viewer, but is not clear to the rest of the characters; lots of food for discussion here

Summaries of this scene in the film versions we used:

"Othello" directed by Oliver Parker:

In this version, the scene opens with Othello (Laurence Fishburne) and Iago (Kenneth Branagh) walking along an open air hallway. They perceive Michael Cassio speaking with Desdemona (Irene Jacob) and then Cassio quickly leaves. Iago says that he likes not what he sees and Othello notes the utterance from Iago. The scene moves on to an open field where Othello and Iago are sparring. They finish and Iago starts to work his magic. He begins to plant the seeds of jealousy in Othello's mind by suggesting that Cassio may not be an honest man. They bounce the idea that Cassio may not be what he seems and the final conclusion is that Cassio may be false. Iago tells Othello that to take his purse is nothing as long as someone does not destroy his good name. In sum, Iago says that he does not care about personal possessions as long as he is not played for a sucker. Iago tells Othello to beware of jealousy. Othello attempts to brush off Iago's words by declaring the Desdemona chose him over others and Iago responds by saying Venetian women are deceitful and that she did deceive her father. Othello entreats Iago to find out more information. The scene closes with Iago in the background with the Moor lamenting his situation.

"O" directed by Tim Blake Nelson:

In this depiction, Odin (Mekhi Phifer) and Hugo (Josh Hartnett) are working out in a weight room. Without much fanfare, Hugo asks Odin if Mike knew that Odin and Desi were getting together. Hugo asks if Odin can trust him. Hugo uses reverse psychology to suggest that Odin is not a jealous person but in reality he really is. Hugo tells Odin to watch his girl and that she did deceive her father. Hugo also says that white girls are like horny snakes and he stresses again how she did trick her father. The scene finishes with Hugo saying that it is important for Odin and himself not to let on to the two 'cheaters'.