

**OTHELLO  
MADE SUPER  
SUPER EASY**



**EVELYN SAMUEL**

Othello  
Made Super Super Easy  
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## DEDICATED TO

Dr Kelvin P  
A Man's A Man for A' That  
*Balliol College Oxford*

There is a star whose beaming ray  
Is shed on ev'ry clime.  
It shines by night, it shines by day  
And ne'er grows dim wi' time.

Away, ye gay landscapes, ye gardens of roses !  
In you let the minions of luxury rove  
Restore me the rocks where the snow-flake reposes  
If still they are sacred to freedom and love.

Tis there for honest poverty.

## REVIEWS

★★★★★ **Othello dissected**

*Reviewed 05 May 2021*

Dissects in detail all facets that makes Shakespeare's Othello such a compelling antagonistic love story.

★★★★★ **A great study guide!**

*Reviewed 26 November 2021*

I needed a concise understanding of the characters, the plot, and interactions to help me achieve the best grade possible. I found it in this study guide made super super easy.

# PREFACE

To all students reading my study guide **Othello made super super easy**. I do hope that my wealth of information will assist you to achieve the highest possible grades. I have formulated a unique structure where detailed explanations are next to the text to make it super super easy for you to connect and understand the book, and to revise without the need to resort to more than one book.

Each scene is defined by a Summary followed by in-depth explanations to the text which is highlighted with relevant important quotes. It identifies connotated meaning, imagery, symbolism, and linguistic devices. The context identifies the rationale behind the book, so that although Shakespeare wrote the play as a jealous-hate tragedy, the play essentially revolves around the historical events happening in the Mediterranean where the Venetians are battling against the Ottoman Turk for control of Cyprus.

Character descriptions and themes are included to provide perspective in understanding the storyline. Typical exam questions are included to give some idea of the scope sought by the Exam Boards. Further details can be found in the Specification published by the Exam Boards on their websites.

Good Luck with your studies and your exam results.



# FOREWARD

What a **super super easy** way to study and understand Shakespeare's 'Othello'. No need to match text with explanation when both are next to each other.

I really enjoyed looking left at the text and right at the explanation. The structure and content of this fantastic Study Guide is a solid base to get to grip with the intricacies of Shakespeare's black and white plot of jealousy by Othello, and hatred by Iago, the nemesis of Othello.

I can without reservation recommend this study guide to all students, and hope they gain as much insight, as I did, into Shakespeare's 'Othello'.

*Teacher of English*

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## SHAKESPEARE

Famous as an Elizabethan playwright, Shakespeare captivated his audience with his imaginative scenes and dialogue. Most of his plays are based on imaginative and real events elsewhere in the world. Although not much is known about his day-to-day life, the wealth of information built into his plays, indicates he had an extensive knowledge of world places and customs, but more importantly, an understanding of the human physique: what made the audience weep, laugh, rage, enjoy and identify with the play.

## PLAY

Shakespeare wrote Othello in circa 1603, melding historical events such as the Ottoman-Venetian War circa 1570 with the human physique of jealousy and lust. The renowned Moorish general Othello hired by the Venetian, is manipulated by his nemesis Iago into a state of jealousy, resulting in Othello's killing his wife Desdemona and later himself on realization of his gross folly.

## CONTEXT

- Othello was written during the Elizabethan era. It is an Elizabethan/Jacobean revenge tragedy with a psychologically driven plot and a dire quest for revenge by the antagonist, Iago.
- Many of the Machiavellian elements ingrained in Othello can be seen in Greek Tragedies where we see the downfall of the hero who becomes a tragic hero and Othello fits perfectly into this category. We see his rise and fall through his hamartia – his unwavering trust in Iago, his hubris – his inability to discover the truth and peripeteia – finding out about the handkerchief and the catharsis - the overwhelming sense of horror that instilled both fear and pity in the audience who, in the end feel relieved from their repressed emotions because everyone paid adequately for their misdeeds.
- The Renaissance period saw a revival of artistic and cultural development through poetry and literature.
- The play is set in Venice in the 16<sup>th</sup> Century at the time when the country was engaged in a war with the Ottoman Empire.
- It was uncommon in Elizabethan society to have Moorish Othello play a significant role in Venetian society.
- Black people were treated differently as seen in Brabantio's, Iago's and Emilia's derogatory treatment of Othello.

- In the Elizabethan and Jacobean era, women assumed subordinate, inferior roles to men but Shakespeare created strong female characters who broke social norms and paid the ultimate price for it. Women were subservient to men as seen in Desdemona's loyalty to Othello and her life was controlled by patriarchy.
- Fathers were expected to choose spouses for their daughters hence Brabantio's fury when Desdemona made her own choice. Brabantio viewed Desdemona as his 'property.'
- Assertive and strong-willed women like Emilia were publicly shamed or punished by the 'ducking' stool.
- Even women's intellectual ability and thought processes were undermined and were thought to be inferior to that of men.
- The underlying theme in Othello is sexual jealousy, Venice was associated with villainy and decadence, hence Shakespeare spiced this Jacobean play with Bianca as a sexually jealous courtesan who is a public mockery and an outcast as seen by her shabby treatment by Iago, Emilia and even Cassio.
- Iago classed Desdemona as a decent, classy, sexually sophisticated woman from Venetian high society.
- This can be true because Desdemona couldn't believe that women can be unfaithful to their husbands and vowed that she will never do such a degrading thing.
- During the Renaissance period, many dramas contained Machiavellian characters who were evil and downright destructive as seen in Iago's malevolent and cynical exploitation of the characters to achieve his own desires.
- In the end these antagonists ultimately get the punishment they rightfully deserve.

**CHARACTERS**

A list of the CHARACTERS and their RELATIONSHIPS

CHARACTER																RELATIONSHIP
ACT	1			2			3				4			5		ACT
SCENE	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	1	2	SCENE
<b>FAMILY</b>																<b>FAMILY</b>
Othello																The Moor
Desdemona																Othello's wife
Brabantio																wife's father
Clown																servant
Herald																Othello's
<b>ANTAGONISTS</b>																<b>ANTAGONISTS</b>
Iago																Ensign
Emilia																Iago's wife
Cassio																lieutenant
Roderigo																Venetian
<b>VENETIANS</b>																<b>VENETIANS</b>
Lodovico																Brabantio man
Gratiano																Brabantio man
Duke																
Senator 1																
Senator 2																
Officer																
Sailor																
Musician																
<b>CYPRIANS</b>																<b>CYPRIANS</b>
Montano																Ex-governor
Bianca																Cassio's lover
Messenger																
Gentleman 1																
Gentleman 2																
Gentleman 3																
SCENE	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	1	2	SCENE
ACT	1			2			3				4			5		ACT
CHARACTER																RELATIONSHIP

## SYNOPSIS

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**In Act 1**, love is the theme. The Moorish general Othello has secretly married Desdemona, the daughter of a wealthy Venetian family. Roderigo a jealous suitor of Desdemona, informs her father Brabantio who immediately goes in search of Othello and accuses him of bewitching his daughter. The Duke of Venice intercedes but Brabantio disowns his daughter even though Desdemona and Othello declare their love for each other. The senate decide that Othello should be the general to defend Cyprus from the forthcoming Turkish invasion. Desdemona asks to be allowed to accompany her husband, which is granted but she is put in the care of Emilia, Iago's wife, as lady-in-waiting. Iago is Othello's ensign who has served with him on previous military campaigns, but is a self-seeking opportunistic, who becomes Othello's nemesis. Brabantio warns Othello against trusting Desdemona, and Iago schemes to help Roderigo seduce Desdemona.

**In Act 2**, conflict is the theme. The Turkish fleet is destroyed by a storm, but Othello and his entourage arrive safely in Cyprus. Iago dislikes Cassio, Othello's lieutenant, and makes Roderigo believe that Cassio is his rival for Desdemona's affections. On the night of victory celebrations, Iago gets Cassio drunk, and undermines Cassio's reputation by informing Montano, the previous governor of Cyprus, that Cassio is a drunkard. Iago then goads Roderigo into picking a fight with Cassio, in which Montano is accidentally wounded. The fight is stopped by Othello on his arrival, with the consequence that Cassio is dismissed from his military post and disgraced. Iago, who has planned all, persuades Cassio to let Desdemona plead his case for reinstatement. To action this plan, Iago persuades Emilia, his wife, to promote Cassio's cause with Desdemona while poisoning Othello's mind with the idea that Cassio and Desdemona are lovers.

**In Act 3**, jealousy is the theme. Cassio hires musicians to serenade Othello and Desdemona, but in response, Othello sends his clown to tell them to go. While Othello and Iago are away inspecting the fortifications, Cassio and Emilia persuade Desdemona to plead Cassio's cause, but when Othello returns, he spots Cassio leaving, and is suspicious of his wife's motives in supporting Cassio's cause. This is further fuelled when later Iago hints that Desdemona has committed adultery with Cassio. Jealousy begins to take hold. Meanwhile, Desdemona drops her handkerchief which is picked up by Emilia and later given to Iago. Iago sees an opportunity to use the handkerchief as a weapon to support the adultery claim and tells Othello that Cassio had called out for Desdemona in a dream and had been seen wiping his beard with the handkerchief that Othello had given Desdemona as a token of their love.

Othello enraged, tells Iago that in three days he expects him to say that Cassio is not alive. With that, Othello promotes Iago to lieutenant. Desdemona asks the clown to inform Cassio that she is still pleading his case. Othello challenges Desdemona about the lost handkerchief, but she cannot produce it which annoys Othello. He is becoming convinced that what Iago has said is true. Meanwhile, Cassio's mistress Bianca, is also annoyed because Cassio has neglected her. Cassio gives her the handkerchief, saying he found it in his bed chamber.

**In Act 4**, torment is the theme. Iago torments Othello with crude images of Desdemona's infidelity and persuades Othello to observe him talking to Cassio. Not being able to hear, but seeing Desdemona's handkerchief in Bianca's hand, and believing that Desdemona must have given it to Cassio as a love token, Othello vows to murder Desdemona. Rather than poisoning her, Iago suggests smothering her in the marital bed. Bianca returns the handkerchief to Cassio. Next, Lodovico arrives with news that Othello is to return to Venice and Cassio is to take his place. Desdemona also arrives, but Othello is seething, and ends up striking Desdemona. Lodovico is shocked. Later, Othello questions Emilia but is not convinced that she is telling the truth about Desdemona's actions. Then, Othello confronts Desdemona, to see if she will confess to adultery, but she remains firm, declaring her innocence. Not being able to get Emilia to condemn Desdemona, Othello gives her money to keep quiet about recent events. Desdemona appeals to Iago for help, but Iago, the instigator of Desdemona's woes, is duplicitous, and assures her it is a misunderstanding, too much pressure of state on Othello. Scheming as ever, Iago persuades Roderigo to kill Cassio. Othello with thoughts of murder, and Iago suggestion of smothering Desdemona in their bed, sends her to prepare for bed. Together, Desdemona and Emilia talk about female infidelity. Desdemona says she still loves Othello, and Emilia says she wishes Desdemona had never met him. Desdemona is unable to dismiss a melancholy song from her mind which she sings.

**In Act 5**, justice is the theme. Roderigo is wounded by Cassio, but Iago stabs Cassio in the leg who is then attended by Lodovico and Gratiano. To cover up the plot, Iago kills Roderigo, and then accuses Bianca of taking part in the plot to kill Cassio. Gripped by jealousy, Othello smothers Desdemona in their bed, still protesting her innocence. Emilia finds Desdemona on the verge of death, proclaiming that Othello is not to blame for her death. Emilia raises the alarm, Iago arrives, stabs Emilia in revenge for revealing his dastardly scheme to kill Othello and leaves her to die on the bed next to Desdemona. Guards return with Iago who is then wounded by Othello. Realising his folly, Othello kills himself and dies next to Desdemona. Iago is led away, and Cassio is made governor of Cyprus.

## SETTING

The two principal locations are Venice in Italy and the island of Cyprus. The most poignant scenes are inside buildings, and in particular the matrimonial bedroom.

At the end of the sixteenth century, dramatists made use of Venice as a setting for tragedies because of its renaissance history encompassing elements of power, culture, wealth, and intrigue. In particular, the sophisticated culture mix generated by trade which led to people from many different countries to visit and live in the city. Othello the Moor being one of them.

Shakespeare uses the Ottoman invasion of Cyprus to create a platform where jealousy, hate, rivalry, ambition, violence, and lust lurk in a Machiavellian world of deceit and cunning, all too familiar to Italian cities like Venice. Iago being the principal Machiavellian architect in Othello's downfall.

## FORM

Shakespeare's Othello takes the form of a play made up entirely of dialogue where the audience discover through words delivered by actors, the type of characters, their motives, their relationships together with the storyline.

Shakespeare's aim was to educate and entertain ordinary people in an age when few people could read - to draw out the emotions in people. In this case, to expose the dark side of human desire where jealousy, lust and ambition destroy love through connivance and deceit.

The dialogue is in three different forms: mainly blank verse, prose and rhyming verse. Each line of blank verse, is made up of roughly ten syllables, organised into five groups of two, where an unstressed syllable is followed by a stressed syllable. This creates an air of authority and identifies higher status characters such as Desdemona from lower characters such as servants who speak in ordinary prose.

Rhyming verse is used by Shakespeare to end lines in a memorable way so that the audience recall it in later scenes; to make characters complete each other's rhymes to emphasise unity in thought, action, ideas and moods between them.