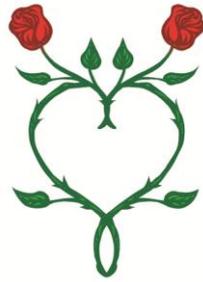


OTHELLO

Education Pack



GUILDFORD SHAKESPEARE COMPANY

 GUILDFORD SHAKESPEARE COMPANY
PRESENTS

OTHELLO

Directed by CAROLINE DEVLIN Designed by NEIL IRISH Lighting by DECLAN RANDALL Sound by MATT EATON

5 - 22 FEB 2014 | HOLY TRINITY CHURCH, GUILDFORD HIGH STREET
Box Office 01483 304384 | www.guildford-shakespeare-company.co.uk

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YOUTH THEATRE**

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INTRODUCTION



This education pack has been written by GSC to complement the stage production in February 2014, staged in Holy Trinity Church.

The information contained in here can be used as preparation material before seeing the performance or as follow-up work afterwards in the class room. This pack is aimed at final year GCSE or A-level students (or equivalent).

This pack contains:

1. GSC – our approach to Shakespeare
2. Cast/Character and Creative Team List
3. Synopsis
4. Shakespeare's Language
5. The Origins of the Moor of Venice
6. Interview with Director Caroline Devlin
7. Othello Mood Boards
8. Practical classroom exercise taken from the rehearsal room

A film of actors David Carr and Nicole Hartley discussing the roles and relationship of Othello and Desdemona is available on the GSC website.

Practical in-school workshops on Othello can be booked, with actors coming into your school to work on the play.

Please see www.guildford-shakespeare-company.co.uk or call 01483 304384 for more details.

GUILDFORD SHAKESPEARE COMPANY

OUR APPROACH TO SHAKESPEARE

***“One of the strongest and most consistent companies
operating in and around London”***

PlayShakespeare.com, 2011

Guildford Shakespeare Company is a professional site-specific theatre company, specialising in Shakespeare. Our approach places the audience right at the heart of the action, immersing them in the world of the play, thereby demystifying the legend that Shakespeare is for an elite, educated few but rather is immediate and accessible to everyone.

“...to be spellbound, amused and to follow every moment of text and to want the production never to end...one of the best evenings of theatre I have ever been privileged to attend.” Audience member 2011

We want our 21st Century audiences to experience the same thrill and excitement that Shakespeare’s original audiences must have felt when they first saw the Ghost appear in *Hamlet*, the rousing battle cry of Henry V, and edge-of-your-seat anticipation in *The Comedy of Errors*.

At GSC we use diverse and unusual non-theatre venues to create dynamic and challenging productions. From castles to lakes, churches to pubs, our approach merges the audience and acting space so that you’re given a visceral, stimulating and, above all, unique theatre experience.

“I am so thrilled to be able to bring my grandchildren to such quality theatre right here on our doorstep. I also think that the proximity to the stage makes the action all the more real and compelling for youngsters” Audience member, 2011

GSC productions are fresh, fast and modern in their interpretation of Shakespeare, but always in the original text and NEVER dumbed down.

We hope you enjoy these fabulous stories as much as we enjoy re-telling them.

All best wishes

Matt & Sarah

Joint Artistic & Executive Producers

THE CAST AND CREATIVE TEAM

OTHELLO, a Moor, General in the Venetian army
DESDEMONA, his wife
CASSIO, his Lieutenant
IAGO, his Ancient (Ensign)

David Carr
Nicole Hartley
Matt Pinches
Chris Porter

EMILIA, wife to Iago
RODERIGO, in love with Desdemona
BIANCA, a local girl in love with Cassio

Rosalind Blessed
Christopher York
LJ Wrey

DUKE OF VENICE

BRABANTIO, a Venetian senator, Desdemona's father
LODOVICO, his kinsman
MONTANO, Governor of Cyprus

James Chalmers
Anthony Cable
Anthony Cable
James Chalmers

ENSEMBLE (senators, messengers, officers, soldiers, sailors...)

Stuart Randall, Luke Wrigley, Scott Livingstone, Charlie Bowyer, LJ Wrey

Director / Adaptor	Caroline Devlin
Designer	Neil Irish
Lighting Designer	Declan Randall
Sound Designer	Matt Eaton
Fight Director	Philip d'Orléans
Movement Director	Nick Winston
Verse & Vocal Coach	Sarah Stephenson
Assistant Director	Richard Neale
Assistant Designer	Anett Black
Production Manager	Olivia Dermot-Walsh
Production Assistant	Ian Taylor
DSM	Jenny Skivens
ASM	Kate Thompson
Producer	Sarah Gobran

Guildford Shakespeare Company Trustees:

Alex Brayshaw
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SYNOPSIS

Roderigo is in love with Desdemona and commissions Othello's ancient Iago to help him in his suit. Desdemona, however, has secretly married Othello, against her father's wishes.

Unseen, Iago and Roderigo warn Desdemona's father Brabantio that his daughter has married Othello and in a rage, Brabantio vows to break this marriage.

Meanwhile, Othello is summoned to the senate with news of an imminent Turkish invasion of Cyprus. Brabantio follows to accuse Othello before the assembled senate and the Duke, who finds Othello's and Desdemona's explanation of their love convincing, orders Brabantio to acquiesce and orders Othello to make ready for Cyprus.

The story now moves to Cyprus where news is that the Turkish fleet has been wrecked in a storm at sea. Soon after the Venetians arrive, whose ships have evaded the storm, and Othello announces that there will be revelling that evening to celebrate Cyprus' safe deliverance from the Turks.

Iago assures Roderigo that Desdemona will lose interest in Othello and seek satisfaction elsewhere in Cassio. Iago has recently been passed over for promotion to lieutenant in favour of the officer Michael Cassio.

A plan is hatched where Roderigo will put Cassio into disgrace by starting a fight with him. Iago gets Cassio drunk and a fight with Roderigo and others ensues. Finding such disrespectful behavior in his lieutenant, Othello strips Cassio of his rank. Iago reassures Cassio that he can regain his place by pleading to Desdemona.

Iago furthers his goal of removing Cassio by suggesting to Othello that Cassio and Desdemona are involved in an affair. Her ensuing entreaties to Othello to reinstate Cassio as lieutenant add to his conviction that his wife is unfaithful.

Iago uses his own wife and Desdemona's friend, Emilia, to steal a handkerchief from Desdemona. This handkerchief was a lover's present from Othello and when he discovers it is missing he is driven further into rage and suspicious jealousy.

Through Iago's machinations, Othello becomes more and more consumed by jealousy and he eventually orders Iago to kill Cassio.

Iago later convinces Roderigo that he must kill Cassio in order to stop Othello and Desdemona leaving, as they have been summoned back to Venice. The assassination is fudged and Cassio wounds Roderigo instead. In the dark, Iago wounds Cassio and runs away. As the fray is discovered, Iago returns and claims Cassio's assailant is Roderigo, whom he murders.

Elsewhere, Othello prepares to kill his sleeping wife. Desdemona wakes and despite asserting her innocence, Othello smothers her. When Emilia returns with news of the fight she sees Desdemona dead and Othello admits that he has killed her.

Horrified by her role in Desdemona's death, Emilia reveals how she found the handkerchief and gave it to Iago, who kills Emilia and tries to flee. Othello, disgusted with his actions, commits suicide and Iago is led away for court martial.

SHAKESPEARE'S LANGUAGE

Elizabethan Language

In Elizabethan English people were much more used to telling stories and listening to them, than they are today. Books and printing were expensive and not everyone could read, so the world Shakespeare was working in could be said to be an Oral Culture.

People went to **hear** a play, not **see** a play. An important point. Shakespeare's society relied on listening. From accounts of voyages in taverns to folk stories, people were naturally trained to listen and to speak; something we don't give as much weight to today because we rely on seeing.

The way people spoke was also a lot rougher and tougher than English is today - there is the opinion that Shakespeare himself might have had Birmingham accent! When you add to this the fact that on stage theatres had no scenery, lighting or modern special effects to create atmosphere, you begin to see the mechanics behind why Shakespeare's language is descriptive.

Shakespeare's Stage

Shakespeare was a 'commercial playwright', writing to make money: if his plays didn't sell, not only did he not get paid but the rest of the company didn't either! He was also an actor and perhaps most importantly, a share-holder in the theatre in which he worked.

Plays were performed during the day, usually between 2pm and 5pm – it is very likely that the original performances of Shakespeare's plays were only about 2 ½ hours long – and the actors could see the audience, unlike in today's theatre – a very exciting but dangerous thing!

1500 people would gather to see a play, with 400-600 people paying a penny to stand. In the theatre there would have been representatives from every part of society, talking, doing business, eating, drinking, chatting each other up! It was the playwright's and the actors' job to keep their attention.

Practical ideas

Don't try to analyse the meanings of words and phrasing but rather let them inform you by how they make you feel. It is a bit of a leap of faith to begin with, but if we give ourselves over to the words, rhythms, and sounds, they will tell us how the character/situation is to be played.

Tip. This is a play – so do that! **Play** with the words, their sounds, their rhythms; play with the characters and their situations.

THE ORIGINS OF THE MOOR OF VENICE

In August 1600, the King of Barbary (north Africa) arrived in London for a 6 month to negotiate an alliance against Spain. The 42 year old Moroccan, who communicated mostly in Italian through an interpreter, was welcomed and entertained by Queen Elizabeth I. The Christmas court celebrations of 1600/01 were, in part, delivered by Shakespeare's acting company, The Lord Chamberlain's Men, and so it is not hard to surmise that it was here that the playwright first encountered 'the valiant Moor'.

Shakespeare must have been intrigued by these exotic foreigners, and though there is no direct evidence to suggest so, it is tantalising to suppose that the experience of witnessing a cultured, stately 'Barbarian' (as they were called) began to fuel the dramatist's imagination.

The play *Othello* is given a date of 1603/04 and sits in the midst of Shakespeare's greatest works, sandwiched between *Hamlet* and *King Lear*. Unlike these tragedies and the surrounding plays of *Measure for Measure* and *All's Well That Ends Well*, it is a simple story that contains surprisingly few characters and a lack of sub-plots; yet it boasts some of the most beautiful poetry in the canon and one of the most exciting, if not the most compelling scene in all of Shakespeare's work – Iago's gulling of Othello in Act 3.

Taking on the baton from *Hamlet*, *Othello* continues the writer's fascination with the psychology of the mind – Othello's questioning of himself and Iago's observation of the human condition reminds us of Hamlet's awesome declaration '*What a piece of work is a man!*'. *Othello* is a sublime study of manipulation without force, a forensic dissection of how to destroy trust and love.

The literal source for Shakespeare's play is a series of 10 stories called the *Hecatommithi*, written by Geraldini Cinthio, published in Venice in 1566. The fact that there was no English translation until 1753, also tells us something about Shakespeare's grasp of languages. The *Hecatommithi* are a set of moral tales of which *Othello* is the third, entitled '*The Unfaithfulness of Husbands and Wives*'.

The tale is fairly wooden and the characters two dimensional; only Desdemona is given a name whilst others are referred to as types such as 'the captain', 'the Moor', 'the ensign's wife'. Here the character of Iago is described as a 'handsome villain', who after being rejected by Desdemona seeks to destroy her, and does so with the help of Othello where they beat her with a sand-filled bag before tearing down the house upon her.

A significant addition to the story by Shakespeare is the character of Roderigo, who works as a foil for Iago. The addition of Roderigo also adds depth to the suspense in the play as he is the only person (along with the audience) who knows Iago's true intents.

Shakespeare's choice of the 'Blackamoor' for a central tragic hero is also an indication of the playwright's growing reputation and brilliance as a master storyteller. Negroes and Moors had been seen on stage before, (*The Battle Alcazar* in 1589, *Lusts Dominion* in 1600 by Dekker, and Shakespeare's own *Titus Andronicus* with the villain 'Aaron the Moor') but although the

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notion of racism as we know it today did not exist for Elizabethans, their view of these exotic people and their customs was one of scepticism and wariness.

Throughout the medieval period the colour black had been associated with evil and death. Reginald Scot's *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* published in 1584 which collated English views of superstition and magic, reported that the Devil's favourite form as a human being was as a Negro. The expansion of trade routes around the world brought reports from these new worlds of sub-human, inferior beings which Gonzalo describes in *The Tempest* as

"mountaineers dewlapp'd like bulls...whose heads stood in their breasts"

Combine this with their skin colour associating them with evil and death, and a picture of fear and unknowing is easily put together for the average Groundling. In the very first scene of a play entitled *Othello: The Tragedy of the Moor of Venice* the audience are given confirmation of the archetypal Moor, and notably not by a senator or a prince but by an everyman, an army Ensign, with graphic references to beasts and aggressive sexuality.

However, Shakespeare then does something unexpected: he turns this common view on its head, for when Othello appears he is a mannered General who speaks eloquently and poetically

"Keep up your bright swords or the dew will rust them"

he tells the soldiers about to enter into a street brawl. This Moor is revered by the Duke of Venice and trusted as the only man to protect the senate's interests against the Turks who are threatening an invasion of Cyprus. Othello is also a Christian, not a pagan.

Shakespeare goes further to elevate Othello in our minds through his account of winning the heart of Desdemona; of which her father is disgusted and pronounces that Othello has clearly 'bewitched' her. Over the next five acts however we witness the tragedy unfold as Iago reduces Othello to that same archetype the audience expected to see at the start – a beast, enraged with jealousy and consumed with confusion and passion.

However, it should be noted that *Othello* is not a play about race, but about human failings. The first act finishes with a significant instruction both to the onstage characters and to us in the audience:

*"If virtue no delighted beauty lack,
Your son-in-law is far more fair than black."*

With these parting words from the Duke of Venice Shakespeare leaves the 'thick-lipped' references behind and shifts the focus the story on to a brilliantly detailed human tragedy on the meaning of loyalty, betrayal and suspicion...and takes us back to the dignified portrait of that Moorish ambassador which the playwright may have met 3 years before.

Matt Pinches is Co-Founder of Guildford Shakespeare Company, an Associate Tutor at the University of Surrey and lectures freelance on the works and life of Shakespeare.

IN CONVERSATION WITH...**CAROLINE DEVLIN**

The director of *Othello* discusses the play, the characters and the time period in which this production is set.

***Othello* is an unusual play in that it starts with the potential to be a sweeping epic of sea battles and soldiers, but in fact it quickly becomes an intimate domestic tragedy. Is that part of its endearing appeal do you think?**

Very much so, it isn't dealing with Kings and Queens and their struggle for the throne, which although exciting, is not something most people have to deal with on a daily basis! This is a play about a man and a wife in the early stages of their relationship; it explores the first thrill of love and the poisonous terrible emotion that is jealousy, which is something we can all identify with to a greater or lesser degree.

Even the locations are day-to-day, from a city street, to soldiers in their barracks and the terrible climax ends up in a bedroom. All these elements make it very easy to relate to and given the terrible result, chillingly familiar.

In today's rehearsal you were talking to the cast about the continual imagery of water and the sea in *Othello*. Can you elaborate on this and its importance for your production?

So much of the play is dominated by water, from canals to sea-battles, from storms to shipwrecks, and that still only takes us to the middle of Act 2, so water in all its varying forms seemed to form a lot of the imagery and setting of the play. But most importantly, the language of the play, especially Iago's, is littered with sea-faring and nautical references; one of my favourite couplets of his being "If consequence do but approve my dream,/My boats sails freely, both with wind and stream".

The Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung equated water with the subconscious and we've reflected the watery theme through the colour palette choices for the show and the structure of the quay-side, constantly reminding us of our proximity to watery depths both literal and subconscious.

The relationship between Iago and Othello is magnetic to watch, and some people would even say that this play should be called *Iago* rather than *Othello*! What is your view of their relationship and how have you approached this?

That is understandable to a degree as Iago has so much direct contact with the audience, so he builds a very visceral if uncomfortable relationship with us. But it diminishes the play to make it simply about an angry, evil man. Shakespeare (in my opinion) is able to create a hero figure in Othello that one could suggest is representative of all that is great and heroic and good in human nature, so to watch that being destroyed before us is a horrifying site.

I don't see this play as the triumph of evil, but as a call to arms for us to stand for integrity and truth in ourselves as individuals and as society, Othello's downfall warns us, it is all too easy to be blinded by emotions that lead us to violence and destruction not only between countries, but given the domestic tragedy, in our very homes.

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Over the years there has been much written on Iago as a psychopath. Without giving too much away, do you hold with this interpretation?

In our modern psycho-analytical world it is easy and probably correct to identify psychopathic tendencies in Iago, but this wasn't the field that Shakespeare was working in. He simply recognised how easy it was for human nature to turn to violence. It perhaps frightens us to think that Iago can commit such evil with so little provocation, so we put him in a context, as a mad-man. I think that lets him off the hook and takes us one step away from the full brutality of it. Iago isn't mad, he is all too clear in his actions and makes a very

definitive choice to wreak the havoc he does. He's the man next door whom no-one would suspect, so it chills us even more to have to acknowledge what human beings are capable of.

Finally, you've chosen to set this production in the late 1950s. Can you tell us a little bit about the thought behind this?

This play is incredibly modern in its subject matter and setting, so I wanted to use a time that is still within living memory but also a time that served the social politics of the play. In 1959 it was still quite shocking for a black man to marry a white woman and a woman's place was still in the home. Even looking at fashions of the time, women dressed either as a cosy domestic home-maker or as a vampish sex-siren, the virgin/whore mentality was still prevalent, Brabantio discovering his daughter Desdemona is not in her bedroom declares "How got she out?" This is still very much a man's world!

On a wider scale the world was in the grips of the Cold War, with all its developing paranoia, so a potentially small skirmish like Cyprus being invaded has the threat of escalating into something of global consequence, the fear of nuclear war and all its potential horrors was very much in people's psyche. In 1570 there was a Venetian/Turkish battle for Cyprus (a battle within Shakespeare's living memory) and of course in the late 50's and early sixties Cyprus was in the grips of conflict, so that epoch seemed to sit perfectly for serving the mores of an Elizabethan play.

OTHELLO STAGE DESIGN MOOD BOARDS

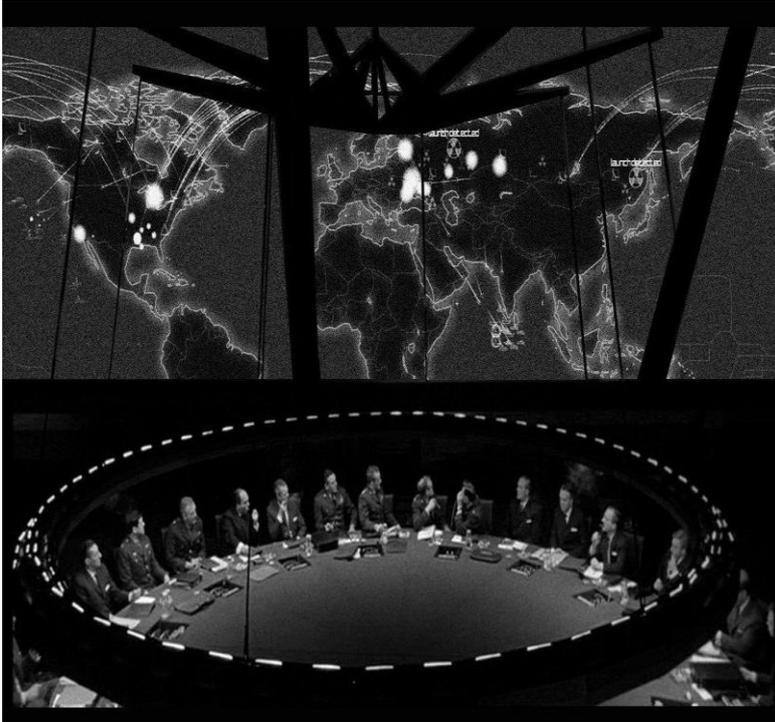
INSPIRATION FROM 1950'S CYPRUS



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OTHELLO STAGE DESIGN MOOD BOARDS IDEAS FOR VENICE SENATE, ACT 1, SC 2



OTHELLO EXERCISE **STATUS HANDKERCHIEFS**

Try this exercise the cast explored in rehearsal:

The group are given characters from the play and are asked to line themselves up in their order of status in the play.

Once agreed upon, take 4 characters from line up, the other watch. Handkerchiefs are given to the four characters - they can put them where they think best - in their pocket, in their hands... The following instructions are given:

The highest status character can take anyone's handkerchief

The next can take anyone's except the highest status

The third can only take the lowest

The fourth - no-one's

Once a handkerchief is taken it is dropped and the person from whom it was taken picks it up and carries on.

The characters are then begin to interact with one another - NO SPEAKING.

Let the game play for a little while. It is a fascinating game to watch as characters begin explore not only their relationship to one another but also how it feels to be the lower or high status - how does Roderigo feel to continually have his handkerchief taken away; how does the battle between Othello and Brabantio play out if Brabantio is given higher status because of his senator position.... the way in which handkerchiefs are taken or even demanded - are they given freely or regretfully?

Encourage the students to talk about their experiences. A variation could be who has the most love, which might put the females characters further up the status chain - especially Bianca!