

Week 1: Tragic Terminology

- A **Tragedy** is a play dealing with tragic events. It usually includes the downfall of a character and an unhappy ending.
- A **tragic hero** is a central character who begins the play as a hero but causes their own downfall and death as a result of a character flaw.
- The flaw in the tragic hero is called their **hamartia** (Greek = sin/error).
- A **motif** is a repeated image, movement or piece of music, which has particular importance within a play. It might also help to establish a certain mood or tone.
- **Comic relief** refers to moments of comedy or comedic characters who are created in order to contrast more serious scenes, or to provide a relief from sadness.
- **Pathos** is a quality in a character which evokes pity or sadness.
- **Tragic waste** is when good is destroyed along with the bad at the resolution of the play. This often happens when somebody unnecessarily loses their life – it might even be the ‘good guy.’
- An **internal conflict** is a battle which the tragic hero has within their own mind.
- An **external conflict** is a problem or dilemma which the hero faces and which links to another character.
- **Catharsis** is a feeling of relief once conflict is resolved and order is restored.

Week 2: Othello - Main characters and plot

What is the plot of Othello?

- Othello (a general in the Venetian army) promotes Cassio over Iago. Iago is angry and wants revenge.
- Othello has recently married Desdemona in secret. Iago reveals this to Brabantio (Desdemona's father) who is not happy about the marriage.
- Iago then plots to make Othello believe his new wife has been unfaithful with Cassio. He plants her handkerchief in Cassio's bedroom and stages a conversation to anger Othello.
- Cassio gets into a drunken fight and loses his promotion.
- Desdemona tries to help Cassio appeal to Othello but, thanks to Iago, it seems as if she is trying to help the man she is having an affair with.
- Iago continues to manipulate Othello to the point where he kills Desdemona.
- Emilia (Iago's wife) reveals the truth to Othello. Iago then kills his wife.
- Othello is overcome with guilt and grief, he stabs Iago (who is only wounded) and then commits suicide.

Week 3: Othello - Context

- The play's focus on love, jealousy and betrayal have made the play popular because these themes are still relevant and often used in literature today.
- Race: Elizabethan and Jacobean Literature tended to present other races using negative stereotypes. The character of Othello was the first portrayal of a noble black protagonist in English Literature.
- Gender: Women were expected to be chaste (not engaging in any sexual behaviour), quiet and subservient (prepared to obey) their father or husband. Desdemona is an innovative character because she chooses her own partner.
- Marriage: Marriages were often arranged by a woman's father—women were expected to marry someone of the same class and race.
- Othello and Desdemona's marriage went against society's expectations as interracial marriages were seen as “unnatural.”
- The play is exciting to critics because it explores and undermines stereotypes about race and gender.

Week 4: Othello - Context (2) and key quotations

- Othello was written to be performed at The Globe Theatre in London.
- Canopy—The stage was covered with a canopy but the rest of the play was open air. There was no electricity so plays began at 2.00pm; Shakespeare used language cleverly to create scenes at night time.
- A trapdoor led to an area below the stage. This is not explicitly used in Othello, but often the trapdoor might also be used to symbolise hell in other plays.
- Othello is dehumanised by the names “thing” “devil” and “old black ram” (Brabantio).
- Desdemona is described as “half the wooer” in her relationship, implying that she was very much part of the decision making in the marriage.
- Brabantio accuses Othello of binding Desdemona in “chains of magic.” This witchcraft imagery suggests that he cannot believe that Desdemona would choose to marry Othello.
- Shakespeare ensures that Iago uses hellish language such as “all the tribe of hell,” to ensure that he is associated with dark forces.
- Desdemona and Othello's love is given nearly spiritual importance, as she refers to him as “my dear Othello” and he refers to Desdemona as her “soul's joy.”
- Shakespeare portrays the relationship as equal, as Desdemona is referred to as “my fair warrior,” which suggests that Desdemona has strength when she becomes involved in war.
- As Othello becomes “much changed,” he uses more warlike, aggressive imagery; He threatens to “chop [Desdemona] into messes.”

Week 5: Othello - Good vs Evil

- Shakespeare presents the audience with thought provoking and valuable lessons about human behaviour.
- In 'Othello' the theme of good and evil is evident through the actions and intentions of the characters.
- The theme of good and evil is widely explored in 'Othello' through the on-going conflict between Iago and Othello.
- Shakespeare's use of juxtaposition between good and evil symbolises the consequences of having too much of one trait.
- Desdemona is symbolic of the good in 'Othello' just as Iago represents the evil. Desdemona is often depicted wearing white, which is associated with purity and morality.
- Desdemona is the protagonist presented as pure, graceful and saint-like. She views the world as a place with no evil and ultimately pays the price for her naivety. She becomes the victim to a cruel fate.
- Ultimately, Iago aims to hurt Othello in any way he can and this is done through the expense of others.
- Iago eliminates every shred of 'goodness' as his manipulation and ill intent poison those around him.
- As the main protagonist, Othello suffers from an extreme internal conflict as he is battling with the good and bad within him.

Week 6: Othello Dramatic Conventions and Love, Betrayal and Friendship

- **Hamartia:** A fatal flaw which leads to a downfall.

Othello's **hamartia** is his jealousy when he is manipulated into believing Desdemona's unfaithfulness.

- **Patriarchal society:** a social system in which men hold primary power in roles of political leadership, moral authority, social privilege and control of property.

In Othello, **Patriarchy** is common as we see it at the very start of the play with Brabantio curses Desdemona for going against his wishes and marrying a man who he has not given consent to. Desdemona becomes the enemy and loses her dignity because Othello places importance on the opinion of a man than of a woman, even if it is his own wife.

- **Supernatural Elements:** Something that goes against the natural laws and understanding of the universe.

The talk of **witchcraft** and **magic** is used to suggest how Othello is discriminated because of the colour of his skin and the ancient belief of the colour black being representative of the devil.

- **Oppressive:** Inflicting harsh treatment and asserting authority.

Iago's behaviour towards the end of the plays suggests that he is intent on asserting his power over his wife, Emilia. He tells her 'charm your tongue,' 'hold your peace' and to 'go home' many times. His behaviour is **oppressive**.

- **Inferior:** a person who is low in rank, status, ability and quality.

Iago believes Othello to be his **inferior** because of his race and ethnicity. Furthermore, he believes that Othello is also intellectually inferior because 'the Moor is of a free and open nature, that thinks men honest that but seem to be so, and will as tenderly be led by the nose as asses are.'

- **Superior:** a person who is high in rank, status, ability and quality.

Othello is Iago's **superior** because of his experience, skills and ability in battle. Othello is also the General of the Venetian Army while Iago is a courtier (advisor).