



William Shakespeare's

Othello

Adapted by Brandon J. Dirden

Directed by Vincent Murphy

October 10th-November 3rd, 2006

Conant Performing Arts Center

Set Designer

Kat Conley

Costume Designer

Sydney Roberts

Lighting Designer

Liz Lee

**Composer/
Sound Design**

Klimchak

Dramaturg

Sarah Smith

Stage Manager

Margo Kuhne

Study Guide Creation

Allen O'Reilly, Education Director

Brooke Collins, Education Associate

Stacey Colosa Lucas, Carrie Ragsdale, *Editors*

Contributors: Richard Garner, Sarah Smith, Kat Conley, Sidney Roberts

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**Please be sure to share the theatre etiquette sheet with your students, as we will expect them to comply to our standards when they are in our facility.*

***All writing and discussion questions are based on the Georgia Standards for the 2006-2007 school year.*

Characters in Othello

Othello	the Moor, (a general in the service of Venice)
Brabantio	Father to Desdemona, (a Venetian senator)
Cassio	an honorable lieutenant (who serves under Othello)
Iago	a villain (Othello's ancient or ensign)
Duke	of Venice
Montano	governor of Cyprus (replaced by Othello)
Lodovico	a noble Venetian (Desdemona's cousin)
Desdemona	wife to Othello (and Brabantio's daughter)
Emilia	wife to Iago
Bianca	a courtesan (and Cassio's mistress)

Role Assignments

Othello	Brandon J. Dirden
Iago	John Preston
Desdemona	Park Krausen
Cassio	Joe Knezevich
Emilia/Duke of Venice/Bianca	Kate Donadio
Brabantio/Montano/Lodovico	Chris Kayser

This particular piece is a six-actor adaptation. The adaptor felt as though the heart of the play was focused on two and three person scenes. He then started mapping the character's entrances and exits, and realized that it was possible to make such an interesting and drastic choice. By eliminating the crowd scenes, the audience is able to focus directly on the dramatic action. However, this choice presents a challenge in casting, which we handle by using a common theatre solution: doubling roles. Doubling means that one actor is playing several different characters, and the difference in characters can be distinct by physical movements, vocal changes, and costume changes. One example of this challenge is that the lady ensemble role must also play the Duke of Venice.

Synopsis, aka “A Pageful of Spoilers”

By Sarah Smith, Dramaturg

The play opens in the middle of the night in Venice. Iago, a military man under Othello’s command, announces his hatred of Othello, because he had heard a rumor that Othello and his wife once had an affair. Iago then anonymously wakes up Brabantio to tell him that his daughter Desdemona has secretly married Othello. Brabantio, distressed, sets out to find them.

The Duke of Venice has already called an unexpected war council. Brabantio arrives to make his case that Othello has worked some evil magic on Desdemona to make her elope with him. In answer, Othello tells the story of his courtship of her, how when visiting Brabantio’s house he told Desdemona the stories of his perilous life experiences as a warrior, and hearing them she fell in love with him. Desdemona arrives and confirms Othello’s explanation and declares her love for him. The Duke is sympathetic to the lovers and decides not to let Brabantio decide a punishment for Othello, though she promised that she would.

The Duke asks Othello to set out at once to defend Cyprus, (A Venetian stronghold), against a pending attack from the Turks. Othello makes his preparations for battle and entrusts Desdemona to Iago, who will take her on a separate ship to meet Othello on the island of Cyprus. A storm kills the Turks and spares Othello the need to do so, and the Venetians all arrive at Cyprus ready for a night of celebration.

Iago encourages Cassio (Othello’s lieutenant) to drink, and Cassio gets into a drunken brawl. Othello, his night with Desdemona interrupted once again, arrives on the scene and fires Cassio from his post. Iago advises Cassio to go through Desdemona with his appeals to get Othello to reinstate him to his post.

Iago then begins his work of making Othello suspicious of Cassio. As Iago begins to insinuate the possibility of an inappropriate relationship between Cassio and Desdemona, Othello is immediately caught in suspicion, distress, and growing jealousy.

Desdemona’s companion and Iago’s wife, Emilia, finds a handkerchief that was a special gift from Othello to Desdemona and turns it over to Iago, who has been asking her to steal it. Iago tells Othello that Cassio has been talking in his sleep about his lovemaking with Desdemona, and that he has seen Cassio with Desdemona’s handkerchief. Othello, wracked with jealousy, rages to Iago, and Iago promises Othello to kill Cassio.

As Part Two opens, Cassio runs into his girlfriend Bianca. Having found the handkerchief at his house, Cassio gives it to Bianca and asks her to make a copy of its excellent stitching. In the meantime, Desdemona realizes that the handkerchief is lost. Othello demands to see it and she denies that it is lost. She talks to him instead of Cassio’s reinstatement, which only enrages him. Desdemona and Emilia begin to realize that Othello is jealous and they don’t know why.

Iago arranges a scene in which Othello eavesdrops on Cassio laughing about Bianca but Othello thinks he is talking about his affair with Desdemona. During the conversation, Bianca angrily returns Desdemona’s handkerchief to Cassio, since she is jealous of where he might have gotten it.

Othello resolves to kill Desdemona, this very night, and Iago confirms his promise to kill Cassio.

When Othello and Desdemona next meet, she is confused and distraught over his unexplained anger towards her. He even hits her, which causes her uncle Lodovico to wonder if Othello has lost his mind.

Alone together in their bedroom, Othello tries to extract a confession from Desdemona, but she protests her innocence. After he calls her a whore and storms away, she and Emilia send for Iago, who reassures Desdemona that maybe it’s something about his work that is bothering Othello, and that everything will be fine. Desdemona sends Emilia away and waits for Othello.

Meanwhile on the street, Iago injures Cassio from behind and then reappears pretending to help tend to the injury.

Returning to a sleeping Desdemona, Othello struggles with the decision he has made to kill her. When she wakes, she begs for mercy, but he finally smothers her. Emilia arrives and calls for help. Iago and Lodovico answer, and she confronts Iago about the handkerchief. Othello, realizing the fatal mistake he has made, tabs Iago. Iago kills Emilia and escapes. Cassio, whom Iago’s wounding failed to kill, returns with Iago as prisoner. In his distress Othello kills himself. Lodovico gives the job of deciding Iago’s fate to Cassio.

The Artistic Vision of Theatrical Design

Our particular version of *Othello*, adapted for our stage by acting company member Brandon Dirden, is unique, intriguing, and theatrically challenging, with only six actors in the cast. The artistic team began meeting early in the year to determine what type of designs would best support, engage, and promote this new version for our student matinee and public performance audiences.

Webster's Definition of Design: (*verb*)

1. Make or work out a plan for; devise;
2. (to) create or execute in an artistic or highly skilled manner;

Set, Costume, and Lighting Designers must communicate about style choices, color, and time period with the Director of the piece in order to create a cohesive performance. A lot of the dramatic action from the text can be defined, and even driven forward, by the design elements of a show.

Sydney Roberts, Costume Designer for *Othello*, wanted to make sure that the female characters are presented powerfully, and with self-confidence. She also felt that the female characters have a great deal of sexuality about them, with a soft and feminine touch.

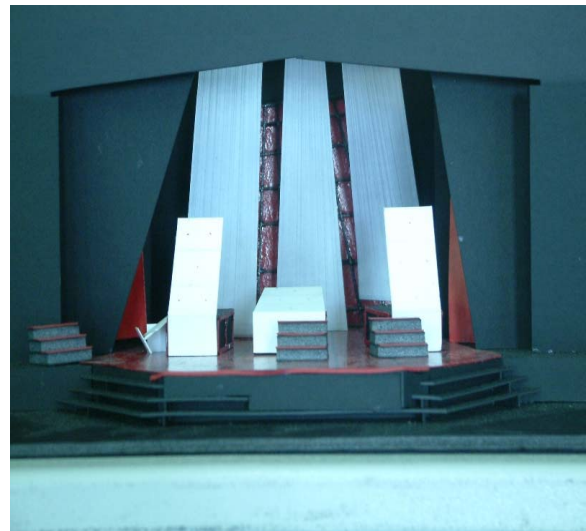
These qualities led to the decision of having strength shown by wearing pants, sexuality and confidence shown by the clothes being tight, and the feminine softness shown by the flowing floor-length dressing gown worn over it all.

*At right:
Rendering for Desdemona's first dress
by Sydney Roberts.*



Kat Conley, Scenic Designer for *Othello*, felt as though the set needed to be stark, abrupt, personal, and sensitive. The only use of color is red, mixed in with black and white. The red represents many things: blood, desire, passion, excitement, anger. The black and white helps the red stand out, as a logical point, but can also reference the viewpoints of many of the characters as only one way or the other. Very little gray is used for shading and blending.

To access the sensitivity of the subject and story, there are three beds on stage. Much of the action takes place in a bedroom, a couple's sacred place. Therefore, many layers of confusion, anger, and jealousy can be visually added to Shakespeare's language by beds that move, rotate, and stand upright to become walls. There is also fabric draped across the stage to help accentuate the feeling of a sacred and, what should be, a peaceful place.



*Model for the Set Design of Othello 2006
by Kat Conley*

The Heart of Othello

Editorial Notes by Sarah Smith, Dramaturg

Most productions of Shakespeare involve some cutting of lines. Usually it is the director, sometimes in conjunction with a Dramaturg or the actors, who whittle the original text down to a workable length. But this *Othello* script by Brandon Dirden goes beyond judicious cutting to become a fully adapted new piece. While acting in the play several times on other stages, he realized that its significant action occurs in intimate two- and three-person scenes, and that it focuses closely on intense personal relationships, not on public consequences. The external world of Venice and the war with the Turks seem to matter little to these characters as the events of this story unfold in the island setting of Cyprus.

Dirden wondered what sort of play *Othello* would be if stripped down to only the essential characters, played by only six actors. Aiming for a version without crowd scenes or nameless servants, a more intimate mode to which this play is uniquely well-suited among Shakespearean tragedies, Dirden decided to tackle adapting it himself. The result is, as Artistic Director Richard Garner describes it, a “lean and muscular” *Othello*. So while the words used in the script are Shakespeare’s, with few changes within single lines of verse or in the order of events, Dirden has streamlined the text by eliminating not only whole lines and scenes but also by cutting and merging whole characters.

Those familiar with Shakespeare’s *Othello* will certainly feel at home here; Othello, Iago, Desdemona, and Cassio are still the characters we know from the original, as are Brabantio and Emilia. But Dirden has the actors who play these last two roles constantly transforming themselves to create the theatrical universe of the play. We discover new connections as the actor who plays Brabantio becomes Montano and Lodovico. And, as a single actress dances between the roles of Emilia and Bianca, layers of understanding unfold about what it means to be a woman in this jealous world. Best of all, Dirden has chosen the Duke of Venice as a woman, which then brings a woman’s perspective on connectedness and affection into this chamber of warriors and senators. She sits in judgment over the choice that Desdemona has made by falling in love with Othello and gives it her sympathetic approval.

Driving Dirden’s choices about what to keep and what to cut was the defining idea of sexual jealousy. While Iago’s professional jealousy of Cassio is also a catalyst for his plotting, sexual jealousy turns out to be the crucial force destroying these intense personal relationships. According to Iago, a rumor that his wife Emilia had an affair with Othello sparked Iago’s hatred of him. And of course it is Othello’s jealousy of Desdemona’s imagined affair that leads to his unraveling into murder and suicide by the play’s end. As we look through the lens of this theme, the layers of sexual jealousy appear everywhere: Cassio and Iago are both jealous of Othello for winning the captivating Desdemona; Bianca is jealous of whatever woman might have given Cassio that handkerchief. Only Desdemona herself seems to escape the contagion of becoming jealous, and even she doesn’t escape the consequences of jealousy, as she dies at the hands of her husband’s misguided obsession. And certainly Shakespeare has invited us to scrutinize this theme: Mr. Vocabulary himself, the ultimate imaginative user and inventor of language, nevertheless repast some form of the word “jealous” a relentless nineteen times in the play.

Cueing from the adaptation’s focus on jealousy, director Vincent Murphy came to the play ready to explore an idea he had found compelling in *Othello*: voyeurism. What does a man see when he fears that his beloved is having an affair? How does he misinterpret what he actually sees, and what does he concoct in his imagination? Once a person is trapped in a down spiral of jealousy, voyeurism makes him an outsider, an audience, to his own marriage or his own desires. This fault line of disparity between what one knows and what one imagines opens into a chasm of confusion, and we watch the needle of Othello’s moral compass waver into a chaotic spin under the magnetic pull of jealous obsession, as he falls into that chasm. In staging the play, Murphy has followed the idea of infection: as the contagion of addictive jealousy passes from one character to the next, how does it affect these bodies as well as these minds? On and around the beds of this production, jealousy and voyeurism bed-hop from one relationship to another like a disease, leaving none of these characters untouched.

Pre-Show Writing and Discussion Activity

Based on the Georgia Language Arts Standards for 10th-12th grade:

10th: (ELA10RL1), 11th: (ELA11W1) 12th: (ELA12W1)

Although written in 1604, the themes of Shakespeare's *Othello* still resonate in today's society. Spend a class period exploring the themes of *Othello*, and have them relate these themes to their own experiences in life. Further the self-discovery and improve creative writing skills with the creation of a sonnet. To help with the lesson plan, one of Shakespeare's sonnets, dripping with jealousy, has been pulled for your reference.

Sonnet LXI (61)

*Is it thy will, thy image should keep open
My heavy eyelids to the weary night?
Dost thou desire my slumbers should be broken,
While shadows like to thee do mock my sight?
Is it thy spirit that thou send'st from thee
So far from home into my deeds to pry,
To find out shames and idle hours in me,
The scope and tenor of thy jealousy?
O, no! thy love, though much, is not so great:
It is my love that keeps mine eye awake:
Mine own true love that doth my rest defeat,
To play the watchman ever for thy sake:
For thee watch I, whilst thou dost wake elsewhere,
From me far off, with others all too near.*

Major themes in *Othello*:

- Jealousy
- Appearance Versus Reality
- Race
- Order Versus Chaos
- Good Versus Evil (*Iago and Othello*)

I. Activity One- Individual

Ask your students to pick one of the themes from the list above and write a paragraph relating the theme to their own life experience. Once the assignment has been completed, have the students break into small groups (four to five students), and ask the students to discuss the reason why they chose a certain theme and what it means to them. The students can either read the paragraph aloud to the group or class, or allow the students to keep the paragraph to themselves; maybe the paragraph is more like a journal entry and is simply a catalyst to help them to begin to think about the themes in relation to their own lives.

II. Activity Two- Group

- A. Ask the groups to pick their favorite theme and paragraph (if read aloud) of the group. They then work together to decide five action verbs and five sensory adjectives to describe the chosen theme and paragraph.
- B. Working together in the group, ask the students to help each other come up with five action verbs and five sensory adjectives that relate to their individually chosen theme.

III. Theme Sonnet

- A. If the group is working together with one theme and paragraph, have the group collaborate on the construction of a Sonnet, using the elected action verbs and sensory adjectives to help guide them through the writing process. Each student can contribute a couplet or two.
- B. If the student is moving away from the group to work individually, have each student write their own Sonnet as a homework assignment, to be presented to the class, incorporating the action verbs and sensory adjectives.

Post-Show Discussion Questions- Language Arts

Based on the Georgia Language Arts Standards for Reading and British Literature for 10th-12th grade. (ELABLRL1)

I. Character Point of View

- Compare and Contrast the point of view of Othello (protagonist), and Iago (antagonist).
- Explore the point of view of a minority (Othello) in relation to the citizens of Venice and Cyprus.
- How is Desdemona's point of view affected in relation to her husband (Othello), after he starts to accuse her of infidelity?

II. Language and Style

- In the character of Iago: Identify the important soliloquies and asides, as well as dramatic irony.
- How do Iago's lies affect the development of the play?
- In Shakespeare's full-length version of *Othello*, Iago refers to the Roman God Janus. Why does he invoke this God's name?
- Take a look at the following famous passage spoken by Othello, how does the language and imagery of the speech illustrate his declining sense of self? How does the written form propel the dramatic action?

Othello:

*I had been happy, if the general camp,
Pioneers and all, had tasted her sweet body,
So I had nothing known. O, now, for ever
Farewell the tranquil mind! farewell content!
Farewell the plumed troop, and the big wars,
That make ambition virtue! O, farewell!
Farewell the neighing steed, and the shrill trump,
The spirit-stirring drum, the ear-piercing fife,
The royal banner, and all quality,
Pride, pomp and circumstance of glorious war!
And, O you mortal engines, whose rude throats
The immortal Jove's dead clamours counterfeit,
are well! Othello's occupation's gone!*

III. Imagery and Symbolism

- What is the symbolism and importance of Desdemona's handkerchief to the following characters: Iago, Othello, Emilia and Bianca?
- In Georgia Shakespeare's production, the primary colors of the set are red, black and white, with the primary set pieces being beds and fabric. Why do you think these particular design choices were made by the director and scenic designer, and are they effective in helping tell the story?

Post-Show Discussion Questions- Social Studies, World History and Geography

- Most of the action in *Othello* takes place on the Greek Island of Cyprus. Why do you think the Venetians chose this location as a military outpost? (SSWG1)
- In the many biographies written about the life of William Shakespeare, there is no reference to him ever traveling outside of England. Why do you think he set his plays in such exotic locales, having never traveled there himself? Does the exotic setting help enhance the play for the Elizabethan audience, as well as today's audiences? (SSWG2)
Example: Venice and Cyprus. Do these locations support the geographic, historical and political essence of the plays and time-period he is writing about?
- Does the exotic setting help enhance the play for the Elizabethan audience, as well as today's audience? How does the enhancement differ between then and now? (SSWG2 and SSWH9-f)
- Assuming that Shakespeare had little or no contact with the Moorish culture growing up in England, how do you think he was able to draw such a definitive and sympathetic portrait of an outsider like Othello? (SSWG2)
- The Spanish Armada was defeated by the English in 1588, and Spain was home to many citizens of Moorish descent. *Othello* was written in 1604. How do you think the defeat of the Armada affected Shakespeare's view of *Othello's* character and personal story line? (SSWH9-f)

OTHELLO "QUOTABLES"

Lots of expression that we use every day made their first appearance in Shakespeare plays.
Have you ever used or heard any of these that came from *Othello*?

"wearing your heart on your sleeve"

For when my outward action doth demonstrate
The native act and figure of my heart
In compliment extern, 'tis not long after
But I will wear my heart upon my sleeve
For daws to peck at.

Iago, Act I. Scene i. line 68

"led by the nose"

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.

Iago, Act I. scene iii. lines 419-420

"the green-eyed monster"

O, beware, my lord, of jealousy!
It is the green-eyed monster, which doth mock
The meat it feeds on.

Iago, Act III. scene iii. lines 191-192

"loving not wisely, but too well"

Speak of me as I am. Nothing extenuate,
Nor set down aught in malice. Then must you speak
Of one that loved not wisely, but too well;
Of one not easily jealous, but, being wrought,
Perplexed in the extreme.

Othello, Act V. scene ii. Line 396-400

PREPARED BY SARAH SMITH, DRAMATURG

INTERESTING SHAKESPEARE FACTS

William Shakespeare was born on April 23, 1564.
Shakespeare later died on his birthday in 1616.
He was 52 years old.

In Elizabethan times, plays were not considered a literary accomplishment. Therefore, Shakespeare's plays were not published until almost a decade after his death. He only published the 154 sonnets and the 2 narratives in his lifetime.

The best seat in the house was considered to be the farthest away.
That way you could see the entire action on stage.

There were no women allowed on the Elizabethan stage. Young male acting apprentices, whose voices had not yet changed, played the young female roles.

William Shakespeare was 18 years old when he married.
His wife, Ann Hathaway, was 26 years old.

William and Ann had three children: Susanna, and twins Judith and Hamnet. Hamnet died when he was eleven. Very soon after his death, Shakespeare wrote Hamlet.

William Shakespeare helped expand the English language more than any other poet of his lifetime
by coining more than 1500 words!

Many of these words and phrases are part of our everyday speech.

His plays have inspired operas, ballets, paintings, songs, and film.

Shakespeare's plays have been translated into more than 180 languages.

**THERE ARE ONLY A FEW PLAYS THAT SHAKESPEARE
INVENTED THE PLOT LINE COMPLETELY BY HIMSELF.
THEY ARE: A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM, CYMBELINE, LOVE'S LABOR'S LOST, THE TEMPEST**

As well as being a playwright, Shakespeare balanced the books and appeared as an actor in his own plays.
However, he did not direct, as the position of director was not created until the late 1800's.

**Sometimes the actors wouldn't know what play they were performing
until the day of the show.**

Talk about stage fright!

Theatre Etiquette for Georgia Shakespeare

We encourage you to explore the role of the audience in Shakespeare's day.
Who were the Groundlings? How did they behave at a performance?
How does it differ from the role of the audience today?

Please have your entire group seated and accounted for prior to the **10:00 AM curtain time**. This request requires a **recommended arrival time of 9:30 AM**, at the latest. **We will seat first come-first served**. Please call the box office at 404-264-0020 if you are running late or lost.
(*Othello* run times are as follows: Act One- 1:10, Act Two- 1:00)

What rules apply when attending live theatre? Why are they different than attending a movie theater?
The main reasons for the differences in etiquette are safety and courtesy.

For obvious reasons, safety is an issue because the theatre is dark during a performance. However, in live theatre, you may not always know what is coming next! Not only is it dark, the door you may need to go through to get to the restroom may be the same door being used by an actor with a broadsword. As a courtesy to the actors, house management staff and those seated around you, it is best to remain seated until a scheduled break in the performance.

Unlike a movie, the actors are live on stage, and can hear the audience when they talk, play video games, and text message. They can see the light from your phone as you check your messages, or see you sleeping. This distracting activity harms one of the most awesome parts of live theatre: the communication between the actors and you! There is an energy that is passed between the two, and good audiences can make a good show jump to being a great show because the actors know that you are listening and engaged in the performance. In a movie, the actors filmed 6 months ago, and are currently lounging in Hollywood. They are not part of the immediate experience like live theatre actors.

A few behavioral guidelines are as follows:

The performers, crew and administrative staff are all professionals working to provide an exceptional theatre-going experience. Please encourage your students to assist our efforts by abiding by school and theatre guidelines at all times. Please know that we will expect your students to comply with our standards when they are in our facility.

We encourage your students to fully engage in the performance by reacting to the events on stage in an appropriate manner. Definitely laugh when something is funny, and definitely applaud at the end. One of the most exciting things about a student matinee is its vibrant energy and spontaneity. In addition, we expect the utmost respect to the actors, and other patrons sitting around you, by creating a quiet and non-disruptive environment so that everyone can enjoy the performance, including the actors.
Therefore, please follow these guidelines:

- ***The use of photography or recording devices is strictly forbidden at all times while in the theatre. (This includes camera phones, digital cameras, video cameras and audio recorders.)***
Any photography or recording taken will be confiscated due to copyright and performance union laws.
- ***Cell phones are strictly forbidden in the theatre, and if seen, will be confiscated until the end of the show.***
The signals disrupt the digital lighting and sound for the show. [This includes **TEXT MESSAGING**.]
- ***Disruptive behavior will not be tolerated.***
This statement can be defined as talking, yelling, and inappropriate response to stage material. Included in the definition of disruptive behavior is **the use of headphones, cd players, ipods, video games, and sleeping**. Also, we will have a **zero-tolerance level for throwing objects such as coins and rubber-bands, and for the use of laser pointers**. We will ask that all hoods from sweatshirts remain on the shoulders, and that all baseball caps are removed.
- ***Please encourage your students to remain seated during performance.***
Unaccompanied students will not be permitted to leave the auditorium during the performance. Bathrooms are located in the lobby and will be available for use prior to the scheduled curtain time of 10:00 AM, and during the (1) 10-minute intermission. Any patron who leaves the theatre during performance will be re-seated at the discretion of house management.
- ***Food and drinks are not permitted in the auditorium.***
- ***After the performance, please remain in your seats.***
Our house management staff will release you by school to the buses in order to insure everyone's organized return.
- ***PLEASE NOTE: Students must be accompanied by a school appointed chaperone at all times.*** Therefore, if a student from your school is asked to leave the auditorium by house management for any reason, a school appointed chaperone will need to accompany that individual to the lobby for the remainder of the performance. **The definition of disruptive behavior is at the discretion of stage and house management and may not result in re-admittance.**

If you have any further questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact our offices at 404-504-3422 or groupsales@gashakespeare.org.