Daily Bard

LESSON PLANS

Othello: three lesson plans

Three lessons that teach the play through its central problem: how does Iago do it, and how far is Othello responsible? Each lesson is built on one named passage and ends in writing.



LEVEL
Ages 14-18 (GCSE, A-level, AP Lit, IB); adaptable for first-year seminars

SEQUENCE
3 lessons of 60 minutes

FOCUS
Iago's methods of persuasion, Othello's changing language, and competing judgements of the ending

YOU WILL NEED
Copies of the play (1.1, 1.3, 3.3, 5.2), the printed worksheet, highlighters, mini whiteboards or paper

Overview

This sequence takes students from Iago's first self-description to Othello's last. It assumes the class knows the plot; if not, set the act summaries in the Othello study guide as homework. Each lesson isolates one short passage, so the work is close reading, not retelling.

- Students will be able to explain, with quotation, the techniques Iago uses to deceive.
- Students will be able to analyse how Othello's language changes under pressure, using accurate terminology.
- Students will be able to evaluate two opposed readings of Othello's final speech and argue for one.

Assessment focus. Lessons 1 and 2 concentrate on analysis of language, form and structure (the AO2 idea). Context (AO3) is brought in where it explains a line, especially attitudes to race and marital honour. Lesson 3 builds a sustained argument (AO1) and, for older students, weighs critical interpretations against the text.

Lesson 1: "I am not what I am" - how Iago works

Key question: What do we learn about Iago's methods and motives before the plot has even begun?

- Identify the techniques Iago uses on Roderigo and Brabantio in Act 1, Scene 1.
- Analyse Iago's soliloquy at the end of Act 1, Scene 3 for motive and plan.
- Explain how dramatic irony positions the audience.

TIME	ACTIVITY	WHY
0-8 min	**Starter.** Write *"I am not what I am"* on the board without attribution. Pairs write two things it could mean. Take three answers, then reveal speaker and scene (Iago, Act 1, Scene 1).	Establishes that Iago defines himself by concealment.
8-18 min	**Teaching input.** Read aloud Iago's shouts to Brabantio in 1.1, including *"an old black ram / Is tupping your white ewe"*. Model one annotation: present tense, animal imagery, colour contrast. Define dramatic irony.	Shows the annotation standard; prejudice speaks before Othello appears.
18-35 min	**Main task.** In pairs, read the soliloquy that ends 1.3, from *"Thus do I ever make my fool my purse"* to the end. Complete a two-column table: "Reasons Iago gives" and "What he plans". Highlight every word of uncertainty, such as *"I know not if 't be true"*.	Separates motive from method; students discover that the motives are thin.
35-48 min	**Discussion.** Whole class: (1) Which reason seems strongest, and does Iago believe it? (2) Why does Shakespeare let Iago describe Othello as *"of a free and open nature"*? (3) How does knowing the plan make us feel?	Moves from evidence to interpretation; introduces the audience as accomplice.
48-55 min	**Writing.** One paragraph using the stem: "Shakespeare presents Iago as ... through ..., which suggests ...". Success criteria: one embedded quotation, one named method, one comment on the audience.	Converts talk into the written form that is assessed.
55-60 min	**Plenary.** On whiteboards: one word for Iago's motive. Compare the range of answers.	The text will not settle on one motive.

Differentiation

- **Support:** give the soliloquy with a paraphrase and the table part-completed.
- **Core:** complete the table independently and write the paragraph to the success criteria.
- **Stretch:** Coleridge thought Iago was hunting for motives to justify a malice that has none. Does the soliloquy support this?

Assessment and homework

Check the paragraphs for a named method attached to a quotation, not a general statement about evil. Homework: from 1.3, choose three short quotations that show how Othello speaks before Iago goes to work, ready for Lesson 2.

Lesson 2: The temptation scene

Key question: How does Iago make Othello jealous without making a single direct accusation?

- Trace the steps of Iago's persuasion in Act 3, Scene 3.
- Analyse the imagery of the "green-eyed monster" speech.
- Compare Othello's language here with his language in Act 1.

TIME	ACTIVITY	WHY
0-7 min	**Starter.** Three volunteers read their Act 1 quotations for Othello. The class agrees three adjectives for his speech (for example calm, formal, certain).	Sets a baseline so that change can be measured.
7-17 min	**Teaching input.** Summarise 3.3 up to the passage: Cassio's exit, Iago's *"Men should be what they seem"*, his refusals to speak. Iago makes Othello ask. Two students read the worksheet passage aloud.	The warning comes only once Othello is already anxious.
17-37 min	**Main task.** Worksheet questions 1-6 in pairs. Circulate and press for method: "Which word does that? What kind of word is it?"	Moves from comprehension to analysis on a passage short enough to know thoroughly.
37-47 min	**Discussion.** Take answers to questions 4 and 6. Then ask: Othello says *"To be once in doubt / Is once to be resolved"*. Is that a strength or the weakness Iago needs?	Opens the debate about responsibility that Lesson 3 completes.
47-56 min	**Writing.** Begin the worksheet writing task; aim for the first paragraph in class.	Timed, independent practice while the passage is fresh.
56-60 min	**Plenary.** Exit ticket: "The most dangerous word in this passage is ... because ...".	Checks that every student can tie an effect to a word.

Differentiation

- **Support:** gloss *"cuckold"*, *"wronger"*, *"fineless"* and *"tribe"* on the sheet; answer questions 1-4 and write to the sentence stems.
- **Core:** all questions and the full writing task.
- **Stretch:** read on to Othello's lines beginning *"Haply, for I am black"* later in the scene. How has his certainty changed, and what does he blame?

Assessment and homework

Collect the exit tickets and the writing task. Look for analysis of at least one image and one feature of the dialogue's form, such as Othello's short interjections. Homework: finish the writing task. As a low-stakes reading habit alongside it, students with an iPhone or iPad could read the day's page in **Daily Bard**, one Folger-verified passage a day with a plain-English reading on the back, and note one word they would comment on.

Lesson 3: "Speak of me as I am" – judging the ending

Key question: Is Othello's final speech honest self-knowledge or a last act of self-deception?

- Analyse the language of Othello's last speech in Act 5, Scene 2.
- Understand two opposed critical readings and test each against the text.
- Construct and defend an argument in speech and writing.

TIME	ACTIVITY	WHY
0-8 min	**Starter.** Project Othello's self-description *"An honorable murderer"*. Students write for two minutes: can both words be true? Hear two views.	Puts the contradiction before the class before any critic is mentioned.
8-20 min	**Teaching input.** Read the final speech aloud, from *"Soft you. A word or two before you go"* to his death. Annotate together: the request *"Speak of me as I am"*, the repeated *"Of one"*, the passive *"being wrought"*, the pearl simile, the story of the Turk in Aleppo.	Gives every student the same evidence base.
20-30 min	**Two readings.** A. C. Bradley: a noble, trusting man destroyed by an extraordinary villain, who recovers his greatness at the end. F. R. Leavis: a proud, self-dramatising man, easily deceived, who dies still flattering himself. Students place a mark on a line between the two.	Presents interpretation as a debate with evidence.
30-46 min	**Main task: structured debate.** Split the class by their marks. Each side finds three quotations from 5.2 (six minutes), presents (two) and rebuts (one). Offer Emilia's verdict, *"O, the more angel she, and you the blacker devil!"*, and Iago's *"Demand me nothing. What you know, you know."* as evidence either side may use.	Forces selection of evidence and brings in other voices from the scene.
46-56 min	**Writing.** Individual paragraph: "The final speech presents Othello as … . Although it could be argued that …, the phrase … suggests …". Success criteria: a clear position, a counter-view, two short quotations, one comment on form.	Captures the debate in balanced, evaluative writing.

TIME	ACTIVITY	WHY
56-60 min	**Plenary.** Students move their mark on the line if they have changed their mind, and tell a partner why.	Makes thinking visible.

Differentiation

- **Support:** provide six pre-selected quotations from 5.2 to sort into "supports Bradley" and "supports Leavis".
- **Core:** find evidence independently and write the paragraph.
- **Stretch:** Othello describes himself killing a *"turbanned Turk"* who had attacked a Venetian. What does it mean that he plays both parts?

Assessment and homework

The paragraph shows whether students can hold two readings and choose. Homework: a full essay on "How far is Othello responsible for his own tragedy?", planned with the essay planner and drawing on all three lessons.

Student worksheet: The temptation scene

Read the passage twice, once aloud. Iago has been hinting that he knows something about Cassio and Desdemona, and refusing to say what.

> IAGO O, beware, my lord, of jealousy!
> It is the green-eyed monster which doth mock
> The meat it feeds on. That cuckold lives in bliss
> Who, certain of his fate, loves not his wronger;
> But O, what damned minutes tells he o'er
> Who dotes, yet doubts; suspects, yet strongly loves!
> OTHELLO O misery!
> IAGO Poor and content is rich, and rich enough;
> But riches fineless is as poor as winter
> To him that ever fears he shall be poor.
> Good God, the souls of all my tribe defend
> From jealousy!
> OTHELLO Why, why is this?
> Think'st thou I'd make a life of jealousy,
> To follow still the changes of the moon
> With fresh suspicions? No. To be once in doubt
> Is once to be resolved.
>
> OTHELLO · ACT 3, SCENE 3

1. In your own words, what does Iago warn Othello against?
2. According to Iago, which husband is happier: the one who knows his wife is unfaithful and does not love her, or the one who loves and suspects? Why?
3. Iago calls jealousy a *"green-eyed monster"*. What does the image of a monster that mocks *"The meat it feeds on"* suggest about what jealousy does to a person?
4. Look at *"Who dotes, yet doubts; suspects, yet strongly loves!"*. How do the sound and the structure of this line help to convey the jealous man's state of mind?
5. Othello speaks only two words between Iago's speeches: *"O misery!"*. What does this tell you about the effect Iago is having?
6. Iago never says that Desdemona is unfaithful. Find two places where he implies it, and explain how a warning can work as an accusation.
7. Othello insists *"To be once in doubt / Is once to be resolved"*. Is he right about himself? Use the rest of the scene.

Writing task

How does Shakespeare present Iago's manipulation of Othello in this passage? Write two or three paragraphs.

- Make a clear point about Iago's method at the start of each paragraph.
- Use short, embedded quotations (no more than a line).
- Name at least two techniques, such as personification, antithesis, imperative or exclamation.
- Comment on Othello's replies as well as Iago's speeches.

Teacher notes and indicative answers

1. Against jealousy itself, which he presents as a danger to Othello's peace.
2. The one who knows and does not love. Certainty is bearable; loving while suspecting means counting every minute in torment.
3. Jealousy is alien, predatory and cruel: it consumes the person who harbours it and torments him as it does so. Stronger answers note that a creature is something attacking Othello from outside.
4. Alliteration binds *"dotes"* to *"doubts"*, so love and suspicion sound alike. The line is built as two balanced halves, each turning on *"yet"* (antithesis), which enacts a mind pulled two ways.
5. He has been reduced from fluent speech to an exclamation. He already feels what Iago describes, before any evidence is offered.
6. The word *"cuckold"* assumes a wife's infidelity; *"loves not his wronger"* assumes there is a wronger; the prayer to be defended from jealousy implies there is cause. A warning presupposes a danger, so Othello supplies the accusation himself.
7. Only in part. He does act as soon as he doubts, but the "proof" he accepts is a handkerchief and a reported dream. His confidence that he will *"see before I doubt"* is exactly what Iago exploits.

Model paragraph

Shakespeare presents Iago's manipulation as a warning that does the work of an accusation. By personifying jealousy as a *"green-eyed monster"* which mocks *"The meat it feeds on"*, Iago makes it sound like an external predator, so that Othello feels threatened without being told by what. The balanced antithesis of *"dotes, yet doubts"* then describes in advance the divided state Iago intends to produce. Othello's reply, the bare exclamation *"O misery!"*, shows the general's measured verse of Act 1 already shrinking. Iago has asserted nothing, yet *"cuckold"* is now in Othello's mind, and a culture that ties a husband's honour to his wife's fidelity does the rest.

Extending the sequence

For a fourth lesson, pair Emilia's speech in 4.3 with the willow song. The **Othello study guide** has the context and critical perspectives to support it, and the **quotation sheet** is useful for retrieval starters. Our essay on **"O, beware, my lord, of jealousy"** goes further into the worksheet passage, and the **close reading toolkit** and **guide to Shakespeare's language** give students a reusable method. The **assessment map** shows in general terms how this work is credited, and these plans are available as a **printable PDF**. The **King Lear lesson plans** follow the same pattern.



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paraphrase the passage before you turn the leaf to compare.



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