

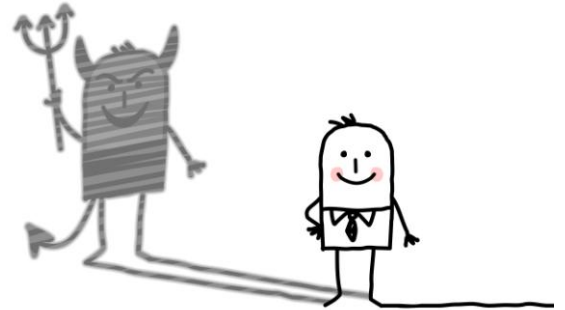
Lies in Shakespeare's Othello

Student worksheets

Warmer – What would you do?

Read the text and answer the questions.

You have a good job in a good company and you are doing well. You are married to a really wonderful partner and your life is going nicely. One day a good work colleague who you have known for quite a long time tells you they have something to worry about. The colleague tells you that you should 'watch' your partner because they are being unfaithful.



What would you do? Why might/might not you do these things?

- Talk to your partner about the accusation, and ask if it is true
- Think that the colleague must be lying, and ignore them
- Watch your partner to see if they are doing anything strange, but not mention the accusation
- **Task 1 – The characters in *Othello***
- a. Look at the picture showing a scene from *Othello*. What do you think is happening?



(left to right) Desdemona, Cassio (in the garden), Othello, Iago (on the terrace)

b. Now read about the four main characters from the play.

Desdemona is the daughter of a powerful senator in Venice and she is married to Othello. Although she is kind and sweet, Desdemona can also be playful. She is strong enough to stand up to Othello when he accuses her of being unfaithful.

Othello is the hero of the play. He is a powerful general in the army of Venice and is respected by those around him for being experienced and talented. Despite being African and so looking different from other people in Venice, Othello is well thought of because of his past actions. Othello has a good nature but he is passionate and his love for his wife Desdemona is twisted by



Othello's lieutenant **Cassio** is a young and inexperienced soldier. He has a high position in the army which makes Iago angry. Cassio is loyal to Othello and an honourable man. He wants to do the best he can and is faithful to his friends and his position.

Iago is a standard bearer (flag carrier) in the Venetian army. It's not the best job and he knows it. He is an ambitious, bitter and manipulative man who uses lies to control people. Although he pretends to be Othello's friend, Iago bitterly hates him and wants to hurt him any way he can. During the play, Iago's lies turn Othello into a jealous monster.

. Now put the adjectives from the texts above into the right column in the table.

positive adjectives	negative adjectives	both / neutral
powerful		different

Task 2 – Making predictions about the story

a. Put these phrases in order to make predictions about the play.

1. that / will probably be / Desdemona / unfaithful / I think / to Othello
2. to Othello / is certain to / Iago / lie /
3. Desdemona / Iago will / lie to / most probably / as well
4. kill themselves / the characters / is bound to / one of
5. friends / Cassio and / probably won't / be / Iago
6. is likely to / position / his / in the / Cassio / army / lose
7. that / kill / I doubt / Othello will / Desdemona
8. with Iago / get / Othello / might well / angry



Desdemona and Othello in a 1943 Broadway production of *Othello*

b. Now decide if you think the predictions in (a) are going to be correct or incorrect.

c. Read these true statements about the play.

1. One character hides something in someone's bedroom.
2. Someone uses a pillow in one scene.
3. One character changes so much that they seem to be a different person by the end of the play.
4. One of the characters kills another one.

Now use the phrases in the box to make other predictions about the play. Try to answer the questions below.

will probably is certain to will most probably is bound to probably won't
 is likely to I doubt that might well

Do you think that Othello and Desdemona will still be happily married by the end of the play?

What will the pillow probably be used for?

Who is likely to be dead by the end of the play?

Task 3 – Listening to a plot summary

Listen to two friends, Tom and Jane, discussing the plot of Othello, and see which of the predictions from Task 2 were correct.

Task 4 – Remembering the plot

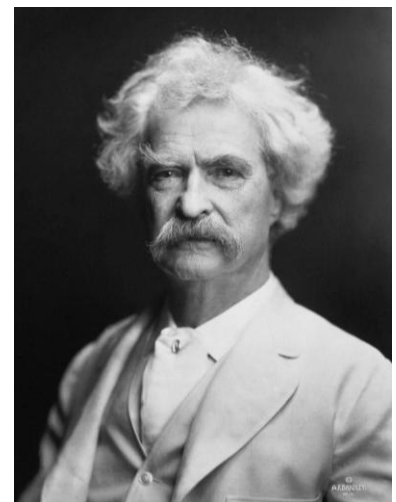
Match the questions to the answers. There are three answers you don't need

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. Why does Iago hate Othello? | a. She had told a servant |
| 2. Why does Cassio lose his position in the army? | b. He has a fight with Cassio |
| 3. How does Iago try to prove that Desdemona is being unfaithful? | c. Because he believes his wife is being unfaithful to him. |
| 4. Why does Othello's personality seem to change? | d. With a handkerchief |
| 5. How does Othello kill Desdemona? | e. With a pillow |
| 6. How does Othello eventually find out his wife was telling the truth? | f. He lies to Othello |
| | g. He got into a fight |
| | h. Because he didn't give him a better job |
| | i. Because he doesn't believe what she says |

Task 5 – Discussion

Talk about the following questions with your partner.

1. As well as being lied to by Iago, Othello lies to himself. In what way do people lie to themselves?
2. When was the last time someone told you a lie and you found out about it?
3. Is there a difference between good and bad lies? Is it OK to lie sometimes?
4. *'If you tell the truth, you don't have to remember anything.'* Do you agree with this quotation from Mark Twain? Why?/Why not?



American novelist Mark Twain

