

Lies in Shakespeare's 'Othello'

Topic

The use of lies in Shakespeare's play 'Othello'

Learning outcomes

- Say if adjectives to describe personality have a positive, negative or neutral meaning
- Describe the key events of Shakespeare's play 'Othello'
- Use a variety of structures to make predictions about a plot
- Listen for specific information in a dialogue describing the plot of 'Othello'
- Participate in a discussion about lies and lying and give opinions

Age and level

13-17, Adults (B2)

Time

Approximately 85 minutes or two shorter lessons

Materials

- Presentation (PDF or PowerPoint) and/or student worksheet (PDF)
- Audio (MP3)
- Audioscript (optional)

Introduction

This lesson plan introduces students to the theme of lies in Shakespeare's play 'Othello'. Students read about the main characters of the play and identify the meanings of adjectives used to describe them. They read a short summary of the first part of the play and predictions about the rest of the plot. They

make their own predictions using a range of structures e.g. 'is certain / bound / likely to...' They listen to a summary of the play to check their predictions, and answer questions to check their understanding of events. Finally, they discuss the theme of lies and lying.

Teachers can print a student worksheet to accompany the lesson, or they can use a presentation for a no printing option. An audioscript is also available.

Procedure

1. Lead-in (10 mins)

- **Option 1 (if using the presentation):** Show **slide 2** of the presentation. Explain that the picture shows a scene from Shakespeare's play 'Othello'. Explain that students will talk about the picture, but it doesn't matter if they don't know the play. They can guess.
- Students discuss questions 1-3 in pairs, small groups or as a whole class. If students discuss in pairs or groups, invite some to share their thoughts. If some know the play or film, ask them to give their answers to the questions. Alternatively, you can provide **answers**.
 1. The picture shows four important characters from the play. Othello and Iago are on the terrace, and Desdemona and Cassio are in the garden. Desdemona is Othello's wife.
 2. Iago is angry with Othello, his General. He has told Othello that Desdemona (Othello's wife) is being unfaithful with Cassio. This is not true, but Othello believes it and is jealous. He accuses his wife Desdemona of being unfaithful.
 3. This scene takes place in Venice, Italy. It is set in the 16th century,
- Now tell students to write five words they associate with the picture. Students compare words in pairs. If you like, you can ask some to share their words with the class.
- **Option 2 (if not using the presentation):** Tell students that they are going to learn about Shakespeare's play 'Othello'. Ask if they know anything about the play. Establish that it is set in Venice and Cyprus in the 16th century. Explain that main characters are Iago, Othello, Desdemona and Cassio. Iago is angry with Othello, his General. He has told Othello that Desdemona (Othello's wife)

	<p>is being unfaithful with Cassio. This is not true, but Othello believes it and is jealous. He accuses his wife Desdemona of being unfaithful.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask questions about the characters: What kind of a person is Othello if he believes lies / that his wife is unfaithful? What kind of a person is Iago to tell lies? Should Desdemona talk to Cassio? Should Cassio talk to Desdemona? Why (not)?
2. Task 1: Introduction to main characters (10 mins)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show slide 3 of the presentation or refer students to Task 1 in the student worksheet. • Give students time to read the four texts. Ask some questions to check understanding: Who is Desdemona / Othello / Cassio / Iago? What kind of a person is Desdemona / Cassio / Othello / Iago? To make this more competitive / challenging, close the slide or ask students to cover their worksheets and see what they can remember about the characters from the texts.
3. Task 2: Character adjectives (10 mins)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show slide 4 of the presentation or refer students to the texts in Task 1 in the student worksheet. • Ask students to find an example of an adjective with a positive meaning in the texts e.g. kind; an example of an adjective with a negative meaning e.g. bitter; and an example of an adjective with a neutral meaning e.g. young. There may be some discussion as answers might be subjective: some may see 'passionate' as positive, and some may see it as negative. • In pairs or small groups, students write examples of adjectives from the texts which are positive, negative, neutral/both positive and negative. If they are using the worksheet, refer them to the table in Task 2. Walk around the room to help. Students can consult dictionaries. • With lower-level groups or students, you could elicit or give the adjectives first, and review their meanings together. • Check answers and accept variations. Check that all students know the meanings and pronunciation of the words. Suggested answers:

Adjectives with positive meaning	Adjectives with negative meaning	Adjectives with both positive / negative meaning or neutral
Best experienced faithful honourable kind loyal playful powerful strong sweet talented	bitter jealous manipulative unfaithful	ambitious angry different inexperienced passionate young

**4. Task 3A:
Ordering
sentences
(10 mins)**

- Show **slide 5** of the presentation or refer students to **Task 3A** in the student worksheet. Read out the summary of the first part of the play and review any unfamiliar vocabulary e.g. promoted, lieutenant, revenge. Invite a few students to say what they think will happen next.
- Show **slide 6** of the presentation or refer students to sentences 1-6 under the summary. Explain that some students have made predictions about the play, but they're mixed up.
- Individually or in pairs, students put the phrases in order. If necessary, do the first one together with the whole class first. Elicit answers. Ask students to say if they agree with these predictions.
- Refer students to structures used to make predictions (in bold below). Check that they understand the meanings and how they are used i.e. they are all followed by infinitive verbs. These are also available on **slide 7** of the presentation.

Answers:

1. I think that Desdemona **will probably** be unfaithful to Othello.
2. Iago **is certain to** lie to Othello again.

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Iago will most probably lie to Desdemona as well. 4. One of the characters is bound to kill themselves. 5. Cassio and Iago probably won't be friends. 6. Iago is likely to lose his position in the army. 7. I doubt that Othello will kill Desdemona. 8. Othello might well get angry with Iago.
5. Task 3B: Making predictions (15 mins)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show slide 8 of the presentation or refer students to Task 3B in the student worksheet. • Explain that the sentences in the left-hand column of the table describe things that happen in the play. Students must write predictions based on these events. They should use phrases in the box to make the predictions. Review the examples provided in the right-hand column and elicit a few more. Write them on the board and check that students are using the structures correctly. • Walk around the room as students write and help if necessary. When they are ready, invite some students to read their predictions. Correct any mistakes with the key structures.
6. Task 4: Listening (10 mins)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain that students will listen to two people discussing what happens in the play. They should listen and check their predictions. • Play the audio file. The audio is 4 minutes long. If this is challenging for your students, pause the audio after each minute or so and ask questions to check understanding, for example: Why is Iago angry with Othello? (Because he promoted Cassio) What does he do to get revenge? (He gets Cassio drunk so he loses his job; he lies and says that Cassio and Desdemona are having an affair) Does Othello believe Iago (Yes) How does Othello's character change? (He changes from a courteous and noble husband to an aggressive and abusive one) Is Cassio killed? (No, but Othello believes he is) Does Othello believe Desdemona? (No) What does he do (He kills her with a pillow) Does Othello kill Iago? (No, the guards take Iago away) What does Othello do at the end? (He kills himself)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show slide 8 again or refer students to Task 3B in the student worksheet. Read out the sentences in the left-hand column of the table. Ask students to say what happens in the play. They can do this in pairs, groups or as a whole class. Ask them to say if their predictions were correct. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Iago hides a Desdemona's handkerchief in Cassio's bedroom (to convince Othello that Desdemona is having an affair with Cassio) ○ Othello changes from a courteous and noble husband to an aggressive and abusive one. ○ Othello uses a pillow to kill Desdemona (he doesn't believe her) ○ Othello kills himself (because he feels so guilty) <p>Note: The audioscript is available as a separate document for your reference. You could give / show copies of the audioscripts to students if necessary.</p>
<p>7. Task 5: Remembering the plot (10 mins)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show slide 9 of the presentation or refer students to Task 5 in the student workbook. In pairs or small groups, students discuss the questions. Ask some pairs / groups to give answers. • If students find this challenging, you could provide the audioscript or write the answers mixed-up on the board (or read them out) for students to match. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Because Othello promoted Cassio and not him to the position of lieutenant. 2. Because Iago gets him drunk. 3. He puts Desdemona's handkerchief in Cassio's bedroom. 4. Because he doesn't believe his wife and he thinks she is being unfaithful. 5. He kills / smothers her with a pillow. 6. Because Desdemona told a servant the truth.
<p>8. Task 6: Discussion (10 mins)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show slide 10 of the presentation or refer students to Task 6 in the student workbook. • Students discuss in pairs, groups or as a whole class. If they discuss in pairs / groups, invite some to share their thoughts.