

Lies in Shakespeare's *Othello*

Lesson plan

Topics: the plot of *Othello*; lying

Level: B1/B2

Time: 75 minutes

Aims

- To develop students' knowledge of the story and themes of the Shakespeare play *Othello*
- To develop students' ability to discuss issues surrounding deception, manipulation and lies
- To develop students' ability to use language to make predictions
- To give practice of reading for information and sharing this information with other students
- To give practice of discussion

Introduction

Students begin by discussing what they would do in a situation similar to the one in which Othello finds himself in. They then discuss the characters in the play before making predictions about what will happen in the story. After listening to a synopsis of the play, students then check if their predictions were correct. Students then discuss questions about lies and deception.

Preparation and materials

Make one copy of the **student worksheets** per student.

Check that you can play the **audio track** in class.

If you want to, you could also make copies of the **transcript** at the end of this lesson plan, although this is not needed for any of the set tasks in the lesson.

Procedure

Warmer – What would you do? (10 minutes)

- Dictate this question for students, 'What was the last lie you told?', and get them to discuss their answers with each other. Ask students to share some of the ideas and thoughts they had with the rest of the class. Be tactful when doing this, as telling lies might not be something people are very willing to discuss openly.
- Ask students to read through the text in the Warmer and the questions before they discuss what they would do with a partner or a small group.
- After conducting feedback, tell the students that the question of what someone might do when told their partner was having an affair is a central theme of Shakespeare's play *Othello*, and that students are going to learn about what happens.

Task 1 – The characters in *Othello* (15 minutes)

- Here, students get to find out about the main characters in *Othello*. This lesson focuses on the main four.
- Ask the students to discuss the picture in (a), and take feedback.

Answer: *In the picture, we see Iago and Othello secretly watching Desdemona (Othello’s wife) meeting a man called Cassio. Othello is tricked into believing that Desdemona and Cassio are having an affair, with tragic consequences.*

- (b) Ask students to read the text individually and make sure they understand all the words. Allow students to use their book or mobile phone dictionaries to help them (as long as they are English to English dictionaries).
- (c) Then, ask them to identify which adjectives are positive/negative/both positive and negative and have them share their answers with their partner. There may be some discussion about some of the adjectives and the answers might be subjective. Feedback the answers to the class as a whole.

Suggested answers:

positive adjectives	negative adjectives	both/neutral
powerful experienced talented best loyal honourable faithful kind sweet playful strong	bitter manipulative inexperienced unfaithful	different passionate (?) ambitious (?) jealous angry young

Task 2 – Making predictions about the story (20 minutes)

- Using the information they have learned about the characters, students put the sentences in (a) into the right order in pairs. Give students a few minutes before eliciting the answers. When students have finished doing this, make sure they understand the key structures in the box at the bottom of the page.

Answers

1. *I think that Desdemona will probably be unfaithful to Othello.*
 2. *Iago is certain to lie to Othello.*
 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. *Cassio 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.*
- (b) Students then decide if the sentences in (a) are true or false. Allow them another couple of minutes to do this. Explain that in the next section of the lesson, students will find out if the sentences are true or false. Do not give away the answers yet, as students will find these out in **Task 3**.

- Ask students to read the sentences in **(c)**, and make sure they understand the vocabulary before they use the sentences to make further predictions about what the characters will do.
- As students do the task in pairs or small groups, monitor closely to ensure that the students have understood what to do, and are making appropriate suggestions.
- Then elicit students' sentences, correcting any mistakes.

Task 4 – Remembering the plot (5 minutes)

- Ask the students to work alone or in pairs to match the questions and answers. The audio transcript at the end of this lesson plan might be useful for this.

Answers: 1 h 2 g 3 d 4 c 5 e 6 a

Task 5 – Discussion (10 minutes)

- Now students get to explore some of the ideas from the lesson in discussion. Again, in pairs or small groups, ask them to read and discuss the questions. Give them five minutes to discuss the ideas together or until the majority run out of conversation before feeding back the ideas as a class. Pick up and develop any interesting ideas that might spring from these discussions.