

***Othello* notecards.**

What students noticed in their reading of *Othello*, before our first in-class discussion:

“Nothingness”: apparent in many works of Shakespeare. Othello asks Iago what he’s thinking about and Iago replies “nothing my Lord” when he has his mind filled with evil schemes.

Comparison and imagery of light and dark: what’s done in the dark vs. light, “bring this monstrous birth to the world’s light.” “Put out the light, then put out the light.”

Historical question: what would have been the racial feelings at that point?

The characters talk a lot about each other’s personalities and dispositions or hum or in terms of blood.

Is Othello’s race a way to make him an outsider? How much further is it important in interpretation?

Is Iago more worthy of lieutenant? Does Othello want someone intelligent near him, or not? Proudful?

Why did Othello pick Cassio over Iago in the first place?

Why does Othello say in Act I that he doesn’t have the words to explain himself, to let Desdemona explain? Especially when he constantly finds descriptive words for other situations?

Why did Brabantio accuse Othello of witchcraft, instead of just running off with his daughter?

Why go to Cyprus at all? Do we need the whole Turks plot?

The importance of Reputation over everything, even physicality.

Is the clown only for comic relief? I didn’t think he was funny.

Desdemona vs. Iago: the complete opposites. Paragons of good and evil.

I thought it was interesting how most of the time that only Iago and one other character were on stage (whenever Iago was in the act of deceiving someone), the verse would leave iambic pentameter and go into prose.

Iago seems to hate everyone (or want to cause harm to everyone) for no particular reasons! What are his “real” motives?

Iago: why, why, why?? He gives various reasons, but they don't seem ever fully truthful. He never explains himself: he just says he won't talk anymore.

Is there ever any overarching reason why Iago hates Othello?

Does Iago have it in for Cassio too, or is Cassio a victim of this plot just because he's convenient?

Iago is speaking the truth at times but it has a completely different meaning for the listener—clever.

Also, how does Iago know things will work? Planning?

Why does Othello's character break down so easily? At the beginning, he seemed so strong, rational, and noble.

At what point is Iago no longer "honest"?

I find it ironic that Iago is so often called "honest," considering how he schemes and plays people.

Why do Othello and Cassio keep calling Iago honest (who is not) but none of the other characters (who are)? Why does everyone believe so much in Iago's "honesty"?

At the end, I thought it ironic that in the darkness and foggy confusion of the attempted murder on Cassio, Iago is the one with the light (symbolic of truth); he provides the light to shine *his* personal truth on the situation.

The parallel between Iago/Emilia and Othello/Desdemona is interesting because Iago verbally abuses and uses his wife.

Is Emilia a bad character, trying to get her husband's love and dumb to the consequences?

What is Emilia's true relationship with Iago? Dysfunctional marriage? Knowing accomplice?

Emilia is the only woman who demonstrates a strong action (Desdemona's defiance of her father being beforehand). Why?

I find it interesting that the one that finally reveals Iago is his wife, so that in being faithful to truth, she is also going against Iago.

Why can't Iago get away with it? Where does he screw up?

Why does Iago just stop talking in the last act?