



# OTHELLO

## HISTORICAL CONTEXT ACTIVITIES

Activities to develop thinking about the historical and social context of the play

In **'Teacher's Mode'** on the website, click on the **'Moors in Early Modern England'** download. Focus on the paragraph at the end of page 3 beginning *'Emma Smith discusses...'* where some of the feelings that an audience in Shakespeare's time would have towards *'Moors'* are discussed.

How could this information help a modern audience to understand the reaction of Brabantio in Act 1, Scene 2, when he furiously confronts Othello about his marriage with Desdemona?

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In **'Teacher's Mode'** on the website, click on the **'Moors in Early Modern England'** download. Focus on the first two paragraphs of the section headed *'Europe's Relationships with Africa and the Middle East'* at the end of page 1.

How could knowing how much Europeans feared invasion from Turkey in Shakespeare's time help a modern audience to understand the urgency the Duke feels in the meeting with Othello in Act 1, Scene 3 when he says *'Valiant Othello we must straight employ you / Against the general enemy Ottoman'*?

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In **'Teacher's Mode'** on the website, click on the **'All the King's Men'** download. Focus on the two paragraphs beginning *'Within a month of enlisting...'* towards the end of page 1.

Here the experience of racial prejudice in the British Army in the First World War is described through the experience of one black soldier, Norman Manley, who was promoted to become an officer. Many years later, he recalled the terrible prejudice of other officers and the ordinary soldiers who resented taking orders from a black soldier, which made him resign his position and go back to being an ordinary soldier. (41 years after the end of the First World War, Norman Manley became prime minister of Jamaica.)

How might reading this account from a different time help an audience to understand the pressure on Othello in his position as a leader of Venice's army, and also Iago's feelings of resentment?