



OTHELLO

LANGUAGE ACTIVITIES

Activities to develop thinking about the language of the text

Click on '**Interviews**' page on the website. Listen to **Interview 1** with **Jamie**, the actor playing **Iago** where he talks about how the language Shakespeare uses shows the speed with which Iago's mind has to work as he tricks Othello.

Jamie describes Iago as '*winging it*' and that his trickery is almost '*running away with himself*' particularly in the key scene Act 3 Scene 3. Jamie picks out Shakespeare's use of quick '*half-lines*' as well as pauses and questions to show the audience that Iago is thinking quickly. Jamie says Iago is 'constantly on it' working hard to make the tricking of Othello work.

Looking at **Act 3, Scene 3, lines 335** to the end of the scene, find some examples where the language used shows that Iago is thinking quickly. Look for questions, pauses and short sentences. Try saying these lines aloud so that you can see how they show the audience that Iago is thinking quickly.

In **Act 1**, the audience hears the ways in which other characters such as Brabantio and Iago insult Othello because of his race. For instance Iago describes him as '*an old black ram*' (Act 1, Scene 1, line 89). In contrast Othello speaks and behaves with restraint and dignity.

Draw up two columns, in one list the insults other characters say about Othello and in the other examples where Othello speaks in a dignified and restrained way. What impact does Othello's language have on the audiences – the Senate and the one watching the play?

In **Act 1**, the audience first becomes aware of Iago's ability to deceive others. Focus on the conversation between Roderigo and Iago in Act 1, Scene 3, lines 298 – 373, where Iago is attempting to provoke Roderigo to become his accomplice in bringing down Othello.

List all the techniques which Iago cleverly uses language to convince Roderigo to abandon his thoughts of suicide and instead join with Iago against Othello. How does he persuade Roderigo to do what he wants?

Click on **'Language'** page on the website and find the article **'Iago's insincere sincerity'** where Giles Block describes prose as *'a smoke screen, hiding one thought behind another'*. He explains that in the play there are around 600 lines of prose and most of these lines are spoken by Iago.

Find **Act 2, Scene 3, lines 240-313** and identify the ways in which Iago uses trickery through language to persuade Cassio to approach Desdemona to help him. One example is in line 280 where Iago says of Cassio's drunken brawl *'I could heartily wish this had not befallen'* when the audience knows that the opposite is true. Identify other examples of his trickery.

Click on **'Language'** page on the website and open **Act 3, Scene 3**. Using the **Script Machine**, find lines 90-243 where Iago 'works on' Othello to start to make him doubt Desdemona.

List the ways in which Iago plants the seeds of doubt in Othello's mind such as the repeated use of the word *'honest'*. With a fellow student, take a section of these lines (90-134) and say the lines emphasising the way Iago begins the process of making Othello doubt Cassio and Desdemona.