



## EDUCATION DEPARTMENT CURRICULUM GUIDE TO *OTHELLO*

### About the Folger Shakespeare Library

The Folger Shakespeare Library houses one of the world's largest and most significant collections of materials pertaining to Shakespeare and the English and Continental Renaissance. The Folger Shakespeare Library editions of Shakespeare's plays are acclaimed throughout the world by educators, students, and general readers.

The mission of the Folger Library is to preserve and enhance its collections; to render the collections accessible to scholars for advanced research; and to advance understanding and appreciation of the Library and its collections through interpretive programs for the public.

### About the Folger Shakespeare Library's Education Department

*"There is much matter to be heard and learned."  
As You Like It*

Shakespeare's audience spoke of *hearing* a play, rather than of seeing one. The Folger Shakespeare Library's Education department believes in active learning, using a performance-based and language-centered approach to teaching Shakespeare. Drawing on the Folger's abundant resources and incorporating opportunities provided by the Web, their activities and workshops present innovative ways to engage children, students, and teachers in Shakespeare's work.

For a complete selection of curriculum plans from the Folger Shakespeare Library Education department, visit [www.folger.com](http://www.folger.com).

## About the Folger Shakespeare Library's Publishing Program

For nearly 70 years, the Folger Shakespeare Library has been the most respected resource for the scholarship and teaching of William Shakespeare. Designed with everyone in mind—from students to general readers—these editions feature:

- Freshly edited text based on the best early printed version of the play
- Modern spelling and punctuation
- Detailed explanatory notes conveniently placed on pages facing the text of the play
- Scene-by-scene plot summaries
- A key to famous lines and phrases
- An introduction to reading Shakespeare's language
- An essay by an outstanding scholar providing a modern perspective on the play
- Illustrations from the Folger Shakespeare Library's vast holdings of rare books
- Biographical and historical essays

To receive a complete list of available titles, e-mail your request to [folger.marketing@simonandschuster.com](mailto:folger.marketing@simonandschuster.com).

## The Shakespeare Set Free Workshops

Make meaningful learning fun. Shakespeare Set Free workshops model a fresh approach for teaching Shakespeare in grades 3-12. Based on twenty years of best practices, the Folger method inspires teachers with proven activities that address national and local standards. Schedule a one-day workshop for 20-30 teachers at your school. If you teach in New Jersey, you may be eligible for funding from the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation. Contact the Folger Shakespeare Library at 202-675-0380 or by e-mail at [educate@folger.edu](mailto:educate@folger.edu) for more information.

Turn the page for sample curriculum plans that you can find at <http://www.folger.com>  
Additional plans and tools are available on the website.

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# OTHELLO

Dear Colleagues,

Somewhere along the line, most of my students and probably most of yours have heard about William Shakespeare. Maybe they saw the film *Shakespeare in Love* or heard an answer on *Jeopardy*, but somehow, along with the ozone, they've breathed in that name: Shakespeare. In fact, to many kids Shakespeare is "sposed to be" a part of high-school education, and they expect to read one of his works. If we don't give them that exposure, they feel vaguely cheated or assume we think they're incompetent to meet the challenge of something important.

But when that anticipated moment comes and the teenage eye actually meets the Shakespearean page, then, unfortunately, that early interest too often is followed by . . . "Huh? What is this? Why are we reading this?"

The faces of the bored and defiant can make the best of us dread going into the classroom. It's happened to me, and maybe it's happened to you, but it doesn't have to be that way. Incredibly, teaching Shakespeare can actually invigorate both your class and you. . . . You have an intimate knowledge of your teaching style and of the workings of your class. Use that knowledge to select the exercises [from this packet] that you think will provoke excitement, enhance learning, and help ease your students past the language barrier and into the wonder of the play.

Here's to the magic in the play and to the magic in your classroom.

Judith Elstein

Adapted from *Shakespeare Set Free: Teaching Romeo and Juliet, Macbeth, and A Midsummer Night's Dream*

Each of the five lesson plans in this packet includes:

- Step-by-step instructions
- Materials needed
- Standards covered
- Questions students should be able to answer when the lesson is over
- Suggested related lesson plans with directions on how to find them on the Folger Web site.

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## Curriculum Plan #1

### **Othello's Father of the Bride** **(A Lesson in Analysis)** **Developed by Linda G. Wolford**

In this lesson students will examine Brabantio's reaction to the marriage of Desdemona to Othello. After reading Act 1 of *Othello*, students will explore the various themes on love and marriage introduced in Act 1 and support their analysis with references from the text. This analysis will help students understand Brabantio's character by interpreting his words in 1.3.333-334 using different subtexts.

This lesson will take one class period.

#### **NCTE Standards Covered:**

1. Students read a wide range of print and nonprint texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.
3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).
4. Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.
6. Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and nonprint texts.
9. Students develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles.

## **What To Do:**

1. Write the following themes or concepts on the board and have students suggest others to add to the list:

Attitudes toward women

Duties of a daughter

Brabantio's feelings about this marriage

Reasons why Desdemona and Othello got married

Brabantio's objections to Othello as a son-in-law

Then ask students to give examples of how these topics are developed in Act 1 using plot instances and specific lines in the text. List their findings and corresponding line numbers under each topic. Discuss and summarize their observations.

2. Read 1.3.333-334 aloud together. Hand out prepared emotion notecards to volunteers. Instruct each volunteer to read the line aloud as motivated by the emotion on the card. Have the rest of the students try to identify the feeling as interpreted by the reader. Then explain to the class that they have just practiced finding the subtext (literally, the "under words" or meaning an actor gives to a line by varying the volume, tone, rate, and pitch of his/her voice). Discuss which readings were substantiated by the events in the play and the earlier analysis of the topics in Act I. Which interpretations worked, and why? Which were believable? Which were true to the story, to the text, and/or to their own experiences?

## **What You Need:**

The Folger Shakespeare Library edition of *Othello* (ISBN: 0-7434-7755-3, \$4.99)

Notecards with emotion/attitude words: bitter, loving, angry, hurt, insulted, sad, resigned, cautioning, disgusted, hateful, etc.

## **How Did It Go?**

Did the students find quotes in the text to support a thorough analysis of the topics?

Were the line readings varied, and were they clearly communicated to the other students?

Did the activities increase student understanding of the events and characters?

## **If You And Your Class Enjoyed This Curriculum Plan, You'll Want To Try:**

"O, I Have Lost My Reputation": The students study the issue of reputation to allow them to better understand the plot and themes of the play.

## **Where Can I Find This Lesson Plan?**

1. Go to the Web site address: [www.folger.edu](http://www.folger.edu)

2. Scroll down to "Teachers and Students"

3. In the menu that appears, choose "Resources for Teachers" and then "Teaching Shakespeare"

4. Click on “Archives”
5. Click on “Lesson Plan Archives”
6. Scroll down until you get to “Othello”
7. Choose the lesson plan listed above or browse the other titles for more classroom ideas

## Curriculum Plan #2

### **Fear and Loathing in Othello** **(A Lesson in Character Analysis)** **Developed by Jenny Beekly**

Students will look at *The History and Description of Africa* by Leo Africanus, a primary source that existed at the time Shakespeare wrote *Othello*. This text, which includes a description of African people, was translated into English in 1600 and was widely circulated. Students will examine the Africanus text and note assumptions, tones, and images used to describe Africans. The class will then turn to *Othello* and examine Othello's descriptions of himself in the play.

This exercise will expose students to the ideas and principles regarding Africans that existed during Shakespeare's time, providing a cultural context in which they can analyze Othello's feelings about himself as an individual. Students will use both the Africanus and the Shakespeare texts as evidence for a character analysis essay of Othello. Because this exercise is intended to function both as a review of the play and a work session for the development of a formal paper, it will take three days to complete.

#### **NCTE Standards Covered:**

1. Students read a wide range of print and nonprint texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.
2. Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.
6. Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and nonprint texts.
9. Students develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles.

#### **What To Do:**

Students will have finished reading *Othello*. Students should have been informed at the beginning of the play that a formal paper, involving citations from that text as well as a primary source from Shakespeare's time, will be required.

#### **DAY 1: EXPLORING A PRIMARY SOURCE**

1. Print sufficient numbers of copies of Handout #1, "The Description of Leo Africanus" (see the "What You Need" section below) and distribute to your students. The handout contains an excerpt from *The History and Description of Africa*. Tell students that the text of the handout is a modern transcription of Africanus' text, translated into English by John Pory around 1600. It was considered an accurate, well-researched reference work by the people of Shakespeare's day. It is conceivable that writers of that time, perhaps even Shakespeare himself, would have referred to this source for background knowledge in constructing a character such as Othello.

2. Divide students into five groups. Explain that they will spend the period reading and marking up their copies of the Africanus text. They should be looking for passages that describe the traits, behaviors, and perspectives of Africans, specifically Moors. In addition, they should consider the tone the author uses, whether he is objective in his descriptions, and what his purpose in writing such a text might be. They should come away from this class period with extensive notes marking the excerpt as well as additional notes that might help them in their final papers.

#### DAY 2: EXPLORING *OTHELLO*

3. At the beginning of the next class period, have students return to their small groups and pull out their copies of the Africanus text. They should also get out their copies of *Othello*.

4. Assign each of the five groups one act of the play. Instruct students that they will be looking for Othello's descriptions of himself. Remind students that the statements that Othello makes to other characters can also provide information about how he feels about himself. Students should keep a list of quotations that they find. Tell students that they need to turn in one copy of their group's findings at the end of the class.

#### DAY 3: CLASS DISCUSSION

5. Before the next class period, you will need to photocopy each group's work on quotations from *Othello*. Collate and make a packet to give to each student at the beginning of class. Arrange all the chairs in a large circle to encourage class discussion.

7. Tell students that this discussion should draw connections between Shakespeare and Africanus, considering what each text might tell us about the character of Othello. Remind students that this discussion will also serve as a review session before the character analysis paper on *Othello*. At this time, you may want to distribute a checklist for the final copy of their paper (Handout #2, "Checklist for Character Analysis Paper on Othello," attached).

8. Ask if students have any questions about the Africanus text. Let students direct the conversation to the areas that they find most puzzling or pertinent to the construction of their papers. Some suggestions:

The purpose of Africanus' description (of course, this issue requires guessing, but it is important to consider)

The tone of Africanus' text (What did his attitude towards the subject seem to be? Unbiased, critical, contemptuous, friendly?)

Specific examples that Africanus gave (What were they? Why might they have been included?)

The tone of Othello's remarks about himself (Were they confident? Self-critical?)

Specific examples from Othello's own words (What does he tell us about himself? What made him choose to reveal the information he did?)

Connections between the Africanus description and *Othello* (Were there similar attitudes found in both texts? Were there examples that bore resemblance to each other?)

At the end of the discussion, students should have an idea of how they will complete their character analysis papers, with a strong sense of how they will incorporate examples from the Africanus text and the play and how these sources will function as evidence to help them prove their thesis statements.

### **What You Need:**

The Folger Shakespeare Library edition of *Othello* (ISBN: 0-7434-7755-3, \$4.99)  
2 Handouts (attached)

### **How Did It Go?**

You can check student progress throughout by observing them during their small group work and class discussion. Did students engage with both texts, focusing on passages that they believed to be important to the assignment? Were they talking in their small groups about what specific examples in the text meant? During class discussion, were students concerned about connecting the Africanus text with the quotes they pulled from *Othello*? The most significant evaluation will be that of the final paper. The checklist handout, with few adaptations, could function as a rubric from which to grade the character analysis papers.

### **If You And Your Class Enjoyed This Curriculum Plan, You'll Want To Try:**

"Othello's Predecessors: Moors in Renaissance Popular Literature": Students look at how the stereotypes of Moors and Africans prevalent in Shakespeare's time affected how Elizabethan audiences viewed the character of Othello.

## **Where Can I Find This Lesson Plan?**

1. Go to the Web site address: [www.folger.edu](http://www.folger.edu)
2. Scroll down to “Teachers and Students”
3. In the menu that appears, choose “Resources for Teachers” and then “Teaching Shakespeare”
4. Click on “Archives”
5. Click on “Lesson Plan Archives”
6. Scroll down until you get to “Othello”
7. Choose the primary source lesson plan listed above or browse the other titles for more classroom ideas

## Curriculum Plan #3

### **“I Am Not What I Am” (A Lesson in Interpretation) Developed by Robert Hiles**

This lesson asks students to explore their own curses and epithets, and uses the emotions generated to launch an introductory discussion of the language in *Othello*.

This activity can be completed in one class period.

#### **NCTE Standards Covered:**

1. Students read a wide range of print and nonprint texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.
2. Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.
3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).
4. Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.
6. Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and nonprint texts.
9. Students develop an understanding of and respect for diversity in language use, patterns, and dialects across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles.
11. Students participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.
12. Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

### **What To Do:**

1. Have students take out pen and paper. Give them 30 seconds to write down names and epithets they have called others. Assure them they will not share this work with their classmates.
2. Have a brief discussion of the activity. Possible prompts include: why are those names hurtful? What names have you been called? What was the person's motive for using those words? How do you feel after using them?
3. You may want to make a public show of disposing of this work anonymously. I pass around a manila envelope which I then seal and dispose of at home.
4. Now turn to 1.1 of *Othello*. On the board or in small groups, have students determine the different things that Othello gets called. Then move on to Cassio and Desdemona.
5. In discussion, see if students can determine any motive for Roderigo and Iago. See if they can draw any conclusions on how Shakespeare wants his audience to react to each character.

### **What You Need:**

The Folger Shakespeare Library edition of *Othello* (ISBN: 0-7434-7755-3, \$4.99)

### **How Did It Go?**

Were students engaged? Did they make connections between their own epithets and those used in *Othello*? Did the activity help them understand the characters and the issues of intolerance that the play raises?

### **If You And Your Class Enjoyed This Curriculum Plan, You'll Want To Try:**

"Where Do They Stand?: Perspectives on Othello's Marriage": In this lesson students will explore the text and establish understanding, to determine each character's attitude toward Othello.

### **Where Can I Find This Lesson Plan?**

1. Go to the Web site address: [www.folger.edu](http://www.folger.edu)
2. Scroll down to "Teachers and Students"
3. In the menu that appears, choose "Resources for Teachers" and then "Teaching Shakespeare"
4. Click on "Archives"
5. Click on "Lesson Plan Archives"
6. Scroll down until you get to "Othello"
7. Choose the lesson plan listed above or browse the other titles for more classroom ideas

## Curriculum Plan #4

### **“Divinity of Hell!”: Soliloquies, Cutting, and Computers** (A Lesson in Language) Developed by Janet Field-Pickering

Students struggle with soliloquies—the language is poetically rich and dense, and they often complain, "Why can't Shakespeare just get to the point?" This lesson sets students loose on the language and gives them permission to cut Shakespeare down to size. In the process of reducing a soliloquy to half its former length, students get a clearer understanding of a character's thoughts and intentions. In debating what is essential to the soliloquy and what is expendable, they discover how the language of the soliloquy works.

This lesson will take one to two class periods.

#### **NCTE Standards Covered:**

1. Students read a wide range of print and nonprint texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.
3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).
4. Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.
6. Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and nonprint texts.
8. Students use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.
12. Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes (e.g., for learning, enjoyment, persuasion, and the exchange of information).

## What To Do:

This activity works best with a networked computer lab in which each student works at a computer. If, like many teachers, you don't have access to a networked lab or one computer per student, change the group size to four and have each group work together at one computer station.

1. Put the text of the *Othello* 2.3 soliloquy on every computer screen. (You can use the text from the handout below.)
2. Assign the students to groups of five and seat them at adjacent computers. Tell them to read the soliloquy on the screen in front of them. Their ultimate goal is to cut the text in half. Their immediate task is to cut two or three lines and paste them below the asterisks at the bottom of the screen.
3. When the students have selected two or three lines and moved them, play musical computers. Hum a few bars of "Pop Goes the Weasel" as each student in the group moves to the computer to his or her right—except for the fifth person who circles around to sit at the first computer.

A few rules: a "line" can mean an entire line or phrase. No student may move the same line twice. The cut lines are moved below the asterisks in the order in which they are cut—no deleting. The soliloquy must preserve its sense and meaning—no random cuts for the sake of cutting.

4. Tell the students to read what is in front of them, cut two or three more lines and paste them below the asterisks. Have the students move from screen to screen in this manner until at least ten lines appear below the asterisks on each screen and all the members of a group have circled back to their original computer screens.
5. Save and print the altered texts. Have each group discuss its five different versions and select the best one. Print a copy of the new script for each member of the group. Here is a sample script.

### Sample Script Group #3

And what's he then that says I play the villain,  
When this advice is free I give and honest,  
the course  
To win the Moor again? For 'tis most easy  
Th'inclining Desdemona to subdue  
In any honest suit  
How am I then a villain  
To counsel Cassio to this parallel course  
Directly to his good. For whiles this honest fool  
Plies Desdemona to repair his fortune,  
And she for him pleads strongly to the Moor,

I'll pour this pestilence into his ear:  
That she repeals him for her body's lust;  
And by how much she strive to do him good,  
She shall undo her credit with the Moor.  
So will I turn her virtue into pitch,  
And out of her own goodness make the net  
That shall enmesh them all.

\*\*\*\*\*

Probal to thinking, and indeed  
She's framed as fruitful  
As the free elements. And then for her  
To win the Moor—were't to renounce his baptism,  
All seals and symbols of redeemed sin—  
Even as her appetite shall play the god  
With his weak function.  
His soul is so enfettered to her love  
That she may make, unmake, do what she list,  
Divinity of hell!  
When devils will the blackest sins put on,  
They do suggest at first with heavenly shows,  
As I do now

6. Give each group five to ten minutes to figure out how to stage the final script, with everyone in the group participating (lines can be shared or spoken in unison). Have each group perform its version in front of the class.

7. After all the groups have performed, discuss the choices made.

#### **Discussion Prompts**

Did any patterns emerge—were all the performed versions similar or different in terms of the lines that were cut?

Did some versions seem to preserve the meaning of the text better than others?

Argue the case for discarded lines—should the lines be returned to the script or are they expendable?

8. Homework assignment: have each student create a new poem using some or all of the discarded lines.

#### **What You Need:**

The Folger Shakespeare Library edition of *Othello* (ISBN: 0-7434-7755-3, \$4.99)

A computer lab

## **How Did It Go?**

This lesson requires that students engage in a number of activities—text analysis, group work, performance, class discussion, and writing. If the students are actively involved in all stages of the process, if they are able to debate the relative merits of individual and group choices, if they take words and phrases and create a poem that might lead them even further in their understanding of character or language, they will end up with a clearer understanding of how a soliloquy works and why.

## **If You And Your Class Enjoyed This Curriculum Plan, You'll Want To Try:**

“Words, Words, Words”: The students learn how language choices and shades of meaning affect their understanding of the play.

## **Where Can I Find This Lesson Plan?**

1. Go to the Web site address: [www.folger.edu](http://www.folger.edu)
2. Scroll down to “Teachers and Students”
3. In the menu that appears, choose “Resources for Teachers” and then “Teaching Shakespeare”
4. Click on “Archives”
5. Click on “Lesson Plan Archives”
6. Scroll down until you get to “Othello”
7. Choose the lesson plan listed above or browse the other titles for more classroom ideas

## Curriculum Plan #5

### **MTV *Othello*** **(A Lesson in Performance and Music)** **Developed by Susan M. Kochman**

Songs are often overlooked in Shakespeare's plays; this lack of attention will be addressed by having students dramatize Desdemona's "Willow Song." Creating a choral reading, singing and performing the song, or staging a music video helps students recognize how music and lyrics contribute to the mood and meaning of a scene. The students' creativity and active participation in whatever form the dramatization takes will make both the song and scene more memorable.

This lesson will take one to two class periods.

#### **NCTE Standards Covered:**

1. Students read a wide range of print and nonprint texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works.
3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).
4. Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.

#### **What To Do:**

1. Ask students to recall any plays they have read or seen that have songs or music in them. (If they can't think of any plays, resort to movies.) Discuss specific examples and their responses to these songs or music, and note what effects the songs produced on the audience.
2. Tell students that they will create a performance of a song in *Othello*. Read aloud *Othello* 4.3 up to line 62. Discuss the meaning and mood of the lines.
3. Divide students into groups of four or five and have them prepare a dramatization of Desdemona's song. Have each group "script" the song, parceling out lines and phrases to different students, or perhaps saying or singing certain lines all together. Each person in

the group must contribute either by reading, singing, acting out a part, or adding sound effects. Encourage the students to be creative in scripting their choral reading. They may also choose to set the words to a modern tune or write their own music for the song.

4. Each group will present its version of the song to the class. When all the groups have performed, discuss what the students discovered throughout the process, noting differences among groups in performance and interpretation, and determining what the song contributes to the scene.

### **What You Need:**

The Folger Library edition of *Othello* (ISBN: 0-7434-7755-3, \$4.99)  
A camcorder and videotape are optional

### **How Did It Go?**

Discussing the exercise afterwards will reveal students' understanding of the effects of songs on drama. Having students write their individual reactions in a journal prior to class discussion is an effective means of preparing students for discussion.

Extend this activity over a few more days to allow the students to bring in costumes and props and videotape the students' performances for later viewing and analysis.

If you test at the end of the unit, include an essay question that asks students to discuss specifically how Desdemona's song enhances the mood of the scene and their understanding of the play.

### **If You And Your Class Enjoyed This Curriculum Plan, You'll Want To Try:**

"Imagery—It's Music to My Ear!": Students will listen to Verdi's opera *Otello*, specifically to Iago's aria "Credo in un Dio crudel," and compare the orchestration and the libretto to Iago's soliloquy in 2.3.

### **Where Can I Find This Lesson Plan?**

1. Go to the Web site address: [www.folger.edu](http://www.folger.edu)
2. Scroll down to "Teachers and Students"
3. In the menu that appears, choose "Resources for Teachers" and then "Teaching Shakespeare"
4. Click on "Archives"
5. Click on "Lesson Plan Archives"
6. Scroll down until you get to "Othello"
7. Choose the lesson plan listed above or browse the other titles for more classroom ideas

### **Also Available from the Folger Shakespeare Library**

Shakespeare wrote more than twenty plays\*, and many are terrific for students. Whether tragedy or comedy, all will teach students about the age of Shakespeare, about the subtle manipulation of language and image, and about the dramatic construction of character in a new and exciting way. Additional titles include:

Hamlet (ISBN: 0-7432-7712-X )

Macbeth (ISBN: 0-7432-7710-3)

Romeo and Juliet (ISBN: 0-7432-7711-1)

A Midsummer Night's Dream (ISBN: 0-7432-7754-5)

Julius Caesar (ISBN: 0-7432-8274-3)

The Taming of the Shrew (ISBN: 0-7432-7757-X)

The Merchant of Venice (ISBN: 0-7432-7756-1)

Much Ado About Nothing (ISBN: 0-7432-8275-1)

King Lear (ISBN: 0-7432-8276-X)

\*For a complete list of available titles, please e-mail your request to [folger.marketing@simonandschuster.com](mailto:folger.marketing@simonandschuster.com)

Handout for Curriculum Plan #2

**Fear and Loathing in Othello**

**Handout #1: The Description of Leo Africanus**

**The commendable actions and vertues of the Africans**

The Arabians which inhabite in Barbarie or vpon the coast of the Mediterran sea, are greatly addicted vnto the studie of good artes and sciences: and those things which concerne their law and religion are esteemed by them in the first place. Moreouer they haue beene heretofore most studious of the Mathematiques, of Philosophie, and of Astrologie: but these artes (as it is aforesaid) were fower hundred yeeres agoe, vtterly destroyed and taken away by the chiefe professors of their lawe. The inhabitants of the cities doe most religiously obserue and reuerence those things which appertaine vnto their religion: yea they honour those doctours and priests, of whom they learne their law, as if they were petie-gods. Their Churches they frequent verie diligently, to the ende they may repeat certaine prescript and formal prayers; most superstitiously perswading theselues that the same day wherein they make their praiers, it is not lawfull for them to wash certaine of their members, when as at other times they will wash their whole bodies. Whereof we will (by Gods helpe) discourse more at large in the second Booke of this present treatise, when we shall fall into the mentioning of *Mahumet* and his religion. Moreouer those which inhabite Barbarie are of great cunning & dexteritie for building & for mathematicall inuentions, which a man may easily coniecture by their artificiall workes. Most honest people they are, and destitute of all fraud and guile; not onely imbracing all simplicitie and truth, but also practising the same throughout the whole course of their liues: albeit certaine Latine authors, which haue written of the same regions, are farre otherwise of opinion. Likewise they are most strong and valiant people, especially those which dwell vpon the mountaines. They keepe their couenant most faithfully; insomuch that they had rather die than breake promise. No nation in the world is so subiect vnto iealousie; for they will rather leese their lives, then put vp any disgrace in the behalfe of their women. So desirous they are of riches and honour, that therein no other people can goe beyonde them. The truell in a manner ouer the whole world to exercise traffique. For they are continually to bee seene in AEGypt, in Aethiopia, in Arabia, Persia, India, and Turkie: and whithersoouer the goe, they are most honorably esteemed of: for none of them will possesse any arte, vnlesse he hath attained vnto great exactness and perfection therein. They haue alwaies beene much delighted with all kinde of ciuilitie and modest behaiour: and it is accounted heinous among them for any man to vtter in companie, any bawdie or vnseemely worde. The haue alwaies in minde this sentence of a draue author; Giue place to thy superior. If any youth in presence of his father, his vncler, or any other of his kinred, doth sing or talke ought of loue matters, he is deemed to bee woorthie of grieuous punishment. Whasoeuer lad or youth there lighteth by chaunce into any company which discourseth of loue, no sooner heareth nor vnderstandeth what their talke tendeth vnto, but immediately he withdraweth himselfe from among

them. These are the things which we thought most woortie of relation as concerning the ciuillitie, humanitie, and vpright dealing of the Barbarians: let vs now proceede vnto the residue. Those Arabians which dwell in tents, that is to say, which bring vp cattell, are of a more liuerall and ciuill disposition: to wit, they are in their kinde as deuout, valiant, patient, courteous, hospitall, and as honest in life and conuersation as any other people. They be most faithfull obseruers of their word and promise; insomuch that the people, which before we said to dwell in the mountaines, are greatly stirred vp with emulation of their vertues. Howbeit the said mountainer, both for learning, for vertue, and for religion, are thought much inferiour to the Numidians, albeit they haue little or no knowledge at all in naturall philosophie. They are valiant, and exceeding louers and practisers of all humanitie. Also, the Moores and Arabians inhabiting Libya are somewhat ciuill of behauiour, being plaine dealers, voide of dissimulation, fauourable to strangers, and louers of simplicitie. Those which we before named white, or tawney Moores, are stedfast in friendship: as likewise they indifferently and fauourable esteeme of other nations: and wholly indeuour themselues in this one thing, namely, that they may leade a most pleasant and iocund life. Moreouer they maintaine most learned professors of liberall artes, and such men are most deuout in their religion. Neither is there any people in all Africa that lead a more happie and honorable life.

*What vices the foresaid Africans are subiect vnto.*

Neuer was there any people or nation so perfectly endued with vertue, but that they had their contrarie faults and blemishes: now therefore let vs consider, whether the vices of the Africas do surpasse their vertues & good parts. Those which we named the inhabitants of the cities of Barbarie are somewhat needie and couetous, being also very proud and high-minded, and woonderfullly addicted vnto wrath; insomuch that (according to the prouerbe) they will deeply engraue in marble any iniurie be it neuer so small, & will in no wise blot it out of their remembrance. So rustically they are & void of good manners, that scarcely can any stranger obtaine their familiaritie and friendship. Their wits are but meane, and they are so credulous, that they will beleue matters impossible, which are told them. So ignorant are they of naturall philosophie, that they imagine all the effects and operations of nature to be extraordinarie and diuine. They obserue no certaine order of liuing nor of lawes. Abounding exceedingly with choler, they speake alwaies with an angrie and lowd voice. Neither shall you walke in the day-time in any of their streetes, but you shall see commonly two or three of them together by the eares. by nature they are a vile and base people, being no better accounted of by their gouernours then if they were dogs. They haue neither iudges nor lawyers, by whose wisdome and counsell they ought to be directed. They are vtterly in trades of merchandize, being destitute of bankers and money-chargers: wherefore a merchant can doe nothing among them in his absence, but is himselfe constrained to goe in person whithersoouer his wares are carried. No people vnder heauen are more addicted vnto couetise the this nation: neither is there (I thinke) to bee found among them one of an

hundred, who for courtesie, humanitie, or deuotions sake will vouchsafe any entertainment vpon a stranger. Mindfull they haue alwaies beene of iniuries, but most forgetfull of benefites. Their mindes are perpetually possessed with vexation and strife, so that they will seldome or neuer shew themselues tractable to any man; the cause whereof is supposed to be; for that they are so greedily addicted vnto their filthie lucre, that they veuer could attaine vnto any kinde of ciuillitie of good behaiour. The shepherds of that region liue a miserable, toilsome, wretched and beggarly life: they are a rude people, and (as a man may say) borne and bred to theft, deceit, and brutish manners. Their yoong men may goe a wooing to diuers maides, till such time as they haue sped of a wife. Yea, the father of the maide most friendly welcommeth her suiter: so that I thinke scarce any noble or gentleman among them can chuse a virgine for his spouse: albeit, so soone as any woman is married, she is quite forsaken of all her suiters; who then seeke out other new paramours for their liking. Concerning their religion, the greater part of these people are neither Mahumetans, lewes, nor Christians; and hardly shall you finde so much as a sparke of pietie in any of them. They haue no churches at all, nor any kinde of prayers, but being vtterly estranged from all godly deuotion, they leade a sauage and beastly life: and if any man chanceth to be of a better disposition (because they haue no law-giuers nor teachers among them) he is constrained to follow the example of other mens liues & maners. All the Numidians being most ignorant of naturall, domesticall, & commonwealth-matters, are principally addicted vnto treason, trecherie, murther, theft, and robbie. This nation, because it is most slauish, will right gladly accept of any seruice among the Barbarians, be it neuer so vile or contemptible. For some will take vpon them to be dung-farmers, others to be scullians, some others to bee ostlers, and such like seruile occupations. Likewise the inhabitants of Libya liue a brutish kinde of life; who neglecting all kindes of good artes and sciences, doe wholly apply their mindes vnto theft and violence. Neuer as yet had they any religion, any lawes, or any good forme of liuing; but alwaies had, and euer will haue a most miserable and distressed life. There cannot any trechery or villanie be ijmented so damnable, which for lucre sake they dare not attempt. They spend all their daies either in most lewd practises, or in hunting, or else in warfare: neither weare they any shooes nor garments. The Negroes likewise leade a beastly kinde of life, being vtterly destitute of the vse of reason, of desteritie of wit, and of all artes. yea they so behaue themselues, as if they had continually liued in a forrest among wilde beasts. They haue great swarmes of harlots among them; whereupon a man may easily coniecture their manner of liuing; except their conuersation perhaps be somewhat more tolerable, who dwell in the principall townes and cities: for it is like that they are somewhat more addicted to ciuillitie.

Africanus, Leo. *The History and Description of Africa*. Trans. John Pory. 1600.

## Handout #2: Checklist for Character Analysis Paper on Othello

Objective: The goal of this paper is for you to prove your thesis statement about Othello as a character. You are analyzing Othello as a character, and proving an idea you have about what his essential traits are, and how these traits contribute to the outcome of the play.

When you have completed your paper, it should include the following:

- an interesting title that gives an idea of what your paper is about

- a clearly worded thesis statement (remember: a thesis statement is what you plan to prove)

- sufficient examples from the Africanus text and the play to lend credibility to your argument

- coherently worded connections you have drawn between the two texts

- a paper that is laid out logically in its discussion of your thesis and the examples that prove it

- correct documentation of quotes (MLA style)

Before you hand in your paper, please make sure that you have addressed each of these areas. In terms of evaluating your paper, I will be grading you on the degree of completion your paper demonstrates in each of the areas listed above.

