



Study Guide for Othello

Mile Square Theatre's Production of Y York's Adaptation
Created by MST Education for teachers & students attending the production

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"Othello" adapted by Y York
November 2005
For dates and times visit MST's website
www.milesquaretheatre.org

Mile Square Theatre
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About Othello

"Othello" is best known as a play by William Shakespeare. He wrote his original script in 1604 and it was first published in 1622, but it was inspired by and adapted from an Italian story in Giraldi Cinthio's *Hecatommithi*, published in 1565. A few years later, in 2001, Y York wrote another adaptation of Shakespeare's play with the same title.

About this production

About Mile Square Theatre's production

Y York's adaptation of "Othello" distills Shakespeare's tragedy down to the characters Othello, Iago, Desdemona, and Cassio in a streamlined, actor-driven production that focuses on the themes of passion, jealousy, and ambition. Director Will Pomerantz's (Culture Project, Public Theatre, Playwrights Horizons) modern staging illuminates the tragedy of the Jealous Man, whose fatal flaw is exploited by the vengeful Iago (John McAdams of the off-B'way production and HBO film of *The Laramie Project* and *Gross Indecency*).

Mile Square Theatre's production is a limited engagement, presented in three performances at the Hoboken High School Auditorium on November 11 at 8pm and November 12 at 2pm and 8pm. The Hoboken High School stage will be transformed into an intimate black box theatre, seating 100 audience members, so seating is limited. Tickets are free to the public and reservations are strongly suggested. For information and reservations, call 201-716-3044.

Information about the cast of actor and director and playwright

Y York (Playwright) has written many plays for children and adults, including *Afternoon of the Elves*, *Accidental Friends*, *The Forgiving Harvest*, *Frog and Toad (Forever)*, *The Garden of Rikki Tikki Tavi*, *Holiday Wrappings*, *The Last Paving Stone*, *Mask of the Unicorn Warrior*, *The Portrait*, *the Wind and the Chair*. Adult plays include *American 60's in the three Ax*, *The Bottom of the Ninth*, *Gerald's Good Idea*, *It Comes Around*, *Krisit*, *Life Gap*, *Rain*, *The Secret Wife*, and *Snowflake Avalanche*. She received a 2001 AATE award for best adaptation of literature, a 1997 Berrilla Kerr Playwriting award, is a member of the Dramatists Guild, and is an alumna of New Dramatists. Her plays have received support from the NEA, Rockefeller Foundation, AT&T, and the King County and Seattle Arts Commissions. She is also a recent Pew Charitable Trust Playwright-in-Residence at Honolulu Theatre for Youth.

Will Pomerantz (director) has recently developed plays for The Public Theatre (*A Free Man of Color* by John Guare and *The God Botherers* by Richard Bean), Playwrights Horizons (*Afterdark*, by Kara Manning), Hartford Stage (*Splitting Infinity* by Jamie Pachino), New York Theatre Workshop (*Glow* by Ed Bok Lee), Ensemble Studio Theatre (*Luminescence Dating* by Carey Perloff) and Cocteau Rep (*Crime and Punishment* by Curt Columbus).

He has directed for and been associated with such organizations as The Signature Theatre, The Williamstown Theatre Festival, The Denver Center, The Mark Taper Forum, The Pittsburgh Public, The Studio Theatre and Soho Rep. He has directed world premiere productions by such writers as John Guare, Julia Jordan, Sung Rno, Norman Allen, Kira Obolensky, and Gordon Dahlquist. In addition to his work on new plays, Will has also directed texts by Chekhov, Ibsen, Strindberg, Wedekind, Shakespeare, Shaw and Sophocles.

Mile Square Theatre's "Othello"

John McAdams (*Iago*) Previous Mile Square Theatre credits: *Metonymy*, *Foul Territory*, both part of *7th Inning Stretch*; *The Laramie Project* at the Union Square Theatre, *Gross Indecement: The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde* at the Minetta Lane, *Everything that Rises Must Converge* at New York Theatre Workshop, *Mud, River, Stone* at Playwrights Horizons, *Romola & Nijinsky* at Primary Stages, *Messalina* at the Kirk Theatre, *Learning Curve* at The Beckett Theater, *93 Acres* at HERE, *The Red Death* at the Ohio. Regional: *The People's Temple* at Berkeley Repertory Theatre, Perseverance Theatre, *One Arm* at Steppenwolf, *The Laramie Project* at Denver Center, Berkeley Rep & La Jolla Playhouse, *How I Learned to Drive* at the ATL. Off-off credits include: *A Devil Inside* and *Wally's Ghost* at SoHo Rep, *The Memory of Love's Refrain* and *Jail Bait* at the Womens InterArt Annex, *Downwinders and Vortex du Plasir* at the Ohio Theatre. Film: THE LARAMIE PROJECT. TV: LAW AND ORDER. He is a native of San Diego and holds an MFA from UCSD.

Alexander Elisa (*Othello*) Alexander Elisa is a proud native of New York City: "Born in Harlem, raised in the Heights". He is a graduate of Oberlin College where he earned bachelors degrees in psychology and in African American Studies. He has recently returned from a great summer season at Weathervane Theatre, one of the few theaters in the nation that presents plays and musicals in alternating repertory. It was there [while performing in six different shows] where he was able to undertake two of his favorite roles to date: the Beast (*Disney's Beauty and the Beast*) and Bernardo (*West Side Story*). Other cherished experiences include: touring Germany as a choir member and featured soloist with Queen Esther Marrow and the Harlem Gospel Singers; *Smokey Joe's Café* at Maine State Music Theatre.

Anna Kepe (*Desdemona*) Anna is a founding member of The Acting Shakespeare Company in New York and has directed and produced work in the areas of theatre, film, dance and music. Her NY credits includes: Off-Broadway: *Measure for Measure* (45 Bleecker/Culture Project), *Iphigenia at Aulis* (Symphony Space), *Traumnovela* (Barrow Street Theatre) as well as Lady Capulet in *Romeo and Juliet*, Lady Macbeth in *Macbeth*, Queen in *Cymbeline*. Regional theatre includes: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Macbeth*, *Cyrano de Bergerac* (all with Texas Shakespeare Festival, Viola in *Twelfth Night* (Franklin Park, VA), *22 Day Adagio* (Mill Mountain Theatre), Vittoria Corombona in *The White Devil* (The Shakespeare Theatre/ACA). Film: TORTURE ME NO MORE, THE BEAUTIFUL. She received her MFA from The Shakespeare Theatre / ACA. Other training with SITI Company and RADA. Thank you to my family, Laila and Daisy.

Matthew Stucky (*Cassio*) Matthew is delighted to be joining the cast of *Othello*. Most recently, he was seen as Lucentio in this summer's production of *Taming of the Shrew* at Shakespeare and Company. Favorite roles have included Tuzenbach in *Three Sisters* (SU Drama, ACTF Award of Distinction), Guildenstern in *Hamlet* (Syracuse Stage), Kilroy in *The Camino Real* (Hangar Theater), Big Deal in *Westside Story* (Syracuse Stage), The Boy in *Incident at Vichy* (NYSTI), John in *Bash* (SU Drama) and Calvin in *Hot 'N' Throbbin'* (Kitchen Theatre). Matthew holds a BFA in acting from the Syracuse University Drama Department and has trained both with Shakespeare's Globe in London and Shakespeare and Company. Matthew is delighted to be living his life as an actor and is grateful beyond words to be sharing that life with such an amazing collection of people.

Discussion Questions

The following are thematic questions to prompt discussion both before and after seeing the production. They are intended to be the spark to deeper conversation inspired by the students.

Deception

Pre When does a lie become "the truth"? Have you seen examples at school when a rumor spreads? What does it take for people to *believe* that rumor?

Post When does a lie become the truth in Othello?

Who's Play Is It?

Pre Why do you think the play is called Othello?

Post Why is the play called "Othello"? Could the play be called "Iago"? "Desdemona"? "Cassio"?

Green Eyed Monster

Pre Where have you seen jealousy in your life—amongst your friends, your family?

Post Who exhibits jealousy in the play? What happens because of that jealousy?

Where's the Beef?

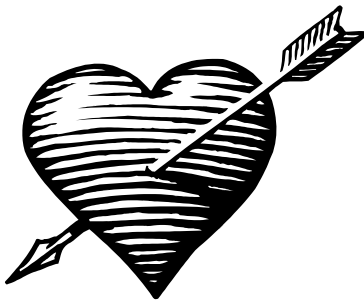
What does Iago have against Othello? What does he do about that?

The Blame Game

Who is to blame of the death of Desdemona? Iago? Othello?

Love

Is Love strong or weak? What does Y York's Othello say about Love? What does Shakespeare think about Love? Compare Shakespear opinion about love in Othello with his opinion about love in his Sonnet 116.



Sonnet 116 by William Shakespeare

Let me not to the marriage of true minds
Admit impediments; love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds,
Or bends with the remover to remove.
O no, it is an ever-fixed mark,
That looks on tempests and is never shaken;
It is the star to every wand'ring bark,
Whose worth's unknown, although his height be taken.
Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks
Within his bending sickle's compass come;
Love alters not with his brief hours and weeks,
But bears it out even to the edge of doom.
If this be writ and upon me proved,
I never writ, nor no man ever loved.

Exercises for the Classroom

Acting Lessons

Just as a playwright or any other writer makes choices about how to create a character, an actor has to do some detective work to find out about the writer's choices before making their own choices about how to play their part. Two key elements to every actor's process—whether the process is conscious or not—is to determine who the character is (characterization) and what the character wants (objectives).

+ Objectives

Every actor studies their character to determine what their "objective" is as a character. Each character has a "superobjective"—what they want through the whole play and throughout their whole life—and an "objective" for each scene. In order to achieve their objective, a character will use "tactics" to get around the "obstacles" that stand in their way.

What is Iago's **superobjective**? What is it that he wants most throughout the entire play? What are some of the **obstacles** that stand in his way?

What is Iago's **objective** in telling Desdemona that he loves her? What does he hope to get and how does he go about trying to get it?

+ Characterization

If you were to play one of the characters in the play, where would you begin to make choices about how to play that part? Just as when analyzing great literature, great actors and directors begin with some basic questions about the character in order to determine who they are:

What does the playwright say about the character?

What does the character say about him or her self?

What do other characters say about the character?

What are the character's actions?

Does what the character says about themselves and their actions match up?

How many of these questions can you answer about Iago? Othello? Desdemona? Cassio?

Plays are Living Literature

Just as in any good piece of literature there are essential elements in any good play that must be present. When watching Othello, look for the following literary elements in action:

Exposition: The background information—usually at the beginning of the play—that we need to know in order to follow the characters, the conflict and the plot.

Inciting Incident (or "Complication"): The thing that happens that launches the conflict.

Conflict: The struggle between the **protagonist** and the **antagonist**.

Climax (or "Crisis"): The turning point in the play. In Shakespeare's plays, often the climax revolves around a death (or deaths) in tragedies and a wedding (or weddings) in comedies.

Resolution: The "solution" to the problem that the climax creates.

Adaptation: Comparing Shakespeare's Othello with Y York's Othello

Just as Shakespeare adapted his story from another story of Othello, Y York has adapted her Othello from Shakespeare's.

On this page you will see an excerpt from Y York's Othello as well as the section from Shakespeare's play from which she adapted it.

- What did she include from Shakespeare? Why do you think she chose to keep only the text that she did?
- What did she leave out?
- What did she change?
- If you were to adapt Shakespeare's text, what would you include? What would you omit? What would you change?



1

From Y York's Othello

If I can fasten but one cup upon him, he'll be as full of quarrel and offence as my young mistress' dog. In this way I shall put Cassio in some action that may offend Othello. Then I will put the Moor into some anger so strong that judgement cannot cure him. 'Tis here, but yet confused: Knavery's plain face is never seen 'til used.

2

From Shakespeare's Othello

(Act II, Scene iii)

If I can fasten but one cup upon him,
With that which he hath drunk to-night
already,
He'll be as full of quarrel and offence
As my young mistress' dog. Now, my sick fool
Roderigo,
Whom love hath turn'd almost the wrong side out,
To Desdemona hath to-night caroused
Potations pottle-deep; and he's to watch:
Three lads of Cyprus, noble swelling spirits,
That hold their honours in a wary distance,
The very elements of this warlike isle,
Have I to-night fluster'd with flowing cups,
And they watch too. Now, 'mongst this flock of
drunkards,
Am I to put our Cassio in some action
That may offend the isle.--But here they come:
If consequence do but approve my dream,
My boat sails freely, both with wind and stream.
...
That Cassio loves her, I do well believe it;
That she loves him, 'tis apt and of great credit:
The Moor, howbeit that I endure him not,
Is of a constant, loving, noble nature,
And I dare think he'll prove to Desdemona
A most dear husband. Now, I do love her too;
Not out of absolute lust, though peradventure
I stand accountant for as great a sin,
But partly led to diet my revenge,
For that I do suspect the lusty Moor
Hath leap'd into my seat; the thought whereof
Doth, like a poisonous mineral, gnaw my inwards;
And nothing can or shall content my soul
Till I am even'd with him, wife for wife,
Or failing so, yet that I put the Moor
At least into a jealousy so strong
That judgment cannot cure. Which thing to do,
If this poor trash of Venice, whom I trash
For his quick hunting, stand the putting on,
I'll have our Michael Cassio on the hip,
Abuse him to the Moor in the rank garb—
For I fear Cassio with my night-cap too—
Make the Moor thank me, love me and reward me.
For making him egregiously an ass
And practising upon his peace and quiet
Even to madness. 'Tis here, but yet confused:
Knavery's plain face is never seen til used.

Preparing to Watch a Play

For many students, seeing "Othello" will be their first opportunity to see live theater. For those who have seen live theater before, it will be just as important that they are reminded of "audience etiquette" in order to create a better experience for them and for their fellow audience members. The following are a series of questions that may be helpful to ask your students before attending "Othello" or any live performance that you might see with your classroom:

- How many of you have seen a live play before? What did you see?
- What is the difference between seeing a play and attending a sports event? How is your role as an audience member different?
- What jobs are involved in producing a play? What do they do?

Actors	Set Designer	Producer/Artistic Director
Playwright	Costume Designer	PR/Marketing
Stage Manager	Lighting Designer	Dramaturg
Director	Sound Designer	House Manager

New Jersey Standards for Visual and Performing Arts

At MST we are interested in helping you with the work that you are doing in your classroom. The following information is intended to "point you" to the places in this Study Guide that address the New Jersey Standards in Performing Arts.

STANDARD 1.1 (Aesthetics) All students will use aesthetic knowledge in the creation of and in response to dance, music, theater and visual art.

Adaptation; Acting Lessons

STANDARD 1.3 (Elements and Principles) All students will demonstrate and understanding of the elements and principles of dance, music, theater and visual art.

Plays are Living Literature; Preparing to Watch a Play

STANDARD 1.4 (Critique) All students will develop, apply and reflect upon knowledge of the process of critique.

Discussion Questions

Additional Resources

On-line For a Full Script of Shakespeare's Othello: <http://www-tech.mit.edu/Shakespeare>

In print Arden Shakespeare's Othello
Shakespeare Set Free III: Teaching Twelfth Night & Othello
Y York's other plays

In person MST Education offers workshops including "Exploring Language through Shakespeare" To schedule a workshop, contact MST Education

This Study Guide and a clickable list of resources are available on-line in PDF format at the Mile Square Theatre website: www.milesquaretheatre.org.

About Mile Square Theatre

The Mission of **Mile Square Theatre** is to promote the theatre arts in the community of Hoboken and Hudson County, New Jersey by bringing together theatre artists and presenting works of quality that speak to a diverse audience and reflect the beauty and complexity of today's world. We aim to achieve our goals through the production of new works and the classics, through community-based projects, school residencies, and classes.

Our goals:

- To produce works rooted in the classics that are accessible to the wide demographics of Hudson County, NJ.
- To produce and foster new works.
- To promote theatre arts in Hoboken and Hudson County, NJ.
- To provide opportunities for theatre education in area schools in the form of outreach.
- To work with local literacy programs based on theatre texts.

Past **Mile Square Theatre** productions have included Jo Roet's adaptation of *Cyrano* in Frank Sinatra Park, three years of *7th Inning Stretch: 7 Original 10-minute Plays About Baseball*, and *Episodes in Blue* written and performed by Rodney Gardiner performed at The Hudson School in celebration of Black History Month.

About MST Education

MST Workshops are offered to classrooms and to teachers throughout the school year and are tailored to the needs of the teacher. Workshops range from Shakespeare for Grades 2 through 12, Bringing Literature to Life and Stepping into History.

MST Education has collaborated with Hoboken Historical Museum over the past several years, leading drama workshops with Hoboken school students and their families on the themes of the HHM exhibits *On the Waterfront*, *City Animals* and *History of Hoboken*.

MST Education is helmed by David A. Miller, Education Associate. In addition to his work at MST, David is the Artistic Director of CityKids Repertory Company in Manhattan and has taught throughout NY, NJ, DC and the Northwest with many theaters, including The Kennedy Center, Seattle Children's Theatre, Seattle Repertory Company, and McCarter Theater.

To schedule a workshop or to find out more, contact David at mrdauidamiller@yahoo.com.

Friends of MST

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