

## Outline of *Othello* Drama Structure

### Pre-reading

This is a pre-reading activity that establishes the main characters and the tension of the play.

Pre-text: What is a problem that is bothering one of the characters?

Episode: Students receive a parallel list of characters and their descriptions. In the role of one of the characters, students write a journal entry based on the character descriptions. They write about an implied tension from the descriptions. When students share their entries, two themes emerge: jealousy and stereotyping. For homework they read supplementary materials about Shakespeare and his play *Othello*. Articles from the series *Literature and Its Times* are excellent. Something that provides an overview and the historical context of the play is helpful.

### Act 1 scene 1

This episode occurs before students read the scene. In my parallel summary of the scene, students find out that Diana and Theo have returned from a date. They're at Theo's apartment. Of course Diana's parents are unaware of this date, (they wouldn't approve of what they call "apartment trash"), but not for long. Ian has given Rod the idea to let Mr. Baker know about this "scandal."

Pre-text: Without anyone else knowing, how does Ian get Rod to inform Mr. Baker?

Episode: After reading the episode, students get into groups of three. They create a skit that portrays my modern version of the scene. The trick is that they need to use several lines I provide from the corresponding scene in *Othello* with their own lines in order to convey a convincing scene of Rod's conversation with Mr. Baker.

Unpacking: After the skits, students write the parallel modern names next to Shakespeare's characters in their copies of *Othello*. The class then talks about what they expect to read about in *Othello* Act 1 scene 1 based on what was portrayed in the skits. Students begin reading scene 1.

### Act 1 scene 2

This episode also occurs before students begin reading the scene. In my parallel summary of the scene, students find out that Mr. Baker and Police Chief Warren confront Theo. Fortunately, or so Theo thinks, Ian arrives before Diana's father and warns them of the impending altercation. Diana calls a friend to get a ride home while Theo and Ian prepare themselves for the conflict.

Pre-text: What will Theo and Mr. Baker do and say to one another?

Episode: After reading the episode, students get into groups of three or four. They make a tableau of this encounter. Their tableau must include Mr. Baker, Theo and Ian. Other characters are optional. They can even include inanimate objects or be the interior thoughts of characters. In addition to creating a frozen pose, they need to give their tableau a title. Before students present their tableaux, I tell them the following: "If I tap you on the shoulder, come to life. Move and say something as that character. Then freeze back into a position."

Unpacking: I make sure everyone is still clear about the parallel characters and who matches up with whom in *Othello*. Also, because most groups usually focus their tableaux on Ian, I ask why they did that in light of the fact that the play is titled *Othello*. Then students predict what they expect to see in Iago as they read scene 2 of the play.

### Act 1 scene 3

This episode occurs before students begin reading the scene. In the previous episode, the confrontation with Mr. Baker and Theo was cut short because Chief Warren received a call to come to the station immediately. There was a big fight between members on Theo's soccer team and a rival team. Now everyone is at the police station. While Mr. Baker is accusing Theo of manipulating and taking advantage of his daughter, Diana stops the barrage of insults by declaring her love for Theo. Because Rod has always loved Diana, he is crushed. Ian of course capitalizes on Rod's broken heart and enlists Rod into helping him devise a plan to destroy Diana and Theo's relationship.

Pre-text: It's the day after the police station incident. The principal is holding a press conference in order to clear up the mess with the soccer team. He wants to assure the community that his boys will make things right. How will Theo, Ian, and Chris convince the media that they are upstanding players and will get their team back on track?

Episode: After reading the modern parallel summary of the scene, six students engage in hotseating and

inner-hotseating. The rest of the class are reporters. The teacher plays the principal. There are three chairs set up in front of the class. Two students play Ian (one outer voice who sits in the chair and one inner voice who stands behind the chair). Two play Theo and two play Chris; they play outer and inner voices just like those who play Ian. The principal then instructs everyone about the procedure of the press conference and stresses the importance of telling the truth and making sure the community sees how good of a school this is. The reporters then ask questions. Inner and outer voices respond in an impromptu fashion, being sure to stay in role and portray their respective characters as depicted in the previous scenes.

Unpacking: I ask what it is like to play a character and a reporter and what is revealed about the characters in the hotseats, especially those in the inner-hotseats. Students pick up on the duplicity of Ian, the vulnerability of Theo, and the naiveté of Chris. Ian is specifically the focus of the conversation. The themes of stereotyping and jealousy re-emerge. Then students predict what they will encounter in *Othello*. They read scene 3 and hi-light lines that indicate Iago's duplicity.

#### Act 2 through Act 5

My modern parallel continues with similar pre-reading drama activities.

#### The Final Episode

To conclude this unit on *Othello*, students engage in a conflict resolution drama. I set up the drama by giving notes on some peaceful and democratic means of solving conflict. Students then add their suggestions to my list. Once they have some strategies, they're ready to engage in a drama.

The drama involves the technique of fish bowl. In pairs, students choose a conflict in the play and then create a role-play that demonstrates an attempt to solve the problem. While performing the role-play, the class peers into the fish bowl and records any instances of the conflict resolution strategies we discussed. They also note any phrases, body language, etc., that escalate rather than alleviate the conflict. After each role-play, we discuss what they saw.

Finally, students write a personal reflection about a past or present conflict in their lives. I ask them to be honest and analyze how they've contributed to the conflict. Have you tried to solve the problem? Have your actions or words served to escalate rather than neutralize the conflict? Do you even want to solve the conflict? What can you do to seek resolution?

This personal reflection stays in their notebooks. I do not collect it nor do I ask them to share it with a partner.

#### Assessment

Assessment is in two parts. One is their journals where they take on the voice of one of the modern characters. I require them to make predictions and/or react to the events that previously transpire in an episode. The second is a traditional literary essay. I provide students with several prompts from which to choose. These prompts are based on essay questions from past Advanced Placement Literature exams.

A Modern *Othello* – Episode 1 (pre-reading)

Characters

**Theo** – He’s 18 and captain of the boys’ varsity soccer team. He works out four days a week with teammate Ian. He lives in a three-bedroom apartment with his mother and sister. He works at the local hardware store most weekends to save for college, because he plans to attend a prestigious state university in the fall. Though he has received some scholarship money, he still needs to come up with quite a bit more on his own. He’s handsome and dresses well, despite the fact that his parents are divorced and his father hasn’t sent child support in over ten years. He usually gets a ride to school with his friends.

**Ian** – He’s 18, a senior and on the boys’ varsity soccer team. He expected to be named co-captain, because he has played soccer since the fifth grade and actually played varsity since his sophomore year. Inside he’s pretty resentful of Theo’s decision to name Chris as co-captain. However, in order to keep up appearances, he continues to work out with Theo during the week. He lives with his mom, dad, and two sisters in a nice four-bedroom, 2½-bath house within walking distance of the school, yet he drives himself to school in his ’96 Honda Accord he got last year from his grandma when she went into a retirement community. He knows he should go to college in the fall (he definitely has the grades). However, there are other things more important on his mind right now than deciding on where to go to college.

**Diana** – She’s 17 and the most popular and attractive girl in school. Every guy wants to date her, but she is waiting for the right one. As a matter of fact, she has turned down Rod two times in the last year, gently of course. In the last few weeks, though, she has taken a romantic interest in Theo. They’ve been friends—pretty much best friends—since middle school, a purely plutonic relationship. Recently, however, she has begun to look at him as more than just a friend. Actually, they have a date this Friday night. She lives in the richest neighborhood in town with her father, a radiologist, and her mother, a lawyer. Her parents have high expectations of her, especially where she’s going to college and whom she will marry. She does plan to attend a private, all-girls school in the East this fall. Obviously her parents are very proud of her. Now they just have to make sure she finds the right man. She drives herself and friends to school in her 2002 Volkswagen Cabrio.

**Chris** – He is 17 and so excited to be co-captain of the soccer team, serving under Theo. He respects Theo and knows the team will do well under his leadership this season. However, Chris has only been playing soccer since freshman year. His inexperience has some teammates upset with him, but they’re even more upset with Theo. Like Ian, some think Chris shouldn’t be co-captain because he hasn’t earned the position. They feel Theo shouldn’t have named Chris his second in command. They believe Chris “earned” his position through favoritism rather than merit. Chris knows how to talk soccer, but he doesn’t have near the amount of years of playing experience as most of his teammates have. But Ian faults Theo more than Chris for this injustice. Chris didn’t lobby for his co-captain position; Theo appointed him. Chris is an easy-going guy who doesn’t like to make waves. He’s a good student and plans to attend a four-year college in the fall. He lives in the same neighborhood as Ian and drives a ’90 Toyota Corolla.

**Rod** – He is 17, president of student council, and obviously well liked by the “important” people. He lives in the same neighborhood with Diana. As a matter of fact, his family is a member of the same country club as the Bakers. He and his dad regularly play golf with Mr. Baker. Rod is expected to attend an Ivy League school in the fall and play la crosse on a full scholarship. Rod is considered prime marital material according to the Bakers. He has had a major crush on Diana since freshman year. But no matter what he does, she just won’t take a romantic interest in him. He’s friends with Ian and is well aware of the injustice done to him by Theo. He drives himself and no one else to school in his BMW SUV.

**Emily** – She is 17 and friends with Diana. They hang out most weekends and talk every night on the phone. She’s been dating Ian for two years. She believes their relationship is strong but has noticed recently that he’s been distracted and stressed. They haven’t connected like they normally do. Actually, it feels at times like he’s bored with her. She’s decided that she needs to do something to make sure this relationship lasts. However, she’s not yet sure about what to do. She, too, is a good student who plans to go to college in the fall. She gets a ride to school with Diana.