

Othello

Exam Preparation Pack for
AS and A Level OCR English Literature

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Teacher's Introduction

The purpose of this resource is to support students who are studying *Othello* for the following examinations:

- OCR English Literature AS Level (H072) Component 01 Shakespeare and poetry pre-1900 (Exam: Section 1)
- OCR English Literature A Level (H472) Component 01 Drama and poetry pre-1900 (Exam: Section 1)

It is designed to help students revise the play and prepare for the examination to enable them to produce high-quality responses to the best of their ability. All the activities in this resource assume the students have studied the play in detail.

What does this resource contain?


- Student introduction covering the AS and A Level assessment objectives, details about the examinations and the OCR specifications
- Revision notes and activities
- Practice examination questions with indicative content
- Student-friendly mark scheme
- Essay answer breakdown
- Sample answers for some of the exam questions
- Answers to all activities

Play edition: The Shakespeare component of the examination at both AS and A Level for OCR is closed book. Students may therefore use any edition of *Othello* for their study, though OCR advises them to avoid using heavily edited editions. It is also important to note that OCR's policy is to select passages for consideration in part (a) of the A Level paper from the Alexander text of Shakespeare's plays (published by Collins). This may guide the choice of edition used in the classroom.

Remember!

Always check the exam board website for new information, including changes to the specification and sample assessment material.

For this resource pack, the following edition has been used:

 *Othello*. Ed. Norman Sanders. New Cambridge Shakespeare. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. ISBN: 9780521535175

Unless otherwise stated, all references to the play will be given in the order: act number, scene number and line number(s), using the format II, 1, 34–36 (Act 2, Scene 1, lines 34–36).

July 2025

Selected Pages Only

This sample shows a limited selection of pages.

Student Introduction

OCR AS and A Level English Literature Specifics

A choice of one of the following Shakespeare texts: *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Othello*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Tempest*

Overview of the examination

<https://www.ocr.org.uk/qualifications/as-a-level-gce/english-literature-h072-h472/>

In OCR, Shakespeare is studied in both the one-year AS and the two-year A Level course. The examination is closed book: you are not permitted to take a copy of *Othello* in

AS Level

Component 01, Shakespeare and poetry pre-1900; Section 1: Shakespeare

- Closed-book, written exam
- Choice of two questions on each set text
- 30 marks in total – AO1, AO2, AO3 and AO5 assessed
- Component 01 overall (Sections 1 and 2) is 1 hour 30 minutes long and is worth 30% of the AS Level

Othello is examined in Section 1 of the examination. You are required to respond to two questions. You have a choice between two questions.

The *Othello* question is worth 30 marks out of a paper worth 60 marks, and the question is 45 minutes long; you are thus advised to spend 45 minutes on Section 1.

The Shakespeare question is assessed on AO1, AO2, AO3 and AO5, with the AOs broken down in the table below. While it is important that you are aware of which AOs are assessed, do not be constrained by them to the extent that responses end up becoming limited. When answering the question and, in doing so, the AOs should be met. Examiners are using holistic judgement when marking and give a single overall mark out of 30 (rather than separate AOs).

Assessment objective	What is being assessed
AO1	Articulate informed, personal and creative responses to literary texts, using associated concepts and terminology, and coherent and accurate written expression
AO2	Analyse ways in which meanings are shaped in literary texts
AO3	Demonstrate understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which literary texts are written and received
AO5	Explore literary texts informed by different interpretations

As you can see from the table above, in the Shakespeare question the AOs have different weightings. AO2 is the most heavily weighted (40%), followed by AO1 (30%), then AO5 (20%) and AO3 (10%).

The diagram to the right is a graphic representation of the different weightings of the AOs within the Shakespeare question.

■ AO1

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A Level

Component 01, Drama and poetry pre-1900; Section 1: Shakespeare

- Closed-book, written exam
- One question (no choice) which is divided into two parts, both of which must be answered
- 30 marks in total, 15 marks per part: part one is assessed by AO1 and AO2; part two is assessed by AO5
- Component 01 overall (Sections 1 and 2) is 2 hours 30 minutes long and is worth 60 marks

Othello is examined in Section 1 of the examination. You have no choice of question. The first part of the question requires you to analyse an extract from the play, and the second part requires you to respond to a question about the play using your knowledge of the whole play.

In total the question is worth 30 marks out of a paper total of 60 marks, and is 1 hour 15 minutes long. You are thus advised to spend 1 hour 15 minutes on Section 1.

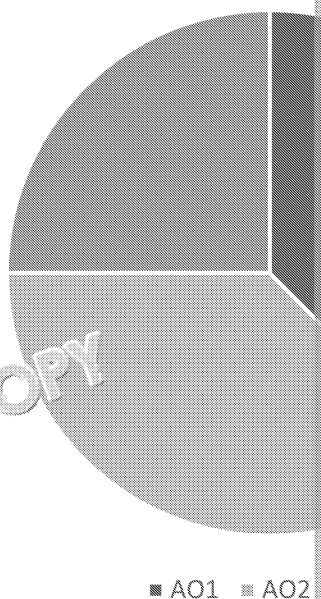
The first part of the Shakespeare question is worth 15 marks and assesses AO1 and AO2. The second part is worth 15 marks and assesses AO5.

The Shakespeare question as a whole is assessed on AO1, AO2 and AO5, with the weightings as shown in the table below. While it is important that you are aware of which AO is assessed, you are advised to not be constrained by this to the extent that responses end up becoming formulaic. Focus on answering the question and, in doing so, the AOs should be met. Examiners use holistic judgement when marking and give a single overall mark out of 30 (rather than three separate AO marks).

Assessment objective	What is being assessed
AO1	Articulate informed, personal and creative responses to literary texts, using appropriate concepts and terminology, and coherent, accurate written expression
AO2	Analyse how meanings are shaped in literary texts
AO5	Evaluate literary texts informed by different interpretations

As you can see from the above table, in the Shakespeare question the AOs have different weightings. Within the whole question, AO1 and AO2 are both weighted at 37.5 % and AO5 is weighted at 25%.

The diagram to the right is a graphic representation of the different weightings of the AOs within the whole Shakespeare question.



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Revision Notes and Activities

Since you are not allowed to take a copy of *Othello* into the examination you will

In their summer 2023 report on the AS examination, the OCR examiners noted that 'familiarity' with the Shakespeare text is key to do well in the paper. Knowledge of contextual factors and critical arguments will count for very little if you do not recall

Ideas for Revision of the Play

- Read the play **at least three times** before the examination. Make sure you read references you are unsure of, make new notes, identify echoes and parallels between
- Make a timeline for the play: note what happens when, and which characters. You may make some very interesting discoveries!
- Write three-sentence summaries of each of the five acts of the play (15 sentences in total).
- In groups, take responsibility for one of the five acts of the play and write 10–15 actual events of that act. Then test the rest of the class.
- Create a tension graph for the whole play, identifying where the moments of
- Create mood/tension graphs for the main characters in their journey through
- As a class: divided into five groups, each group takes responsibility for one act and perform a three-minute modern language performance of your act. Taking it in turn, perform as an audience, feed back your reactions to what the group performed. Write a summary of the act and what they chose to omit – do you agree with
- In a group, create and perform a 60-second version of *Othello*.
- Budding film directors: use your phones to create a short Instagram reel or TikTok
- If you are lucky enough to have the opportunity to see a performance of *Othello*, bring you with material for AO5 – interpretations of the play – seeing the play performed can help your understanding of the text.
- Likewise make use of film versions of *Othello* – there are a number and some are available on YouTube. For example:
 - ✓ Orson Welles' *Othello* (1951): available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...>
 - ✓ Laurence Olivier's *Othello* (1965): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...>
 - ✓ The Royal Shakespeare Company's *Othello* (1990) starring Willard White: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oX0cbcrMAdo>

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Revising Plot: *Othello* in Five Acts

Activity 1: Act Revision

Complete this table to provide a summary of each of the five acts of the play. The first act has been completed for you.

Act	Key Events	Key Themes	
One	Iago tells Roderigo – who loves Desdemona – of his hatred of Othello, and the two men waken Brabantio to tell him of Desdemona's elopement with Othello. The couple defend their love to the Senate when Othello is called to lead a fleet to Cyprus against a Turkish invasion.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Racism Jealousy Love Women's lives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Venice Scene 1: Brabantio's house Scene 2: The Senate Chamber Scene 3: Cyprus
Two		Relationships between men and women.	Cyprus Scene 1: the day after the wedding Scene 2: the day after the wedding Scene 3: the day after the wedding
Three			
Four			
Five			

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Revising Characterisation: Major Characters

Activity 2: Character Revision

Complete this table to show you have an overview of the main characters of the play; Or

Character	Key Ideas	Key Quotations	Language Presented
Othello	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moor • General in Venetian army • Around 40 years old • Well spoken • Physically strong • Prone to jealousy • Trusting • Insecure about age and race • Inexperienced in nature of love <p>Concerned with how he is perceived by others</p>	<p><i>'My parts, my title and my perfect soul' (I, 2, 31)</i></p> <p><i>'My services which I have done the signiory / Shall out-tongue his complaints' (I, 2, 13–19)</i></p> <p><i>'My life upon her faith' (I, 3, 290)</i></p> <p><i>'... he loved me for the dangers I had passed, / And I loved her that she did pity them.' (I, 3, 166–167)</i></p> <p><i>'I kiss'd thee ere I kill'd thee: no way but this; Killing myself, to die upon a kiss' (V, 2, 354–355)</i></p> <p><i>'This fellow's of exceeding honesty.' (III, 3, 260)</i></p> <p><i>'Haply for I am black... or for I am declined / Into the vale of years' (III, 3, 265–266)</i></p> <p><i>'... whose soft parts of conversation / That chamberers have' (III, 3, 265–267)</i></p> <p><i>'Then must you speak / Of one that loved not wisely, but too well;' (V, 2, 339–340)</i></p>	<p>Animal imagery: Roderigo as a black man, a beast: 'an</p> <p>Othello uses restraint in presenting himself from his position and Roderigo as a bright sword that rust them</p> <p>In the play, Othello speaks of himself as a person, proud, exotic and powerful. In the end, he threw a party (V, 2, 342–</p>

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Character	Key Ideas	Key Quotations
Iago	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An ensign Name means 'murderer' Vengeful Egotistical Manipulative Compelling Quick-witted Persuasive Criminally intelligent Immoral Full of hate Jealous A liar 	<p><i>'I am not what I am' (I, 1, 66)</i></p> <p><i>'an old black ram / Is tupping your white ewe' (I, 1, 89–90)</i></p> <p><i>'Honest Iago' (I, 3, 290)</i></p>
Emilia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Desdemona's handmaid and confidante Loyal Compassionate Witty Ultimately chooses good over evil 	<p><i>'Who would not make her husband a cuckold to make him a monarch?' (IV, 3, 72–73)</i></p> <p><i>'I have a thing for you' (III, 3, 303)</i></p> <p><i>'You have done well that men must lay their murders on your neck' (V, 2, 168–169)</i></p>
Desdemona	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Around 16–18 years old Her name means 'unfortunate' in Greek Determined Intelligent Witty Dignified and worthy of respect Loving Loyal Forgiving Proud Able to defend herself verbally At times independent, at others submissive 	<p><i>'A most exquisite lady' (II, 3, 17)</i></p> <p><i>'She loved me for the dangers I had passed' (I, 3, 166)</i></p> <p><i>'...threw me if I would do such a wrong' (IV, 3, 74)</i></p>

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Character	Key Ideas	Key Quotations
Roderigo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wealthy Foolish Simple Delusional Poor judgement Weak In love with Desdemona 	<p><i>'Thou iago, who hast had my purse' (I, 1, 2)</i></p> <p><i>'I do not find that thou dealest justly with me' (IV, 2, 172)</i></p>
Cassio	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> From Florence (thus an outsider in Venetian society) Inexperienced soldier Concerned with reputation and honour Weakness for alcohol Uses Bianca 	<p><i>'She's a most exquisite lady' (II, 3, 17)</i></p> <p><i>'Reputation, Reputation, Reputation!' (II, 3, 242)</i></p>
Brabantio	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Senatorial High opinion of himself and his status Difficult to sympathise with Materialistic Impatient 	<p><i>'Fathers from hence trust not your daughters' minds' (I, 1, 169)</i></p> <p><i>'She is abused, stol'n from me, and corrupted' (I, 3, 60)</i></p>

Tip

Remember that the characters in the play are not real people: they are created by Shakespeare to fulfil a particular dramatic function. Focusing on the characters' actions and motivations, rather than their personalities, will enable you to avoid making simplistic statements about the characters.

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Minor Characters in *Othello*

It is all too easy when revising a text to focus our attention on the 'key' characters and to spend little time on the minor characters who only appear in the occasional scene. Minor characters are still important and have a vital dramatic function – Shakespeare would not have included them if they were not integral to the play.

Activity 2.4 Minor Characters

Copy and complete the table below on the minor characters in the play: identify the character, say in the scene(s) in which they appear, and comment on their dramatic function (what does the character serve? What do they contribute to the unfolding of the events in the play?)

Character	Scene	Actions/Speech	
Duke	Act I, Scene 3		
Montano (Governor of Cyprus)	Act II, Scene 1		
	Act II, Scene 3		
	Act V, Scene 2		
Clown (Othello's servant)	Act III, Scene 1		
	Act III, Scene 4		
Bianca	Act IV, Scene 4		
	Act IV, Scene 1		
	Act V, Scene 1		
Lodovico (a relation of Brabantio)	Act IV, Scene 1		
	Act IV, Scene 3		
	Act V, Scene 1		
	Act V, Scene 2		
Gratiano (Brabantio's brother-in-law)	Act I, Scene 3		
	Act V, Scene 2		

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Revising Themes

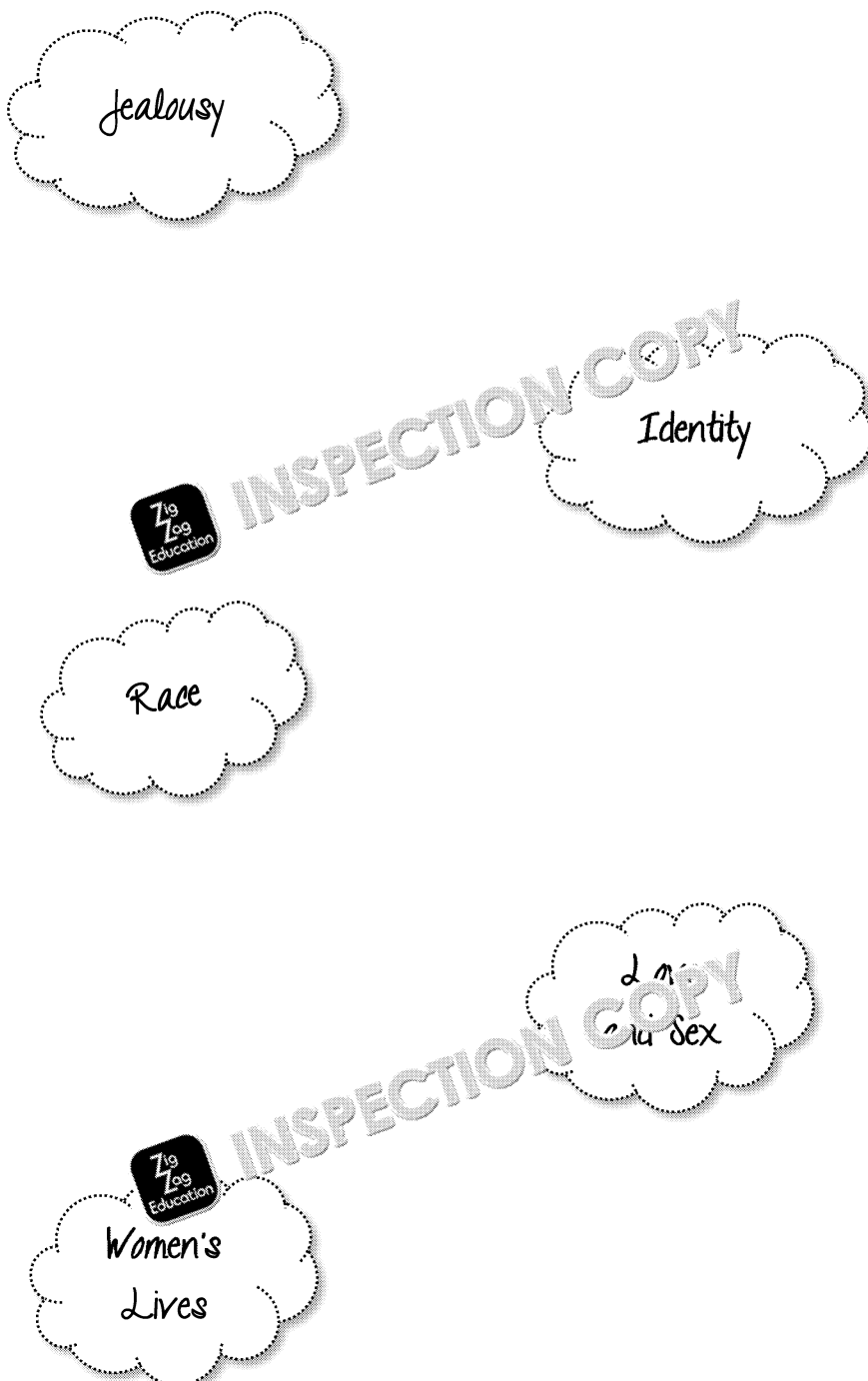
Activity 4: Exploring Key Themes

A theme is a big idea that runs throughout a text – it is distinct from the plot, which is the sequence of events that happen in the narrative. Examination questions will often be concerned with themes.

Listed here are some of the key themes of *Othello* – but you might add others.

- Jealousy
- Manipulation
- Race
- Love and Sex
- Marriage
- Women's Lives
- Power
- Identity

- a) Copy and annotate the mind map below of the play's key themes with relevant examples from *Othello*.



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- b) The bullet points below may provide some useful pointers for revising the theme
- Summarise *Othello* in relation to this theme
 - Key characters who embody the theme
 - The theme at the beginning of the play
 - The theme at the end of the play
 - Identify three scenes which act as a focus for the theme
 - Select 6–10 quotations that illustrate the theme
 - Consider how Shakespeare presents the theme (language, imagery, structure)
 - The historical and social context

Below the template is a template with reference to the theme of Identity. This is page 13 of the pack. You can use it to revise other key themes.

Key Theme: Identity	
Summary of the play	Competing versions of people's identities are debated, both by characters and by audiences. Is Desdemona a sheltered innocent enchanted by a handsome man? Is Othello a civilised, Western man or a barbaric, heathen? The play's dramatic power resides in the conflicts between these expectations and rebellion against them, with individual identities at stake.
Key characters	<p>Othello: characters view him in different ways, presenting the audience with shifting identities. To the Duke he is 'Valiant Othello' (I, 3, 48) and to Brabantio he is a 'foul thief!' (I, 2, 62). Roderigo and Iago use animalistic terms: 'thick lips' (I, 1, 66); 'old black ram' (I, 1, 89) and to as 'the Moor' (I, 3, 46). Othello is preoccupied with how other characters view him through his storytelling of his exotic adventures (I, 3, 26). His speech attempts to restore his reputation through another narrative.</p> <p>Iago: characterised by his self-identity – the version of himself he presents to the world (which the audience sees for most of the play) and the version he presents to himself. He is epitomised in the figure of 'Janus', the Roman two-faced god (I, 2, 32), and his pronouncement, 'I am not what I am' (I, 1, 66). He repeatedly and ironically refer to him as 'honest'.</p> <p>Desdemona: While Brabantio describes his daughter as 'A maiden never true' (I, 2, 162), Othello gives the audience a different version of a woman who is 'true' (I, 3, 162–165).</p> <p>NB There is of course something to say about every character in relation to identity; these are just some of the key points.</p>
Beginning of the play	I, 1 establishes Iago's self-confessed identity as a jealous and duplicitous man. The play's tragedy. His jealousy of Cassio (for taking the position of Othello's lieutenant) he is going to 'show out a flag and sign of love' (I, 1, 155) and his diabolical animal are all voiced in this scene.
End of the play	The closing lines of the play focus on Othello's desire to present himself as a noble man. He moulds his identity in his final speech. In response to Lodovico's account of his death, Othello describes himself as 'An honourable man' (V, 2, 353). He tells the story of the 'base Indian' who 'threw a pearl away' (V, 2, 353). Othello as 'great of heart' (V, 2, 357) demonstrates his character to his point of view.

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Key Theme: Identity	
Three key scenes	<p>I, 3: the discussion in the Senate Chamber reveals many competing views of Desdemona.</p> <p>IV, 1: this scene shows the effect Iago's manipulations are having on Othello as a coherent and civilised individual, culminating in Othello's epiphany about his language.</p> <p>IV, 2: this scene provides the vehicle for a detailed exploration of the contrasting and contesting ideas about Desdemona: Othello's 'true and loving' common wife and Iago's 'whore'.</p>
6–10 quotations	<p><i>'I am not what I am'</i> (Iago: I, 1, 66 – in a reversal of God's words to Moses in that I am' [Exodus 3: 14], Iago sets out the foundations of duplicity on which the tragedy is based.)</p> <p><i>'Are we turned Turks...?'</i> (Othello: II, 3, 152 – Othello reprimands Cassio for drunken fighting, pointing out that they have demeaned themselves by this behaviour, a charge that could later be made against him.)</p> <p><i>'O, I have lost my reputation! I have lost the immortal part of myself, and this shows more clearly than my death. I am not what I am.'</i> (Cassio: II, 3, 243–244 – Cassio draws on contemporary ideas of the difference between the divine elements of reason and logic and the bestial behaviour of the animal world.)</p> <p><i>'Haply for I am black... or for I am declined into the vale of years.'</i> (Othello: II, 3, 250 – Othello's decline is shown in the way he has now internalised the racist ideas of the age originally articulated by other characters.)</p> <p><i>'If she be false, O then heaven mocks itself!'</i> (Othello: III, 3, 280 – Othello's internalised racism align what Iago is saying about Desdemona with the woman he killed.)</p> <p><i>'Is this the noble Moor whom our full senate Call all-in-all sufficient to the state?'</i> (Lodovico: III, 3, 300 – Lodovico utters this speech at the change in Othello; this is not the noble Moor of the beginning of the play.)</p> <p><i>'Of my own bloody hand, Like the base Indian, threw a pearl away Richer than all his tribe.'</i> (Othello: IV, 2, 342–344 – in his final speech before killing himself Othello uses an analogy to describe his inability to appreciate how precious Desdemona is.)</p>
Presentation	<p>Iago's soliloquies allow him to present a different version of himself to the audience, shown to the play's characters.</p> <p>Deterioration in Othello's language reflects the way Iago strips Othello of his status as a brave and powerful military leader.</p> <p>Recurring use of epithets to describe characters: 'valiant Othello', 'brave Othello', 'noble Moor'.</p> <p>Animal and diabolical imagery used to describe Othello in opposition to Iago.</p>
Historical and social context	<p>Early seventeenth-century views of other races and women.</p> <p>Perspectives on madness and reason.</p>

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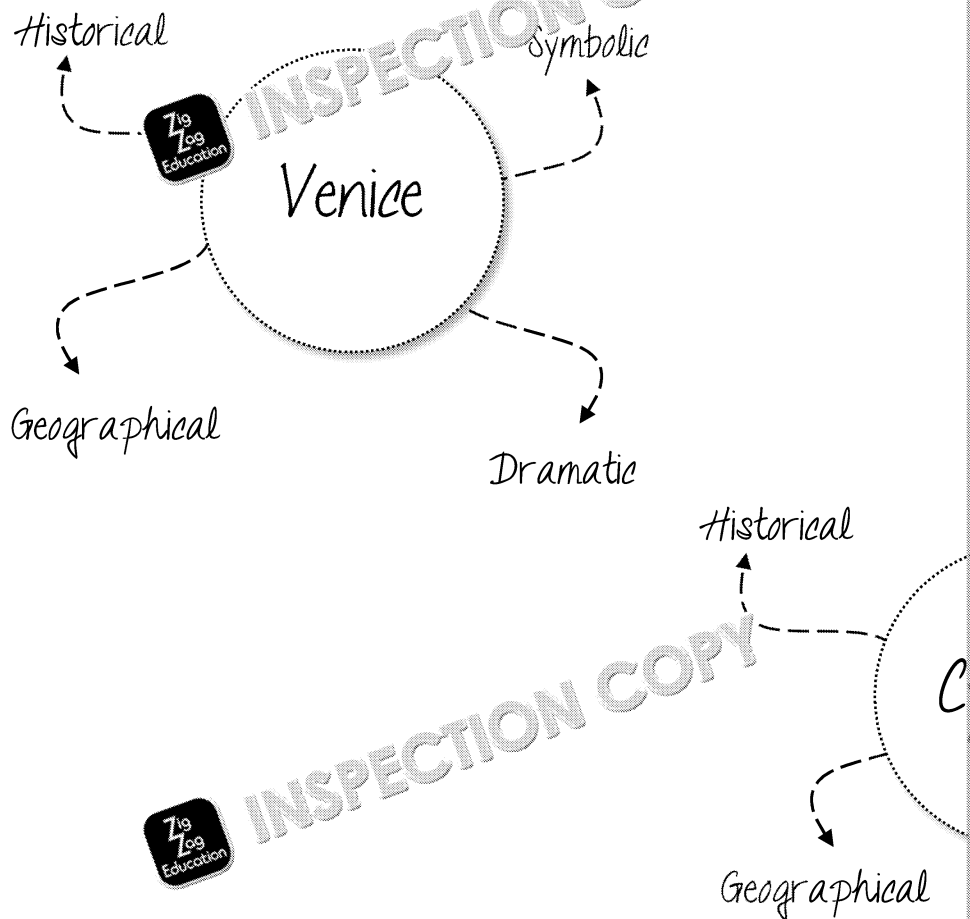
Key Theme:	
Summary of the play	
Key character	
Beginning of the play	
End of the play	
Three key scenes	
6–10 quotations	
Presentation	
Historical and social context	

Revising Settings

Activity 5: Revising the Settings of the Play

Othello is set in two locations: Venice (Act I) and Cyprus (Acts II–V). Venice and Cyprus are significant settings for many reasons.

Complete the mind map with your ideas about their significance, making notes under each heading.



Activity 6: Other Settings

In addition to Venice and Cyprus, there are other significant settings in *Othello*.

Night

Key scenes in *Othello* take place at night.

- Identify the scenes that take place at night.
- What happens in these scenes? Who are the main characters?
- What is the significance of the night-time settings? What dramatic impact is there?

The Council Chamber

Act I, Scene 3 of *Othello* takes place in the council chamber.

- What is the focus of this scene?
- Which characters feature in this scene? Who are the most vocal characters and why?

The Bedchamber

Act IV, Scene 3 and the play's final scene – Act V, Scene 2 – take place in Desdemona's bedchamber.

- Describe the mood of Act IV, Scene 3. How does it differ from the scenes that follow it?
- The mood and atmosphere of Act V, Scene 2 varies – describe the atmosphere and how it changes. Why does it change?
- Which characters feature in this scene? Who are the most vocal? Where do they stand?

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Revising Imagery

Key Motifs

A motif is an image, a symbol, or even a word or phrase which recurs throughout added resonance as a result. Examples of motifs in *Othello* include the handkerchief, action of looking, storytelling, black versus white, and animals.

Activity 7: The Motifs of *Othello*

For each of the motifs:

1. trace its appearance in the play (in which scenes? In relation to which characters?)
2. consider which of the play's key themes it relates to
3. explain how the motif creates dramatic impact

Ideas for handkerchief have been provided below.

Motif	
Handkerchief	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. (a) Desdemona drops her handkerchief and Emilia picks it up (III, 3, 287–301) (b) Iago says he will drop the handkerchief in Cassio's drink (c) Iago tells Othello he has seen Cassio wipe his beard with the handkerchief (III, 3, 435–442) (d) Desdemona expresses her regret at losing the handkerchief (e) Othello tells Desdemona of the handkerchief's magical powers (f) Cassio asks Bianca to copy the handkerchief's embroidery (g) Iago inflames Othello's jealousy by repeatedly mentioning the handkerchief (IV, 1, 10–22) (h) Othello's soliloquy fit is preceded by incoherent thoughts of the handkerchief (IV, 1, 35–41) (i) Bianca throws the handkerchief at Cassio while Othello watches (IV, 1, 143–169) (j) Othello accuses Desdemona of giving the handkerchief to Cassio (k) Emilia reveals what really happened with the handkerchief after the murder of her (V, 2, 209–234). <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. Jealousy: Iago uses his fabricated tale of the handkerchief to fuel Othello's jealousy; Bianca is also jealous when Cassio asks her to copy the handkerchief, assuming he obtained the handkerchief from another woman. Love: the handkerchief was Othello's first love-gift to Desdemona Identity: the story behind the handkerchief, told by Othello, grants it magical powers and contributes to Othello's self-identity <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. For Othello the handkerchief acts as the 'ocular proof' of his wife's infidelity, although there has been no infidelity. It shows how Iago's machinations that 'the light as air' can have such a powerful effect (III, 3, 323–325). In the final scene the handkerchief triggers Othello's decision to fulfil his aims, and her revelation that he has wrongly killed his innocent wife.
The word 'honest'	
The action of looking	
Storytelling	
Black vs white	
Animals	

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Activity 8: Revising Key Images in the Play

For each of the images below:

- identify where it comes in the play and which characters are involved
- note up to three short quotations which illustrate the power of the image
- comment on the meaning(s) of the image



The storm



Othello's epileptic fit



The island

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Revising Language

In addition to the imagery and motifs in the play, there are other aspects of the language that you could write about in the exam.

Epithets

An epithet is a word or phrase applied to a character for descriptive purposes. If it becomes automatically associated with the character, as if they are one and the same, it is an epithet. For example, 'Great' is the epithet used to refer to Alexander III of Macedon, where 'Great' is the epithet used to refer to Alexander III of Macedon. The best known one is 'honest' in relation to Iago. There are other examples.



Activity 9: Epithets

Scan the play to find epithets that are applied to Othello and Desdemona. Note where they come in the play and who uses them, and consider their significance:

- Desdemona
- Othello

Extension Activity

Extend this activity to Emilia and Cassio.

The Language of Manipulation

The principal tool Iago uses to persuade Othello of Desdemona's infidelity is language. See this in III, 3, where there are many examples of Iago's verbal manipulations.



Activity 10: The Language of Manipulation

- a. Read III, 3, 93–127
- Count up the number of times the following words appear in this extract:
 - 'think'
 - 'indeed'
 - 'honest'
 - 'seem'
 - For each word explain how Iago uses it to unsettle Othello.
- b. Write short commentaries explaining how the following phrases or lines show Iago's ability to manipulate Othello through language:
- 'I speak not yet of proof' (III, 3, 198)
 - 'I know our country disposition well' (III, 3, 204)
 - 'She did deceive her father, marrying you;' (III, 3, 208)
 - 'I humbly do beseech you of your pardon / For too much loving you' (III, 3, 214)
 - 'Long live she so, and long live you to think so!' (III, 3, 228)
 - 'My lord, I take my leave.
... [Returning] My lord, I would have said that I had trea-
soned your honour / To scan the colour of your cheek' (III, 3, 243–247)



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A Character's Changing Language

Shakespeare frequently uses a change in language to illustrate a change in character; most commonly in Iago, characters who have been in positions of power begin to lose control, and their language, which was previously controlled and fluent, starts to deteriorate. Othello is a good example of this.

Activity 1:

Complete the table to identify how Othello's language changes in the following scenes:

- I, 2, 17–28 and IV, 1, 243–254
- IV, 1, 35–41 and V, 2, 334–352

You should consider language choices

	Language choices	Imagery	Sentence structure
I, 2, 17–28			
IV, 1, 243–254			
IV, 1, 35–41			
V, 2, 334–352			

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Prose vs Poetry

Since Shakespeare writes mostly in poetry – blank verse – his occasional use of prose is usually for one – or more – of the following reasons:

- To create comedy
- To demonstrate that characters are of a lower social status
- To create depth and variety of character (when a character speaks in verse and then in prose)
- To depict strong emotion – that cannot be contained in regular verse

Activity 12: Prose in *Othello*

Below are some examples of prose in *Othello*. Complete the table to show:

- who is talking
- what they are talking about
- what effect is created by the character speaking in prose at this point in the play

Passage	Who is talking?	What is the subject?
I, 3, 219–224	The Duke speaks to the Senate, and specifically Othello.	The Turkish threat to Cyprus. Othello is ordered to lead Venetian troops against them.
I, 3, 297–364		
II, 3, 239–302		
III, 1, 1–27		
IV, 1, 35–41		
IV, 1, 107–161		

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Revising Form and Structure

As well as writing about language and imagery, AO2 (Analyse ways in which meaning is created in literary texts) requires you to write about what are conventionally called the 'form' and 'structure' of a text.

Form

The form of a literary text refers to many aspects of the text, its genre, its physical form – including the use of prose or poetry, and rhythm and rhyme.

When thinking about the form of *Othello*, that means considering the following:

- **Type of text:** see the section Revising Dramatic Techniques
- **Genre:** see the section Revising *Othello* as a Tragedy
- **Physical form:** see 'Prose vs Poetry' in Revising the Language of the Play

Structure

The structure of a literary text refers to the way the author has organised the material. It encompasses the significance of the opening and the ending (of both the play as a whole and individual scenes); contrasts; echoes and repetitions (including foreshadowing); turning points.

Opening: The opening of a literary text is vitally important. It sets the scene, introduces characters and relationships and establishes key themes. With a play, all this information is delivered to the audience having no chance to revisit the scene if they miss anything.

Activity 13: Opening

- Othello* opens at night. What effect is created by this choice of setting?
- At line 106, Brabantio informs the audience of where they are – 'This is Venice'. What might an audience in Shakespeare's time have responded to this? What effect might this setting establish in the audience?
- The play opens with Iago saying to Othello, 'Tush, never tell me, I take it you are not to be trusted, for you have had my purse / As if the strings were thine shouldst know me'. What effect(s) might these opening words have on an audience?
- Unlike many of Shakespeare's other plays, the main character – Othello – is not introduced in the opening scene. However, he is the main subject of the conversation between Iago and Brabantio.
 - What impression is created of Othello?
 - What effect is created by Shakespeare choosing to delay the introduction of Othello?
- What key themes are set up in this opening scene?

Ending: The ending of a literary text is equally important. Conventionally – though not always – loose ends are tied up, leading to a clear conclusion. In a tragedy you would expect a clear moral or lesson, and there is often a sense of a new beginning: traditionally a good, surviving character is there to begin the new era and put aside the mistakes of the past. A sense of circularity with the end echoing – or alternatively providing a contrast to – the beginning is also common.

Activity 14: Ending

- Where – and with whom – is the final scene set? Consider the appropriateness of this setting for the ending.
- Which loose ends are tied up by the end of *Othello*? Is everything resolved? Are there any unanswered questions?
- To what extent does the final scene provide a sense of circularity to the play?
- To what extent does the ending of *Othello* provide hope to the audience and a new beginning?

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