

# ●THELLO● – THE BIG QUESTION

A Key Stage 3 and 4 PSHE and Citizenship  
Resource



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## Curriculum Links

This KS3/KS4 Citizenship, English and Personal Wellbeing teaching sequence provides a scheme of work to help pupils learn about forming and talking through their opinions. It uses Shakespeare's plays to explore a range of topics including:

- *Personal growth and maturity*
- *Responsibility at different stages of life*
- *The importance of the rule of law*
- *Young people and mental health*
- *The power of political rhetoric*
- *Forgiveness and retribution*
- *Religious and other forms of extremism*
- *Cyberbullying and the pressures of social media*
- *The importance of diversity and of respecting difference*

### From the National Curriculum – Citizenship

#### Purpose of study

A high-quality citizenship education helps to provide pupils with knowledge, skills and understanding to prepare them to play a full and active part in society. In particular, citizenship education should foster pupils' keen awareness and understanding of democracy, government and how laws are made and upheld. Teaching should equip pupils with the skills and knowledge to explore political and social issues critically, to weigh evidence, debate and make reasoned arguments. It should also prepare pupils to take their place in society as responsible citizens, manage their money well and make sound financial decisions.

#### Aims

The national curriculum for citizenship aims to ensure that all pupils:

- Acquire a sound knowledge and understanding of how the United Kingdom is governed, its political system and how citizens participate actively in its democratic systems of government.

- Develop a sound knowledge and understanding of the role of law and the justice system in our society and how laws are shaped and enforced.
- Develop an interest in, and commitment to, participation in volunteering as well as other forms of responsible activity, that they will take with them into adulthood.
- Are equipped with the skills to think critically and debate political questions, to enable them to manage their money on a day-to-day basis, and plan for future financial needs.

## Subject content

### Key stage 3

Teaching should develop pupils' understanding of democracy, government and the rights and responsibilities of citizens. Pupils should use and apply their knowledge and understanding while developing skills to research and interrogate evidence, debate and evaluate viewpoints, present reasoned arguments and take informed action.

Pupils should be taught about:

- The development of the political system of democratic government in the United Kingdom, including the roles of citizens, Parliament and the monarch.
- The operation of Parliament, including voting and elections, and the role of political parties.
- The functions and uses of money, the importance and practice of budgeting, and managing risk.

### Key stage 4

Pupils should be taught about:

- Parliamentary democracy and the key elements of the constitution of the United Kingdom, including the power of government, the role of citizens and Parliament in holding those in power to account, and the different roles of the executive, legislature and judiciary and a free press.
- The different electoral systems used in and beyond the United Kingdom and actions citizens can take in democratic and electoral processes to influence decisions locally, nationally and beyond.
- Other systems and forms of government, both democratic and non-democratic, beyond the United Kingdom.
- Local, regional and international governance and the United Kingdom's relations with the rest of Europe, the Commonwealth, the United Nations and the wider world.

- Human rights and international law.
- The legal system in the UK, different sources of law and how the law helps society deal with complex problems.
- Diverse national, regional, religious and ethnic identities in the United Kingdom and the need for mutual respect and understanding.
- The different ways in which a citizen can contribute to the improvement of their community, to include the opportunity to participate actively in community volunteering, as well as other forms of responsible activity.
- Income and expenditure, credit and debt, insurance, savings and pensions, financial products and services, and how public money is raised and spent.

## **The Personal Wellbeing Programme of Study – non statutory**

### **The range and content includes:**

#### **Key Stage 3**

- Examples of diverse values encountered in society and the clarification of personal values.
- The knowledge and skills needed for setting realistic targets and personal goals.
- Physical and emotional change and puberty.
- Sexual activity, human reproduction, contraception, pregnancy, and sexually transmitted infections and HIV and how high-risk behaviours affect the health and wellbeing of individuals, families and communities.
- Facts and laws about drug, alcohol and tobacco use and misuse, and the personal and social consequences of misuse for themselves and others.
- How a balanced diet and making choices for being healthy contribute to personal wellbeing, and the importance of balance between work, leisure and exercise.
- Ways of recognising and reducing risk, minimising harm and getting help in emergency and risky situations.
- A knowledge of basic first aid.
- The features of positive and stable relationships, how to deal with a breakdown in a relationship and the effects of loss and bereavement.
- Different types of relationships, including those within families and between older and young people, boys and girls, and people of the same sex, including civil partnerships.
- The nature and importance of marriage and of stable relationships for family life and bringing up children.
- The roles and responsibilities of parents, carers and children in families.

- m. The similarities, differences and diversity among people of different race, culture, ability, disability, gender, age and sexual orientation and the impact of prejudice, bullying, discrimination and racism on individuals and communities.

#### **Key Stage 4**

- a. The effect of diverse and conflicting values on individuals, families and communities and ways of responding to them.
- b. How the media portrays young people, body image and health issues.
- c. The characteristics of emotional and mental health, and the causes, symptoms and treatments of some mental and emotional health disorders.
- d. The benefits and risks of health and lifestyle choices, including choices relating to sexual activity and substance use and misuse, and the short and long-term consequences for the health and mental and emotional wellbeing of individuals, families and communities.
- e. Where and how to obtain health information, how to recognise and follow health and safety procedures, ways of reducing risk and minimising harm in risky situations, how to find sources of emergency help and how to use basic and emergency first aid.
- f. Characteristics of positive relationships, and awareness of exploitation in relationships and of statutory and voluntary organisations that support relationships in crisis.
- g. The roles and responsibilities of parents, carers, children and other family members.
- h. Parenting skills and qualities and their central importance to family life.
- i. The impact of separation, divorce and bereavement on families and the need to adapt to changing circumstances.
- j. The diversity of ethnic and cultural groups, the power of prejudice, bullying, discrimination and racism, and the need to take the initiative in challenging this and other offensive behaviours and in giving support to victims of abuse.

# The Big Question – Othello

## Learning Objective

Pupils use a range of balanced and persuasive argument techniques across a range of activities to formulate a viewpoint and argument related to the Big Question for this lesson.

Pupils analyse the themes of distorted reality in Othello and relate this to their own lives through their use of social media.

## Success Criteria (including differentiation)

**All** can express an initial opinion on the 'Big Question' and justify their viewpoint.

**Most** can develop their opinion over the course of the lesson sequence by listening and responding to others.

**Some** can articulate a clear balanced argument on the 'Big Question', using sophisticated argument techniques.

## Big Question: Are we in control of how we perceive reality?

**Vocabulary:** exploitation, perception, interracial marriage,

*To begin: Explore the 10 events of Othello using the SSF 10 Events instructions and play summary in the Appendix*

## Lesson Plan

- Ask pupils for their reaction to the behaviour of Othello with regards to his killing of Desdemona and think about the steps that led him to this action.
- Create a story structure to map out the path from the beginning to the end via a catalyst event that changes everything. Stage these moments in freeze frames.
- Students then consider three or four reasons for how the characters get to their end point using a 'because of that...' structure.
- Pupils focus on the scene where Iago tells Othello that his wife has been unfaithful and stage the scene.
- Discuss the parallels of these events and modern day equivalents - where have they seen similar events? Students make link to social media.
- Use the film ['Are you living an Insta lie?'](#) as a discussion point.
- In groups, students create an image of a post on social media to show the rest of the class. The class look at it and discuss what they might think if they saw it.
- Students create fake social media profiles for Othello and Desdemona from the perspective of Iago.

Possible follow up: The TV show Black Mirror featured an episode that took the dangers of social media to extremes. 'NoseDive'. **Note that this is a 15 certificate.**

**See Teaching and Learning Activities for full details.**

## Resources

- **Scene 9 from SSF's abridged script**
- **Story Structure template**
- **Film 'Are you living an Insta lie?'**
- **Othello – 10 events**
- **Instructions for exploring the story in the Appendix**

## National Curriculum Links

- The knowledge and skills needed for setting realistic targets and personal goals.
- Physical and emotional change and puberty.
- How the media portrays young people, body image and health issues.
- The characteristics of emotional and mental health, and the causes, symptoms and treatments of some mental and emotional health disorders.
- Characteristics of positive relationships, and awareness of exploitation in relationships and of statutory and voluntary organisations that support relationships in crisis.

# Othello – The Big Question

## Teaching and Learning Activities

### Starter – Exploring the story

- Using the **10 events** and the story summary and any previous work on the play, ask the students to discuss in pairs the behaviour of the central character and whether they were surprised at his actions.
  - Feedback ideas to the class and hear all viewpoints, steer them towards the idea that this was a marriage of love but a controversial one because of Othello's race. Ask why was this controversial at the time and whether it would still be considered this way? *Carefully discuss the rise of interracial marriages but how this was uncommon in Shakespeare's time.*
  - As the marriage between Desdemona and Othello started as a happy one, how did it end with him murdering her and killing himself? Apart from these two characters, who else influences the events of the play?
  - Using the **Story Structure template**, ask the class to work together or in groups to complete for this play. (See below for suggested start and end points.)
1. *The world as it is before the story starts.*
    - **Once there was** a black man, Othello, and a white woman, Desdemona, who got married **and everybody** thought it scandalous.
  2. *This is the catalyst event. Something that happens near the beginning of the play that breaks the norm and sets the rest of the plot in action.*
    - **One day**, Othello is led to believe that his wife has been unfaithful to him.
  3. *The 'happy ever after moment' or not so happy!*
    - **And finally** Othello murders his wife and kills himself.
- Bring the class onto their feet and ask them to create these three moments (rather like the Beginning, Middle and End of a story mountain) in a living image or a freeze frame.
  - Try to use about half of the class for this and have the other half as an audience to notice and like what the actors are doing and how they are showing the story points.
  - Once you have three clear images, reflect on how the world at the end of the play has changed compared the world at the beginning. A lot of stuff happens in the middle to bring that change about!

- Ask the class to come up with these events, using the sentence starter
  - **Because of that...**
- We suggest it's good to try and boil this down to three or four events.
- Ask the groups to add these to their **Story Structure template**. They could then show these moments through living images or freeze frames.
- Hear some of these and reflect on who has control over these events – it is mostly, (if not all) Iago. Iago is the voice in Othello's ear, distorting his reality and planting the seed of jealousy in Othello's mind.

### Teaching and Learning Activity One

- Hand out **Scene 10 from SSF's abridged script** where Iago tells Othello that Desdemona has been unfaithful.
- Pupils stage this scene using ghosting and improvisation techniques.
- Pupils discuss the parallels between this story and today's modern world.
- Introduce the Big Question and ask 'Is Othello in control of his perception of reality right now?'
- In small groups, ask pupils to discuss the parallels between this event and others from different texts, TV programmes, films or anything else from popular culture. Take feedback from pupil groups. They may draw parallels from other Shakespeare plays too.
- Carefully ask pupils to share their own experiences of distorted reality.
- This leads on to the question: To what degree can we blame social media for its users' distorted version of reality and the decline in young people's mental health? (This links to our examination of public shaming in the *Much Ado* Big Question lesson plan.)
- Carefully discuss with the class how they use social media. Write their ideas down for all to see and discuss how the versions of themselves they present to others is different to their true selves. Why do they think this is? Discuss that all users are victims **and** perpetrators of this problem.
- Ask how they can learn to identify the lies for themselves (not necessarily to do anything about it but to help them cope with any feelings of inadequacy when comparing themselves to others).
- Note that *whilst social media can be hailed as providing a voice for people to get behind E.g. #MeToo movement) are there times when it can also force people to compare their honest lives with the best bits of others?*

### Teaching and Learning Activity Two

- Discuss with pupils whether they consider social media to put pressure on them to prove that they are having a good time, all of the time. Have pupils' parents discussed with them what it was like before social media? Do they think that this would have been a simpler time to enjoy socialising with friends, without the added pressure of proving yourself to be having a good time?



- Show the following film [‘Are you living an Insta lie?’](#) to use as a discussion point regarding the Big Question. Ask the students to draw parallels back to Othello and his distorted version of reality.
- In pairs or small groups, ask the students to create freeze frames to show a classic social media post that conveys one thing but can hide a truth.
  - E.g. friends together appearing to have a great time but actually it is being used to make others feel that they are missing out.
- Show these freeze frames to the class and ask the class for their input. What is it that they are seeing?
- Teacher in role to thought tap the people in the image. What are they actually thinking? Why are they posting this for the public to see?

### Written Activity

- Ask pupils to create a fake social media profile for Desdemona and Othello, as seen by Iago. This could be done using a paper template resembling a Facebook page, or via an online tool.
- Note – there are a number of online tools that allow for the creation of fake social media profiles. One of these is [Classtools’ Fakebook](#) – an online social media generator, with some excellent historical and literary examples that pupils could look at before creating their own Othello or Desdemona FB page.

### Plenary

- This generation (Gen Z) is unique in that it has been online since birth. What effects do they think this will have on them as opposed to their parent’s generation?
- Look at the article [HERE](#), which makes a link between an increase in mental health problems in young people, and increased social media usage. Read this as a class and watch the accompanying online clip. Discuss.

## Possible follow up

The TV show Black Mirror featured an episode that took the dangers of social media to extremes and might make interesting viewing when considering cyber bullying and the dangers of living your life on social media? 'NoseDive' is described at <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt5497778/> A woman desperate to boost her social media score hits the jackpot when she's invited to a swanky wedding, but the trip doesn't go as planned.

**Note that this is a 15 certificate, and we would recommend that you watch it yourself initially to check that you consider it appropriate viewing for pupils of your age group.**

Appendix 1

**OTHELLO**

**THE BIG QUESTION**

Resources Pack



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## Othello Scene 9 Castle Garden

**[Enter OTHELLO and IAGO in conversation.]**

**OTHELLO** Hath Cassio said anything?

**IAGO** Faith, that he did – I know not what he did.

**OTHELLO** What, what?

**IAGO** Lie –

**OTHELLO** With her?

**IAGO** With her, on her, what you will.

**OTHELLO** Lie with her? Lie on her? Is't possible? Handkerchief – confessions – handkerchief. O devil!

**OTHELLO** **[Exits, head in his hands.]**

**IAGO** Work on,  
My medicine, work!

**[Enter CASSIO.]**

How now, Cassio!

**CASSIO** I do attend here on the General.

**IAGO** Do you withdraw yourself a little while.

**[Exit CASSIO. Re-enter OTHELLO, in distress.]**

**IAGO** Whilst you were mad with your grief –  
Cassio came hither. I bade him anon return  
And here speak with me.  
Do but encave yourself,  
For I will make him tell the tale anew,  
Where, how, howoft, how long ago, and when  
He hath and is again to cope your wife.  
Will you withdraw?

**[OTHELLO withdraws.]**

**IAGO** Now will I question Cassio of Bianca.  
Cassio, when he hears of her, cannot refrain  
From the excess of laughter. Here he comes.

**[Enter CASSIO.]**

As he shall smile, Othello shall go mad.  
How do you now, lieutenant?  
Bianca gives it out that you shall marry her.

**CASSIO** Ha, ha, ha!

**[OTHELLO is not close enough to hear words.]**

**OTHELLO** Look how he laughs already! Iago beckons me. Now he begins the story.

**[OTHELLO moves closer in order to hear CASSIO.]**

**CASSIO** She was here even now. She haunts me in every place; she falls thus about my neck. Ha, ha, ha!

**OTHELLO** Now he tells how she plucked him to my chamber.  
O, I see that nose of yours, but not that dog I shall throw it to!

**[Enter BIANCA with the handkerchief.]**

**BIANCA** I was a fine fool to take this handkerchief! **[Throws it at CASSIO.]**

**CASSIO** How now, my sweet Bianca!

**OTHELLO** By heaven, that should be my handkerchief!

**BIANCA** A likely piece of work, that you should find it in your chamber and not know who left it there!

**[EXIT BIANCA.]**

**IAGO** **[to CASSIO]** After her, after her!

**CASSIO** Faith, I must. She'll rail in the streets else.

**[Exit CASSIO.]**

**OTHELLO** O, Iago!

**IAGO** Did you see how he prizes the foolish woman your wife: he hath given her handkerchief to his whore.

**OTHELLO** Get me some poison, Iago, this night. This night, Iago.

**IAGO** Do it not with poison; strangle her in her bed, even the bed she hath contaminated.

**OTHELLO** Good, good! The justice of it pleases.

**IAGO** And for Cassio, let me be his undertaker. You shall hear more by midnight.

**OTHELLO** Excellent good.

## Story Structure template

(The world as it is before the story starts)

**Once there was... and everyday...**

(The catalyst event, which allows the story to change)

**One day...**

(Key events)

**Because of that...**

**Because of that...**

**Because of that...**

(The 'happy ever after moment or not so happy!')

**Until, finally...**

# Othello

## 10 Events

1. Othello, a moor in the Venetian army, appoints Cassio as his lieutenant preferring him over his Ancient – Iago. Othello secretly marries Brabantio's daughter Desdemona.
2. Iago and Desdemona's would-be suitor, Roderigo, inform Brabantio of the marriage.
3. Brabantio confronts Othello, accusing him of witchcraft. Othello and Desdemona declare their mutual love. Othello is sent to Cyprus to fight the Turkish army. He commands Iago to take his wife, Emilia, and Desdemona safely to Cyprus. Iago incites Roderigo to follow them.
4. A storm destroys the Turkish fleet before the Venetians land safely in Cyprus. Iago persuades Roderigo to attack Cassio.
5. Iago gets Cassio drunk, Roderigo taunts him and Cassio becomes violent. Othello strips Cassio of his office.
6. Iago poisons Othello's mind against his wife. A lost handkerchief becomes evidence; Othello and Iago plan the murders of Cassio and Desdemona.
7. Lodovico, a relative of Brabantio, arrives with news from Venice. Othello strikes Desdemona in public.
8. Iago has persuaded Roderigo to kill Cassio, whom he wounds. Iago kills Roderigo.
9. Othello murders Desdemona.
10. Iago's plot is revealed by Emilia and he is arrested, Othello commits suicide.



## Exploring the story

**Before you start this lesson and delve into the Big Question in the play, you might want to familiarise yourself with the story first.**

- There are lots of different approaches you could take, including using the 10 point summary.
- If you and/or your students don't know the play, then the following process is a great way to introduce them to the story and some of the main characters.
- As with any lesson, do adapt this to suit the needs of your students.
- This is a great way to get the story on its feet quickly and help your students to understand the story arc.

**Firstly, divide your students into groups and give them copies of the 10 point summary to explore the story order.**

- Cut up and remove the numbers from the 10 point summary.
- Give each group a few minutes to rearrange them into the correct order.
  - You could print a large copy of the 10 point summary so that each one is on an A3 page and when you go through the order with the whole class you can stick them up in the correct order around the room.
  - Ensure that you correct misconceptions as you go through the points and ask your students to justify and clarify the decisions they made.
  - This will support with comprehension work across English as there are some key indicators of the story structure (E.g. Romeo and Juliet can only get married once they have met, Macbeth can only become King once he has killed the King).

**Once the correct order has been established, give each group two consecutive story points and ask them to create freeze frames to show this moment. Provide them with two rules**

1. Everyone must be involved.
2. Someone/some people must read out the story point.
  - Give them a strict time limit to create the freeze frame, before moving onto their second one.
    - Ask them to consider what else they could be if there are only a small amount of named characters in the scene - could they create the architecture or double up on characters?
  - After the time limit is up, give them a further two minutes to consider how they would adjust their positions so that the rest of the class can see the whole image – ask them to consider their audience.
  - With the rest of the class watching, move from one group to another, seeing each freeze frame in order and hearing the story point. Then jump into the image to ‘Thought tap’ some (or all ideally) of the characters.
    - It is really encouraging for students if they get to share their ideas, whether they are Juliet or Juliet’s wardrobe, Macbeth or one of his soldiers.
  - Ask them open questions about who they are, what they are doing and how they feel about it. Facilitate this in a light-hearted way to avoid the students feeling under pressure.
  - If they struggle with an answer, throw the question out to the rest of the group and the audience.
    - This is a great opportunity to get some interpretations of characters’ thoughts and actions but do use it to clarify facts about the story and the characters too.
    - It is also a great time to show that you don’t have all of the answers either and that you will all find out more as you delve further into the play and rehearsals.
    - You could do this ‘Thought Tapping’ as a ‘Roving Reporter’, using a prop as a microphone to interview the characters as if live in that moment.

**Once you have done this for each of the 10 images, bring the class back together for a plenary.**

This is a good time to recap on what they have learnt about the characters and/or the story and you could do this in a number of ways. E.g.

1. **Tell the story in a circle.** Everyone sits in a circle and adds a bit more information on the previous person's ideas. This means that those that have a good grasp will be able to share their knowledge and those who are still working towards it, will be able to add whatever they can – such as a character name or a setting for the play.
2. **Provide them with Plenary cards.** Use the following examples and ask them to share their response with someone else.
  - Something they have learnt today; a new word or phrase that they have used today; something that they would like to know more about; something that they are looking forward to in the play; a question that they now have about the play.
3. **Learnt and enjoyed.** Simply ask for them to tell a partner something that they have learnt and something that they have enjoyed in this lesson.