

OTHELLO KNOWLEDGE ORGANISER

SUMMARY OF THE PLAY (A)

	<i>Act/Scene</i>	<i>Summary</i>
1.	Act 1 Sc. 1	Roderigo is unhappy with Iago for failing to promote his marriage to Desdemona, meanwhile Desdemona and Othello married in secret. Iago is angry that Othello has promoted Cassio over him and declares revenge. To create trouble, Iago encourages Cassio to wake Brabantio and tell him about his daughter and Othello. Brabantio discovers that Desdemona is missing and so, calling for weapons, sets out to find the pair.
2.	Act 1 Sc. 2	Iago warns Othello that Brabantio will try and have him arrested, however Othello is confident that he is of high enough status that his marriage to Desdemona will be blessed. Cassio brings a message from the Duke telling Othello to meet with the Venetian council. On the way to the meeting, Othello is accosted by Brabantio and his men. Othello commands the men to put their weapons away and denies bewitching Desdemona into marrying him. Brabantio decides to attend the meeting to speak to the Duke about their marriage.
3.	Act 1 Sc. 3	Othello is told to prepare for war against the Turks after their invasion of Cyprus. Brabantio declares that Othello has bewitched his daughter, to which Othello recounts the history of his relationship with Desdemona stating that she fell for him because of his valiant war stories and the stories of his life. Desdemona is brought to testify to Othello's statement. The Duke urges Brabantio to accept the marriage, and Desdemona requests to accompany Othello on his military campaign. Othello therefore places Desdemona in Iago's care to be transported safely to Cyprus. Brabantio warns Othello not to trust Desdemona after she lied to her father about her marriage. Iago tells Roderigo that he will help him seduce Desdemona in order to cuckold Othello.
4.	Act 2 Sc. 1	The Turkish fleet is destroyed by a storm, but the characters arrive safely in Cyprus. Iago is annoyed about the way Cassio greets Emilia (Iago's wife). Othello is overjoyed to be reunited with Desdemona. Iago persuades Roderigo to provoke Cassio into losing his temper to discredit him. Iago repeats his desire for revenge on both Othello and Cassio and he suspects them both of cuckolding him.
5.	Act 2 Sc. 2	Peace is restored in Cyprus and so a herald announces that there is to be a night of celebrations about the destruction of the Turkish fleet and Othello's marriage to Desdemona.
6.	Act 2 Sc. 3	Iago is put in charge of the party arrangements and so Othello and Desdemona leave to consummate their marriage. Iago persuades Cassio to join the partying and then undermines Cassio's reputation by telling Montano that Cassio is a drunkard, after convincing him to drink. Roderigo antagonises Cassio and then a fight ensues and as a result, Othello dismisses Cassio from his position as lieutenant. Iago advises Cassio to seek Desdemona's help in getting his job back. Iago states that he will persuade Emilia to promote Cassio's cause to Desdemona while he poisons Othello's mind against her.
7.	Act 3 Sc. 1	To regain Othello's favour, Cassio hires some musicians to serenade Othello and Desdemona but Othello sends a clown to pay the musicians to leave. Cassio gives the clown a gold piece and asks him to bring Emilia to him so that he may talk to her. Iago enters and says that he will send Emilia down himself and ensure that Othello is out of the way; Cassio thanks Iago for his honesty. Emilia comes down and explains that the couple have been discussing Cassio's situation and Desdemona has implored Othello to reinstate Cassio. Othello explains that he can't because Montano is well revered. Emilia says she will talk again to Desdemona.
8.	Act 3 Sc. 2	Othello, Iago, and a gentleman walk together. Othello gives Iago some letters to send to the Venetian senate, and tells him to meet him on the fortifications. Iago exits and Othello goes to tour the fortifications, checking the security of his territory against foreign enemies, unbeknownst to him that the enemy in the form of Iago is much closer to home.

KEY CONTEXT (B)

16. The play was first performed for King James I in 1604.
17. Set against the wars that raged between Venice and Turkey in the latter part of the 16th century.
18. Shakespeare is set to have based the story of **Othello** on an Italian prose tale written in 1565 by Giovanni Battista Giraldi Cinzio (Cinthio)
19. Shakespearean society was inherently patriarchal Women could only rise through their association with men' 'Men wished to marry virgins...This made reputation an essential commodity for social society.' 'Fallen woman... necessitating suicide or entrance into a nunnery.' (Cox)
20. 'Women and blacks exist as the other' (Loomba) 'Moor' was a term used widely by society in the period to describe darker skinned individuals as black people were viewed as 'other'

KEY CHARACTERS (C)

21. Othello	The first great black protagonist in Western literature, a general in the Venetian army and the governor of Cyprus. Othello is strong and brave, but a racial outsider and therefore experiences feelings of insecurity.
22. Iago	The Machiavellian/malcontent villain of the text. Othello's ensign who is jealous and enraged when he is passed over for promotion.
23. Desdemona	Othello's wife and the main tragic victim of the text. She appears strong-willed at the opening, but we look on her as a symbol of female passivity.
24. Emilia	Iago's wife and Desdemona's chaperone. Mistreated by her husband, 'the mouthpiece of repressed femininity' (Bayley) who emancipates herself at the end of the play by revealing Iago's deception.
25. Michael Cassio	Othello's lieutenant who is accused of adultery with Desdemona. He is a virtuous and trustworthy character who is promoted to governor in the resolution of the play.
26. Roderigo	Iago's assistant in his scheming plot against Othello. He has been in love with Desdemona and aids Iago in his scheme to break up Othello's marriage so that Roderigo can be with Desdemona.
27. Brabantio	Desdemona's father and a Venetian senator who has had Othello over to his home multiple times which allows Desdemona and Othello to fall in love.
28. Bianca	Cassio's mistress, who is also an outsider because of her role as a prostitute.

KEY QUOTATIONS (D)

9.	Act 3 Sc. 3	Desdemona pleads with Othello to reinstate Cassio whilst Iago poisons Othello's mind against Cassio, hinting that he has committed adultery with Desdemona. Othello begins to question Desdemona's love and becomes jealous and irate. Desdemona drops her handkerchief and Emilia gives it to Iago. When Othello demands proof of the infidelity, Iago describes how Cassio called out for Desdemona in a dream and has been seen wiping his beard with her handkerchief. Othello asks Iago to kill Cassio and he promotes him to his new lieutenant. Othello intends to kill Desdemona himself for her infidelity.
10.	Act 3 Sc. 4	Desdemona asks the clown to inform Cassio that she has pleaded for him. She is feeling uneasy about the loss of her handkerchief. Again, she pleads for Cassio and Othello is angry with Desdemona because he believes that she has not lost the handkerchief but given it to Cassio as a symbol of her love. Cassio's mistress, Bianca, is annoyed that he hasn't visited her recently; he gives Bianca the handkerchief, saying that he found it in his bed chamber.
11.	Act 4 Sc. 1	Iago taunts Othello with crude images of Desdemona's infidelity and references to the handkerchief; Othello collapses in a fit of rage as a result. Iago assures Cassio that these 'fits' are epileptic and that they should wait it out. Iago tells Othello to withdraw so that he may have a conversation with Cassio about Bianca. Iago encourages Cassio to discuss Bianca in a derogatory way. Othello sees Desdemona's handkerchief and believes that she had given it to Cassio and vows to murder her. Cassio is to replace Othello as governor. Othello hits Desdemona in public, calling her a 'devil'.
12.	Act 4 Sc. 2	Othello questions Emilia but does not believe her when she assures him of Desdemona's fidelity. As a result, Othello confronts Desdemona who is still defensive of her honour. Othello pays Bianca whom he believes was the instrumental in Desdemona's infidelity and calls Desdemona 'that cunning whore of Venice' Desdemona asks Iago for help and Iago simply states that Othello is angry about state business rather than her. Iago manages to persuade Roderigo to plan to kill Cassio.
13.	Act 4 Sc. 3	Othello sends Desdemona to get ready for bed. Emilia, annoyed at the way Othello has treated her friend, states that she wishes Desdemona had never met him; Desdemona says that she still loves Othello. Desdemona sings Barbary's melancholy 'Willow song.' She has a premonition of death and asks Emilia to wrap her in her wedding sheets if she dies. The women discuss the theme of female infidelity: Emilia thinks it is a 'small vice' whereas Desdemona finds the idea repulsive.
14.	Act 5 Sc. 1	Scene set in the dark: Roderigo tries to wound Cassio but is instead wounded by Cassio. Iago steps in and stabs Cassio in the leg. Othello hears the cries of pain from Cassio and assumes he is dead; therefore he is compelled to move forward with his own revenge. Lodovico and Gratiano cautiously enter when they hear the commotion and attend to Cassio. Iago kills Roderigo. Bianca appears and Iago accuses her of being involved in a plot to kill Cassio. Roderigo's body is discovered and Iago sends Emilia to inform Othello and Desdemona.
15.	Act 5 Sc. 2	As Desdemona sleeps in her chamber, Othello enters and speaks about how he will murder her. He kisses her and she wakes. Desdemona weeps when she discovers that Cassio is dead; this enrages and fortifies Othello. He explains to her that he is murdering her for her own good and Desdemona begs to be allowed to live. Othello smothers her. Emilia enters and Desdemona revives briefly to say that she was responsible for her own death. Othello explains why he killed Desdemona and Emilia insults him and summons Iago, Gratiano and Montano. The plot unfolds through Emilia's dialogue and she accuses Iago of villainy. In response, Iago stabs her and leaves her to die next to Desdemona. Guards bring Iago back and Othello tries to kill him. Iago refuses to justify his actions even though his plot is exposed. Othello speaks, asking everyone to remember him for the brave soldier that he was and then he kills himself.

29.	Act One	'I am not what I am' Iago (Sc.1) 'Look to your house, your daughter and your bags!' Iago (Sc.1) 'An old black ram is tupping your white ewe' Iago (Sc.1) 'I follow him to serve my turn upon him' Iago (Sc. 1) 'For know, Iago, But that I love the gentle Desdemona' Othello (Sc. 2) 'Would ever have, t'incur a general mock, Run from her guardage to the sooty bosom Of such a thing as thou' Brabantio to Othello (Sc.2) 'Let me go with him' Desdemona to the Duke (Sc.3)
30.	Act Two	'Worthy governor'... 'war-like Othello' ... 'the man commands like a full soldier' Montano about Othello (Sc.1) 'With as little web as this, I will ensnare a great fly like Cassio' Iago (Sc. 1) 'If I were now to die, 'Twere now to be most happy' Othello (Sc.1) 'Iago is most honest' Othello to Cassio (S.3) 'Reputation, reputation, reputation! O I have lost my reputation! I have lost the immortal part of myself and what remains is bestial!' Cassio (Sc.3) 'Our general's wife is now the general' Iago (Sc.3)
31.	Act Three	'Be thou assur'd, good Cassio, I will do All my abilities in thy behalf' Desdemona (Sc.3) 'Excellent wretch, perdition catch my soul but I do love thee. And when I love thee not, Chaos is come again'' Othello about Desdemona (Sc.3) 'And, for I know thou'rt full of love and honesty, And weigh'st thy words before thou giv'st them breath' Othello to Iago (Sc.3) 'Good name – in man and woman – dear my lord, Is the immediate jewel of their soul' Iago to Othello (Sc.3) 'O, beware, my lord, of jealousy; it is the green-eyed monster which does mock the meat it feeds on' Iago to Othello (Sc.3) 'Give me the ocular proof' Othello to Iago (Sc.3) 'It is a monster Begot upon itself, born on itself' Emilia (Sc.4)
32.	Act Four	'As doth the raven o'er the infected house/ Boding to all! – he had my handkerchief' Othello (Sc.1) 'A horned man's a monster and a beast' Othello (Sc.1) 'I/ strike it and it hurts my hand' Othello about Desdemona (Sc.1) 'I tremble at it' Othello before he falls into trance (Sc.1) 'Ud's pity, who would not make her husband a cuckold, to make him a monarch?' Emilia to Desdemona (Sc.3)
33.	Act Five	'Oh brave Iago, honest and just That has such a noble sense of thy friend's wrong! Thy teachest me!' Othello to Iago (Sc.1) 'she'll betray more men. Put out the light' Othello (Sc.2) 'Nobody: I myself' Desdemona to Emilia (Sc.2) 'O Desdemon! Dead Desdemon! Dead! O! O!' Othello (Sc.2)

SYMBOLS/MOTIFS (E)

Symbol	Meaning
34. Handkerchief	In European medieval and renaissance love poetry, a handkerchief is typically a symbol of women's romantic favour. The handkerchief that Othello gives Desdemona is similarly a love-token and therefore a symbol of their love. But the handkerchief, which originally belonged to an Egyptian sorcerer also comes to symbolise the illusions that Iago is 'casting' through his deception and subterfuge.
35. Animals	<i>Othello</i> is rife with animal metaphors. In particular, this language is used to describe Othello, the 'barbary horse' or Desdemona the 'beautiful creature'. In each case, the animal language is connected to prejudice. Describing a person or group in animal terms is a way of defining that person or group as less than human, something that deserves to be humiliated and controlled. Othello is described using animalistic imagery due to the fact he is black, Desdemona because she is a woman; both are groups which are subjugated in society.
36. Candle	The candle Othello blows out right before he murders Desdemona symbolises him distinguishing her life.
37. Location	Shakespeare often uses different locations for different mindsets. The setting in the play moves from Venice to Cyprus in Act 2. Venice represents civilisation, whilst Cyprus symbolises the wilderness. The idea is that what happened in Cyprus (supposed infidelity and murder) would not have happened in Venice.

THEMES (F)

Theme	Analysis	Examples of where it appears in the text
38. Racism	The most prominent form of prejudice in <i>Othello</i> is racial prejudice. In the very first scene Iago and Roderigo disparage Othello in explicitly racist terms, calling him among other things 'barbary horse' and 'thick lips'. In nearly every case, the prejudiced characters use terms that describe Othello as an animal or a beast. In other words, they use racist language to try to define Othello not only as an outsider to white Venetian society, but as being less human and therefore less deserving of respect. Othello himself seems to have internalized this prejudice. On a number of occasions, he describes himself in similarly unflattering racial terms. And when he believes that he has lost his honor and manhood through Desdemona's supposed unfaithfulness, he quickly becomes the kind of un-rational animal or monster that the white Venetians accuse him of being.	(use summary for reference) 1, 2, 3, and 11.
39. Treatment of women	Racial prejudice is not the only prejudice on display in <i>Othello</i> . Many characters in the play also exhibit misogyny, or hatred of women, primarily focused on women's honesty or dishonesty about their sexuality. In all of these cases, the characters displaying prejudice seek to control and define another person or group who frighten them. In other words, prejudice works as a kind of strategy to identify outsiders and insiders and to place yourself within the dominant group. Men, particularly Iago, subjugates and attempts to control his wife. He speaks of her in derogatory terms and criticises the gender in general. Even the women fall guilty of allowing their own subjugation: Desdemona appears to accept Othello's treatment of her and intrinsically adopts a position of servitude.	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12 and 15.
40. Appearance vs. reality	The tragic plot of <i>Othello</i> hinges on Iago's ability to mislead other characters, particularly Roderigo and Othello, by encouraging them to misinterpret what they see. Othello is susceptible to Iago's plot because he himself is so honest, and due to his position as a racial outsider, insecure. The language of the play, which time and again refers to dreams, trances, and vision, constantly highlights the way in which what seems to be real may actually be fake. In addition, Shakespeare extends the theme of appearance vs. reality to include the art of playwriting and acting. As he develops his plot against Othello, Iago creates scenes within scenes. He sets up encounters between two characters and putting a third in the position of a spectator. In each case, Iago manipulates Othello so that Othello sees the appearance that Iago wants him to see, rather than the reality of what is actually happening. In this way, Iago becomes a kind of "director"—he even directly addresses the audience through his many soliloquies—and Shakespeare draws attention to the way that a playwright and actors create an appearance onstage that tricks the audience into seeing something other than reality.	1, 4, 6, 7, 9 and 11.
41. Jealousy	Iago refers to jealousy as the "green-eyed monster." As this metaphor suggests, jealousy is closely associated with the theme of appearance and reality. Othello's jealousy impedes his ability to distinguish between reality and appearance. While the prejudiced characters in the play denigrate Othello as an animal or a beast based on his race, Othello's obvious honor and intelligence makes these attacks obviously ridiculous. Yet when Othello is overcome by jealousy, he does become beast-like, falling into epileptic fits that rob him of the ability to speak	1, 4, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12 and 13.

	intelligibly. Othello is also not the only character in Othello to feel jealousy. Both Iago and Roderigo act to destroy Othello out of jealousy, with disastrous consequences.	
42. Womanhood and sexuality	Two contrasting images of womanhood dominate Othello: the virtuous and loyal woman, or Madonna, embodied by Desdemona; and the whore, embodied, to a certain extent by Bianca. Yet over the course of the play, it becomes clear that these two different ways of describing women don't actually apply to real women. Instead, they are male fantasies imposed on women—ideals that men want women to fulfill, and roles that women therefore purposefully play for men. For instance, Desdemona often describes her devotion to Othello in front of other people, underscoring that, even though she does love him very deeply, she is to a certain extent playing the role of the virtuous wife. Iago's wife, Emilia, complicates the simple contract between the Madonna and the whore. Initially, she wants to please her husband—and does so by stealing Desdemona's handkerchief, knowing that he has long hankered after it. Yet she is not wholly loyal, and even tells Desdemona in 4.3 that she believes many women, including she herself, would cheat on their husbands under certain circumstances. And, finally, she proves her own, independent virtue by defending Desdemona's virtue and revealing her husband's crimes in the process. So while womanhood in Othello is, therefore, often defined by men in terms of pure virtue or voracious and deceptive sexuality, the play ultimately shows that real women are far more complex.	1, 3, 6, 9, 10, 11 and 13.
43. Manhood and honour	Throughout the play, various male figures seek to assert and protect their manhood and their honour. Othello, it is clear, has attained political power and therefore is an honourable and powerful man. The subplot in which Iago gets Cassio drunk and causes him to humiliate himself, also indicates the importance of "reputation, reputation, reputation." Though military exploits are one way for men to build their honour, when not in war the primary means by which men define their honour is their ability to command the faithfulness of their women. Othello's murderous rage comes from the threat of cuckolding places on a man's honour and sense of manhood.	1 – 15.

LINKS TO TRAGIC GENRE (G)

Tragic convention	How/where it appears in Othello
44. Hamartia	Othello's jealousy is his fatal flaw: it is his jealousy that allows him to be tricked and manipulated by Iago to create his own destruction. Othello's lack of trust in his wife and his susceptibility to Iago's lies come from his own feelings of jealousy and insecurity due to his position in society and his race. A.C. Bradley argues that Othello is essentially a "faultless hero." He does not have the typically fatal flaw seen in other tragic heroes such as hubris. His character is pure and noble and is corrupted and twisted by the villain of the story, Iago.
45. Peripeteia	Othello's reversal of fortune happens in Act 3 when Iago attempts to persuade Othello of Desdemona's infidelity. When Othello begins to become convinced; this is when his peripeteia occurs. The course of the play is changed after this point when Othello's rage, fuelled by Iago, becomes the driving force in the events to follow. Othello's language and behaviour are evidence of his downfall: his speech becomes more disjointed and base language is used, he experiences a downfall from a once-noble warrior to an out-of-control man who fits with rage.
46. Anagnorisis	Othello's moment of realisation comes in Act 5 after the death of Desdemona. He discovers, after Desdemona's murder, that Iago had deceived him and that his wife was faithful after all. Othello is so stricken with grief and regret after his anagnorisis that he takes his own life.
47. Catharsis	Othello's moment of anagnorisis is also the audience's moment to experience catharsis: when he experiences these feelings of guilt and realisation that he has been wronged and killed his innocent wife, the audience experiences more feelings of pity towards him than hatred. Othello is a cathartic work not only because readers feel Othello's pain, but especially because readers vicariously experience Othello's feeling of being released from that pain through his suicide.
48. Hubris	Othello's jealousy and rage towards Desdemona comes from a fear that other men will laugh at him (think about context and themes) because his wife is having an affair; therefore, his rage comes from a sense of pride . Pride is truly what motivates Othello's desire for revenge.
49. Tragic Victim	Desdemona is the typical tragic victim in the text: an innocent who is collateral damage in Iago's quest for revenge against Othello. Desdemona can be seen as both a tragic victim but also a tragic heroine: she endures suffering that is greatly out of proportion to her mistakes but also lacks the wisdom to see that her effort to reunite Othello and Cassio as friends is the background to Iago's manipulation of Othello. Arguably, we could say there are other tragic victims in the text who are manipulated and/or mistreated e.g. Roderigo, to an extent, Emilia.

