



EXERCISE: RACISM, WHITE SUPREMACY & PATRIARCHY

2 classes: approx. 120 minutes

OBJECTIVE: Students will analyse Act 1, scene 3 by examining the key issues in the text through the critical lens of intersectional oppression.

INSTRUCTIONS: Students will explore the text of Act 1, scene 3 together, starting with what they know and understand to be the key issues and then delving deeper into how language and issues of racism, white supremacy and patriarchy impact the characters.

RESOURCES: Act 1, scene 3 script copies*, pens, pencils, notebooks
Using PerformancePlus
Othello: Act 1, scene 3 film video; *PDF script; Learning Activities video; Artistic Insights videos

INTRODUCTION

1. Have the students consider the following questions, either by responding with their own writing or by discussing with a partner:
 - What do you already know about the play?
 - How do stereotypes¹ and bias² work to devalue certain social groups?
 - Does language have power? Why or why not? Explain your position.

EXPLORING THE SCENE

2. Look at the scene together and watch the film clip. (Note: You can read the text on your screen while the scene plays out.)
3. Next, have the students, working either independently or with a partner, make note of the following:

¹ **STEREOTYPE:** a fixed idea or image that many people have of a particular type of person or thing, but which is often not true in reality.

² **BIAS:** a strong feeling in favour of or against one group of people, or one side in an argument, often not based on fair judgement.

- Notice how language is used throughout this scene. Which characters are using it to destroy? Which characters are using it to support?
- Why do you think the Duchess dismisses Brabantio?
- Focus on Othello in this scene. What do we learn about him?
- How does Othello navigate power structures? How does he disrupt the white supremacy and the patriarchy of the court? Investigate code-switching³ and how Othello manoeuvres throughout the play.
- Did Desdemona's response to her father surprise you? Why or why not?
- Think back to the lesson on misogyny.⁴ How do misogyny and racism⁵ work together in this scene to devalue particular characters? How do Othello and Desdemona reassert their power?
- What do we learn about Iago at the end of this scene? Why do you think Othello trusts Iago so deeply? How might their military service impact their relationship?⁶
- Who are the most powerful characters in this scene and why? Does who holds power change as the scene unfolds? Explain why or why not.

OTHELLO TODAY

4. Have the students, working in pairs, watch the scene again.
5. Then have them consider whether it would unfold in the same way today. Have them write a piece sharing what they think. Students are to consider the following when forming their opinions:

³ **CODE SWITCHING:** the conscious modification of one's behaviour, appearance, use of language, etc., to be more acceptable to oppressive systemic expectations based on race, gender, culture or other marginalized identifiers.

⁴ **MISOGYNY:** feelings of hating women or the belief that men are much better than women. **Examples of misogyny** may come in the form of exclusion, discrimination, patriarchy, male privilege, belittling of women, violence, harassment, disenfranchisement, sexual objectification, etc.

⁵ **RACISM:** prejudice, discrimination or antagonism directed against a person or people on the basis of their membership in a particular racial or ethnic group, typically one that is a minority or marginalized.

⁶ For further insights check out the "Interview" section under "Artistic Insights" of PerformancePlus as the actors discuss the character relationships.

- What are the similarities and differences between the world when the play was written 400 years ago and your world today?
- How have things changed, particularly in terms of race relations and gender equity?⁷

6. Have the students share their opinion pieces with one another.

DEBRIEF

7. After sharing some of the work they have created, use the following questions to debrief the students, either by having them write independently or by discussing as a class:
- Were you surprised by what your classmates thought when reflecting on *Othello* today? Why or why not?
 - Iago uses language to incite violence while characters like Othello and Desdemona use it to diffuse it. How can words be used to prevent violence? Are words and peaceful interventions enough when confronting injustice? Why or why not?

⁷ **GENDER EQUITY:** fairness and impartiality in the treatment of women, men and gender-diverse people, according to their respective needs in terms of rights, benefits, obligations and opportunities.