

## Lies in Shakespeare's 'Othello'

### Task 1: Read about the main characters in 'Othello'.

<p><b>Desdemona</b> is the daughter of a powerful senator in Venice, and she is married to Othello. Although she is kind and sweet, Desdemona can also be playful. She is strong enough to stand up to Othello when he accuses her of being unfaithful.</p>	<p><b>Othello</b> is the hero of the play. He is a powerful general in the army of Venice and is respected by those around him for being experienced and talented. He is well thought of because of his past actions. Othello has a good nature, but he is passionate and his love for his wife Desdemona is twisted by Iago.</p>
<p>Othello's lieutenant <b>Cassio</b> is a young and inexperienced soldier. He has a high position in the army which makes Iago angry. Cassio is loyal to Othello and an honourable man. He wants to do the best he can and is faithful to his friends and his position.</p>	<p><b>Iago</b> is a standard bearer (flag carrier) in the Venetian army. It's not the best job and he knows it. He is an ambitious, bitter and manipulative man who uses lies to control people. Although he pretends to be Othello's friend, Iago bitterly hates him and wants to hurt him any way he can. During the play, Iago's lies turn Othello into a jealous monster.</p>

### Task 2: Write the adjectives from the texts about the characters in the table.

Adjectives with positive meaning	Adjectives with negative meaning	Adjectives with both positive / negative meaning or neutral

### Task 3A: Read a short summary of the first part of the play.

Othello is an army general. He has promoted Cassio to the role of lieutenant. Iago has a lower position in the army, and he is angry that the young and inexperienced Cassio has been promoted instead of himself. He wants revenge! First, Iago gets Cassio drunk, which means that Cassio loses his position. Then, Iago lies to Othello. He tells him that Desdemona, his wife, has another lover – Cassio. What will happen next?

**Some students have made predictions about what will happen in the play. Put the phrases in the correct order.**

1. that / will probably be / Desdemona / unfaithful / I think / to Othello
2. to Othello / is certain to / Iago / lie / again
3. Desdemona / Iago will / lie to / most probably / as well
4. kill themselves / the characters / is bound to / one of
5. friends / Cassio and / probably won't / be / Iago
6. is likely to / position / his / in the / Iago / army / lose
7. that / kill / I doubt / Othello will / Desdemona
8. with Iago / get / Othello / might well / angry

**Task 3B: Use phrases in the box to write some predictions about what will happen in the play.**

will probably	is certain to	will most probably	is bound to	probably won't
	is likely to	I doubt that ... will	might well	

A character hides something in someone's bedroom.	Ex: I think Othello will probably hide some poison in Desdemona's room.
A character changes so much that they seem to be a different person by the end of the play.	Ex: I doubt that Iago will change.
Someone uses a pillow.	Ex: Desdemona might well kill Iago with a pillow.
One of the characters kills himself / herself.	Ex: Cassio is bound to kill himself.

**Task 5: How well can you remember the plot? Answer these questions.**

1. Why does Iago hate Othello?
2. Why does Cassio lose his position in the army?
3. How does Iago try to prove that Desdemona is being unfaithful?
4. Why does Othello's personality appear to change?
5. How does Othello kill Desdemona?
6. How does Othello eventually find out that his wife was telling the truth?

**Task 6: Discuss these questions.**

1. As well as being lied to by Iago, Othello lies to himself. In what way do people lie to themselves?
2. When was the last time someone told you a lie and you found out about it?
3. Is there a difference between good and bad lies? Is it OK to lie sometimes?
4. 'If you tell the truth, you don't have to remember anything.'  
Do you agree with this quotation from Mark Twain? Why? Why not?