

Othello Learning Checklist

The points below are all crucial pieces of information you need to know – for each piece of information, you need to be able to link it to its significance in the play and how it shapes your understanding of the characters and events of the play. It is no use just knowing the information, you need to be able to write about it, where relevant, in your exam.

You must only tick the green box if you are comfortable writing about and understanding all the aspects explained within that box, otherwise you need to tick the red box and research the aspects you do not feel confident with and then tick the green box. Highlight any aspects you need to research further; this will help to focus your revision and research.

	Green: <i>You are 100% confident on every aspect and can confidently write about it in the exam.</i>	Red: <i>Highlight the aspects you still need to research/revise.</i>
<p>Who was William Shakespeare? Research his life – when he was born and when he died – how did he die? What was his life like – look at his personal life as well as his literary career. What was he most famous for in his literary career and why was this significant? How did the two monarchs he lived under influence his writing? What did he write about and why? What influenced his writing? What were his religious beliefs? How did events that happened to him in his life and the time he was living in influence his writing and attitude?</p>		
<p>Typical conventions of a tragedy and more specifically a Shakespearean tragedy: Confidently show an understanding of the key elements and features of a tragedy and how these are similar to or differ from Shakespeare's features and elements? Why is this significant? How are characters typically presented in a tragedy? How was Othello as a character presented, did he conform to typical conventions and why/why not? How typical of a tragedy is Othello as a play?</p>		

How does Othello compare with at least two other tragedies written by Shakespeare? Focus on similarities and differences.		
Aristotle's theory of a tragedy and tragic hero: Clear understanding of Aristotle's theory as well as a clear understanding of the following and how they are presented in the play: Catharsis Anagnorisis Peripeteia Hamartia		
Jacobean Society: Can you confidently write about the following and link them to the play? Religion Women Men Family Marriage and general attitudes towards love Class systems Attitudes of the Monarchy and leadership in general at the time Venetian law at the time		
King James: Who was he? His background, family life and time as King. What were his interests/ beliefs/attitudes/religious beliefs and how would this have influenced the way Shakespeare wrote? How did the people of England feel towards James as their King? What was Demonology? What was it about? Why was it written? How was it received? How could this have influenced the way Shakespeare write under James' reign?		
Religious belief of the period: The 7 Deadly Sins The Hierarchical Chain of Being – what was this? Why was it important? How is this evident in the play? What constituted being good and evil? What character traits fitted each of these qualities? How are these concepts explored or		

<p>contradicted in the play and what is the significance of this?</p> <p>Superstition – what did they fear most and why? What superstitions were prevalent at the time and why were these significant?</p> <p>Religious references in the play – in particular the story of Judas and Moses in Exodus: “I am that I am”.</p>		
<p>Attitudes towards race at the time:</p> <p>Especially towards ethnic minorities and black people in particular – how were they perceived? What character traits were they believed to have?</p> <p>Have a very clear understanding of the term moor – what did it mean? What character traits was it believed a moor possessed? Who does it refer to and why was it used?</p> <p>Attitudes to multi-racial marriages at the time – how common were they and why was it a problem that Othello and Desdemona were married in the eyes of Brabantio?</p> <p>What was perceived to be the superior race/religion? How did this effect the events in the play?</p> <p>The Christian/Muslim war and divide – what caused this, what were the basics of this war at the time the play was written?</p> <p>What was the significance of Othello, being a black General in the Venetian army at the time – what was Shakespeare trying to teach his audience?</p>		
<p>Cyprus & Venice:</p> <p>What was going on in Cyprus at the time the play was written – who was the island under threat from? Why is this significant to the play?</p> <p>Where is Cyprus located? What is the significance of the place being an island – link to the play and the way this will make the characters feel.</p> <p>Can you confidently analyse the significance of the play being vastly set in Cyprus and the isolation of the characters being taken away from what they know?</p>		

<p>How was Venice perceived at the time the play was set? What was Venetian law/society/government/religion like then? Why is this significant in the play?</p> <p>What was Venice's role in protecting Christianity and the war against the Turks?</p> <p>Why do you think Shakespeare removes the characters from Venice and transports them to Cyprus, what impact does this have on their state of mind?</p>		
<p>The origins of Shakespeare's Othello:</p> <p>What was the original about – look at Cinthio's version. What did Shakespeare change and the impact of this? Why do you think he made these changes – link to context and King James.</p>		
<p>Machiavellian Villains:</p> <p>Who was Machiavelli?</p> <p>What constitutes being a Machiavellian villain?</p> <p>How is Iago typical of a Machiavellian villain and why is this significant in the play?</p>		
<p>The significance of soliloquies:</p> <p>What are they?</p> <p>Why does a playwright use them?</p> <p>What impact do they have on the audience?</p> <p>Who has the most soliloquies in the play and when are they used most – think about where they are placed, what has gone on before/after a soliloquy has been delivered?</p>		
<p>The role of females during the time period:</p> <p>Lower and higher class – what was expected of them? How did their lives differ?</p> <p>Domestic role/expectations of women?</p> <p>What was a courtesan?</p> <p>Patriarchal society/dominance?</p> <p>Alpha male Vs silenced female voices?</p> <p>Female oppression – who is oppressed and why/how?</p>		

<p>The digression of Desdemona going from challenging patriarchal dominance to conforming to it.</p> <p>Who are the dominant females in the play and how do they dominate/who do they dominate?</p> <p>The presentation of Emilia and Desdemona as wives – similarities and differences between them.</p> <p>The significance of Bianca being the only female character alive at the end of the play?</p> <p>The significance of when and how the female characters are introduced in the play, the order they are introduced to us in and what this tells us about the way they are viewed?</p> <p>Emilia's role in the play and how her betrayal towards Desdemona is perceived by different audiences and her relationship with Iago?</p> <p>The last speeches given by Desdemona and Emilia, why and how these are important? The significance of what they say and how many lines they are given compared to Othello.</p> <p>The way the characters speak to Bianca and the way they treat her? Why is this significant? Compare the way Cassio interacts with Bianca and Desdemona, why is there a difference in the way he treats the two women?</p>		
<p>Cuckoldry:</p> <p>What was this?</p> <p>Why was it so important during the time and how did it influence writing?</p> <p>How is this presented in Othello and what was the significance of this?</p>		
<p>The significance of the Willow Song:</p> <p>What is the song about?</p> <p>What does a willow signify/represent?</p> <p>What does it symbolise/represent?</p> <p>The significance of where it appears in the play.</p>		

<p>Who sang it before Desdemona and why? What is the significance of this?</p> <p>The significance of the absent mother figure in the play and in Shakespeare's plays in general?</p> <p>What impact does this have on Desdemona and the role Emilia adopts as a result.</p>		
<p>The Handkerchief:</p> <p>What does it symbolise – there are multiple points here, consider what it symbolises for Othello, Desdemona, Iago, Cassio, Emilia, Bianca?</p> <p>The mythical powers of the handkerchief – why is this significant?</p> <p>The history of the handkerchief – where Othello obtained it from and where his mother obtained it from. Look also at the mythical powers of the handkerchief and how it could be seen as a destructive gift rather than a sentimental one? What does it foreshadow?</p> <p>How does the handkerchief symbolise the end of Othello & Desdemona's relationship?</p> <p>How does the handkerchief symbolise Emilia's betrayal?</p> <p>The significance of the colour and the fruits on the handkerchief – what do these symbolise?</p>		
<p>Aspects of love in the play:</p> <p>What are the different types of love in the play and how are they presented?</p> <p>In-particular you need to be able to confidently write about the effects of the following:</p> <p>Unrequited love</p> <p>Marriage</p> <p>Lust</p> <p>Betrayal</p> <p>Parental/familial</p>		
<p>Renaissance drama:</p> <p>How are women typically presented in Renaissance drama, how typical/atypical are the females in Othello?</p>		

Ingredients/typicality of Renaissance drama generally and how the play conforms/juxtaposes these.		
Understanding how to write about context: Make sure you are able to write about the following and their significance/influence in the play... Historical Cultural / Social / Political Literary Biographical Linguistic Religious		
Understanding how to write about structure in the play: The significance of exits, entrances and asides as well as monologues and soliloquys; what impact do they have? What does Shakespeare use more of and why? When are particular characters (Othello, Desdemona, Bianca, Iago) introduced and why/what is the significance of this?		
You know 15 quotes from across the play that you can confidently write about		
You know 20+ quotes from across the play and can confidently write about them.		
You understand the role of the following characters and how they develop throughout the play: Othello Desdemona Iago Emilia Cassio Roderigo Bianca		