

SHAKESPEARE IN 30 MINUTES: OTHELLO

Adapted by Mike Willis

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PUBLISHED BY

**HEUER PUBLISHING LLC
P.O. BOX 248 • CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA 52406
TOLL FREE (800) 950-7529 • FAX (319) 368-8011**

AUTHOR'S NOTES:

“Shakespeare in 30 Minutes” is available as an anthology of four award-winning adaptations by Mike Willis, or each adaptation separately. Mr. Willis is a high school drama director who spent twelve seasons with the Wisconsin Shakespeare Festival Acting Company. He used his Shakespearean experience to fashion four 30-minute adaptations were entered in the Wisconsin High School Forensic Association’s Fall Play Festival Competition. In order to be selected as an “all-state” play and given the opportunity to perform at the state festival, a production is required to participate at sub-district, district, and sectional levels and be awarded advance recommendations from two of three adjudicators. Each of the four adaptations in this collection received all-state recognition and were performed at the Wisconsin High School Forensic Association’s State Theatre Festival. Along with their all-state selection, these plays were also accorded several other awards, including: ten student outstanding acting awards, four state outstanding director’s awards, and “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” was chosen to receive the Critic’s Choice Award at the 1993 state festival. These adaptations are easily staged and unlike some adaptations of Shakespeare, they keep the poetry of the dialogue intact. Each adaptation is ideal for one act play competitions and school productions where resources do not allow for a full-length Shakespearean production.

OTHELLO
ADAPTED BY MIKE WILLIS

CAST OF CHARACTERS

OTHELLO	(52 lines)
DESDEMONA	(53 lines)
EMILIA	(28 lines)
THE TEACHER	(14 lines)
BOY #1	(4 lines)
BOY #2	(4 lines)
GIRL #1	(4 lines)
GIRL # 2	(4 lines)
GIRL # 3	(5 lines)
GIRL # 4	(4 lines)

INTRODUCTION

The play is simply set in a classroom, using a teacher's desk and some student's desks. The students are part of a class that is studying the play **Othello** by William Shakespeare. The teacher and the students prepare the audience by outlining for them the events that have taken place in the play prior to Act Five, Scene 2. Once the scene has been set, Othello, Desdemona and Emilia enter and act out the happenings of Act Five, Scene Two of Shakespeare's **Othello**.

Setting:

The setting is a high school classroom. There is a teacher's desk upstage left angled downstage right toward a number of student desks.

THE TIME: The time is the present.

At Rise:

The TEACHER enters from stage left and crosses behind the desk. The students enter noisily, bantering back and forth. (A class bell sounds.)

TEACHER: Okay people, let's quiet down and take our seats.

(Noise continues.) Quiet please! Today we will be continuing discussion of the play **Othello** by William Shakespeare.

ALL: Oh, no.

BOY #1: Not Shakespeare!

GIRL #1: Can't we watch the video or something?

GIRL #2: Yeah, the video would be cool.

GIRL #3: Maybe some of the boys would understand it then.

GIRL #4: Maybe.

BOY #2: Heh, what do you mean by that? I understand just as much as you do.

TEACHER: Well, since we all understand so much, let's review what we know so far. Matthew, let's start with you.

BOY #2: Well, Othello, a Moorish nobleman, has secretly married Desdemona.

TEACHER: And who is Desdemona?

GIRL #2: The daughter of Barbatio, a Venetian senator.

GIRL #3: Iago is busy plotting against Othello.

TEACHER: Who's Iago?

GIRL #3: An ensign under Othello and a person Othello thinks he can trust.

TEACHER: And why is he plotting against Othello?

GIRL #4: Because Othello had promoted Cassio, a young Florentine, to the rank of lieutenant over him, Iago.

BOY #1: Iago sees Cassio talking with Desdemona and decides he can get even with Othello and Cassio by telling Othello that his wife is being unfaithful.

TEACHER: Is she?

GIRL #1: No!

GIRL #2: Othello thinks so though, because of the handkerchief.

TEACHER: What handkerchief?

GIRL #3: Desdemona's. She had lost it and Iago's wife Emilia, Desdemona's waiting woman, found it.

GIRL #4: Othello had given it to Desdemona as a gift.

BOY #1: Iago then hides it in Cassio's room and Cassio ends up giving it to his mistress Bianca.

GIRL #1: Iago then goes to Othello and tells him he has seen Cassio with the handkerchief.

GIRL #2: And he places Othello in a place where he sees and overhears Bianca giving the handkerchief back to Cassio.

TEACHER: And what does Othello feel at this point?

GIRL #3: Betrayed. He thinks Desdemona has given his gift to Cassio because they are lovers.

GIRL #4: He becomes very jealous.

BOY #1: Iago then convinces Othello to strangle his unfaithful wife in her sleep and says he will go and kill Cassio.

TEACHER: But Desdemona hasn't been unfaithful?

BOY #2: No. But Othello is convinced that she has been.

TEACHER: I see. Do you think Othello loves his wife?

BOY #2: I guess.

GIRL #1: Of course he does.

TEACHER: Yes, you're right. He does love her, very much, that's why he feels so betrayed.

GIRL #2: Then why does he listen to Iago?

TEACHER: Because, Othello believes his friend is loyal and even refers to him in the text as "honest Iago." Let's open our books to page 66 and begin reading where we left off yesterday.

The TEACHER crosses downstage to the student desks and sits with the students.

We are in a room in the castle and Othello is questioning Emilia, Desdemona's lady in waiting, concerning his suspicions.

OTHELLO and EMILIA have entered stage right.

OTHELLO: You have seen nothing, then?

EMILIA: Nor ever heard, nor ever did suspect.

OTHELLO: Yes, you have seen Cassio and she together.

EMILIA: But then I saw no harm, and then I heard

Each syllable that breath made up between them.

OTHELLO: (*Suspicious.*) What, did they never whisper?

EMILIA: Never, my lord.

OTHELLO: Nor send you out o' th' way?

EMILIA: Never.

OTHELLO: (*More demanding.*) To fetch her fan, her gloves, her mask, nor nothing?

EMILIA: Never, my lord.

OTHELLO: That's strange.

EMILIA: I durst, my lord, to wager she is honest,
Lay down my soul at stake: if you think other,
Remove your thought, it doth abuse your bosom.
If any wretch have put this in your head,
Let heaven requite it with the serpent's curse!
For, if she be not honest, chaste, and true,
There's no man happy; the purest of their wives
Is foul as slander.

OTHELLO: Bid her come hither: . . . go.

EMILIA exits.

OTHELLO: (*Aside.*) She says enough; yet she's a simple bawd
That cannot say as much. This is a subtle whore,
A closet-lock-and-key of villainous secrets:
And yet she'll kneel and pray; I have seen her do't.

DESDEMONA enters with EMILIA.

DESDEMONA: My lord, what is your will?

OTHELLO: Pray, chuck, come hither.

DESDEMONA: (*Crossing to Othello.*) What is your pleasure?

OTHELLO: Let me see your eyes; (*Louder.*) Look in my face.

DESDEMONA: (*Shocked.*) What horrible fancy's this?

OTHELLO: (*Accusingly to EMILIA.*) Some of your function, mistress;
Leave procreants alone, and shut the door;
Cough or cry 'hem, if any body come:
Your mystery, your mystery; . . . nay, dispatch.

EMILIA exits.

DESDEMONA: Upon my knees, what doth your speech import?
I understand a fury in your words,
but not the words.

OTHELLO: Why, what art thou?

DESDEMONA: Your wife, my lord; your true
And loyal wife.

OTHELLO: Come swear it, damn thyself;
Lest, being like one of heaven, the devils themselves
Should fear to seize thee: therefore be double-damn'd,
Swear thou art honest.

DESDEMONA: Heaven doth truly know it.

OTHELLO: Heaven truly knows that thou art false as hell.

DESDEMONA: To whom, my lord? With whom? How am I false?

OTHELLO: Ah, Desdemona! Away! Away! Away!

OTHELLO starts to weep.

DESDEMONA: Alas the heavy day! Why do you weep?

Am I the motive of these tears, my lord?

If haply you my father do suspect

An instrument of this calling back,

Lay not your blame on me: If you have lost him,

Why, I have lost him too.

OTHELLO: Had it pleased heaven,

To try me with affliction; had they rain'd

All kinds of sores and shames on my bare head,

Steept me in poverty to the very lips;

Given to captivate me and my utmost hopes;

I should have found some place in my soul,

A drop of patience: but, alas, to make me

A fixed figure for the time of scorn

To point his slow unmoving finger at!

Yet could I bear that too; well, very well:

(Pointing to DESDEMONA.)

But there, where I have garner'd up my heart,

Where either I must live, or bear no life,

The fountain from which my current runs

Or else dries up; to be discarded thence!

Or keep it as a cistern for foul toads

To knot and gender in! Turn thy complexion there,

(DESDEMONA starts to speak.)

Patience, thou young and rose-lipt cherubin,

Ay, there, look grim as hell!

DESDEMONA: I hope my noble lord esteems me honest.

OTHELLO: O, ay; as summer flies are in the shambles,

That quicken even with blowing. O thou weed,

Who art so lovely fair, and smell'st so sweet,

That the sense aches in thee, . . . would thou hadst

ne'er been born!

DESDEMONA: Alas, what ignorant sin have I committed?

OTHELLO indicating DESDEMONA'S face.

OTHELLO: Was this fair paper, this most goodly book,

Made to write 'whore upon? What committed!

Committed! O thou public commoner!

I should make very forges of my cheeks,

That would to cinders burn up modesty,
Did I but speak thy deeds. What committed!
Heaven stops the noise at it, and the moon winks;
The bawdy wind, that kisses all it meets,
Is husht within the hollow mine of earth,
And will not hear it. What committed!
Impudent wanton!

DESDEMONA: By heaven, you do me wrong.

OTHELLO: Are you not a wanton?

DESDEMONA: No, as I am a Christian:

If to preserve this vessel for my lord
From any other foul unlawful touch,
Be not to be a wanton, I am none.

OTHELLO: What not a wanton?

DESDEMONA: No, as I am saved.

OTHELLO: Is't possible?

DESDEMONA: O, heaven forgive us!

OTHELLO: I cry you mercy, then:

I took you for a cunning whore of Venice
That married with Othello.

(Calling for EMILIA.)

You, mistress,

That have the office opposite to Saint Peter,
And keep the gate of hell!

(EMILIA enters.)

You, you, ay, you!

We have done our course; There's money for your pains:

OTHELLO hands some money to EMILIA.

I pray you, turn the key, and keep our counsel.

OTHELLO exits.

EMILIA: Alas, what does this gentleman conceive?

How do you, madam? How do you, my good lady?

DESDEMONA: Faith, half asleep.

EMILIA: Good madam, what's the matter with my lord?

DESDEMONA: With who?

EMILIA: Why, with my lord, madam.

DESDEMONA: Who is thy lord?

EMILIA: He that is yours, sweet lady.

DESDEMONA: I have none: do not talk to me, Emilia;

I cannot weep; nor answer have I none,

But what should go by water, Prithee, to-night
Lay on my bed my wedding-sheets . . . remember . . .
And call my husband hither.

EMILIA: Here's a change indeed!

EMILIA exits.

DESDEMONA: Tis meet I should be used so, very meet.
How have I been behaved, that he might stick
The small'st opinion on my least misuse?

OTHELLO enters.

OTHELLO: O . . . Desdemona . . .

DESDEMONA: My lord?

OTHELLO: Get you to bed n th' instant; I will be return'd
forthwith: dismiss your attendant there: look't be done.

OTHELLO exits and EMILIA re-enters carrying a night-gown and the wedding sheets. She places the sheets on the teacher's desk which will now serve as the bed.

EMILIA: How goes it now? He looks gentler than he did.

DESDEMONA: He says he will return incontinent:

He hath commanded me to go to bed,
And bade me to dismiss you.

EMILIA: Dismiss me!

DESDEMONA: It was his bidding; therefore, good Emilia,

Give me my nightly wearing, and adieu:
We must not now displease him.

EMILIA: I would you had never seen him!

DESDEMONA: So would not I: my love doth so approve him,
That even his stubbornness, his checks, his frowns . . .
Prithee, unpin me . . . have grace and favor in them.

EMILIA unpins DESDEMONA'S gown and helps her into her nightgown.

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