

Q THE
Tragoedy of Othello,

The Moore of Venice.

Shakespeare's

As it hath bene diuers times acted at the
Globe, and at the Black-Friers, by
his Maiesties Seruants.

Written by VVilliam Shakespeare.

Othello:

A Study Guide

LONDON,

Printed by N. O. for Thomas walkley, and are to be sold at his
shop, at the Eagle and Child, in Brittons Bursle.

1622.

Adapted from the Warehouse Theatre's guide:

<https://www.peacecenter.org/assets/doc/4-Othello-Study-Guide-a524feb3eb.pdf>

OTHELLO: A SYNOPSIS

The play begins in Venice, in the middle of the night. Iago and Roderigo are meeting to discuss their hatred of Othello. Iago hates Othello because he promoted Cassio to lieutenant over Iago, and Roderigo is a heartbroken, failed suitor of Desdemona's. They decide to wake up senator Brabantio with the news that his daughter, Desdemona, has secretly married Othello, the general of the Venetian army and a Moor. Brabantio calls an emergency meeting of the senate, where Othello and Desdemona make a case for their mutual love and defy the objections of a marriage between a black man and white woman. The Duke of Venice sides with Othello, who is then called to defend Venice from attacks of the Turkish fleet.

The action of the play then moves to Cyprus, where we learn Othello has just defeated the entire Turkish fleet. Desdemona, Iago, and Emilia have just arrived in Cyprus as well. The honeymoon phase doesn't last long, as Iago doesn't waste any time enacting his evil plan to convince Othello that Desdemona is disloyal and having an affair with Cassio, bringing about both of their downfalls.

The more Othello trusts Iago, the more he distrusts Desdemona and Cassio. His jealousy begins to rule him. Othello reaches his breaking point after Iago tell him he has seen the handkerchief Othello had given Desdemona, claiming that Desdemona had given Cassio the handkerchief as a token of her love. When Desdemona cannot produce the handkerchief, Othello flies into a rage. After he leaves, Emilia suggests that Othello is jealous, but Desdemona brushes this off, swearing he has nothing to be jealous about. In actuality, Emilia has given Iago the handkerchief.

To further seal Othello's fate, Iago plans a conversation with Cassio

while Othello hides to listen. Instead of discussing Desdemona, as Othello believes, Iago asks Cassio about Bianca, the courtesan in love with him. Enraged by what he hears, Othello asks Iago to kill Cassio and leaves to meet his wife.

Instead of killing Cassio himself, Iago tricks Roderigo into trying to kill Cassio, saying it is the only way Roderigo can win Desdemona's love. When both men are wounded, Iago enters and kills Roderigo to hide the truth. Then, he pretends to mourn the death of his friend.

Meanwhile, Othello meets Desdemona in their bed chamber. Although Desdemona protests her innocence, Othello's jealousy has consumed him, and he smothers his wife.

Emilia enters to deliver news of Roderigo's death, raising the alarm once she sees the murdered Desdemona. Realizing what has happened, Emilia denounces Iago, and he stabs her and flees.

Once Iago is brought back, the whole truth is revealed.

Overwhelmed by his own guilt at what he has done, Othello kills himself. Iago is arrested and taken away.

A SIMPLE STRUCTURE IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS (SOMETHING YOU CAN COUNT ON)

According to Louis Fantasia, scholar and author of *Instant Shakespeare*, in all of Shakespeare's plays you can count on the plot including four elements:

ONE: The world (or worlds) of the play begin in some sort of disorder or chaos as a result of some inciting incident.

TWO: Some figure of authority (a king or queen, prince, duke, parent) makes a decision that will have a significant impact on the lives of the other characters in the world of the play.

THREE: The dramatic or rising action of the play unfolds as the affected characters in the world of the play take some action in response to the decision made by the authority figure. Often, this will lead them on a journey to a "middle" world of the play that is in direct contrast or juxtaposition to the world of disorder or chaos that starts the play.

FOUR: The actions taken by the affected characters force some sort of climax or resolution based on the decision made by the figure of authority. In a comedy, this resolution comes in the form of multiple marriages. In a tragedy, it comes in the form of multiple deaths. Ultimately, this resolution restores order to the first world.

CHARACTERS IN *OTHELLO*:

- **Othello**—a Moor, General in the service of Venice
- **Desdemona**—his wife, a Venetian lady
- **Brabantio**—her father, a Venetian senator
- **Iago**—Othello's ensign
- **Emilia**—Iago's wife and Desdemona's waiting woman
- **Cassio**—Othello's lieutenant
- **Roderigo**—suitor of Desdemona, a Venetian gentleman
- **Bianca**—a courtesan in Cyprus in love with Cassio
- **Duke of Venice**
- **Senators**
- **Montano**—a Venetian official in Cyprus
- **Gratiano**—Brabantio's brother
- **Lodovico**—Brabantio's kinsman and Desdemona's cousin
- **Various Officers, Gentlemen, Sailors, and Messengers**

CHARACTERS, ACCORDING TO THEMSELVES:

Othello

- My noble Moor is true of mind and made of no such baseness as jealous creatures are. (Desdemona, III, iv)
- I will be found most cunning in my patience but – dost thou hear? – most bloody. (Othello, IV, i)
- Is this the noble Moor whom our full senate call all in all sufficient? Is this the noble nature whom passion could not shake? (Lodovico, IV, i)
- Speak of me as I am ... one that loved not wisely, but too well; of one not easily jealous but being wrought, perplexed to the extreme. (Othello, V, ii)

Iago

- I am not what I am. (Iago, I, i)
- I follow him to serve my turn upon him. (Iago, I, i)
- And what's he then that says I play the villain? When this advice is free I give and honest... (Iago, II, iii)
- When devils will the blackest sins put on they do suggest at first with heavenly shows as I do now. (Iago, II, iii)
- I do think it is their husbands' faults if wives do fall. (Emilia, IV, iii)

Desdemona

- She loved me for the dangers I had passed, and I loved her that she did pity them. (Othello, I, iii)
- That I did love the Moor to live with him, my downright violence and scorn of fortunes may trumpet to the world. (Desdemona, I, iii)
- Look to her, Moor, if thou hast eyes to see; she has deceived her father, and may thee. (Brabantio, I, iii)
- Has she forsook so many noble matches, her father, and her country, and her friends, to be called whore? (Emilia, IV, ii)

MAJOR THEMES AND MOTIFS

Theme is defined as the central idea in a piece of writing or other work of art.

Motif is defined as a distinctive feature or dominant idea in an artistic or literary composition.

In drama, the central theme is usually an intrinsic or essential idea surrounded by several more literal or representative motifs. Below is a list of words representing either themes, dominant images, or motifs from *Othello*.

Prejudice	Reputation & Honor	Men vs. Woman
Race	Love: Romantic &	Human Nature
Rank/Status	Brotherly	Proof & Judgment
Appearance vs.	Action vs. Reaction	The Handkerchief
Reality	Truth vs. Lies	Water
Jealousy & Trust	Black vs. White	The Devil

SYSTEMS OF OPPRESSION IN OTHELLO: CHALLENGES FOR 21ST CENTURY DIRECTORS

Thoughts from Directors Anne Tromsness and Maegan Azar

When we were hired to co-direct *Othello*, one of the first conversations we had was about how fraught this text might be for a 21st century Southern audience comprised primarily of young people. We live in a culture where **racism, misogyny, and other forms of inequity and systems of oppression** are at the front of most discussions about our nation's greatest challenges and our identity. Producing a play which simultaneously points up inequity and also normalizes it offers special challenges.

Theatre has the capacity to promote conversation, transform thought, and to give its audiences an opportunity to examine their own points of view, positions, privileges, and **prejudices**. Theatre does this because it employs - simultaneously - distance for its audience through (primarily) fictional events and characters, while making the watchers witnesses, and therefore complicit in the events of the play and the actions of the characters. Good theatre, while reflecting the very intentional choices of directors, actors, and designers, also doesn't preach or dictate the audience's response to it. It is in this free and open exchange between audience and performance that theatre wields both the power of transforming thought, and the potential for misunderstanding and misinterpretation.

We asked ourselves in the early days of our process - and throughout - what statement(s) are we making with this play right here, right now? How do systems of oppression play out in the text, and in our production specifically? How can we honor the text, as well as our own points of view, without imposing them on the audience? But also, how can we make sure we don't do harm to the populations that are affected by the systems of oppression in the play?

As we moved forward, we were moved by moments in the text, quotes and passages, actions, which both resonated with us in terms of contemporary culture, shocked us, and which left us wondering what the effect of such a text might be on a young, 21st century audience.

The following are a few key foundational ideas in terms of examining and illuminating the systems of oppression in the text:

- As **feminist** co-directors, we look at the world of the play and its systems of oppression in terms of race, class and gender. The dominant oppressions in this play center around race and gender; they function both separately, and together - as they are part of a web - as Iago states - "that will enmesh" all of the characters. This is not to equate their natures - racism and misogyny are entities with their own characteristics, forms, and consequences in the play and in our world. However, they are both connected under the umbrella of "**othering**" - which means they often do work together as Iago enlists them in his plans, and the violent culmination of his manipulations has everything to do with his exploitation of both.

- In the world of *Othello*, and, as we might argue, in our world today, racism and sexism are **normalized**. Their power often exists in the fact that they occur so often and as such a matter of course, that they often seem to be "everyday" or "harmless" occurrences. That Desdemona and Othello's marriage is questioned and scrutinized because of their races is understood, and, from the beginning, is normalized. Othello's identity is linked to his race as others name and define it - he is called "The Moor" by everyone from his wife to his enemies, and this designation immediately sets him apart - even from his rank (achieved by deeds) and it gives most of the play's characters a seemingly accepted place from which to assign all manner of characteristics to his temperament, behavior, and very nature. Even when Desdemona favorably describes how Othello has never been jealous, she says "I think the sun where he was born drew all such humors from him." Even her benevolent characterization of him indulges in **exotification** of his race.

- In our production, Othello, and the actors who play Cassio and Emilia are also actors of color, which underlines that systems of oppression are more complex than simple othering of a minority population by a majority population. Internalized oppression (as we see in Emilia's calling Othello a "blacker Devil" and "dull Moor") as well as the idea of a hierarchical structure Othello has "conquered" but still is placed in relationship to become more evident. Also, Iago's relationship to Cassio is complicated - as Iago believes that Othello has promoted him - not because he is a good warrior - (Iago is angered that Cassio is well educated in strategy but has no practical experience in the field

and cannot understand why someone like him would be promoted), but for another reason - in this context, race.

- Misogyny, too, is normalized. For example, Iago's language in referring to his wife - even though he is joking - as "foul and foolish" belies a more sinister truth. His hatred of her and of women in general, his distrust of his own wife, and his view of Desdemona as a pawn, defined by her sexuality, come out in casual conversation. While these underlying prejudices may not seem too obvious or harmful at first - they ooze and seethe and grow from comments and jokes to controlling behavior, and to physical and emotional violence. We see this in our contemporary culture, where the "harmless" banter or "locker room talk" between men can lead to real-world oppression of and violence against women. And while Cassio may refrain from such talk when Iago openly discusses Desdemona's sexual prowess, he does not openly object to or stop Iago from doing so. This passivity in the face of **micro-aggressive** behavior condones it and helps it flourish.
- Those who participate in racist beliefs and behavior often disguise them publicly. This type of behavior is mostly Iago's burden in the text. Iago speaks at length about putting a "show" of support for his General, but that this is nothing but show, "I must show out a flag and sign of love -- Which is indeed but sign" (Act I, Scene 1). In our culture, racism often hides its rawest expression, but, it is in seemingly mundane, sometimes private acts that it continues to strengthen its foothold. Racist jokes among friends, denying a service or opportunity to someone based on race but thinly disguising it as another reason - these types of de facto prejudicial acts happen everywhere.
- For example, Iago only SUSPECTS Othello has slept with his wife - but he openly declares that he will act upon this suspicion AS IF it were truth. This logic carries through with regards to race - baseless assumptions and stereotypes about "The Moor" become the foundation upon which Iago can act against him with complicity from those around him.
- Another theme in our production is how oppression can develop, flourish, and escalate in a climate where people are isolated from other points of view. Social media may create the illusion of open

dialogue and global discussion, but it can also push people into bubbles where all they see and hear supports their point of view or fuels conspiracy about “others.” It can be used to promulgate suspicions, false or incomplete information, and even lies as outright truth. If the characters in *Othello* sat down and sorted out Iago’s claims face to face - they might have been able to determine that Iago had lied, and perhaps prevent the tragedy from occurring. In a world where this type of isolation is nurtured, there are moments in the play when lies are questioned, when characters are confronted with the truth, and they still believe the falsities. Often, in our culture, half-truths, rumors, exaggerations and outright deceit distract and attract our attention away from the truth. Is our contemporary relationship to social media benefitting communication and understanding, or is it “a pageant to keep us in false gaze?”

- Iago states that his two reasons for plotting against Othello (and Cassio) are because he has been passed over for a promotion by Othello, and that he suspects Othello and his wife, Emilia, have slept together. Therefore, it is a combination of both mistrust in women (specifically his wife, but we see his thoughts about women extend to Desdemona as he makes his assumptions about her sexuality and enlists it as the commodity by which he sets his plan in motion), racism (which we see in his descriptions of Othello in the language of the first and subsequent scenes), and his use of others’ (Roderigo’s and Brabantio’s) racist misgivings about the title character. In our society, prejudices in different spheres work together to magnify inequity in both. As Martin Luther King, Jr, wrote - “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”

Ultimately, the play does not provide much opportunity for equality and fairness to win out. It is more of a cautionary tale than anything else. Our hope is that this production will illuminate how aggression and othering, combined with the manipulation of power and people for malevolent ends, can so easily occur in a society where empathy, communication, and personal prejudices and privilege are not attended to. Othello, in the end, characterizes himself as one who “loved not wisely, but too well.” We must, as artists and as a culture, enlist our wisdom to not cling to the mores of our time and culture, but to question our motives, beliefs, and societal systems if we are to escape Othello’s fate.

A GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Exotification: to aestheticize or sexualize difference, racial or otherwise, for sexual or nonsexual purposes

Feminism: the advocacy of women's rights on the basis of the equality of the sexes

Inequity: lack of fairness or justice

Micro-aggression: a statement, action, or incident regarded as an instance of indirect, subtle, or unintentional discrimination against members of a marginalized group such as a racial or ethnic minority

Misogyny: dislike of, contempt for, or ingrained prejudice against women

Normalize: to make conform to or reduce to a norm or standard

Othering: viewing or treating (a person or group of people) as intrinsically different from and alien to oneself

Prejudice: preconceived opinion that is not based on reason or actual experience

Racism: prejudice, discrimination, or antagonism directed against someone of a different race based on the belief that one's own race is superior, manifested not only individually but also in terms of a power structure which protects the interests of the dominant culture and actively discriminates against ethnic minorities

Systems of Oppression: the interconnected, structural, and prolonged cruel or unjust treatment or control of one group or multiple groups of people by another group

FAMOUS OTHELLOS THROUGHOUT HISTORY

Richard Burbage: Star actor of The King's Men, Burbage played all of Shakespeare's most famous roles. It is widely believed that he starred as Othello in the 1604, although his costuming or whether he appeared in blackface is unknown. His casting as the first Othello set the standard for white men playing the Moor.

Ira Aldridge: The first black man to play Othello, Ira appeared in the title role of Othello at the London Royalty theatre in 1826. Originally from America, Ira emigrated to England in hopes of finding more success as an actor; however, there was still considerable resistance to a black Othello. Aldridge did find more success and better reception in touring continental Europe.

Paul Robeson: A century after Ira Aldridge, Robeson was the second black actor to be cast as Othello in a major production which debuted in London's Savoy Theatre on March 19, 1930. The play was a huge success, running 295 performances. In 1943, Robeson reprised the role on Broadway at the Shubert Theatre, becoming the first African American to play the part in an American playhouse. This run was also a huge success, running 296 performance (twice as long as any other Shakespeare play on Broadway). Robeson was not immune from discrimination, however, as segregation was still the law of the land in the United States, keeping Robeson from eating at the same restaurants as his cast mates.

Sir Lawrence Olivier: The famous British actor played Othello in the 1965 movie (in color). Olivier wore blackface for the role, a fact

which troubled American audiences watching the movie in the midst of the Civil Rights Movement.

Laurence Fishburne: The first black actor to be cast in a movie adaptation of *Othello*, Fishburne starred in this sexual thriller meant to appeal to modern audiences. When the film was released, critics drew parallels with the OJ Simpson trial.

Patrick Stewart: The first white Othello in decades, Stewart played the title role in a “racial re-interpretation” at the Shakespeare Theatre in Washington DC in 1997. All other cast members were black.

Chiwetel Ejiofor: Starring In a “back to the basics” production alongside Ewan McGregor, Ejiofor won the 2008 Olivier Award for his performance. Tickets sold out hours after their release, and some were rumored to sell on ebay for £2,000.

ACTIVITY:

Go Further: How did the events of the world affect the perception of *Othello* (Segregation, Civil Rights Movement, OJ Simpson trial, Obama presidency)? Do some research on a particular time period and production to see how life imitates and informs art.

WHAT MAKES A TRAGEDY?

When we ask modern audiences this question, we often receive the response “it’s sad.” True enough, but many Shakespearean tragedies have a good deal of humor (usually from a clown or fool). The truest marker of distinction between comedy and tragedy is how the play ends. If the play ends in death (or, as is generally the case, multiple deaths) it is a tragedy. If the play ends “happily ever after,” which is to say in marriage (or multiple marriages), then it is a comedy.

But is that it? Of course not. Many Shakespearean tragedies often have other tragic elements in them. Here are some common ones:

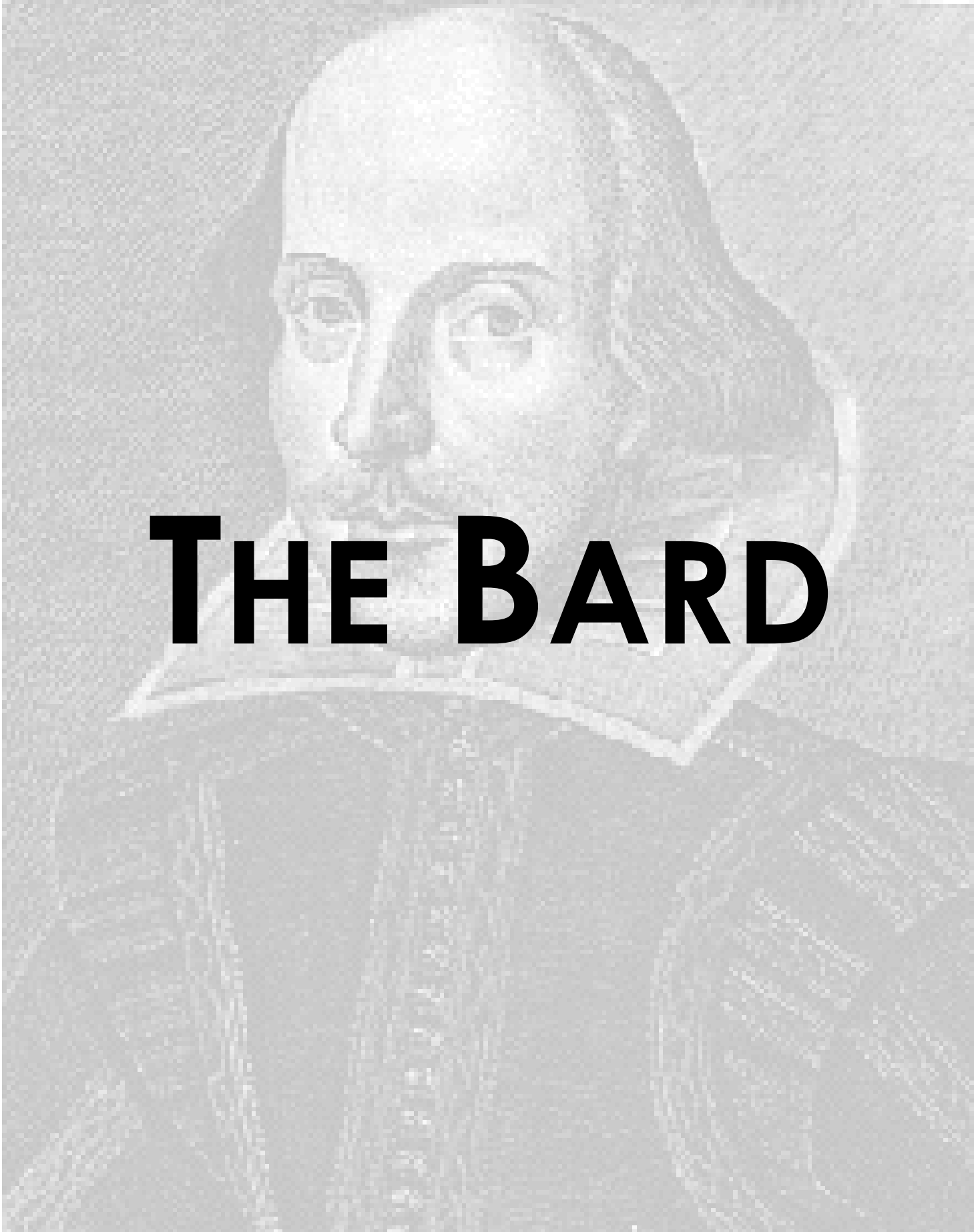
1. **A tragic hero:** Oftentimes, this is a person of nobility, although it does not have to be. Regardless of class, this person has a towering personality and is in good standing with his state.
2. **Good vs. Evil:** This is so common a theme that we often forget it is worth mentioning, but tragedies show us the struggles between good and evil.
3. **The fatal flaw:** Sometimes referred to as hamartia meaning “sin” or “error,” all tragic heroes have some sort of fatal flaw. This flaw will lead to his (or her) eventual destruction and death.
4. **Conflict:** Both internal and external, tragedies are full of conflict. Often, our tragic heroes struggle with conflict in themselves (emotions) as much as they do with conflict from external sources (a villain, the supernatural, fate, etc).
5. **Tragic waste:** The death of a hero of such esteem or high profile is a waste of human potential that often leads to a feeling of regret or sadness in the audience witnessing the tragedy.

6. **Catharsis:** Meaning the purgation or release of one's emotion, catharsis gives the audience an opportunity to feel pity, fear, hate, or any variety of emotions for a certain character in a tragedy. Frequently, we also see ourselves in the characters of a tragedy, which allows us to go through their emotional journey in a "safe" way.

7. **Poetic Justice:** This is when everyone gets what is coming to them— good is rewarded, and evil is punished.

ACTIVITY: Examine the tragic elements laid out in this article

1. Recognize It: Does *Othello* contain all of the listed tragic elements? Is it missing one or more?
2. Support It: Find textual support from the play to support each one of your claims.
3. Visualize It: Choose one tragic element. Trace the evolution of this tragic element throughout the play in a visual map. Where does it begin? Where is it strongest? How does it end?
4. Physicalize It: In small groups, make a tableau (or frozen picture) for the definition **and** examples of each tragic element. There will be two tableaux for each element.
5. Go Further: Is there an element of tragedy that we left out that you see in *Othello*? What is it? Define and support it.



THE BARD

SHAKESPEARE'S LIFE AS A PLAY

ACT I 1564-1576/78 Sense and Sound, Family, Foundation

Shakespeare's personal history is not well known. But we do have about forty official documents to draw from. More facts are known about Shakespeare than any other of his contemporary writers from this period except Ben Jonson. He is thought to have been born on April 23, 1564 in Stratford-upon-Avon, near Warwickshire. His father, John, was a glover (a tradesman and craftsman who works in fine leather), and later an alderman and bailiff. Shakespeare's mother, Mary Arden, was a landed local heiress; her family was an old and respected one in the area. According to church record, William was the third of eight children. During this time period, Shakespeare learned Latin, philosophy, theology, history, and classic mythology at the local grammar school, but he also learned the day-to-day customs, manners, and language of rustic and country life.

ACT II 1576/78-1582 Work? Apprentice? Tutor?

Shakespeare did not proceed to university after Grammar school. Other than this, little is known for sure. During this next span of time, Shakespeare probably learned his father's trade and may have been engaged as a tutor for children of local noble families.

ACT III 1582-1590/92 Marriage, Family

Documents concerning Shakespeare's marriage to Anne Hathaway, a woman some seven or eight years his senior, on the 28th of November in 1582 and the births of their children Susanna in May of 1583, and twins Hamnet and Judith in February of 1585, provide some of the only information we have about William Shakespeare during this time. Shakespeare all but vanishes from record for seven years after the birth of the twins. This period in his life is often called the "Lost Years." How or why he ends up in London writing plays and acting is a mystery that has sparked many theories and arguments among scholars and historians.

ACT IV 1588-1603 London, the age of Elizabeth

Even less is known for certain as to how Shakespeare came to join a professional troupe of actors and then become a playwright. What we do know is that by the year 1588, he was gone from Stratford and living in London working as an actor and later as mainly a playwright. In 1592, a

rival playwright named Robert Greene publically attacked Shakespeare in a critical article in which he refers to Shakespeare as an “upstart crow.” By 1594, Shakespeare was a managing partner of one of the most popular theatre companies in London, the Lord Chamberlain’s men (later the King’s Men) and the company’s principle playwright. His star was on the rise. In 1596, his son Hamnet, twin brother to Judith, dies.

ACT V 1603-1616 Wealth, Fame, Return to Stratford

Shakespeare achieved a significant fame and notoriety by this time. His company was successful and his plays well known and even published during his lifetime (not a usual occurrence during this era). By the end of his career, Shakespeare was a part owner in the company, the Globe theatre itself, and was involved in the establishment of one or more other theatres. He was wealthy enough in 1611 to purchase a new house in Stratford and retire in comfort; a highly respected, and distinguished gentleman. He is reported to have died on his birthday, April 23 in 1616. His last lines of verse to us are those of his epitaph:

*Good friend, for Jesus' sake forbear
To dig the dust enclosed here.
Blessed be the man that spares these stones,
And cursed be he that moves my bones.*

EPILOGUE 1623 and beyond

John Hemminges and Henry Condell, two of his theatrical partners, organized and had printed the First Folio edition of the collected plays of their friend William Shakespeare. Half of this collection included plays that had previously been unpublished. We owe these two gentlemen a great debt.

William Shakespeare is arguably the greatest playwright of the English language. His body of work has stood the test of time and distance with his plays still being produced all over the world on a regular basis. He is one of the most produced playwrights in history.

SHAKESPEARE'S ENGLAND

THE RULERS:

Most of Shakespeare's plays were written during what is referred to as the Late or High Renaissance period. In England, this era is also referred to as the Elizabethan Period after Queen Elizabeth I. It is important to note that

Shakespeare's world, while dominated by Elizabeth, was shaped by other monarchs before and after her reign. Starting with her father, Henry VIII, and concluding with her nephew, James I, we see that Shakespeare was the subject of a turbulent and volatile royal family.



Henry VIII (reigned: 1509-1547)
Excommunicated, started English Reformation



Edward VI (reigned: 1547-1553)
Devoted Protestant, died young



Mary I (reigned: 1553-1558)
Fanatical Catholic, persecuted protestants

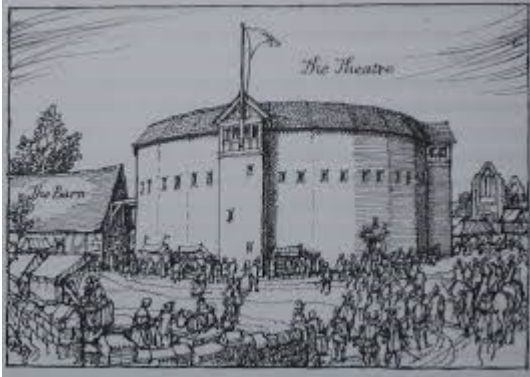


Elizabeth I (reigned: 1558-1603)
Protestant but tolerant of the old faith to a point

James I (reigned: 1603-1625)
More political than devout,
fascinated by the occult

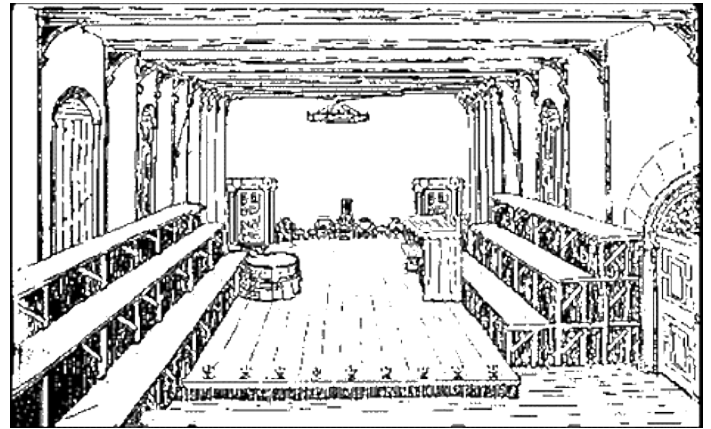


THE THEATRES:



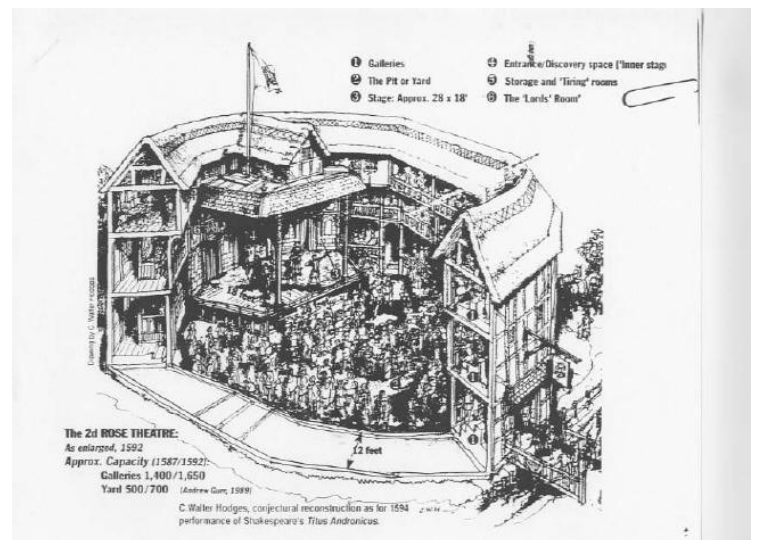
The Theatre: 1576-1598. The first public theatre in London. When it was torn down its timbers were used in constructing the first Globe Theatre. It was owned by James Burbage and his son Richard who would originate many of Shakespeare's leading characters including Hamlet.

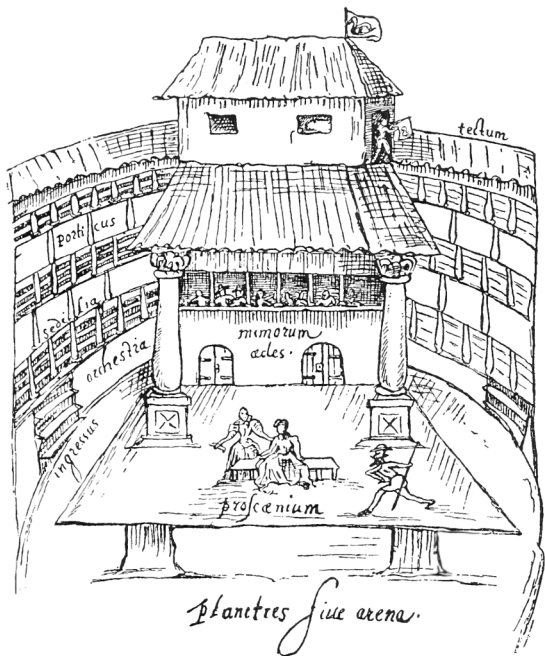
The Blackfriars: Eventually owned by Richard Burbage in 1597 and intended to operate as a second space for the King's Men.



The Curtain: One of the longest standing theatres, it lasted from about 1577 until the 1660s.

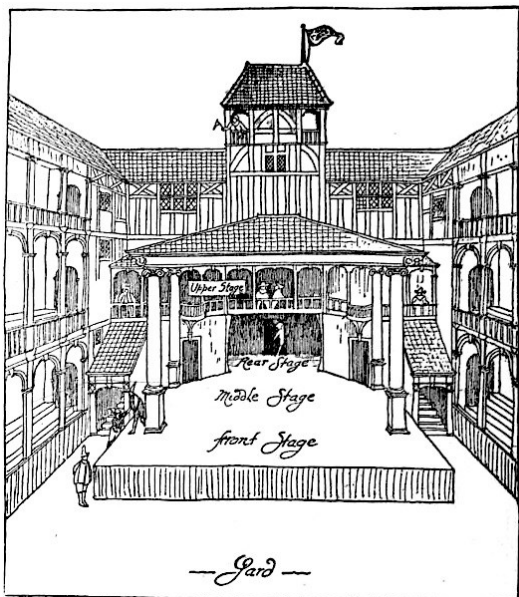
The Rose: Probably the first London theatre in which Shakespeare's plays were seen. Opened by Phillip Henslowe who would go on to work frequently with Shakespeare. Later, the theatre fell into ruins and could not compete with the newly built Globe Theatre. The Rose was torn down in 1605.





The Swan: Little is known of this theatre which operated between 1595-1632. It is important to history because of a famous sketch of it made by Johannes de Witt and later copied by Aernoudt. This sketch provides us with the most detailed picture of an Elizabethan theatre.

The Globe: Home to the Lord Chamberlain's Men (Later the King's Men) the first version of this theatre opened in 1599. Both Shakespeare and Burbage were part owners. It burnt down in 1613 and a new Globe was built in 1614 and lasted until 1644.



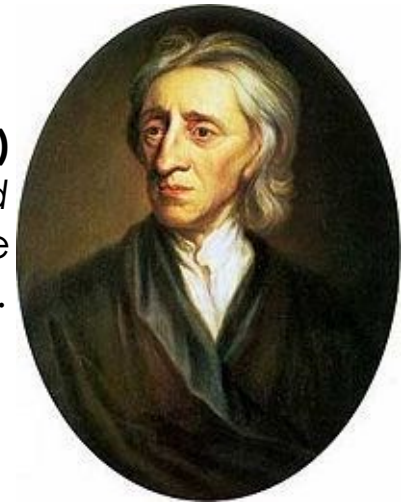
Fortune Theatre: Built by Phillip Henslowe in 1600 to compete with the Globe Theatre. The contract for the construction provides detailed information about the characteristics and operation of an Elizabethan theatre.

PLAYWRIGHTS AND CONTEMPORARIES:



Edmund Spenser (London—1552-1599)

Influential poet and playwright. His poem, *The Fairie Queen*, is one of the greatest epic poems of its age.



John Lyly (Kent—1554-1606)

Euphues: The Anatomy of Wit and *Euphues and His England*. Credited with developing “polite comedy” in England.



Thomas Kyd (London—1558-1594)

Author of the play, *The Spanish Tragedy*, which set the standard for Elizabethan tragic form.

Robert Greene (Norwich—1560-1592)

A member of a group of writers known as the “University Wits.” He was a critic of Shakespeare and attacked his work in public articles.



Christopher (“Kit”) Marlowe (Canterbury—1564-1593)

Said to have been a significant influence on Shakespeare and may even have been regarded as a rival. His life and writings have become almost legendary. His plays *Faustus*, *Tamburlaine the Great*, and *The Jew of Malta* are most famous.

Ben Jonson (London 1572—1637)

Regarded as one of the literary masters of his age, Johnson was a contemporary of Shakespeare’s who both praised and criticized him. His plays *Volpone*, *The Alchemist*, and *Bartholomew Fair* are most famous.



WHY DO WE STUDY SHAKESPEARE?

William Shakespeare is the most popular and most produced playwright in the western world. His plays and poems have outlived the popularity of countless other playwrights. When being introduced to his work, students and young artists are right to ask **why**? Each new generation must come to its own conclusions regarding his continued popularity and significance. The following list contains many commonly agreed upon reasons for this popularity.

1. Shakespeare expressed in both concrete and abstract terms the range of the human condition.

His eloquence and instinct for capturing with words what it means to be human is the strongest reason for his enduring popularity.

2. Shakespeare knew what stories appealed to his audience.

While he borrowed many or most of the plots for his plays from outside sources or even other plays based on the same subject, event, or characters, Shakespeare was original in how he told the stories. He told every kind of story and always with attention toward the human condition as it was altered by the events of the story. This is one reason why they last today; they're about the human experience.

3. Complex, compelling characters that could be us.

Shakespeare's characters are borrowed from history, other plays or stories, or are purely his invention. They have in common recognizable human qualities, rich and difficult contradictions, sublime language, and passionate, volatile actions. We see ourselves in these characters regardless of their eras or social status or circumstance. Scholar Harold Bloom often says that Shakespeare "invented" the human on stage.

FURTHER EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS

SOURCE/REFERENCE TEXTS:

The Actor's Guide to Performing Shakespeare. Madd Harold. Lone Eagle Publishing Company, 2002.

All the Words on Stage. Louis Scheeder and Shane Ann Younts. Smith and Kraus, 2002.

Othello. William Shakespeare, Ed. Daniel Vitkus. New York: Barnes and Nobel Shakespeare, 2007.

Shakespeare After All. Marjorie Garber. Anchor Books, 2004

The Shakespeare Miscellany. David Crystal and Ben Crystal. Penguin Books, London, England, 2005.

Speak the Speech: Shakespeare's Monologues Illuminated. Rhona Silverbush and Sami Plotkin. Faber and Faber, 2002.

WEBSITES AND ARTICLES:

Shakespeare's Words, www.shakespeareswords.com – this is the official David and Ben Crystal website, with the complete works with glossary, themes and motifs, allusions, and much, much more.

Folger Shakespeare Library, www.folger.edu – Replete with lesson plans, a teachers' blog, and information about Folger programming and collections.

British Library, <http://www.bl.uk/treasures/shakespearehtml> - Extensive information on the background, production and publication history, and quartos of Shakespeare's plays

Controversial Subjects in the Classroom: www.tolerance.org/article/controversial-subjects-classroom