Unit Overview

In Units 1 and 2, you explored how your perception of a text could change when you examined it using a particular critical perspective. In this unit, you will deepen your understanding of critical perspectives as you apply Reader Response, Feminist, Marxist, Cultural, and Archetypal Criticism to scenes from a drama. William Shakespeare’s *The Tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice* has inspired various critical interpretations over the centuries. The many interpretations are, in some ways, as compelling as the drama itself; thus, *Othello* offers the ideal opportunity for introducing Historical Critical Perspective.

Visual Prompt: What do you notice about the figures in this image of Othello and Desdemona? How would you characterize each of them? How do you think the artist views them? Explain.
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*Texts not included in these materials.
Learning Targets

- Preview key ideas and vocabulary for the unit.
- Identify and analyze the skills and knowledge needed to complete Embedded Assessment 1 successfully.

Making Connections

Shakespeare’s *The Tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice*, has been in continuous production for more than 400 years! In addition to its role as a drama, *Othello* was also the inspiration for two operas that have been in production since the early 1800s: one written by Gioachino Rossini and first performed in 1816, and a second written by Guiseppe Verdi and first performed in 1887. Ballets and other plays have also been derived from *Othello*. Shakespeare’s works continue to be relevant today because they are based on events that happen in many people’s lives. In this unit, you will read *Othello* and apply Historical Criticism to analyzing the drama and the characters.

Essential Questions

Based on your current knowledge, respond to the following Essential Questions.

1. What role does literature play in the examination of recurring social issues?

2. How can a dramatic performance reflect a critical perspective?

Developing Vocabulary

Look at the list of Literary Terms on the Contents page. Are any of them familiar to you? As you study the unit, use your Reader/Writer notebook to capture definitions and to explore the meanings of these key terms.

Unpacking Embedded Assessment 1

Closely read the following assignment for Embedded Assessment 1: Writing an Argument.

Your assignment is to construct an argumentative essay that defends the critical lens that you feel provides modern society with the most compelling view of literature (choose among Historical, Cultural, or Feminist for this assignment). You will support the claim with valid reasoning and with relevant and sufficient evidence from your reading and observations.

With your class, create a graphic organizer that includes the skills you must demonstrate and the knowledge you must possess to write an argument. Summarize the major elements in your Reader/Writer Notebook.

INDEPENDENT READING LINK

For this unit, you might enjoy reading works that pertain in some way to Shakespeare or to the Elizabethan era.
Learning Targets

- Examine the requirements for a staged interpretation of a scene from *Othello*.
- Choose a scene and prepare and perform an oral interpretation.

All the World’s a Stage

In Shakespeare’s day, acting companies named themselves, sometimes honoring their patron. Shakespeare belonged first to the Lord Chamberlain’s Men and later to the King’s Men. Choose a name for your acting company.

For the second Embedded Assessment, you and your acting group will stage an interpretation of a scene from *Othello*. Work with your acting company to make a preliminary scene choice from the list of suggested scenes on pages 172–173. Do not let gender dictate your casting choices. Also make preliminary decisions about the following roles within your acting company:

- **Director**: Leads the rehearsals, working collaboratively with the group. Assumes responsibility for all of the theatrical elements: a set diagram, a plan for lighting and sound, props, and a complete script of the scene. Writes and memorizes an engaging introduction to the performance and delivers it on performance day.

- **Dramaturge**: Conducts research to support the critical perspective the group is applying to the scene and answers questions about the scene. Writes and memorizes a concluding statement about the scene that explains how the group applied a critical perspective and how research supported the performance, and delivers it on performance day.

- **Actors**: Study the play, paying particular attention to their characters, and take notes. Collaborate with the director and the other actors to plan a performance. During the performance, use appropriate vocal delivery, facial expression, gestures and movement, props, and costumes to convey nuances of their characters.

Once you have come to an agreement, sign and turn in a contract to your teacher. Here is a template:

*We, the ______________________ (name of acting company), pledge to plan, rehearse, and perform ______________________ (act and scene) from William Shakespeare’s *The Tragedy of Othello*.*

**Cast:**

(Name of student) as (name of character)

**Director:**

**Dramaturge:**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scene</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Characters</th>
<th>First line and approximate length</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Act I, Scene i</td>
<td>Iago and Roderigo awaken Brabantio and inform him that his daughter has eloped.</td>
<td>Iago, Roderigo, Brabantio</td>
<td>RODERIGO: Tush, never tell me!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>206 lines (Companies could opt to do only part of the scene.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act I, Scene iii</td>
<td>Desdemona admits her love for Othello; the Duke dispatches them to Cyprus.</td>
<td>Duke, Desdemona, Othello, First senator (only one line)</td>
<td>DUKE: I think this tale would win my daughter too.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lines 197–335</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>139 lines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act I, Scene iii</td>
<td>Iago continues to take advantage of Roderigo's affection for Desdemona.</td>
<td>Roderigo, Iago</td>
<td>RODERIGO: Iago—IAGO What say'st thou, noble heart?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lines 344–447</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>104 lines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act II, Scene i</td>
<td>Desdemona welcomes Othello to Cyprus; Iago convinces Roderigo to attack Cassio.</td>
<td>Othello, Desdemona, Iago, Roderigo</td>
<td>OTHHELLO: O my fair warrior!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lines 197–307</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>111 lines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act II, Scene iii</td>
<td>With Iago's encouragement, Cassio gets drunk.</td>
<td>Cassio, Iago, Montano, Gentleman (only one line, which could be given to Montano)</td>
<td>CASSIO: Welcome, Iago. We must to the watch.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lines 14–124</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>111 lines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act II, Scene iii</td>
<td>A drunken brawl ends with Othello demoting Cassio.</td>
<td>Iago, Montano, Cassio, Roderigo</td>
<td>IAGO [to Montano]: You see this fellow that is gone before.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lines 125–265</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>141 lines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scene</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Characters</td>
<td>First line and approximate length</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act III, Scene iii Lines 1–99</td>
<td>Desdemona tries to convince Othello to reinstate Cassio.</td>
<td>Desdemona, Emilia, Cassio, Othello, Iago</td>
<td>DESDEMONA: Be thou assured, good Cassio . . . 99 lines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act III, Scene iii Lines 100–240</td>
<td>Iago plants the seed of doubt in Othello’s mind.</td>
<td>Othello, Iago</td>
<td>OTHELLO: Excellent wretch! 141 lines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act III, Scene iv Lines 39–115</td>
<td>Othello demands to see the handkerchief, while Desdemona tries to change the subject by pleading Cassio's case.</td>
<td>Othello, Desdemona</td>
<td>OTHELLO: How do you, Desdemona? 77 lines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act IV, Scene ii Lines 128–201</td>
<td>Desdemona seeks advice from Iago, while Emilia curses the person who planted the thought of infidelity in Othello’s mind.</td>
<td>Iago, Desdemona, Emilia</td>
<td>IAGO: What is your pleasure, madam? 74 lines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act IV, Scene iii Lines 11–117</td>
<td>Desdemona and Emilia discuss infidelity.</td>
<td>Desdemona, Emilia</td>
<td>EMILIA: How goes it now? 107 lines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act V, Scene i Lines 1–151</td>
<td>Roderigo attacks Cassio.</td>
<td>Iago, Roderigo, Cassio, Gratiano, Lodovico, Bianca, Emilia</td>
<td>IAGO: Here, stand behind this bulk. 151 lines</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Act V, Scene ii Lines 131–301</td>
<td>Emilia tells Othello the truth.</td>
<td>Emilia, Othello, Desdemona, Montano</td>
<td>OTHELLO: What’s the matter with thee now? 171 lines</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
LEARNING STRATEGIES:
Quickwrite, Graphic Organizer, Jigsaw

Learning Targets
• Compare and contrast song lyrics and poetry.
• Apply a critical perspective to the interpretation of a text.

Before Reading
1. Review the components of Cultural Criticism below. Use this critical perspective as your lens as you carefully consider two texts that follow.

Cultural Criticism examines how differing religious beliefs, ethnicities, class identifications, political beliefs, and individual viewpoints affect how texts are created and interpreted. What it means to be a part of—or excluded from—a specific group contributes to and affects our understanding of texts in relation to culture.

Some common assumptions in the use of Cultural Criticism:
• Ethnicity, religious beliefs, political beliefs, and so on are crucial components in formulating plausible interpretations of text.
• While the emphasis is on diversity of approach and subject matter, Cultural Criticism is not the only means of understanding ourselves and our art.
• An examination or exploration of the relationship between dominant cultures and the dominated is essential to understanding a text.

During Reading
2. As you listen to a song your teacher will play, follow along with the printed lyrics. After listening to the song, write a one-sentence summary of what the song is about. Then, read the poem on the next page.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Born to a prosperous Roman Catholic family in London at a time when anti-Catholic sentiment abounded, John Donne (1572–1631) had a promising career as a diplomat but spent most of his fortune on leisure and pleasure. He secretly married Anne More, much to the disapproval of her father, and she bore him twelve children and died with the last birth. In 1615, at the King’s order, he became an Anglican priest and was later dean of St. Paul’s Cathedral. His life was riddled with spiritual conflict, and Donne is best known as a metaphysical poet whose writings are laden with rich religious symbolism and metaphor.

WORD CONNECTIONS
Roots and Affixes
The word components contains the Latin prefix com-, which means “with” or “together.” The Latin root of component is ponere, which means “to place.” Related words include comport, compose, composer, and composite.
Poetry

THE

CANONIZATION

by John Donne

For God's sake hold your tongue, and let me love;
Or chide my palsy, or my gout;
My five gray hairs, or ruin'd fortune flout;
With wealth your state, your mind with arts improve;

Take you a course, get you a place,
Observe his Honour, or his Grace;
Or the king's real, or his stamp'd face
Contemplate; what you will, approve,
So you will let me love.

Alas! alas! who's injured by my love?
What merchant's ships have my sighs drown'd?
Who says my tears have overflow'd his ground?
When did my colds a forward spring remove?
When did the heats which my veins fill

Add one more to the plaguy bill?
Soldiers find wars, and lawyers find out still
Litigious men, which quarrels move,
Though she and I do love.

Call's what you will, we are made such by love;
Call her one, me another fly,
We're tapers too, and at our own cost die,
And we in us find th' eagle and the dove.
The phoenix riddle hath more wit
By us; we two being one, are it;

So, to one neutral thing both sexes fit.
We die and rise the same, and prove
Mysterious by this love.

We can die by it, if not live by love,
And if unfit for tomb or hearse
Our legend be, it will be fit for verse;
And if no piece of chronicle we prove,
We'll build in sonnets pretty rooms;
As well a well-wrought urn becomes
The greatest ashes, as half-acre tombs,
And by these hymns, all shall approve
Us canonized for love.

And thus invoke us, “You, whom reverend love
Made one another’s hermitage
You, to whom love was peace, that now is rage;

Who did the whole world’s soul contract, and drove
Into the glasses of your eyes;
So made such mirrors, and such spies,
That they did all to you epitomize—
Countries, towns, courts beg from above

A pattern of your love!”

**After Reading**

3. For each text, respond to the following question in a quickwrite before sharing with your discussion group and completing the appropriate column on the graphic organizer.

a. Think about the song lyrics and the poem. What do you think each is about

b. How are the two texts similar in the kinds of relationships or situations the singer/speaker might be describing?

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### “The Right to Love” Cultural Criticism Lens

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>“The Right to Love”</th>
<th>Cultural Criticism Lens</th>
<th>“The Canonization”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Who is the speaker? What is the situation? How might the speaker’s ethnicity, religious beliefs, or political beliefs affect the situation?</td>
<td>Is the point of view from the marginalized perspective or from the dominant perspective?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is the point of view from the marginalized perspective or from the dominant perspective?</td>
<td>What does this literary work add to our understanding of human experience in the time and place in which it is set, including the ways individual identity shapes and is shaped by cultural institutions?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What does this literary work add to our understanding of human experience in the time and place in which it is set, including the ways individual identity shapes and is shaped by cultural institutions?</td>
<td>How might this work be received differently by today’s audience than it was by the audience of the time it was written?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Check Your Understanding

Writing Prompt: Write a comparative analysis of the song lyrics and the poem, reflecting the principles of Cultural Criticism. Be sure to:

- Include an interpretative statement about an aspect of Cultural Criticism.
- Support analysis with textual support and integrate quotes seamlessly.
- Use a formal, academic tone that uses third-person point of view.
Learning Targets
• Identify and analyze the effect of meter and rhythm.
• Integrate rhythm and meter in writing

Meter
Meter refers to a repeating pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables in spoken or written language. John Donne and Shakespeare both use meter to create rhythm in their works. Look at these lines from “The Canonization”:

Alas! alas! who’s injured by my love?
What merchant’s ships have my sighs drown’d?
Who says my tears have overflow’d his ground?

The lines consist of a number of metrical feet, each containing one unstressed and one stressed syllable. Repeating patterns of one unstressed then one stressed syllable create iambic meter. Iambic meter, which some say sounds like a heartbeat, may be the most common rhythm in English verse, and it sounds a bit like

da-DUM, da-DUM, da-DUM, da-DUM, da-DUM

Much of Othello is written in blank verse (the dominant meter of Shakespearean drama): unrhymed iambic pentameter (10 iambic syllables to a line). Read these lines from I.i.57–65 (Othello speaking).

Mark up the text below to show meter. Write a symbol like this ( ˇ ) over each unstressed syllable and one like this ( ´ ) over each stressed syllable.

She loved me for the dangers I had passed,
And I loved her that she did pity them.
This only is the witchcraft I have used.
Here comes the lady; let her witness it.

Variations in the rhythm (iambic) prevent the poetry from becoming singsong, though the ten syllables of pentameter are usually maintained.

Check Your Understanding
Revisit a section of John Donne’s poem of interest to you and mark the text to identify meter. Write an original poem emulating Donne’s pattern of rhythm.
Learning Targets

• Interpret a scenario considering characters’ background and motivations.
• Create and stage an interpretive performance that incorporates multiple forms of irony.

Analyzing Plot and Themes

1. Although it is likely you have not encountered Shakespeare’s *Othello* in your previous English classes, the plot and the themes it brings to light will not be brand new. Jump into the timeless story of an unconventional marriage and the issues that complicate it by visualizing the scenario and the outcome assigned to you by your teacher.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario</th>
<th>Character 1 tells Character 2 that his or her girlfriend is cheating on him or her. Character 1 then produces “evidence.” The story is untrue; the character is lying.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Outcome A</td>
<td>Character 2 does not believe the story and turns on character 1.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcome B</td>
<td>Character 2 considers the story as a possibility but then decides it is not true after much investigation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcome C</td>
<td>Character 2 believes the story, is filled with jealousy, and wants revenge.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Review the definitions of the types of irony in the box on the right. How is irony—dramatic, verbal, or situational—a part of your plot? How can you make it a significant aspect of your presentation?

3. Give the characters names and traits that seem fitting and that may explain why they find themselves in this situation. Consider the motivations of each character. Your identification of character backgrounds and motivations is an important aspect of the subtext of this scene.

4. Include dialogue that conveys the scenario and its outcome.

5. Determine the physical evidence that will serve as “proof” of cheating. Be imaginative about the prop your character uses as the “evidence.”

6. Be sure to incorporate forms of irony (verbal, situational, and dramatic) to create an effect. Dramatic irony particularly applies; make sure that your audience knows that the story is not true.

7. In addition to subtext and irony, consider other literary elements you may want to highlight in the performance (for example, sophisticated use of point of view may enhance the audience’s understanding of a character).

8. Think about the way your delivery of lines or the way you stand or move on stage will enhance the performance.

9. Rehearse and present the scenario to your classmates.

**Literary Terms**

Dramatic irony is a situation in which the audience knows more about the circumstances or future events in a story than the characters within it; as a result, the audience can see a discrepancy between characters’ perceptions and the reality they face.

Verbal irony occurs when a character says one thing but means something completely different.

Situational irony is like a surprise ending—your audience expects one thing to happen, but something completely different takes place.
Check Your Understanding

- What did you learn about the role of irony in a plot, about writing dialogue, and about performing a short scene?

- How realistic is your group’s scenario? How realistic are the scenes? Do you think scenarios and outcomes like this happen in real life? Explain.
Learning Targets

- Use a Marxist critical lens to analyze the relationships among a cast of characters.
- Plan and construct an expository essay.

Cast of Characters

1. Revisit your response to Essential Question 2 from Activity 3.1. In the last activity, you staged a scene. It is likely that you considered your personal experiences or observations to help you formulate the who, what, how, and why of that scene as it would occur today. Which critical perspective informed your interpretation of that scenario? Share your ideas with a partner.

2. Examine the character descriptions from the play *Othello*, shown below. Based on their descriptions, what relationships exist among these characters? Discuss how the character descriptions provide information about how society is organized in the play. With your discussion group members, create a graphic organizer that illustrates these relationships.

*Othello*

**Cast of Characters**

- Othello, a Moorish general in the Venetian army
- Desdemona, a Venetian lady, Othello’s wife, Brabantio’s daughter
- Brabantio, a Venetian senator, Desdemona’s father
- Iago, Othello’s standard-bearer, or “ancient”
- Emilia, Iago’s wife, Desdemona’s attendant
- Cassio, Othello’s second-in-command, or lieutenant
- Roderigo, a Venetian gentleman
- Duke of Venice
- Lodovico and Gratiano, Venetian gentlemen, kinsmen to Brabantio
- Venetian senators
- Montano, an official in Cyprus
- Bianca, a woman in Cyprus, in love with Cassio
- Clown, a comic servant to Othello and Desdemona
- Gentlemen of Cyprus
- Sailors
- Servants, Attendants, Officers, Messengers, Herald, Musicians, Torchbearers

KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS

What three countries are represented in this cast of characters? Why could this be important in a tragic drama?
Viewing a Cast of Characters Through a Marxist Lens

Check Your Understanding
When viewing characters (or a scene) in terms of the organization of society, you are viewing the work from a Marxist critical perspective. Examine the organizational structure of Venetian society in Othello and use the cast descriptions to infer meaning. How might ideas of Marxist Criticism emerge or present conflict in the play?

Language and Writer’s Craft: Determining the Meanings of Words
When you are reading a text and find a word you do not know, there are several ways to determine the word’s meaning.

Example: What does the word decorum mean in the text below?
In their tragedies they acted with appropriate decorum; in these they caused tears not only by their speaking, but also by their action.

You can use patterns of word changes that indicate different meanings or parts of speech. If you know that -um is a suffix usually used with noun forms and you are familiar with the words decor or decorate, you may be able to tell the meaning of decorum without looking it up.

Also, look for context clues. What meanings and connotations do surrounding words and sentences provide? The word appropriate is a strong context clue here.

Sometimes, however, you need to consult a dictionary to be sure you understand a word’s denotation, or definition, and its connotations, or associations. You can also look up a word’s etymology, or history, to learn more about it. For instance, if you look up the definition of decorum, you will learn that its denotation is “proper or graceful behavior.” If you look up its etymology, you may learn that decorum was originally a theater term referring to the appropriateness of part of an artistic work or performance to the larger artwork.

Check Your Understanding
Read the text below. What does the word implored mean?
Indeed Desdemona, although greatly successful throughout, moved us especially when at last, lying on her bed, killed by her husband, she implored the pity of the spectators in her death with her face alone.

First, jot notes based on context clues and your knowledge of word parts and changes. Then look up the word in a good dictionary. What does it mean? Does it mean what you thought it did?
Learning Targets
• Compare interpretations of a text from different critical perspectives.
• Defend the most effective interpretation with a rationale.

Before Reading
1. Imagine the different reactions of a father at hearing unexpected—and undesired—news about events in his child’s life. Share the possible emotions with a partner.
2. In a play production, how would that father act and move onstage to convey these emotions? Use Reader Response—your own expectations based on your own life experiences—to interpret the text.

During Reading
3. In Act I, Scene i, Iago and Roderigo deliver the news to Brabantio that his daughter has eloped with Othello. Reread the lines from the end of Act I below. As you read, visualize Brabantio, a father awakened in the middle of the night to discover that his only child is missing. What emotional state might Barbantio exhibit in his performance? What theatrical elements (e.g., costume, props, set, etc.) might a director use to set the scene and to convey the emotion selected?
4. As you read Brabantio’s lines, look for any indication in his words (and in the action that you visualize) that he is not in a peaceful state of mind.
5. Follow along as your teacher models how to annotate the text on this page in order to guide an actor delivering Brabantio’s lines. Then annotate the text on the following pages to indicate to whom Brabantio is speaking. Also add notes about how the actor should move and sound in order to convey the character’s feelings.

Drama

FROM THE TRAGEDY OF OTHELLO, THE MOOR OF VENICE

by William Shakespeare

BRABANTIO: It is too true an evil. Gone she is;
And what’s to become of my despised time
Is naught but bitterness.

—Now, Roderigo,
Even though the English of Shakespeare’s day is somewhat different from the language we use today, much of the sentence structure remains the same.

Note Roderigo’s sentence _I think I can discover him, if you please to get good guard and go along with me_.

This is a complex sentence; it begins with an independent clause and ending with the dependent clause that starts with the subordinating conjunction _if_. The subordinate clause modifies the verb, and is thus an adverb clause. An adverb clause generally tells _how, when, where, why, how much, to what extent, or under what condition_ the action of the verb occurs.

Where didst thou see her?—O, unhappy girl!—

With the Moor, say’st thou?—Who would be a father?—

How didst thou know ’twas she?—O, she deceives me

Past thought!—What said she to you?—Get more tapers.

Raise all my kindred.—Are they married, think you?

RODERIGO: Truly I think they are.

BRABANTIO: O heaven! How got she out? O treason of the blood!

Fathers, from hence trust not your daughters’ minds

By what you see them act.—Is there not charms

By which the property of youth and maidhood

May be abused? Have you not read, Roderigo,

Of some such thing?

RODERIGO: Yes, sir, I have indeed.

BRABANTIO: Call up my brother.—O, would you had had her!—

Some one way, some another.—Do you know where we may apprehend her and the Moor?

RODERIGO: I think I can discover him, if you please

To get good guard and go along with me.

BRABANTIO: Pray you lead on. At every house I’ll call.

I may command at most.—Get weapons, ho!

And raise some special officers of night.—

On, good Roderigo. I will deserve your pains.
6. What if Brabantio’s response to Roderigo’s news is anger instead of heartbreak? Imagine that Brabantio has a different reaction—one of fury at his daughter’s impudence. Annotate the text to indicate how you would have the actor playing Brabantio convey anger.

BRABANTIO: It is too true an evil. Gone she is,
And what’s to become of my despised time
Is naught but bitterness.—Now, Roderigo,
Where didst thou see her?—O, unhappy girl!—
With the Moor, say’st thou?—Who would be a father?—
How didst thou know ’twas she?—O, she deceives me
Past thought!—What said she to you?—Get more tapers.
Raise all my kindred.—Are they married, think you?
RODERIGO: Truly, I think they are.
BRABANTIO: O heaven! How got she out? O treason of the blood!
Fathers, from hence trust not your daughters’ minds
By what you see them act.—Is there not charms
By which the property of youth and maidhood
May be abused? Have you not read, Roderigo,
Of some such thing?
RODERIGO: Yes, sir, I have indeed.

BRABANTIO: Call up my brother.—O, would you had had her!—

Some one way, some another.—Do you know
Where we may apprehend her and the Moor?
RODERIGO: I think I can discover him, if you please
To get good guard and go along with me.
BRABANTIO: Pray you lead on. At every house I'll call.
I may command at most.—Get weapons, ho!
And raise some special officers of night.—
On, good Roderigo. I will deserve your pains.

7. Choose one of the Brabantio’s reactions, and with your acting company, rehearse and perform the lines for another company. Provide—and receive—feedback regarding your company’s performance and how it conveys the chosen emotion in the scene.
8. After reading this text while applying a Reader Response critical lens to annotate Brabantio’s reaction, consider interpreting the text through the application of another critical lens. What happens when you apply a Cultural or Marxist critical perspective to this scene? How would you convey the text to emphasize these perspectives?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Critical Perspective</th>
<th>Delivery of Lines, Staging (characters’ actions), Blocking (characters’ movements)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cultural</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marxist</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Check Your Understanding**

Which critical perspective affords the most effective interpretation of the tension in this scene? State your preferred interpretation and defend your choice with relevant and sufficient evidence. Be sure to:

- Provide a well-reasoned claim that incorporates the critical perspective.
- Establish the significance of the claim distinguishing it from alternate or opposing claims.
- Use varied syntax and demonstrate command of conventions of standard English.
Learning Targets

• Analyze elements of character and critical perspectives.
• Apply both of those components in a character sketch.

Before Reading

1. Share your answers to the following questions with a partner:
   • What’s in a name?
   • What is the significance of your name?
   • How did you end up with the name you have?
   • What titles or nicknames have others given you, aside from your name?
   • What is your feeling about being called something other than your birth name?

2. Whether endearing or irritating, the way others refer to us says a great deal about our culture—its values, beliefs, attitudes and expectations. The use of epithets such as “so-and-so’s daughter” or a “quarterback on team X” can reveal a culture’s attitudes about family legacy or social expectations.

During Reading

3. Throughout the first scene, no character uses Othello’s name, although all three characters refer to him several times. Collect all the terms, or epithets, used to describe Othello in Act I, Scene i. Decide what each speaker is suggesting about Othello, and whether each term is complimentary or derogatory. Also, decide what the descriptive terms tell you about the speaker in each case. Use the graphic organizer on the following page to record your ideas.

**WORD CONNECTIONS**

Roots and Affixes

**Derogatory** comes from *de-* “away” + *rogare* “ask, question, propose.” It means “tending to lessen or impair; disparaging; belittling.”
4. Most characters in the play are referred to by their name when other characters make mention of them. What cultural motivations may be influencing how characters refer to Othello in Act I?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference to Othello</th>
<th>Who is speaking? (line number)</th>
<th>What does the reference suggest about Othello?</th>
<th>What does the reference suggest about the speaker?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Example: “his Moorship’s”</td>
<td>Iago (line 35)</td>
<td>He’s compared to royalty.</td>
<td>Iago uses verbal irony here; we know he doesn’t truly think of Othello as royalty.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Moor: Character Analysis Through a Cultural Lens

5. As you read Act I, Scene ii, make note of Othello’s responses to the accusation(s) against him.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accusation</th>
<th>Accuser</th>
<th>Othello’s Response</th>
<th>What does Othello’s response indicate about him?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. As a model for your writing, use the following character sketch of Brabantine, Desdemona’s father.

*Brabantine, Desdemona’s father in William Shakespeare’s Othello, is a statesman and respected member of Venetian society. He disapproves of his daughter’s marriage to the Moor. Brabantine is unable to conceive of anything—aside from spells and witchcraft—that could move his dear Desdemona to commit this “treason of the blood” (I.i.191). In spite of his having placed a great deal of trust in Othello—enough to honor Othello with frequent visits to his own home—Brabantine laments that “[Desdemona] is abused, stol’n from me, and corrupted” (I.iii.73). His view of his daughter as his property and of the valiant military man as an outlandish choice for his daughter’s hand in marriage shows Brabantine to be a nobleman who shares prejudices common in his culture. His inability to accept or honor the choices of others may help explain his grief at his daughter’s elopement.*

**GRAMMAR & USAGE**

**Dashes**

This sketch provides an example of the use of dashes to amplify or explain. In several sentences, a pair of dashes set off the explanatory element. If the element comes at the beginning or the end of the sentence, only one dash is needed. Commas, parentheses, or a colon may perform a similar function.

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Learning Targets

- Apply a critical perspective to a monologue in order to infer the critical perspective of a director.
- Evaluate the more effective interpretation of a text.

Before Reading

1. Based on what you have inferred about Othello from Act I, Scenes i—ii, how do you predict he will respond to Brabantio’s accusations?

During Reading

2. Use SOAPSTone to guide you through an analysis of Othello’s speech before the Duke and the Senate in Act I, Scene iii, lines 149–196.

   Her father loved me; oft invited me;  
   Still questioned me the story of my life  
   From year to year—the battles, sieges, fortunes  
   That I have passed.  
   I ran it through, even from my boyish days  
   To the very moment that he bade me tell it.  
   Wherein I spake of most disastrous chances,  
   Of moving accidents by flood and field;  
   Of hairbreadth scapes i’ th’ imminent deadly breach;  
   Of being taken by the insolent foe  
   And sold to slavery; of my redemption thence  
   And portance in my travel’s history:  
   Wherein of antres vast and deserts idle,  
   Rough quarries, rocks, and hills whose heads touch heaven  
   It was my hint to speak—such was the process;  
   And of the Cannibals that each other eat,  
   The Anthropophagi and men whose heads  
   Do grow beneath their shoulders. This to hear  
   Would Desdemona seriously incline:
But still the house-affairs would draw her thence:
Which ever as she could with haste dispatch,
She'd come again, and with a greedy ear
Devour up my discourse. Which I observing,
Took once a pliant hour, and found good means
To draw from her a prayer of earnest heart
That I would all my pilgrimage dilate,
Whereof by parcels she had something heard,
But not intentively. I did consent,
And often did beguile her of her tears,
When I did speak of some distressful stroke
That my youth suffered. My story being done,
She gave me for my pains a world of sighs.
She swore, in faith, 'twas strange, 'twas passing strange,
'Twas pitiful, 'twas wondrous pitiful.
She wished she had not heard it; yet she wished
That heaven had made her such a man. She thank'd me;
And bade me, if I had a friend that loved her,
I should but teach him how to tell my story.
And that would woo her. Upon this hint I spake.
She loved me for the dangers I had passed,
And I loved her that she did pity them.
This only is the witchcraft I have used.
Here comes the lady: let her witness it.

3. With your acting company and using your SOAPSTone analysis of the written text and the Cultural or Marxist Critical Perspective, discuss how you would have Othello deliver these lines. Keep in mind the other characters in the scene; with whom, and how, will Othello interact? How will the other characters respond to Othello?

4. How will your performance of this scene differ according to the chosen critical perspective? Highlight a few lines from Othello’s speech and perform them based on your chosen lens.
5. As you view different interpretations of Othello’s speech, take notes on the following elements of the scene. Consider the critical perspective apparent in each interpretation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Film version 1</th>
<th>Film version 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Delivery of lines</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actions/gestures/facial expressions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interactions among characters</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Props/costumes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cinematic/theatrical elements</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A Husband’s Response: Defending a Critical Perspective

Language and Writer’s Craft: Language Change

Language changes over time. Although we can still read and understand Shakespeare, we can also see that certain words from his time are not used often anymore or that they are used differently, and we also know that there are many words and usages that have arisen since Shakespeare’s time. As language changes, the rules about standard and nonstandard usage change, too.

Who gets to say what usage is correct, or standard? As new words and usages appear and fill new communication needs, they may gain popular currency. People who create dictionaries, usage guides, and other reference works decide which new usages to include and which to exclude. Between popular usage and the sanction of cultural gatekeepers such as dictionary editors, a working consensus arises about what the new words and usages mean and how to use them effectively.

This means that “correct,” or standard, usage is largely a matter of cultural consensus, or convention. And what is standard changes over time. Not everyone agrees about what is standard. Good usage dictionaries, such as Bryan Garner’s Dictionary of Modern American Usage, can help you resolve issues about contested or complex usages.

Check Your Understanding

Skim a few scenes from Othello. List a few words that are not commonly used today or that are used differently now. Look them up in a dictionary of etymology such as the Oxford English Dictionary or etymonline.com. Then, use a chart or other graphic organizer with the categories then and now to show how the meanings have shifted.

Writing Prompt: Which critical perspective is apparent in each director’s interpretation? What evidence do you see? Which interpretation is more effective? Write a response. Be sure to:

• Clearly state your claim and the basis of your rationale using relevant evidence from the text.
• Organize your argument logically, establishing the significance of the claim and distinguishing it from alternate or opposing claims.
• Use varied syntax and demonstrate command of conventions of standard English.
Learning Targets

• Analyze a work of literary criticism for its presentation of a character type.
• Participate in a Socratic Seminar to defend or challenge a position about Othello’s character from the perspective of Historical Criticism.

Before Reading

1. Previously, you learned about critical theories and used them to understand and interpret various texts. Review the critical perspectives with a partner, taking turns to identify and define the perspectives until you have reviewed all those you have studied. Write the critical perspectives in your Reader/Writer Notebook and sketch a picture suitable to represent each.

2. Another critical perspective is Historical Criticism. What do you predict about this perspective?

Historical Criticism considers the time period in which a work was created and how that time period may have influenced the work. For example, an interpretation of *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe may be enhanced by an understanding of the effects of colonialism in present-day African life. Likewise, an interpretation of *The Crucible*, which is set in seventeenth-century New England, may be enhanced by an understanding of political developments in the 1950s, when Arthur Miller wrote the play. Some common assumptions in the use of Historical criticism are as follows:

• A text cannot be separated from its historical context, which is a web of social, cultural, personal, and political factors.
• An understanding of a text is enhanced by the study of cultural norms and of artifacts such as diaries, films, paintings, and letters in existence when the text was created.

Historical Criticism suggests that we examine how a text is influenced by the context in which that work is created and set. With drama, the time period in which a drama is reimagined and performed adds another layer of interpretation of historical significance. For instance, producing *Othello*, a drama about an interracial marriage, in South Africa before apartheid was abolished was an act of social, cultural, and historical significance.

Historical performances of *Othello* give modern audiences a peek into the minds of people in generations past and inspire us to imagine how future generations might perform and receive this tragedy.
3. Add Historical Criticism to your list of critical theories from the previous page. On that page or on separate paper, sketch an illustration appropriate to the focus of Historical Criticism.

4. Paraphrase each of the two basic assumptions of Historical Criticism.

During Reading

5. Your teacher will assign chunks of an excerpt from “The Moor in English Renaissance Drama” to various individuals in your group. After reading and discussing the excerpt, locate in Act I of Othello textual evidence that confirms or counters D’Amico’s assertions.

Chunk 1 Readers:
- Scan paragraphs 1–3, marking the text by highlighting the words Moor and Morocco.
- Locate Morocco and Venice on a map. Why would their citizens come in contact with each other?
- Locate Cyprus on a map.
- As you reread the paragraphs, pay special attention to the images and characterizations of the Moor. Highlight the words used to describe him. Be prepared to discuss stereotypes.

Chunk 2 Readers:
- Highlight the topic sentence in paragraph 4. Discuss the collection of images that characterize the Moor so far.
- Highlight the topic sentence of paragraph 5 and the kinds of power it mentions within the paragraph. Note the primary example of power used in the paragraph.
- In paragraph 6, highlight the topic sentence and a sentence that shows how Renaissance dramatists “do more than trade in dead stereotypes.”

Chunk 3 Readers:
- How do paragraphs 7 and 8 discuss Shakespeare’s use of the Moor to embody cultural conflict?
- Highlight the word Moor in all three paragraphs and note how it is used.
- Reread paragraph 7 and highlight two sentences that state what conflict “Othello, the Moor of Venice” embodies.
- Reread paragraph 8, highlighting what the Moor signified. What connections do you make between the cultural conflict described here and modern cultural conflicts?
- What do you find to be “most disturbing” in the final paragraph? Why?
Relations between England and Morocco were extremely complex, and the opinions generated by those relations were as varied. What we find is not one image of the Moroccan, but many images, from the dangerously inscrutable alien to the exotically attractive ally. I have reviewed the experiences of these men in this chapter because, it seems to me, theater has the ability to re-create for its audience the encounter with an alien culture and to force an imaginative assessment of likeness and difference. Through this kind of experience some prejudices may be confirmed, while in other ways spectators may come to see themselves and their world differently.

The positive and negative characterizations that emerge from the first fifty years of trade and diplomacy can with ease be related to the specific historical perspectives of trade, war, and diplomacy. But traditional images of the Moor as black devil, Islamic infidel, or oriental despot were certainly drawn on to articulate what the traders and diplomats experienced. Optimistic prospects, disappointment and frustrations, and strong prejudices against Catholic Spain were by turn equally strong. Dramatic contexts, too, reflect a give-and-take of opinion, a frequent counter-balancing of prejudices, the interplay of abstract stereotypes and the more complex shadings of experience.

The theatrical representation of the Moor, while shaped in part by the traditional anti-Islam polemic, or the characterization of the black man as devil, also reshapes those traditions. Along with the stereotypes we will find subtler explorations of the problems that beset individuals from different cultures as they attempt to judge one another. Stereotypes often provide a convenient mask the dramatist can use to identify a character. But under the pressure of dramatic experience that character will often move closer to the context of the observer’s world, exhibiting the same needs, frustrations, and perceptions that shape our experience. As with the diversity of opinion about Moors and Morocco represented by the reports of traders and diplomats, we must follow the complex, and at times tangled, dramatic interplay of ideas, opinions, stereotypes, and fresh characterizations within the plays. Even if the spectator does not come away from the dramatic experience with a fuller understanding of another culture and its people, in most instances seeing the familiar world set in a different perspective leads to an expansion of imaginative experience.

Yet the representation of the Moor could also lead the dramatist and the audience beyond a comfortable sense of superiority or the superficial titillation provided by a darkly alien villain. The Moor could become a dramatic symbol of the many stereotypes and masks that divide society and alienate the individual. The process by which a character is reduced to a type and the consequences of that reduction became a central

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1 inscrutable: mysterious
2 polemic: controversial argument
3 titillation: excitement
A Historical Look at the Moor

My Notes

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KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS
Give an example of a "dead stereotype" as mentioned in the first sentence of paragraph 6. What is set up in contrast to that stereotype?

---

Chunk 3

Shakespeare more than any other dramatist of the English Renaissance used theater to create an important political perspective that framed the encounter between different cultures. On the Moor he focused the problems that any state would face when it moved from a relatively closed condition to the open expansion that generates contact and conflict with other civilizations. Around the Moor he built those conflicts which test a society’s sense of the natural rightness of its particular cultural traditions. He saw that with the kind of political expansion that characterized Renaissance Venice and ancient Rome came the problem of absorbing the outsider and the fear of being absorbed. The opposition between Roman reason and the darkly feminine otherness and fertility of Egypt is but one variation on this conflict between different conceptions of power and order. Shakespeare could also identify with a Moor of military virtú who is fearful of the erotic femininity of Venice, a European city as exotic for him as Alexandria was for the Romans. For the modern, cosmopolitan state that thrives on the exchange of goods and images with other nations and cultures, this conflict persists in the struggle between a closed national identity and the need for intercourse with others.

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4 prowess: exceptional ability
5 insidious: stealthy, deceitful
8 . . . Shakespeare wrote for a society that saw its contact with other people increase, while it struggled to define for itself the kind of government and religion it would have. Traditional definitions of Western norms and of the others who deviated from those norms provided a groundwork for curiosity, or a base of operations for exploration and exploitation. But the ground was and always is shifting as experience and traditional values interact. What may have seemed strange turns out to be familiar, as when Clem finds that courts in Morocco and England are much the same; and what is native may, upon closer examination, turn out to be more monstrous than the strangest alien. As we have seen with Tamburlaine, an outsider who became a projection of new political ambition, the imaginative contact with the outsider became a way of dramatizing the need to create new categories. The Moor’s difference was something established by tradition, and the Moor was a sign of spatial distance, a creature from a distant place. But for the English Renaissance stage the Moor could also be identified with the newness of discovery, exploration, and trade. This experience, real or theatrical, might confirm or challenge the tradition. Since the Moor was often portrayed as isolated and in rebellion against Western society, the type might conveniently channel opposition to traditional structures. If the old definitions fixed the character in safe inferiority, the new experience created an emotionally and intellectually charged encounter with a figure who required the audience to reflect on and to question its own values.

9 The plays certainly trade in what were, and still are, trusted assumptions about the Moor, Islam, and cultural difference. And they also draw upon our fascination with how another culture can make the familiar world seem strange. It is unsettling and also exciting to feel the ground of assumptions shift, as is the case in travel, when the norm is not your norm, when dress, speech, food, and the details of life reflect a difference that places you at the margin, reduced to a sign of deviation from the norm. That sense of disorientation was projected into an Eleazar who speaks of the finger of scorn pointed at him, or Othello who fears the accusing gesture that will destroy his reputation. What is most disturbing for the outsider is the sense that the secret, unwritten codes are being used to degrade one’s true image. As a group, sharing language, a national and racial identity, and an inherited set of theatrical conventions, the audience would have been like those Venetians or Spaniards who share a culture the Moor can never understand. And yet the individual spectator might retain a sense of separateness and know what it is like to be the object of open scorn, or what is worse, to feel the unspoken isolation of one who is reduced to a mere sign of the abnormal.

**After Reading**

6. Discuss the following questions with your classmates.

- How did English Renaissance poets and playwrights represent the Moors in their literature?
- What evidence from Act I of the play supports or contradicts D’Amico’s assertions?

**Check Your Understanding**

Be prepared to share your ideas and questions about the text in a Socratic Seminar.

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6 exploitation: the use of someone or something for profit
7 Tamburlaine: a character who had high political aspirations, from the play of the same name by Christopher Marlowe.
8 Eleazar: a villainous Moor in an English Renaissance drama called Lust’s Dominion.
Learning Targets
- Analyze a scene’s portrayal of women.
- Explain various interpretations based on differing critical perspectives.

Before Reading
1. **Quickwrite:** How much of your identity is shaped by your gender? In your response, you may consider the kinds of expectations placed upon you because of your gender.

2. Review the Feminist Critical Perspective and the sketch you used to represent it in Activity 3.10 on page 195. In what light has Desdemona’s character been cast in Act I of Othello?

During Reading
3. As you read or listen to Act II, Scene i, pay attention to the ways women are referred to in the text. When you encounter a character’s perception of women in lines 108–179, record the quotation and your response in the double-entry journal below. Include the line numbers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quotation</th>
<th>Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
After Reading

4. How might someone with a Feminist critical perspective view this scene?

5. Choose a few lines of this scene to perform as an acting company. Interpret it through the Feminist lens. Describe the tone of each of the characters and of the conversation as a whole.

6. Now choose a different critical perspective through which one might interpret this scene. Describe the tone of the scene when performed through a different lens.

7. Revisit the Essential Question, “How can a dramatic performance reflect a critical perspective?” How has this lesson strengthened your understanding of the way literary criticism shapes a staged scene?
Learning Targets

- Analyze a character’s speech in relation to the play as a whole.
- Determine the staging, blocking, and delivery of a speech.

Before Reading

1. Revisit the definition of dramatic irony from Activity 3.4. How is dramatic irony already evident in *Othello*?
2. What do you recall about the dramatic conventions known as soliloquies and monologues from your previous study of plays?

Both are speeches given by an actor on stage. **Soliloquies** are generally longer and are spoken while the actor is alone on stage, whereas **monologues** may be delivered while other actors are also present. Asides, like monologues and soliloquies, allow a character to reveal his or her thoughts to the audience. An **aside**, however, is usually a brief piece of dialogue spoken while others are on stage (like a monologue) but clearly not being heard by the other actors. The following are ways in which an aside can be used as a dramatic convention:

- Directly to the audience, or to the camera (if filmed)
- As if the character is simply talking to himself
- As a voice-over, while the actor appears to be lost in thought

During Reading

3. With your acting company, conduct a close reading of one of Iago’s asides or soliloquies. Take notes on your discussion about the meaning of the speech as well as the importance of the speech in the play as a whole.

   **Act II, Scene ____, lines ____–_____

   - Set the scene: what has happened before this speech?
   - Summarize the speech. Paraphrase challenging sections of the speech to clarify meaning.
   - How does the speech advance the plot of the drama?
   - What does the speech reveal about Iago’s character?

**Literary Terms**

A **soliloquy** is a long speech delivered by a character alone on the stage. The audience hears the character’s internal thoughts. An **aside** is a short speech spoken by an actor directly to the audience and unheard by other actors on stage.
After Reading

4. Now that you have analyzed the speech, work as a group to decide how to present the speech. Take these questions into consideration as you reread the speech and plan your presentation:

- What does the set look like?
- Is this an aside or a soliloquy?
- Are any other actors on the stage? If so, what are they doing?
- What do you want the audience to understand about the play and about Iago?
- How will you convey this understanding? In other words, how will the character’s vocal delivery, staging (gestures, acting choice), and blocking (movement) convey an interpretation of Iago’s character?

Write the soliloquy in the space below. Mark the text for its presentation as you did for Brabantio in Activity 3.5. Take turns rehearsing the role of Iago. Be sure to take a turn as Iago, as an audience member, and as director as you prepare to share your work with other groups.
Learning Targets

- Compare and contrast visualizations of a scene.
- Craft an argumentative essay that evaluates an interpretation of a scene.

Before Reading

1. In Activity 3.5 your acting company produced evidence to prove the “guilt” of the cheating partner. What evidence did you choose? Why did you make that selection? How did you incorporate it meaningfully in your scene? How effective was it in accomplishing your intended mission?

During Reading

2. Often, trials are won or lost and defendants pronounced innocent or guilty on the basis of seemingly innocuous objects. A handkerchief takes on that kind of significance in Othello. As you read Act III, trace each reference to the handkerchief with sticky notes. Then create a graphic organizer in the space below to explore the significance of the handkerchief to the various characters (Othello, Desdemona, Emilia, Iago, Cassio, and Bianca) and to the plot of the play through the end of Act III. Include line numbers as textual support. Use the space below for your graphic organizer.
3. In Act III, Scene iii, appear the critical stage directions “[The handkerchief falls, unnoticed.]” Emilia, who is nearby when the handkerchief falls, picks it up and then gives it to her “wayward” husband. Why would she give Iago Desdemona’s first gift from Othello, knowing how dear it is to Desdemona? Brainstorm a list by taking turns sharing possible reasons in your discussion group.

4. How would you use the handkerchief as a prop in this scene in your production of *Othello*?

5. To understand Emilia’s deception, it is important to make sense of the nature of the relationship between Emilia and Iago. Directors and actors have presented a number of interpretations of the characters’ relationship. As you watch two of these interpretations, take notes in the charts below.

### Film Version 1 — Director:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emilia</th>
<th>Iago</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Delivery of lines (pace, volume, emphasis, tone of voice, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actions/gestures/facial expressions</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the nature of this relationship?</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>How can you tell?</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>In this interpretation, why does Emilia give Iago the handkerchief?</td>
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<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
### Film Version 2—Director:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emilia</th>
<th>Iago</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Delivery of lines (pace, volume, emphasis, tone of voice, etc.)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Actions/gestures/facial expressions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What is the nature of this relationship?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How can you tell?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In this interpretation, why does Emilia give Iago the handkerchief?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### After Reading

**Writing Prompt:** After examining two film versions of this scene, write an argumentative essay from a critical perspective. Explain which interpretation presents the most plausible explanation of Emilia’s deception. Consider the critical perspective that produces this interpretation. Be sure to:

- Include a specific claim and critical perspective supported with evidence from the text and director’s choices.
- Follow a cohesive argumentative structure (including counterclaim).
- Use varied syntax and demonstrate command of conventions of standard English.
Demystifying Emilia: Questioning Through a Critical Lens

Learning Targets
- Adopt a critical lens to gather evidence about and question a character in a text.
- Use an outline or graphic organizer to plan an argumentative essay.

Before Reading
1. Many characters are caught in the throes of a difficult choice between two loyalties. In Act I we hear Desdemona lament her divided loyalties between her father, “To you I am bound for life and education” (I.iii.210) and her husband, “And so much duty as my mother show’d to you, preferring you before her father, so much I challenge that I may profess due to the Moor” (I.iii. 215–218). Though Emilia is a minor character in Othello and her marriage to the antagonist Iago secondary to that of Othello and Desdemona, the drama unfolds around and in some ways because of her.

   Where does Emilia’s loyalty lie—to her honest lady, Desdemona, or to her husband, Iago? Explore Emilia’s conflicts, her possible choices, and their results in a discussion.

During Reading
2. Read closely the short scene assigned to your group. What does the scene reveal about Emilia? You may begin to make your determinations about this character by questioning the text. How is she characterized? What is her relationship to other characters? What are her motivations? Use the graphic organizer on the next page for your notes.
Demystifying Emilia: Questioning Through a Critical Lens

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scene</th>
<th>What the Scene Reveals About Emilia</th>
<th>Textual Evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Act III, Scene i, lines 46–64, Emilia &amp; Cassio</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(Begins with EMILIA: Good morrow... and goes to the end of scene i)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Act III, Scene iii, lines 344–368, Emilia &amp; Iago</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>(Begins with IAGO: How now? What do you here alone? and ends when Emilia exits)</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Act III, Scene iv, lines 23–34, Emilia &amp; Desdemona</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Begins with DESDEMONA: Where should I lose that handkerchief, Emilia? and ends when Othello enters)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
3. You are working toward writing an argumentative essay for Embedded Assessment 1 that requires you to support a critical perspective. One of the ways to ensure you differentiate one mode of criticism from another is to ask questions geared toward the different lenses. With a partner, choose one critical perspective (Archetypal, Marxist, Feminist, Reader Response, Cultural, or Historical). Draft one literal, one interpretive, and one universal question through that lens. When you have checked your work with another group, repeat the process for a different critical perspective, this time on your own.

Act /Scene / Lines:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Critical Perspective: Marxist</th>
<th>Levels of Questions</th>
<th>Critical Perspective:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Literal</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interpretive</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Universal</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Check Your Understanding
Create an outline for an argumentative essay supporting the critical perspective that provides the best lens for understanding Emilia. Use the scene and questions from the graphic organizer to guide your planning. Be sure to:
- Include a specific claim and critical perspective.
- Include well reasoned claims, counterclaims and evidence.
- Use a cohesive argumentative structure.
Learning Targets

- Apply a critical interpretation to the staging of a scene.
- Make informed decisions about blocking to convey a particular effect on the audience.

Before Reading

1. Revisit Activity 3.5, “Building a Plot and Bringing It to Life.” Now that you are reading *Othello*, you should understand that the scenario and outcomes in the earlier activity were based on the play. Discuss your scenario with your acting company and take notes on connections between it and Shakespeare’s play.

**Scenario:** Character 1 tells Character 2 that his or her girlfriend is cheating on him or her. Character 1 then produces “evidence.” The story is untrue.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcomes</th>
<th>How My Acting Company (or Another Company in My Class) Presented the Outcome</th>
<th>How <em>Othello</em>, the Play, Presents the Situation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Outcome A</td>
<td>Character 2 does not believe the story.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcome B</td>
<td>Character 2 considers the story as a possibility but then decides it is untrue.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcome C</td>
<td>Character 2 is filled with jealousy and wants revenge.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
2. Based on what you have read so far, predict what Iago will do to convince Othello of Desdemona’s unfaithfulness.

**During Reading**

3. Summarize the key events of Act IV, Scene i, in the space below.

4. The moment when Othello falls into a trance is important, but it can be challenging to stage. How would your acting company present Othello’s trance in a way that would not create an inadvertently humorous effect? With your acting company, read Act IV, Scene i, lines 1–88 on your feet, pausing to discuss and determine the most effective way to stage this scene. Below, describe how you will stage the scene.

5. Summarize lines 89 (“IAGO: Stand you apart awhile”) to 120 (“IAGO: How do you now, lieutenant?”).

6. The conversation that follows can be tricky to stage. Othello must be visible to the audience but not to Cassio. The audience needs to see how Othello could misinterpret Cassio’s comments about Bianca, knowing all the while, of course, how Iago has orchestrated this misunderstanding.

Block this scene by using paper as the set and X’s and arrows to indicate characters and blocking. Or use trinkets to represent characters in a “shoebox” set, with arrows to show blocking. Be prepared to explain your choices regarding blocking and the effects you intend to create through characters’ movements on stage.
7. You will view two versions of this scene, one a filmed version and the other a stage production. What is the difference between a film version and a stage production on film?
   - What advantages might a film version have?
   - What advantages might a stage version have?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Film Version—Director: Miller, Parke or Welles</th>
<th>How is it presented?</th>
<th>What is the effect?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dialogue between Iago and Othello, up to the trance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The trance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialogue between Iago and Cassio, observed by Othello</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialogue between Cassio and Bianca, observed by Othello</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialogue between Othello and Iago, after Cassio and Bianca exit</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Othello striking Desdemona</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Filmed Stage Version—Director: Burge, Milam or Suzman</td>
<td>How is it presented?</td>
<td>What is the effect?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialogue between Iago and Othello, up to the trance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The trance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialogue between Iago and Cassio, observed by Othello</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dialogue between Cassio and Bianca, observed by Othello</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dialogue between Othello and Iago, after Cassio and Bianca exit</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Othello striking Desdemona</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Check Your Understanding**

In discussion groups, determine which film interpretation of the scene creates the strongest effect on the viewer. Explain your selection and provide appropriate examples to support your position during the discussion.
LEARNING STRATEGIES:
Graphic Organizer, Rehearsing, Oral Interpretation

Learning Targets
- Stage one scene through multiple critical perspectives.
- Apply the most effective interpretation to the staging of the scene.

Before Reading
1. By now you have read through Act IV, Scene iii, including Othello’s confrontation with Emilia and Desdemona about his wife’s meeting with Cassio. Choose a memorable or revealing quotation from Scene ii or iii. Share the quote and your commentary with your acting company.

During Reading
2. Examine this scene through each critical perspective.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Critical Perspective</th>
<th>How does this perspective apply to this scene?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Archetypal criticism</td>
<td>Archetypal criticism might suggest that an archetype such as the temptress (a woman who uses her power—in tellect, magic, or beauty—to make men weak) is essential to understanding this scene.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feminist criticism</td>
<td>Feminist criticism might suggest that the male-female power relationships that come into play in this scene are the most important influence on our understanding of it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marxist criticism</td>
<td>Marxist criticism might suggest that we must examine the issues of class or social standing in order to fully understand this scene.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reader response criticism</td>
<td>Reader response criticism might suggest that what you bring to the scene will determine its significance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural criticism</td>
<td>Cultural criticism might suggest that we must consider such issues as ethnicity, religious beliefs, sexual identity, and so on to understand this scene.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical criticism</td>
<td>Historical criticism might suggest that the historical context plays a significant role in a modern reader’s understanding the scene.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Your teacher will assign you one of the critical perspectives from the list above. With your acting company, determine how the interpretation of Act IV, Scene ii, lines 1–110 from this perspective would translate into staging this scene. Record your ideas below.

**Vocal Delivery** (rate, volume, pitch of voice, and the general tone this character should convey):

Othello

Emilia

Desdemona

**Staging** (gestures, mannerisms, and the image you want each character to convey):

Othello

Emilia

Desdemona

**Blocking** (the position of the actors on stage in relation to one another, the set, props, and so forth): Illustrate your plan for blocking in the margins or on separate paper.

4. Assign roles and rehearse the scene according to your notes. Choose one individual to play the role of director to guide speaking and moving and to ensure that actors are conveying the assigned interpretation. Rehearse your scene before presenting it to the class.

**Check Your Understanding**

**Writing Prompt:** After viewing each staged interpretation, decide which critical perspective provides the most interesting lens for the scene. Explain your selection. Be sure to:

- Explain which presentation you think provides the most interesting lens.
- Describe how the presentation illustrates the lens.
“Talk You of Killing?” Defending a Perspective

**Learning Targets**
- Analyze a film scene for theatrical elements.
- Defend one interpretation and the corresponding critical perspective in an essay.

**Before Reading**
1. **Quickwrite** It is no surprise that a Shakespearean tragedy ends . . . tragically. Now that you have read Act V, Scene i, predict the action in the final scene. Will Othello learn the truth? Will Iago be brought to justice? How will the conflict ultimately be resolved?

**During Reading**
2. Act V, Scene ii of *Othello* is the climax of the tragedy. As you read Desdemona’s last conversation with her husband, visualize the set, costumes, actions, lighting, and music. Make notes in your Reader/Writer Notebook.
3. As you view two versions of the film, take notes in the graphic below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Describe Theatrical Elements:</th>
<th>Title: Director: Year:</th>
<th>Title: Director: Year:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The set</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Othello’s costume</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Desdemona’s costume</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Othello’s actions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Desdemona’s actions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lighting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Critical perspective reflected in the film</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Check Your Understanding

Writing Prompt: Draft an argumentative essay that supports the most effective visualization of the final scene in *Othello*. Which interpretation best illuminates a theme of the tragedy? Be sure to:

- Include a clear claim that includes the theme and the critical perspective/interpretation that best reflects it.
- Create cohesion between the claim and reasons, between reasons and evidence, and between claim and counterclaim.
- Include a concluding statement that supports the argument.

Share your draft with peers and use the feedback provided to revise it accordingly.
LEARNING STRATEGIES:
Quickwrite, Revisiting Prior Work, Close Reading, Graphic Organizer

Learning Targets
• Closely read the assessment, including its standards for argumentation and sample argumentative essays
• Collaboratively construct a rubric that effectively evaluates content, structure, and style

Revisiting Prior Work
1. **Quickwrite** Review some of the essays you wrote earlier in the year. What kind of feedback did you receive? Write some of the comments about your writing below.

2. While usually relying on the teacher to assess written work, one of the resources that you may not have considered is your own ability to assess your writing. The process of writing is ongoing, and getting in the habit of writing—and revising—and rewriting—and editing—will strengthen your ability to make an effective argument.

   In order to create a standard for evaluating your writing, you need to be fully aware of the criteria. With your acting company or discussion group, closely read the Assignment and Steps for Embedded Assessment 1: Writing an Argument. Identify the key categories in Column 1 that, according to the Assignment and Steps, need to be mastered in this assessment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Categories</th>
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</table>

   How to Write an Argument
3. The requirements for argumentative writing are fairly specific. Read the descriptions on the next page. Do you need to add anything to your “key categories” above?
Standard for Writing an Argument: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

- Introduce precise, knowledgeable claim(s), establish the significance of the claim(s), distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and create an organization that logically sequences claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.
- Develop claim(s) and counterclaims fairly and thoroughly, supplying the most relevant evidence for each while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both in a manner that anticipates the audience’s knowledge level, concerns, values, and possible biases.
- Use words, phrases, and clauses as well as varied syntax to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships between claim(s) and reasons, between reasons and evidence, and between claim(s) and counterclaims.
- Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline in which they are writing.
- Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the argument presented.

4. Your teacher will distribute to your discussion group essays from Activity 3.17. Skim the essays, noting the apparent strengths and weaknesses of each. Use the sample papers to guide you as you co-construct the scoring guidelines for your essay. What constitutes the highest-quality paper in each of the key categories? Write a thorough explanation of the level of mastery for each category, quoting examples from the sample essays where possible and appropriate.

5. Using your established guidelines, evaluate at least two sample essays. If you do not have multiple copies of the rubric, use abbreviations and a number system to score each essay on a separate sheet of paper. In addition to giving a score, answer the following questions about each:
   - What is the strongest sentence in the paper? Why?
   - What is the writer’s most effective argument in support of his or her claim?
   - One suggestion for improvement to this essay is . . .

6. This activity will not be complete until you score your own essay as well. After your teacher has collected and redistributed essays to their owners, evaluate your essay using the rubric and questions BEFORE viewing others’ feedback about your writing.
Learning Targets
• Trace critical perspectives in a critical essay.
• In an argumentative essay, apply one’s own perspective to a contemporary staging of Othello.

Before Reading
1. Before you read about the actors through history who have portrayed Othello on stage and screen, consider how you think Othello should be portrayed. Make a list of traits that should be conveyed to the audience. Brainstorm further with your acting company, and write the traits in the My Notes space.

During Reading
2. The essay you are about to read, “Othello on Stage and Screen,” addresses a topic important to your study of Othello and critical to both your essay of argument and your staging of a scene; it is also long and challenging. What reading strategies will you use to make meaning of the text? Here are some possibilities:
   • Skim/scan the essay to prepare yourself for reading. With a partner, make observations about its contents.
   • Based on your skimming of the essay and your ideas about staging Othello, write a guiding question for your reading of the essay. You will use this question to guide your reading of a lengthy, complex text. As you read, mark the text for the answer to this question.

Guiding Question:

ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Sylvan Barnet is a professor of English and former director of writing at Tufts University. A prolific writer of college English textbooks, his texts on writing and his anthologies remain leaders in their field.

Essay

Othello on Stage and Screen

by Sylvan Barnet

1 The earliest mention of a performance of Othello, in an account of 1604, reports only that the play was acted before James I at Whitehall Palace. Next come two references to performances in 1610, one telling us that it was acted at the Globe in April, the other telling us that it was acted in September at Oxford. The reference to the Oxford production is especially valuable, since it provides one of the very few glimpses we have of early seventeenth-century acting and of an audience's response to a performance. The relevant passage, in Latin, may be translated thus:
In their tragedies they acted with appropriate decorum; in these they caused tears not only by their speaking, but also by their action. Indeed Desdemona, although greatly successful throughout, moved us especially when at last, lying on her bed, killed by her husband, she implored the pity of the spectators in her death with her face alone.

2 This may not seem like much, but it is more than we have for all but a few of Shakespeare's other plays, and it is especially valuable as a reminder that the Renaissance boy actors—a boy played Desdemona—were highly skilled performers.

3 There are only a few additional references to performances in the first half of the seventeenth century, but a very large number of rather general references to the play (as opposed to specific performances) allows us to conclude that the play must have been popular on the stage. From 1642 to 1660 the theaters were closed by act of Parliament, but when the theaters reopened in 1660, Othello was staged almost immediately. Samuel Pepys saw it in 1660:

To the Cockpit to see The Moor of Venice, which was well done. [Nathaniel] Burt acted the Moor: by the same token, a very pretty lady that sat by me called out, to see Desdemona smothered.

He saw it again in 1669, this time with less pleasure:

To the King's playhouse, and there in an upper box . . . did see The Moor of Venice: but ill acted in most parts; [Michael] Mohun which did a little surprise me not acting Iago's part by much so well as [Walter] Clun used to do . . . nor, indeed, Burt doing the Moor's so well as I once thought he did.

5 During this period, the great interpreter of the title role was Thomas Betterton, who performed it from 1684 to 1709. Although he was the leading Othello of the period and was much praised, the only informative contemporary account of his performance in the role tells us little more than that his

aspect was serious, venerable, and majestic. . . . His voice was low and grumbling, though he could lime it by an artful climax, which enforced attention. . . . He kept this passion under, and showed it most.

6 Betterton's successor as Othello was James Quin, who played the part from 1722 to 1751. Wearing a white wig and the white uniform (including white gloves) of a British officer, he was said to have presented an impressive appearance, but his acting was characterized as statuesque, even stiff, lacking in tenderness, pathos, fire, and any suggestion of inner pain. Quin was eclipsed in 1745 by David Garrick, whose Othello was quite different: the complaint now was that this Othello lacked dignity. The accusation was not merely a glance at Garrick's relatively short stature (he sought to compensate for his height by adding a turban to the costume of an officer in the British army), or even at his bold restoration of the fainting episode (4.1.45), which had been cut by his predecessors. Rather, it was directed at Garrick's violent gestures, which suggested to one critic that Othello seemed afflicted with St. Vitus' dance. Garrick defended his interpretation by arguing that Shakespeare

had shown us white men jealous in other pieces, but that their jealousy had limits, and was not so terrible. . . . [In] Othello he had wished to paint that passion in all its violence, and that is why he chose an African in whose being circulated fire instead of blood, and whose true or imaginary character could excuse all boldness of expression and all exaggerations of passion.

KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS
Interpretations of Othello's characters changed over the first 100 years of its production. How is Garrick's interpretation of Othello different from Quin's interpretation?
Garrick’s rival, Quin, was not convinced. Of Garrick’s Othello, Quin said:

“Othello! . . . psha! no such thing. There was a little black boy . . . fretting and fuming
about the stage; but I saw no Othello.”

A reader can scarcely overlook the racism in these remarks, and something
should be said about attitudes toward Moors. There is no doubt that most Elizabethans
regarded Moors as vengeful—largely because they were not Christians. That Moors
were black—the color of the devil—was thought to be a visible sign of their capacity for
endless evil. (In fact, Shakespeare specifies that Othello is a Christian, and this is only
one of several ways in which Othello departs from the stereotype.) Othello’s physical
blackness, by the way, seems not to have been doubted until the early nineteenth
century. Certainly Quin and Garrick played him in blackface, and presumably so
did their predecessor Betterton. And there is no doubt that on the Elizabethan stage
Othello was very black. The only contemporary illustration of a scene from Shakespeare
shows another of Shakespeare’s Moors, Aaron in Titus Andronicus, as having an inky
complexion. But in the early nineteenth century one finds expressions of distinct
discomfort at the thought that Othello is black rather than, say, bronzed, or (to use an
even loftier metaphor) golden. Even the best critics were not exempt from the racist
thinking of their times. Thus, in 1808 Charles Lamb, picking up Desdemona’s assertion
that she judged Othello by his mind rather than by his color, argued that although we
can share her view when we read the play, we cannot do so when we see a black Othello
on the stage:

She sees Othello’s color in his mind. But upon the stage, when the imagination
is no longer the ruling faculty, but we are left to our poor unassisted senses,
I appeal to every one that has seen Othello played, whether he did not, on the
contrary, sink Othello’s mind in his color; whether he did not find something
extremely revolting in the courtship and wedded caresses of Othello and
Desdemona, and whether the actual sight of the thing did not over-weigh all
that beautiful compromise which we make in reading. . . .

At about the time that Lamb offered his comment on Othello, Lamb’s friend
Coleridge made some notes to the effect that Shakespeare could not possibly have
thought of Othello as a black:

Can we suppose [Shakespeare] so utterly ignorant as to make a barbarous negro
plead royal birth? Were negroes then known but as slaves; on the contrary, were
not the Moors the warriors? . . . No doubt Desdemona saw Othello’s visage in
his mind; yet, as we are constituted, and most surely as an English audience was
disposed in the beginning of the seventeenth century, it would be something
monstrous to conceive this beautiful Venetian girl falling in love with a veritable
negro. It would argue a disproportionateness, a want of balance in Desdemona,
which Shakespeare does not appear to have in the least contemplated.

Given Coleridge’s certainty that Othello could not possibly have been black, it
is well to reiterate that the Elizabethans thought of Moors as black. True, there are a
few references in Elizabethan literature to “tawny” Moors, but there is no evidence
that the Elizabethans distinguished between tawny and black Moors, and in any case,
if they did, various passages in Othello indicate that the protagonist is surely a black
Moor. Admittedly, most of the references to Othello’s Negroid features are made by
persons hostile to him—Roderigo calls him "the thick-lips" (1.1.63), for instance, and
Iago speaks of him as “an old black ram” (1.1.85)—but Othello himself says that his
name “is now begrimed and black / As mine own face” (3.3.384–5). Of course “black”
is sometimes used in the sense of brunette, but there really cannot be any doubt that
Othello is black in the most obvious modern sense, and to call him tawny or golden or
bronzed, or to conceive of him as something of an Arab chieftain, is to go against the
text of the play.

11 When Spranger Barry, the actor who displaced Garrick as Othello in the middle of
the eighteenth century (he was said to have not only the passion of Garrick but also the
majesty that in Quin was merely stiffness), the question of color seems not to have come
up, nor did it come up when the role in effect belonged to John Philip Kemble, the chief
Othello at the turn of the eighteenth century (he played his first Othello in 1785, his
last in 1805). Kemble, tall and stately, acted in what can be called a classic rather than
romantic manner, a style suited more to, say, Brutus than to Othello. His interpretation
of the role was criticized for its superabundance of dignity and for its lack of variety
and fire, but not for its blackness. But when Edmund Kean played the role in 1814 he is
said to have used a light brown makeup in place of the usual burnt cork. Oddly, there
is some uncertainty about this—most critics of the period did not comment on the
novelty—but putting aside the question of who made the change, and exactly when,
about this time the color changed. By 1827 Leman Thomas Redé's *The Road to the
Stage* (a book on makeup) could report that "A tawny tinge is now the color used for
the gallant Moor." Here it is evident that the makeup no longer uses burnt cork. Most
of the Othellos of the rest of the century were tawny, their bronze skin suggesting that
they were sons of the desert, but Henry Irving's Othello of 1881 was conspicuously dark
(darker than his "bronze" Othello of 1876), and, as we shall see, in the twentieth century
dark Othellos have been dominant, especially in our own generation, when American
blacks have often played the part.

12 Putting aside the point that Kean's Othello was lighter than usual, it was exceptional
for its power and its pathos. If Kemble is the paradigm of classical acting, Kean—
passionate, even spasmodic—is the paradigm of romantic acting. Coleridge wrote:
"Seeing [Kean] act was like reading Shakespeare by flashes of lightning." Another great
romantic writer, William Hazlitt, at first found Kean too passionate. In the following
passage Hazlitt complains that the fault in the performance is not in the color of Kean's
face, or in Kean's relatively short stature:

Othello was tall, but that is nothing; he was black, but that is nothing. But he
was not fierce, and that is everything. It is only in the last agony of human
suffering that he gives way to his rage and despair. . . . Mr. Kean is in general all
passion, all energy, all relentless will. . . . He is too often in the highest key of
passion, too uniformly on the verge of extravagance, too constantly on the rack.

13 Kean later moderated the passion, perhaps under Hazlitt's influence, but,
curiously, Hazlitt regretted the change, remarking: "There is but one perfect way of
playing Othello, and that was the way . . . he used to play it." Equally compelling is the
tribute to Kean offered by the American actor Junius Brutus Booth, who in England
in 1817–18 played Iago to Kean's Othello. Booth said that "Kean's Othello smothered
Desdemona and my Iago too." Kean's triumph in the role was undoubted, but in 1825,
two weeks after he had been proved guilty of adultery, public opinion turned against
him, denouncing the hypocrisy of an adulterer who dared to play the outraged husband
lamenting his wife's infidelity. Still, he continued in the role, playing Othello almost to
the day of his death. His last performance was in this role, in 1833, when he collapsed
on the stage and died a few weeks later.

14 Other nineteenth-century actors have made their mark in the role—for instance
William Macready (he sometimes played Iago against Kean's Othello) and Samuel
Phelps—but here there is space to mention only four, Ira Aldridge, Edwin Booth,
Tommaso Salvini, and Henry Irving. Aldridge, a black, was born in New York in 1807.
As a very young man he determined to be an actor, but seeing no possibility of a career as an actor in America, he went to London in 1824 and never returned to the United States. At least one black actor, James Hewlett, had already played Othello in America, but that was with the all-black African Company, and Aldridge's ambition was to be accepted as an actor, not as a black actor, an ambition impossible to fulfill in the United States, where there were no interracial companies. He performed throughout the British Isles and also on the Continent, playing not only Othello but also (with white makeup) such roles as Richard III, Shylock, Hamlet, Macbeth, and Lear.

15 In America, Edwin Booth (son of Junius Brutus Booth) acted Othello almost annually from 1826 to 1871. From time to time he changed his performance, sometimes working in the violent style associated with Tommaso Salvini, hurling his Iago to the ground, but sometimes he played with restraint—occasionally he even omitted striking Desdemona at IV.i.240—and he was especially praised for his tender passion. Most critics, however, preferred his Iago, which seemed genial, sincere, and terrifyingly evil; he was widely regarded as the greatest Iago of the later nineteenth century. (Among the performers with whom he alternated the roles of Othello and Iago were Henry Irving and James O'Neill, Eugene O'Neill's father; and he played Iago to Salvini's Othello. Here is his advice on how to play Iago:

Don't act the villain, don't look it or speak it (by scowling and growling, I mean), but think it all the time. Be genial, sometimes jovial, always gentlemanly. Quick in motion as in thought; lithe and sinuous as a snake. A certain bluffness (which my temperament does not afford) should be added to preserve the military flavor of the character; in this particular I fail utterly, my Iago lacks the soldierly quality.

16 Henry Irving played Othello only in 1876 and 1881. Although he had already achieved success in the roles of Hamlet, Macbeth, and Lear, his Othello did not find equal favor. It was not especially violent, but it was said to lack dignity (apparently there was much lifting up of hands and shuffling of feet), and after the attempt in 1881 Irving decided to drop the role. Still, some things about the 1881 performance should be mentioned. The makeup was very black, the costume exotic (a white jeweled turban, an amber robe), and the killing of Desdemona very solemn—until Desdemona tried to escape, at which point he flung her on the bed. The play ended with Othello's suicide, the curtain descending as he fell at Gratiano's feet. Iago (played by Booth) stood by, smiling malignantly.

17 By common consent the greatest Othello of the later nineteenth century was Tommaso Salvini, who acted in Italian—even when in England or the United States, with the rest of the company speaking English. Some Victorians regarded Salvini as too savage, too volcanic, too terrifying to arouse pity—he seized Iago by the throat and hurled him to the floor, and put his foot on Iago's neck, and of course he did not hesitate to strike Desdemona—but most audiences were deeply moved as well as terrified by his performance. We are told that especially in the first three acts, where some of the love play seemed almost to be high comedy, his Othello was "delightful" and "delicate." Still, the overall effect was that of enormous energy, though not of mere barbarism. Henry James was among Salvini's greatest admirers:

It is impossible to imagine anything more living, more tragic, more suggestive of a tortured soul and of generous, beneficent strength changed to a purpose of destruction. With its tremendous force, it is magnificently quiet, and from the beginning to the end has not a touch of rant or crudity.
Actors of note who played Othello or Iago in the early twentieth century include Johnston Forbes-Robertson, Oscar Asche, and Beerbohm Tree, but none of these was widely regarded as great. Indeed, the standard opinion is that the twentieth century did not have a great Othello until Paul Robeson, an African American, played the role in 1943. But Robeson was not primarily an actor. As a college student at Rutgers he distinguished himself not to theatrics but in athletics (all-American end in football in 1918, and letters in several varsity sports) and in scholarship (Phi Beta Kappa). He next prepared for a career in the law, taking a law degree at Columbia University, but while at Columbia in 1921 he performed in his first amateur production. He soon began to appear in some professional productions, including Showboat, where his singing of “Ol’ Man River” led to a career as a concert singer, especially of spirituals and work songs, though he returned to the stage to play Othello in 1930 in England, in 1942 in Cambridge, Boston, and Princeton, in 1943 in New York, and in 1959 at Stratford-upon-Avon. Observers agree that the 1959 performance was poor; Robeson had been weakened by an attack of bronchitis, his political beliefs had been shaken (earlier he had praised Stalin, but now the crimes of the Stalin era were evident), and, perhaps worst of all, the director’s presence was too strongly felt, for instance in a distracting fog that supposedly was the result of the storm at Cyprus. Many scenes were so dark that spectators could not see the actors’ faces, and there seems no reason to doubt the accuracy of those reviewers who accused the director ofobliterating the principal actors.

Robeson’s first Othello—indeed, his first performance in a play by Shakespeare, in 1930—was much more enthusiastically received. The London Morning Post said: “There has been no Othello on our stage for forty years to compare with his dignity, simplicity, and true passion.” But not all of the reviewers were entirely pleased. James Agate, the leading theater critic of the period, said that Robeson lacked the majesty that Shakespeare insists on early in the play, for instance in such lines as

```
I fetch my life and being
From men of royal siege,   (I.ii.20–21)

and

Were it my cue to fight, I should have known it
Without a prompter,   (82–83)

and

Keep up your bright swords, for the dew will
rust them.   (58)
```

The majesty displayed in such passages, Agate said, tells us how Othello must behave when he puts down Cassio’s drunken brawl, but according to Agate, Robeson (despite his height—six feet, three inches) lacked this majesty. Thus, when Robeson’s Othello said “Silence that dreadful bell! It frights the isle/From her propriety” (II.iii.174–75), he showed personal annoyance rather than the “passion for decorum” (Agate’s words) that the line reveals. Agate found Robeson best in the third and fourth acts, where he captured the jealousy of the part, but weak (lacking in dignity) in the last act, where he failed to perform the murder with a solemn sense of sacrifice.
Despite the reservations of Agate and others, there was some talk of bringing the production to the United States, but nothing came of it, doubtless because of uncertainty about how American audiences (and perhaps performers?) would respond to a company that mixed whites and blacks. In 1938 Margaret Webster again raised the topic, but she was discouraged by the Americans with whom she talked. It was acceptable for a black actor—a real black man, not a white man in blackface—to kiss a white girl in England, but not in the United States. Fortunately, however, Webster later persuaded the Theatre Guild to invite Robeson to do *Othello* in the United States in 1942, if not on Broadway at least as summer stock, with José Ferrer as Iago and Uta Hagen as Desdemona. The production was enthusiastically received, but Robeson’s concert commitments prevented it from going to New York until the fall of 1943. When it did open in New York, the reviews were highly favorable, but some of them contained reservations about Robeson’s ability to speak blank verse and to catch the grandeur of the role. In any case, the production was an enormous success, running for 296 continuous performances. The previous record for a New York *Othello* had been 57.

Robeson inevitably was asked to discuss his conception of the role; equally inevitably, he said different things at different times, and perhaps sometimes said what reporters wanted to hear—or perhaps the reporters heard only what they wanted to hear. Sometimes he was reported as saying that the matter of color is secondary, but on other occasions he is reported as saying: “The problem [of *Othello*] is the problem of my own people. It is a tragedy of racial conflict, a tragedy of honor, rather than of jealousy.”

Until Robeson, black actors in the United States were in effect limited to performing in all-black companies. With Robeson, a black actor played *Othello* with an otherwise white company. His appearance as *Othello* in 1943 was an important anticipation of the gains black actors were to make in later decades. Earle Hyman, Moses Gunn, Paul Winfield, William Marshall, and James Earl Jones are among the black actors who have played impressive *Othellos* in mixed-race companies. More important, however, as the careers of these actors show, a black may now also play a role other than *Othello*, as Ira Aldridge did a hundred and fifty years ago, though he had to cross the Atlantic to do it.

Before looking at Laurence Olivier’s *Othello* in 1964, mention should be made of Olivier’s Iago in a production of 1937, directed by Tyrone Guthrie at the Old Vic. Olivier and Guthrie talked to Ernest Jones, friend of Sigmund Freud, and came away with the idea that Iago’s hatred for *Othello* was in fact based on a subconscious love for *Othello*. That Iago protests “I hate the Moor” means nothing, for he is unaware of his true emotions. Ralph Richardson was *Othello* in this production, but Guthrie and Olivier decided not to shock him (remember, this was 1937) by any such unconventional idea, and so, the story goes, Richardson could never quite understand what Olivier was making out of the role. (What Olivier apparently made out of it was something like this: Iago is manic because he cannot face his true feelings.) The critics, like Richardson and the general public, were in the dark, and the production was poorly reviewed. Guthrie himself later called the production “a ghastly, boring hash,” and Olivier has said that he no longer subscribes to Jones’s interpretation.

In 1964 Olivier played *Othello*, with Frank Finlay as Iago, and Maggie Smith as Desdemona, in a production directed by John Dexter. (This production was later filmed, and most of what is true of the stage production is true also of the film.) Far from suggesting that *Othello* was some sort of desert chief, Olivier emphasized the Negroid aspects, or at least the white man’s stock ideas of Negroid aspects. Thus, *Othello’s* skin was very dark, his lips were red and sensuous, and his lilting voice had something of a West Indian accent. He rolled his eyes a good deal, and he walked (barefooted and adorned with ankle bracelets) with a sensuous sway. More important (worse, some
viewers felt), was the idea behind this Othello, which was indebted to some thoughts by T. S. Eliot and F. R. Leavis. For Eliot (in an essay called “Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca,” first published in 1927) and for Leavis (in an essay first published in a journal in 1937 but more readily available, in reprinted form, in Leavis’s *The Common Pursuit*), Othello is not so much a heroic figure—the noble Moor who gains our sympathy despite the terrible deed he performs—as a fatuous simpleton, a man given to egotistical self-dramatizing. The playbill included some passages from Leavis’s essay, which the director in effect summarized when he told the cast that

Othello is a pompous, word-spinning, arrogant black general. . . . The important thing is not to accept him at his own valuation. . . . He isn’t just a righteous man who’s been wronged. He’s a man too proud to think he could ever be capable of anything as base as jealousy. When he learns he can be jealous, his character changes. The knowledge destroys him, and he goes berserk.

26 Thus, Olivier delivered “Farewell the tranquil mind” (3.3.345)—a speech customarily delivered reflectively—in a frenzy. It’s probably fair to say that the gist of the idea underlying this production is fairly odd: Othello is a barbarian with a thin veneer of civilization. Thus, the early speeches were delivered with easy confidence because Othello had no understanding of how simple and how volatile he really was. The change from civilized man to barbarian was marked by Othello tearing off a crucifix he wore, an effective enough bit of business but one at odds with two aspects of the end of Shakespeare’s play: Othello (who just before he kills Desdemona is careful to urge her to make her peace with God; “I would not kill thy soul” (5.2.32) murders Desdemona partly because he believes she has been false to the highest ideals. Second, when he comes to understand the horror of his action he executes justice upon himself. Still, although much in the conception could be faulted, it was widely agreed that Olivier’s acting was a triumph—a triumph won, among other things, at the expense of an unprepossessing Iago and a negligible Desdemona.

27 The film with Olivier (1965), directed by Stuart Burge, was made in a sound studio, using sets that were essentially those of the stage production—even for scenes set out-of-doors—but it was not simply a filmed version of what a spectator sitting in the third row center would have seen. For instance, because close-ups are used for all of Iago’s soliloquies, Iago becomes considerably more prominent in the film than he was on the stage.

28 Olivier said that the backgrounds in the film were minimal because he was concerned with “offering as little visual distraction as possible from the intentions of Shakespeare—or our performance of them.” For a film of the opposite sort, a film that does not hesitate to introduce impressive visual effects not specified in the text, one should look at Orson Welles’s *Othello*, a black and white film begun in 1951 and completed and released in 1955, with Welles in the title role. The film was shot on location, chiefly in Morocco and Venice, but what especially strikes a viewer is not that the camera gives us a strong sense of the real world, but that the camera leads us into a strange, shadowy world of unfamiliar and puzzling appearance. The film begins with Welles reading a passage from Shakespeare’s source while we see a shot of the face of the dead Othello. The camera rises above the bier, which is carried by pallbearers, and we then see Desdemona’s body, also being borne to the grave. We see the two funeral processions converge, and then we see Iago, in chains, thrust into a cage and hoisted above the crowd. From above—Iago’s viewpoint—we look down on the bodies of Othello and Desdemona. All of this is presented before we see the credits for the film. The film ends with a dissolve from the dying Othello to a shot of the funeral procession and then to shots of the fortress at Cyprus, the cage, and Venetian buildings and ships.
Between this highly cinematic beginning and ending, other liberties are taken with the text. The murder of Roderigo, for instance, is set in a steamy bathhouse. Welles had intended to shoot the scene in a street, but because he had run out of money and didn’t have costumes, he set it in a steam bath, where a few towels were all the clothing that was needed. In short, Welles’s Othello is not for the Shakespeare purist (too much is cut and too much is added), but it is imaginative and it often works. Admirers will want to see also Filming “Othello,” a film memoir (1978) in which Welles and others discuss the work.

29 The BBC television version of Othello, directed by Jonathan Miller and released in 1981, is, like Olivier’s film, somewhat in the Eliot-Leavis tradition. In the introduction to the printed text of the BBC version, Miller says that the play does not set forth “the spectacle of a person of grandeur falling.” Rather, what’s interesting is that it’s not the fall of the great but the disintegration of the ordinary, of the representative character. It’s the very ordinariness of Othello that makes the story intolerable.

30 Miller is insistent, too, that the play is not about race. “I do not see the play as being about color but as being about jealousy—which is something we are all vulnerable to.” In line with this emphasis on the ordinary, Othello (Anthony Hopkins) is relatively unheroic, though he is scarcely as commonplace as Miller suggests, since he is full of energy and rage. More successful is Iago (Bob Hoskins), a bullet-headed hood who delights in Othello’s anguish. The sets, in order to reduce any sense of heroism or romance, are emphatically domestic; no effort was made to take advantage of the camera’s ability to record expansive space. Interestingly, however, the domestic images on the screen are by no means ordinary; notably beautiful, they often remind us of Vermeer.

31 During the course of this survey it has been easy to notice racist implications in the remarks of certain actors and critics. And it was racism, of course, that kept blacks from acting in Othello and in other plays) along with whites. One point that has not been raised till now is this: Does it matter if a black plays Othello? When Robeson played the part, some theatergoers found that the play made more sense than ever before, partly because Robeson (whatever his limitations as an actor) was a black. Others found that it was distracting for a black to play the part; it brought into the world of Othello irrelevant issues of twentieth-century America. Jonathan Miller, holding the second position, puts it thus:

When a black actor does the part, it offsets the play, puts it out of balance. It makes it a play about blackness, which it is not. . . . The trouble is, the play was hijacked for political purposes.

32 Many things can be said against this view, for instance that when the white actor Olivier played Othello he expended so much energy impersonating a black that a spectator was far more conscious of the performer’s blackness than one is of, say, James Earl Jones’s. In any case, Miller has not said the last word on this topic, which will continue to be debated.

Bibliographic Note: For a modern edition of Othello prefaced with a long stage history, and equipped with abundant footnotes telling how various actors delivered particular lines, see Julie Hankey, Othello (1987), a volume in a series entitled Plays in Performance.

**After Reading**

3. You have explored multiple Critical perspectives in the framework of a historical view of Othello. Answer the following two questions in a quickwrite and then with your discussion group or acting company.

- Which critical perspective offers a lens most applicable to a modern audience? Why?
- How will you present the character of Othello in light of this critical perspective?

**Check Your Understanding**

Sylvan Barnet’s review pointed out that observers of one production noted “the director’s presence was too strongly felt.” What is the proper role of a director in a performance? How can you use this information to guide your staging of a scene from Othello?

**INDEPENDENT READING LINK**

Think about the reading you are doing independently. Jot a few notes in your Reader/Writer Notebook about which critical perspective you think would best illuminate your reading, and why.
Assignment
Your assignment is to construct an argumentative essay that defends the critical lens that you feel provides modern society with the most compelling view of literature (choose among Historical, Cultural, or Feminist for this assignment). You will support the claim with valid reasoning and with relevant and sufficient evidence from your reading and observations.

Planning and Prewriting: Take time to plan ideas and structure.
- How will you evaluate the different critical perspectives and select the one you feel works best?
- How will you go about collecting textual evidence that supports your position?
- What sorts of tools will you use to record your ideas and structure the essay (for instance, an outline, a graphic organizer)?

Drafting: Select evidence to support your claim and to acknowledge and address counterclaims.
- How can you state your claim as a single thesis statement so that it functions as the controlling idea of your argument?
- How will you use the evidence you selected to support your claims and clarify your thinking?
- Will you consider addressing counterclaims that would be in opposition to your position?
- How can you conclude your work in a way that follows naturally from the argument presented while avoiding unnecessary repetition?

Evaluating and Revising: Get feedback from peers and revise to improve structure, transitions, and coherence.
- How will you make sure that the evidence you include clearly and consistently supports your position?
- How will you make sure you avoid oversimplifying the critical perspective you are supporting or oversimplifying competing perspectives (for instance, “from a Feminist critical perspective, all men are bad”)?
- What kinds of feedback from peers and the Scoring Guide can you use to guide your revision?

Checking and Editing for Publication: Make your work the best it can be.
- How will you ensure that your essay maintains an academic, formal tone; that it seamlessly embeds quotations within the text; and that it uses varied syntax?
- How will you check for grammatical and technical accuracy?
- What sort of outside resources can help you to check your draft?

Reflection
After completing this Embedded Assessment, think about how you went about accomplishing this assignment, and respond to the following:
- How were you able to consider your audience when crafting your argument, anticipating what information they would need, and what potential questions or objections they might have?
## SCORING GUIDE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scoring Criteria</th>
<th>Exemplary</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
<th>Emerging</th>
<th>Incomplete</th>
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</table>
| **Ideas**        | The essay • asserts a strong position and includes apt, specific references to support the argument  
• offers an insightful and thorough analysis of the chosen critical perspective  
• demonstrates a sophisticated understanding of the complexity of the perspective. | The essay • provides a sustained, competent position supported by specific references that advance the argument  
• offers a reasonable analysis of the chosen critical perspective  
• demonstrates an adequate understanding of the complexity of the perspective.                           | The essay • struggles to articulate a convincing position, often relying on summary or paraphrase instead of specific evidence  
• offers a less than thorough understanding of the task and an inadequate treatment of the chosen critical perspective  
• overlooks or understates the complexity of the perspective.                                           | The essay • does not articulate a convincing position, often relying on summary or paraphrase instead of specific evidence  
• offers a weak understanding of the task and an inadequate treatment of the chosen critical perspective  
• does not address the complexity of the perspective.                                                 |
| **Structure**    | The essay • is organized exceptionally, so that ideas move smoothly  
• uses transitions effectively to enhance the essay’s coherence. | The essay • has an organization that is clear and easy to follow  
• includes transitions that help readers move between ideas.                                                               | The essay • is difficult to follow and may jump too rapidly between ideas  
• lacks transitions between ideas.                                                                   | The essay • is confusing and difficult to follow, moving back and forth among different ideas  
• lacks transitions between ideas.                                                                 |
| **Use of Language** | The essay • uses diction, syntax, and other stylistic devices that are notable and appropriate for the subject, purpose, and audience  
• demonstrates command of standard English conventions, with few or no errors.  | The essay • uses diction, syntax, and stylistic devices that are appropriate for the subject, purpose, and audience  
• contains few errors in standard writing conventions; minor errors do not interfere with meaning. | The essay • uses diction, syntax, and stylistic devices ineffectively for the subject, purpose, and audience  
• contains errors in standard writing conventions that seriously interfere with meaning.             | The essay • uses diction, syntax, and stylistic devices inappropriately for the subject, purpose, and audience  
• contains numerous errors in standard writing conventions that seriously interfere with meaning.  |

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LEARNING STRATEGIES:
Activating Prior Knowledge, Visualizing, Graphic Organizer, Rehearsing

Learning Targets
• Reflect on key concepts and analyze and identify skills and knowledge needed to complete Embedded Assessment 2 successfully.
• Determine the theme of a play from its dramatic structure.
• Apply theatrical elements to a performance to reveal theme and reflect a critical perspective.

Making Connections
Think about the events in *Othello* and how you might perform them. In this part of the unit, you will deliver a dramatic interpretation of a scene from *Othello*. Staging a scene will make the play come alive for you and your classmates.

Essential Questions
Review your answers to the essential questions based on your current knowledge.
1. What role does literature play in the examination of recurring social issues?

2. How can a dramatic performance reflect a critical perspective?

Developing Vocabulary
Review the vocabulary you have studied so far in this unit. Which terms need further development?

Unpacking Embedded Assessment 2
Closely read the assignment for Embedded Assessment 2: Staging an Interpretation.

Your assignment is to interpret a scene from *Othello* using one of the critical perspectives you have studied and then plan, rehearse, and perform the scene.

With your classmates, identify the skills and knowledge you will need to complete this assessment successfully.

Staging a Dramatic Scene
3. What do you know about the dramatic structure of a play? Share your ideas about this term with a partner.

4. How would you map the events of *Othello*? Think back to the events that took us from Othello, the outsider yet noble husband, to the triumph of “honest Iago” to the tragic ending. Plot the key events with your acting company. Be prepared to share your visual with the class.
Digging In—The 3 × 3

Knowing what happens in a literary work is where the real fun begins. What is the author trying to say through the dramatic structure? Sometimes determining theme of a work is easier when you simplify your understanding of the plot. Suppose you were to wrap up the plot of Othello in as few as nine words (three 3-word sentences). For Romeo and Juliet, a literal 3 × 3 might look like this:

- Montague loves Capulet.
- Feud complicates love.
- Miscommunication brings death.

In order to derive theme from the literal events, let’s substitute thematic ideas for the specific ones in the previous 3 × 3.

- Adolescents defy boundaries.
- Emotions go unchecked.
- Interference complicates reality.

Our “literary 3 × 3” now leads us to some general truths about life. What is Shakespeare saying about the unchecked emotions of adolescence? Or of the unchecked emotions of adults engaged in an ancient quarrel? Could we also safely infer from the text that adults’ interference in the lives of young people invites—rather than prevents—complications that are a natural part of growing up?

5. Work with your acting company to “wrap up” the dramatic structure of Othello in a literal 3 × 3.

6. Write your class’s combined “best” below.

7. Now move from the literal to capture the themes at work in Othello in a literary 3 × 3.

8. Write a thematic statement from your 3 × 3 in the space below.
Make It Work for You

9. Keeping in mind the theme that you identified from your work with $3 \times 3$s, now consider your assigned scene for Embedded Assessment 2: Staging an Interpretation. Where does your scene fit in the dramatic structure of the play? Revisit your dramatic structure visual at the beginning of this activity, and plot it on your “map.”

10. How does your acting company’s scene connect to the theme of the work? Explain the relationship in a quickwrite.

11. How can you apply a critical perspective to the scene? Considering the scene’s place in the dramatic structure and its connection to a theme of the work as a whole, what are some lenses through which you can view the scene? Use the three below, and add any others that offer a suitable lens for viewing the scene.
   - Marxist—
   - Cultural—
   - Feminist—

12. As an acting company, come to an agreement about the critical perspective that offers the most engaging interpretation of the scene for a staged performance.
13. Now it's time to consider how to make each character’s vocal delivery, the set, staging, and blocking of the scene reflect the critical perspective in a performance. Use the graphic organizer below to plan your presentation. Use the additional rows for other categories/characters.

**Scene:**

**Connection to Theme:**

**Critical Perspective:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Description of Desired Effect</th>
<th>Steps to Take to Create This Effect (How will the character deliver lines? What kind of lighting/music will create the effect? How will the movement on stage enhance the effect?)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The set</td>
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<td>Character 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
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Make Final Preparations

14. Print your script, and annotate the scene for your vocal delivery, gestures, and movement. Rehearse your scene, and accept constructive criticism from your director to help you convey a convincing performance. Be sure to keep in mind the critical perspective you are applying to the scene, and adjust your character’s performance to reflect the appropriate role in light of that interpretation.

Review the Assignment, Steps, and Scoring Guide from Embedded Assessment 2 with your acting company to ensure that you are fully prepared for your performance.
Learning Targets

• Analyze the contents and format of a playbill.
• Contribute to and help produce a performance guide for a staged performance.

Planning a Playbill

1. What kind of information have you seen in a playbill for a theatre performance? Consider the types of information you would expect to find within a playbill.

2. Your teacher will share samples of a playbill. With your acting company, skim/scan the contents. Make a list of the items you see included in its contents, in order. As you make your observations, discuss the possible reasons the creator of the playbill chose to include the information and place it accordingly.

3. Playbills generally include the background and acting experience of the performers. Take the time to closely read a description of a cast member. What kind of information is included? What point of view is used in the description?

4. Next look at the graphics and/or artwork incorporated in the playbill. What images from the play did the artist choose to represent? Why?

5. If you have more than one playbill, what differences do you notice in design, artwork, and copy (text)? What does each playbill reveal about the performance’s context? If you were to choose one of the performances to attend, which would it be? Why?

6. How are advertisements incorporated in the playbill?
7. Your group is responsible for creating a playbill to accompany your performance of *Othello*. Your playbill should enhance your performance and your audience’s understanding of the critical perspective that informs your interpretation. Imitate the playbills you viewed in class to guide your content and structure.

As you design your playbill, be sure to:

- Include a creative design with the artwork, graphics, and advertisements presented.
- Adhere to the message and literary theory pursued through the staged performance.
- Use a computer program to produce a visually appealing and technically sound publication.

Share the responsibilities of designing the playbill. To ensure that everyone equally participates, make a comprehensive list of the tasks to be completed, and assign an individual to each task.
Assignment
Your assignment is to interpret a scene from *Othello* using one of the critical perspectives you have studied and then plan, rehearse, and perform the scene.

Planning and Prewriting: Take time to plan ideas and the structure of your scene.
- How will you determine which one of the critical perspectives will best apply to your scene?
- How can your acting company bring to life the critical perspective you’ve chosen?
- How will you divide the various tasks between group members?

Drafting: Create all elements needed for an effective performance.
- How can you integrate theatrical elements into your scene?
- What changes do you need to make to your scene (delete or change lines, alter the setting or gender of characters) in order to apply your selected critical perspective?
- How can you ensure that the group works successfully to maintain its purpose and achieve its goals?

Evaluating and Revising: Obtain feedback and revise to make your work the best it can be.
- How can you use practice and rehearsal to prepare and evaluate your presentation (videotape a rehearsal, ask another group to provide feedback)?
- How can you use the Scoring Guide as a resource to evaluate your draft?

Checking and Editing for Performance: Polish your written materials and your vocal delivery.
- How will you check for grammatical and technical accuracy in your written materials?
- Are you prepared to provide feedback to other acting companies as well as to accept constructive criticism for your own performance?

Reflection
After completing this Embedded Assessment, think about how you went about accomplishing this assignment, and respond to the following:
- The goal of applying a critical perspective to a text is to bring out a new, deeper understanding of the work. How did you manage the challenge of making changes to your scene in order to highlight the chosen critical perspectives without completely altering the scene’s original meaning?
## SCORING GUIDE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scoring Criteria</th>
<th>Exemplary</th>
<th>Proficient</th>
<th>Emerging</th>
<th>Incomplete</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ideas</strong></td>
<td>The interpretation reveals an insightful analysis and mature understanding of the scene.</td>
<td>The interpretation demonstrates clear analysis and understanding of the scene.</td>
<td>The interpretation reveals a limited analysis or understanding of the scene.</td>
<td>The interpretation reveals little analysis or understanding of the scene.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• insightfully interprets the scene and applies the critical perspective.</td>
<td>• plausibly interprets the scene and applies the critical perspective.</td>
<td>• attempts to interpret the scene but does not successfully apply a critical perspective.</td>
<td>• attempts to interpret the scene but does not successfully apply a critical perspective.</td>
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<td>• clearly communicates the intended effect to the audience.</td>
<td>• communicates the intended effect to the audience.</td>
<td>• inadequately communicates the intended effect to the audience.</td>
<td>• does not communicate the intended effect to the audience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• includes a reflection showing a thorough analysis of the entire process.</td>
<td>• includes a reflection demonstrating adequate analysis of the process.</td>
<td>• includes a reflection demonstrating inadequate analysis of the process.</td>
<td>• does not include a reflection analyzing the process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Structure</strong></td>
<td>The interpretation provides a polished performance that skillfully uses theatrical elements and effective vocal delivery.</td>
<td>The interpretation provides a good performance that uses adequate theatrical elements and vocal delivery.</td>
<td>The interpretation offers a confusing and disorganized scene with no theatrical elements and vocal delivery that detracts from the quality of the scene.</td>
<td>The interpretation offers a confusing and disorganized scene with no theatrical elements and vocal delivery that detracts from the performance.</td>
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<td>• demonstrates equal sharing of responsibility.</td>
<td>• demonstrates mostly balanced sharing of responsibility.</td>
<td>• demonstrates an unequal division of responsibilities.</td>
<td>• demonstrates an unequal division of responsibilities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Use of Language</strong></td>
<td>The interpretation includes written materials that demonstrate a mature style that advances the group’s ideas.</td>
<td>The interpretation includes written materials that demonstrate a style that adequately supports the group’s ideas.</td>
<td>The interpretation includes little or no written materials to support the group’s ideas.</td>
<td>The interpretation includes little or no written materials to support the group’s ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• demonstrates command of oral and written English, with few or no errors.</td>
<td>• demonstrates good usage of oral and written English, with few errors.</td>
<td>• uses inappropriate oral and written language and with serious errors that interfere with meaning.</td>
<td>• uses inappropriate oral and written language and with serious errors that interfere with meaning.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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