

✕ Refers to links on www.crossref-it.info

Othello: (d) The role of women

- ❖ **Lesson focus:** To explore the presentation of the play's female characters, and possible responses to them.
- ❖ **Opening exercise:** Write on the board the sentence starters 'Women are...' and 'Women can...'. Ask students to complete the sentences in as many ways as they can think of (Google searches provides some amusing conclusions to the sentences!)
 - Share ideas in groups (and laugh!)
 - Consider: how might someone at the time of Shakespeare have completed those sentences differently?
 - What assumptions about the role and nature of women have changed since the writing of *Othello*?
 - For the useful historical information it contains, at this stage it would be worth sharing the first part of [✕ Othello > Themes in Othello > Men and women](#)
- ❖ **Textual examination:** Distribute **Student worksheet d)i The role of women** (ideally enlarged to A3). Allocate characters (Desdemona, Emilia, and Bianca) to pairs/groups of students, who are to research the characters, their key scenes and quotations spoken by/about them, and consider audience responses. They might find it helpful to read:
 - [✕ Othello > Othello: Characterisation > Desdemona, the innocent](#)
 - [✕ Othello > Othello: Characterisation > Ill-treated women - Emilia](#)
 - [✕ Othello > Othello: Characterisation > Ill-treated women - Bianca](#)
 - Feed back points so that all students can complete their tables
 - Discuss: What are the main similarities and differences between the women?
 - What qualities and challenges do they have in common?
- ❖ **Discussion ideas:** Create a continuum line across the classroom, from 1 (agree) to 10 (disagree). Read out the statements from **Student worksheet d)ii Female character assessments**, with students moving to the appropriate place. Ask them to justify their positions.
 - [✕ Othello > Themes in Othello > Men and women](#)
- ❖ **Recreative task:** We hear least from Bianca. She is dismissed and insulted by the other characters (including Emilia) for being an impure woman. Yet Cassio, who is having a casual relationship with her, escapes any criticism.
 - Write a soliloquy for Bianca, including her thoughts on:
 - Her feelings towards Cassio, and her hopes and fears for their relationship
 - How she feels about the way she is treated by the other characters
 - Why she lives the lifestyle she does (you will need to make up details)
 - [✕ Othello > Characterisation > Ill-treated women - Bianca](#)
- ❖ **Critical task:** Plan and/or write an essay addressing the following:
 - 'In *Othello*, Shakespeare draws the audience's attention to the difficulties experienced by women across the social strata.' Explore the extent to which Shakespeare uses the play as a vehicle for his message about the ill-treatment of women.
 - [✕ Othello > themes in Othello > men and women](#)
 - [✕ Othello > Critical approaches to Othello > Feminist interpretations](#)
- ❖ **Extension task:** Research how feminists have responded to the presentation of the female characters in *Othello*.
 - [✕ Othello > Critical approaches to Othello > Feminist interpretations](#)
 - Does Shakespeare present female characters in a sympathetic light in his other plays?