

# Act 4: wronged wives



This sample project links to the listen live/download audio clip

## Essentials

Update your character profiles.

Update your list of Iago's motives for destroying Othello, Cassio and Desdemona (worksheet 2a).

Update your lists of language and imagery that relates to:

- Racism
- Sexism
- Ageism
- Beasts or animals
- Sexuality and sexual activity
- Class
- The Bible and theology
- Othello's reliance on Iago to be his eyes
- Music and harmony

Be sure to note the intention of the language or image. If you list a quotation remember to include who said it, about whom, what they meant, and why.



*If your students have heard or read Cinthio's The Wicked Ensign they could also begin to make notes about where Cinthio and Shakespeare's version of events differs. See worksheet 14b.*

Discuss in class or makes notes on the similarities and differences between Desdemona and Emilia in relation to the following:

- Are they naive, if so why?
- Are they at all streetwise?
- Have they been duped by their husbands?
- Are they victims of a patriarchal society?

Level 1

Level 2

Level 3



How effective is Desdemona's song at this point in the play?

- What do the lyrics mean and how does it make you feel? (Worksheet 11a includes the lyrics.)
- How does it compare to Iago's earlier songs?



*You many need to remind the class of Iago's drinking songs in Act 2 Scene 3.*



# Act 4: wronged wives



Research the issues facing Shakespeare and his contemporaries in creating female roles for the stage.

- Make notes on your findings and assess how well crafted you consider Shakespeare's female characters to be.



What does Emilia mean when she says that women have 'desires for sport, and frailty, as men have'? Using evidence from the text (excerpt on worksheet 11b) make notes about:

- Emilia's language and intent
- The differences between women and men in the world of the play

From your understanding of Shakespeare's society do you agree with Emilia's assessment of men and women?

Level 1

Level 2



Write a promotional paragraph that summarises the key messages of a guide to successful relationships. Produce two versions – for couples in Shakespeare's day and modern day.

Each should include:

- Advice and tips on how to create and maintain a good relationship
- How to tackle problems and issues within a relationship
- The key to happiness – how to treat one another



*As an extension to the task students could identify and present the differences between the two as a written exercise or class discussion.*



Divide the class into groups to devise a scene that follows a different turn of events, in which Desdemona has refused her husband's order to go to bed and has instead gone out with Emilia.

The scene's creators and performers should consider:

- Whether to set the scene in modern day or Shakespeare's day – what are the challenges for each?
- The setting – where would they go to talk?
- The language Desdemona uses to describe her own and Othello's attitudes
- Emilia's reaction and response – remember, Desdemona is her employer



When Queen Elizabeth I came to the throne in 1558 she was under much pressure to marry.

Research and make notes on:

- Why the Queen's marital status was considered so important
- What marriage meant for everyday women during her reign
- Acceptable and unacceptable roles in society for women



# Act 4: wronged wives

Level 2

Level 3



Write a short report to analyse Desdemona's response to the idea of women committing adultery (text excerpt on worksheet 11b). Consider:

- Is she naive, distanced from the real world, and closed off to hearing the truth about life?
- How and why is her opinion so fundamentally different to Emilia's?

## Extensions



Does Shakespeare portray women as underdogs in this scene to reflect society or to comment upon it? Write a short report, using references from the text, to support your opinion.



Varying degrees of sexual inequality still exist in the modern world.

Research societies in which women are clearly treated as inferior to men. Make notes on:

- Why women continue to be kept down and held back
- Examples of how they are unfairly or even cruelly treated
- Traditional beliefs that are used to justify the situation

Make notes on aspects of modern society in which women often have to work harder than men to achieve recognition in the home, the workplace and education. Consider:

- Why the situation continues
- Examples of unfair treatment
- Traditional beliefs that are used to justify the situation

Are there commonalities between the more and less extreme examples of inequality?

## Essay

'In *Othello*, Shakespeare presents women as victims of men.' How far does your reading of the play support this view?

Discuss Othello's relationship with Desdemona. Does he truly love her?

