

The Rep
MILWAUKEE

April 3 – May 6, 2012

Shakespeare's timeless tragedy
in a stunning new light.

Othello

By William Shakespeare

Directed by Mark Clements

William
The Rep
MILWAUKEE
Shakespeare

Study
Guide

Othello

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**MILWAUKEE REPERTORY
THEATER**
108 E. Wells Street
Milwaukee, WI • 53202



OTHELLO STUDY GUIDE

Milwaukee Repertory Theater presents

Othello

April 3 – May 6, 2012

Quadracci Powerhouse

By William Shakespeare

Directed by Artistic Director Mark Clements

“*Othello* is a play that I have wanted to do for a very long time. Shakespeare was the greatest writer of his time and nobody has eclipsed his skills, I believe, in over 400 years. His plays still tell the greatest stories and influence modern movies and plays we see today. *Othello* is one such story that explores the human condition of jealousy. It is a thriller that will be set with a very contemporary feel, making Shakespeare’s text live for today.”

-Mark Clements, Artistic Director



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Othello in the World of Motorcycle Clubs

By Leda Hoffmann, Education Coordinator, based on Director Mark Clements' comments at first rehearsal



Lindsay Smiling and Gerard Neugent in The Rep's production of *Othello*. Photo by Michael Brosilow.

Written over 400 years ago, *Othello*'s exploration of love, jealousy, and power remains incredibly relevant to society. *Othello* is often approached as a play about race. It is that, but it is also a great exploration of jealousy, entitlement, and friendship. Almost twenty years ago, Milwaukee Repertory Theater Artistic Director Mark Clements had the idea to set *Othello* in the midst of a motorcycle club.

The world of motorcycle clubs is extremely compatible with the Venetian setting of Shakespeare's play. The self-governing hierarchy and political structure found in motorcycle clubs is virtually indistinguishable from those found in Shakespeare's original text.



A motorcycle club member.

Shakespeare wrote a play about soldiers, relationships, and men with a sense of entitlement. The audience engages with these characters from a social and emotional point of view. The feelings of Othello, Iago, and Desdemona are no different now than they were when Shakespeare first wrote the story.

Central to *Othello* is a rigid code of honor and a deep sense of betrayal when the people you love break that code. That code is also central to the brotherhood of motorcycle clubs. Betrayal happens in many forms in *Othello* – Iago feeling betrayed that Othello looked him over for a promotion, Othello's belief that his wife betrayed him, and Iago's betrayal of Othello's trust, among others.

The sense of rage at betrayal is a universal human emotion. Entitlement gives people the desire to strike back at an injustice that has been done to them. In *Othello*, once you are in, you cannot go back. Iago's rage starts something and then it just keeps going. Like many outlaw motorcycle clubs, once you are in, you cannot get out.

While Milwaukee Repertory Theater's production takes place in a contemporary setting, it maintains Shakespeare's original language and poetry. These words tell an extraordinary and timeless tale about the lengths to which people are driven by jealousy to their own version of justice.

SYNOPSIS

As the play begins, Othello, a Moorish Venetian leader, secretly marries Desdemona, the daughter of Brabantio, a Venetian leader. Othello's ancient, Iago, is upset that Othello overlooked him and promoted Cassio to lieutenant instead. Iago convinces Roderigo, a wealthy man in love with Desdemona, to tell her father about the secret wedding.

Furious, Brabantio goes to the Venetian council and accuses Othello of bewitching his daughter. However, when Desdemona arrives, she tells the group that she fell in love with Othello and willingly married him. The Duke of Venice dismisses Brabantio's claim and instructs Othello to lead the fight against the Turks in Cyprus. Desdemona begs the council to let her go to Cyprus as well. She is granted permission and Iago, with his wife Emilia, is appointed to watch over her.



Reese Madigan as Cassio and Gerard Neugent as Iago.
Photo by Michael Brosilow.

In Cyprus, the Venetians defeat the Turks and Othello calls for a celebration. At the party, Iago gets Cassio drunk and encourages Roderigo to pick a fight with him. A brawl ensues, and when Othello arrives and hears of the fight, he strips Cassio of his lieutenant rank. Iago plots to make Othello think that his wife has been unfaithful to him with Cassio. He convinces Cassio to beg Desdemona to help him win Othello's favor.

Cassio talks to Desdemona, but leaves when he sees Othello coming. Iago uses this action to remark that Cassio was stealing away like he was guilty. Later, Iago tells Othello that he does not trust Cassio and Desdemona, planting the seed of jealousy in Othello's mind.

Desdemona loses the handkerchief that was Othello's first present to her, and Emilia finds it and gives it to Iago. Iago puts the handkerchief in Cassio's room and tells Othello that Desdemona gave the handkerchief to Cassio. Trusting Iago, Othello makes him his lieutenant.

Useful Terms

Moor: In Shakespeare's time, Moor referred to someone of African descent. The term originally referred to a native of Mauretania in North Africa, but could also be applied to anyone with dark skin.

Lieutenant: The rank Cassio has been given. He is second in command to Othello.

Ancient: Iago's rank. He is third in command to Othello.

When Othello asks Desdemona to give him the handkerchief, she does not have it. Later, Cassio gives the handkerchief to his mistress, Bianca, not knowing that it belongs to Desdemona. As Iago continues to encourage Othello's jealousy, Othello has an epileptic fit.

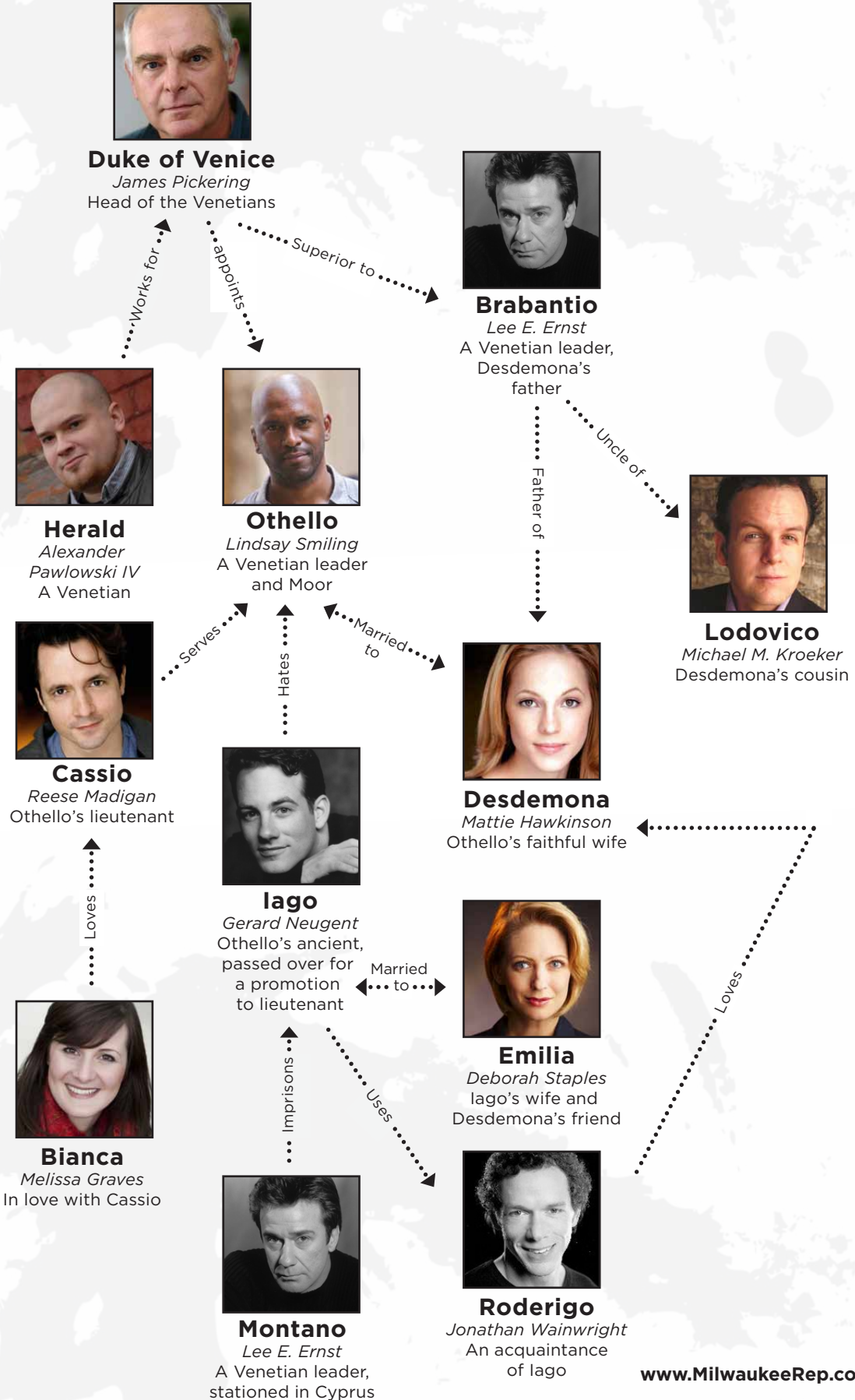
Iago talks to Cassio about Bianca where Othello can hear him and makes him think that Cassio is talking about Desdemona. When Bianca enters and gives Cassio back the handkerchief, Othello is convinced of Desdemona's guilt. Othello plots to kill Desdemona, and Iago says he will kill Cassio. That night, Desdemona goes to bed knowing that Othello thinks she is unfaithful, but believing in her husband's ability to know the truth.

The plot unfolds as Roderigo attacks Cassio, and Cassio stabs Roderigo. In the dark, Iago secretly slices Cassio's leg and kills Roderigo.

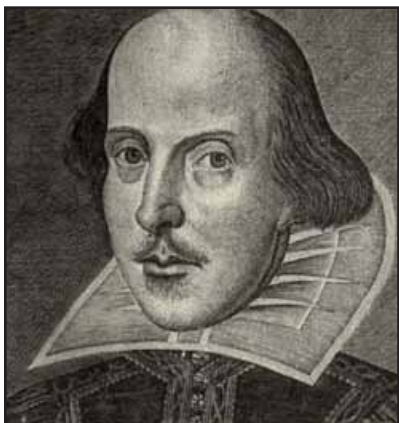
Desdemona is asleep when Othello comes in to murder her. He kisses her, and when she wakes up, he strangles her. Emilia enters to discover Desdemona dead. Othello tells Emilia that Iago told him that Desdemona

was unfaithful. The Venetian men enter when they hear Emilia's cries, and as she learns of the handkerchief plot, she tells the men that Iago got the handkerchief from her and must have planted it in Cassio's room. Iago kills Emilia, Othello kills himself, and Iago is arrested.

CHARACTERS



WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE



William Shakespeare

William Shakespeare is considered to be one of the greatest playwrights of the English language. His surviving work includes 38 plays, 154 sonnets, and two narrative poems. Little is known of Shakespeare's childhood, but church records indicate that he was baptized on April 26th, 1564, in Stratford-upon-Avon, England. Scholars assume that Shakespeare attended grammar school in Stratford, where he would have studied Latin and read classical authors. At the age of 18, he married Anne Hathaway, and the couple had three children – Susanna, Hamnet, and Judith.

The first mention of Shakespeare working as a playwright in London is in a 1592 pamphlet in which poet and playwright Robert Greene attacked him as an “upstart crow.” In 1594, Shakespeare was the principal writer for the Lord Chamberlain's Men, an acting troupe in London. Shakespeare's plays were performed exclusively by the troupe, which was composed entirely of men. The Lord Chamberlain's Men built their own theater in 1599, the Globe Theater, on the south bank of the Thames River outside London.

With Queen Elizabeth I's death and King James I's ascension to the throne, Shakespeare's company was awarded a royal patent and became the King's Men. As the Lord Chamberlain's Men and the King's Men, Shakespeare's company produced at least 38 different plays at the Globe Theater and at court.

Shakespeare retired to Stratford around 1613 and died in 1616 at the age of 52. Much of his work survives because two of his colleagues printed a collection of his plays (now referred to as the First Folio). The fact that his plays were printed is testament to the respect that Shakespeare's contemporaries had for him.



Panorama of London, England during the time of Shakespeare.

▣ Shakespeare Resources For Students

Absolute Shakespeare

<http://absoluteshakespeare.com/>

Character analysis, plot summary and helpful information about all of Shakespeare's plays

Royal Shakespeare Company

www.rsc.org.uk/education/resources

Information on the social and historical context of Shakespeare's plays

MIT Online Shakespeare

<http://shakespeare.mit.edu/othello/full.html>

Entire texts of all of Shakespeare's plays

▣ Shakespeare Resources For Teachers

Folger Shakespeare Library

www.folger.edu/

Lesson plans and further resources for K-12 teachers

The National Endowment for the Humanities

<http://edsitement.neh.gov>

Lessons plans and tips on teaching *Othello*

THEMES

“Delving into this play, I have found that *Othello* is one of Shakespeare’s most relatable stories for a modern audience. The themes of **love**, **jealousy** and **power** are at the heart of this text. Although epic in scale, *Othello* is essentially a domestic drama, devoid of the numerous subplots found in many of Shakespeare’s other plays. It hits at the core of humanity, the brutality of man, and the potential for that brutality.” -Mark Clements, Artistic Director and Director of *Othello*

LOVE

At its core, *Othello* is a love story. It begins with the secret marriage of Othello and Desdemona. Desdemona’s love of her husband makes her trusting and faithful until the very end, and Othello’s love of his wife makes him lose his mind when he believes her to be unfaithful.



Questions

- In what ways is love a force of good in *Othello*? How does it cause negative actions?
- Desdemona goes against her father to marry the man she loves. Is she right in doing this?
- *Othello* is not just a story of romantic love. What other forms of love exist in the play?

**“Speak of me as I am;
nothing extenuate,
Nor set down aught in malice:
then must you speak
Of one that loved not
wisely but too well.”**

-Othello, Act 5, Scene 2

JEALOUSY

Othello explores how jealousy can be fueled by rumors. Othello is convinced that his wife is unfaithful based on circumstantial evidence and Iago’s manipulation. Jealousy over Cassio’s promotion to lieutenant is the source of Iago’s hatred. Both romantically and professionally, jealousy destroys the characters of this story.



Questions

- What language does Shakespeare use to describe jealousy? What are the common metaphors?
- Does this play portray jealousy as unreasonable? Is jealousy sometimes reasonable?
- Why is jealousy such a strong emotion?

**“O, beware, my lord,
of jealousy;
It is the green-ey’d
monster,
which doth mock
The meat it feeds on.”**

-Iago, Act 3, Scene 3

Gerard Neugent. Photo: Michael Brosilow.

POWER

Positions of power are central to *Othello*. Iago feels entitled to the position of lieutenant and when Cassio is promoted over Iago, Iago seeks revenge. Iago, powerless in respect to rank, becomes the most powerful person in the play, gaining people’s trust and confidence and using them for his own gain. Women in *Othello* have very little official power but are also able to use their influence and information to gain power.



Questions

- How are positions of power used in *Othello*?
- What are the ways people of lower status gain power?
- What is the place of women in *Othello*? How would the story be different if women had a greater role in decision-making?

**“Thou hast not half that
power to do me harm
As I have to be hurt.”**

-Emilia, Act 5, Scene 2

PERFORMANCE HISTORY OF *OTHELLO*



A sketch of the Swan Theatre, circa 1595.

1604 London

Othello was first performed at Whitehall Palace in London, and then in 1610 at The Globe

1943 New York

Paul Robeson as Othello, Uta Hagen as Desdemona, Jose Ferrer as Iago. This was the first production in America to feature a black actor playing Othello in a all-white cast and holds the record for the most performances of any Shakespeare play on Broadway.



Uta Hagen and Paul Robeson

1952 Film

Orson Welles' film, *The Tragedy of Othello: The Moor of Venice*, was done as a black and white Film Noire piece



Orson Wells and Suzanne Cloutier

1964 London

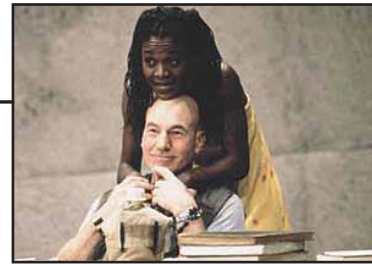
Royal National Theatre with Laurence Olivier as Othello and Maggie Smith as Desdemona; the next year the production was produced for the screen.



Laurence Olivier and Maggie Smith

1997 Washington, DC

Patrick Stewart took the role of Othello with the Shakespeare Theatre Company as a white Othello in an all black cast.



Patrice Johnson and Patrick Stewart

2001 Film

O is a retelling of *Othello* set in a high school with Mekhi Phifer, Josh Hartnett, and Julia Stiles.



Mekhi Phifer and Josh Hartnett

2004 Spring Green, Wisconsin

American Players Theatre's outdoor production



James DeVita and Tracy Michelle Arnold

2006 Film

Omikara is a Hindi retelling of *Othello* through the use of a Middle East crime syndicate.



2007 London

Ewan McGregor takes on the role of Iago opposite Chiwetel Ejiofor as *Othello*.



Chiwetel Ejiofor and Ewan McGregor

Other Theatrical and Literary Adaptations

Un Capitano Moro – Italian opera by Cinthio. Gli Hecatommithi, 1565.

Otello – Opera by Verdi, 1887. and Fortier. Routledge, 2000.

Goodnight Desdemona (Good Morning Juliet) – Play by Ann-Marie Macdonald. Coach House Press, 1990.

Desdemona: a Play About A Handkerchief – Play by Paula Vogel. Dramatists Play Service, 1994.

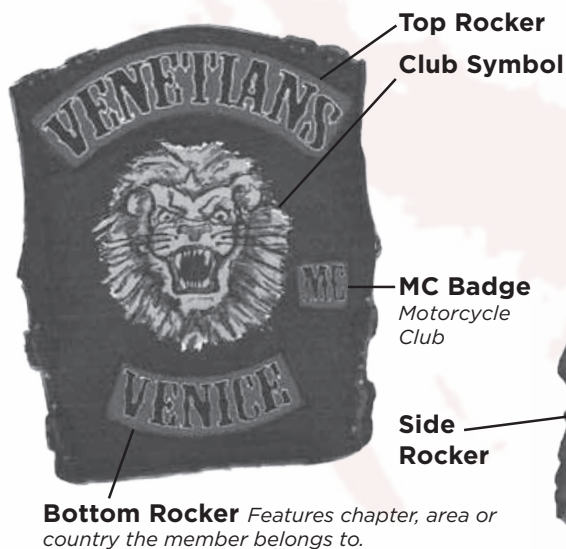
Harlem Duet – Play by Djanet Sears. Scirocco Drama, 1998.

Othello (Manga Shakespeare Series) – Text by Richard Appiganesi, art by Ryuta Osada, 2009.

MOTORCYCLE CLUBS OF *OTHELLO*

The Venetians

The club Othello and Iago belong to.



The Turks

The rival club to the Venetians.

Top Rocker

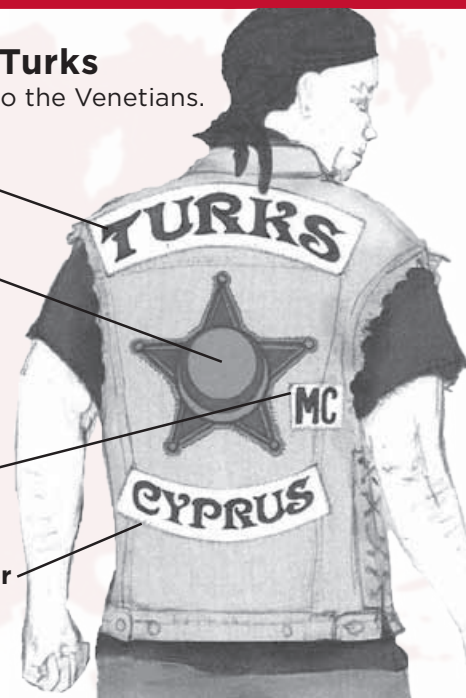
Features the club's name

Club Symbol

MC Badge

Stands for Motorcycle Club

Bottom Rocker



Some Motorcycle Club Terminology

Church: a scheduled club meeting (often weekly). The council chamber meeting in Act I is set in “Church.”

Old Lady: the wife or steady girlfriend of a club member. She’s monogamous and has the respect of the other women. Emilia is considered Iago’s “Old Lady.”

One Percenter: the term “One Percenter” rose out of the 1947 Hollister Riot in which a motorcycle rally got out of hand. Several motorcycle clubs took over the town and began drinking heavily and street racing. To combat the negative image of motorcycle clubs, the American Motorcyclist Association issued a statement that 99% of motorcycle riders are law-abiding citizens, and that it is the remaining 1% that are the problem. Many outlaw clubs took this on as their new identity, and the term “One Percenter” was born. The Venetians and the Turks are fictional One Percenter clubs.

Prospect: a person interested in joining a club who is not yet a full member. Some members of the ensemble in *Othello* are prospects. Look for the prospect badge on their vests.

Further Research

READ

Hell’s Angel: The Life and Times of Sonny Barger and the Hell’s Angels Motorcycle Club.
Barger, Sonny. William Morrow, 2000.

WATCH The following resources contain violent images.

National Geographic: *Inside Outlaw Bikers*

A documentary on the Hell’s Angels on YouTube: www.youtube.com/watch?v=r38OCWEeFnY

Sons of Anarchy

A television series based on a fictional outlaw motorcycle club on the FX Network.

CREATING THE REP PRODUCTION



The Rep
MILWAUKEE

Photo: Brian Ach. Design:
Todd Edward Ivins.

For this production, the director and design team have created a world of warring motorcycle clubs.

Creative Team

Director – Mark Clements

Set Designer – Todd Ivins

Costume Designer – Todd Ivins

Lighting Designer – Jeff Nellis

Sound Designer – Barry Funderburg

Text and Voice Coach – Gale Childs Daly

Assistant Director – JC Clementz

Set

The *Othello* set serves many locations. Pieces of scenery rotate into various playing positions, giving the set the ability to transform from an open space to a labyrinth with hiding spaces. Fitting the compounds of motorcycle clubs, the set suggests the industrial world of a warehouse. With the moving components, the space can be both epic and intimate.

Costumes

Set and Costume Designer Todd Ivins researched many existing motorcycle clubs insignia and clothing styles before designing the costumes for the Venetians and the Turks. The insignia for the Venetians uses the lion of St. Mark's, the symbol of Venice.

Light

The lighting design in *Othello* illuminates the industrial set and transforms the space for the various settings of the play. Lighting also draws the audience's eye to specific moments within larger scenes. Stylized use of highly focused lighting provides heightened emphasis to key moments.

Sound

The sound design of *Othello* uses the music of contemporary biker culture as well as original compositions by Sound Designer Barry Funderburg. The music fits the setting of the play as well as the language and rhythm of Shakespearean text. The industrial world of the set and sound also provide the framework for environmental sounds that help communicate where and when the scenes take place.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

Choose a Setting

Director Mark Clements chose motorcycle club culture as the setting of this production of *Othello*. What other settings could work? What other times and places have a similar structured hierarchy? **Choose a setting and write a summary of the play using the language of that setting.**

Adding Props and Scenery

Shakespeare's existing texts do not include numerous stage directions or instructions on the set and props for the play. Every director working on *Othello* must decide what set and props to use to tell the story. With the motorcycle club setting of *Othello*, Milwaukee Repertory Theater's production adds modern props and scenery to the play. Below is a list of elements in the Rep production. Using the synopsis on page four of this guide or a script of the play, decide and record where you would include these elements if you were directing the play.

- a cell phone
- a bonfire
- a wire (a secret microphone)
- a strobe light
- a switch blade
- a laptop
- a motorcycle
- a rifle
- a flashlight



William Shakespeare

Match the Quote with the Character from *Othello*

- | | |
|--|--------------|
| 1. Death's unnatural that kills for loving. | a. Brabantio |
| 2. We cannot all be masters, nor all masters cannot be truly followed | b. Othello |
| 3. She loved me for the dangers I had pass'd, And I loved her that she did pity them, This only is the witchcraft I have used. | c. Desdemona |
| 4. Look to her, Moor, if thou hast eyes to see:
She has deceived her father, and may thee | d. Cassio |
| 5. Speak of me as I am; nothing extenuate, Nor set down aught in malice:
then, must you speak, Of one that lov'd not wisely but too well; | e. Emilia |
| 6. Reputation, reputation, reputation! Oh, I have lost my reputation! | f. Iago |
| 7. I hold my peace, sir? no; No, I will speak as liberal as the north; Let heaven
and men and devils, let them all, All, all, cry shame against me, yet I'll speak. | g. Othello |

Answer Key: a-L 'p-g 'b/q-S 'e-7 'b/q-E 'j-z 'c-I

Education Standards

Core Reading Standards for Literature

R.8.2: Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to the characters, setting, and plot; provide an objective summary of the text.

R.8.3: Analyze how particular lines of dialogue or incidents in a story or drama propel the action, reveal aspects of a character, or provoke a decision.

R.8.7: Analyze the extent to which a filmed or live production of a story or drama stays faithful to or departs from the text or script, evaluating the choices made by the director or actors.

R.9-10.3: Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of the text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme

R.11-12.3: Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).

R.11-12.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful (include Shakespeare as well as other authors).

R.11-12.5: Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.

Wisconsin Social Studies Standards

History

B.8.10: Analyze examples of conflict, cooperation, and interdependence among groups, societies or nations

B.12.13: Analyze examples of ongoing change within and across cultures, such as the development of ancient civilizations; the rise of nation-states; and social, economic and political revolutions.

Wisconsin Theater Standards

Performance

A.8.1: Attend a live theatrical performance and be able to analyze, evaluate, and create personal meaning from the experience through small group discussion:

- SAY what they liked and didn't like, and why
- EXPLAIN what happened in the play and discuss why they think the playwright made particular choices-explain how the technical aspects of the play helped to present the message of the play
- EXPLAIN the message of the play

A.12.2: Attend a live theatrical performance and be able to explain the personal meaning derived from the experience, and also be able to analyze, evaluate, and create meaning in a broader social and cultural context in either written or oral form:

- ARTICULATE with increased understanding what they liked and didn't like and why
- EXPLAIN what happened in the play and why they think the playwright made particular choices
- EXPLAIN what happened in the play and why they think the director and actors made particular choices
- EXPLAIN how the technical aspects of the play supported the choices of the playwright, director and actors
- DESCRIBE how the audience appeared to respond to the play
- EXPLAIN the message of the play and its meaning to individuals and to society

E.8.4: Analyze a play and determine appropriate setting, lighting, costume, and make-up requirements.

E.12.5: Demonstrate in written or oral form, an increased understanding of the importance of one aspect of theatre management in the successful promotion of theatre production.

VISITING THE REP

Milwaukee Repertory Theater's Patty and Jay Baker Theater Complex is located in the Milwaukee Center downtown at the corner of Wells and Water Streets. The building was formerly the home of the Electric Railway and Light Company.

The Ticket Office is visible on the left upon entering the Wells Street doors. In the central rotunda is a large staircase which leads to The Rep's Quadracci Powerhouse theater and lobby.



Milwaukee Repertory Theater. Photo by Michael Brosilow.

THEATER ETIQUETTE

Attending the theater can be a fun experience for everyone if you observe a few simple courtesies:

- Turn off and put away all electronic devices prior to entering the theater (cell phones, iPods, games).
- Taking photographs and video recording in the theater is strictly prohibited.
- Do not place your feet on the seat in front of you.
- The actors onstage can see and hear the audience just as well as you can see and hear them. Please refrain from talking or moving around during the performance as it can be distracting to the actors as well as to other audience members.
- Feel free to respond to the action of the play through appropriate laughter and applause. The actors enjoy this type of communication from the audience!
- Have fun! Attending theater should be an enjoyable experience.



CONNECT WITH US ONLINE:

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CONTACT US:

Milwaukee Repertory Theater, Education Department at 108 E. Wells Street, Milwaukee, WI 53202
Or visit www.MilwaukeeRep.com or call 414-224-9490!

FOR QUESTIONS OR TO SCHEDULE A CLASSROOM WORKSHOP, PLEASE CONTACT:

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MPS Partnership for the Humanities

National Endowment for the Arts and Arts Midwest
Northwestern Mutual Foundation
Park Bank
The Richard and Ethel Herzfeld Foundation
Target
WE Energies

THE REP'S 2012/13 SEASON

Gutenberg!

The Musical!

Written by Scott Brown & Anthony King

August 21 – October 14

Stackner Cabaret

Assassins

Music & Lyrics by Stephen Sondheim

Book by John Weidman

Based on an idea by Charles Gilbert, Jr.

Directed by Mark Clements

September 4 – October 7

Quadracci Powerhouse

The Mountaintop

By Katori Hall

September 26 – November 4

Stiemke Studio

Blues in the Night

Written & Originally Directed by Sheldon Epps

Original Vocal Arrangements &

Musical Direction by Chapman Roberts

Orchestrations & Additional Vocal Arrangements

by Sy Johnson

October 19 – December 23

Stackner Cabaret

The Diary of Anne Frank

Dramatized by Frances Goodrich and

Albert Hackett

October 23 – December 2

Quadracci Powerhouse

Sense and Sensibility

By Jane Austen

Adapted by Mark Healy

December 11 – January 13

Quadracci Powerhouse

Mind Over Milwaukee

By Marc Salem

December 28 – February 24

Stackner Cabaret

TBD

January 16 – February 24

Stiemke Studio

Ring of Fire: The Music of Johnny Cash

Created by Richard Maltby

Conceived by William Meade

Orchestrations by Steven Bishop

and Jeff Lisenby

March 1 – May 5

Stackner Cabaret

Clybourne Park

By Bruce Norris

Directed by Mark Clements

January 29 – February 24

Quadracci Powerhouse

A Raisin In the Sun

By Lorraine Hansberry

March 12 – April 14

Quadracci Powerhouse



Patty & Jay Baker Theater Complex
MILWAUKEE REPERTORY THEATER

108 E. Wells St. | Milwaukee, WI 53202

Quadracci Powerhouse • Stiemke Studio • Stackner Cabaret

Mark Clements, Artistic Director
Dawn Helsing Wolters, Managing Director

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