

Worksheet 15 – Act 3, Scene 4: Where is the Handkerchief?

Review: Lecture 14

In the previous lecture, Prof. McRae explored the role of catharsis in *Othello*, and the moment where Othello's jealousy gains control.

- ✓ What was the definition of "catharsis", according to Aristotle?

Recall: Lecture 15

Complete this section after watching the video lecture to check how much you remember.

1. Complete the quotation by Emilia from this scene:

Emilia

But jealous souls will not be answer'd so;
They are not ever jealous for the cause,
But jealous for they are jealous: _____
_____.

Analysis

2. Make a cartoon strip, or other visual representation, of the journey of the handkerchief throughout the play. Annotate it with key quotations. Key moments are given below to help you:

- The handkerchief was woven by a witch using magical ingredients, including embalming fluid from the hearts of dead virgins.
- It is given to Othello's mother by an Egyptian who can read people's minds. She tells Othello's mother it will keep her husband faithful to her.
- On her death bed, Othello's mother passes it on to Othello, to give to his future wife.
- Othello gives the handkerchief to Desdemona as a token of his love.
- Desdemona carries the handkerchief around with her, and Emilia sees her kissing it.
- Othello has a headache and Desdemona tries to give it to him for him to wrap around his head.
- Desdemona drops the handkerchief and Emilia picks it up.
- Emilia gives the handkerchief to Iago, because he has previously mentioned he wanted her to steal it for him.
- Iago plants the handkerchief in Cassio's bedroom.
- Iago tells Othello he has seen Cassio wipe his face with a handkerchief just like Desdemona's.
- Cassio finds the handkerchief in his room and asks his lover, the courtesan Bianca, to copy the pattern from the handkerchief and make him a matching one.
- Bianca gets jealous, thinking that the handkerchief has been given to him by a new lover.
- Othello demands that Desdemona shows him the handkerchief as proof of her loyalty, and when she can't he loses all faith in her.

3. The handkerchief is a powerful symbol throughout the play. Make a mind map for each of the themes below, exploring how the handkerchief might be a symbol of that theme:
- a) Love
 - b) Purity/ innocence

c) Death

Evaluation

4. In his lecture, Prof. McRae argues states that 'it's as if the handkerchief taints everybody it touches'. To what extent do you agree this statement? *Make a mind map for an essay answering this question.*

Glossary

- **Symbol** – a thing that represents or stands for something else, especially a material object representing something abstract (e.g. an emotion or theme).
- **Perdition** – a state of complete ruin; (in Christianity) a state of eternal punishment in the afterlife for a sinful person.
- **Sibyl** – witch.
- **Hallowed** – holy; greatly revered.