

# Shakespeare's Tragedies

William Shakespeare

Retold by  
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LEVEL B1.2

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# The Tragedy of Othello

## CHAPTER 1

### Iago Was Unhappy

#### Preview Questions

1. How many military ranks (titles) can you name?
2. Do you believe in magic?
3. What do you do when you are angry?

Iago was unhappy. He was an officer in the army of Venice. He was an **ensign**. An ensign was an important soldier in the army, but a **lieutenant** was a more important soldier. Iago wanted to be a lieutenant.

5 The general, who was much more important than either an ensign or a lieutenant, decided he needed a new lieutenant. Iago thought the general would choose him, but the general chose Cassio instead. That's why Iago was unhappy. He was also quite angry. He believed he was the best man for the job. He knew Cassio did not have enough experience to do the job properly. He knew some important people had told the general he should choose Iago. He believed the general gave Cassio the job because he was a friend.

He complained about this to his friend Roderigo.

15 "Why do you still work for him?" asked Roderigo. "You should look for another job."

"No," said Iago. "I will stay with him as his ensign. I will pretend to serve him, but I will serve myself."

The general's name was Othello. He was unusual in Venice because he was a black man. He was a very good and brave soldier, and the **duke** was happy to make him a general. Othello, however, was in love, and he was a **possessive** man. He loved  
5 Desdemona, the beautiful daughter of a **senator**. Cassio had spoken to Desdemona about Othello and told her what a good and brave man he was. That is why Othello had made him a lieutenant. Roderigo also loved Desdemona, and asked her father Brabantio if he could marry her. However, Brabantio  
10 had refused. He thought she should marry somebody more important than Roderigo.

One night, Iago discovered that Desdemona had escaped from her father's house and secretly married Othello. He told Roderigo about it as soon as he could. Now Roderigo was  
15 angry too. Her father should have allowed him to marry her. Now she had run away and secretly married a black man. He was sure that Brabantio would not be happy about this when he discovered it. The two angry friends decided to tell Brabantio. It was late at night, but they went to his house and began to  
20 shout.

"Brabantio! Brabantio! Wake up! Thieves and robbers! Brabantio! Wake up!"

Brabantio woke up and came to the window in his night clothes to see what the noise was all about.

25 "What do you want? What is all this noise for?"

"There are thieves, Brabantio. Look out for your daughter! Are your doors locked? Is your family safe inside?"

"Why are you asking this?"

30 "An old black **ram** has run away with your little white **ewe!**" shouted Iago.

“Are you mad? Who are you?”

“Don’t you recognise my voice?” asked Roderigo. “I am Roderigo.”

5 Brabantio was angry. “Roderigo, I told you not to come to my house. You are making trouble because I did not give you my daughter. Go away!”

“Wait, Brabantio,” insisted Iago. “We are telling you the truth. The black man Othello has stolen your daughter.”

10 “Go and see if she is in the house,” said Roderigo. “If she is there, you can put me in jail for making trouble. However, I am sure you will not find her.”

Brabantio decided to check. While he was checking, Iago went to find Othello, leaving Roderigo to talk to Brabantio. Brabantio was very angry when he discovered that Roderigo and Iago were right. Desdemona was gone!

15 “Where is she?” he screamed. “Has she married the black man? I will be unhappy forever! Are you sure it was her? Where did you see her? How did she get out? I wish I had allowed you to marry her!”

20 He pulled his hair and shook his **fists** and stamped his feet, but it did not bring Desdemona back. She was gone.

Brabantio thought Othello must have used magic to get her out of the house. Roderigo agreed, and promised to help him find his lost daughter.

25 Iago found Othello and pretended to be his friend. He warned him that Brabantio was angry about the marriage and would try to get Desdemona back. As they were speaking, Cassio, the new lieutenant, arrived with a message from the duke. There was trouble in Cyprus, and the duke wanted to see Othello immediately. At the same time, Brabantio and his men arrived

# N E W W O R D S

## The Tragedy of Othello

### Chapter 1

**ensign** *n.* a soldier (usually in the navy) below the position of lieutenant

**lieutenant** *n.* an important soldier

**duke** *n.* a male ruler

**possessive** *adj.* having a strong desire to control things or people

**senator** *n.* a political representative in a city or country

**ram** *n.* a male sheep

**ewe** *n.* a female sheep

**fist** *n.* a closed hand

**sorcerer** *n.* someone who does magic

**primary** *adj.* main, first

**reluctantly** *adv.* not willing to do something

### Chapter 2

**ruined** *adj.* destroyed

**invasion** *n.* the act of an army entering enemy territory with the intent of taking control

**convince** *v.* to persuade someone into agreement

### Chapter 3

**frown** *v.* to make a look of disapproval

### Chapter 4

**strangle** *v.* to kill a person by squeezing his or her throat; to choke

**weed** *n.* wild plant that is unattractive

**stab** *v.* to thrust a knife into a person's body

## The Tragedy of Macbeth

### Chapter 1

**rebellion** *n.* a fight against the leader

**execute** *v.* to put to death; to kill

**rag** *n.* a piece of old cloth

**witch** *n.* a woman who does magic

**hero** *n.* a person who is brave and does great deeds

**achieve** *v.* to get or attain by effort

**serpent** *n.* a snake

**retinue** *n.* people who travel with the king

**honour** *n.* the privilege of receiving a favour from a respected person

### Chapter 2

**hostess** *n.* a lady who has guests in her house

**uproar** *n.* a state of anger, upset experienced at the same time by many people

**deny** *v.* to refuse guilt or responsibility for an action

### Chapter 3

**ghost** *n.* the spirit of a dead person

**beware** *v.* to be careful of something

**dynasty** *n.* a family of rulers

**vanish** *v.* to disappear

**traitor** *n.* a person who betrays his or her country

### Chapter 4

**grief** *n.* great sadness

**futility** *n.* uselessness

**charmed** *adj.* lucky

**exclaim** *v.* to say something in surprise



## King Lear

### Cast

King Lear	Cordelia
A poor man	Albany
Kent	Cornwall
Goneril	Burgundy
Regan	The King of France

King Lear is sitting on his throne. There are a lot of people crowding around in front of the throne.

**King Lear:** Go away! All of you! Go away! I will solve your problems tomorrow!

**A poor man:** But Your Majesty, I...

**King Lear:** No! I said go away. I am tired. Come back tomorrow. In fact, I'm going to take a holiday. Come back next week! Go!

Everyone leaves. King Lear rests his head on his hand and sighs.

**King Lear:** There are too many of them! Kent!

Kent enters the room.

**Kent:** Your Majesty?

**King Lear:** Kent, I am tired. I am too old to be King of England.

**Kent:** Perhaps you should take a holiday.

**King Lear:** No, I am going to do more than that. I am going to retire! Call my daughters to come to me immediately! And bring me a map of the country!

**Kent:** Yes, Your Majesty!

Kent leaves, and King Lear rests his head on his hand while he waits. He is very tired. Kent returns with Goneril, Regan, and Cordelia. Albany, Cornwall, Burgundy, and the King of France also come in. Kent is carrying a map.

**Goneril:** Good afternoon, Your Majesty!

**Regan:** Good afternoon, Your Majesty!

**Cordelia:** Hello, Father!

**King Lear:** I am glad that your husbands have come with you! I have an important announcement to make.

Albany looks at Goneril, and Cornwall looks at Regan. Burgundy and the King of France look at each other angrily.

**King Lear:** My three lovely daughters! I am old, and I am not getting any younger. The business of running the country is making me very tired. I do not want to do it any longer. Therefore, I have made a decision. I will give one third of the kingdom to each of you, and I will retire! You will own everything. I will still be the king, and you will look after me. But each of you will have to solve the problems of the kingdom.

**Goneril:** This is good news, Father!

**Regan:** I think it is very wise.

**Goneril:** Yes, very sensible. What part will I have?

**Regan:** Yes, what part will I have?

**King Lear:** I will give first choice to the daughter who loves me the most! Goneril, you are the oldest, so you may speak first. Tell me how much you love your old father!

**Goneril:** Your Majesty! Dad. There are not enough words in the English language to tell you how much I love you. I love you more than my eyes or my freedom. People say I am beautiful, but I love you more than I love my beauty!

**King Lear:** Excellent!

He claps his hands.

**King Lear:** Well spoken, Goneril! Now, what do you say, Regan?

**Regan:** Papa! Father dearest! I do not know what to say. I love you as much as my sister Goneril does but even more, if that is possible. Every moment that I am not thinking about you is a sad moment. All other pleasures are like enemies to me.

**King Lear:** Excellent again!

He claps his hands.

**King Lear:** Well spoken, Regan. Now for our youngest and sweetest daughter. What do you say, Cordelia?

Cordelia looks at her sisters in disgust. Their husbands are looking very pleased.

**Cordelia:** Nothing, my lord.

**King Lear:** Nothing?

**Cordelia:** Nothing, my lord. You are my father.

**King Lear:** Nothing will come from nothing. Think about it, Cordelia, and speak again.

**Cordelia:** I love you as a daughter should love her father. That is all.

**King Lear:** That is all? That is not enough, you ungrateful daughter!



# The Tragedy of Othello

## [ Chapter 1 ] Iago Was Unhappy

I. Put the sentences in order from 1 (first) to 5 (last).

- \_\_\_\_\_ Desdemona's father was angry with Othello.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Iago did not get promoted to lieutenant.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Othello and Desdemona were married.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Othello and Brabantio saw the duke.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Othello started out on a mission to fight the Turks.

II. Choose the best answer.

1. Why was Iago angry with Othello?
  - a. Othello killed a senator.
  - b. Othello married a black woman.
  - c. Othello married another man's wife.
  - d. Othello promoted Cassio.
2. Why did Desdemona marry Othello?
  - a. He had kidnapped her against her will.
  - b. She loved him.
  - c. She hated her father.
  - d. She actually wanted to marry Iago.
3. Why did the duke want to see Othello?
  - a. The Turks were coming.
  - b. Venice had lost the war with Turkey.
  - c. Venice was invading Turkey.
  - d. The Turks were visiting the duke.
4. What happened at the end of the chapter?
  - a. Othello left for France.
  - b. Iago died.
  - c. Roderigo told the duke he wanted to go and fight the Turks.
  - d. Othello set out to fight the Turks.

III. Write the correct word in each blank.

lieutenant	sorcerer	reluctantly	possessive	senator
ensign	experience	complained	ewe	warn

1. Brabantio \_\_\_\_\_ agreed to allow Othello to marry his daughter.
2. A(n) \_\_\_\_\_ is a kind of soldier.
3. A(n) \_\_\_\_\_ is a man who practises magic.
4. Iago and Roderigo \_\_\_\_\_ about their problems.
5. A(n) \_\_\_\_\_ has babies called lambs.
6. Othello was a \_\_\_\_\_ man and wanted all of his wife's love.
7. A(n) \_\_\_\_\_ gives orders to ensigns.
8. Othello had many years of \_\_\_\_\_ in the military.
9. A(n) \_\_\_\_\_ is a powerful person in the government.
10. No one could \_\_\_\_\_ Othello about Iago because Iago made everyone believe that he was a good man.

IV. Write a summary by answering the questions.

1. Who was Iago?
2. Why was Iago unhappy?
3. What had Othello and Desdemona done secretly?
4. What did Iago and Roderigo do about Othello's secret?

**Summary:** \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_