



Critical readings of Iago

KS5 > Drama > Othello > Critical readings of Iago

How it works

There are four short quotations of different critical opinions of Iago. The idea is, as explained in the teacher's notes at the start of the resource, that these are the stimulus for group work leading to presentations to the whole class. If students work in groups of five, they can each examine that critical opinion in relation to one act of the play, then they pool their ideas, discuss and develop a coherent argument and presentation. This will give you several lessons of fairly independent student centred activity in which you can concentrate on supporting individuals who need extra scaffolding or extra stretch.

This is a simple but highly effective activity that could be replicated for any text – the beauty of it being oven-ready on Teachit is that you don't have to go trawling around for the quotations. It focuses directly on the assessment objective that is about informed and alternative critical responses without going overboard on literary theory straight out of GCSE, or trashing the departmental photocopying budget by dishing out whole essays.

Try this!

In this resource, all of the critical opinions are from relatively recent years. If this activity went down well, maybe with a stronger class, or as an extension activity for those who would enjoy it, I might follow it up by looking at some pre-twentieth century critical opinions and exploring the relationship between critical opinion and the attitudes and values of the times in which they are expressed. We might go on from there to think about the pressing concerns of our own very contemporary times, and how they might inform our response to Iago. I'd then perhaps get them writing critical soundbites of their own, modelling them in length and language on those we'd used as our initial stimulus. Hey presto, instant future teaching materials and nice closely focused practice of writing in an appropriate literary register.

Or this!

If you like this, there is a matching resource with critical opinions of Othello. Now, how about someone does Desdemona and Emilia next?

Teacher's Notes:

Divide the class into groups, preferably of five, so that each student can take one act of the play to investigate. Give each group one of the readings below to justify to the rest of the class. They will need to go through the play carefully, Act by Act, to find references and quotations that support their particular reading. They will then present their case to the whole class, with the supporting evidence.

1. 'Psychologically Iago is a slighted man, powerfully possessed by hatred against a master who (as he thinks) has kept him down, and by envy for a man he despises who has been promoted over him.'

Neville Coghill

2. 'He is monstrous because, faced with the manifold richness of experience, his only reaction is calculation and the desire to manipulate ... Ultimately, whatever its proximate motives, malice is motiveless; that is the secret of its power and its horror, why it can go unsuspected and why its revelation always shocks.'

Helen Gardner

3. 'We no longer feel, as Shakespeare's contemporaries did, the ubiquity of Satan, but Iago is still serviceable to us, as an objective correlative of the mindless inventiveness of racist aggression. Iago is still alive and kicking and filling migrants' letterboxes with excrement.'

Germaine Greer

4. 'The audience becomes complicit in Iago's intention and, like it or not, is soon involved in his vengeful plotting. He actually asks them what he should do ... Many actors who have played the part have been capable of getting members of the audience to share Iago's delight in his own powers of evil invention.'

Sean McEvoy *Shakespeare: The Basics* (Routledge (UK))