2015

Learning Shakespeare Shouldn't Hurt: An Engaging 4-Week *Othello* Curriculum for 9th Graders

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English Literature and Educational Studies Senior Thesis
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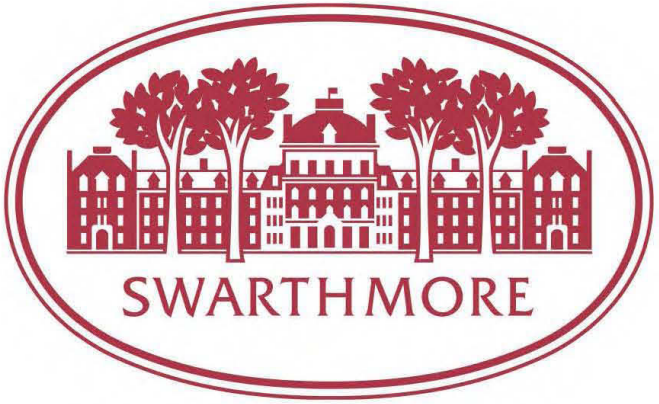

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Abstract: Shakespearean literature is an essential component of American literature and cultural consciousness, discusses material that is highly relevant to modern adolescents, and presents an ideal platform for creative learning across multiple intelligences. However, intimidated students are often reluctant to engage with this material. This *Othello* curriculum draws on progressive educational theory, strategies for teaching literacy to English Language Learners and Special Education students, and existing creative methods of teaching Shakespeare to circumvent this intimidation and engage 9th graders with *Othello* through the exploration of relevant themes, utilization of students' natural propensity for creative expression, and development of traditional English literacy skills.

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Introduction

The works of William Shakespeare have long been a staple in American culture, and his influence, whether explicit or inferred, can be found in countless modern texts, plays, films, and other forms of human artistic expression that are still consumed by citizens nationwide. Since as early as the country's inception, the American elite were usually well-versed in Shakespeare, and by the mid-nineteenth century "a substantial portion of... American audiences knew their Shakespeare well" (Levine). He was thought to be not only an expert storyteller and master of melodramatic theatre (which was very popular with mainstream Americans in the 19th century), but also an excellent vessel through which the moral values of the day could be transmitted to American schoolchildren. Unfortunately, due to a declining interest in melodrama and the prescription of Shakespeare being "highbrow," Shakespeare's popularity began to decline in the twentieth century (Levine). To this day, many American students who read Shakespeare in high school, or even in college, complain about the irrelevance and inaccessibility of Shakespeare. Yet modern Americans may be exposed to his works without even knowing it: Every person who has been "elbowed," who has claimed to be "tongue-tied," "played fast and loose," or believed that "the game is up" is, in fact, quoting just one of the hundreds of words and phrases that American English has borrowed from Shakespeare (McCrum and Cran, 99); every teenager swooning over Heath Ledger in *10 Things I Hate About You* was in fact pining after *The Taming of the Shrew*'s Petruchio; and anyone who so much as reads the title of Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World* is exposed to allegories of *The Tempest*. Clearly, not having a firm grasp on Shakespeare's body of work is to lose valuable insight into a vast array of important cultural phenomena that Americans engage with every day.

However, a variety of roadblocks stand in the way of the average American high school freshman gaining a comprehensive understanding of a Shakespearian work in just three weeks, which is about the amount of time one might expect to spend on a single Shakespeare play in the average American school. The first of these barriers is a lack of understanding of the context of Shakespeare's plays, often on the part of both the teacher and the students (since it is extremely unlikely that any high school offers a course on Elizabethan and Jacobean history, and most teachers haven't taken one either). An understanding of any particular play's historical and cultural context is essential to accessing the material at the level it was meant to be understood, as topical and relevant to the issues of the day. Teaching the context of Shakespearian dramas not only gives them deeper meaning and can help students, but can also help ameliorate the first problem by making connections to modern-day topics more distinct. Many students also feel that his work in and of itself is irrelevant to their lives, which is blatantly untrue; the themes of love, betrayal, sexuality, corruption, gender, race, marriage, and so on are pervasive in Shakespeare and can provide important inroads to the text for adolescent learners. Unfortunately, despite Shakespeare's relevance to American culture and the powerful, relatable themes in his plays, many students are still 'afraid' of Shakespeare or write him off as being too difficult to understand. This leads to the third and final roadblock I will be addressing in this thesis: the significant issue of language in Shakespearian plays. This, more than any other aspect of Shakespeare, dissuades readers from engaging in his work; everything from his reversed syntax to the way in which particular words are emphasized in iambic pentameter will probably be unfamiliar to the average high-school freshman, not to mention the fact that the passage of time (and the Shakespeare's invention of a variety of words) has rendered swaths of his plays' vocabularies incomprehensible to the uninitiated. Of

course, there are resources available that 'translate' Shakespeare into modern Standard American English, but part of the joy of immersing oneself in Shakespeare is experiencing his use of language. "Words in Shakespeare do a lot, arguably more than anyone else has ever asked them to do" (Kastan), so while allowing students to access the plot in multiple ways is definitely important for their personal engagement with the text, it is equally important for them to gain an appreciation and understanding of the language in the plays themselves if they are to comprehend the full gravity of Shakespearian literature.

In order to address these issues, I have devised a four-week, 9th grade curriculum intended to teach Shakespeare's *Othello* in an average Denver Public School (DPS) classroom. I have selected this type of classroom because I am the most familiar with the DPS system, and it is the most relevant to my intended uses for this thesis. I will be using a variety of approaches and resources drawn from various pedagogical methodologies, including those used in English Language Learner (ELL) and Special Education classrooms. My reasoning for the selection of this particular play and these particular method of instruction can be found in the following literature review, in which I examine the aspects of *Othello* that make it an ideal platform for overcoming the aforementioned roadblocks that may arise in teaching Shakespeare, and offer a review and critique of the best theories and pedagogies that may be applied to teaching such material. I will then present a full four-week curriculum, including two sample lesson plans and brief descriptions of all twenty lessons.

Shakespeare's *Othello* may not necessarily seem like the most obvious choice for a 9th-grade literature class, which have historically favored comedies such as *Romeo and Juliet*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (with *Romeo*

and Juliet being far and away the most popular choice, according to the publishing company behind Folger Shakespeare Library, Simon & Schuster). However, given the difficulties presented by context, topicality, and language when teaching Shakespeare, *Othello* seems like an ideal text through which to confront these issues to build a rich and effective Shakespeare curriculum.

Race, Religion, Sexuality, and Gender in Early Modern England and *Othello*

The historical and cultural context of *Othello* is intimately related to integral aspects of the plot as well as how the play might have been received by contemporary audiences, why themes that were relevant in the 17th century are still relevant today, and how the play relates to current events in the United States. All of these factors can be harnessed to build a stronger relationship between students and *Othello*. There are a variety of rich themes in the play, although perhaps the most pervasive are race, religion, sexuality, and gender. All of these topics intersect in dynamic and intriguing ways throughout the text, providing extremely useful inroads to student connections with the text, given that they are likely to have also experienced the effects of one or more of these topics themselves. Furthermore, the ways in which these themes intersect also present a variety of opportunities for intense and critical classroom discussions, lectures, and activities. In order to have a full appreciation of these themes, it is necessary to become familiar with the historical and cultural context of *Othello* and how these topics would have been perceived within the play by a contemporary audience.

First performed on November 1, 1604, almost exactly one year after the official end of the Elizabethan era, the play technically is Jacobean. However, because it was written following forty five years of Elizabethan cultural development, it is more relevant to

developing a historically accurate cultural awareness of the play to focus on Elizabethan attitudes. Understanding contemporary views on such issues as ethnicity, race, gender, and religion not only sheds light on various nuances within *Othello*, but can help make it more relatable for modern audiences.

Othello relies heavily on the Elizabethan audience's sense of Italian exoticism to establish the gravity of the relationships between various characters, namely Othello, Brabantio, Desdemona, and Iago. Seeing as the majority of English theatergoers in Shakespeare's time would not have been to Italy (and it is unlikely that Shakespeare had, either), the Venetian identities of the majority of the characters would have seemed exotic and inherently interesting; contemporary stereotypes led to Italy being perceived by the English "as a country of intrigue, poisoning, murder, hate and revenge," although they did also positively recognize Italy as the epicenter of the Renaissance cultural movement (Hotteman, 374). This in itself sets the tone for *Othello*, a play that unquestionably incorporates intrigue, murder, hate, and revenge (interestingly, when Othello is set to murder Desdemona, Iago urges, "Do it not with poison, strangle her in her bed, / even the bed she hath contaminated" (4.1.207-208), but is interwoven with beautiful, poetic, artistic language. Even knowledge of these small contextual details about Italian stereotypes helps one better understand the vivid lens through which Shakespeare's contemporary audience would have viewed the drama of the play, and could provide an appropriate inroad to pre-reading activities like making predictions.

As they did with Italians, Shakespeare's audiences would also have viewed Moors with a sense of exoticism. It is true that the term "Moor" is somewhat nebulous in terms of whether it relates to religion, race, ethnicity, or all three (Ta Neter). Othello, for

example, is clearly dark-skinned, being described as a "black ram," (1.1.97). However, he is implied to be a Christian when Iago claims that Othello's love for Desdemona runs so deep that he would go so far as to "renounce his baptism" for her (2.3.363), which would indeed be a tremendous sacrifice given the hatred the majority of Elizabethans, who were white Christians, harbored towards Muslims. The Muslim identities of the majority of Moorish people through Europe was both a result and a source of conflict during the tumultuous expansion and reduction of the Ottoman Empire centuries before and after *Othello*'s publication. Many Christian Elizabethans saw Muslims both in and out of Europe as heretics, and described Muhammad with vicious, fantastical tales that would cast him as an "antichrist" capable of witchcraft, robbery, deceit, and a vast variety of other fantastical and inimical characteristics. Furthermore, they characterized "Africans [as] strange and foreign enemies of Christianity, given to heathen practices such as witchcraft and voodoo. In the literature of the time, they were invariably portrayed as villains" (Skiba xix).

Such antagonizing attitudes often served as a justification for politically and economically motivated retaliations against Moorish people by a variety of European political figures. In 1502, Queen Isabella I forced all Moors living in Leon and Castile into exile, claiming that the "heretic race [was] … a blemish upon her piety and a scandal to her dominion" (Scott, 251). Just over a century later, in 1609, five years after Othello's first staging, King Philip III followed suit, exiling all "Moriscoes" living in Valencia upon the claim that they were "heretics, apostates, traitors, criminals guilty of *lese-majeste* human and divine" (314). These occurrences reflect the general trend across Europe of viewing Islamic Africans and people of African descent as not only 'others,' meant to be openly feared and hated, but "convenient scapegoats in times of crisis" (Ali and Siblon).

Exoduses like these forced Moors to migrate from the Iberian peninsula to Northern and Central regions of Europe, including England. There, many Moors of high or aristocratic birth became prominent royal, social, artistic, military, or scholarly figures. However, the vast majority of Moorish people became servants in noble British households, as having African (rather than European) servants became quite fashionable among the English elite towards the end of the 16th century. This influx of both high- and low-society foreigners coupled with a rising African slave-trade meant that an unprecedented number of people of African descent were living in England at the turn of the 17th century. Finally, Queen Elizabeth I followed in the footsteps of other European monarchs by declaring, once in 1596 and again in 1601, that "Negroes and black-a-moors" should be deported from her realm, citing her "discontentment" and "annoyance" at their presence. Her true intent, however, was to foster resentment towards a religious and cultural scapegoat in response to the deterioration of the feudal system and crop failures, both of which were "bringing hunger, disease and a rapid increase in poverty and vagrancy" to England (Ali and Siblon).

This long and complex history, which has been only briefly examined here, provides an essential backdrop to the storyline of *Othello*, particularly in terms of how the titular character is perceived by the others. The beginning of Act 1 clearly outlines what should, for Jacobean and modern audiences alike, have been a familiar tale in the tradition of New Comedy: the *senex* stands in opposition to a young couple, and his resistance is overcome by the young male challenger. As with the majority of Shakespearean comedies, however, the agon of *Othello* does not lie within this external factor of fatherly disapproval. Rather, the generic norm of defying the *senex* provides a "powerful and indispensable formula for creative exploration and transformation" (Beiner, 69): in this

case, Brabantio's opposition to Othello and subsequent relinquishing of control over his daughter sets up an interesting dynamic of positive versus negative Moorish stereotypes as they might influence Othello throughout the play.

The opening scene of *Othello* may seem like a simple springboard for the action of the play: Iago reveals to the audience why he hates Othello, and he and his underling Roderigo set the stage for the play's hero to challenge the *senex* through romantic conquest. However, a closer reading of the scene reveals subtle but important nods to Elizabethan attitudes towards Moors. First, the audience does not see Othello until Scene II, and does not hear his name spoken by any of the characters until Scene III, when the Duke commands him to fight against the Ottomans. In a play where the weight of specific words is so significant, it is worth noting that the words used to refer to Othello at the beginning of the play, particularly in the first scene, do not mark him as an individual but rather as a disliked member of an objectionable group. The first time Othello is referred to at all is when Roderigo says to Iago, "Thou toldst me thou did hold him in thy hate" (1.1.7). At this point, the audience does not know who "he" is, nor why Iago hates "him," though it is soon revealed that "he" has made "a great arithmetician, / One Michael Cassio, a Florentine" (1.1.20-21) his lieutenant rather than Iago, much to the latter's consternation. Cassio is given a full, albeit bitter, description as an academic long before Othello is given a description as a General. There are several possible explanations of this, none of which are mutually exclusive: the first is simply that Iago is somewhat obsessed with Cassio and his ignorance in "the division of a battle... unless the bookish theoric" (1.1.24-25) which Iago sees as far inferior to his own military experience. The fact that Cassio's failing categorization (he is a scholar rather than a

soldier) needs more explaining to the audience than Othello's (who is a Moor instead of an Italian); and that Shakespeare is simply building intrigue about the mysterious General within the audience.

At this point, the audience must be intrigued by the man to whom "Three great ones of the city" (1.1.9) must go, hat in hand, in order to have Iago made lieutenant, and who would have the freedom to refuse a request from such important noblemen. Finally, when Iago says of Cassio, "He, in good time, must his lieutenant be, / And I--God bless the mark!--his Moorship's ensign" (1.1.34-35), several pieces of information are simultaneously handed to the audience. One, it becomes clear that the General whom Iago feels slighted by is more than likely none other than the titular "Moor of Venice," although his failure to be named still lends an air of mystery. Two, as an ensign, or standard-bearer, Iago has clearly been placed in a lower role than lieutenant, meaning that he must create his own opportunities for advancement through the ranks. Finally, Iago's bitter use of the pun "his Moorship," riffing on the term "his Worship," used to refer to knights by their underlings (Pruyn, Griswold, and Nelson) quite handily captures Iago's feelings towards Othello. On the one hand, Iago is forced to respect Othello as a General, and knows that he is "worth no worse a place" than as Othello's underling. However, the sarcasm of the term "his Moorship" shows how the previously discussed negative connotations of Moors in Elizabethan society affect (and in this case are used as justification for) the other characters' malignant feelings towards Othello.

Throughout the remainder of the scene, Othello is described disparagingly. Roderigo refers to him as "the thick-lips," a derogatory term for Moors, and Iago tells Brabantio that "an old black ram / is tupping your white ewe" (1.1.89), and "you'll have

your daughter covered with a Barbary horse, you'll have your nephews neigh to you, you'll have coursers for cousins and jennets for germans" (1.1.112-115). The implications of bestiality and inbreeding here lend a sickening visual to that of Brabantio's unnamed daughter in "the gross clasps of a lascivious Moor" (1.1.141), which plays into Elizabethan stereotypes of Moors being barbaric and animal-like. Brabantio, after all, makes it quite clear that he does not approve of the marriage. Despite having told Roderigo, "My daughter is not for thee" (1.1.109), he rescinds on his word upon confirmation that Desdemona and Othello have been married, saying, "Oh, would you had had her!" (1.1.198) While it is clear regardless of historical context that Othello is not being favorably described in these scenes, an understanding of the relationships between Europeans and Moors lends an additional richness to an already complex text, and gives a quick, convenient setup for the traditional agon between *senex* and suitor.

A grasp on the historical context of these relationships and stereotypes also helps explain moments throughout the play when Othello is described as magical and savage, such as when he falls into a rage-induced "trance," from which he must not be woken lest he "foams at the mouth and by and by / Breaks out to savage madness" (4.1.66-67). Such symptoms of a "falling sickness" were also said by Englanders in the Middle Ages to have plagued Muhammad, a story that was widely accepted and deliberately "intended to denigrate Islam" (Salem, 45). Associating Othello with negative Islamic stereotypes during such a crucial scene, in which Iago finally convinces him to murder Desdemona, may have played into contemporary audiences' preconceived notions of Islam in order to facilitate Othello's transition from a wise and powerful warrior to a man capable of jealousy to the point of murdering a (white)

woman. Another clear example of Othello's negative association with Islam in his denigration of European woman occurs when Brabantio expresses certainty that his daughter was "stol'n" from him by Othello through witchcraft in Act 1, Scene 3.

The first scenes of *Othello,* in which the men fight and worry over Desdemona, points to the importance of another contextual factor in the play: the role of women in Elizabethan society. Desdemona's character is complex in that she both embodies and defies contemporary concepts of gender roles: while she is the essence of a loving and obedient wife, she holds power over her father in her ability to choose her husband over him, and power over her husband in that his love for her drives him to actual madness. Emilia, who foils Desdemona in many ways, also challenges Elizabethan gender norms by way of her powerful disobedience of her husband despite a 'desirably' demure exterior. The third female character in *Othello,* Bianca, juxtaposes these two highly-ranked women in her status as a courtesan, and provides a glimpse into the Elizabethan practice of commidifying women. Thus, an understanding of Elizabethan gender roles lends itself to a much more meaningful understanding of Desdemona, Bianca, and Emilia, and opens up the floor for critical classroom exercises in writing, predictions, and argumentative reasoning.

Though Desdemona, like Othello, neither makes an appearance nor is mentioned by name in Act 1, Scene 1, the audience gets a similarly clear view of how she is perceived by other characters: namely, as an "inanimate treasure" (Kemp, 88). When alerting Brabantio to the fact that his daughter has eloped, Iago cries, "Thieves! Thieves! Look to your house, your daughter, and your bags!" Desdemona's placement between Brabantio's property and money bags clearly suggests that not only is she a possession of Brabantio's, but she's not even necessarily his most valuable possession (having come second to his home in the list of things he must

make sure the thieves have not pilfered). When Desdemona is revealed to have married Othello, Brabantio eventually acquiesces to turning her over to the Moor when he says to her, "For your sake, jewel, / I am glad at soul I have no other child: / For thy escape would teach me tyranny, / To hang clogs on them" (1.3.225-228). This metaphor clearly denotes to the audience that Brabantio resents being forced to give her up and perhaps laments not better protecting his treasure. However, on a deeper level the connotations of Desdemona's jewel-like qualities could also be a reference to the wedding rings worn by wealthy women as a sign of their engagement and marriage. That is, Desdemona goes from a jewel in her father's treasury to a one set in a ring symbolizing her commitment to Othello. This reading further supports the assertion that Desdemona is seen not only as the property of some male figure during the entirety of the play, but as a valuable, transferable asset that would likely be coveted by others.

This covetousness is also hinted at when Desdemona first disembarks from the ship bearing her to Cypress, as Cassio exclaims upon her arrival, "the riches of the ship is come on shore!" (2.1.92). Clearly, Cassio also sees her as an object worthy of acquisition – and while Desdemona sees such praise as flattering (she replies, "I thank you, valiant Cassio" (2.1.97) before inquiring as to her husband's whereabouts), it also becomes the seed that Iago uses to plant jealousy in Othello's mind. Indeed, once this seed has grown to fruition and Othello murders his wife, he expresses his remorse through a metaphor of lost riches, claiming that he, "Like the base Indian, threw a pearl away / Richer than all his tribe" (5.2.407-408). In addition to demonstrating to the audience the great worth that Desdemona held for her husband, this proclamation reveals that Desdemona was seen as a valuable, male-owned possession until the very end, when she was ultimately transferred to the impenetrable coffers of Death.

The clear link between Desdemona and patriarchal commodification points to Elizabethan cultural norms and ideals of femininity. A better understanding of these norms and ideals can lead to a richer understanding of Desdemona's character and why she makes the choices that she does, as well as the significance of Emilia's tenacity and the foil created between Desdemona and Bianca.

Women in 16th-17th century England were seen as subservient figures, regardless of class. They were percieved, with few exceptions, to be mentally and physically inferior to men, who dominated England's decidedly patriarchal society. Both men and women contributed through their performance of gender to the upholding of the status quo:

> Academic theories and popular beliefs both constructed woman as secondary or 'other' in relation to man, confirming the necessity for female dependence and subjection. Just as the axiom of female inferiority defined the misogynistic character of the discourses about women, the axiom of female dependency shaped the patriarchal character of institutions, their hierarchical rules and organization (Mendelson and Crawford, 71).

Thus, women's roles in society were largely defined by their relationships with, and dependence on, men. Until they were married, "maids" were subservient to their fathers; upon being married, the ultimate goal for almost all early modern English women, although 20% remained unmarried (Kemp, 36), women's legal rights and property were transferred from her father to her husband. That is, "with few exceptions, a married woman had no legal existence apart from her husband" (42). Thus, it is unsurprising that Desdemona is so blatantly, and seemingly positively, compared to material wealth by a variety of male characters in *Othello.* However, this historical context also provides a reference point for the significance of Desdemona's elopement with Othello; while she may be commodified by both her husband and her father, she does seize control over the manner of her subservience.

By defying her father in front of the entire Venetian court in Act 1, Scene 3, Desdemona proves herself to be a strong female character, one that must balance her own will with that of the patriarchy throughout the play. Desdemona defies her father's belittling view of her as "a maid / So tender, fair, and happy" (1.2.85) by shunning "The wealthy curled darlings of our nation" that had approached her as suitors and expressing autonomy by choosing her own husband. She also defies the previously discussed racial biases of the time by not 'tolerating' Othello's blackness, but celebrating and expressing attraction to it (Kemp, 88). That being said, part of Othello's manipulation at the hand of Iago stems from the patriarchal fear of losing control of his woman precisely because she defied her father in order to marry him: "If women have wills and desires of their own – and act on them by taking lovers of their own choosing – then what is to keep a woman from changing her mind (and the culture sees women as by nature fickle and changeable) and choosing another?" (41). This fear of cuckoldry is pervasive throughout Shakespeare's works, and *Othello* is no exception. Othello even says to Iago, "A horned man's a monster and a beast" (4.1.75) referring to the 'cuckold's horns' contemporarily associated with men who have been the victims of infidelity.

This description is particularly complex when considered within the context of both race and gender stereotypes of the era. The Elizabethan rhetoric postulated that "Because man was created mentally and physically superior to woman, his reason should enable him to control his wife *without* resorting to force" (Mendelson and Crawford, 33), although Othello *does* feel compelled, eventually, to strike Desdemona, when she mentions the "love I bear to Cassio" (4.1.255). Of course, Desdemona describes her love for Cassio as "with such general warranty of heaven / as I might love"(5.2.75), suggesting that her love is not only platonic, or general, but free of

sin to the point of being sanctioned by heaven itself. Unfortunately, Othello's fear of being made into a "monster" or "beast" trumps his reason, despite the fact that his behavior "would not be believed in Venice" (4.1.270). The fact that Moors were stereotyped as savages in Elizabethan society lends an ironic twist to Othello's words and his subsequent actions in this scene. At the beginning of the play, Iago characterizes Othello as beast-like because he *is* having sex with Desdemona; here, Othello fears being labeled one because he *isn't*. Ultimately, this irony leads to Othello truly committing a savage act when he beats his beloved wife. One may argue that wife-beating was actually commonly accepted during Shakespeare's era, but in actuality it was "in many respects a contested issue... beatings did not mesh quite well with the emergent ideologies that viewed marriage as a partnership and wives as spiritual equals and domestic helpmates" (Kemp, 41). Thus, an understanding of the cultural context of this act uncovers a greater depth of character in Othello than is afforded by the simple reading of jealousy.

That being said, Desdemona is by no means a rebellious wife. She is loyal to Othello until the very end; while she protests when Othello reveals that he is going to kill her, she says to Emilia that "I myself" was responsible for her death. She also says, "A guiltless death I die," in an attempt to reclaim not only her questioned chastity (which was perhaps a woman's most prized possession in the Elizabethan era), but also to rescind her husband of his status as a cuckold. This reading of Desdemona's actions accounts for her self-perception as an equal spiritual partner with Othello, as well as her conditioned instinct to protect and serve her husband until the end. A feminist reading of *Othello* also would portend that the play itself is a word of warning against the era's ideals of gender and sexuality, as the fear of cuckoldry and "of becoming uxorious" (87) drives Othello to murder and Desdemona's subservience to

her husband seems to prevent her from resisting him (as when she says "I will" (5.2.57) when he asks her to lie still so she can strangle her). While going too far down this line of thinking may lead away from the original (and contextually-based) intentions of the play, it could serve as an interesting starting point for a classroom debate or discussion.

Of course, Desdemona is not the only female character in the play: she is attended to by Emilia, and foiled by Bianca. Emilia, like Desdemona, both submits to and disregards the patriarchal ideals of her society at various times. This inner conflict is perhaps most obvious when Bianca disregards her husband's orders in front of the gentlemen assembled in Desdemona's bedchamber after her death: Iago commands Emilia, "I charge you, get you home" (5.2.231) but she refuses, saying, "Good gentlemen, let me have leave to speak: / 'Tis proper I obey him, but not now. / Perchance, Iago, I will ne'er go home" (5.2.232-234). Emilia's request for permission to speak before men above her social rank, as well as her acknowledgement that she *should* be following the orders of her husband, characterizes her as a "good" woman – one who knows her place. However, her subsequent refusal to not only obey her husband but return to her home, the place where women unquestionably belonged, simultaneously demonstrates her strength of character and resolve. The latter characteristic is particularly significant in the cultural context of the play, as "one of the problems with which feminist theorists wrestle is how it might have been possible for contemporaries to think in different ways within a culture and a language imbued with patriarchalism" (Mendelson and Crawford, 72-3). However, when she reveals the truth about Iago asking her to steal Desdemona's handkerchief (a symbol of chastity in its own right), Iago immediately retaliates by calling her a "Villainous whore" (5.2.273), thus calling into question her most precious chastity. She defends her honor and her honesty, saying "By heaven, I

do not [lie], I do not, gentlemen (5.2.276). Like her mistress Desdemona, Emilia is then killed by her husband. Iago, like Othello, feels that his wife has betrayed him and failed to play her part as a wife and a woman. Thus, the similarities between Emilia and Desdemona as the former follows the latter in her defense of her mistress' honor until the end is clear, despite these characters' previous juxtaposition.

There are other scenes in which Emilia demonstrates her willingness to subvert the usual feminine rhetoric about submission to men, exploiting "the ambiguities and contradictions" of her patriarchal society and "making a space for subversive ideas and dissident behaviour" (Mendelson and Crawford, 73). The idea of creating a safe space for disruptive expression is perhaps most clearly illustrated in the scene in which she and Desdemona are discussing whether or not they'd cuckold their husbands "for all the world" (4.3.72). Desdemona, a paradigm of chastity and virtue throughout the play (a characterization that renders her wrongful death that much more tragic), claims that "by this heavenly light" (4.3.75) she would never commit such a deed. Emilia agrees, raunchily suggesting that it would be easier to do it in the dark, and that "The world's a huge thing. It is a great price for a small vice.... I should venture purgatory for't" (4.3.78-87). The reason that women and Elizabethan society as a whole held their chastity so dear was because an unfaithful woman was a damned woman, having been created to serve only her father, her husband, and God. Thus, women who were unfaithful with their husbands in Shakespeare's time did not stand to inherit the Earth. Rather, they could lose it, as their husbands could take their possessions, their children could be labeled bastards, and they could be cast out of their homes, not to

mention being damned to an eternity in hell. Emilia's flagrant disregard for such social and spiritual laws in the safety of a feminine space (Desdemona's bedchambers) speaks to her practical nature and rejection of male control.

This context helps characterize Emilia as a truly strong character, whose later sacrifice in the name of her beloved mistress would be a powerful marker of female loyalty rather than of female cunning. Women in early modern England were thought to be inherently deceitful and any subservience was seen as cunning rather than cleverness or fortitude. Emilia is revealed to be a free-thinking woman who is loyal to her mistress, though she does steal the handkerchief out of loyalty for her husband and ultimately seals her mistress' fate. Her divided loyalties speak to a complex character whose inner dilemmas are strengthened significantly in a modern reading by a contextual understanding of Elizabethan gender roles. Furthermore, she helps expose the "patriarchal ambiguity" of her time in her simultaneous role as a disobedient woman and a feminine hero: In going against her husband's orders, she restores Desdemona's rightful honor (which, again, was basically the most valuable thing about a woman). She at once shows the importance of chastity and of feminine subversion – a seemingly contradictory role in Shakespeare's time, yet an essential element of the play's conclusion.

The third female role in the play is that of Bianca. Although she is originally referred to as Cassio's troublesome yet beautiful "wife," it comes to light that she is in fact a courtesan to whom Cassio has expressed love but no real intent of marriage. As a courtesan, Bianca serves as a dramatic foil to the chaste, highly bred Desdemona, although Emilia is often juxtaposed against her mistress. Bianca is seen in more stark contrast because by trade she plays into the fear "of unbridled sexuality" that was considered

"dangerous to women" (Mendelson and Crawford, 69). In "presenting a good woman next to a bad one in a culture where the basic tenet of the prevailing misogyny is that all women are the same" (Callaghan, 67), Shakespeare made Desdemona's chastity an even more significant characteristic of her personality. Because Desdemona is seen as both "the witty woman indulging in dockside banter and sexual innuendo with Iago... [and] the incredulous innocent who cannot grasp the concept of betrayal" (Callaghan, 66), there needs to be a contrasting force that consistently reminds the audience that Desdemona is not actually "dangerous"; she must remain a multifaceted yet *indisputably chaste* character throughout the various stages of dramatic irony that her character is subjected to at the hands of Iago.

Bianca can also be foiled against Desdemona because while Desdemona's love for Othello is pure, courtesans in Shakespeare's time were known to seek pregnancy and marriage with their wealthy clients in order to establish financial security. Bianca's character is by no means actually a "bad" one – however, an understanding of contemporary gender ideals reveals the actual ambiguity and complexity of her character. She would have been seen as dangerous and morally unsound because of her sexuality, yet Emilia – a far less "dangerous" character and a hero of the play – comes to her defense at *Othello*'s conclusion. Whether she wanted to marry Cassio for his money or out of true love is up to interpretation, allowing the audience to construct Desdemona as suitably opposite in her chastity and devotion as the case against her is deviously built by Iago. Bianca, like Emilia and Desdemona, is a complex character, and the richness of her role is illuminated much more brightly in the light of her cultural context.

Topicality of Major Themes in *Othello*

In the context of a 9th grade classroom it is important to remember that "if the students can't see a piece of literature as something realistic or relevant, they aren't going to care what is going on within it" (Smiley). While teaching some of Shakespeare's historical and cultural contexts would be immensely helpful in establishing the realism of the play, making it relevant to students in the 21st century would require making connections between the history and culture of early modern England, *Othello,* and adolescent life in the present-day United States. Thus, *Othello* presents an opportunity to teach students that their current life experience not only has roots in the annals of history, but also connects them with people (both real and fictional) form years ago. In seeing the similarities and differences between how Jacobean and modern audiences might contextualize *Othello,* students would have a more meaningful basis from which they, themselves might understand and critique the play. Such a basis would also open up the possibility of more substantive discussion about the events and characters in the play by making them more relevant and, therefore, relatable to students.

Creating a Positive and Engaging Learning Experience

Clearly, Shakespeare is an integral part of the American cultural consciousness, and the importance of relaying an understanding and appreciation of his works to students in the United States is without question. However, the fact of the matter is that many students come away from middle school, high school, and even college with neither of those objectives fulfilled. Between the antiquity of the plays, the unfamiliarity of Shakespearean English, and the general sense of Shakespeare being "hard," many students struggle with Shakespeare to the point of developing a lifelong distaste for his literary contributions.

There are three major areas which, if addressed, could potentially make many students' experiences with Shakespeare a positive one: contextualization and relevance, vocabulary and language, and accessibility of the text. The context of *Othello*, and how it might translate the relevant themes and events of the play for modern students, has already been addressed; however, the theory behind its importance will be discussed here, along with the theoretical frameworks behind the necessity of teaching vocabulary with Shakespeare and making his works accessible to students of all ability levels and skill sets. Strategies for integrating and addressing these three areas will also be explored, with an eye toward both adhering to theoretically-based practices and capturing the interest of the average 9th-grader (of course, "the average 9th grader" could look extremely different depending on which school is being considered).

Relevance and Context

Othello is obviously a play with a myriad of themes that are pertinent to students' lives, especially when viewed within the context of Elizabethan England. *Why* this is important is revealed through a closer look at the applicable theoretical literature. According to Kember et al, "If teachers wish to motivate their students' learning they need to find ways to show the relevance of topics included in their courses. If relevance was established students took an interest in the topic. Establishing relevance and stimulating intrinsic interest seemed to be intimately related" (255). Shakespeare, unfortunately, is a topic for many students that automatically invokes a feeling of fear or dread (Townsend). Thus, it is imperative that students make connections between themselves and the text early in the curriculum, so that they will be motivated to engage with the material.

Current theories of motivation argue that it essentially stems from two sources: an internal source that is generated by the student through a desire to learn, intrinsic interest in the material, or both; and an external source that motivates students to engage in the learning process as a means of procuring rewards, such as praise, good grades, or a sense of superiority over their peers (Covington). Because teachers cannot assume that students will come into their classes internally motivated to explore the difficult terrain of Shakespeare, they must encourage students to develop a personal interest in the text and scaffold this process through the direct exploration of overlaps between the content of Shakespearean literature and students' own experiences. That is not to say that the strategy of rewarding students through praise, positive grades, or other tangible payoffs has no place in a 9th-grade classroom – however, the most effective and enjoyable learning processes are the result of a combination of these two types of motivating factors. Thus, providing relevant curriculum and coherent activities are "absolutely essential to maintaining motivation. When students are actively involved in something they are about, motivation is nearly automatic" (Jensen, 110).

Discussing relevant topics and themes in a classroom setting is also essential for establishing a school culture that fosters students' personal growth and understanding of their individual and community identities. The most effective pedagogical practices "not only address student achievement but also help students to accept and affirm their cultural identity while developing critical perspectives that challenge inequities that schools (and other institutions) perpetuate" (Ladson-Billings, 469). Allowing students to discuss themes like race, religion, and gender affirm their cultural experiences while building a space in which they can critique the way in which these identities are performed and interpreted, both in the text and in the world around them.

Finally, helping students discover connections between the text, themselves, and their world fosters the development of horizontal learning. When students learn to think horizontally, they are presented with, discover, or create connections between different subjects and even life experiences. Horizontal learning therefore builds a more comprehensive structure of knowledge and learning than vertical learning, which can be uneven in that it builds upon one subject only (and therefore does not allow students to use strengths in one area to support weaknesses in others). This style of learning also builds upon and adds to students' knowledge base in other areas and subjects in ways that encourage critical thinking and symbolic analysis. Being able to find connections and solve problems not only "fosters deeper understanding" (Dumont, 7) and enriches students' learning experiences in school, but provides them with essential skills for navigating the adult world and making themselves attractive to employers. Thus, "the ability for learners to see connections and 'horizontal connectedness' is important between the formal learning environment and the wider environment and society" (7).

There are several types of relevance that may be effective in the classroom: relevance to local issues, relevance to everyday applications, and relevance to current topics (Kember et al, 255-256). Obama's executive orders regarding immigration being blocked in Texas, Big Sean and Ariana Grande's breakup, #illridewithyou, Andrew Harrison's remarks about his teammate – all of these are current topics of which a large number of teenagers are at least aware (if not actively following or discussing) that also share strong ties with essential themes in *Othello*. As previously discussed, there are also a wide variety of topics in *Othello* that students can almost certainly relate to on a personal level. This makes *Othello* an ideal play for introducing high school freshmen to Shakespeare. If

they learn early on in their experience with Shakespeare that his works have withstood the test of time because they are not only beautifully written but also highly relevant and relatable, there is a much greater chance that they will not only get more out of their 9th grade Shakespeare experience, but have more positive interactions with Shakespearian text throughout the remainder of their educational careers.

Because *Othello* has so many themes that are applicable today, it is not surprising that-- like *The Taming of the Shrew*, *Hamlet*, and *Twelfth Night*, to name only a few – it has been adapted into a modern film, *O*. The film focuses on an American high schooler, Odin James, who is the only black student at an all-white private school and the star of the school's basketball team, invoking the wrath of his best friend and fellow teammate, Hugo Goulding. Unfortunately, the film is rated R and received relatively poor reviews, so watching it in its entirety in a classroom of freshmen seems like both asking for trouble and an exercise in futility.

That being said, appropriate clips from the movie could be used as an example of real-world applications of the themes and events of *Othello* (a particularly good one is when Hugo sets up O to hear his girlfriend being dissed, as it makes the disgust and betrayal Othello feels during the scene when Iago tricks him into thinking Cassio is describing Desdemona instead of Bianca much more real). Also, the mere fact that *O* (as well as the more faithful film adaptation of the play starring Laurence Fishburne) garnered an "R" rating may be enough to pique students' interests. The Laurence Fishburne movie can provide an example of how great dramaturgy can create true emotional connections between the audience and the play; the incredibly tragic last scene, in which Othello murders Desdemona and then kills himself, is incredibly cutting in this movie. Shakespeare's plays are undeniably the raunchiest

material they will be encouraged to read in school, which often surprises students; their antiquity falsely earns them the label of "boring," and stripping this misconception away can help generate the intrinsic interest that is essential for the creation of an effective and positive learning experience.

There are a multitude of classroom exercises and activities that can make use of the context and relevant themes in Othello. Students can write response paragraphs detailing how a certain theme (e.g., love) plays out in their own lives, and how they are similar to and different from the experiences of characters in the play. Point-of-view exercises and projects detailing how minor characters may have seen the events of *Othello* could also be useful (such as, "Write a description of Act III, Scene III from Bianca's point of view"). Students may also benefit from an exercise comparing and contrasting the climate of 17th-century England and the 21st-century United States, especially in terms of race, gender, and religion. Students could also complete an end-of-unit project in which they create a modern-day version of a key scene or event in *Othello*, complete with an explanation of the events preceding and following the scenes they portrayed. Such activities give students the opportunity to make personal connections with the text that may pique their interest and generate more enthusiasm for both *Othello* and Shakespeare's works as a whole.

Vocabulary and Language

While *Othello* has a variety of topical and long-standing themes, a rich plot, and fascinating characters, none of that will matter to students if they are unable to follow the story. "Too often, particularly when studying Shakespeare, students become so bogged down by the words that they are unable to connect to the characters and the conflict of the drama" (Dulaney, 40). This is troublesome

for three reasons, the first of which is that if students do not understand the most basic elements of the play, it is literally impossible for them to analyze or further engage with the text in any way. Second, Shakespeare's language is integral to his work, and understanding the role of iambic pentameter, trochaic pentameter, blank verse, and quartos unearths a much richer understanding of *Othello.* Finally, language itself is integral to Iago's manipulation of the other characters in the play, and therefore to the progression of both character development and the plot itself. If students are unable to pick up on the nuances of Iago's speech, they risk missing the suspense and drama of his intricately executed betrayal, and thus a major element of *Othello*'s compelling drama.

Although there are a myriad of reasons why students might not understand the basic elements of *Othello*'s plot (several of which will be addressed in the next section), one significant factor in students' inability to comprehend the play is because of their unfamiliarity with 17th-century English. "Vocabulary, syntax, and word play or rhetorical devices" can all cause comprehension problems for students, regardless of reading ability (Garrett). A multitude of words used in the plays are not a part of the Standard American English lexicon, and his syntax often uses patterns that are similarly outdated. Hopefully, 9th grade students should be at least somewhat familiar with basic rhetorical devices, such as simile, metaphor, imagery, and allusion. However, Shakespeare's literary devices can be more complex, and, coupled with the difficulties students experience with word meaning and order in his plays, even simple puns – which were included by Shakespeare for the benefit of his least-educated audience members – can be frustratingly obtuse. That being said, there are a variety of ways in which the barriers of vocabulary, syntax, and rhetorical devices can be addressed in a 9th-grade classroom.

Understanding Vocabulary in Othello

Vocabulary has the unfortunate dual nature of being both traditionally tedious to learn and essential to comprehension of any given text. However, vocabulary competence is essential not only for reading comprehension, but also for students' own development of a rich and varied lexicon. This means that educational researchers and theorists are consistently striving to find more effective ways of teaching vocabulary in a meaningful and easily retained manner. A variety of strategies abound for different types of learners; however, because they struggle with the vocabulary, syntax, and nonliteral meanings of Shakespearean English, students who have been newly exposed to Shakespeare's plays may benefit from instructional practices originally designed for students learning English as a second language (ESL) or English as a foreign language (EFL). Using curriculum that was developed with the needs of students with a variety of learning styles in mind is beneficial for all students in an integrated classroom, regardless of skill sets or ability level (NYCORE, 7). This approach may also be helpful to students who are, in fact, learning English as a second language. Of course, ESL students should be supported and protected in a variety of ways, and the curriculum developed here does not include specific strategies for supporting ESL students beyond the use of differentiated instruction.

One strategy for teaching vocabulary that has been proven to be effective with certain EFL students is the "semantic field" theory, which "suggests that the lexical content of a language is best treated not as a mere aggregation of independent words or an unstructured list of words but as a collection of interrelating networks of relations between words... individual word meanings exist within systems of related meanings, and knowledge of the meaning relations among a set of words would seem to follow from

knowledge of the constituent meanings. There is ample psychological evidence that supports this assumption... Adults are better at remembering words from lists that contain semantically related subsets than words from lists of unrelated words" (Amer). An example of vocabulary words grouped by semantic field from *Othello* would be "pernicious, odious, insolent, abhorrent, egregious" All of these words are adjectives that are related to negativity and dislike; however, to simply label them as synonyms – as often happens in ESL classrooms – would be incorrect. The relationship between these words could be presented *using* synonyms (e.g., "Pernicious – extremely harmful"), or with a chart like the following:

Word	Bad	Because harmful	Because hateful	Because disrespectful	Because outrageous
Pernicious	x	x			
Odious	x	x	x		
Insolent	x			x	
Abhorrent	x		x		
Egregious	x	x			x

Such a visual illustrates that while all 5 words are related (i.e., they could all be substituted with the simple word, "bad"), they are in fact nuanced and different. Students then apply this knowledge by completing a series of fill-in-the-blank questions:

Their _____ fighting was destroying their relationship.

The mother was upset by her son's _____ refusal to clean the bathroom.

Kim Jong Un's _____ violations of human rights in North Korean people is a global tragedy.

The _____ little dog would not stop growling and barking at me.

His _____ body odor makes me want to puke after P.E.

The goal of the fill-in-the-blank exercise is not only to demonstrate students' applied knowledge, but also to help them understand the important but subtle differences between words. This distinction not only helps students learn the vocabulary more effectively and demonstrates the importance and significance of Shakespeare's word choices, which can come across to struggling students as frustrating and unnecessary. Furthermore, even if students do not retain the exact nuance of a particular word, they are more likely to apply the correct connotation while reading and therefore gain a greater (even if somewhat incomplete) comprehension of the play.

Using semantic fields to teach vocabulary can help establish similarity in meaning between vocabulary words when relevance from context is difficult to parse out due to the challenges presented by the act of reading Shakespeare itself. In typical learning situations, acquiring vocabulary "through reading... or any 'fully contextualized activities,' to use Oxford and Scarcella's 1994 term" is an extremely effective strategy, as "vocabulary words thus acquired retain not just their referential meaning but also the syntactic, pragmatic, and even emotional information from their context. Most important, vocabulary is no longer thought of as acquired as separate items; it is an integral part of discourse and is developed along with reading strategies such as contextual guessing" (Gu and Johnson, 645-646). However, the other two components of Shakespeare's writing that make his works difficult for students to

understand – syntax and rhetorical devices – may curtail the effectiveness of using "context clues" to understand the meaning of a particular word.

Interestingly, there are some similarities between the performance of and difficulties experienced by ESL students and learning disabled (LD) students. As with ESL, certain strategies that have been developed for LD students may be helpful for students in an integrated or general education classroom, with the added benefit of being particularly useful for any LD students who are in the class. Once again, however, that is not to say that any techniques discussed here can stand alone as total student support, irrespective of students' needs as outlined in their IEPs. That being said, particular methods used when teaching students with disabilities may be particularly applicable to a Shakespearian curriculum, due to the difficulty and inaccessibility it presents to many students.

One method of vocabulary instruction that I have only observed in special education classrooms (specifically, to help with the reading and vocabulary retention skills of severely dyslexic students) takes a three-pronged approach to vocabulary memorization, rather than the traditional word/definition approach. In this method, the student looks up the definition for a vocabulary word, and writes it on a notecard. The student also writes a simple example sentence of their own invention that demonstrates the use of the word. Neither of these is particularly groundbreaking practice; however, the third step of the process involves looking up the root origin of the word and writing that down as well. The thought process behind this practice is that learning the etymology of various words can not only help students memorize the meanings of various vocabulary words, but also help them discover connections between different words that share similar roots.

As with the semantic field-centered approach to learning vocabulary, this method emphasizes connections and patterns as a strategy for helping students retain vocabulary information. Explicitly focusing on orthography – including the etymological roots of words – is a strategy used to help dyslexic students decode words and form semantic connections, as they do not automatically engage in these processes at the rate of typical readers (Special Education Support Service). However, because some of the words that Shakespeare uses are completely unfamiliar to many younger students, they cannot rely on innately forming orthographical or semantic connections when confronted with a new word in the same way that they may be used to doing when reading texts written in modern American English.

Knowing etymological roots of Shakespearean words may also be a helpful approach for students who are familiar with a romance language other than English, as many of the words Shakespeare uses have Latin roots that more closely resemble words in other languages. Some of these words are now obsolete, and thus may be entirely unfamiliar to students, while others – even more confusingly – may still be used in modern American English, but with a completely different meaning. For example, when Shakespeare uses the word "assist," he does not mean "help," as in the modern American English lexicon– rather, he means "to be present" (Clafin, 348). This becomes less confusing when one considers that "assist" comes from the Latin root *assistere,* meaning "stand by" or "attend" – and which, it so happens, is very close to the French word "assister," which means "to stand by" (Harper 2014). While knowing the root word in this situation would presumably help all students avoid confusion in this regard, it would be a particularly powerful tool for students who are familiar with the French language. There are also a variety of words that were used

literally by Shakespeare but are used figuratively today, such as "sensible" and "assume." Knowing the etymology of these words would be useful for students because it explains *why* Shakespeare used certain words, and provides a more meaningful context for students to develop a sense of Shakespearean English as it diverges from the modern American version.

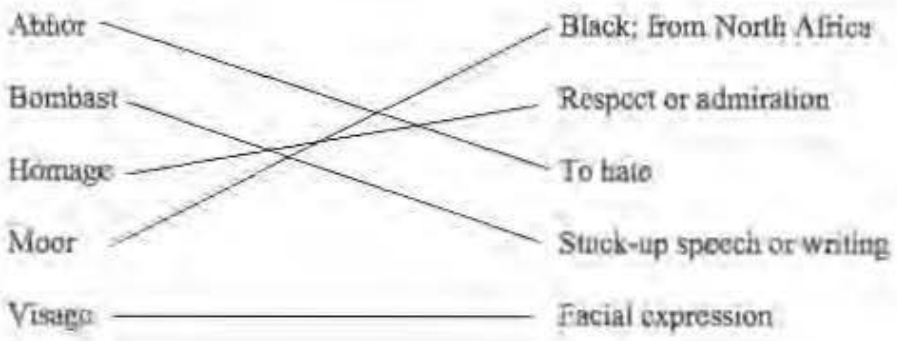
Addressing vocabulary while reading *Othello* should be both an explicit and a continuous process. Lessons explicitly devoted to learning vocabulary through the strategies discussed above will be necessary as students progress through the play. A vocabulary lesson at the beginning of each Act which addresses the main vocabulary words would help students better understand the material they are about to read, and a quiz on the learned vocabulary – both before and after reading the Act – could help with not only retention, but give students who struggled more with the initial vocabulary lessons a chance to see the words applied in context and improve their score. In this system, students who score at or above a particular percentage point on their post-reading vocabulary quiz, based on their first quiz result (i.e., >90% for students who got 80%-85% on their initial test, etc.) would receive a set amount of extra credit.

A very simple strategy for teaching vocabulary is to capitalize on students' incidental attention by posting the vocabulary words around the room before they are officially taught. This technique, which is said to be useful for students with attention-deficit disorders, means that "as the eyes of students wander around the classroom that week, they often focus on the posters and the spelling words" (Armstrong, 63). Students are then more likely to retain these words when they are explicitly taught later on. If these words are then hung in the back of the classroom to make room for new "incoming" words, they can also serve as a consistent visual aid if

students encounter them while reading (backing words with velcro will allow for easy maneuverability around the classroom, with the added benefit of being stored in a unit-themed "word box" for student use after the conclusion of the curriculum).

Other, more entertaining activities can also be used to help students retain vocabulary, like making a list of insults from the play and allowing students to yell them at one another or creating a scavenger hunt using vocabulary words from *Othello*. Such activities may help some students overcome their fear of Shakespearian language in a non-threatening way. Students should also be provided with a "cheat sheet" of common Shakespearian contractions, and provided with a brief lesson early on pertaining to the proper use of "you/thou/thee/thy" (see Appendix 1 for graphic). Furthermore (assuming that there is not a limit on the number of copies teachers are allowed to make at the school where this curriculum is being taught), it would be very helpful to use photocopies of *Othello* made from the Greenblatt edition, as this version of the play includes a huge number of extremely helpful footnotes and annotations to which students may refer while reading.

Students will be tested on their knowledge of vocabulary in one of four ways. The first is through matching, in which students will pair vocabulary words with their definitions by drawing a line between the two, like so:



This method is particularly useful for low-level readers, students who rely heavily on visual cues, and those who have difficulty with memorization and recall. If students are ready for an extra challenge, vocabulary words and/or definitions that have no mate may be added. The second method of vocabulary evaluation is vocabulary fill-in-the-blank, in which students are presented with a definition and must write the correct vocabulary word in the blank next to it. This method may be made more or less difficult through the addition or absence of a word bank, which may be helpful for students who struggle with memorization and recall. If students still need a word bank but are ready for less scaffolding, the word bank may contain vocabulary words whose definitions are not listed. The third method, definition fill-in-the blank, is identical, except that students write the definition instead of the vocabulary word. The final method of vocabulary assessment used is original sentence creation, in which students must use each vocabulary word in a sentence they make up. As this is the hardest method, extra points may be given for particularly creative sentences or ones that use multiple vocabulary words at once.

Understanding Syntax in Othello

Even once students are familiar with the words in *Othello*, they will not be able to understand the play if they are consistently getting tripped up by syntax variations. In Standard American English, a syntactic order of Subject-Verb-Object is usually followed; that is, "I *(S)* walked *(V)* the dog *(O)*." Of course, no student, regardless of background, speaks Standard American English all the time, and other syntax variations are commonly and expressively used all the time. Explicit knowledge of this syntactical

inconsistency, especially in light of Shakespeare's purposeful manipulation of it, can be validating to students and provide examples of how varying ones' syntax can be a powerful source of expressive material.

There are six possible S-V-O combinations in English, all of which are technically correct (even if some are very seldom used). The unusual syntactic combinations, or inversions, are unfamiliar to many students – especially those who already have difficulty with reading – and can be very confusing. In order to understand what is being said, readers simply have to mentally rearrange the inverted sentence into the standard S-V-O order; eventually, even this step becomes unnecessary for comprehension. However, many students struggle with it because it is unfamiliar; once they learn to recognize inverted syntax, they can learn to decode it.

Such efforts are incumbent because Shakespeare, as a master of the English language, used inversion "to create specific dramatic and poetic effects... to emphasize key words, to create specific poetic rhythms, to give a character a specific speech pattern (think Polonius, for example), or for a variety of other purposes" (Garrett, 2). Thus, in addition to being able to understand what is being said at all, the ability to decode inversion will help students pick up on key emphases throughout *Othello.* For example, in Act I, Scene II, Othello delivers a speech to the Venetian court that uses inversion to emphasize particular words, despite the fact that he is speaking in blank verse: "That I have ta'en away this old man's daughter, / It is most true; true, I have married her: / The very head and front of my offending / Hath this extent, no more. Rude am I in my speech, / And little bless'd with the soft phrase of peace." The inversion of the first sentence not only puts the emphasis of the line on "true," but allows it to be repeated without seeming unnatural –

proof of Othello's honesty, and courage to accept the consequences of his actions; similarly, "rude" is emphasized by its unusual place at the beginning of the sentence, speaking to Othello's consciousness of how he might appear crude or simple in speech due to years of war. In just these few short lines, inversion is used to subtly characterize Othello – a characterization that students may not pick up on outside the context of a close reading, but an important one nevertheless and one that students should have the tools to decode.

One lesson at the beginning of the unit on inversion should give students the basis they need to understand particular phrases, with the eventual goal of them recognizing when inversion is happening and triggering a response that something significant may be happening in the play. In order to reach that goal, however, one pre-emptive, explicit lesson is not enough; rather, continual returns to and emphasis on the topic (as with all topics, as per is necessary for students to gain a proficient or advanced understanding of how and why inversion is used).

Understanding Wordplay and Rhetorical Devices in Othello

Wordplay and rhetorical devices both play important roles in *Othello*, as with all of Shakespeare's work. In the contemporary logic of Shakespeare and his audience, "the term 'rhetoric' referred to the structuring of argument and devices used to shape thought and feeling into communication, and it encompassed poetry, oratory, grammar, and logic" (O'Dell, 116). Elizabethans were used to processing rhetorical devices as a means of understanding information. Thus, even people who were poorly educated were conditioned to understand and appreciate rhetoric. The language in *Othello* is reflective of this fact – while there are a variety of complex jokes,

themes, and allusions that would have catered to the upper classes (many of whom were undoubtedly familiar with *Un Capitano Moro* to begin with), there are also an abundance of puns, geared towards the enjoyment of less-educated audience members.

Ironically, many of the puns in Shakespeare's plays fly over the heads of all but the most educated viewers, owing to changes in their social and linguistic contextual knowledge that have occurred over the past 400 years. This contributes to confusion and frustration among students – if Shakespeare was enjoyed by people of all classes and educational backgrounds in Early Modern England, why is he so inaccessible to modern audiences? The truth of the matter is that, as with a familiarity with the social context of *Othello*, an understanding of the rhetorical devices used makes the play not only more comprehensible, but adds significance and drama.

Indeed, being able to decode rhetorical devices gives students the ability to appreciate both the epic language of the play and its juicier moments. Iago's obscene descriptions of Othello and Desdemona having sex in Act I is a good example of this – in addition to understanding what he's talking about in the first place, decoding the rhetorical devices used in this scene will enhance students' understandings of Iago as a character. After all, his descriptions are shocking, explicit, and clearly intended to provoke an enraged response from Brabantio; in this very early scene, Iago is shown to be a man who manipulates people through language, and who clearly and vehemently hates the (as of yet unnamed) Moor.

Unfortunately, "it is impossible to master Early Modern rhetoric in a few weeks. An important step, though, is simply being aware that these texts are highly rhetorical, and the rhetoric works both to embellish the text and express characterization" (Garrett, 2).

As 9th-graders, and assuming that this unit occurs near the middle of the semester, the students should have at least a cursory understanding of simple rhetorical devices. However, reading *Othello* affords an excellent opportunity to teach students to recognize and understand a variety of key but non-intuitive rhetorical devices, such as metaphor, simile, allusion, synecdoche, and ellipsis.

Students may apply their knowledge of these areas by searching for examples in a given passage and explaining their meaning, conducting close readings of a given passage and using the meaning and purpose of rhetorical devices to prove a point about the author's purpose, and using original examples of various devices in creative assignments. Students would also benefit from watching a professional production of *Othello* in which the meaning behind rhetorical devices is made clear by the intonations and actions of the actor, as "the point of rhetoric is that the communication takes place between someone who uses rhetorical devices and someone who *hears* them" (O'Dell, 233). The importance of using performance as a means of enhancing students' engagement with *Othello* will be discussed at greater length later on.

The Role of Verse in Othello

Shakespeare used three types of writing styles in his plays: prose, rhymed verse, and blank verse. He wrote the majority of his verse in iambic pentameter, consisting of five iambs, or metrical feet containing one unstressed syllable followed by one stressed syllable. The name of this meter itself can help students remember the definition of "iambic pentameter," as "iambic" refers to the iambs, "penta" means five, and "meter" refers to any regular rhythmic pattern in poetry. Shakespeare used both rhymed and unrhymed verse in his plays, for a variety of specific reasons. Rhyming iambic pentameter was "often used for ritualistic or choral effects and for

highly lyrical or sententious passages that give advice or point to a moral," such as during songs, prologues, epilogues, and choruses (Schwartz). However, Shakespeare also used rhyme to give the audience a sense of distance or magic in a play. Using rhyme during the plays happening within his plays (such as the performance of *Pyramus and Thisbe* in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*) helped the audience recognize that the events unfolding on stage were not meant to be considered part of the "actual" play, but rather existed in a separate sphere – similarly, rhyme is often used during the masque scenes, lending an air of mystery and separation from the real world to these scenes. The faeries in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* – as with a variety of other magical characters throughout Shakespeare's works – also speak in rhymed verse, as a marker of their separation from mortal humans and occupation of a more magical plane of existence. While there are no magical creatures in *Othello*, this general pattern is useful for students to learn because it will help them recognize the fact that rhymed verse rhymes for a *reason*, which they, as a reader or audience member, can use as a tool in decoding the events of the play.

Rhymed verse is relatively easy to identify in Shakespeare's work, as students should be familiar with the concept of rhyme schemes (even if they are not knowledgeable about more advanced meters, such as iambic pentameter). Blank verse can be somewhat more difficult to recognize right away; however, it is used more regularly than rhymed verse because it mirrors regular speech but still lends a sense of artistry and passion to characters' words:

> Art elevates and distills the everyday; writing in blank verse helps sharpen that distinction. Blank verse, as opposed to prose, is used mainly for passionate, lofty or momentous occasions and for introspection; it may suggest a refinement of character. Many of Shakespeare's most famous speeches are written in blank verse... a speech or scene in blank verse

> may end with a single rhyming couplet known as a capping couplet. It is used to lend a final punch, a concluding flourish or a note of climax to the end of a speech or scene (Schwartz).

If students are unable to identify blank verse by counting iambs or reading the text aloud in an attempt to parse out stressed and unstressed syllables, they can also use the "visual clue" of determining whether the lines fill the page or are cut off at strategic intervals (Schwartz). Once students are able to determine independently whether or not a passage is written in verse, they can start to consider the significance of using this type of language. Students who are skilled at recognizing patterns, rhythm, or inflections should eventually be able to recognize verse simply by reading or hearing it, rather than by using any particular technique. However, regardless of how they come to the conclusion that some type of verse is being used, this could be an important step for students while they are conducting close readings of key passages.

Prose was used "whenever verse would seem bizarre: in serious letters... in proclamations, and in the speeches of characters actually or pretending to be mad... for cynical commentary... or reducing flowery speech to common sense terms... It is used for simple exposition, transitions, or contrast.... It is used for scenes of everyday life.... for low comedy... and for bantering, relaxed, or unbuttoned conversation" (Schwarz). Of course, Shakespeare's prose is still poetic in its use of language and rhetorical devices – however, the unstructured form of prose allows it to code for certain factors amongst characters. A common misunderstanding is that prose is used solely by lower-class characters, as the more lyrical quality of verse connotes high society and quality education. However, this is patently untrue: Iago, for example, switches back and forth between prose and verse for a variety of reasons, none of

which are related to class. It is partially for this reason that *Othello* contains so much dialogue in prose, especially compared to Shakespeare's previous plays.

Iago's Use of Language

Iago's role as a hypocritically dishonest villain is the main reason that it is important for students to understand the differences between rhymed verse, blank verse, and prose. Iago's speech is always artful and refined, regardless of whether he is speaking in meter or not. However, by occasionally dropping down from verse into prose, Iago suggests two things: one, that he is highly capable of the manipulation of speech; and two, that he means to be relatable on the terms of the 'common man;' further cementing his ironic image as "Honest Iago" (Pedagogy). Of course, even the fact that Iago would use various patterns of speech to manipulate the other characters' (and the audience's) feelings towards him serves as a kind of characterization. However, this effect is quite subtle (which makes sense, given Iago's penchant for sneakiness), and students will need to have strong skills in decoding verse and understanding its importance to pick up on it.

Iago's use of language is a unifying factor among many of the topics discussed above other than verse alone, such as diction and vocabulary, as well as some of the major themes in *Othello*, like love, jealousy, and betrayal. Therefore, Iago's linguistic prowess and penchant for manipulation can serve as a useful recurring theme throughout the curriculum. After all, *Othello*'s plot is driven largely by Iago's verbal trickery, through which he plants the seeds of doubt in Othello's head, cons Roderigo into giving him a handsome sum of money, and convinces Emilia to steal Desdemona's handkerchief for him. Students may also be intrigued by the use

of slippery language in their own lives. Engaging exercises that explore "half-truths," the power of code-switching, and how public figures use language to portray themselves in certain lights (a la, "mistakes were made") could all help students both identify with the text and explore how language is used to shape their own experiences.

Othello is a fantastic source text for exploring the complex role of language in shaping students' own experiences because the plot of the play relies entirely on how Iago shapes the experiences of other characters with his words. Othello's insistence on, and obsession with, gaining "ocular proof" (3.3.412) of Desdemona's infidelity, for example, is a testament to the sway of Iago's speeches. On the one hand, Othello loves Desdemona, and wants to be absolutely sure that she has betrayed him before seeking revenge. On the other hand, through the manipulation of a few key words, Iago dupes Othello into thinking he has received this proof, even when he really hasn't:

> ….he has told Othello 'I speak not yet of proof' (3.3.199). How carefully, subtly different is this from 'I speak not of proof'; the adverb implies that proof is available, does indeed exist. By the end of the scene, when Iago introduces the topic of the handkerchief, he can say, 'It speaks against her with the other proofs' (3.3.444), obscuring the fact that there have been no other proofs, only linguistic tricks (Maguire).

This is an excellent example of diction and the theme of jealousy, as both are necessary for Iago's successful manipulation of Othello. Such small instances of "linguistic trickery" also strongly attests to the importance of using close reading exercises with this text. By the time this curriculum comes up in the school year, students should be familiar with a variety of close reading strategies, such as re-

reading and systematic annotation. *Othello* can provide them with not only a useful space to practice these skills, but also a more challenging and rewarding text that demonstrates the value of close reading in general.

Accessibility

Because it is such a difficult text for 9th-graders to be reading, *Othello* presents an opportunity for a variety of learning strategies to be employed. Some of these strategies, such as using methods from the fields of ELA and Special Education to teach vocabulary, have already been discussed, with the idea in mind that "certain teaching strategies developed for one purpose could be effectively applied to other groups of children with different patterns of educational need (Florian, 16). However, vocabulary is far from the only area in which these techniques would be useful when teaching *Othello.*

Being a complex text with unusual vocabulary, syntax, and rhythm, *Othello* presents a special challenge to low-level readers. The text also must overcome the mental block students may have already developed regarding Shakespeare, finding his works intimidating (and therefore not worth trying to understand or engage with). Thus, the ideal *Othello* curriculum would offer ways for all students, regardless of personal interest or reading ability, to find some meaningful connection with the text and come away having fulfilled an adequate number of objectives accompanying the play. Such a curriculum would also be relatively easy to "be arranged along a continuum from high to low intensity" (16), based on the needs of individual students. That is to say, each activity or assignment will have either a threshold of acceptable work for each student based on a) whether they made an adequate effort and b) how successfully the objective was fulfilled, or a variety of options that would all contribute to or demonstrate the mastery of a

particular objective. An example of the former would be giving certain students different numbers of vocabulary words to master, with the idea that they will spend equivalent amounts of time doing the work but still need to define or identify the same *percentage* of words during a test in order to pass. An example of the latter type of differentiated instruction could occur during a class staging of a scene from *Othello*. Students playing Othello would have a high-intensity assignment, while a student who plays the First Senator or the Clown would have a low-intensity assignment.

Strategies for Students with Developing Reading Skills

Because *Othello*, like Shakespeare's other plays, presents the plot solely through dialogue and a miniscule smattering of stage directions, the sequence events unfolding on stage are not always obvious to the reader. Students whose reading skills are still developing may not be able to find the clues within any particular scene that will direct their knowledge of the play's actual plot. The laundry list of characters – some of whom, like Emilia, are only on stage for brief periods *and* are extremely unpredictable and unreliable – can be especially confusing when they exist in what seems to be a vacuum, devoid of the explicit character descriptions that accompany most of the more typical texts that students at this age will encounter.

There are several strategies that can be employed to ensure that every student, regardless of current skill level, can understand not only the plot of *Othello*, but also analyze the themes and characters in the play to the best possible extent of their ability. The first strategy is to make use of Standard Academic English (SAE) summaries. These are printed before each scene in the Folger edition of *Othello*, and are widely available online (an online version would be preferable, since copies of the play from the Greenblatt edition

include much more thorough notations than copies from the Folger edition). These could be used in a variety of ways. As part of an in-class exercise, students could read the first half of a summary, then make a prediction about what will happen next – the next day at the beginning of class, they could discuss whether or not their predictions came true while doing the previous night's reading. Students could also read the summary aloud in class, and have a discussion about whether or not they think these events make sense in the context of the rest of the play that they've read so far. Students could also potentially "opt in" to taking a summary home to use as a study guide while reading. These summaries can serve as "guideposts" for students to follow when reading, giving them clues of what events to look for and giving them a base on which to ground their analysis of the play.

Of course, despite the benefits of SAE summaries, there will always be students who attempt to use them as a replacement for, rather than supplement to, the test. This is why short pop quizzes 1-3 days a week can be so helpful. Ideally, the pop quizzes used for this curriculum would include one question about the an event that happened in the scene that *was* discussed in the summary (to ensure that students are at least taking in that much), one question about an event that happened in the scene that was *not* discussed in the summary (if possible), and one quote identification question. Such quizzes should take no more than 6 minutes, but are worth the class time in that they encourage students to read the actual text for real comprehension. It should also be noted that students who fail two pop quizzes in a row should be given the option to retake the second failed quiz orally with the teacher during lunch, as some students struggle with wording on tests (and doing an oral exam allows for the questions to be rephrased) or tests in general. As an alternative to testing, another possibility includes completing a reading journal with specific guided questions for each night's reading.

This approach fosters the opportunity for more collaborative efforts between students, while still providing them with a structured approach to avoiding dependence on pre-written summaries.

Students who have difficulties while reading the play may also benefit immensely from seeing a staged version of it. There are a variety of filmed stagings of the play available online, from which clips of particularly confusing or key scenes may be pulled to be shown in class. Visual aids may also be helpful in helping students distinguish between characters. One strategy that could be used to address this particular problem is by having students draw the play's major characters based on descriptions provided by the teacher, to be hung around the room. If available, these posters could be drawn on different colors of poster paper, and students who need help in this area could underline the lines of different characters in the same color as their poster. This kind of tactile-visual connection may help students gain a more useful mental picture of how the play is unfolding – and having students reference their own work (i.e., pictures) can be encouraging. In a similar vein, having students act out key scenes can be helpful, because it connects students to the text without the use of writing exercises. Such activities can also open the door for creativity, which is essential for student engagement, and also intrigue students and get them involved with the literature, even if they don't quite yet understand it. After all, "giving students the opportunity to voice the words as if they understand them, even before they do, can connect them to the language and make them wonder at it" (Johnston and Maurer). It is also important to encourage students to enjoy the language on a visceral level, even if they don't understand 'every word of every line of every page.' After all, Shakespeare's language is beautiful and moving,

and if students are able to recognize that even just learning to appreciate how he sounds is an accomplishment, they may be much less intimidated by the difficulty of the material itself.

Another way to support struggling students and foster academic achievement and hard work is to provide a variety of opportunities to revise or redo assignments and quizzes. Because this unit is reading-intensive, revised work would not be required to be handed in by the end of the 4-week period -- rather, it can be turned in at any time before the end of the semester. Extra credit will also be awarded to students who come in for extra support during non-class hours.

Strategies for Fostering Student Engagement

A focus of this curriculum is finding ways to help students engage with the material in ways that are both meaningful and contribute to their mastery of key objectives. While the ultimate goal is for students to understand Shakespeare's writing, the "richness [of Shakespeare's works] can also make it worthwhile to try to get students engaged with the language before they fully comprehend it (Johnston and Maurer). The first step to encouraging a relationship between students and *Othello* is by helping them connect with a variety of the play's major themes. Although 9th graders are similar to middle school students in that they are still at varying stages of development, all students at this age can relate to the themes of love, hate, jealousy, and friendship. In fact, 9th-graders have quite an advanced understanding of these themes because they have just left middle school, and the excitement they feel about making new friends coupled with the pain and betrayal of losing old ones means that they are in touch with many of the key emotions explored by the play.

The relevance of topics such as race, gender, and religion has also been discussed at length, and capitalizing on these similarities between students' lives and the lives of the characters in the play will potentially allow for the students to draw some thought-provoking and engaging parallels between *Othello* and themselves. Students may participate in discussions or write paragraphs about how these themes play out in their own lives. They will also be required to keep a personal journal at the back of their notes (as they will have done for all of their other units). At the end of select class periods, students will be required to write in these journals for a set amount of time, starting with a given prompt about the text but with the understanding that they can move away from that however they see fit, so long as their pencil does not stop moving for the entire allotted time. The teacher will never read these entries, but at the end of the unit, students will review these entries and submit a paragraph based on what they find. This allows students to write in a low-pressure environment, and encourages them to be vulnerable and reflective in their experience with the text (Brady, 19).

There are a wide variety of opportunities for creative assignments and assessments that come with studying a play as rich and exciting as *Othello*, and which may help keep students engaged with the material. One such assignment is dividing students into groups and allowing them to pick a scene that the class has already read, which they will perform with modern clothes, scenery, props, dialogue, and context. This would check for not only mastery of content, but also critical thinking skills and an understanding of the context of the play, an analysis of parallels between *Othello* and life in the 21st century, and creative use of supplies – as well as interpersonal skills and memorization. Another assignment would be a rubric-based point-of-view project, in which students could

rewrite a scene, draw a comic, put on a puppet show, make a diorama, write a gossip or "Dear Amy" style article, take a series of photographs, or create a piece that expresses the point of view of any secondary character (the only drawback of this is finding enough time for students with performance pieces who want to present in front of the class to do so, although there could be special performances scheduled during lunch or after school). Not only would this give students the opportunity to think about the issues that women faced during the Elizabethan era (as both of the main characters are male), but it would serve as an assessment of comprehension and ability to apply the text instead of simply regurgitate it, as well as allow students to earn a grade using a method that they feel speaks most strongly to their personal strengths and intelligence type. Such a form of assessment would be assigned with the goal of not only evaluating students but maintaining their interest in the text, as "developing authentic assessment instruments based on multiple intelligences can provide a context within which teachers can better engage [students'] attention" (Armstrong, 60).

Another creative activity that may engage students with *Othello* right away is the use of a prop box. At the beginning of the first class of the curriculum, students will enter the room to find a "skull, white candle, candlestick, bridal veil, plastic dagger, and handkerchief with a strawberry painted on it" laid out across a table or several desks (Dulaney, 39). They are encouraged to pick up and mess around with the objects, before sitting down and processing the objects by filling out a word web, with "Othello" written at the center and the six objects in the surrounding centermost bubbles. Upon completion of that activity, students would divide into group and create a sketch that incorporated all of the various items on the table in one way or another. Students then will present their sketches to the class, but with the (surprise) caveat that they cannot speak, as "the omission of dialogue forced students to consider

how characters' actions and mannerisms, along with the uses of the props, are critical within the context of a play" (Dulaney, 40). Because of the natural relationship between the items, students may create scenes that reflect some of the events of *Othello,* despite (presumably) having never read the play before.

This activity, therefore, serves a variety of purposes. First, it gets students actively involved in the pre-reading process, and helps them create a tangible connection between themselves and the play through the use of physical props. Second, it helps students recognize the emotional connotations of certain objects, and how reliance on physical props and action is essential for a play. Third, this activity shows students that the themes in *Othello* are still relevant, since their skits embodied several of them without even trying to make a distinct connection. Obviously, students will still be writing paragraphs, conducting close readings, and reading the play aloud in class. However, more nontraditional methods of instruction, such as those listed above, can help students gain a real appreciation for – rather than fear of – Shakespearean literature.

Curricular Fundamentals: Dewey, Bruner, and Vygotsky

The following curriculum is based on the aforementioned research, guidelines for 9th grade English Literature standards in the state of Colorado, and underlying principles of modern pedagogy that pervade current methods and theories of teaching. Three main educational theorists stand at the heart of these underlying principles: John Dewey, Jerome Bruner, and Vygotsky, all of whom drew upon the constructivist and developmental theories of Jean Piaget. These three educational theorists' ideas about effective instruction

and classroom experiences are so deeply integrated into prevailing attitudes of progressive 21st century education that they are almost second nature; however, a brief overview of their pedagogical theories in relation to this curriculum bears examining.

Dewey's theories of progressive education are rooted in the ideals of child-centered education, in which the natural curiosities and needs of individual students dictate how and why they are presented with information in the classroom and expected to respond to this stimuli. His model of progressive education "asserted that students must be invested in what they were learning. Dewey argued that curriculum should be relevant to students' lives" (Levin). The following curriculum clearly draws upon this theory, as it places a large emphasis on generating student interest and helping them draw connections between themselves, their word, and the text. This curriculum is also designed with the goal of helping students discover an appreciation for and curiosity about Shakespeare, which mirrors Dewey's claim that "the criterion of the value of school education is the extent in which it creates a desire for continued growth" (Dewey, 58). This also ties in to Dewey's argument for the importance of finding connections between what students are learning in different subject areas, as "the best type of teaching bears in mind the desirability of affecting this interconnection. It puts the student in the habitual attitude of finding points of contact and mutual bearings" (170). Ideally, students will parse out the connections between *Othello* and their learnings in other courses, most notably history and social studies.

Bruner, like Dewey, believed in the importance of children finding connections between information they are presented with at school. He argued that the role of the teacher is not to lead by example, but rather to support students as they discover connections between pieces of information for themselves. This draws on Bruner's theory of discovery learning:

> Acquired knowledge is most useful to a learner, moreover, when it is "discovered" through the learner's own cognitive efforts, for it is then related to and used in reference to what one has known before. Such acts of discovery are enormously facilitated by the structure of knowledge itself, for however complicated any domain of knowledge may be, it can be represented in ways that make it accessible through less complex elaborated processes" (Bruner, xii).

Discovery learning is facilitated best by the development of a spiral curriculum, in which students are originally presented with "an intuitive depiction of a domain of knowledge, circling back to represent the domain more powerfully or formally as needed" (Bruner, xii). This development of scaffolding allows students to eventually achieve mastery of a complex skill, regardless of grade level or prior knowledge. The following curriculum emulates the spiral design in a variety of ways, such as teaching vocabulary that students are then expected to understand and use themselves and eventually having them identify and define unknown terms independently. Explicitly drawing text-to-self, text-to-world, and text-to-text connections is emphasized at the beginning of the curriculum, after which students will find and analyze these connections independently as they are revisited over the course of the curriculum.

Bruner's spiral curriculum closely resembles Vygotsky's zone of proximal development, which is "*the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers*" (Vygotsky, 86). In order to master new skills, students require assistance from a More Knowledgeable Other (MKO), or "someone who has a better understanding or a higher ability level than the learner, with respect to a particular task, process, or concept" (Levin). As students' skill increases the MKO can

reduce their support until the student is able to perform the task independently. This theory is most apparent in the individual lesson plans used in the following curriculum, the meat of which is made up of Say-See-Do instruction. This style involves three steps for each new idea that is introduced: Say, where the teacher explains the idea; See, where the teacher models the step; and Do, where the students copy the model of the teacher. This formula is somewhat deviated from in the following lesson plans at certain moments, but the emphasis on cycling through auditory, visual, and kinesthetic processes, as well as the emphasis on task analysis, is preserved. The Say-See-Do cycles are eventually followed by Structured Practice, in which the teacher provides more examples or opportunities for assessment to the class with gradually quickening pace. During this period, the teacher helps students approach automaticity by manipulating time, materials, and group size. Finally, the lessons end with Guided Practice, in which the teacher provides an opportunity for assessment that directly relates with the day's objective, and the explanation of that night's Independent Practice, or homework.

This model of lesson planning, borrowed from Breakthrough Collaborative and based on the teaching strategies of Doug Lemov (as presented in his 2010 book, *Teach Like a Champion*), explicitly makes use of Vygotsky's theories as it gradually removes MKO support and fosters students' independent learning. Used in conjunction with a spiral curriculum design, this style of lesson planning provides students with a high level of support while still encouraging independent learning. This structure should reduce the effects of anxiety and learned helplessness among students while providing a content-rich, complex curriculum that is accessible to

students of all skill and ability levels and instilling them with the confidence that comes with knowing they have achieved at least some level of mastery over a very difficult text.

Logistical Notes and Student Expectations

It is worth noting that a variety of classroom practices are implied in this curriculum, and therefore not extensively discussed. Because of the difficulty of Shakespeare, it is unlikely that *Othello* would be taught until at least the middle of the year. Thus, students are acclimated with not only common classroom rules of etiquette and protocol, but also the following practices:

- Completing a Do Now (an activity to be started as soon as one enters the classroom)
- Reading the objective and purpose aloud at or near the beginning of each class
- Participating in Closing Activities in order to leave the classroom
- Receiving participation points for completed class work and/or participation in class discussions (depending on the planned lesson and the predisposition of the student)
- Rules and regulations of both group and open discussion
- Doing Think-Pair-Shares (in which students have short periods of reflection and communication with a partner before sharing their joint ideas with the entire class)
- Writing paragraphs, essays, personal responses, and close-reading responses

- Using Visual-Instructional Plans (VIPs)
- Free journaling and journaling based on a prompt for a grade
- Completing worksheets
- Being called on through popsicle sticks (a method of cold-calling in which students' names are pulled from a mug, with either controlled or random outcomes in that students may or *may not* be called upon once in the same round)
- Raising hands
- Tracking
- Passing out and appropriately using whiteboards
- Having their binders organized and using them to appropriately store paper handouts
- Completing pop quizzes in which there is one supplemented online summary-related question, one summary-related question whose answer is not supplemented and/or online, and one quote-identification question, in which students must identify both the context and meaning of a given quote
- Bulletpoint note-taking
- The implementation of semantics fields and etymology in vocabulary studies.

These methods will therefore not be further explained like other activities in the following week-by-week curriculum breakdown, as their implementation has either already been examined or is assumed to be commonplace or intuitive to the modern educator. Students will also be used to various elements of inclusive classroom culture, including but not limited to receiving different versions of worksheets, assignments, and quizzes and being graded differently for classroom participation or contribution to group work. Students will understand that the purpose of these activities is to help them learn and grow as citizens of the world, and everyone learns differently. However, because there are accommodations for different skill and ability levels, students will be expected to contribute to the class and complete their assignment to the fullest prescribed extent.

Students will also not be required to complete computer-based homework (including but not limited to the typing of assignments and use of Internet research) outside of class, although of course these habits are encouraged if students are willing and able. It is also assumed that each student will check out a copy (either bound or photocopied) of the text, in which they will take notes in pencil (at the end of the period, students may purchase their texts for a reduced price or erase their markings and return their texts). It is assumed that the teacher will have access to a projector (either digital or overhead), a personal laptop, at least one laptop cart reservation per month, appropriate numbers of photocopied materials, butcher paper, and necessary student supplies such as pencils, notebook paper, and binders -- at the school's expense -- as well as materials such as speakers, planners, props and costume materials, markers, colored pencils, and single-subject notebooks (many of which will also be used for and may be recycled from other units).

Finally, many of these lessons incorporate elements that are relevant to modern-day life -- that is, life in the US during the spring of 2015. Obviously, these elements can and should be changed over time. However, the objectives and purposes behind these lessons are meant to be enduring, and should maintain their integrity regardless of shifts in the pop culture, political, and lifestyle shifts of the 21st century.

Standards

Although there are many current conversations that surround the usefulness of standardized evaluation, the reality is that students in modern American public schools are held to a variety of universal standards. The iteration of these standards being enacted in schools as of spring 2015 is the Common Core State Standards Initiative, colloquially known as the Common Core. These boundaries, which are designed to ensure that a student is "making progress toward being a prepared graduate" (Colorado Department of Education, 4), are listed in their entirety for writing and reading literacy at the 9th and 10th grade level in Appendix A. Each of the following lessons adheres to at least one Common Core standard.

Curriculum Overview

What follows is a 4-week overview of the planned curriculum for quick reference. This grid can also be used as an indicator of how particular patterns (e.g., when pop quizzes or comprehension checks occur, how often students have large-group discussions, and when major assessments take place) manifest themselves across the four-week curriculum period.

Monday (46 min)	**Tuesday (46 min)**	**Wednesday/Thursday (93 min)**	**Friday (46 min)**

Prop Box
• Examine props
  ○ *Word map*
• Create skits
• Discussion
	Act I Scene i
	• Language discussion
	• Vocab: Semantic Field
	• Self-select multicharacter read-aloud
	• Summary journals
	  ○ *Overview and initiation*
	• Free writes
	
	HW: Read I.ii; annotations
		Characterization & Act I Scene iii
		• Pop quiz
		• Character sketches
		  ○ *Othello, Iago, Desdemona, Roderigo, Brabantio, and Cassio*
		  ▪ *Check annotations*
		• Act out court scene with costumes, props
		
		HW: Finish I.iii, summary
			Act II Scene i
			• Vocab Act II
			• Round robin read-aloud
			  ○ *Emilia and Desdemona*
			• Prompt response (Iago)
			  ○ *Summary checks*
			
			HW: Read II.ii-iii; vocab

Theme Discussion #1
• Vocab quiz
• Jealousy and betrayal
  ○ *Small group*
  ▪ *Share out*
  ○ *Large group*
  ○ *Written response*
 	
HW: Finish written response, II summary
	Intro to Meter & Close Reading
	• Freeman/Taylor video
	• Iago's II.iii speech
	  ○ *Review*
	  ○ *Group annotation*
	• Individual annotation
	  ○ *Summary checks*
	• Individual close reading essay outline/writing
	
	HW: Work on close reading; read III.i & III.ii,
		Gender & Act III Scene iii
		• Pop quiz
		• Gender in Early Modern England lecture
		  ○ *Discussion and note-taking session*
		  ▪ *Everyday life and theatrical repercussions*
		• Read III.iii using costumes
		  ○ *Modern gender roles*
		• Work period
		
		HW: Finish close reading, III summary
			Act III Scene iv
			• Meter lesson review
			• Read III.iv
			  ○ *"Lyrical Snares" game*
			• Free write
			  ○ *Summary checks*
			• Vocab Act IV
			
			HW: Read IV.i; annotations

<u>Act IV Scene ii</u>
• Vocab quiz
• Self-select single character read-aloud
  ○ *"Prizewinning" comprehension checks/pre-reading*
• P2P summary checks
• Vocab Act V
 	
HW: Read IV.iii
	<u>Theme Discussion #2</u>
	• Race and religion
	  ○ *Chalk talk*
	  ○ *Large Group*
	  ○ *Lecture*
	  ○ *Venn Diagrams*
	  ○ *Private journaling*
	
	HW: Write summaries of IV.i-iii
		<u>Scene Adaptations</u>
		• Pop quiz
		• Scene from "O"
		  ○ *Group discussion*
		• Present project
		  ○ *Rubric*
		• Work time
		
		HW: Finish skits
			<u>Performances; Act V.i</u>
			• Scene adaptation performances
			  ○ *Flowers*
			• Multi-part read V.i
			
			HW: Read V.ii; Act V summary

<u>Close Reading #2</u>
• Pop quiz
• Peer summary checks
• Othello's final soliloquy
  ○ *Watch*
  ○ *Small group annotation*
  ▪ *Share out*
  ○ *Individual Annotation*
  ▪ *Refer to W3D2*
• Essay outline/writing
 	
HW: Work on close reading
	<u>Final Project Discussion</u>
	• Reflection
	  ○ *Liked*
	  ○ *Disliked*
	  ○ *Related*
	  ○ *Confused*
	  ▪ *Anonymous share out & respond*
	• Discuss final project
	  ○ Rubric
	
	HW: Work on final project; finish close reading
		<u>Final Project Work Period</u>
		• Workshop final projects and close readings
		• Music & snacks
		
		HW: Finish final projects
			<u>Final Project Showcase</u>
			• Peer rubrics

Times are based on George Washington High School 2014-2015 bell schedule (Denver, CO)

Lesson Plan Descriptions

A description of the particulars of each individual lesson planned for this curriculum is listed below, with the exception of the two lessons which have been detailed in extensive lesson plans. Each lesson has a chronological tag (W1D1, for example, stands for Week 1 Day 1) and a title that reflects the main focus of the lesson.

W1D1: Prop Box. Students will enter the room to hear ominous music playing and see six props (a skull, a candlestick, a veil, a plastic dagger, a handkerchief with a strawberry drawn on it, and a white candle) laid out on a table in the middle of the room. Students will play with the props, then complete a word web explicating the connotations of each object. Next, students will devise skits that make use of each prop, and perform them (without speaking, in order to emphasize the importance of action) for the class. Students will end the class by discussing the themes that were common among their skits.

W1D2: Act I Scene ii. Class will begin with an activity in which students are presented with a list of modern English terms and can guess which ones were invented or popularized by Shakespeare. They will then get to play with the language through a short "Shakespearean Insult" game. Students will participate in a brief lesson on word choice and vocabulary using the semantic field method. The teacher will then lead a discussion about strategies for comprehension, and the importance of enjoying the sound of the language even if its meaning is difficult to decode. Students will then read Act 1 Scene 1 aloud; students will self-select for reading different roles, although multiple students will have the opportunity to play a single character. There will be frequent checks for

understanding, and a conversation about the use of language and metaphor surrounding Iago's vulgar description of Desdemona and Othello's marriage. Students will then write a brief summary of the scene in their Summary Journals, and close out the period with a timed private free-write in response. They will read and annotate Act I Scene ii for homework, and write a brief summary in their summary journals.

W1D3: Characterization & Act I Scene iii. Students will take a pop quiz on I.ii at the beginning of class, then briefly review their summaries from the previous night and make corrections if necessary. Students will then participate in a characterization activity, in which students are divided into six groups, each of which is assigned a single character: Othello, Iago, Desdemona, Roderigo, Brabantio, or Cassio. The group will have to list their character's dominating traits (based on specific textual evidence) and present their findings, along with a rough drawing of the character, to the class. Each character will be associated with a color; students will be encouraged to underline character's passages in the appropriate color as they read if they need help keeping them separate. The groups will then hang their drawing on the walls. The remainder of class will be spent reading and acting out I.iii. Students will self-select roles; each role will be played by one student only, and they will be given props or simple costume pieces (such as ties for the senators and a plastic tiara for the Duke). The students not acting will be in the "jury," and do comprehension checks by periodically saying whether they think the speaker has made a good argument. For homework, students will finish reading I.iii (assuming they did not get through it in class) and write a brief summary in their Journals.

W1D4: Act II Scene i. Class will begin with an etymology-based lesson on the vocabulary students will encounter in Act II. Students will then read II.i round-robin style, pausing at strategic intervals to discuss Emilia's character and how she compares to and contrasts against Desdemona. The class will then do a brief, whole-group characterization activity for Emilia like they did during W1D3, with one student drawing what his or her classmates describe. Students will then do a prompt-response activity in based on Iago's aside about ensnaring Cassio in a trap. As students write, the teacher will grade their summary journals on a check plus to check minus scale; students who get check minuses will have to come in for a review with the teacher during lunch or after school. Students may then choose to share some of their ideas from the prompt response activity, which will be turned in for a grade. For homework, students will review the vocab words they learned in class, read II.ii and II.iii, and finish their prompt response if they did not do so in class.

W2D1: Theme Discussion #1. Students will take a vocabulary quiz and explore the theme of jealousy and betrayal through small and large group discussion. See Lesson Plan #1 for more details.

W2D2: Intro to Meter & Close Reading. At the beginning of class, students will watch David T. Freeman and Gregory Taylor's YouTube video on iambic pentameter, pausing at :50, 1:51, 2:46, and 3:43 for choral/physical interaction. They will then review Iago's speech (II.iii.245) as a class. The class as a whole will then conduct a teacher-guided close reading of this speech, beginning with a read-aloud of the entire passage to emphasize its turn to iambic pentameter beginning with the line, "When devils will the

blackest sins put on." Students will discuss what they think this shift means, especially in conjunction with the response paragraphs they wrote about Iago on W1D4. The teacher will then circle words related to two major themes in the passage (Christianity and blackness) and ask students to discuss these words, and possible themes, in small groups. Students will then have a whole-group discussion on these themes. Students will then do individual or small-group annotations on lines 260-271. Students will have done many close readings before, and will know to annotate with the goal of writing a response that shows how these themes are explored in the passage, and how they relate to the rest of the play. They will then fill out an outline in class and write a 3-5 paragraph essay on their findings. For homework, students will work on their essays and read III.i and III.ii.

W2D3: Gender & Act III Scene iii. The lesson will begin with a pop quiz on III.i and III.ii, followed by a lecture on women's roles in Elizabethan England. Students will take notes and break into small groups to discuss how these gender roles appear are both supported and challenged by *Othello,* referring back to their notes from W1D4 if they get stuck. Students will then come together for a large group discussion on their findings, as well as similarities and differences they notice about women's roles in Early Modern England and 21st century America. The teacher will then explain that unlike today, women weren't allowed to be actors, so young boys would play their parts on stage. Students will then self-select to read individual roles in III.iii, with the caveat that they must select a role that is the opposite of the gender they identify with (i.e., Desdemona would be played by a boy). Wigs will be provided and students will be encouraged to be creative in their reading. The reading will be followed by a brief discussion of why it is humorous in our society

for men to act like women, and what that says about our culture. The remainder of class will be used as a work period for students to work on their essays, using each other and the teacher as resources. For homework, students will finish their close readings.

W2D4: Act III Scene iv. This class will begin with a review and supplement of W2D2's lesson on meter; students will demonstrate mastery by correctly identifying iambic pentameter, verse, and prose in passages they have already read. Students will then self-select to read various roles in III.iv, with multiple students reading one role. As they read, students will play a game. If they notice that verse is being used, they will stand up. If the whole class stands at a correct moment, they will get a point. However, if they collectively stand at the wrong time, they will lose a point. If they get a certain number of points, they will earn a certain reward (such as extra credit or candy). Students will then have a timed free-write period with no set prompt -- all they have to do is keep their pencils moving for the entire timed period. As they are writing, the teacher will check their Summary Journals. The class will end with a lesson on vocabulary from Act IV. Over the weekend, students will read and annotate IV.i and review the vocabulary words they learned in class in preparation for a quiz on Monday.

W3D1: Act IV Scene ii. In this class, students will take a vocabulary quiz, and read Act IV Scene ii aloud. Students will then exchange Summar Journals with one another and check for comprehension by peer reviewing their Summary Journals. Finally, students will engage in an etymologically-based lesson about vocabulary in Act V. For homework, students will read IV.iii and summarize it in their Journals.

W3D2: Theme Discussion #2. Students will enter the room to discover that a Chalk Talk has been set up, with instructions written on the board to immediately begin (a Chalk Talk is a pre-discussion activity in which several pieces of butcher paper are hung around the room, each with a different question. Students write responses to the question and to other students' responses. They may also write their own questions. Students are required to pen a meaningful response at least once on each paper, but must keep circling the room and reading other responses -- if they choose not to participate further -- until the time runs out). The questions are as follows: *How is Othello's race treated by other characters? Why do you think Othello converted from Islam to Christianity? Are race and religion important to the play -- why or why not?* After this activity, students will discuss their responses as a class. This will lead into a lecture about blackness, Christianity, and Islam in Early Modern England, after which students will discuss as a group how these views are integrated into the play. Next, students will work in small groups to fill out a Venn Diagram addressing similarities and differences between how race and religion impacted life in 16th century Europe and 21st century America. Remaining class time will be used for students to journal privately, with the opportunity to share if they want to. For homework, students will write summaries of Act IV, scenes i-iii.

W3D3: Scene Adaptations. Class will begin with a pop quiz on Act IV, after which students will watch an (appropriate) scene from the movie "O." Students will then discuss similarities and differences between the scene they watched and the corresponding scene in

the play. Students will then be divided (by the teacher) into groups based on personal compatibility and receive rubrics for crafting their own adaptation of an individual scene; the basic criteria for the project are as follows:

- Students will select and adapt one scene or part of a scene, at least 200 lines
- Adaptations must parallel the source material in character personality, major plot points, and interactions between characters (i.e., the source scene must be obvious)
- The context of the scene must be made clear in a logical manner
- Students will meaningfully incorporate props and costumes
- Student groups will write their own original scripts
- Each student in the group will play a major role in the creation of the adaptation, although not every student is required to act
- Memorization is encouraged but not mandatory
- Creativity, humor, effort, and thoughtfulness in your scripts and preparedness in your performances will earn you the most points. Have fun and work hard!

The remainder of the class period will be used as collaborative time for groups to write, rehearse, and prepare props and costumes for their adaptations. If groups finalize their scripts before the end of the period, they may be handed in to be typed and photocopied; students may pick up their copies at the end of the day. For homework, students will finalize and rehearse their skits.

W3D4: Performances; Act V Scene i. Students will present their scenes to the class. At the end of the performances, each student will receive a paper flower with a compliment about their performance written on it by a classmate. After a quick debriefing, students will read V.i aloud. For homework, students will finish V.i (if they didn't in class), read V.ii, and write a summary of Act V.

W4D1: Close Reading #2. Class will begin with a pop quiz on Act V. Students will then exchange the summaries they completed over the weekend with a partner and correct or add to their Summary Journals. Students will then review, as a class, the moment where Othello commits suicide, discussing what leads up to this moment and their own reactions to it. Students will then watch Laurence Fishburne's performance of Othello's final soliloquy. Students will then discuss themes they notice in this soliloquy and why it is important to the play as a whole. In small groups, they will then begin annotating this speech. Each group will share some of their work with the class; then, students will complete their annotations individually. It will be helpful for students to think about their discussion on race and religion as they work. At the end of the class period students will fill out an outline for a 3-5 paragraph close reading essay, and begin writing if they have enough time. For homework, students will continue to work on their essays.

W4D2: Final Project Discussion. Students will start class by writing a personal reflection on *Othello* and their experience in the class. These reflections will explore what they liked and disliked about the play and the class, as well as what they felt they could relate to and were confused by. After they have finished their reflection, students will receive instructions and a rubric for their final projects, and have the rest of the period to work on their projects and close readings. For more details about the project, see Lesson Plan #2.

W4D3: Final Project Work Period. Students will have the entirety of this period to work on their final projects and close readings, the latter of which will be due at the end of the period. To create a relaxed, non-stressful atmosphere, students will be provided with snacks and water, and will have the option to listen to music if it helps them concentrate. For homework, students will finish their projects and be ready to present.

W4D4: Final Project Presentations. Students will celebrate the last day of the *Othello* unit by presenting their final projects to the class. Depending on what they chose to do, these presentations will take a variety of forms. As they watch their classmates perform, some students will fill out peer-evaluation rubrics. Each student will be assigned 3-5 other students to complete rubrics for. These rubrics will have students rate each others' presentations based on effort, interest, and relevance, on a scale of 1-5. Students will also write at least one comment for the person they are evaluating. These peer rubrics will be given to students at the end of the day -- however, they will all be anonymous to minimize any potential for interpersonal conflict.

Individual Lesson Plans

Below are two sample lesson plans. The first, which outlines the first large in-class discussion students will have, shows the structuring of ideas that is intended to encourage productive and introspective discussion. The second, which outlines the students' final projects, is meant to show what skills and thematic ideas students are expected to take away from this curriculum, as well as how they are being objectively and subjectively evaluated.

Lesson Plan #1: Theme Discussion #1 (Jealousy and Betrayal)

<table>
<tr><th colspan="3">GETTING YOURSELF READY</th></tr>
<tr>
<td>Materials: Projector
Notebooks [students]
Pencils [students] / extras
Outlines
Sticky Notes
Bell
Popsicle sticks/mug</td>
<td>Your Preparation:
Print and copy vocab quizzes; stack for easy access
Load links on computer
Hook up projector and computer
Prepare prompts on butcher paper
Print and copy outlines</td>
<td>Agenda (w/times):
Do Now 1 min
Vocab Quiz 4 mins
Summary Review 5 mins
Simpsons Activity 8 mins
Journaling 7 mins
Small Group Discussion 7 mins
Large Group Discussion 10 mins*
Guided Practice 5 min
HW 2 mins
Closing 2 mins
*If there is not time for a satisfying discussion because preceding activities took too long, may continue at the beginning of Tuesday's class</td>
</tr>
<tr><th colspan="3">GETTING YOUR STUDENTS READY</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">*Do Now: Take out a pencil, write the date at the top of today's notepage and put it on your desk, and put everything else away.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Objective: Today you will be able to… make connections between their lives and the context and plot points of Othello</td><td>Proving behavior: by… completing a worksheet on race and religion and meaningfully participating in a class discussion</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Purpose: We are doing this because… making connections between your own world and that of Othello will not only prove the play to be more interesting and relevant, but also develop Critical Thinking skills.</td></tr>
<tr><th colspan="3">TEACHING</th></tr>
</table>

Step 1: Vocab Quiz	Say: Thank you for getting ready so quickly, [student]. Now that everyone has followed suit, I'm going to distribute your vocab quizzes. I know everyone here studied over the weekend, so I'm sure you'll do great. [Once all are distributed] You have 4 minutes, starting… *now!* See: Quiz [1 of 3 versions, all of which test the same words: matching, vocabulary fill-in-the-blank with word bank, definition fill-in-the-blank with no word bank.] Do: Quiz
Step 2: Summary Review	Say: Great work guys. I saw [student] thinking really hard. I knew you all studied! Now we're going to do a quick review of last night's meeting. [Fidgety student], can you take notes on the board, please? Everyone else, take out your summary journals so you're ready to share. Take notes if someone adds something you didn't catch. See: Notes on board Do: Share summaries (2-3 students, hands); take notes on other students' answers
Step 3: Introduction of Reference & Theme	Say: Now, time for the meat of our lesson. [Student], please read today's objective. Thanks. Let's have a look at a recent clip from *The Simpsons*. YES, as you guys will all learn TV has a lot in common with good old Shakespeare, although that's kind of like comparing Beyonce and [music teacher]. Not that [music teacher] isn't great, ha ha. BUT! Let's get down to business. On today's notepage, write "2015" at the top. For every "reference" you get, make a tic mark underneath. See: Write example on board of "2015" and subsequent tic mark. Do: Watch clip; make tic marks.

	Say: How many marks did you guys make? Here's what my sheet looks like. See: My sheet [[number] marks] Do: [Hands] share tic marks and why they think they made so many. Do: Have students show fingers of how many marks they got; standing indicates more than ten. Say: Great. One reason people still watch *The Simpsons,* even though it's been on air for even longer than *I've* been alive, is that anyone can get the jokes -- but the references are the cherry on top. Even if you don't get the references, it's still a quality show. Let's see what things were like back in [year]. Write [year] on your papers like you did with 2015, and again, make tic marks for every reference you "get." See: Show from 10 years ago. Less tic marks. Do: [Popsicle sticks] share tic marks and why they got the number they did. Say: Yeah, it seems like [student] got a lot less tic marks than [student]. I did too! [Show paper]. What if we multiply that difference by 40? That's 400 years ago. Close enough to appreciate and understand, but far away enough that there's tons of stuff we're not gonna get. And that's okay, because the product is still awesome. We don't have to get everything. I've watched the first season of *The Simpsons* four times, and I don't get hardly any of the jokes. Why? It's the longest-running sitcom, animated series, and primetime TV show in the US. Shakespeare is arguably the longest-running popular playwright and poet in the Western English-speaking world. And for similar reasons. There is humor that applies to people of all walks of life, relatable characters (even if they're horrible), themes that we have all experienced. And that is what gives a work of

	art longevity. I'd be shocked if there weren't scholars in the future studying *The Simpsons*... just as shocked as I'd be if we ever stop studying Shakespeare.
Step 4: Introduction of Jealousy and Betrayal	Say: You'll notice that some references, and a lot of themes from Shakespeare, resonate with us today. And that's part of what makes him such a *huge* part of literary culture, even today. We can still get him, even if we don't, you know, *get* him. One`theme that we can still relate to is that of jealousy and betrayal. Under the space where you just took notes, write "Jealousy and Betrayal" and underline it. [Pause]. Now, I'm going to call on a few of you to name instances of those themes that we've seen so far. [Different fidgety student], can you take notes on the board, please? Everyone else take notes in your new space. See: Notes on board Do: Briefly discuss 2-3 instances of jealousy and betrayal in the play so far Say: Great! As you can see, we can come up with a lot of examples already -- and we've only read two out of five acts! But you guys are probably already pretty familiar with these themes outside of the context of *Othello*, seeing as real-life people can be pretty awful and messed up in the betrayal department -- and who hasn't felt jealous? Maybe when you were a little kid, you got jealous when somebody had a toy you didn't or your mom payed more attention to your little siblings than you. But now things are probably getting more complicated. And that's okay! Why, just the other day [super brief, hilarious and appropriate personal anecdote]. And, surprise surprise, people were dealing with this stuff 400 years ago. But reading Shakespeare is way more fun if you can tap into those 400-year-old-emotions and realize that we may talk differently now, but being a human is still the same. So what we're gonna do now is take a moment

	of silence, then do some private journaling, based on this prompt [read aloud]: See: [Magnet butcher paper onto whiteboard with prompt] Think of one time a friend betrayed you or your felt jealous of a friend. What did that feel like, in your mind, your heart, your whole body? What did you want to do? What did you do? Are you still mad or sad? What is your relationship with that person like now? If you absolutely cannot think of a personal example, write about one from a book or TV show you like. Say: We're going to have 90 seconds of silence now. Let your mind chew on the prompt. When I ring the bell, start writing. Don't let your pencil stop until you hear the bell again. As always, please show respect for your peers by being quiet and letting them think. Do: Journal Say: Alright, great work guys. [Student]'s pencil was flying across that page! Does anybody want to talk about what they wrote? It's challenge by choice but I know a lot of you guys have lots to say. Do: Brief discussion on responses.
Step 4: Small Group Discussion; Summary Checks	Say: Wow, we are so lucky to get to talk about these stories. Thanks so much for sharing [students who shared], and everyone else for your respectful listening and discussion! [Remove butcher paper]. Hopefully you can start to see why Othello is getting so torn up and frustrated by what Iago's saying. Let's try to get a bit more inside his head, though. With three people around you, answer one of these questions using specific references to the text: See: [Magnet new butcher paper with new prompt]: Do you think Othello

	believes Iago -- why or why not? Is Othello a naturally jealous person, and would it affect the plot of the play if he was or was not? [Pause for questions] Do: Discuss in small groups
PRACTICE	
***Structured Practice** (additional examples led by teacher with gradually quickening pace, helping students approach automaticity by manipulating time, materials, and group size)	
Time: 2 min Materials: N/A Group Size: Whole	Example 1: Nice work guys. I heard some really good ideas out there! I'm going to call on some people to share now [popsicle sticks -- make sure all three questions are discussed and that other students chime in on whether they agree or disagree. Lead discussion towards textual examples and evidence-based thinking].
Time: 8 min Materials: N/A Group Size: Whole	Example 2: Okay, let's all come together now for a large group discussion. Everyone needs to make their voice heard today, and as always let's respect those who haven't had a chance to respond. We're going to start with some prompts, but of course the discussion is free to meander: -What is Iago's motive behind tricking Othello into thinking he is being betrayed? -How does Iago make Othello think that Desdemona might not be faithful? -What role does language play in Iago's trickery? -How can we tell if Iago is lying or not (mention use of verse)?
***Guided Practice** (the proving behavior of the objective monitored by the teacher)	
Assignment: Complete outline of 2-paragraph response on parallels between jealousy, betrayal, different moments in the text, and at least one	Criteria for Mastery: Topic sentences and one piece of supporting evidence per paragraph (How are jealousy and betrayal shown in the text, how do these moments relate to

personal example.	my life)
Independent Practice (Homework)	
Explain Homework: Finish outlines; work on paragraphs (due Friday)	
CLOSURE	
Explain Closure: Enter HW in planners; write one question you wished you had brought up in today's discussion on a sticky note. Line up at door and hand your sticky note to [teacher] when you leave.	

Template from Breakthrough Kent Denver

Lesson Plan #2: Final Projects

GETTING YOURSELF READY		
Materials: Outlines, brainstorming handouts, project description and rubric handouts, pencils [students], journals [students]	**Your Preparation**: Make copies of outlines, brainstorming handouts, and project description and rubric handouts; write reflection questions on board	**Agenda (w/times)**: Do Now: 1 min Personal Reflection: 6 min Project Introduction: 8 min Brainstorming: 8 min Outline: 10 min Independent Work: 10 min Homework: 1 min Closure: 2 min
GETTING YOUR STUDENTS READY		
***Do Now**:Take out your journals and a pencil. Look at the following questions and begin to quietly reflect on		

them. You may discuss your thoughts with a partner if you would like.	
Objective: *Today you will be able to...* begin a final project that demonstrates a detailed understanding of *Othello's* plot, characterization, and vocabulary.	**Proving behavior**: *by...* brainstorming, outlining, and beginning a point-of-view project that reflects the comprehensive experience of a secondary character.
Purpose: *We are doing this because...* describing the experience of a secondary character requires critical thinking skills, an extensive knowledge of the plot's finer details, an ability to make abstract connections, and an understanding of subtle characterization. It is a fun way to synthesize what you've learned this month and express yourself creatively.	
TEACHING	
Step 1: Personal Reflection	Say: Wow guys, we're nearing the end of *Othello*... hard to believe, isn't it? Today's going to be all about wrapping things up and figuring out what you've gotten out of these past four weeks. First, we're going to reflect on how you personally have experienced this play. You guys have made some really deep connections and we've had some powerful discussions in here, and it's important for you as scholars to consider your own experience with this text in a critical light. I'm also always curious about how you experience this class, so that I can change how I teach and make our classes better and more useful for you guys. Take a few more moments to consider these questions; when you feel ready, write a response to each one on a fresh piece of paper. I'll be reading these, so if you want to leave your name off of it that is totally okay. See: Questions on board: "What was the most enjoyable part of this class? What was the least enjoyable part?" "What part of the play did you find most interesting? Which part was the most boring?" "What was one aspect of the play you personally connected with?" "What is one thing that confused you?"

	Do: Reflect and write
Step 2: Project Introduction	Say: Thank you for doing that. [Student] looked like she was really chewing on those questions. Now that you've had a chance to do some personal reflection, we're going to talk about how you can show everyone else what you've taken away from *Othello*. [Student], please read today's objective. Thank you. [Other student], go ahead and read our proving behavior. Great, thanks. What you guys are going to do for the rest of class is think about which character you want to explore and how you're going to express their point of view. Say: What I mean by "point of view" is that a lot of stage time is devoted to Othello and Iago specifically. Talking about what they're thinking is too easy for you guys, since Shakespeare gives them both speeches that outline exactly what's going on in their heads. But Desdemona, for example, gets a lot less space to talk, which means that you'll have to *infer* what she's thinking. For example, when Emilia asks who is responsible for her death, she says "Nobody. I myself." See: Line Do: What do you think she might be thinking when she says that? [Hands]. Say: Right, very thoughtful response, [student]. She might be thinking [rewording of response]. But her thoughts change over the course of the play. At first, she's probably thinking about how happy she is to be married to Othello. But in the last scene of the play, what do you think she is thinking? Do: [Hands]

	Say: Right. So there's tons of stuff going on in her head that doesn't really get explored that much. But that's where you guys come in! You're going to give a voice to these secondary characters. I'm handing out a list of characters whose views you can explore, and different creative projects you can do to show your work. Follow along as I go through and explain each one to you See: Handout. The available characters are Desdemona, Emilia, Bianca, Brabantio, Cassio, and Roderigo. The possible projects are as follows: *Diary: Write 3-5 diary entries from the point of view of your character that explores how they have grown and changed over the course of the play. Each entry should be at least 150 words and discuss specific events from the play, your character's emotions and thoughts, and topics they may be interested in, worried about, or confused by. Entries may be typed or handwritten, and bound together in book form. Individual project.* *Puppet Show: Design and make one or more puppets that you will use to put on a 5-minute (minimum) puppet show about a day in the life of your character. Your show should encompass an entire day and include references to events from the play. It does not have to be a day during the play's events (may be in the past or future), but it must be canon. Memorization optional. Group or individual project.* *Skit: Write and act out a 5-minute (minimum) skit that explores a day in the life of your character. Your skit should encompass an entire day and include references to events from the play. It does not have to be a day during the play's events (may be in the past or future), but it must be canon. Props*

	required; costumes encouraged but not mandatory. Memorization optional. Group or individual project. *Scene: Take an existing scene involving your character and write an aside or series of asides (at least 25 lines) detailing their reactions and emotions during the scene. Asides should show thoughtful use of prose, rhyming, and /or iambic pentameter, and reflect the sound of Shakespearean English. You and your partner(s) will write and perform your scene. Group project.* *Poem: Write a poem or series of poems (at least 25 lines) that explores your character's emotions during the play, either at a specific moment or more generally. Poems may use free verse, iambic pentameter, limericks, and rhymed or unrhymed verse. Be prepared to perform your poem for the class. Memorization optional. Individual Project.* *Song: Write a song from the point of view of your character (at least 4 verses) that they would use to express themselves to another character. Explore your character's emotions based on the events of the play, and make specific references to the text. If you work with a partner, you may write a duet in which two characters communicate through song (one of you may be Iago or Othello). Group or individual project.* *Comic Strip: Draw a series of multi-panel comics (at least 4) involving your character. Each strip should have specific references to the text, but should not copy existing scenes. Individual project.*

	All projects must use specific textual examples, thoughtfully and correctly use at least 5 vocabulary words from this unit, and adhere to standard academic grammatical and spelling rules. Do: Follow along as teacher reads through list; can ask questions and for clarification about each option. Say: If you flip over your handout, you'll see a rubric on the back. You guys are all familiar with this rubric, but take a moment to look it over. I'll answer any questions you may have. See: Rubric Do: Ask questions
Step 3: Brainstorming	Say: There are a lot of options here, and it may be somewhat overwhelming. However, there is a graphic organizer that can help you sort out your thoughts. You may do this individually or with a partner. See: Graphic organizer Do: Fill out organizer and/or discuss ideas with partner.
PRACTICE	
***Structured Practice** (additional examples led by teacher with gradually quickening pace, helping students approach automaticity by manipulating time, materials, and group size)	
Time: 10 min Materials: Outlines, pencils Group Size: 1-5	Example 1: Students will fill out an outline for their project, either individually or with their group. Students will also make a list of materials they will need for their project (cloth, glue, colored pencils, speakers, etc) that will (if possible) be procured for them by the next class.
***Guided Practice** (the proving behavior of the objective monitored by the teacher)	
Assignment: Begin working on Final Project	Criteria for Mastery: Student is able to complete outline

	and proceed with project because they have an adequate understanding of the play's plot and can apply critical thinking in order to creatively express the point of view of a secondary character
Independent Practice (Homework)	
Explain Homework: Continue work on Final Project (presentations Friday) and Close Reading Essay (due at the end of class tomorrow)	
CLOSURE	
Explain Closure: Whipshare one thing you're excited about with your project, a question you have about it, or a problem you're having with it.	
RUBRIC	

	Standard of Excellence	**Exceeds Expectations**	**Meets Expectations**	**Does Not Meet Expectations**
Effort	Project reflects clear forethought and careful planning. There are no mistakes. The minimum length is surpassed by a significant and useful amount. Presentation is appealing and thoughtful	Project reflects clear forethought and planning. There are few mistakes. The minimum length is usefully surpassed. It is obvious that student put time into the project. Presentation is appealing	Project is thoughtful and reflects some planning. There was an effort to find and correct mistakes. Minimum length is met. Presentation shows forethought	Project does not show forethought or planning. There are many mistakes that could have easily been corrected if more time was spent. Minimum length is not met. Project is unorganized and presentation is lackluster.
Analysis	Project reflects unique and thoughtful analysis of source text. Ideas are complicated, not obvious, and show heavy critical	Project reflects thoughtful analysis of source text. Ideas are complex and show critical thinking.	Project reflects analysis of source text. Ideas are compelling and show critical thinking.	Project repeats ideas from source text with no application of outside ideas and/or demonstrates a lack of comprehension of source text.

	thinking.			
Creativity	Project uses words and/or materials in a unique and engaging way. Ideas are novel and presentation is artistically appealing.	Project uses words and/or materials in an engaging way. Ideas are compelling and presentation reflects artistry.	Project uses words and/or materials usefully. Ideas are compelling and presentation makes use of available resources.	Project does not use words and/or materials in a thoughtful way. Ideas are not unique in any way. Presentation is dull and unorganized.
Textual Evidence	Project uses a wide variety of textual evidence; all ideas are supported by evidence.	Project uses a variety of textual evidence; most ideas are supported by evidence.	Project uses a variety of textual evidence. Main ideas are supported by evidence	Project uses little to no textual evidence or is not rooted in the source text at all.
Vocabulary	Project uses a wide variety of vocabulary words in thoughtful and compelling ways	Project correctly uses a wide variety of vocabulary words	Project correctly uses the required amount of vocabulary words	Project does not use the required amount of vocabulary words

Template from Breakthrough Kent Denver

Conclusion

Learning Shakespeare can be an equally challenging and rewarding experience if his work is presented in an accessible and engaging yet rigorous and thoughtful manner. An examination of a variety of teaching methodologies and theories, ranging from the simple tenets of a spiral curriculum to specific strategies for teaching vocabulary based on research on English Language Acquisition,

reveals that there are many strategies and activities that can be used to help students discover the beauty and intrigue of Shakespearean literature.

Although a somewhat unusual choice for a freshman year curriculum, *Othello* provides an excellent inroad to Shakespearean literature for diverse learners in this age group. A range of fascinating themes, such as jealousy, race, and gender, drive the plot in ways that 9th graders can connect to through their own lived experiences as adolescents in 21st century America. Exploring these themes also helps to foster an emphasis on horizontal learning, as they integrate a variety of plot points, historically significant contexts, and personal student interests. *Othello* is also a useful text for 9th grade exposure to Shakespeare because of how important language is to the progression of the plot and characterization.

Of course, the curriculum developed here does have a variety of limitations. Students are asked to read rather significant portions of text individually, and to be autonomous in their completion of projects. Although there are a variety of ways in which support and scaffolding is built in to this curriculum, the reality is that it does not address the needs of every student at length. The curriculum also assumes that a variety of supplies and technologies will be available, and that classroom management will be a negligible enough obstacle that a wide variety of topics and activities may be addressed in a single lesson. Of course, it can be tailored to suit unique classroom situations and student populations, but it is worth noting these weaknesses ahead of time to facilitate this tailoring. Finally, this curriculum is based on secondary rather than primary research, and has yet to be used in a real classroom.

Regardless of these limitations, the preceding curriculum should offer a viable alternative to more traditional methods of teaching Shakespeare, although vestiges of these traditions have been preserved where appropriate. Through a focus on multiple intelligences, the combined power of reading, writing, listening, and speaking, encouraging student expression, and drawing explicit connections between the text, students' lives, and life in the modern United States, this curriculum seeks to engage young readers with *Othello* in a rigorous but accessible way. The goal of this curriculum is not only to teach students about the play, but to kindle an appreciation of Shakespearean literature that they will carry for the rest of their lives.

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Appendix A: Colorado Common Core Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1

Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2

Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.3

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

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.5

Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it (e.g., parallel plots), and manipulate time (e.g., pacing, flashbacks) create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.6

Analyze a particular point of view or cultural experience reflected in a work of literature from outside the United States, drawing on a wide reading of world literature.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.7

Analyze the representation of a subject or a key scene in two different artistic mediums, including what is emphasized or absent in each treatment (e.g., Auden's "Musée des Beaux Arts" and Breughel's Landscape with the Fall of Icarus).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.9

Analyze how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific work (e.g., how Shakespeare treats a theme or topic from Ovid or the Bible or how a later author draws on a play by Shakespeare).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.10

By the end of grade 9, read and comprehend literature, including stories, dramas, and poems, in the grades 9-10 text complexity band proficiently, with scaffolding as needed at the high end of the range.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.1

Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.1.A

Introduce precise claim(s), distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and create an organization that establishes clear relationships among claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.1.B

Develop claim(s) and counterclaims fairly, supplying evidence for each while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both in a manner that anticipates the audience's knowledge level and concerns.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.1.C

Use words, phrases, and clauses to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships between claim(s) and reasons, between reasons and evidence, and between claim(s) and counterclaims.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.1.D

Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline in which they are writing.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.1.E

Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the argument presented.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2

Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2.A

Introduce a topic; organize complex ideas, concepts, and information to make important connections and distinctions; include formatting (e.g., headings), graphics (e.g., figures, tables), and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2.B

Develop the topic with well-chosen, relevant, and sufficient facts, extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples appropriate to the audience's knowledge of the topic.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2.C

Use appropriate and varied transitions to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships among complex ideas and concepts.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2.D

Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to manage the complexity of the topic.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2.E

Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline in which they are writing.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.2.F

Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the information or explanation presented (e.g., articulating implications or the significance of the topic).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.A

Engage and orient the reader by setting out a problem, situation, or observation, establishing one or multiple point(s) of view, and introducing a narrator and/or characters; create a smooth progression of experiences or events.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.B

Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, reflection, and multiple plot lines, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.C

Use a variety of techniques to sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.D

Use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.E

Provide a conclusion that follows from and reflects on what is experienced, observed, or resolved over the course of the narrative.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.4

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1-3 above.)

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.5

Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience. (Editing for conventions should demonstrate command of Language standards 1-3 up to and including grades 9-10 here.)

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.6

Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products, taking advantage of technology's capacity to link to other information and to display information flexibly and dynamically.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.7

Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.8

Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the usefulness of each source in answering the research question; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.9

Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.9.A

Apply *grades 9-10 Reading standards* to literature (e.g., "Analyze how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific work [e.g., how Shakespeare treats a theme or topic from Ovid or the Bible or how a later author draws on a play by Shakespeare]").

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.9.B

Apply *grades 9-10 Reading standards* to literary nonfiction (e.g., "Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is valid and the evidence is relevant and sufficient; identify false statements and fallacious reasoning").

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.10

Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

(Colorado Department of Education, 2015).