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Dramatic Publishing

OTHELLO
or
Tracking the Green-eyed Monster

Adapted from Shakespeare's play
by
NANCY LINEHAN CHARLES



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

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(OTHELLO or Tracking the Green-eyed Monster)

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Adaptor's Notes

This adaptation was prompted by the overwhelming success of *Macbeth ... A Kid's Cautionary Tale* the year before at the same school. We had discovered that young children could indeed get the plot and a large chunk of the language of Shakespeare and have a whale of a good time in the bargain.

So why Othello? It's all about betrayal, jealousy and listening to gossip, and the perilous consequences of trusting the wrong guy. Who can't relate? As often happens in Shakespeare, the characters are larger than life (kid-sized ... see?): The hero is *really* brave and virtuous but fatally vulnerable; the villain is *really* evil and scheming and actually tells the audience exactly how he will bring the hero down. The audience gets to participate in trying to save the hero ... to no avail. It's a fascinating road map of a trip from glory to destruction, with lots of sword fighting, soldiering, dancing and deception along the way.

We found the children understood all this fairly quickly. We find it most helpful to solidify blocking early, change very little, and drill it. As they get more familiar with the words and movements, they blossom. If a particular speech is difficult, it's helpful to put it on tape for the actor to listen to. One child had a reading disability and learned his part mostly from tape. He had never received such praise from his teachers as he got for his performance in the play. We also find children being validated right and left from the experience because—truth to tell—no one ever believes children can do Shakespeare. And when they do, accolades abound.

OTHELLO or Tracking the Green-eyed Monster was first performed at Edison Language Academy in Santa Monica, California, on February 27, 1999, with the following cast:

SHAKESPEARE CHARACTERS

Othello..... BRENNON NUNN
Iago..... MATTHEW KIM
Desdemona..... ERIN PERKINS
Emilia 1..... MADELAINE MOORE
Emilia 2..... AMANDA BANNOUT
Emilia 3..... KAREN MARTINEZ
Emilia 4..... KATE ODERKIRK
Michael Cassio..... STEVEN RAUDRY
Roderigo..... DENNIS PEREZ
Montano..... JONATHAN KING
Brabantio..... DIEGO BRITO

SENATORS/SOLDIERS..... MAX AQUINO
RICARDO AQUINO
TERRANCE BOOZER
FREDDY CRUZ
KENNETH DE PABLO
ANTONIO HERNANDEZ
JEFFREY RAMIREZ
AARON SCHWARTZ
DAVID VEERMAN

STORYTELLERS..... ANJANETTE ACOSTA
ESTHER ANDERSON
CHRISTINA BURROWS
MARCELLA DUNN
WENDY GONZALEZ
RILEY FRANKS

PRODUCTION STAFF & CREW

Directed by	DOROTHY KING
Produced by	MARIA RODERIGUEZ
Costumes and set by	SHAWN BARRY
Special props by	MARIA ELENA "LENNY" ACOSTA
Lighting design by	LISA WIEGAND, execution by JAVIER ALVARADO
Vocal Coach	SARAH ZINSSER
Fight Choreography	MICHAEL ROTHHAAR
Production Photographer	LAUREN MACLAUGHLIN
Backstage Crew	BRENDA RUIZ, ANGELA VARGAS
Logo Design	RIC LIRA
Tickets	LYNN SCHWARTZ

Special thanks to Stephen Martinez, Emily Borden, Kristen Pierce, Andrew Denyer, Annette Dittmar, Bruce Henry, Candi Lira, The Fifth-grade Parents, Starving Students Moving Co., J.C. Backing of Culver City.

OTHELLO
or
Tracking the Green-eyed Monster

A Play in One Act
For 8 to 11 principals,
plus as many soldiers and senators as desired.

CHARACTERS

OTHELLO

IAGO

BRABANTIO, father to Desdemona

MICHAEL CASSIO

RODERIGO

DESDEMONA, wife of Othello

EMILIA, wife of Iago and servant to Desdemona (3-4 of these)

SOLDIERS

MUSICIANS

SERVANTS

SENATORS

STORYTELLERS (2-6 of these)

SCENES

Venice street (includes Brabantio's house)

Senate chamber

Cyprus street

Cyprus citadel (Othello's bedchamber)

Fight Choreographer's Note About the Fight Scenes

The first rule in all stage combat is safety. Use the simple, basic cuts... try to rehearse the fights from the beginning all the time. Picking up in the middle can confuse the inexperienced. Always go at half speed. Repetition and confidence will naturally speed them up.

REMEMBER: SAFETY FIRST!

(See page 47 for Fight Choreography.)

OTHELLO

or

Tracking the Green-eyed Monster

AT RISE: *The stage is bare except for a platform stage left. In addition, there are four large columns, freestanding but on casters, able to be pushed around the stage to define different playing areas: the Venetian Senate chamber, a street in Venice, a street in Cyprus, etc. The lights go out, then a spotlight comes up on a solitary figure, center stage. It is OTHELLO.*

OTHELLO (*with appropriate gravity*). I kissed thee ere I killed thee.

(*A STORYTELLER steps out from the wings.*)

STORYTELLER 1 (*to OTHELLO*). What did you say?

OTHELLO. I kissed thee ere I killed thee.

STORYTELLER 1 (*to the audience*). He kissed someone and then he KILLED them? Ever heard of anything like that? Well, you're about to.

10 OTHELLO or Tracking the Green-eyed Monster

(Every character in the play—STORYTELLERS, SENATORS, SOLDIERS, SHAKESPEARE CHARACTERS—stick their heads out from places all over the auditorium and on the stage.)

ALL. GET REEEAAAADY!

(The troupe moves through the auditorium doing cartwheels and jumping and shouting to one another. They all gather on or in front of the stage. STORYTELLER 1 blows a whistle hard. Everyone becomes quiet.)

STORYTELLER 1. And my teacher says I don't play well with others.

STORYTELLER 2. Well, speaking of playing well—or not so well—with others, that's part of the story we're gonna tell you today. Well, us and... who else?

ALL. WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE!

STORYTELLER 3. Yeah. You know the guy. Great storyteller. Dead a few years—three or four hundred—but who's counting? You think all those movies about blowin' things up are good stories—forget about it!

STORYTELLER 4. The one we're gonna tell you today is about jealousy, revenge and the consequences of paying attention to gossip.

STORYTELLER 6. Shakespeare knew how to take the tiniest little thing...

STORYTELLER 1. ...like a lady's handkerchief covered with strawberries... *(Takes out the handkerchief, waves it at the audience.)*

STORYTELLER 2. ...and weave the story so that that little item—that tiny handkerchief—causes sane men to go mad.

ALL STORYTELLERS (*looking at the audience: quietly, with awe*). Wow.

STORYTELLER 3. And the guy you just saw ...

(*OTHELLO, from wherever he has ended up in the initial run-around, takes a step forward and says:*)

OTHELLO. I kissed thee ere I killed thee ...

STORYTELLER 3. Yeah. That one. His name's "Othello."
Everybody say that: OTHELLO!

(*The audience responds. If they're not loud enough, STORYTELLER 1 blows her whistle.*)

STORYTELLER 1. Care to try that again, guys? OTHELLO!

(*If they're still not responding loudly enough, she should say:*)

STORYTELLER 1. Again! I have control issues. And a whistle. OTHELLO!

(*Hopefully, they'll respond and the STORYTELLERS can move forward.*)

STORYTELLER 4. There's nobody better than this guy when it comes to fighting.

STORYTELLER 5. Whad'ya expect? He's the guy in red—the hero. You'll see what I mean.

12 OTHELLO or Tracking the Green-eyed Monster

(There ensues a vignette of battle scenes (see p47), every one of which OTHELLO wins. In one of them, TWO MEN with sweatshirts over their heads, jump OTHELLO and he defeats them. They represent the Anthropopagai whom OTHELLO mentions later. People fall all over him, congratulating him, yet he seems very humble.)

STORYTELLER 6. They LOVE this guy. Pretty much everybody. Well, not everybody. There's this one fellow named Iago.

STORYTELLER 1. They call him "Honest" Iago. But you will see soon enough that it's a big, fat lie.

(IAGO comes onstage and looks at OTHELLO being worshiped by everyone.)

STORYTELLER 2. He wants to be a big shot too, like Othello. He's Othello's ancient. *(Condescendingly.)* That means he carries Othello's flag.

STORYTELLER 3. Not a big deal in a fightin' man's army.

STORYTELLER 4. He wants a bigger job. He has his eye on the job of lieutenant.

(As the STORYTELLER says this, OTHELLO picks up a lieutenant medallion. IAGO gets a big smile on his face and moves toward OTHELLO. But as he nears, MICHAEL CASSIO comes out from the other side of the stage, walks toward OTHELLO and receives the medal. IAGO burns with anger and envy.)

STORYTELLER 5. But Othello has other ideas. He gives the job to Michael Cassio. And has no idea just how mad Iago is. But he'll soon find out.

STORYTELLER 6. Just so ya know...this guy Iago? Maybe the biggest liar EVER. You'll see.

(Everyone comes on stage for a dance. If STORYTELLERS play instruments—great! If not, the music can be recorded.)

STORYTELLER 1. Well, Othello doesn't fight all the time.

STORYTELLER 2. Oh no. He's a big-time general, so he's invited to a lot of places.

(As each of the following characters is named, they break out of the dancing, come DC and bow.)

STORYTELLER 3. And one of those places is to the home of Mr. Brabantio, who's a senator in Venice.

STORYTELLER 4. Now, Brabantio has a beautiful daughter named Desdemona. And after a lot of dinners...Desdemona and Othello fall in love.

STORYTELLER 5. He loves Desdemona like...like...remember "Titanic"? Well, Othello loves Desdemona like Leonardo DiCaprio loved...ya know...ya know...what's-her-name.

(All the GUYS turn from the dance toward the audience and shout:)

GUYS. KATE WINSLETT!

STORYTELLER 5. Oh yeah. Her.

14 OTHELLO or Tracking the Green-eyed Monster

STORYTELLER 1. Iago—remember? The guy who's so mad at Othello?

STORYTELLER 2. He's got this friend Roderigo, who wants Desdemona too.

(RODERIGO appears. IAGO pantomimes about how great RODERIGO looks and how cool he is.)

STORYTELLER 6. He's kind of a noodge. But Iago's been telling him, Desdemona LOVES noodges. I mean guys like him.

(We see DESDEMONA and OTHELLO kneeling before a priest.)

STORYTELLER 6. So, when Desdemona and Othello sneak away and get married...

STORYTELLER. Roderigo's furious and thinks Iago has lied to him.

RODERIGO. Thou told me thou did hold him in thy hate!

IAGO. Despise me if I do not.

RODERIGO. I would not follow him then.

IAGO. I follow him to serve my turn upon him.

I am not what I am.

STORYTELLER. They both go to Desdemona's dad and tattle that Desdemona's run away with Othello.

RODERIGO. Here is her father's house.

What, ho, Brabantio!

IAGO. Awake! Thieves! Thieves! Look to your daughter.
Thieves!

(IAGO and RODERIGO put branches in front of their faces to hide.)

STORYTELLER 5. Notice how they hide so no one will know it's them? Cheaters always do that.

BRABANTIO. What profane wretch art thou?

STORYTELLER 6. He can't see them. They're hiding!

RODERIGO. Your daughter, if you have not given her leave
Hath made a gross revolt.

BRABANTIO. Strike on the tinder, ho!
Call up my people! Light, I say, Light!

(Everyone runs around with lights, looking for DESDEMONA. STORYTELLERS change the columns to represent the Senate chamber. All the SENATORS begin to gather.)

STORYTELLER 2. Then all heck breaks loose.

STORYTELLER 1. Desdemona's father runs to the Senate to tell the Duke of Venice that Othello has stolen his daughter from him.

STORYTELLER 4. And Brabantio doesn't waste a second.

BRABANTIO. O thou foul thief, where hast thou stowed my daughter?

16 OTHELLO or Tracking the Green-eyed Monster

STORYTELLER 5. Hold it a second! (*All freeze.*) Why does he mind? I mean, Othello's a celebrity.

STORYTELLER 6. But he's not a Venetian.

STORYTELLER 1. He's called a Moor.

STORYTELLER 2. Everyone say that: MOOR!

STORYTELLER 3. That's like another country. Like some people are from Spain or Russia. (*Pause.*) Or Texas.

STORYTELLER 4. So they love Othello to fight for them. But not to marry their daughters.

STORYTELLER 5. You know what prejudice is, don't you? Sure you do.

STORYTELLER 1. Let's all say "boo!" to prejudice.

AUDIENCE. BOOOOOOOOO!

STORYTELLER 1 (*looks back at the SENATORS*). OK, guys. Carry on.

OTHELLO. That I have taken away this old man's daughter,
It is most true; true I have married her.

BRABANTIO (*hotly*). She is abused, stolen from me, and
corrupted
By spells and medicines!

OTHELLO. I do beseech you,
Send for the lady ...
And let her speak of me before her father.
And till she come, I'll present
How I did thrive in this fair lady's love.

(*Everyone leans in like they're listening to a talk show.*)

OTHELLO. Her father loved me; oft invited me;