

Othello Background

- Believed to have been written between approximately 1603-1604
- Based on the Italian story, *Hecatommithi*, or "A Moorish Captain" by Cinthio, which was published in 1565.
- First recorded performance was for King James I in 1604.
- Richard Burbage, Shakespeare's partner and fellow actor, played Othello.
- Setting Venice, Italy

- Othello is unlike any other Shakespearean tragedy, in that there is no secondary plot.
- The tragic hero at the center of this story, Othello, is a black Moor, or a North African Muslim, a general in the Venetian army who falls in love and elopes with Desdemona, the white daughter of a powerful Venetian senator.
- Othello is a highly respected man of honor, but is still considered an outsider for the color of his skin.
- He becomes trapped in a web of deceit spun by his "trusted" ensign, Iago, which leads to his downfall. Iago seeks to destroy all that Othello values in life because he was passed over for a promotion by the soldier, Cassio.

Dramatic Terms to Know

Dynamic Character- character evolves from beginning to end
Ex: Othello

Static Character- character does not evolve or change Ex: Iago (the villain)

Foil Character- character who highlights or emphasizes certain traits of a major character by contrasting them

Ex: Emilia → Desdemona Cassio → Iago

