

# Shakespeare's othello literature review example

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## **August Wilson's The Piano Lesson**

As part of August Wilson's ten play cycle, *The Piano Lesson* concerns issues that African-Americans deal with in the 1930s, primarily the effect of the past, its bearing on the present, and the consequences for the future. The weight of the past in the play is represented by the piano. This piano once belonged to the Sutter family, slaveholders who owned the members of the Charles family who currently possess the piano. As Doaker reveals when he explains to Boy Willy why Berniece will not consent to the sale of the piano, members of the Charles family stole the piano from the Sutters. This resulted in a longstanding feud between the former slaveholding family and the descendents of the slaves. Carved into the piano is the history of part of the Charles family.

The conflict during the play arises because Boy Willy wants to sell the piano to buy land from Sutter, but his sister Berniece does not want to sell it. This illustrates the problem that African-Americans have during the middle of the 20th century in being able to deal with the past as well as look to the future. Boy Willy cannot seem to let go of the past, because all he cares about is getting Sutter's land. His motivation is less about his own welfare and that of his family's and more about getting some kind of revenge on Sutter.

Berniece cannot seem to let go of the past, but instead of confronting it and letting go of it, she chooses to try to forget about it. Neither of these are productive ways for either sibling to deal with the horrific past history of their family or to find better ways to make a future. They both seem lost for their own reasons because of this past; it is only through embracing the memories

while also letting go of the evil that fuels revenge or bitterness that causes them to deny it that they can move forward.

Othello contributes to his own destruction by persisting in the belief that he is an outsider and never truly a part of the society that has endowed him with fame and honor. Society is full of prejudice, and Othello becomes unable to believe that Desdemona truly loves him. He listens to Iago's lies about Desdemona rather than believing in Desdemona herself. His tragic flaw is that he lets outside influences cloud his judgment. Although he is a victim of prejudice, rather than allowing his experience to guide him to a clearer picture and better decisions, he instead allows prejudice to infect his thoughts like a poison. He becomes a believer of the dishonest influences around him, symbolized by Iago, and the tragedy is that he kills the one honest and truly loving person in his life, Desdemona.

Iago has more than one reason to despise Othello, and though they are not particularly rational, that does not matter to Iago. For instance, when Cassio is promoted to a position that Iago feels he deserves more, this adds to his resentment of his superiors. Iago also discusses in a soliloquy the rumor that Othello may have slept with his wife Emilia. Iago is more than willing to invest in the prejudices of the time against people like Othello who are black. To him, it is unreasonable that someone like Othello, "The Moor," can be in a superior position to himself. His suspicion that Othello would take advantage of his wife is likely fueled by his prejudice because it bears no basis in reality.