

# "othello" and "o" comparative essay essay sample

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## **“ Othello” and “ O” Comparative Essay Essay Sample**

We live in a world entangled with lies, jealousy, violence and tragedy. We are an envious society that never has enough, and we're willing to tear down others to get what we want, or to ruin their happiness. Two texts that portray these values of society include “ Othello”, a play written by William Shakespeare and “ O”, a film directed by Tim Blake Nelson. Today I will be contrasting these two texts and in more depth contrasting two parallel characters, Othello and Odin. The different language and medium of production of the two texts reflect the time in which they were written. Othello was composed in the Elizabethan era, displayed by the classy English literature written in the form of a play. It was aimed at all classes of society, from the monarchy right down to the peasantry. However, O was created in a time no different from today, shown by its modern language, themes and its medium of production, film. “ O” is aimed at a much younger, simpler, Westernised audience portrayed by the swearing and rap music.

“ Othello” is a powerful tragedy based on the themes of love, jealousy, trust and betrayal and is quite simply the basis of “ O”, Nelson has borrowed the storyline, plot and even the characters from the great drama. However, he has appropriated Othello into a post-modern structure, superimposing it into a contemporary time and setting. Nelson presents his own themes and values to his audience without betraying Shakespeare's original tale of disaster and despair. New values Nelson gives “ Othello” in “ O” are violence, teenage relationships, drugs and Sport. “ O” will perhaps introduce a new

audience to William Shakespeare and some of his most intriguing and tragic characters.

One of those characters is "Othello", a general of the Venetian armed forces, Othello is a noble, important man, and a well respected soldier. He is said to be "great of heart," and "honourable and valiant." He is loved and looked up to by all. Similarly, O has everything going for him, he is the star Basketball player of his school team, he enjoys widespread popularity with all the students, has the love of a beautiful girl and a promising future as an elite athlete. While Othello and O are both very important in their own context, being dark skinned makes them cultural and racial outsiders. The play Othello seems unrealistic as a black man has managed to reach the rank of general in the 16th century Italian army. Iago, Roderigo and Brabantio treat him as inferior by making racist remarks, calling him "old black ram" and "barbary horse." In opposition to Othello, O is more realistic as Odin is African-American, like many great basketball players. Also, black people are generally more accepted in the 20th century, however, Odin is the only black person in the school and he has the same problem as Othello, he does not fit in. Hugo uses the metaphor of a hawk to describe Odin's place in the school "He soars above us, he can fly, although hawks are no good around normal birds, they can't fit in"

Nelson addresses racism through Odin's final speech in Act 5 Scene 2. Odin says that he was not a rapist or a druggie, or troubled or violent. It is Hugo who is these things, and Odin only fits the stereotype after Hugo manipulated him. It's not the black guy who fits the black stereotype, it's the white guy.

Nelson is making a statement, the black stereotype is not justified, it wasn't made by black people, it was created by the racist attitudes and hatred of white people. In the beginning, both Othello and O are not only well-respected leaders, but they are kind-hearted and affectionate people.

However, it isn't long before there is a crack in their personalities, in Othello this is a result of Iago being deceitful to Othello, making him think that Desdemona has committed adultery with Cassio, Likewise in O where Hugo makes Odin think Desi has been with Mike. Othello shows his first signs of change when he hits Desdemona in a jealous rage. Lodovico witnesses this incident and says, " Is this the noble Moor whom our full Senate call all in all sufficient? Is this the nature whom passion could not shake? whose solid virtue the shot of accident nor dart of chance could neither graze nor pierce" just like the audience, Lodovico is shocked that Othello would do such a thing as it is not like him.

Equivalent to Othello, Odin starts to be violent as a result of jealousy, he attacks Mike at basketball practice, pushes a small boy at a dunking competition and abuses Desi both verbally and physically. In fact, violence is a major theme in both Othello and O, without violence, neither text would be a tragedy but instead tales of conversation and discussion. Nelson uses the setting of an American high school due to its violent culture and makes references to the Columbine high school massacre to show this. The violence portrayed in O is more shocking than Othello as the main characters are still in school rather than grown men in an army. Roger highlights this

after he shoots Mike " If he wakes up hes gunna tell on me" reminding us these are simple school kids committing these violent crimes.

In the final scene of Othello, Act 5 scene 2, violence concludes the play, Othello suffocates Desdemona with a pillow before putting a sword through his own chest. This is very similar to the final scene of O, Odin strangles Desi and not long after shoots himself. Nelson is saying that American youth is quick to turn to guns and violence over trivial matters rather than attempting to reach a more satisfactory conclusion. A similar statement can be made about Othello, he is quick to jump to violence before really listening to Desdemona and what she has to say. I believe this is a reflection of the time in which Shakespeare was written, a time when a man would trust a man before ever trusting a woman.

By changing the context of Othello into post-modern times and aiming it at a younger audience, Tim Blake Nelson is able to make new social comments in his film O. The younger audience can relate to the high school setting, the swearing and the rap music. The themes values and ideas essentially remain the same, proving that over the centuries the human condition remains virtually unchanged. The new social comment made by Tim Blake Nelson is that American culture among youths has reached the stage where guns and racism are uncontrolled and violence is the solution to nearly all of society's problems.