

# Othello study guide

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Othello is chronologically the first of Shakespeare's Jacobean tragedies, written during the reign of King James I (1603-25). (In Latin, the word for James is "Jacobus.") the second, after Hamlet, of Shakespeare's "four great tragedies." In the Renaissance, a novella (an Italian word that literally means "a little new thing") was a short prose tale. In literature today, however, what is a novella? Who wrote the Italian novella that was Shakespeare's main source for Othello? When did Shakespeare write Othello? What is the full title of this play? In what sense does the title contain an oxymoron or contradiction in terms? In Early Modern English, the word "Moor" could refer to either a black African or an Arab from Northern Africa. Which kind of Moor do the lines of the play suggest? Prior knowledge or extra-credit research: What is Verdi's Otello, and what is its relationship to Shakespeare's Othello? What city provides the setting of act 1? What island provides the setting of acts 2-5? How do these settings sharply contrast with each other? This play is said to use "double time" in that some events would appear to take much longer to occur than the three days that supposedly elapse from the beginning to the end of the play. What inconsistencies arise concerning the amount of time required for each of the following events? What passages suggest these inconsistencies? Time for Iago repeatedly to ask Emilia to steal Desdemona's handkerchief Time for Desdemona to have had many sexual encounters with Cassio Time for Cassio to have stayed away from Bianca for a week