

### Lines 319-380 – exploring the text in performance

We learn a lot about Iago from this part of the scene in which he speaks in prose. Roderigo is upset and angry about losing any chance of gaining Desdemona. As his 'friend', Iago could react in various ways to this – maybe he could sympathise with him or try to cheer him up or encourage him to forget Desdemona.

- Talk about what you think a good friend would do.
- Try performing from lines 319 to 380, in different ways, to explore what Iago actually does, what his tone and intentions are towards Roderigo. Try it in each of these ways:
  - gentle and kind
  - bullying and aggressive
  - persuasive and wheedling
  - hesitant and uncertain.

■ Which of these four styles works best? Which doesn't seem to work at all?

■ One way of seeing what Iago is really concerned about is to look at what he emphasises by repetition. Highlight or underline words or phrases that occur more than once. Now try reading the speeches again, in the style you find most appropriate. This time, emphasise all the repeated words and phrases, with your voice or your actions. (For instance, you could use increasingly powerful gestures, each time you say the same thing over again.)

### Iago's thoughts

Shakespeare lets us into Iago's thoughts by giving him a soliloquy, where he speaks to the audience alone.

A soliloquy is a dramatic device in which a character is alone on the stage and speaks out loud. It is as though the audience can hear what the character is thinking and it is a convention to accept that what a character says in a soliloquy is the truth – as the character sees it. Some critics and directors suggest that in a soliloquy a character is talking to – and involving – the audience.

- Before you read Shakespeare's soliloquy for Iago, try jotting down your own ideas of what Iago might say.
- Then read the soliloquy and compare it with the ideas you had.

### A summary of the scene

Act 1 Scene 3 is a long scene, with lots of action, entrances and exits and changes of mood. Here's a summary of the scene.

- 1 The Duke of Venice and Senators talk about the Turkish threat to their interests in Cyprus. Messages come through with news of Turkish fleets heading for Cyprus.
- 2 Othello, Brabantio and the others come in, intending to sort out their dispute over the marriage and Othello is immediately told that he will be sent to fight the Turks.
- 3 Othello defends himself against Brabantio's accusations.
- 4 Desdemona is called upon to speak, to see if she will justify Othello's statements. She corroborates his version of events.

- 5 Othello leaves for Cyprus, with Desdemona having been granted permission to go with him.
- 6 Iago talks to Roderigo about human emotions and virtue, persuading Roderigo to keep up his campaign to win Desdemona despite the marriage.
- 7 Iago speaks to himself (and the audience) in his first soliloquy, revealing much about the way his mind works and his motivation in relation to Roderigo, Cassio and Othello.

■ After reading the scene, talk generally about what you think each section contributes. One way of doing this is to ask yourself, in each case, what would be lost if that section of the scene were missing?

■ Match the descriptions below to each of the seven parts of the scene. (You may want to match each of the descriptions to more than one part of the scene.)

- Taking the plot forward
- Introducing a new character
- Developing our understanding of a character we've already encountered
- Developing a key theme
- Developing the context
- Establishing a mood
- Creating suspense
- Anything else

## After reading Act 1

### A close focus on Iago

Iago appears in this first act in different contexts.

- 1 In Act 1 Scene 1, talking to Roderigo.
- 2 Telling Brabantio about Desdemona's marriage.
- 3 Talking to Othello.
- 4 Holding forth to Roderigo, in prose, about the nature of virtue and encouraging Roderigo to continue his pursuit of Desdemona.
- 5 On his own, talking out loud about his attitudes and motives in his first soliloquy.

■ How would you describe Iago at each of these moments? Choose between the statements below. Look closely at his language to justify your choice of statement.

- Iago is directing the action.
- Iago fits the stereotype of the typical stage villain.
- Iago's ability to manipulate language shows just how dangerous he is.
- Iago is the character who makes the audience keep re-considering their assumptions.
- Iago changes according to who he's talking to – this shows how untrustworthy he is.
- The audience doesn't know who to trust at this stage in the play.
- Iago is the most interesting character in the play so far.

### **Othello and Desdemona's greeting – a role-play**

This moment in the scene (lines 182-199) gives us a chance to look at the way Desdemona and Othello relate to each other.

- Read the segment from the scene once, then work in threes, role-playing a conversation between Desdemona, Othello and a daytime TV chat show host (for example Trisha or Kilroy), at this stage in their marriage. What are the chances of the relationship surviving? What is the attraction based on? Is one partner dominant? How well do they know each other? Make use of what you've discovered from Act 1 about the start of the relationship, as well as what you learn from the way they relate to each other in this scene.

### **Iago in Scene 1**

In Act 1 you saw Iago in a range of contexts. In this scene he appears in the different contexts listed here.

- 1 Talking to Desdemona, Emilia and others.
- 2 Talking to Othello.
- 3 Within the above 'social' or 'public' contexts listed above, he is given asides, where he talks to himself/the audience.
- 4 Talking to Roderigo, alone.
- 5 Talking to himself, in a soliloquy.

- Drawing on what you learned in your work on Iago at the end of Act 1 (page 31 of this text), share out the five different contexts in which Iago appears and prepare a presentation to the rest of the group on how Shakespeare presents him. You might consider:

- how Iago wants to be seen and what his intentions are
- how other characters respond to him
- the language he uses
- his status in relation to the other characters
- anything else you find interesting.

- Talk about what different perspectives on Iago might be offered by presenting him in these different ways.

- Look closely at the two asides. What is their purpose at each of the moments they are introduced? To help you think about this, try acting them out, experimenting with the following:

- proximity to the audience
- body language (the way you sit, lean, move or stand)
- the extent to which, in role as Iago, you aim to seduce the audience, to charm them or simply to inform them, coldly, of your actions.

- Look at the use of poetry and prose. Can you see a pattern to their use? What reasons do you think there might be for Shakespeare using prose at certain times?