

Character: aspects of Othello

USE WITH WORKSHEET 85

In the first speech, Othello tells Desdemona, his wife, of the handkerchief she has lost. In the second speech, a little later, he is maddened by jealous thoughts of her unfaithfulness.

That handkerchief

Did an Egyptian to my mother give:
 She was a charmer and could almost read
 The thoughts of people. She told her, while she kept it,
 'Twould make her amiable and subdue my father
 Entirely to her love; but if she lost it
 Or made a gift of it, my father's eye
 Should hold her loathèd and his spirits should hunt
 After new fancies. She dying gave it me,
 And bid me when my fate would have me wive,
 To give it her. I did so, and take heed on't:
 Make it a darling, like your precious eye.
 To lose't or give't away were such perdition
 As nothing else could match.

charmer
 witch

amiable
 beloved

fancies
 lovers

perdition
 damnation

belie
 slander

Zounds
 by God's wounds

fulsome
 revolting

shadowing
 overwhelming

instruction
 reason

Lie with her? Lie on her? We say lie on her when they belie
 her. Lie with her! Zounds, that's fulsome! Handkerchief –
 confessions – handkerchief! To confess and be hanged for his
 labour. First to be hanged and then to confess. I tremble at it.
 Nature would not invest herself in such shadowing passion without
 some instruction. It is not words that shakes me thus. Pish! Noses,
 ears, and lips. Isn't possible? – Confess? Handkerchief? O devil!

He falls in a trance



Use with questions a–d on worksheet 85 to help you deduce as much as you can about Othello's personality, and to stage the two extracts.