MA99 EDUCATION

Othello and New Boy: Topic Notes

NSW ENGLISH ADVANCED 11-12 SYLLABUS 2024 FOR HSC 2028 AND LATER

What this document is. These are the topic notes for the pairing of Othello and New Boy. They read the play as a story about storytelling, walk through the novel's five parts, and then set the two side by side: what the retelling keeps, what it changes, and what the changes reveal. The last pages are for working on with a pen.

What it replaces and what it uses. The Othello Study Guide in this folder stays in use: it holds the play's context, concerns and quotation bank, and these notes do not reprint them.

How New Boy appears here. New Boy is in copyright, so these notes quote none of it. Every statement about the novel is a description in our own words, located by the part of the school day it happens in. In your own essays you may quote short phrases from your copy; section 5 shows how to anchor an argument when you cannot. Quotations from Othello are checked by machine against a public domain text.

1. Where you are with the pairing

Eight statements. Tick only what is true today.

- ☐ I can say what happens in each act of Othello and each part of New Boy.
- ☐ I can name who tells stories in Othello, and whose story wins in each act.
- ☐ I know when Othello is first called by his name, and what he is called before that.
- ☐ I can match the main characters of the novel to the play, and say what changes in each.
- ☐ I can follow the pencil case through the novel and the handkerchief through the play.
- ☐ I can explain why the novel is set in 1974 but was written in 2017.
- ☐ I have a one sentence argument about the pairing that a reasonable person could deny.
- ☐ I have written at least one timed comparative response.

1.1 Interpreting your score

Count the ticks and read the matching row.

TICKS	WHAT IT MEANS	GO HERE FIRST
0 to 2	You know the stories in outline. Start with each text in turn.	Sections 3 and 4
3 to 5	You know both texts. You are not yet comparing them.	Sections 5 and 6
6 to 8	You have a comparative position. Test it under time.	Section 7, then the Practice Questions

Date this. Run the same statements again at the end of term. Record a score now and compare it with a later score to measure progress.

First run. Date: Score:

End of term. Date: Score:

2. What the course asks of this pairing

Narratives travel. The focus area asks what happens to them on the way.

Othello and New Boy are taught together in Year 11 under **Narratives that shape our world** in the English Advanced 11-12 Syllabus (2024). The focus area is about narratives connected across contexts: how stories shape the way individuals and communities see themselves and others, how they are shaped in turn by the values of their authors and readers, and how a narrative can be adapted, reimagined or reconceptualised for a new audience.

THE FOCUS AREA ASKS YOU TO CONSIDER	THE QUESTION FOR THIS PAIRING
Narratives linked across historical and contemporary contexts	What connects a Jacobean tragedy to an American school in 1974, and what does not survive the journey?
How narratives shape perceptions and representations	How does each text show a community's story about an outsider becoming the story he tells about himself?
How authors' and readers' values shape narratives	What did the Moor mean to an audience in 1604, and to a reader in 2017?
Whether a narrative challenges or reinforces cultural norms	Does either text challenge the racism it depicts, or only display it?
How narratives are adapted, reimagined or reconceptualised	Which of the three verbs best fits what Chevalier did, and why?
Comparison of language, form and perspective	What can a novel told through several children do that a stage play cannot, and the reverse?

The table's left column is MA99's paraphrase of the focus area, not NESA's wording. All six Year 11 outcomes, EAV-11-01 to EAV-11-06, attach to it; EAV-11-02, on the relationships between texts, is the one this pairing tests most directly.

2.1 Three things you may have been told that are no longer true

MYTH 1 · THIS IS MODULE A, AS THE 2017 SYLLABUS HAD IT.

Correct position

The 2024 syllabus has no module letters. In Year 11 this focus area is Narratives that shape our world. Textual conversations, a different comparative focus area, belongs to Year 12.

Keep your notes and change the label. The comparative method you learn here carries into Year 12.

MYTH 2 · COMPARING MEANS LISTING THE SIMILARITIES.

Correct position

The parallels only prove that New Boy is a retelling. They are the starting point, not the argument. The focus area asks how the narrative is changed and what the change shapes in a reader.

Spend one sentence on the parallel and the rest of the paragraph on the change and its meaning.

MYTH 3 · IF YOU HAVE STUDIED OTHELLO, YOU HAVE DONE MOST OF THE WORK.

Correct position

Here the unit of study is the pair. A paragraph on Othello alone has not yet done what this focus area asks.

Studying Othello as a single text is Critical study of literature, which has its own Year 11 focus area and a prescribed Year 12 version. Its materials are separate.

Use your Othello knowledge only where it helps you read New Boy, and the reverse.

3. Othello as a play about storytelling

Who tells the story, act by act, and whose version wins.

Othello is full of people telling stories about Othello. The largest part in the play is not the title role: in the text used here Iago speaks about 1021 lines to Othello's 862. And before Othello is named aloud, he has already been described, several times, by men who hate him.

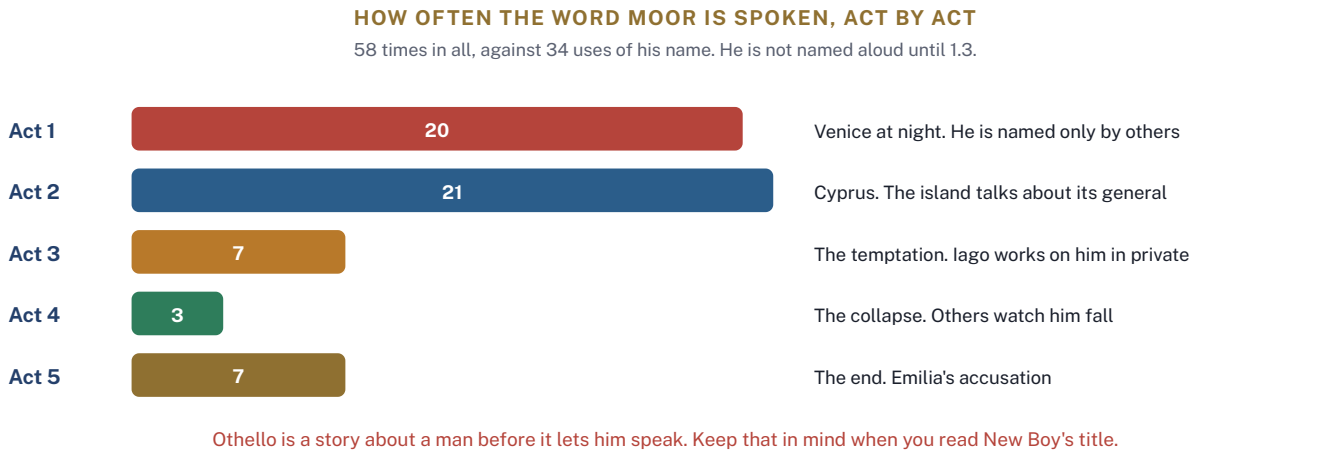


Figure 1 · The word Moor, act by act, counted in the Project Gutenberg text.

ACT	WHO TELLS THE STORY	WHAT THE STORY DOES
1	In the street at night Iago and Roderigo tell Brabantio a story about his daughter in animal images: "an old black ram", a "Barbary horse". Othello is not named until the Duke addresses him in 1.3. Before the Senate Othello answers with his own story: how Desdemona fell in love listening to his adventures.	Two narratives of the same marriage. The Senate believes Othello's, which he calls "a round unvarnished tale". He wins by telling a better story.
2	On Cyprus, Iago entertains Desdemona with rhymes about women, then tells Roderigo that Desdemona loves Cassio. That night he gets Cassio drunk and narrates the brawl to Othello.	Iago's stories now make things happen. Cassio loses his post because of how the brawl is told.
3	In the temptation scene Iago tells Othello a story by refusing to tell it. The handkerchief, not mentioned before this act, appears in 3.3 and is spoken of 27 times from then on. Othello tells his own story of its magic.	Othello asks for "ocular proof" and accepts a story instead. His own tale of the handkerchief raises its stakes.
4	Iago stages a conversation for Othello to overhear, and narrates what it means. Othello strikes Desdemona in front of the Venetian visitors.	Othello now performs the part Iago's story wrote for him, in public.
5	Othello kills Desdemona. Emilia tells the truth about the handkerchief. Othello asks those present to "Speak of me as I am", then tells one last story about himself and a Turk.	The play ends with Othello trying to control how he will be narrated, and with Iago refusing to speak at all.

The fact to build on

The word Moor is spoken 58 times in the play, and Othello's name 34 times. He is talked about as a category more often than addressed as a man.

Hold that against the novel's title, which names its hero by his status, not his name.

Two stories about Othello compete for the whole play: the one he tells, of service, travel and a love won by listening, and the one Venice tells, of a foreigner who does not belong. Iago's achievement is to make Othello believe the second one about himself. When he says "Haply, for I am black" in 3.3, he is reaching for his society's story to explain his wife.

4. New Boy in five parts

One school day, five movements, and nothing quoted.

New Boy was written for the Hogarth Shakespeare series, in which novelists retell Shakespeare's plays for the present, launched around the four hundredth anniversary of his death in 2016. Tracy Chevalier, born in Washington in 1962 and living in London, chose Othello and set it in a suburban Washington primary school on one day in 1974.

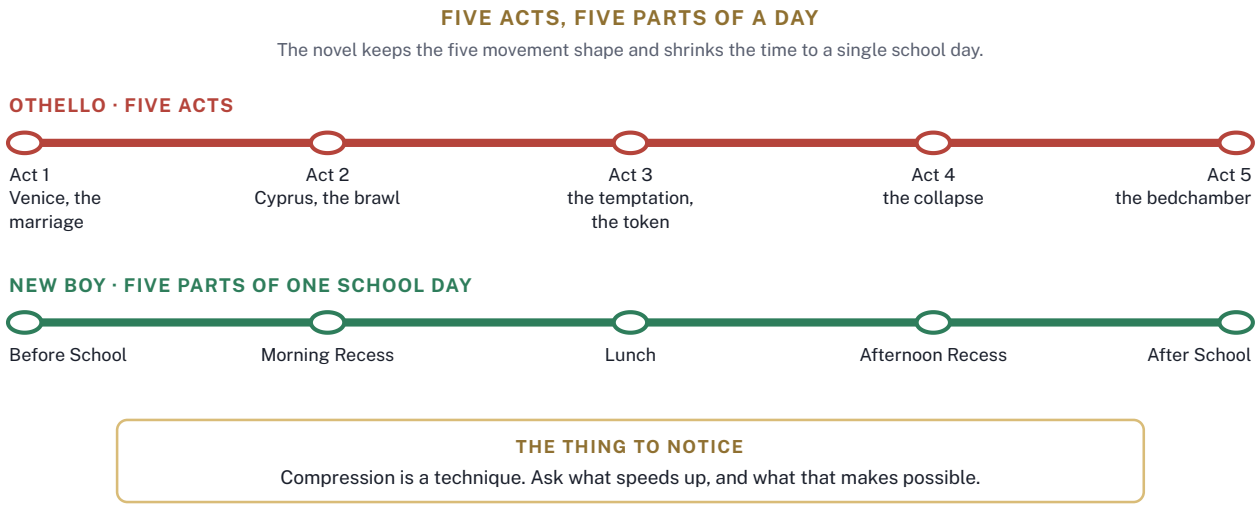


Figure 2 · The five acts of the play and the five parts of the novel's school day.

PART	WHAT HAPPENS, IN OUTLINE	WHAT THE RETELLING IS DOING
Before School	Osei Kokote, the son of a Ghanaian diplomat, arrives as the only Black student in a white sixth grade class a month before the end of the year. Dee notices him at once. Two teachers, Mr Brabant and Miss Lode, discuss his arrival.	The outsider is watched and discussed before he speaks, as Othello is before he appears.
Morning Recess	Osei and Dee are drawn to each other. By now a strawberry pencil case has passed from him to her, and the news of it spreads across the playground. Dee rebukes her friend Mimi for a prejudiced remark. Osei plays kickball with the boys.	The love token appears early, as the handkerchief does not. Gossip plays the part of Venice's rumour.
Lunch	Ian, the class bully, questions Mimi about whether Casper has ever given Dee anything. The pencil case falls from Dee's bag and Mimi picks it up. The adults in the lunch line react to Osei.	Mimi's find mirrors Emilia's. Ian's questions mirror Iago's first insinuations.
Afternoon Recess	Mimi gives Ian the pencil case in return for his agreeing to end things between them and leave her alone. Ian arranges for it to reach Blanca. Rod and Osei pick kickball teams.	The token becomes evidence. The play's slow campaign is done in a single recess.
After School	Osei, convinced by Ian's story, turns against Dee. On the playground climbing frame the day ends in violence and serious injury: Ian pulls Mimi down and she is badly hurt, and Mr Brabant arrives and uses a racial slur to Osei. The novel closes with Osei at the top of the frame, apparently about to throw himself off, and his death is implied, a parallel to Othello's suicide. Check the last pages in your own copy.	An ending of children hurt and a death implied, in place of a bedchamber of the dead.

Check these against your copy

The outline above is MA99's own description, built from published summaries of the novel, not from a copy of it.

Before you rely on any detail in an essay, find it in your book. The part of the day is always your first anchor.

4.1 How the novel tells it

The novel is told in the third person, and its point of view moves between characters rather than staying with one. Check in your copy whose view each stretch of the day follows. Then compare the effect with the play, where Iago confides his plans directly to the audience in soliloquy: in the theatre we are the schemer's confidants; in a novel that moves between several children, we see the day from several sides and belong to none of them.

5. Writing about a text you cannot quote here

The skill that makes a novel paragraph as precise as a play paragraph.

Because these notes quote nothing of New Boy, they model the other way to be precise about a text: anchoring. An anchor is a located, specific description that another reader could find and check. It is not a substitute for quotation in your own essays, where short quotations from your copy are normal. It is what makes a paragraph accurate before a single quotation is added.

VAGUE	ANCHORED
In New Boy, Ian manipulates Osei.	In Afternoon Recess, Ian gets the pencil case from Mimi and arranges for it to reach Blanca, so that the evidence arrives without his fingerprints on it.
Racism is shown in the novel.	In Before School, two teachers talk about Osei within the first pages, before he has said a word to anyone, so the adults' view of him is on record before his own.
The ending is sad.	After School ends on the climbing frame with Mimi badly hurt, the adults arriving late and Osei apparently about to throw himself off, which denies the reader the closure of a tragic ending.

Try this now

Take one vague sentence from your own notes on New Boy.

Add the part of the day, the character whose view the narration follows, and the precise action. Only then decide whether it needs a quotation from your copy.

6. Kept, changed, and what the change reveals

The argument lives in the second column.



Figure 3 · What survives the move from 1604 to 1974, and what does not.

6.1 Who maps onto whom

IN OTHELLO	IN NEW BOY	THE CHANGE WORTH ARGUING ABOUT
Othello, a general	Osei, a diplomat's son	Power becomes childhood. Osei has none of Othello's public standing to lose, only a place in a playground.
Desdemona	Dee	The beloved is wronged, not killed. The story told about her destroys the love, and the novel's last image of danger is Osei's own.
Iago	Ian	The schemer is eleven. The play's mystery of motive becomes a question about where a child learns cruelty.
Emilia	Mimi	Both find the token and hand it on. Emilia is killed; Mimi is badly hurt, and the closing image turns to Osei.
Cassio	Casper	The rival, used without knowing it.
Bianca	Blanca	The one who ends up holding the token.
Brabantio	Mr Brabant	A father becomes a teacher. The prejudice moves from a family into an institution.

6.2 The token

In the play the handkerchief is Othello's first gift to Desdemona, his mother's, "Spotted with strawberries". It enters the dialogue only in Act 3. In the novel a strawberry pencil case passes from Osei to Dee early in the day. The strawberry is kept exactly; the timing is not. Ask why the novel shows the token earlier: in a day that lasts a few hours, the reader has to watch it being given to feel what its loss means.

6.3 Three contexts, one argument

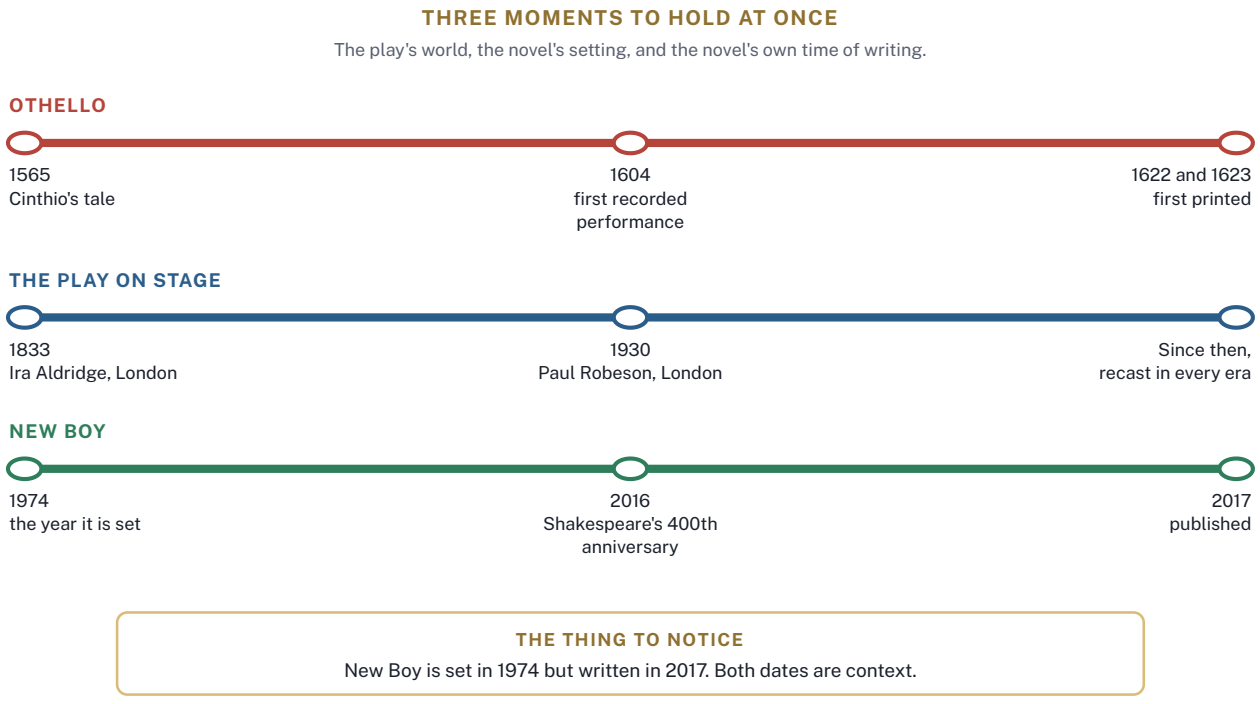


Figure 4 · The play's world, the novel's setting, the novel's writing.

Three dates matter. Othello's first recorded performance was in 1604, for an audience with little direct contact with Africa and a mixed, often hostile, set of ideas about Moors. New Boy is set in 1974, a decade after the civil rights legislation of the 1960s ended legal segregation in the United States, in a city with a large Black population and a school that has none. And it was written in 2017, for readers living through renewed public argument about race. A strong comparison uses at least two of these dates as evidence, not decoration.

6.4 Which verb fits?

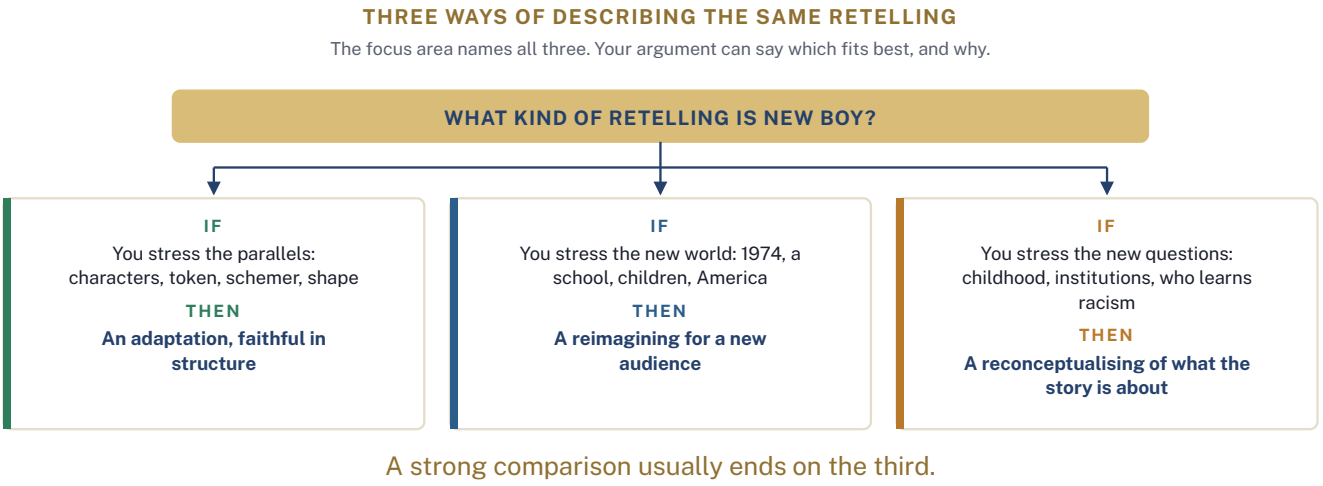


Figure 5 · Adapted, reimagined, reconceptualised. The focus area names all three.

A thesis somebody could deny

Weak: New Boy retells Othello in a modern setting and explores similar themes.

Better: New Boy keeps Othello's machinery but moves its racism from one villain into a whole institution.

Better still, because it judges: by making its characters children, New Boy reconceptualises Othello as a story about how prejudice is learned, and that is a harder question than the play's question of how a great man falls.

7. The comparative paragraph, the drill and the tracker

One concern, both texts, then the judgement.

MOVE	WHAT IT DOES	WORKED ON THE CONCERN OF THE OUTSIDER
1 · The shared concern	Names one idea both texts take up	Both texts show a community narrating an outsider before he can narrate himself.
2 · The play	Evidence and effect from Othello	Othello is not named aloud until 1.3; before that he is "an old black ram", heard through Iago.
3 · The novel	The anchored equivalent in New Boy	In Before School, the adults discuss Osei before he has spoken to anyone.
4 · The change	What is different, precisely	The play's first narrators are villains; the novel's are ordinary adults in charge of a school.
5 · The judgement	What the change reveals	The retelling suggests that the story which destroys the outsider is not one bad man's invention but the community's default.

That shape is MA99's teaching scaffold, not a NESA requirement. Its value is that move 4 cannot be written without doing the comparison, and move 5 cannot be written without a judgement.

Drill

Twelve minutes, once a week

Pick one concern: the outsider, the token, the schemer, the companion, or the ending.

MINUTES	WHAT YOU DO
0 to 3	Write where it happens in Othello, by act and scene.
3 to 6	Write where it happens in New Boy, by part of the day.
6 to 9	Write one sentence on the precise change.
9 to 12	Write one sentence judging what the change reveals. Then check both texts.

> Both texts in every paragraph. Every time.

SIX CARDS FOR THE FRONT OF YOUR FOLDER

Cut along the dashed lines. Each one reads in four seconds.

OTHELLO

- Shakespeare, about 1603 to 1604
- Venice, then Cyprus
- Iago has the most lines
- The handkerchief from Act 3
- Called the Moor, then named

NEW BOY

- Tracy Chevalier, 2017
- Hogarth Shakespeare series
- Washington, a day in 1974
- Five parts of a school day
- Osei, Dee, Ian, Mimi, Casper

THE COMPARISON

- One concern, both texts
- Kept, then changed, then why
- Form: stage and novel
- Three contexts: 1604, 1974, 2017
- End on what the change reveals

NEW BOY, ANCHORED

- Name the part of the day
- Name who the narration follows
- Describe, do not quote here
- Quote from your own copy
- Check every detail in the book

YOUR ARGUMENT

- One sentence someone could deny
- Both texts in every paragraph
- Say what the change reveals
- Name the context that explains it
- End on value, not summary

KEY MOMENTS

- Othello before the Senate, 1.3
- The temptation, 3.3
- Osei arrives, Before School
- The token moves, Afternoon Recess
- Both endings, set side by side

Figure 6 · Six cards. Cut them out and keep them in the front of your folder.

Your progress on the pairing, dated

Come back every few weeks and date it.

Improvement in a written subject is invisible from the inside, which is why students who are getting better so often believe they are not.

> Come back in a month and read your first thesis. It will look different, which is the point.

DATE	WHAT I DID	WHAT CHANGED

Coverage and limits

These notes cover the pairing of Othello and New Boy for Narratives that shape our world in the English Advanced 11-12 Syllabus (2024), Year 11.

NOT ONE WORD OF NEW BOY IS QUOTED. The novel is in copyright. Every quotation in this document is from the public domain text of Othello.

Every statement about New Boy is MA99's description, built from published summaries and reviews, and should be checked against your own copy.

Othello quotations are fifteen words or fewer and were checked by machine against the Project Gutenberg text. Counts are computed from that text.

Othello as a single text for Critical study of literature has its own materials in MA99's Year 12 documents, which this unit does not repeat.

No claim is made about how responses are marked. The first HSC under this syllabus is 2027.

About this resource

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Scope

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Othello and New Boy: Practice Questions

NSW ENGLISH ADVANCED 11-12 SYLLABUS 2024 FOR HSC 2028 AND LATER

How to use this set. Every question involves both texts. Section A pairs a located moment in Othello with a located part of New Boy. Section B is comparative extended response. Section C asks you to retell a moment yourself, which is what the focus area asks you to study. As in the HSC, answer the short questions of Section A in the spaces provided, and write Sections B and C in a separate writing booklet.

Timing. Suggested times are MA99's recommendation, not NESA's.

What is not here. Model answers; any question in the Othello Study Guide, the Focus Area Guide or Practice Paper 2; and any single text question on Othello, which belongs to Critical study of literature.

SECTION A · PAIRED MOMENTS

Short answers. Refer closely to both moments named.

Question 1

Compare how Othello is presented in Othello 1.1, before he appears, with how Osei is presented in New Boy's Before School. (4 marks)

Question 2

Othello tells the Senate his story in 1.3. Explain why the novel gives Osei no equivalent public speech, and what effect that has. (3 marks)

Question 3

Compare the moment the token is found: Emilia and the handkerchief in 3.3, and Mimi and the pencil case in Lunch. (4 marks)

Question 4

Iago confides his plans in soliloquy; the novel moves between children's points of view. Analyse how each method positions the reader or audience in relation to the schemer. (5 marks)

Question 5

Compare the endings. What does each text leave its audience knowing, and what does it leave unresolved? (5 marks)

WHAT EACH ANSWER NEEDS

QUESTION	POINTS A STRONG ANSWER COVERS
1	In the play, animal images and the word Moor from Iago and Roderigo, no name until 1.3; in the novel, adult reactions and the attention of the playground before Osei speaks; the change from villains to ordinary adults; what that suggests about where the story of the outsider comes from.

QUESTION	POINTS A STRONG ANSWER COVERS
2	Othello's speech wins the Senate and is his one public victory; a child has no senate; the novel's form shares Osei's view with other children's instead; the effect is that he is never given the stage to answer his community's story.
3	Both found by the schemer's companion; both handed on; Emilia by chance and Mimi when it falls from Dee's bag; what each companion gets in return; the kept detail of the strawberry.
4	Soliloquy makes the audience Iago's confidants and complicit; shifting viewpoint gives the reader many partial views and no single confidant; dramatic irony in both, built differently; a judgement on which is more unsettling.
5	The play: deaths, Othello's final speech, Iago's silence, order restored by Venice; the novel: injury on the climbing frame, adults arriving too late, and Osei apparently about to throw himself off, an implied death that parallels Othello's suicide; closure against its refusal; what the refusal says about 1974 and 2017.

SECTION B · COMPARATIVE EXTENDED RESPONSE

Each question is worth 20 marks. Suggested time 40 minutes, including planning. Discuss both texts in every answer.

FOUNDATION One clear demand. If you have an argument at all, you can start.

Question 6

Compare how the two texts represent a community's response to an outsider. (20 marks)

Write your response in a separate writing booklet.

Question 7

How does New Boy use its setting in time and place to change the meaning of Othello's story? (20 marks)

Write your response in a separate writing booklet.

STANDARD Two things to hold together, and a verb to obey.

Question 8

Analyse how the change from a stage play to a novel shapes what each text can show about prejudice. (20 marks)

Write your response in a separate writing booklet.

Question 9

To what extent does New Boy challenge the cultural norms it depicts, rather than simply display them? Refer to both texts. (20 marks)

Write your response in a separate writing booklet.

ADVANCED An unfamiliar angle, or a demand you must interpret before you answer.

Question 10

Evaluate whether New Boy is best described as an adaptation, a reimagining or a reconceptualisation of Othello. (20 marks)

Write your response in a separate writing booklet.

Question 11

The adults in New Boy have a larger part in the tragedy than the adults around Othello. Evaluate this view and what it reveals about the retelling's context. (20 marks)

Write your response in a separate writing booklet.

STIMULUS A statement written for this set. It is not attributed to anybody, because it was not said by anybody.

Statement

A story that is retold for children is never only a smaller version of the original.

Question 12

Assess the usefulness of this statement as a way of comparing Othello and New Boy. (20 marks)

Write your response in a separate writing booklet.

SECTION C · REIMAGINING AND REFLECTION

The focus area asks how narratives are reimagined for new audiences. Here you do it.

Question 13

Choose one moment from Othello that New Boy does not directly retell. Rewrite it, in about 400 words, for a setting and audience of your choice. Use no line from either text. Then write a reflection of about 200 words explaining what you kept, what you changed, and what your changes reveal about the original. (15 marks)

Write your response in a separate writing booklet.

CHECKING YOUR OWN WORK AGAINST THE OUTCOMES

There are no published marking guidelines for Year 11 tasks under this syllabus. Check your response against what the Year 11 outcomes ask for instead. The wording below is MA99's paraphrase.

OUTCOME	ASK OF YOUR RESPONSE
EAV-11-02	Have I analysed the relationship between the two texts, through their contexts, forms and language?
EAV-11-03	Have I explained how the values of 1604, 1974 and 2017 shape what each text means?
EAV-11-04	In Section C, have I used the forms and features of my chosen setting deliberately?
EAV-11-06	In Section C, have I evaluated my own choices and what they show about the original?

Your attempts, dated

Come back every few weeks and date it.

Improvement in a written subject is invisible from the inside, which is why students who are getting better so often believe they are not.

DATE	QUESTION	WHAT I WILL CHANGE NEXT TIME

Coverage and limits

Thirteen comparative questions on Othello and New Boy, Narratives that shape our world, English Advanced 11-12 Syllabus (2024), Year 11.

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