



Othello Examining Text Structure

Authors structure a text carefully to best suit the plot, theme, mood, or overall meaning. Some texts reflect a linear, or chronological, structure: The plot starts at the beginning of the story, and readers learn of every action as it unfolds. Some plotlines are more circular in structure: The text opens with how the story will end, and *then* readers learn about what happened leading up to this scene. Other structures seem to jump around: The author uses flashbacks to reveal specific information about an event or character as necessary. No matter how an author chooses to reveal events in a plot, you can be sure the structure was chosen for a reason.

Consider the plot structure of *Othello*. How does the play open? Consider the setting, characters present, action, and dialogue. Record that information below.

In the Beginning . . . Act 1, scene 1

Setting: *Venice*

Characters: *Roderigo and Iago*

Summary of action and/or dialogue: *Roderigo and Iago talk privately. Iago reveals that he hates Othello for choosing Cassio over him for a promotion and that he wants to keep his job in order to take advantage of Othello. He then manipulates Roderigo to help him wake Desdemona's father, Brabantio, and reveal that Desdemona was "stolen" by Othello.*

Use the information above to answer the following questions:

What information is presented to readers right away? *Roderigo seems weak and allows Iago to manipulate him. He thinks Iago is his friend who wants to help him get Desdemona. I see Iago is a heartless and calculating person. This opening scene shows the dynamics between Iago and Roderigo.*

What information is left unclear? *Is Cassio, in fact, underqualified for the promotion? Is Othello truly someone to hate, or is Iago's anger misplaced? Will Roderigo eventually win Desdemona's love?*

How does the play's beginning affect the reader? *The beginning really sets the tone. A sense of tension and suspense is created right away. I know Iago has wicked plans to get back at Othello, and I want to know how he will try to do so. Will he be successful? Will Roderigo always believe everything he says?*

Infer why Shakespeare might have chosen to open the play in such a way. *I infer Shakespeare wanted to present Iago as the villain right away as well as his tool to get his deeds done: Roderigo. Iago seems to be the true culprit here, while Roderigo seems weak and merely a follower. I sense doom for Othello, but I'm not sure if I'm right.*

In the End . . . Act 5, scene 2

Setting:

Characters:

Summary of action and/or dialogue:

Use the information above to answer the following questions:

Would you describe the ending as comedic, tragic, or neutral? Why?

What loose ends are tied up in the ending?

Is the ending crystal clear, or did Shakespeare leave room for interpretation?

Extended Assignment

Write an extension for the ending.

How would you structure your ending? Think about what details you'd like to include. Will your ending continue where the play leaves off, or will it jump ahead into the future?

RL.11-12.5 Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.

W.11-12.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.