

RED VELVET

TEACHER RESOURCE GUIDE



By Lolita Chakrabarti

2023.2024 season

Stanley Industrial Alliance Stage

March 21–April 21, 2024

This show is generously sponsored by:

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Pre-Attendance Resources

**In the following pages, you will find
resources that may be helpful prior to
attending the show**

Welcome



This guide was created for teachers and students. It contains an overview of the play's story as well as informative resources and activities for teachers and students. The guide aims to provide background knowledge and critical perspectives on the play that will yield fruitful discussion and foster an understanding and appreciation of theatre arts.

If you have any questions, comments, or suggestions for the guide, please contact our Education Coordinator, Mikenzie Page, mpage@artsclub.com.

This study guide was written by Mikenzie Page.



About the Arts Club

The Arts Club of Vancouver was founded in 1958 as a private club for artists, musicians, and actors. It became the Arts Club Theatre in 1964 when the company opened its first stage in a converted gospel hall at Seymour and Davie Streets. Now in its 60th season of producing professional live theatre in Vancouver, the Arts Club Theatre Company is a non-profit charitable organization that operates three theatres: the Granville Island Stage, the Stanley Industrial Alliance Stage, and the Newmont Stage at the BMO Theatre Centre. Its popular productions range from musicals and contemporary comedies to new works and classics.

Learn more about the Arts Club Theatre Company at artsclub.com.

Learning Objectives



Through the narrative, the play aims to

- Engage with historically relevant stories of Black artists' lived experience and consider how this narrative informs the present and comments on the current diversity reflected on stage and across media.
- Explore how memory, linear storytelling, and perspective can be subverted through storytelling and theatre.
- Examine how playwrights and directors are inspired and informed by history, culture, media, and community.



Connections to BC Curriculum

Drama 10/11/12



Big Ideas

- Drama provides opportunity for creativity, innovation, and collaboration.
- Preparing a theatre production requires active engagement, resilience, and commitment.
- Active participation in theatre creates personal and cultural connections which offer insight into the human experience, identity, and our personal sense of belonging.

Curriculum Connections

- Examine the influences of social, cultural, historical, environmental, and personal contexts on dramatic work.
- Explore both the process and product of theatre as dynamic ways of exploring our identity and sense of belonging.
- Reflect on the history of a variety of dramatic genres, including their roles in historical and contemporary societies.

English Language Arts 10/11/12

Big Ideas

- The exploration of text and story deepens our understanding of diverse complex ideas about identity, others, and the world.
- Texts are socially, culturally, geographically, and historically constructed.
- People understand texts differently based on their own personal worldview, perspective, and lived experience.

Curriculum Connections

- Discern nuances in the meanings of words, considering social, political, historical, and literary contexts.
- Think critically, creatively, and reflectively to explore ideas within, between, and beyond texts.
- Recognize and understand how language constructs personal, social, and cultural identities.

Social Studies 9/10/11/12

Big Ideas

- Disparities in power alter the balance of relationships between individuals and between societies.
- Emerging ideas and ideologies profoundly influence societies and events.
- The causes of social injustice are complex and have lasting impacts on society.

Curriculum Connections

- Assess the justification for competing historical accounts after investigating points of contention, reliability of sources, and adequacy of evidence.
- Make reasoned ethical judgments about controversial actions in the past or present after considering the context and standards of right and wrong.
- Determine and assess the long- and short-term causes and consequences, and the intended and unintended consequences, of an event, legislative and judicial decision, development, policy, or movement (cause and consequence).

Applied Design, Skills, and Technologies

Textiles, Drafting, Woodworking 10/11/12



Big Ideas

- User needs and interests drive the design process (e.g. everyday clothing vs a specific costume piece).
- Complex tasks require different technologies and tools at different stages.
- Personal design interests require the evaluation and refinement of skills.

Curriculum Connections

- Identify criteria for success and any constraints for a chosen design opportunity.
- Critically reflect on their design thinking and processes and identify new design goals.
- Choose, adapt, and if necessary learn more about appropriate tools and technologies to use for tasks.

Show Information

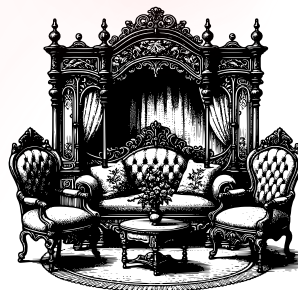


Genre: Drama

Show Dates: March 21–April 21, 2024

Age Range: Recommended for grades 9-12

Venue: Stanley Industrial Alliance Stage



Content Advisory

This production contains racial slurs (use of the n-word), racial stereotyping, and depictions of simulated violence. Red Velvet also contains water-based haze and fog. Please contact our box office for more information.



About the Playwright

Lolita Chakrabarti

Lolita Chakrabarti is an award-winning British playwright and actress who has worked on stage and screen for the last thirty years. Born in Hull and raised in Birmingham, to Bengali Hindu parents, she graduated from the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in 1990 before beginning her career. She is known for “staging the impossible” by adapting novels into scripts and creating stage-worthy narrative structure in her plays. Lolita Chakrabarti is known for her body of work, including Red Velvet (which she spent seven years researching), Life of Pi (stage adaptation), Invisible Cities, Hymn, Hamnet, and more.





Synopsis



The show opens in a traditional theatre dressing room in Lodz, Poland in 1867. Casimir, a young Polish stagehand, and Halina, a young Polish woman, have snuck into a theatre dressing room for what Casimir thinks is a romantic rendezvous. As they sneak around the dressing room, Halina attempts to get information from Casimir about the actor who is currently engaged at the theatre. As Casimir works to romance Halina, they hear a thud and both hide in the shadows.

Terrance, Ira Aldridge's hard-working loyal valet and dresser, enters, complaining of his age and work. He is startled by Casimir and Halina as Casimir attempts to sneak the pair out. Seizing the opportunity, Halina introduces herself to Terrance as a reporter from The Lodz Times, seeking an interview with the famous Ira Aldridge, much to Casimir's dismay. Terrance denies her request and attempts to force her to leave but Halina is persistent, asking why Mr. Aldridge is suddenly unavailable. As Terrance attempts to shoo her, Ira Aldridge calls him, and he must rush out to assist him.

Casimir once again tries to get Halina to leave, citing "he will lose his job!", but she refuses to go. Ira Aldridge, the famous theatre actor, enters the room and stops when he sees the "reception committee". As chaos ensues with Terrance berating Casimir, Casimir berating Halina, and Ira berating everyone, Halina finds a moment to connect with Ira over his recent birthday. She explains that she is twenty-two but in Poland they have name days, to keep their age a secret. Ira muses on what he was like at twenty-two. Intrigued, Ira allows her to stay and kicks everyone else out of the room.

Ira offers Halina cookies baked by his wife, Amanda. They begin to connect until Halina inquires about his health to which Ira quickly changes the subject. He calls Casimir back in to turn on the lamps as the darkness seems to bother him. He changes the subject to Halina's heritage and challenges her, stating she is Russian based on that Poland isn't "real". She challenges him by saying it is "...the king of Prussia and Russians are not admitting it.". She asks if he is from New York to which he comments she's "done her research". He abruptly changes the topic to King Lear, the character he is currently playing and remarks how Lear wears him and makes him stoop. Halina steers the conversation back to his career and the two seem to connect until his first wife, Margaret, is brought up. Trying to ease the awkwardness, Halina comments that he has not played at Covent Garden in London, ever since 1833. Ira dodges the question, instead monologuing on all the other arenas he has played, avoiding the mention of London. However, Halina pushes on as for most actors at the time, London is the goal. Ira continues to avoid her questioning about London and quickly ends the interview. He then asks her what the last article was she wrote was. Halina now tries to dodge the question, though she eventually admits it was a fluff piece about a small dog who was trapped and rescued. Ira calls Terrance back in to remove her and condemns Halina for her intrusion. Halina is escorted out and Ira begins to prepare for that evening's show.



Synopsis



Ira admonishes Terrance who apologizes while giving him medicine and helping him get ready. Ira begins to remark how he can't believe it's been thirty years and how even now, he is still alone. Terrance asks him if he misses London. Ira states "every day.". The scene fades into the sound of chaos, protesters, and police noises attempting to control the crowd. The audience is transported back to London, 1833.

The scene opens, thirty-four years before the events of the previous scenes, onstage at the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden in London. Connie, a Jamaican servant is rushing around the stage setting up for a meeting of the company of actors. Betty Lovall (an English actress in her twenties), Henry Forester (An English actor in his twenties), and Bernard Wade (A senior English actor) all enter the room. As they take off their jackets and outerwear, they casually discuss the latest British political news and the ensuing chaos that has begun to take place. Parliament is debating the abolition of slavery which has caused a great debate within the public sphere. Henry vehemently agrees slavery should be abolished as there should be "no buying and selling of humans in a civilized society", while Bernard believes slavery is a necessary labour force. Betty changes the subject to Edmund Kean, the lead actor of the company playing Othello, who fell ill during a performance which has now caused the need for an emergency rehearsal. The trio continue to debrief and argue about the current political state of London until Charles Kean, Edmund's son and another actor in the company, and his fiancé Ellen Tree, another actress in the company enter.

Immediately the company flocks to his side, inquiring about the health of his father. Charles updates them that he is resting but will still be unable to perform. Henry asks if he has ever taken on the role of Othello to which Charles replies that while he has done Iago many times, Othello has always been his father's role. Pierre Laporte, the French company manager of the Theatre Royal enters with a flourish after being knocked over by political protesters outside the theatre. He moves on quickly, exclaiming there is much work to be done. He reveals he has engaged another actor to come in as Othello, instead of promoting Charles as Pierre believes the shuffling of roles would be too disruptive to re-rehearse in such a short amount of time. He announces that he will bring in Ira Aldridge, for his debut performance at Covent Garden. The company bursts into whispers and gossip as everyone tries to imagine this mysterious new actor. Henry adds that he knows off Aldridge from a friend and is apparently incredible. Charles retorts with the fact that Ira is an American. They continue to squabble until Pierre announces it is done and exits the room.

Some of the company are relieved to avoid the shuffle while Charles is visibly upset by the news. Pierre re-enters with Ira and the room goes silent. To everyone's shock, Ira Aldridge is a Black man. Unfazed by this response, Pierre attempts to keep introducing Ira to everyone. Ira attempts to connect and offer pleasantries to everyone but Charles quickly tries to pull Pierre aside to demand a private conversation. Ira interrupts to offer Pierre the scene list of scenes he would like to rehearse. He attempts to offer condolences and support to Charles but is rejected.





Synopsis



Charles attempts to voice to the room his concerns but covers it by saying that people will be expecting his father, not Ira. Ira eases the situation by acknowledging he knows that he is not what they expected, and Pierre quickly moves the room forward to begin rehearsing. As the actors move into position, Ira and Ellen meet as they will be playing opposite each other as Othello and Desdemona. Ira compliments a previous performance of hers he saw, and the pair begin to have a easy back and forth.

As they start to rehearse the scene where Othello returns, Ira asks Ellen to try something. They banter over their different schools of acting. Ira is a fan of the “domestic” style of acting whereas Ellen tends to fall closer to the “teapot” style of acting which was the preferred choice at the time. Ira offers that as Othello and Desdemona have been away from each other for so long, there is more romance and simmering passion within their first interaction. Charles is displeased by this and considers it extremely unprofessional. Ira and Ellen perform the scene again and Ira ends the scene by taking Ellen’s hands and kissing them. Charles is immediately irate, but Pierre tells him to keep rehearsing the scene. It is Charles turn to speak as Iago and immediately he is much more of a “teapot” actor. When Ira attempts to give him a note, Charles dismisses him and explains his father has given him excellent notes and he doesn’t need Ira’s. Charles also proposes he should be leading the company to which Ira disagrees. Ira expresses that as he is the title role, he should be the one to lead the company. When Charles attempts to provoke him, Ira mocks his acting style as a reason he should not lead the company. As their argument escalates, Pierre announces a five-minute break. Ira leaves stating he is going to put on his costume as “it’ll help him work”.

The room erupts into chaos as the entire company reacts to the idea of having a Black actor onstage. Charles accuses Ira of groping Ellen to which she thinks he is being overdramatic. Charles continues to go on a tirade until Pierre stops him, stating that Ira will be performing tonight. Charles retorts that they “may as well close the theatre now”. Pierre debates this point, as his opinion is that theatre is a political act and progress can not be stopped. Charles disagrees as he believes having a Black actor onstage portraying Othello will prevent the audience from being able to “escape reality” and fully enjoy the play. Ellen points out the same was once said for female actors. Charles dismisses this point as gender doesn’t matter but actors are meant to be “colourless canvases”. Bernard agrees and says theatre must be held to some kind of standard (a standard that does not involve Black actors). Henry argues this job is meant to be progressive which prompts Charles to go on a rant about how if they open the theatre doors to anyone who wishes to perform a role simply because they have lived experience, there will be no jobs or good parts left for them. Pierre says that everyone is entitled to their thoughts, but they will not “limit Ira because they, themselves are limited.”. Charles begins to storm out, threatening to speak to his father when Pierre reveals he already did.



Synopsis

This sets Charles off even more as Pierre reveals that he spoke to Edmund Kean who agrees with him that Ira should play Othello. Charles jabs at Pierre's sexuality and makes thinly veiled racist remarks regarding Ira before asking Ellen to leave with him. She refuses and Charles screams and leaves, telling them "No good will come of this!".

The company is silent before Pierre gives them ten minutes to prepare and promotes Bernard to the role of Iago. The actors all exit to prepare, and Ira and Pierre are left alone. They make jokes at how well that went and fall into an easy, familiar banter as they discuss the reactions. Pierre offers Ira advice. Play the role carefully to start and be gentle as this audience needs to be eased in, especially in these politically divisive times. Ira disagrees citing the script and character are not gentle. Pierre gently asks him to at least try, for him and their friendship. Ira reluctantly agrees and the two reminisce about previous projects together before Pierre tells him "You are every inch the Moor.". They exit and the play travels forward to that evening's performance of Othello. Ira and Ellen perform an abridged version of Othello, Act III, Scenes 3-4, where Othello begins to suspect Desdemona of being unfaithful at the encouragement of Iago and their marriage begins to fall apart. Ira continues to play the role with the gusto, ignoring the advice of Pierre. The act ends with a dramatic moment as Ira (as Othello) grabs for Ellen (as Desdemona).

The play begins again with Ira obsessively rehearsing the handkerchief moment over and over in his dressing room. There is a knock at the door and his first wife, Margaret enters. She reassures him he was brilliant, and no one noticed any mistakes he may have made. He snaps but quickly apologizes and the pair embrace. Ira asks her where she was sitting, and Margaret reveals she couldn't get a seat which Ira immediately goes to rectify with Pierre. Margaret calms him and they discuss the social stigma Margaret has faced since marrying him. Ira is outraged by society's treatment and rejection of her but together, they begin to dream about the new life they could have in London.

Ellen interrupts this moment to see if Ira is coming down to celebrate and is surprised to see Margaret, a white woman in the dressing room with Ira. She is shocked when Margaret reveals herself as Ira's wife before exiting to rejoin the celebrations downstairs. Ellen attempts to recover herself while Ira changes out of his costume. She begins to offer him blocking and staging notes she thinks will make the performance better tomorrow. She also explains while she appreciated his spontaneity, physical moments need to be specific. Immediately Ira checks if she is ok to which Ellen reassures him, she is fine. The two share a moment as Ira teaches her some foundational stage combat so that whenever anything happens, Ellen will be the one completely in control. They share a drink, and the scene fades away.



Synopsis



The next day, before the second show, Ellen and Betty are talking in the dressing room while Connie serves tea and observes their discussion. Betty looks for reassurance regarding her performance but also inquires if Ellen is okay. Apparently when Ira grabbed her last night, it came across as too real and many in the company believe Ellen may be hurt. Ellen denies this, stating “they mistimed the moment” but she’s completely ok. Henry enters and the trio continue to debrief the performance, marvelling at Ira’s work and the audience’s reactions. Bernard and Charles enter the room and the company offer a round of applause for Bernard’s performance that night. Charles quickly goes over to Ellen to see if she is alright, which she again states that she is fine. The pair begin to argue but Ellen stands her ground. Henry leaves and returns as this happens with the newspaper reviews of last night’s performance.

As everyone clamors to read, Bernard is the one who breaks the news that the reviews are...strong. There is an uncertain silence as the group debates whether to read the reviews with Charles eventually offering to do it. Charles and Bernard then begin to read various newspapers all slandering Ira’s performance through prejudiced reviews. Pierre enters, upset at Henry for taking the newspapers as he didn’t want anyone to read the reviews. Pierre announces he needs to speak to the actors after the show tonight and Ellen, Charles, and Pierre all leave. Ira enters and Betty, Henry, and Bernard immediately make up excuses to leave the room, leaving him and Connie alone.

Connie makes Ira a cup of tea and they begin to talk. Connie starts to leave the room with the newspapers, but Ira insists on reading them. She refuses by dodging the subject and asks him about his performance. Connie expresses it upset her “how quickly he turned on his wife and didn’t believe her”. Ira disagrees as he believes theatre is “about getting under your skin”. Ira asks for the papers again and Connie again refuses. She reminds him to only ask if he really wants to know. He asks again and she gives him the papers. Connie leaves the room to let him read the reviews but pauses. She warns him that “people see what they are looking for.”.

The play skips through the day to after the performance that evening. The stage is empty, and Pierre stands alone. Ira enters and asks his friend if he would like to share a cab home. Pierre refuses stating he “has a meeting”. Ira discusses the performance, complimenting Ellen when Pierre interrupts. Pierre asks Ira if he believes that their friendship is based on truth and honesty between them. Ira reassures him of the trust between them when Pierre breaks the news to him. The board has decided that Ira needs to step down from the role due to public backlash and financial pressure.

Ira is shocked and asks Pierre for more details. Pierre gently tries to explain that when he asked Ira to “tone down” his performance, the actor didn’t listen. Ira begins to get upset as the entire character is tragic, angry, and full of emotion. Pierre explains he was “too much”, and the board will not see him to discuss their decision. Ira decides this is unacceptable and begins to propose they issue a formal response and “smoke em’ out”. Pierre ends this discussion by revealing Ellen has bruises from last evening’s performance to which Ira blames Charles, her “doting” fiancé of “meddling”.

Synopsis



Regardless, Pierre tells Ira he got carried away and he agrees with the board's decision. He attempts to recover their friendship by explaining they rolled "a bad hand" and they will get it right "next time". Ira tells Pierre this was his one shot, and his father came all the way from America to see what he had become. He then explains how when he was a kid, he used to meet with a small theatre troupe, full of passion, to rehearse and perform Shakespeare in a small, rundown house. One day, those who didn't "agree" with their performing set the house on fire. Ira barely escaped and was rescued, by his mentor William Alexander Brown. He explains "...We ('re) just in the fire Pierre... I've given everything to be here. I have pushed and forced and played my way in."

Pierre dismissed this and the pair begin to argue. Pierre accuses Ira of inappropriate behaviour with Ellen and Ira accuses him of inappropriate behaviour with men. Pierre continues to insult Ira while Ira accuses him of hypocrisy. Eventually Ira physically attacks Pierre after a racist remark but is startled out of the fight by being transported back to 1867, with Halina knocking at his door.

Disoriented from his dream/memory/flashback, Ira stumbles to the door of his dressing room and lets Halina in. She begins to try and apologize while Ira attempts to open a pot of makeup. He can't open it, so Halina helps him. As she explains herself, Ira paints his face a "natural" shade of white. As he prepares for his performance, Halina explains the prejudice she has felt as a female reporter. Suddenly Ira is called to places and Halina helps him get dressed for the performance. As Ira dresses, he is haunted by the ghosts of his past from London. The play ends with Ira placing his crown on his head and reciting a mixed passage from King Lear...

"You think I'll weep. No, I'll not weep... they are not men o' their words: they told me I was everything; 'tis a lie."



Characters



Casimir: A young German speaking Polish stagehand, working at a theatre in Lodz, Poland, 1867. He is inexperienced, low status, and likes Halina.

Halina Wozniak: A Polish journalist in her early twenties. She is bright, ambitious, and frustrated with her current situation.

Terrance: Ira Aldridge's hard-working loyal valet and dresser.

Ira Aldridge: An American leading actor who begins the play in his 60's. Ira Aldridge is known for being the first Black actor to play Othello. He is grand, ferocious, impatient, and unwell.

Connie: A experienced Jamaican servant working in the Theatre Royal. Connie is often the truth teller and wise beyond her years.

Betty Lovall: An English actress in her early twenties, Betty is self-concerned, clever, and pleasant.

Henry Forester: An English actor in his twenties. He is political, self-interested, ambitious, but earnest.

Bernard Wade: A senior English actor. Bernard is old school, lazy, opinionated and a little insecure.

Charles Kean: The son of grand actor, Edmund Kean. Charles also acts for the Theatre Royal and is grand but lacks the talent to support his ambitions. He struggles to step out of his father's shadow.

Ellen Tree: A leading English actress, she is talented and motivated. Her style is classical, but she is progressive. Ellen begins the play engaged to Charles Kean (whom she would later marry).

Pierre Laporte: The manager of the Theatre Royal in Coventry Garden, London. He is gay, revolutionary, and entrepreneurial.

Margaret Aldridge: An English woman in her thirties, Margaret is married to Ira. She is solid, trustworthy, and Ira's rock.



Context: Ira Aldridge



The story of Ira Aldridge (1807-1867), an American born artist and theatre manager who would grow to become one of the most celebrated Shakespearian actors of his time, is the enduring legacy of a prominent Black artist during a politically complex and turbulent time (as discussed by the actors in Red Velvet!). He is most well-known as the first Black actor to play the titular role of Othello.

Ira Aldridge was born and raised in New York, where he became involved with theatre at a young age. His first professional experience was with the African Company, founded and managed by William Henry Brown and James Hewlett. In 1821, the group built the African Grove Theatre, the first African American theatre in the United States. It was a short-lived endeavour due to protests by neighbors, attacks by a rival company, and racist critical reviews.

Confronted with this discrimination and no adequate room for his ambition, Aldridge set sail for England in 1824. He was considered one of the great tragedians and comedians and is also known for his innovative form of direct address to the audience on the closing nights of his acting engagements. He would use this time to champion the pro-abolitionist movement and address a variety of social and political issues facing the United States, Europe, and Africa.

The British public opinion towards Ira was mixed. While his fame and success grew, so did his critics opinions on his accent, mannerisms, and skin color. This was extremely evident during his time at Covent Garden, which was meant to be the opportunity of a lifetime to act among the greats in London but was cancelled after two performances due to the critics racially prejudiced reviews.

Aldridge continued touring across Europe until his unexpected death in 1867. He performed in whiteface for “traditionally white” Shakespearean roles like Macbeth, Shylock, and King Lear. Aldridge was the first actor to perform Shakespeare in Serbia and parts of Russia, with his performance being considered “so powerful”, that there were uprisings, and some Shakespeare was banned. Aldridge is the only actor of African-American descent to be honored with a plaque at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre in Stratford-Upon-Avon.



Context: Whiteface



Whiteface is a type of performance where a person of color uses makeup to appear fair-skinned. It is a reversal of the term blackface, which is a makeup used by a person to look like a black person, usually to portray a racist stereotype. Blackface is considered racist and condemned due to its offensive nature and racial links to slavery and racial segregation. Whiteface is often defended as a modern art form that argues whiteface does not draw on a legacy of racism.

There is not much academic research to be found regarding the use of whiteface by Black actors, which is the subject of *Acting White: African Americans, Whiteface, and Post-Civil Rights Popular Culture* by Racquel Gates.

“Though a plethora of rich scholarship addresses the use of blackface by white and black performers on both stage and in film, very little work examines the African American utilization of whiteface...”

...This project takes a first step at filling in what I see as a significant gap in scholarship that addresses black representation in popular culture...”

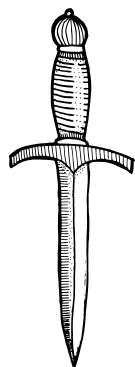
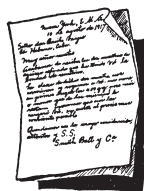


Acting White: African Americans, Whiteface, and Post-Civil Rights
Popular Culture
Racquel Gates, 2010



Context: Othello

Othello is a tragedy written by William Shakespeare, sometime in the early 1600s. The story revolves around Othello, a Moorish (Moor is a historical term first used by Christian Europeans to designate different Muslim populations in the Middle Ages. This term was widely used to describe those of Arab, Berber, and Muslim European descent.) military commander who has returned home from battle, his new wife Desdemona, and Iago, his malevolent ensign. Iago manipulates Othello's jealousy until in a fit of rage, Othello murders Desdemona. *Othello* explores themes of jealousy, passion, and race which is why it is still widely performed and adapted today.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

PRE SHOW

Are you familiar with Shakespeare and historical productions of *Othello*?

Red Velvet is a metadrama, a play which features another play as part of the plot. What other media do you know that has a “play within a play” or a “movie set within a movie”? Why do you think playwrights and screenwriters use metadramas as a plot device?

This play is a period piece about a company of actors. What do you think is different about theatre today vs theatre in the 1800s? How has theatre moved forward? How has it stayed the same?

Red Velvet is set in Europe from 1833 to 1867. What do you know about this time in history?





Post-Attendance Resources

In the following pages, you will find
resources that may be helpful after
attending the show



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS: POST SHOW

“... Don't you think that things have to change?”

Red Velvet, pg. 86

1. Throughout the narrative, the characters take on different ideological positions when it comes to Ira Aldridge and the abolition of slavery. Why are some characters against change? Why are others for it? Why do things have to change?
2. As ***Red Velvet*** is a period piece, how do the set, costumes, and lighting influence the mood of the play?
3. Throughout the play, characters often discuss their thoughts and feelings on Ira while he is not in the room. What did you think of Ira Aldridge? Do the things other characters say about him inform his character and journey?
4. Why do people hold on to painful memories? How do these memories affect us as we grow older?
5. What do you know about ***King Lear***? Are there parallels to Ira Aldridge's journey?

Activity 1: Memory as a Theatrical Form

Recommended for Drama 10-12 and Creative Writing 10-12.

Red Velvet is considered a “memory play” as the narrative jumps back and forth through time and is shaped by Ira Aldridge’s memories. Memory plays don’t always narrate the truth but rather the illusion of truth. This is the truth as the character remembers it rather than the truth that occurred. Throughout this exercise, students will explore writing their own memory scenes and how truth can be distorted theatrically.

Part 1: Creating Scenes from a Memory

1. Divide the class into groups of 3–5. From there, groups will pick out one of the slips of paper. On the slips are different memories and life events (e.g. first day of kindergarten, first ice cream, got into college, etc.).
2. From here, participants will devise their own scene based on the memory they picked. However, there are a few things their scenes **MUST** have...

- **Transitions into the “memory” and out of it! Encourage your students to be wacky and silly! They could use music, movement, or whatever else their brains come up with.**
- **There must be some kind of beginning, middle, and end.**
- **The scene must end on a cliffhanger.**

3. Give students 30 minutes to create their scene (or feel free to stretch this out depending on the time available).
4. Allow groups to present their recreated scenes. We offer to have them perform once then receive feedback from their classmates through the questions below!

- **What did you enjoy/made you laugh during the scene?**
- **What did you want to see more of throughout the scene?**

Materials:

Space for students to move, printed/written memory scenarios

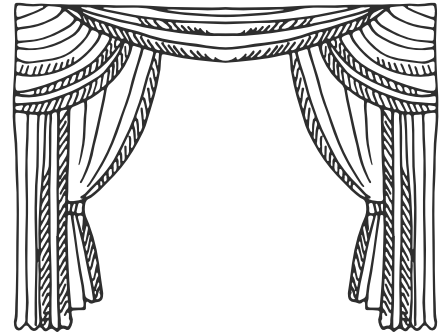


Activity 1: Memory as a Theatrical Form

Recommended for Drama 10-12 and Creative Writing 10-12.

Part 2: When the Truth is Subjective!

1. After everyone has performed and received feedback, offer them their next challenge. **They must recreate the scene however a different character in the group MUST disagree with the memory and then re-tell it from their perspective.**
2. Give the groups 10–15 minutes to rehearse their scenes with this new challenge and feedback.
3. Have them come back together and perform again, incorporating suggestions and giving them a second opportunity to try something new!



Part 3: Reflection and Discussion.

- a) What did you notice about creating a scene from a memory? What makes it different than just improvising a scene?
- b) How did the different character's perspectives change the scene? Is it ever possible that everyone is telling the truth?
- c) How did each group bring their own style to each scene? How do different productions vary depending on the director?



Activity 2: Hidden Stories

Recommended for Drama 10-12, Literary Studies 10-12, and Social Studies
10-12.

Red Velvet tells the story of Ira Aldridge, a trailblazing Black actor from the 1800's and the first African American actor to play the role of Othello. However, his early life is largely unknown, and parts of his career have been lost over history. In this exercise, we encourage students to find their own iconic and influential historical figure who has been lost to time and dive into their legacy.

Materials: Pencils, pens, and paper.

Part 1: Research and Creation

1. Students can do this activity individually or in groups of two. Have students pick a historical figure who has overcome some form of adversity or changed the world through their advocacy and life.
2. Once they have picked someone, have students research these people and their lives. As they research, encourage students to explore the historical context and discover the humanity of their chosen figure.
3. From here, students can create a piece of media based on the historical figure they researched. This could be a...

- **Monologue from the character's POV**
- **Scene**
- **Interview**
- **Collage**
- **Personal essay**
- **Poem**
- **Movie Trailer**



4. Have students share their creations with each other. After everyone has shared, use the discussion questions below to reflect.

Part 2: Reflection and Discussion

- a) What interested you in your chosen historical figure? Why was their legacy "lost"?
- b) Why do we still learn about people and their stories from over 200 years ago?
- c) Has the world changed as much as we think?

SOURCES

BC curriculum:

<https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/curriculum>

About the Playwright:

https://www.chicagoshakes.com/education/teaching_resources/teacher_handbooks/red_velvet/classroom_exercises

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/home/you/article-12724597/From-Brum-Broadway-Actress-playwright-LOLITA-CHAKRABARTI-midas-touch-turning-unstageable-novels-like-Life-Pi-pure-theatre-gold-opens-Tony-Awards-rave-reviews-split-husband-Adrian-Lester.html>

<https://www.ft.com/content/75189c0e-9696-11e9-98b9-e38c177b152f>

<https://www.torch.ox.ac.uk/lolita-chakarabati>

Context: Ira Aldridge

<https://artuk.org/discover/stories/ira-aldridge-a-brief-visual-history-of-the-black-shakespearean-actor>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ira_Aldridge#Critical_reception

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Ira-Frederick-Aldridge>

<https://www.historyextra.com/period/victorian/ira-aldridge-shakespeares-black-othello/>

Context: Whiteface

<https://www.proquest.com/openview/e2ea692b3348ab7ed387adeec27db365/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y>

Gates, Raquel. *Acting White: African Americans, Whiteface, and Post-Civil Rights Popular Culture*. Evanston, Illinois. December 2010.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Whiteface_\(performance\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Whiteface_(performance))