Teacher’s notes

- Students can use their own language as a reference point in order to understand the repercussions of Colonisation and inherently racist societies on their own experiences and the language we all use today.

- In their research, students should think about England’s expansion of the empire, the idea of conquering and discovering new lands and unfamiliar native peoples. They should look at ideas about white and black (white = right and light and pure; black = dark and mysterious and dangerous/evil) and think about how these may have evolved.

- Students can then annotate the speech from Brabantio – highlighting racist elements. They should also unearth the following points:
  - Voodoo/black magic as a tool to control
  - Brabantio removes Othello’s identity and refers to him in terms of his race
  - Othello’s race means he lacks integrity and honour – he’s already damned and will do anything to gain what he wants
  - the assumption that Desdemona would never want a creature such as Othello – he must have drugged her in order to get his wicked desires fulfilled.

Students may like to read a poem that depicts positive connotations and concepts relating to the colour black: [http://www.adisaworld.com/poem3.html](http://www.adisaworld.com/poem3.html) 'Lady Onyx’ by Adisa the Verbaliser.
LADY ONYX

Kind enough to house the baby
She’s the washing line that holds the stars
The gold that runs through nature’s veins
She’s the power in the diplomat’s cars

She’s the belt of respect
That ties the martial art suit
She’s the centre of the earth
Home for the baobab tree roots

She’s the financial caviar
For a wealthy diet
She’s the TARDIS inside our heads
When the curtain falls; and all is quiet

She’s the solar eclipse
Many wait a lifetime to see
She’s a runaway stallion
Leaving no footprints on her quest to be free

She’s the coffee in my cup
No need for white clothes
Like an uncut diamond
She dresses in carbon robes

She’s the view inside the cocoon
Before the butterfly takes flight
She’s the backdrop to life’s movie
As the credits scroll into the night

She’s a natty dread hairstyle
That unites the people like rope
She’s an old man river spiritual
Her voice brings ten tons of hope

She limitless like the desert
More attractive than quicksand in space
Behind her back many mock her
Too afraid to say it to her face

She is the absorber of light
Lady onyx with a shine
She’s the stereotyped refugee
She’s the new black
And she’s mine

Lyrics by Adisa.
The English language, it could be argued, contains elements of racism that we all subconsciously use – see above.

Answer the following questions and complete the following activities in order to understand this idea:

1. **Write** a list of connotations for the colours ‘white’ and ‘black’. Which colour provides more positive associations?

2. **Research**: Colonialism, medieval depictions of the Devil, slavery during the Renaissance. This will give you contextual information about the surrounding racial issues that affect our language. Consider the ideas of mystery and the unknown, the concepts that would have frightened white societies in times of discovery and change.

3. **Find** examples of this subtle racist language in the play. You’re looking for: fear of the dark, mention of wanting ‘light’, that some characters are ‘fair’ etc.

4. Various levels of racist language appear in the play *Othello*. Characters such as Brabantio abuse him with a variety of racist slurs.

**Use** the following speech from Brabantio (Act 1 Scene 2) to analyse the racist language and stereotypes that Shakespeare draws upon:

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O thou foul thief, where hast thou stowed my daughter?
65 Damned as thou art, thou hast enchanted her!
For I'll refer me to all things of sense,
If she in chains of magic were not bound,
Whether a maid so tender, fair, and happy,
So opposite to marriage that she shunned
70 The wealthy curlèd darlings of our nation,
Would ever have, t' incur a general mock,
Run from her guardage to the sooty bosom
Of such a thing as thou—to fear, not to delight.
Judge me the world if 'tis not gross in sense
75 That thou hast practiced on her with foul charms,
Abused her delicate youth with drugs or minerals
That weakens motion. I'll have 't disputed on.
'Tis probable and palpable to thinking.
I therefore apprehend and do attach thee
80 For an abuser of the world, a practice
Of arts inhibited and out of warrant.—
Lay hold upon him. If he do resist,
Subdue him at his peril!
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