



Department of Theatre  
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

## SEND IN THE THESPIANS

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### **All About the MSU Department of Theatre's *Othello***

EAST LANSING, Mich. — The MSU Department of Theatre wrapped their production of *Othello* by William Shakespeare. After a month of rehearsals, the production ran for two weekends in November. The production was a success. With the introduction of free tickets for MSU students, many took advantage of the offer. Set in present day, *Othello* explores parallel themes in past and present society.

Although *Othello* was written in the 17th century, there are many aspects of the story remain relevant today. Director and Department of Theatre Professor Ji Won Jeon, commented on her personal experience with production. The character Othello encounters racist remarks throughout the play. Jeon noted that being Asian during the COVID-19 pandemic was a trying time. “In the United States, public figures and news outlets called it the “Chinese virus,” fueling a wave of anti-Asian racism and violence.” Jeon said. She and other Asians struggled as they lived in fear. Because of this, Jeon decided to create a modern adaptation of the play. Set in

2025, MSU's *Othello* encompasses themes in current day, namely racism. In *Othello*, the title character is referred to as a "Moor", a term referring to "North Africans of mixed Berber and Arab descent" said *Othello* dramaturg and MSU student Ashley Romo. The term is used to intentionally to exclude Othello from his comrades.

*Othello* also explores manipulation as characters struggle to obtain or hold onto power. Iago, Othello's comrade, convinces Othello that his wife has not been faithful. Iago uses manipulation tactics against his superior Othello, to execute his political agenda. Shakespeare portrays jealousy as a trope that often eclipses rationality.

The design elements of *Othello*, created by Department of Theatre Assistant Professor Renae Selmeyer, shaped powerful storytelling moments. The simple set design allowed the actors and narrative drive the production. The costumes were designed to complement each character. Othello appeared in military attire, meant to represent duty and nobility. Desdemona, Othello's wife, wore bright, matronly outfits to represent her loving, loyal, and innocent nature. Clothing and costumes were designed by Department of Theatre's student Ryan Scott Long. Although the design elements supported the world of *Othello*, the acting and story remained the production's primary focus.

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