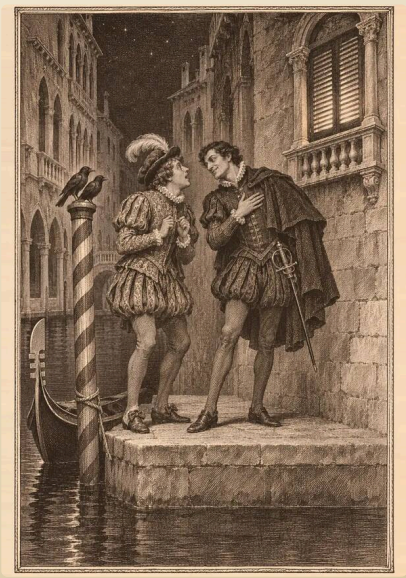
Daily Bard

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Othello: study questions and answers

Fifty-one questions on Othello, act by act and across the whole play, each with an answer checked against the Folger text. Comprehension questions fix what happens; analysis questions show how to write about it; five essay questions come with outline plans.



How to use these questions

Read or reread the act first. Then cover the answers and try each question from memory before you check. The comprehension questions test what happens and in what order, which matters in a play where the plot is a chain of small tricks. The analysis questions ask how and why: each answer is a short model paragraph with a point, a quotation, a method and its effect. The essay questions at the end come with outline answers you can adapt.

Every quotation here is exact to the Folger text. For the wider picture, keep the Othello study guide open beside you, and use the Othello quotation sheet to learn the lines that the answers rely on.

Act 1

Comprehension

1 **Why does Iago say he hates Othello at the start of the play?**

Othello has made Michael Cassio his lieutenant, although "Three great ones of the city" asked that Iago be given the post. Iago sneers that Cassio "never set a squadron in the field", while he, a proven soldier, remains the ancient (ensign, or standard-bearer). At the end of Act 1 he adds a second grievance: a rumour that Othello has slept with his wife, Emilia.

2 **How does Brabantio learn of his daughter's marriage, and what does he conclude?**

In Act 1, Scene 1, Iago and Roderigo shout the news beneath his window at night. Roderigo gives his name; Iago stays anonymous and slips away before Brabantio comes down, so that he will not be seen acting against his general. Brabantio finds Desdemona gone and decides that Othello must have won her with drugs or witchcraft, since he cannot believe she chose him freely.

3 **Why does the Duke send for Othello on the same night?**

A Turkish fleet is at sea. The reports in Act 1, Scene 3 disagree about its size, and one says it is heading for Rhodes, but the senators judge that a feint: the real target is Cyprus, a Venetian possession. The Duke needs Othello to command the defence at once, which is why Brabantio's complaint is heard by a council that cannot afford to lose its general.

4 **How does Othello say he won Desdemona?**

Brabantio himself "oft invited" Othello to his house and asked for the story of his life. Desdemona listened whenever her household tasks allowed, then asked to hear it all. She pitied his sufferings and hinted that a friend of his who could tell such a story would win her. "Upon this hint I spake", Othello says, and he concludes: "This only is the witchcraft I have used."

5 **What is decided by the end of the Senate scene?**

Desdemona confirms that she married willingly, so Brabantio drops his charge, though he parts with a warning: "She has deceived her father, and may thee." Othello must sail for Cyprus that night. Desdemona asks to go too and is allowed to follow in Iago's care, with Emilia to attend her. Left behind, Iago persuades the despairing Roderigo to sell his land and come to Cyprus.

Analysis

6 **How does Shakespeare shape our first impression of Othello?**

Shakespeare lets prejudice speak first and then contradicts it. In Act 1, Scene 1 Othello is never named. He is "the Moor", "the thick-lips", "an old black ram", "a Barbary horse": animal imagery that reduces a marriage to breeding. The man who enters in Scene 2 is the opposite of the description. Told to hide, he answers, "Not I. I must be found", and he stops an armed brawl with one unhurried line: "Keep up your bright swords, for the dew will rust them." The quiet joke about damp shows a soldier with nothing to prove. The structure makes the audience notice its own readiness to believe a slander, which is exactly the weakness Iago will exploit in Othello.

7 **How does Shakespeare present Desdemona when she speaks to the Senate?**

Brabantio has described "A maiden never bold". The woman who enters argues her case better than he does. Her phrase "a divided duty" grants her father his claim before she limits it, and she cites a precedent he cannot reject: her mother once chose him "before her father". She then asks to go to war with her husband in a soldier's vocabulary, saying her "downright violence and storm of fortunes / May trumpet to the world" that she loves him. The military diction shows that she shares Othello's world and has not been carried off into it. The same confident public speech, used later for Cassio, is what Iago turns against her.

8 **What does Iago's soliloquy at the end of Act 1 reveal about him?**

It shows hatred arriving before its reasons. "I hate the Moor" comes first; the rumour about Emilia follows, and Iago at once admits "I know not if 't be true" while resolving to act "as if for surety". A soliloquy (a character alone, speaking thoughts aloud) is usually where we learn the truth; here we learn that the speaker does not need one. We also watch the plot being improvised: "How? How? Let's see." His judgement of Othello is accurate and almost admiring, a man of "a free and open nature", and that virtue becomes the weapon. The closing image of a "monstrous birth" makes the plan a living thing with a life of its own.

Act 2

Comprehension

9 **What happens to the Turkish fleet, and why does it matter?**

A storm wrecks it before it reaches Cyprus. In Act 2, Scene 1 a gentleman announces, "Our wars are done". The war that brought Othello to the island is over before he lands, so the soldiers have a garrison, a celebration and nothing to fight. The only enemy left in the play is inside the camp.

10 **In what order do the main characters reach Cyprus?**

Cassio lands first and reports that he lost sight of Othello's ship in the storm. Next comes Iago's ship, carrying Desdemona, Emilia and Roderigo, a week sooner than expected. Othello arrives last. The delay leaves Desdemona waiting anxiously on the quay, passing the time in banter with Iago while Cassio greets her with elaborate courtesy, which Iago watches and stores up.

11 **What does Iago tell Roderigo to do, and how does he persuade him?**

He claims that Desdemona is already tiring of Othello and is "directly in love" with Cassio, offering as evidence that she touched Cassio's hand. Cassio is therefore the rival to remove. Roderigo, whom Cassio does not know, is to provoke him while he commands the watch that night, so that Cassio disgraces himself. Roderigo doubts the story but agrees.

12 **How does Cassio lose his lieutenancy?**

In Act 2, Scene 3 Othello leaves Cassio in charge of the guard during the celebrations. Cassio admits he has "very poor and unhappy brains for drinking", but Iago presses more wine on him. Roderigo provokes him offstage; Cassio chases him, and when Montano, a senior official in Cyprus, steps in, Cassio wounds him. The alarm bell brings Othello, Iago gives a seemingly reluctant account, and Othello dismisses Cassio.

13 **What does Iago advise Cassio to do after his dismissal, and what is the real purpose?**

He tells him to ask Desdemona to plead for him, since "Our general's wife is now the general". The advice is sensible and Cassio thanks him for it. Its purpose is revealed in soliloquy: while Desdemona presses Cassio's case, Iago will suggest to Othello that she does so out of lust, and he will arrange for Othello to find Cassio "Soliciting his wife".

Analysis

14 **How does Shakespeare present the reunion of Othello and Desdemona in Act 2, Scene 1?**

As the height of their happiness, and as a moment already shadowed. Othello greets his wife as "my fair warrior", an equal who has crossed the same sea. His joy is expressed in absolutes: "If it were now to die, / 'Twere now to be most happy". The conditional is innocent, but dramatic irony (the audience knowing more than the speaker) makes it sound like a forecast, because we have heard Iago's plan. Desdemona's answer looks forward where his looks to an ending: she hopes their "loves and comforts should increase". Iago's aside then supplies a musical metaphor, "O, you are well tuned now, / But I'll set down the pegs that make this music". Harmony is something he can untune, string by string.

15 **How does Iago's soliloquy at the end of Act 2, Scene 1 complicate our sense of his motives?**

It multiplies them. Iago now suspects that "the lusty Moor / Hath leaped into my seat", wants to be "evened with him, wife for wife", claims a kind of love for Desdemona himself, and adds in a bracket that he fears "Cassio with my nightcap too". The lost promotion has almost vanished. What stays constant is the feeling: the thought gnaws him "like a poisonous mineral", an image of being eaten from inside. Jealousy is Iago's own condition before he gives it to Othello, and his stated aim is to reproduce it: "a jealousy so strong / That judgment cannot cure". He even concedes that Othello has "a constant, loving, noble nature". The hatred does not depend on thinking ill of its object.

16 **In his soliloquy after advising Cassio, how does Iago explain his own method?**

He challenges the audience: "And what's he, then, that says I play the villain". The rhetorical question has a real answer, since the advice he has given is good. That is the method. Iago rarely needs a lie when a truth will serve, and he names the principle with an oxymoron (a phrase joining opposites), "Divinity of hell": devils "suggest at first with heavenly shows". The speech ends with his clearest statement of the plot: "So will I turn her virtue into pitch, / And out of her own goodness make the net / That shall enmesh them all." Pitch is black, sticky and defiling. Desdemona's kindness will be the material of the trap, so the better she behaves, the guiltier she will look.

Act 3

Comprehension

17 **What does Desdemona promise Cassio, and why does he leave when Othello appears?**

In Act 3, Scene 3 she promises to press his case until Othello gives way: "My lord shall never rest". When Othello and Iago approach, Cassio hurries off because he is ashamed to face the general who dismissed him. Iago turns the exit into evidence with a single murmur, "Ha, I like not that", and the suggestion that Cassio would hardly "steal away so guiltylike".

18 **How does the handkerchief pass from Desdemona to Cassio?**

Othello complains of a headache and Desdemona tries to bind his forehead with it. He pushes it away as "too little" and it falls unnoticed. Emilia picks it up, remembering that Iago has asked her "a hundred times" to steal it, and gives it to him without knowing why he wants it. Iago leaves it in Cassio's lodging. Cassio finds it and asks Bianca to copy the pattern.

19 **What "proof" does Iago give Othello in Act 3, Scene 3?**

Two things, both invented. First, a story that he heard Cassio talk in his sleep, saying "Sweet Desdemona, / Let us be wary, let us hide our loves". Second, a claim that he has seen Cassio wipe his beard with a handkerchief "Spotted with strawberries". Othello has demanded "ocular proof", proof he can see. He accepts a reported dream and a reported sighting.

20 **What do Othello and Iago swear at the end of Act 3, Scene 3?**

Othello kneels and vows revenge; Iago kneels beside him and pledges his "wit, hands, heart" to Othello's service. Othello orders Cassio dead within three days. Iago agrees and adds, "But let her live", which prompts Othello to resolve on Desdemona's death as well. He then gives Iago what Iago said he wanted in the first scene: "Now art thou my lieutenant."

21 **What does Othello tell Desdemona about the handkerchief in Act 3, Scene 4, and how does she react?**

He says an Egyptian "charmer" gave it to his mother with the promise that it would keep his father's love while she kept it, and lose it if she lost it or gave it away. There is "magic in the web of it". Frightened, Desdemona says it is not lost, which is untrue, declines to fetch it, and returns to pleading for Cassio. Othello leaves in a rage.

Analysis

22 **How does Iago plant suspicion in Act 3, Scene 3 without making an accusation?**

He makes Othello do the work. Iago's opening moves are fragments and questions, not statements: "Indeed?", "Honest, my lord?", "Think, my lord?" Each echo hands Othello's own word back to him as if it concealed something, and the two men share verse lines, so that Othello keeps completing a rhythm Iago has begun. Othello notices the technique and misreads it: "thou echo'st me / As if there were some monster in thy thought". The monster is Othello's image, not Iago's. By refusing to speak, Iago obliges his victim to imagine what is being withheld, and what a man imagines for himself he does not think to doubt. Our essay on "O, beware, my lord, of jealousy" follows the next stage.

23 **What does Othello's "Farewell" speech show about how he understands his loss?**

It shows that what he mourns is himself. The speech is built on anaphora (the same word opening successive phrases): "Farewell the tranquil mind! Farewell content!" But the things he parts from are not his marriage. They are "the plumed troops and the big wars", the "neighing steed", the "royal banner". The list swells into "Pride, pomp, and circumstance of glorious war" and ends with his own name in the third person: "Othello's occupation's gone". His identity is his profession, and he feels a wife's supposed infidelity as the end of a career. Just before it he says he could have been happy had the whole camp "tasted her sweet body, / So I had nothing known". The injury is the knowledge, which means the public shame.

24 **What is the significance of the kneeling vow that ends Act 3, Scene 3?**

It is staged as a parody of a wedding. Othello's rhetoric recovers its grandeur for the worst of purposes: his "bloody thoughts" are like the Pontic Sea, whose current "Ne'er feels retiring ebb". The simile turns a decision into a force of nature, something he need not answer for. He kneels and speaks of "a sacred vow"; Iago says "Do not rise yet" and kneels with him, calling the stars to witness. The scene closes with an exchange of promises, and Iago's last line, "I am your own forever", has the sound of a marriage service. One bond has replaced another. Iago also gets his promotion here, yet the plot does not stop, which is strong evidence that the lieutenancy was never the real motive.



Lines like these are easier to keep when you meet them singly. **Daily Bard** is an iPhone and iPad app that shows one Shakespeare passage a day, exactly as written and checked against the Folger text, with a plain-English reading on the back of the leaf.

Act 4

Comprehension

25 **What happens to Othello at the start of Act 4, Scene 1?**

Iago torments him with images of Desdemona and Cassio in bed, then claims Cassio has boasted of lying with her. Othello's speech breaks into disconnected prose and he falls to the ground in a trance. When Cassio comes in, Iago calls it epilepsy, says it is the second fit in two days, and sends him away with a request to return shortly.

26 **How does Iago use Cassio and Bianca to deceive Othello?**

He hides Othello where he can see but not hear clearly, promising to make Cassio retell the affair. He then asks Cassio about Bianca, the woman in Cyprus who loves him. Cassio laughs at the idea of marrying her, and Othello reads every laugh as contempt for Desdemona. Bianca then storms in and throws the handkerchief back at Cassio, so Othello sees it in his rival's possession.

27 **What news does Lodovico bring, and how does Othello behave in front of him?**

Lodovico, Desdemona's kinsman, brings a letter from Venice recalling Othello and appointing Cassio to govern Cyprus in his place. When Desdemona says she is glad and speaks of "the love I bear to Cassio", meaning goodwill, Othello strikes her in public and calls her "Devil". Lodovico is appalled: "this would not be believed in Venice". Othello leaves muttering "Goats and monkeys!"

28 **What does Roderigo threaten in Act 4, Scene 2, and how does Iago deal with it?**

Roderigo has given Iago jewels to pass to Desdemona and has had nothing in return. He threatens to speak to her directly and demand them back, which would expose Iago. Iago praises his spirit, then tells him a lie: Othello is leaving for Mauritania with Desdemona unless something keeps him in Cyprus. The surest way to keep him is to kill Cassio that night.

29 **What is the willow song, and why does Desdemona sing it?**

In Act 4, Scene 3, as Emilia helps her undress, Desdemona remembers her mother's maid Barbary, whose lover "proved mad / And did forsake her" and who died singing a song of willow, the emblem of forsaken love. The song "Will not go from my mind". She has also asked for her wedding sheets to be laid on the bed and to be shrouded in one if she dies.

Analysis

30 **How does Shakespeare use language to show Othello's state of mind in Act 4, Scene 1?**

The speaker of the play's grandest verse is reduced to prose, and the prose to fragments. Othello snatches at Iago's pun and cannot get past it: "Lie with her? Lie on her?" The nouns that follow, "Noses, ears, and lips", are a body in pieces, the picture Iago has made him see. Then comes the bitterest irony in the scene: "It is not words that shakes me thus." Words are all it is. After the eavesdropping his feeling swings between tenderness and butchery in consecutive speeches, from "the pity of it, Iago" to "I will chop her into messes". Shakespeare does not show love replaced by hatred. He shows both present at once, which is why Othello resolves not to speak with her first, in case her beauty should "unprovide my mind again".

31 **How does Shakespeare present Othello's treatment of Desdemona in Act 4, Scene 2?**

As a trial in which the charge is never read. Othello turns the bedchamber into a brothel by casting the people in it: Emilia is the bawd told to "shut the door" and paid as she leaves, and Desdemona is a "public commoner". The role-play lets him say what he cannot say plainly. Desdemona's reply defines her position exactly: "I understand a fury in your words, / But not the words." She asks the necessary questions, "To whom, my lord? With whom? How am I false?", and he will not answer them, so Cassio is never named and she is given nothing to deny. The scene also shows what the belief costs him. She was where he had "garnered up my heart", now "a cistern for foul toads".

32 **What is the effect of Emilia's speech about husbands at the end of Act 4?**

It gives the play's argument against the double standard, in the one scene with no man present. Emilia has been joking in prose; she moves into verse when she turns serious: "But I do think it is their husbands' faults / If wives do fall." Her method is a run of questions that she answers herself, "Is it sport? / I think it is", a pattern that turns observation into proof. The conclusion is a claim of likeness: women have "affections, / Desires for sport, and frailty, as men have". Placed just before the murder, the speech tells the audience what every husband in the play fails to see. Desdemona, who cannot imagine such a wife, answers with a prayer.

Act 5

Comprehension

33 **What happens when Roderigo attacks Cassio in Act 5, Scene 1?**

Roderigo's thrust fails because Cassio wears a protective coat, and Cassio wounds him in return. Iago, unseen in the dark, stabs Cassio in the leg and slips away. Othello hears Cassio cry out, assumes Iago has killed him, and goes to kill Desdemona. Iago returns with a light as if newly roused, stabs the wounded Roderigo to silence him, and tries to throw suspicion on Bianca.

34 **How does Desdemona die?**

Othello wakes her with kisses and tells her to pray, because he "would not kill thy soul". He accuses her of giving Cassio the handkerchief. She denies it and asks him to send for Cassio; he lets her think Cassio is dead, and takes her tears as confession. She begs for one more night, then half an hour, then one prayer. He answers "It is too late" and smothers her.

35 **What are Desdemona's last words, and what do they do?**

She revives briefly after Emilia enters and says, "A guiltless death I die." Asked who has done it, she answers, "Nobody. I myself. Farewell. / Commend me to my kind lord." She protests her innocence and then tries to take the blame, a last attempt to protect Othello. He will not accept the cover: "'Twas I that killed her."

36 How is Iago exposed?

By his wife. When Othello cites the handkerchief as proof, Emilia declares that she found it and gave it to Iago, who had often begged her to steal it. Iago orders her home, calls her a liar, then stabs her and runs; he is caught and brought back. Letters found in the dead Roderigo's pocket confirm the plots, and Cassio explains that he found the handkerchief in his chamber.

37 What happens to Othello, Iago and Cassio at the end?

Othello wounds Iago but does not kill him. Told that he will be held prisoner until Venice decides his case, he makes a final speech, stabs himself with a hidden weapon and dies kissing Desdemona. Iago refuses to explain himself: "From this time forth I never will speak word." Cassio, now governor of Cyprus, is to decide his torture, and Lodovico sails to report to Venice.

Analysis

38 How does Othello present the murder to himself in his soliloquy at the start of Act 5, Scene 2?

As a duty performed on behalf of something larger than himself. "It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul": the repeated abstract noun stands in for a crime he will not name, even to the stars. He speaks as a judge, "she must die, else she'll betray more men", with Justice and "her sword" personified beside him. Yet the imagery resists the role. Her skin is "smooth as monumental alabaster", the stone of tomb effigies so he sees her as a monument before she is dead. The paradox "This sorrow's heavenly: / It strikes where it doth love" is the self-deception in a single line. When she denies the charge he complains that she makes him call "A murder" what he "thought a sacrifice".

39 How does Shakespeare present Emilia in the final scene?

As the one character who chooses truth over obedience and safety. Her first response is disbelief, and Shakespeare makes it audible: "My husband?" three times, each repetition a step towards understanding. Once she understands, she speaks to the whole room and announces the breach of a wife's duty as she commits it: "'Tis proper I obey him, but not now." Threatened by two armed men in turn, she tells Othello "I'll make thee known, / Though I lost twenty lives" and vows to speak "as liberal as the north", as freely as the wind. Her courage is also atonement, since her silence about the handkerchief helped to make the tragedy. She dies beside Desdemona, taking up the willow song, with a last plain statement of fact: "Moor, she was chaste."

40 Is Othello's last speech honest self-knowledge or self-deception?

The question is open, and the speech supports both readings. For self-knowledge: he asks only for accuracy, "Speak of me as I am. Nothing extenuate", and he condemns himself as one who "threw a pearl away / Richer than all his tribe". In the Aleppo story he is both the Venetian soldier and the "turbanned Turk" he kills, and he executes the enemy of the state he has become. For self-deception: he opens by reminding Venice of his "service", restores the grand style he had before the fall, and describes the murder of his wife as a matter of something thrown away. The stronger essays do not choose too quickly. They show that Othello returns to storytelling, the art that won Desdemona, at the moment he most needs to be believed.

Whole-text questions

41 What are Iago's motives, and do they explain what he does?

He states at least four: Cassio's promotion over him, the rumour that Othello has slept with Emilia, a similar suspicion of Cassio, and a professed desire for Desdemona. In Act 5 he adds that Cassio "hath a daily beauty in his life / That makes me ugly". None is held for long, and the first is satisfied in Act 3 without slowing him. This is why Coleridge's view of Iago as a man hunting for motives has lasted. A good answer does not simply call him motiveless, though. The reasons share a pattern: each is a comparison in which Iago comes off worse. Read this way, his motive is envy in its broadest sense, and his reward is the pleasure of control. For more, see the Iago character analysis.

42 How does the meaning of the handkerchief change across the play?

It begins as a private love token, Othello's first gift, which Desdemona keeps about her "To kiss and talk to". Dropped, it becomes for Emilia a way to please a difficult husband, and for Iago a tool: "Trifles light as air / Are to the jealous confirmations strong / As proofs of holy writ." Othello then loads it with magic, and later with Desdemona's honour itself. For Cassio it is a pretty pattern; for Bianca, proof of a rival. In Act 5 it becomes evidence against Iago. The object never changes. Its meaning depends on who tells its story, which is the play's whole method in miniature. Even Othello tells two stories: in Act 3 an Egyptian gave it to his mother, and in Act 5 his father did.

43 Why is the word "honest" so important in the play?

Because it is repeated until it means its opposite. The word and its relatives are attached to Iago throughout, most often by the people he is ruining: Othello calls him "Honest Iago" in Act 1, Cassio says "Good night, honest Iago" after being destroyed by him, and Othello is still saying "honest, honest Iago" over Desdemona's body. The word also shifts sense. Used of Iago it means truthful and plain-dealing; used of Desdemona it means chaste. Othello's cry "I think my wife be honest and think she is not" shows the two meanings colliding: to trust his ensign's honesty he must deny his wife's. The repetition creates sustained dramatic irony and makes a wider point, that a reputation is only a word other people agree to use. See quotes about deception.

44 How does Othello's race shape the tragedy?

It does not cause the tragedy in the way Brabantio or Iago would claim, by making Othello savage or credulous. It makes him vulnerable, because he lives among people who think the marriage unnatural and he comes to share their view. Iago's decisive argument in Act 3, Scene 3 is that Desdemona refused matches "Of her own clime, complexion, and degree", so her choice of Othello shows a will "most rank". Othello's reply is not anger but agreement, and alone he reaches for the explanation himself: "Haply, for I am black". Soon he uses his own face as a simile for dirt. Venice values him as a general and, in the Duke's words, as "far more fair than black", praise that keeps the prejudice intact. See quotes about race and otherness.

45 How does the play present its three women?

Desdemona, Emilia and Bianca differ in rank and in outlook, and the men describe all three in the same word. Desdemona, a senator's daughter, is called "whore" by her husband; Emilia is called "Villainous whore" by hers at the moment she tells the truth; Bianca is a "strumpet" to Iago and to Emilia herself. Each is loyal to a man who uses her. Shakespeare gives them different responses: Desdemona's is constancy, Emilia's is argument and finally defiance, Bianca's is a flat refusal of the label, "I am no strumpet". The pattern shows that the accusation says nothing about the woman accused. It is the way men in the play manage their fear, and only Emilia's voice in Act 5 breaks it. See the pages on Desdemona and Emilia.

46 How do the play's handling of place and time serve the tragedy?

Act 1 is set in Venice, where an accusation is tested by a council that hears both sides and asks for evidence: "To vouch this is no proof", the Duke tells Brabantio. The remaining four acts are set in Cyprus, a garrison under one man's command, where Othello is judge, witness and injured party. The same kind of charge that failed in Venice succeeds there. Time tightens the trap. Events in Cyprus seem to fill barely two days, too short for any affair, yet characters speak as though weeks have passed: Bianca complains of a week's absence, and Othello believes the act was committed "A thousand times". Critics call this the double time scheme. On stage the speed is what counts: nobody has time to compare stories.

Essay questions with outline answers

I **"Iago succeeds because of other people's virtues, not because of his own cleverness." How far do you agree?**

Thesis: Iago's plot is built from his victims' best qualities, but it takes a skilled and attentive mind to see how each virtue can be turned, so the statement is half right.

- **Point 1:** He says so himself. Othello's "free and open nature" (Act 1, Scene 3) and Desdemona's "goodness" (Act 2, Scene 3) are named in soliloquy as the materials of the plan.
- **Point 2:** Each virtue is then used. Cassio's courtesy becomes evidence of lust; Desdemona's loyalty to a friend makes her plead "strongly"; Othello's trust in a comrade makes him believe a man he thinks "of exceeding honesty".
- **Point 3:** Yet the skill is real. In Act 3, Scene 3 he works by echo and silence, and he improvises at once when chance gives him the handkerchief: "This may do something."
- **Counter-argument:** He also depends on luck and on others' flaws: Cassio's weak head for drink, Emilia's silence, Othello's readiness to doubt himself. And the plot fails in the end because he misjudges one virtue, his wife's loyalty to Desdemona.

Conclusion: Iago's cleverness is the ability to read goodness accurately without sharing it, and his defeat comes from the one piece of goodness he did not read.

II **How far does Shakespeare present Desdemona as a passive victim?**

Thesis: Desdemona is a victim but never a passive one: her tragedy is that the qualities which make her active in Act 1 are the ones used to destroy her.

- **Point 1:** She chooses. She marries without her father's consent and defends the choice before the Senate, claiming her "divided duty" and asking to go to Cyprus (Act 1, Scene 3).
- **Point 2:** She persists. Her promise to Cassio, "My lord shall never rest" (Act 3, Scene 3), is energetic and public, and she keeps pressing even when Othello demands the handkerchief.
- **Point 3:** Under attack she still speaks for herself: "I have not deserved this" (Act 4, Scene 1), and "By heaven, you do me wrong" (Act 4, Scene 2). She resists the murder to the last.
- **Counter-argument:** By Act 4 she excuses Othello, blames "my wretched fortune", and dies taking the guilt on herself. Some readers find this submission; others find a deliberate constancy, love as an act of will.

Conclusion: Shakespeare shows a strong will given no accurate information, which is more disturbing than weakness would be.

III **"Othello is a play about reputation more than it is a play about love." Discuss.**

Thesis: The play shows that in this society love cannot be separated from reputation, because a wife's fidelity is treated as her husband's public honour.

- **Point 1:** Cassio defines reputation as "the immortal part of myself" (Act 2, Scene 3), and his need to recover it is the lever of the whole plot.
- **Point 2:** Iago argues both sides. To Cassio reputation is "an idle and most false imposition"; to Othello, "Good name" is "the immediate jewel of their souls" (Act 3, Scene 3). He uses the idea; he does not hold it.
- **Point 3:** Othello experiences betrayal as shame. He fears becoming "A fixed figure for the time of scorn" (Act 4, Scene 2), and his last request is about how he will be reported: "Speak of me as I am."
- **Counter-argument:** The love is real and is what gives the loss its force: "when I love thee not, / Chaos is come again" (Act 3, Scene 3). Desdemona's love ignores reputation entirely.

Conclusion: The tragedy happens where the two meet: Othello kills what he loves to protect what he is called. See quotes about reputation.

IV **How far is Emilia responsible for the tragedy?**

Thesis: Emilia makes the tragedy possible by one act and one silence, but she is not responsible for it in the sense that Iago and Othello are, and she alone pays to undo it.

- **Point 1:** The act. She gives Iago the handkerchief knowing Desdemona will "run mad" to lose it, because she wants to "please his fantasy" (Act 3, Scene 3).
- **Point 2:** The silence. Asked directly where it is, she answers "I know not, madam" (Act 3, Scene 4), then watches Othello rage about it and says nothing.
- **Point 3:** Her limits. She does not know the plan. She even guesses the truth in general, "some eternal villain" (Act 4, Scene 2), without seeing that he is in the room.
- **Counter-argument:** Her position explains much: a wife's duty of obedience, a husband who dismisses her as "a foolish wife". And in Act 5 she speaks when silence would have saved her life.

Conclusion: Emilia shows how ordinary compliance helps evil along, and how much it costs to stop complying.

V **“In Othello, words do more damage than weapons.” Explore the importance of speech and storytelling in the play.**

Thesis: Every decisive event in the play is an act of speech, and the swords only finish what stories have begun.

- **Point 1:** Love is made by a story. Desdemona would “with a greedy ear / Devour up my discourse”, and the Duke admits “this tale would win my daughter, too” (Act 1, Scene 3).
- **Point 2:** Jealousy is made by a better storyteller. Iago promises to “pour this pestilence into his ear” (Act 2, Scene 3), and his chief evidence is narrative: Cassio’s supposed dream.
- **Point 3:** Speech is also the remedy, and it arrives late. Emilia insists “I am bound to speak” (Act 5, Scene 2); Iago’s final power is to stop speaking.
- **Counter-argument:** Brabantio doubts that words can wound: “I never yet did hear / That the bruised heart was pierced through the ear” (Act 1, Scene 3). The play proves him wrong, though real bodies are struck, smothered and stabbed, and Othello ends his last speech with a blow.

Conclusion: The play distrusts eloquence, including its hero’s, and gives the truth to the plainest speaker on stage. The essay planner will help you turn any of these outlines into a timed answer.



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