

## Othello Study Questions

### 1.1

1. What is Roderigo complaining about in the opening scene?
2. Why does Iago say he hates Othello so much, and what does he mean when he says: "In following him, I follow but myself."
3. What do Iago and Roderigo hope to accomplish by shouting insulting remarks about Othello and Desdemona under Brabantio's window?

### 1.2

4. What are Othello and Iago talking about at the opening of this scene?
5. When Iago warns Othello that Brabantio is "much-loved" and may try to separate him and Desdemona, what is Othello's answer and what does it suggest about what Othello values?
6. What does Othello mean when he says: "My parts, my title, and my perfect soul/ Shall manifest me rightly."
7. According to Brabantio, how has Othello seduced his daughter?

### 1.3

8. In response to Brabantio's accusation that Othello has bewitched his daughter, Othello explains how she originally fell in love with him. How did it happen and why has Othello's description been called "the Othello music"?
9. What is the point of Iago's "Virtue, a fig" speech and what is the "new" Elizabethan philosophy behind it?
10. How would you characterize the difference between the way Othello and Iago talk, both in their subject matter and their style?
11. At the end of this scene, Iago gives a second reason for hating Othello; what is this reason?
12. What did the city of Venice symbolize to members of the Elizabethan audience? What was the reputation of Venetian women?

### 2.1

13. In lines 163-173 of this scene, what does Iago notice and what does he plan to do as a result?
14. What does Iago's advice (lines 220-276) to the lovesick Roderigo reveal about what he thinks of Desdemona's love for Othello?
15. What does Iago's last speech in the scene reveal about his attitude toward Othello?

### 2.3

16. How does Iago dishonor Cassio in this scene and what does he advise Cassio to do in order to be reinstated?

### 3.3

17. As Cassio pleads his case to Desdemona, Othello and Iago approach: Why does Iago comment: "Ha, I like not that"?
18. What is the principal strategy that Iago uses (over and over in this scene) to convince Othello that his wife has betrayed him with Cassio?
19. As suggested in lines 260-296, why was Othello so suspicious of himself and therefore so trusting of Iago?
20. By lines 385 to end, what is Othello's state of mind?
21. What is the primary thing Othello has lost through Desdemona's betrayal?
22. What kind of proof does Othello ask for?
23. According to the editor's stage directions, what do Othello and Iago both do at the end of this scene and how might this be significant?

### 3.4

24. Why is the handkerchief that Desdemona has lost so important to Othello?
25. What does Cassio do with the handkerchief he found?

#### 4.1

26. What does Othello's language in 43-61 suggest about his state of mind? How is his language now much more like that of Iago than it was?
27. How does Iago go about providing the visual proof of Desdemona's infidelity that Othello had earlier asked for?

#### 4.2

28. Why doesn't Desdemona react more strongly when Othello accuses her of infidelity?

#### 4.3

29. As Emilia prepares her mistress's wedding bed, Desdemona talks of her mother's servant Barbary who was forsaken by a mad lover; then, she and Emilia talk about whether they would be unfaithful to their husbands or not. What is the significance of this conversation?

#### 5.2

30. As he enters Desdemona's bedchamber in order to kill her, Othello mutters: "It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul." What is he talking about? In what way might he be rationalizing Desdemona's murder?
31. Often at the end of a play, Shakespeare's tragic heroes have a moment of insight: According to what he says in this act, what is Othello's insight into himself?

## Othello Notes

William Shakespeare

### Play Facts

- Written between 1601 and 1604, England
- Published 1622
- Setting Time: Late sixteenth century during the wars between Venice and Turkey
- Setting Place: Act I in Venice and After Act I on the Island of Cyprus
- Plays action spans three days

### Themes

- Incompatibility of military heroism and love
- Danger of isolation
- Appearance versus reality
- Jealousy

### Motifs

- Sight and Blindness
- Animal Characteristics

## Symbols

- Handkerchief
- Song: "Willow"