***Othello* Study Guide Questions**

**ACT I**

1. What is Othello’s position in society? How is he regarded by those who know him? By his own words, when we meet in Scene ii, what traits of character does he manifest?

2. How do you account for Brabantio’s dismay on learning of his daughter’s marriage, despite the fact that Desdemona has married a man so generally honored and admired?

3. What was Iago’s view of human nature? In his fondness for likening men to animals (as in I, i, 49-50; I, i, 90-91; and I, iii, 380-381), what does he tell us about himself?  
4. What reasons does Iago give for his hatred of Othello?

5. In Othello’s defense before the senators (Scene iii), how does he explain Desdemona’s gradual falling in love with him?

6. Is Brabantio’s warning to Othello (I, iii, 293-294) an accurate or an inaccurate prophecy?

7. By what strategy does Iago enlist Roderigo in his plot against the Moor? In what lines do we learn Iago’s true feelings toward Roderigo?

**ACT II**  
1. What do the Cypriots think of Othello? Do their words (in Scene i) make him seem to us a lesser man or a larger one?

2. What cruelty does Iago display toward Emilia? How well founded is his distrust of his wife’s fidelity?

3. In II, iii, 221, Othello speaks of Iago’s “honesty and love.” How do you account for Othello’s being so totally deceived?

4. For what major events does the merrymaking (proclaimed in Scene ii) give opportunity?

**ACT III**  
1. In III, 49-98, Emilia knows of Desdemona’s distress over the lost handkerchief. At this moment, how do you explain her failure to relieve Desdemona’s mind? Is Emilia aware of her husband’s villainy?

ACT III, Sc iii

1. Were you surprised by Desdemona’s statement in scene iii, lines 7585?

2. How will Desdemona’s statement in lines 20-27 affect the outcome of the play?

3. Trace the steps by which Iago rouses Othello to suspicion. Is there anything in Othello’s character or circumstances that renders him particularly susceptible to Iago’s wiles?

How is Othello manipulated by Iago in the following lines:

a. 92-123

b.193-213

c. 371-423.

d. 424-476

Can you explain why Othello is so easily manipulated?

4. Identify the point in the play when Iago knows he has successfully tricked Othello? Explain.

5. Why does Othello believe Desdemona betrayed him? What does he decide to do about it?

6. Where did Iago’s dream (lines 407-423) come from? Why does Iago focus on certain details?

7. Reread the last thirty lines of scene iii. How does the relationship between Othello and Iago change? How does Shakespeare physically show the shift in power?

**ACT IV**  
1. In this act, what circumstantial evidence is added to Othello’s case against Desdemona?

2. Who is Bianca? What is her problem? What similarities does she share with Othello?

3. How plausible do you find Bianca’s flinging the handkerchief at Cassio just when Othello is looking on? How important is the handkerchief in this play? What does it represent? What suggestions or hints do you find in it?

4. What prevents Othello from being moved by Desdemona’s appeal (IV, ii, 33-92)?

5. When Roderigo grows impatient with Iago (IV, ii, 181-202), how does Iago make use of his fellow plotter’s discontent?

6. What does the conversation between Emilia and Desdemona (Scene iii) tell us about the nature of each?

7. In this act, what scenes (or speeches) contain memorable dramatic irony?

**ACT V**

1. Summarize the events that lead to Iago’s unmasking.

2. How does Othello’s mistaken belief that Cassio is slain (V, i, 27-34) affect the outcome of the play?

3. What is Iago’s motive in stabbing Roderigo?

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***Othello* Book Questions**

**Experience**

1. Describe your experience of reading Othello. To what extent can you identify with any one of the play’s characters? Which one(s)? Why?

**Interpretation**

2. What makes Othello a tragic figure? Is his tragedy self-inflicted of is it beyond his control? What is his tragic flaw?

3. Compare Othello’s speeches from the beginning, middle, and the end of the play (Act I, III, and IV). Explain the significance of their differences I style and tone.

4. Iago us a resourceful and clever character who knows how to manipulate people. Explain how he manipulates Roderigo, Cassio, and Othello.

5. What reason does Iago give for seeking Othello’s destruction? Does this seem an adequate or a credible motive?

6. How does Emilia’s role help us to better understand Iago? In what ways is she a foil (a contrasting character) to Desdemona? What other characters serve to balance each other?

7. Of what significance is Bianca’s role in the play? Brabantio’s?

8. Othello had a duel setting ---Venice and Cyprus. With what values and ideas is each place associated, and how are these related to the action and themes of the play?

9. What ideas about love are expressed by Othello kills Desdemona (Act V, Scene II). Read his speech beginning, “It is the cause” (lines 1-22) Explain how Othello sees himself at this point, and describe his state of mind.

12. Examine the scene in which Othello secretly watches Cassio talking to Biance (Act IV, Scene I). Explain how Iago controls Othello’s perception, leading him to misinterpret what he sees. In what other scenes does Iago direct other characters to misinterpret one another’s actions and speech?

13. Any staging of Othello requires careful attention to lighting. Single out tow scenes in which lighting is especially important, and explain how you would stage them.

14. Look carefully at the beginning and ending of any two acts. Consider how Shakespeare guides the audience’s responses at these points. Consider also the effectiveness of each beginning and ending in relation to the development of the plot.

15. Locate two scenes in which characters’ speeches shift between prose and verse. Explain the significance of these shifts.

**Evaluation**

16. What judgment does Shakespeare’s Othello make about jealousy? About the power of evil over goodness?

17. How effectively do you think Shakespeare dramatizes Iago’s power over others?

**Connections**

18. Compare Iago as a villain with Claudius in Hamlet.

**Critical Thinking**

19. At the end of the play, Iago says that he will never speak again. Offer at least two explanations for the refusal to never speak again.

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**Essay Questions**

1. Some critics have said that Iago and Othello are two sides of a coin: Iago representing the evil, and Othello, the god. Is this too simplistic a view? Why or why not?

2. Is Othello a tragic hero? Analyze his character and elaborate on his strengths and weaknesses. Explain using the criteria of tragedy and tragic heroes from your notes as well as Aristotle’s definition. What is his flaw? Do you sympathize with him? How is Shakespeare’s portrayal of tragedy different from the Greeks view of tragedy?