

# Othello study guide questions

[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



1. Describe the sensory details of the opening scene: sights, sounds, smells, etc. The opening scene takes place during the night in a street in Venice. Iago and Roderigo are loudly conversing with each other. 2. Why do Iago and Roderigo wake up Brabantio? Why is Brabantio angry? Why does Iago slip quietly away once Brabantio comes down? Iago and Roderigo wake up Brabantio to spoil his happiness by telling him the Desdemona ran off with Othello. Brabantio is originally angry because he had told them not to come around his house, but is even more angry when he finds out that Desdemona is missing.

Iago quietly slips away because he doesn't want anybody to know that he isn't loyal to Othello. 3. Explain the relationship between Iago and Roderigo. Who seems to be 'in control'. Explain your first reaction to each of these characters. Iago is paid to help Roderigo win Desdemona's hand in marriage, and both of them seem angry and unkind.

The main difference is that Iago appears to be in charge and the mastermind behind everything while Roderigo is his puppet who carries the plan out.

4. Explain why Iago says he needs to get revenge on Othello. Do you think he is justified? Why is the need for revenge so powerful, and for that matter, such a popular topic of modern music/movies? Iago wants to get revenge on Othello because he gave the lieutenant position to Michael Cassio, a less experienced man. He has a right to be upset, but he shouldn't get revenge on Othello. Revenge (in books and movies) is often motivation for the antagonist and a main element on why characters do what they do. 5. How does Iago act when Desdemona's father appears at the window? Why does it take so

long for Brabantio to figure out what is going on? Why doesn't Iago just tell him what happened straight out? Iago acts very mysterious and hides in the darkness to conceal his identity. It takes Brabantio a while to figure out what is going on because Iago isn't clear about it. Iago wants to agitate Brabantio before he tells him about Desdemona so he will be angrier.

Scene

ii

1. How does Iago lie at the beginning of this scene? Iago went to Othello and acted loyal and nice towards him. 2. Is Othello afraid of Brabantio? Should he be? Othello is not afraid of Brabantio and doesn't have to be because he believes that his good qualities and his status in society will protect him. 3. What do you learn about Othello's background from this scene? How do you learn that information? Othello grew up in many battles, was a slave, and had a very difficult life. We find this out when Othello talks about how he and Desdemona fell in love.

4. Why has the Duke called for Othello? How can you tell that Othello is highly regarded in military circles? The Duke has called for Othello to come to Cyprus for the war. We can tell that Othello is highly regarded in military circles when Cassio said that the senate had sent out 3 search parties to find Othello. 5. Why is Brabantio so against having Othello for a son-in-law? Does he seem to blame his daughter for running off with this man? Would he feel differently if Desdemona had run off with another man? Brabantio is against having Othello for a son-in-law because of how different he is. He believes that Othello used magic and trickery to get Desdemona to marry him. He probably would feel differently if Desdemona had run off with a different man. Scene iii

1. How does Desdemona respond when Brabantio confronts her? What other approach to the problem could she have taken? Desdemona tells Brabantio that even though she respects him for everything he's done for her, her loyalty lies with her husband, Othello. She could have told him in private or in the form of a letter. 2. How does the Duke seem to feel about the problem of Desi and Othello? Who do you think he sympathizes with? The Duke feels that Desdemona and Othello love each other, so there is no use in being upset or resentful. He appears to sympathize with Othello. 3. According to Othello, when did Desi and he fall in love?

Why do you suppose they kept their love a secret? Does this sort of behavior fit his character as he has been described so far? According to Othello, him and Desdemona fell in love after she heard his war stories at Brabantio's house. They have kept their love a secret to prevent all the trouble that they are now dealing with. This secretive behavior is different from the rest of his character who appears to be honest and open with his life. 4. Like Othello, Roderigo is in love. Describe the difference between the two lovers. What is it about Roderigo that makes it easy for Iago to manipulate him? Roderigo doesn't get the women. He is in love, but the feelings aren't mutual which makes him easier to manipulate.

#### Act 1 Prediction

5. What does Iago plan to convince Othello of at the end of Act I? How do you think he will accomplish this? Iago plans to convince Othello that Cassio is too close to Desdemona. He will probably accomplish this by manipulating people and lying.

Act

II

Scene i

1. Describe the events surrounding Othello's arrival in Cyprus. Why is Desdemona nervous before he shows up? There was a big storm, which took out the Turks, so there is no war. Desdemona is nervous because Othello is still gone at sea and could have possibly been killed as well. 2. How does Cassio treat Desdemona? Is there anything about this exchange that might help Iago push forward his plan? Cassio is a gentleman towards Desdemona and held her hand. Iago could use this to make it seem like they are too close with one another. 3. What suspicions does Iago have about his own wife? What does this show us about Iago? Iago believes his wife cheated on him with Othello. He doesn't care about her, and only appears to care because it will bring him personal gain.

4. How can you tell that Cassio is devoted to Othello? Does there seem to be any jealousy or disloyalty there? Cassio turned down going to a party and getting drunk. He respects all of Othello's decisions and takes responsibility for his own actions. There's no indication of any jealousy or disloyalty towards Othello. 5. Describe Iago's feelings towards women and love in general. Iago believes women should just be housewives, and they aren't worth much. Also, he believes that their physical characteristics are everything. 6. How does Iago manage to convince Roderigo to provoke Cassio to a fight? What is the real reason Iago wants the two to fight? Iago tells Roderigo that Cassio loves Desdemona to provoke a fight. He really wants Roderigo and Cassio to fight so Cassio will lose his job. 7. Why does

Iago says of Desdemona “ Now I do love her too”? Desdemona is the perfect pawn in his plan.

#### Scene ii

1. What is the mood of this scene? The mood of scene two is happy and very positive. 2. Why the celebration? How is the celebration going to help Iago? There is a celebration of Desdemona and Othello’s marriage and also because there is no war. The celebration will allow Iago to get Cassio drunk and fight in front of many witnesses. Scene iii

1. Explain how Cassio gets drunk, even though he knows that he can’t hold his liquor. Iago pressures Cassio to drink, even though he knows he shouldn’t. 2. How does Cassio react when Iago starts to discuss Othello and Desdemona’s sex life? Cassio avoids saying anything crude. All of his comments are respectful, and he doesn’t say anything bad. 3. What do Cassio and Roderigo argue about? How is the governor of Cyprus involved? Roderigo tries to tell Cassio how to do his job and tries to teach him some manners. This agitates Cassio, and when they fight, the governor of Cyprus gets stabbed when he tried to hold Cassio down.

4. What advice does Iago offer to Cassio after he is demoted? How might this advice, which Cassio takes, play right into Iago’s plan? Iago tells Cassio to talk to Desdemona about convincing Othello to give him his position back. This plays right into Iago’s plan because he wants Cassio and Desdemona to get close so Othello can walk in on them. 5. Explain how Iago’s plan seems to be progressing ... what other events could happen that would play right into Iago’s plan? Any other drama with Cassio regarding his reputation would

help with the plan. Also, if Desdemona were to do anything and keep it from Othello, Iago could use that against her.

### Act III

#### Scene i

1. What is the setting of this scene? What is the mood? Scene I begins in an entryway in the castle. The mood is serious, although the clown attempts to provide comic relief. 2. How does Iago get Desdemona and Cassio together? Iago uses Emilia to get Desdemona and Cassio together. Cassio talks to Emilia first, who is Desdemona's lady in waiting so he can talk to Desdemona privately.

3. What is ironic about Iago's comment to Cassio that he will "devise a means to draw the Moor out of the way, that your converse and business may be more free"? Iago has already formed the plan to manipulate Othello except that he and the audience knows that it won't work out in the way Cassio intended. 4. How does Cassio know that Desdemona has already spoken to Othello in his behalf? What do you think he arranges to meet Desdemona, then? Emilia tells Cassio that Desdemona is already talking to Othello on his behalf. He seems impatient to get his position back and get back in Othello's good graces which is probably why he arranges to meet Desdemona.

#### Scene ii

1. How does this scene show you that Othello is a busy man? This scene isolates the characters, and shows that there is other things going on in

Othello's job as he runs errands and has meetings. 2. Why is this a good time for Iago to act?

Othello is distracted and stressed out from work.

Scene iii

1. Why does Cassio leave Desdemona in such a hurry? Why does Iago point that out to Othello? Cassio leaves Desdemona in a hurry so Othello won't see him. However, he does notice Cassio, and Iago points out that he appeared to sneak away while looking guilty. 2. Why is Desi so willing to speak up for Cassio? Do you think she goes too far? Cassio was kind to Desdemona, and they were friendly with each other. Also, Cassio talks to Emilia and then Desdemona about his situation. Desdemona agrees to help him, and might have gone too far with Othello by being forceful. She also thinks that she would be helping Othello by reuniting the two friends. 3. When does Othello first begin to doubt Desdemona? Do you think most newly married husbands would be as easy to fool? Othello begins to doubt Desdemona when Iago talks to him about Desdemona and Cassio. Most newly married husbands probably trust their wives but could be easily manipulated in the same way Iago did to Othello.

4. How does Emilia get Desdemona's handkerchief? Why does she give it to Iago? Do you think Emilia has any suspicions that her husband might be up to no good? Desdemona drops her handkerchief, and Emilia picks it up. She gave it to Iago because he had been asking her to steal for a while. Emilia might have suspected that Iago is up to no good because she asked him if it had a purpose. 5. How does Iago push Othello over the edge in his doubts about Desi's fidelity? What is the "clinging" piece of evidence put forth by



Iago? What do you think Othello would have done if he discovered that Iago was lying at this point? Iago lies to Othello about Cassio's actions including a story about Cassio's dream about Desdemona. The piece of evidence that Iago has is Desdemona's handkerchief. The handkerchief is so important that Othello finally believes Iago. Othello would probably kill Iago if he figured out that Iago was lying to him.

#### Scene iv

1. How does Emilia respond when Desdemona asks about the handkerchief? What do you suppose she is thinking at this point? Emilia said that she doesn't know where Desdemona's handkerchief is. Desdemona is probably worried that this might upset Othello. 2. According to Othello, what is the history behind the handkerchief? Do you think he has revealed this information to Desi before? The handkerchief was given to his mother by a witch and is a symbol of his parents' love. He probably hasn't told this to Desdemona before because she questioned the validity of the story. 3. Why is Bianca mad at Cassio? How is her anger like Othello's? What sort of relationship do Bianca and Cassio have? Bianca is mad at Cassio because she saw the handkerchief that Cassio had and thought it was from a new, secret lover.

Othello also believes that the person he loves might be cheating on him. Bianca is Cassio's mistress. 4. So far, who thinks that the handkerchief is special? Is it really supernatural? Who thinks so? Othello, Iago, and Desdemona think that the handkerchief is special. It is supernatural in the sense that it meant so much and caused trouble in Othello and Desdemona's relationship. 5. What is Emilia's opinion of men? How does Desdemona's

opinion differ? Whose side are you on? Emilia believes men are all the same. To her, all men are deceitful, and when they are bored, they throw out their woman and get another. On the other hand, Desdemona believes that there are good men such as Othello and Cassio which I agree with.

#### Act IV

#### Scene

i

1. Why does Othello fall unconscious?

Othello falls unconscious because he is so angry and upset about Cassio and Desdemona. 2. According to Iago, why is Othello luckier than many other men who have been cuckolded? Do you agree with his reasoning? Would you rather not know if someone had betrayed you? According to Iago, every married man has been cheated on, but Othello is lucky that most because he isn't in the dark about his wife like most men are. I would want to know if somebody betrayed me. 3. What is Cassio saying to Iago, as Othello stands hidden? What does Othello think he is saying? How is this all part of Iago's plan? Why do you suppose Othello doesn't confront Cassio right then? Cassio is talking and laughing about Bianca, but Othello thinks he is talking about Desdemona. This leads Othello to trust Iago even more and to believe that Cassio isn't a good person.

Othello probably doesn't confront Cassio right then because he wants to talk to Iago about it first. 4. According to Iago, why should Othello strangle Desdemona rather than poison her? What do you think his real reasons are? Iago tells Othello to strangle Desdemona instead of poisoning her to make it more personal by doing it on the bed where she allegedly cheated on Othello. 5. Why do you think Shakespeare has Othello welcome Lodovico to

Cyprus with the phrase “goats and monkeys!” Does Lodovico realize that Othello is upset? The phrase basically means welcome to chaos which is what everything is turning into. Lodovico doesn't see that Othello is upset and believes that he normally treats Desdemona like that.

#### Scene ii

1. Why does Othello summon Emilia—if he is not going to accept her testimony? Why do you think Emilia didn't speak up earlier? Part of Othello wants to not believe Iago, wants his mind to be changed, even if it's not entirely possible. Emilia knows her role as a woman and as Iago's wife, which is probably why she hasn't spoken up until now. 2. How does Desi react when Othello calls her a whore? How does she explain his behavior to herself? Are you surprised she doesn't act differently? Desdemona is very confused and surprised when Othello calls her a whore. She keeps trying to tell him that she hasn't done anything wrong. She tries to explain it as being her bad luck that is responsible.

I am surprised she doesn't get angry or doesn't blame it on anybody but herself. 3. How can you tell Desi trusts Iago? Is she being more naive than most women would be about him backbiting? Desdemona trusts Iago because he tries to comfort her. She is probably reacting in the same way most other women would in the same situation. 4. How does Iago plan Cassio's murder? How does he convince Roderigo that Cassio must die? Why do you think he involves Roderigo instead of handling it himself? Iago tells Roderigo to kill Cassio otherwise Othello and Desdemona will leave, and Roderigo will lose his chance. Iago has Roderigo do it in case it backfires, so he won't get in any trouble himself.

## Scene iii

1. Why do you think Desi obeys Othello so meekly when he sends her to bed? Do you think she has any suspicions that he intends to hurt her? Desdemona still loves Othello and sees the good in him, so she is as obedient as before. She understands that Othello is angry, but doesn't know exactly what is going on, so she doesn't understand the extent of the situation. 2. Has Desi fallen out of love with Othello? Would you?

Desdemona has not fallen out of love with Othello. I wouldn't be able to love my husband in the same way if the same thing had happened to me. 3. How is the story in the "Willow song" like Desi's life? The song and the story behind it are both full of sorrow where the woman knows she is dying after her lover left her. This is foreshadowing what is to come for Desdemona. 4. How does Emilia feel about the double standard that applies to men and women? Does Desi agree with her? Emilia feels that cheating is okay because it is the man's fault that a woman cheats. Desdemona doesn't agree with her. 5. What does Desi mean when she says, in the closing lines of the scene, "Good night, Good night. God me such uses send/Not to pick bad from bad, but by bad mend!" Do you agree with that philosophy? She wants to learn by example and not be like them. The philosophy of learning from mistakes that have already been made is good.

## Act IV Prediction

6. What could possibly happen now to make Othello see the error of his ways? Othello and Desdemona could talk to each other, or even Othello and Cassio, and Othello could realize that he is being lied to by Iago.

## Act V

## Scene

i

## 1. How is Roderigo killed?

Roderigo is first injured by Cassio, but is actually killed by Iago. 2. Why does Othello think that Iago has carried out his promise to kill Cassio? What do you think Othello would have done if he had realized that Cassio was merely wounded? Othello hears Cassio screaming and thinks that Iago carried out his promise to kill Cassio. Othello would probably get angry and kill Cassio himself if he realized that Cassio was merely wounded. 3. How can you tell that Lodovico and Cassio—like most others in the play—think that Iago is honest and courageous? Lodovico and Cassio believe that Iago is honest and courageous because he appears to be coming to the rescue of Cassio and kills Roderigo, the assailant. 4. How does Iago cast suspicion on Bianca for Cassio's injuries? Why, do you suppose? What do you think Cassio's reaction to this is? Iago tries to blame Bianca for the entire thing because she had dinner with Cassio. He is just trying to pin things on another innocent person. Cassio will probably be very angry when he hears about that. 5. How does Emilia react to all this violence?

Emilia still sides with Iago and remains faithful to him.

## Scene ii

1. How can you tell that Othello still loves Desdemona and does not wholly want to kill her—moments before he does? Is there any way that Desdemona could have prevented him from killing her? Do you think she resigned herself to die, in the end? He is very sad and wants Desdemona to die honest and

have a short death. Also, he hesitates before killing her, but feels like she has to die. His mind could not be changed, so there was little Desdemona could do to prevent her death at this point. She accepts that she is going to die, and just tries to bargain for more time. 2. Why has Emilia come? Why do you think Desdemona doesn't tell her the truth before she dies? Emilia has come to tell Othello about the outside battle and misinforms him that Cassio killed Roderigo.

Desdemona doesn't tell her the truth before she dies because she still loves Othello and remains faithful to him. 3. When does Emilia realize that her husband is behind all this? How does she react? Does she feel guilty for her own part in it? When Othello reveals that Iago told him that Desdemona was unfaithful, Emilia realizes that her husband is behind all this. She rats Iago out, and she definitely feels guilt for her own part in it. 4. Why does Iago kill his wife? Do you think he has any regrets about that? Why didn't anyone stop him? Iago kills his wife because she betrayed him. He appears to stab her cold-blooded. Everybody was probably too surprised and overwhelmed to stop him.

5. How does Othello die? Why does he want to die? Why wasn't he disarmed? If he hadn't died, what do you think would have happened to him? Othello kills himself. He wants to die because he realizes what has happened. He wasn't disarmed because the other people didn't really know what to do. If he hadn't died, he probably would have been kicked out of his position and thrown into jail. 6. What will happen to Iago now? How do you think he feels about being caught? What scenarios do you think would have made this ending more satisfying? Iago will probably be jailed and maybe even

tortured. He knew that his plan would either work or fail. He chooses to remain quiet about his plan. The ending would probably have been more satisfying and resolved if he had died.