

FURTHER WORK ON OTHELLO QUESTIONS:



Firstly, let's look at the broad categories questions often fall into:

1. CHARACTER
2. THEME
3. STYLE

CHARACTERS

You must be able to discuss the following when it comes to **characters**:

Othello:

- a tragic hero? (does he recognise his flaws and gain self-knowledge?)
- his nobility (is he a good man?) / strengths & weaknesses / virtues & flaws
- his relationship with Desdemona & treatment of her
- his manipulation by Iago and transformation into a jealous brute
- the extent to which he is responsible for the tragedy which occurs at the end of the play
- our level of sympathy for him

Iago:

- the real 'hero' of the action?
- flaws and virtues?
- his motivation
- how he controls & manipulates all of the action/characters

Desdemona:

- too good to be true or a believable character?
- dramatic function in the play?

Emilia / Bianca:

- Emilia's dramatic function in the play
- foils to Desdemona – worldly and cynical rather than pure and innocent
- add variety to Shakespeare's presentation of women & his exploration of their position in society

Cassio:

- symbol of goodness
- extent to which he contributes to the tragedy

All characters:

- contrast the extremes of good and evil presented in the characters in the play
- the play is very pessimistic about human nature
- the play is very pessimistic about human relationships

THEMES:

The major **themes** in the play are:

- Jealousy
- Revenge / Power
- Good vs Evil
- Appearance vs Reality (Deception/Manipulation)
- Love & Hate / Loyalty & Betrayal
- Racism
- Women's position in society

For each theme – no matter what the wording – ask yourself

1. **WHO** does this theme apply to?
2. **HOW / WHY** does this character have to deal with this issue?
3. Do they **CHANGE** over the course of the play?
4. Are there any **SCENES** which highlight this theme specifically?
5. What are our **FINAL IMPRESSIONS** of this issue?

STYLE QUESTIONS:

- Language & Imagery
- Dramatic Irony
- Compelling Drama – scene or scenes

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

Othello & Iago:

“Othello’s foolishness, rather than Iago’s cleverness, leads to the tragedy of Shakespeare’s Othello”

“It is Othello’s egotism and lack of self-knowledge, and not Iago’s evil schemes, which ultimately bring about the tragedy at the end of the play”

“Othello is arrogant, impulsive and violent. While Iago sets up the conditions for tragedy to occur, it is Othello, ultimately, who we must hold responsible for the tragic events which unfold”

“A combination of Iago’s skill, Othello’s weakness and a measure of good luck, bring about the tragedy in Othello”

“Iago cannot be blamed for the deaths of Desdemona and Othello”

“We cannot blame Othello for being fooled by Iago. Everyone else in the play, including Iago’s wife, believes that he is honest and true”

“Othello and Iago are both egotists, obsessed with proving how clever and capable they are, and hell bent on revenge when they feel they have been wronged”

Othello:

“Othello is the principal agent of his own downfall”

“Othello is essentially a noble character, flawed by insecurity & a nature that is naive & unsophisticated”

“Othello is a good man who is skilfully manipulated by Iago. For this reason, despite his credulousness, we continue to feel sorry for him”

“Iago’s schemes succeed, not because Othello is weak, but because he is so noble”

“Othello is a noble hero who loses, but ultimately regains our sympathy”

“We do not approve of Othello’s behaviour, yet we nonetheless pity him”

“Othello is not a tragic hero; he is a gullible fool”

“Othello is not a tragic hero. He never really takes responsibility for his errors of character and judgement”

“Despite his suffering, Othello learns little of himself or of human relationships“

To what extent do you agree with Othello’s assessment of himself as an *“honourable murderer”* who *“loved not wisely but too well“*?

“The collapse of Othello and Desdemona’s marriage is the real tragedy of this play“

Iago:

“Iago is the real hero of Shakespeare’s play Othello”

“Iago is a likable villain”

“Iago is motivated by jealousy of others good fortune and by a lust for power”

“Iago is a charming villain, but it is difficult to understand his motivation”

“Iago is an evil villain with no redeeming qualities“

“While we are repulsed by Iago’s evil, we are fascinated by his ingenuity“

“Iago is the most evil but also the most fascinating character in the play Othello”

Desdemona:

“Desdemona is not a credible character, she is an unrealistic saint who does nothing to try and prevent her fate”

“Desdemona is a woman, not an angel; she lives and loves with her whole person, both body and soul”

“Desdemona’s dramatic function in the play is to act as a symbol of purity, innocence and goodness but this means that her behaviour is not always entirely believable”

“Desdemona and Iago are at opposite poles in the play, Othello, the one representing pure love, the other hate incarnate“.

Emilia / Bianca:

Discuss the importance of the character Emilia in the play as a whole.

“Women are not presented in a very positive light in Shakespeare’s Othello”

Cassio:

“Cassio may be a ‘proper man’ but he is also an honest fool whose weakness plays no small part in the tragic death of Desdemona”

All characters:

“Shakespeare’s play Othello demonstrates the weakness of human judgement”

“Shakespeare’s Othello presents the very best and the very worst in human nature”

“Shakespeare’s Othello presents us with a dark and pessimistic view of human nature”

“Shakespeare’s Othello presents us with a dark and pessimistic view of human relationships”

“In the play Othello, naive, innocent characters are no match for the evil machinations of the world weary Iago”

Theme questions:

“The destructive power of jealousy is dramatically presented in Shakespeare’s play Othello”

“Shakespeare’s Othello is concerned not so much with jealousy, as with misunderstanding”

“Shakespeare’s play Othello powerfully portrays a world dominated by jealousy and revenge”

“Evil ultimately conquers good in Shakespeare’s play Othello”

“In Shakespeare’s play Othello, we witness a profound inability to distinguish between appearances and reality”

“Appearances do not mask a sinister reality in this play, yet Iago manages to convince every character that there is more going on than meets the eye”

“Love and hate are presented as opposite sides of the same coin in Shakespeare’s play Othello”

“Shakespeare’s Othello initially questions, but then confirms racist stereotypes”

“The role and status of women is dramatically explored in Shakespeare’s Othello”

“Shakespeare’s Othello remains relevant for a modern audience”

“Despite the striking portrayals of goodness and nobility, the play Othello leaves the audience with a sense of dismal despair”

Style questions:

“Image of animals, images of storm and images of heaven and hell predominate in Othello”

“Irony is a powerful dramatic device used by Shakespeare to heighten the tragic dimension of his play Othello”