



Othello

Exam Preparation Pack for A Level Edexcel English Literature

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8471**

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Teacher's Introduction

The purpose of this resource is to support students who are studying *Othello* for the following examination:


- Edexcel English Literature A Level Unit 9ET0/01 Component 1 – Drama (Examination – Section A)

It is designed to help students revise the play and prepare for the examination to enable them to produce high-quality responses to the best of their ability. All the activities in this resource assume the students have studied the play in detail.

What does this resource contain?

- Student introduction covering the A Level assessment objectives, details about the examination and the Edexcel specification
- Revision notes and activities
- Practice examination questions with indicative content
- Student-friendly mark scheme
- Essay answer breakdown
- Sample answers for some of the exam questions
- Answers to all activities

Play edition: Edexcel does not specify a particular edition of *Othello* for students to use in the examination. However, since the examination is open-book, students may not use an edition of *Othello* which includes critical material. For this resource pack, the following edition has been used:

 *Othello*. Ed. Norman Sanders. New Cambridge Shakespeare. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003. ISBN: 9780521535175

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Student Introduction

Edexcel A Level English Literature Specification

Antony and Cleopatra, Hamlet, King Lear, Othello, A Midsummer Night's Dream, The Taming of the Shrew, Twelfth Night

Component 1, Section A: Shakespeare

- Open-book, written examination
- Choice of questions on each set text
- 35 marks total – AO1, AO2, AO3 and AO5 assessed
- Component 1 overall (Sections A and B) is 2 hours 15 minutes long and is worth 40% of the total A Level grade

Overview of the examination

www.edexcel.org.uk/8471-exam

In the Edexcel specification, Shakespeare is only studied in the full two-year A Level English Literature course (AS and A2).

You may take a clean (unannotated) copy of *Othello* into the examination. The Critical Companion supports your study of the play – must **not** be taken into the examination hall.

Othello is examined in Section A of the examination. You write one essay from a choice of two questions.

Your essay on *Othello* is worth 35 marks out of a paper total of 60 marks, and the examination is 2 hours 15 minutes long; you are advised to spend 1 hour 15 minutes on Section A.

Section A is assessed on AO1, AO2, AO3 and AO5

Assessment Objective	What is being assessed	How the AOs are marked
AO1	Communicate informed, personal and creative responses to literary texts, using associated concepts and terminology, and coherent, accurate written expression	Marked together, they comprise 21/35 marks
AO2	Analyse ways in which meanings are shaped in literary texts	
AO3	Demonstrate understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which literary texts are written and received	
AO5	Explore literary texts informed by different interpretations	Marked separately, comprises 14/35 marks

As you will see from the above table, in the Shakespeare section of the paper the AOs have different weightings. AO1, AO2 and AO3 are marked together out of a total of 21 marks (and are worth 7 marks each); AO5 is given a separate marking of 14. AO5, being worth double the marks of the other AOs, is what is commonly termed a double-weighted AO. It will therefore be more important that you make sure you have discussed other interpretations of *Othello* – drawing particularly on the Critical Companion – as a significant part of your examination essay.

The diagram to the right is a graphic representation of the different weightings of the AOs within Section A.

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Revision Notes and Activities

While you are allowed to take an unannotated copy of *Othello* into the examination, it is important to know the play very well. Having the text with you can create a false sense of security, but inside out you will waste time in the exam trying to find specific episodes and quotations.

Ideas for revising the play

- Read the play **at least three times** before the examination. Make sure you note references you are using. Make new notes (either on the play, if you have an annotated copy, or on the exam itself, or on paper), identify echoes and parallels in the play.
- Make a timeline for the play: note what happens when, and which characters are involved. You may make some very interesting discoveries!
- Write three-sentence summaries of each of the five acts of the play (15 sentences in total).
- Write 140-character tweets for each scene of the play.
- In groups, take responsibility for one of the five acts of the play and write 10–15 actual events of that act. Then test the rest of the class.
- Create a tension graph for the whole play, identifying where the moments of tension occur.
- Write Facebook profile pages for the main characters.
- Create mood/tension graphs for individual characters in their journey through the play.
- As a class, divide into five groups, each group should take responsibility for one act. Perform a three-minute modern language performance of your act. Taking it in turn, perform your act. As an audience, feed back your reactions to what the group performed. Write a dramatic summary of the act and what they chose to omit – do you agree with their choices?
- In a group, create and perform a 60 second version of *Othello*.
- If you are lucky enough to have the opportunity to see a performance of *Othello*, take notes on it. You will have material for AO5 – interpretations of the play – seeing the play performed can help your understanding of the text.
- Likewise make use of film versions of *Othello* – there are a number and some are available on YouTube. For example:
 - ✓ Orson Welles' *Othello* (1951): available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...>
 - ✓ Laurence Olivier's *Othello* (1965): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=...>
 - ✓ Oliver Parker's *Othello* (1995), starring Ian McKellen as Iago – extracts available on YouTube
 - ✓ *Othello* at Shakespeare's Globe (2012) – extracts available on YouTube

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Act Revision

Task

Completing this table will give you an overview of the whole play; the subjects covered are explored in more detail in the tasks that follow. The first act has been completed, along with some aspects of the other acts.

Act	Key Events	Key Themes	Setting
One	<p>Iago tells Roderigo – who loves Desdemona – of his hatred of Othello, and the two men waken Brabantio to tell him of Desdemona's elopement with Othello.</p> <p>The couple defend their love to the Senate when Othello is called to lead a fleet to Cyprus against a Turkish invasion.</p>	<p>Racism</p> <p>Jealousy</p> <p>Love</p> <p>Women's lives</p>	<p>Venice at night.</p> <p>Scene 1: outside Brabantio's house.</p> <p>Scene 2: in the streets</p> <p>Scene 3: in the Duke and Senate's council chamber</p>
Two		<p>Relationships between men and women.</p>	<p>Cyprus</p> <p>Scene 1: on the shore in the day</p> <p>Scene 2:</p> <p>Scene 3:</p>

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Act	Key Events	Key Themes	Setting
Three			
Four			
Five			

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Character Revision

Task

Space has been left for you to add extra key ideas and quotations of your own.

Character	Key Ideas	Key Quotations	Language Present
Othello	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Moor General in Venetian army Around 40 years old Well spoken Physically strong Prone to jealousy Trusting Insecure about age and size Inexperienced in matters of love Concerned with how he is perceived by others 	<p><i>'My parts, my title and my perfect soul' (I, 2, 31)</i></p> <p><i>'My services which I have done the signiory / Shall out-tongue his complaints' (I, 2, 17–19)</i></p> <p><i>'My life upon my faith' (I, 3, 290)</i></p> <p><i>'... she loved me for the dangers I had passed, / And I loved her that she did pity them.' (I, 3, 166–167)</i></p> <p><i>'I kiss'd thee ere I kill'd thee: no way but this; Killing myself, to die upon a kiss' (V, 2, 354–355)</i></p> <p><i>'This fellow's of exceeding honesty.' (III, 3, 260)</i></p> <p><i>'Haply for I am black... or for I am declined / Into the 'ale of years' (III, 3, 265–266)</i></p> <p><i>'... whose soft parts of conversation / That chamberers have' (III, 3, 265–267)</i></p> <p><i>'Then must you speak / Of one that loved not wisely, but too well;' (V, 2, 339–340)</i></p>	<p>Animal imagery: Roderigo as a black man, a beast: 'an</p> <p>Othello uses restraint in presenting himself from his perspective and Roderigo as a bright sword that rusts them</p> <p>Othello speaks in third person as exotic and in his hand, / Like a hand that threw a p (V, 2, 342)</p>

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Character	Key Ideas	Key Quotations	Language
Iago	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An ensign Name means 'killer' Villain Egotistical Manipulative Compelling Quick-witted Persuasive Criminally intelligent Immoral Full of hate Jealous A liar 	<p><i>'I am not what I am' (I, 1, 66)</i></p> <p><i>'an old black ram / Is tupping your white ewe' (I, 1, 89–90)</i></p> <p><i>'Honest Iago' (I, 3, 290)</i></p>	
Emilia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Desdemona's handmaid and mother figure Loyal Cynical Worldly-wise Ultimately chooses good over evil 	<p><i>'Who would not make her husband a cuckold to make him a monarch?' (IV, 3, 72–73)</i></p> <p><i>'I have a thing for you' (III, 3, 303)</i></p> <p><i>'You have done well that men must lay their murders on your neck' (V, 2, 168–169)</i></p>	

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Character	Key Ideas	Key Quotations	Language Present
Desdemona	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Venetian • Around 30-35 years old • Her name means 'unfortunate' in Greek • Determined • Intelligent • Witty • Dignified and worthy of respect • Loving • Loyal • Forgiving • Pure • Able to defend herself verbally • At times indecisive but at other times decisive 	<p><i>'A most exquisite lady' (II, 3, 17)</i></p> <p><i>'She loved me for the dangers I had passed' (I, 3, 166)</i></p> <p><i>'Beshrew me if I would do such a wrong' (IV, 3, 74)</i></p>	
Roderigo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wealthy • Foolish • Simple • Desperate • Poor judgement • Weak • In love with Desdemona 	<p><i>'Thou iago, who hast had my purse' (I, 1, 2)</i></p> <p><i>'I do not find that thou dealest justly with me' (IV, 2, 10)</i></p>	

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Character	Key Ideas	Key Quotations	Language Presentation
Cassio	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Florentine Inexperienced Concerned with reputation and honour Weakness for alcohol Uses Bianca 	<p><i>'She's a most exquisite lady'</i> (II, 3, 17)</p> <p><i>'Reputation, Reputation, Reputation!'</i> (II, 3, 242)</p>	
Brabantio	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Venerable High opinion of himself and his status Often difficult to sympathise with him Materialistic Impatient 	<p><i>'Fathers from hence trust not your daughters' minds'</i> (I, 1, 169)</p> <p><i>'She is abused, stol'n from me, and corrupted'</i> (I, 3, 60)</p>	

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Minor Characters

It is all too easy when revising a text to focus our attention on the 'key' characters and to spend little time on the minor characters who only appear in the occasional scenes. However, minor characters are still important and have a vital dramatic function – Shakespeare would not have included them if they were not integral to the play.




Activity
Complete the table below on the minor characters in the play: identify what she or he does in the scene in which she or he appears and interpret his or her dramatic function. What does the character do? What does she or he contribute to the unfolding of the play?

Character	Scene	Actions/Speech	
Duke	Act I, Scene 3		
Montano (Governor of Cyprus)	Act II, Scene 1		
	Act II, Scene 3		
	Act V, Scene 2		
Clown (Othello's servant)	Act III, Scene 1		
	Act III, Scene 4		

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Character	Scene	Actions/Speech	
Bianca 	Act III, Scene 4		
	Act IV, Scene 1		
	Act V, Scene 1		
Lodovico (a noble Venetian and relative of Brabantio) 	Act IV, Scene 1		
	Act IV, Scene 3		
	Act V, Scene 1		
	Act V, Scene 2		
Gratiano (Brabantio's brother) 	Act V, Scene 1		
	Act V, Scene 2		

Revising the Themes of the Play

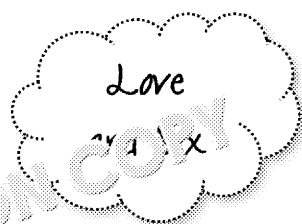
Exploring Key Themes

A theme is a big idea that runs throughout a text – it is distinct from the plot, which is the sequence of events that happen in the narrative. Examination questions will often be concerned with themes.

Listed here are some of the key themes of *Othello* – but you might add others.

- Jealousy
- Manipulation
- Race
- Love and Marriage
- Women's Lives
- Power
- Identity

a) Mind-map some ideas on each of the key themes below.



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- b) Listed below are some key headings to help you revise the themes of the play
- Summarise *Othello* in relation to this theme
 - Key characters who embody the theme
 - The theme at the beginning of the play
 - The theme at the end of the play
 - 3 scenes which act as a focus for the theme
 - 6–10 quotations that exemplify this theme
 - How Shakespeare presents the theme (language, imagery, structure, drama)
 - The historical and social context
 - Critical views

Below is a template which is completed with reference to the theme of **Identity**. The template can be used to revise other key themes.

Key Theme: Identity	
Summary of the play	In <i>Othello</i> competing versions of people's identities are debated by the play and by audiences. Is Desdemona a sheltered innocent or a woman who knows her own mind? Is Othello a brave soldier or a savage black heathen? The play's dramatic power lies in the tension between conformity to expectations and rebellion against them, which is under continual negotiation.
Key characters	<p>Othello: characters view him in different ways, presenting him with shifting identities. To the Duke he is 'Valiant Othello' (I, 3, 48) (I, 3, 186), while to Brabantio he is a 'foul thief!' (I, 2, 62). Racist and animalistic terms: 'thick lips' (I, 1, 66); 'old black ram' (I, 1, 36) commonly referred to as 'the Moor' (I, 3, 46). Othello is perceived differently: he wins Desdemona through his storytelling of his past (I, 2, 127–169), and in his final speech attempts to restore his reputation (V, 2, 250–260).</p> <p>Iago: characterised by his dual identity – the version of himself he presents to other characters (which they believe for most of the play) and the version he presents to the audience, through his soliloquies: epitomised in the figure of God, whom Iago swears by at I, 2, 32, and his pronouncement of his own identity. Other characters repeatedly and ironically refer to him as 'honest Iago'.</p> <p>Desdemona: While Brabantio describes his daughter as 'A most exquisite creature' (I, 1, 165), Othello gives the audience a different version of a woman who has eluded him in courtship (I, 3, 162–165).</p> <p>NB There is of course something to say about every character's identity; these are just some of the key points.</p>
Beginning of the play	Opening scene establishes the fact that Iago's self-confessed duplicity is the key to the play's tragedy. His jealousy is justified by the fact he is going to 'show' Othello (I, 1, 155) and his accusation of Othello to a base diabolical animal.
End of the play	The main themes of the play focus on Othello's desire to preserve his identity in his final speech. In response to Lodovico's account of himself, Othello describes himself as 'An honest man' and then tells the story of the 'base Indian' who 'threw a pearl' (V, 2, 357) down at least one character to his point of view.




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Key Theme: Identity	
Three key scenes	<p>Act I, Scene 3: the discussion in the Senate Chamber reveals on who Othello and Desdemona are.</p> <p>Act IV, Scene 1: this scene shows the effect Iago's manipulation on sense of himself as a coherent and civilised individual, culminating in the disintegration of his language.</p> <p>Act IV, Scene 2: this scene provides the chance for a detailed exploration of Desdemona's conflicting ideas about who Desdemona is: Othello or a 'black and tanned' 'commoner' (72).</p>
6–10 quotations	<p><i>'I am not what I am'</i> (Iago: I, 1, 66 – in a reversal of God's word to Moses, 'I am that I am' [Exodus 3: 14], Iago sets out the foundation on which the whole tragedy is based.)</p> <p><i>'Are we turned Turks...?'</i> (Othello: II, 3, 152 – Othello reprimands Cassio for their drunken fighting, pointing out that they have demeaned themselves with uncivilised behaviour, a charge that could later be made against Othello.)</p> <p><i>'O, I have lost my reputation! I have lost the immortal part of myself, and here this cursed hand sheds dropping blood on it.'</i> (Cassio II, 3, 243–244 – Cassio draws on contemporary ideas of reputation being divided between the divine elements of reason and logic and the earthly elements.)</p> <p><i>'Haply for I am black... or for I am declined into the vale of years.'</i> (Othello: III, 3, 281 – Othello's decline is shown in the way he has now internalised the racism and age originally articulated by other characters.)</p> <p><i>'If she be false, O then heaven may as well destroy itself.'</i> (Othello III, 3, 281 – Othello's oath to match up what Iago has said about Desdemona with the way he feels about her in front of him.)</p> <p><i>'...the Moor whom our full senate Call all-in-all sufficient to the state.'</i> (Lodovico utters shock at the change in Othello; this is the way Othello was known.)</p> <p><i>'of one whose hand, Like the base Indian, threw a pearl away.'</i> (Othello V, 2, 342–344 – in his final speech before killing himself, Othello uses a storytelling mode, using an analogy to describe his inability to live with the way Desdemona was.)</p>
Presentation	<p>Iago's soliloquies allow him to present a different version of himself from that shown to the play's characters.</p> <p>Deterioration in Othello's language reflects the way Iago strips Othello of his civilised and powerful military leader.</p> <p>Recurring use of epithets to describe characters: 'valiant Othello' and 'fair Desdemona'.</p> <p>Animal and diabolical imagery is used to describe Othello in order to strip him of his humanity.</p>
Historical and social context	<p>Early seventeenth-century views of other races and women.</p> <p>Recurring themes of madness and reason.</p>
Critical views	<p>A C Bradley on 'The Shakespearean tragic hero'</p> <p>Leavis on Othello's 'habit of self-dramatisation'</p> <p>Honigsmann on 'Iago's convenient masks'</p> <p>Loomba reflects on diverging contemporary views of blacks and whites.</p>

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Key Theme:	
<p>Summary of the play</p> 	
<p>Key characters</p>	
<p>Beginning of the play</p> 	
<p>End of the play</p> 	

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Key Theme:	
<p>Three key scenes</p> 	
<p>6–10 quotations</p>	
<p>Presentation</p> 	
<p>Historical and social context</p>	
<p>Critical view</p> 	

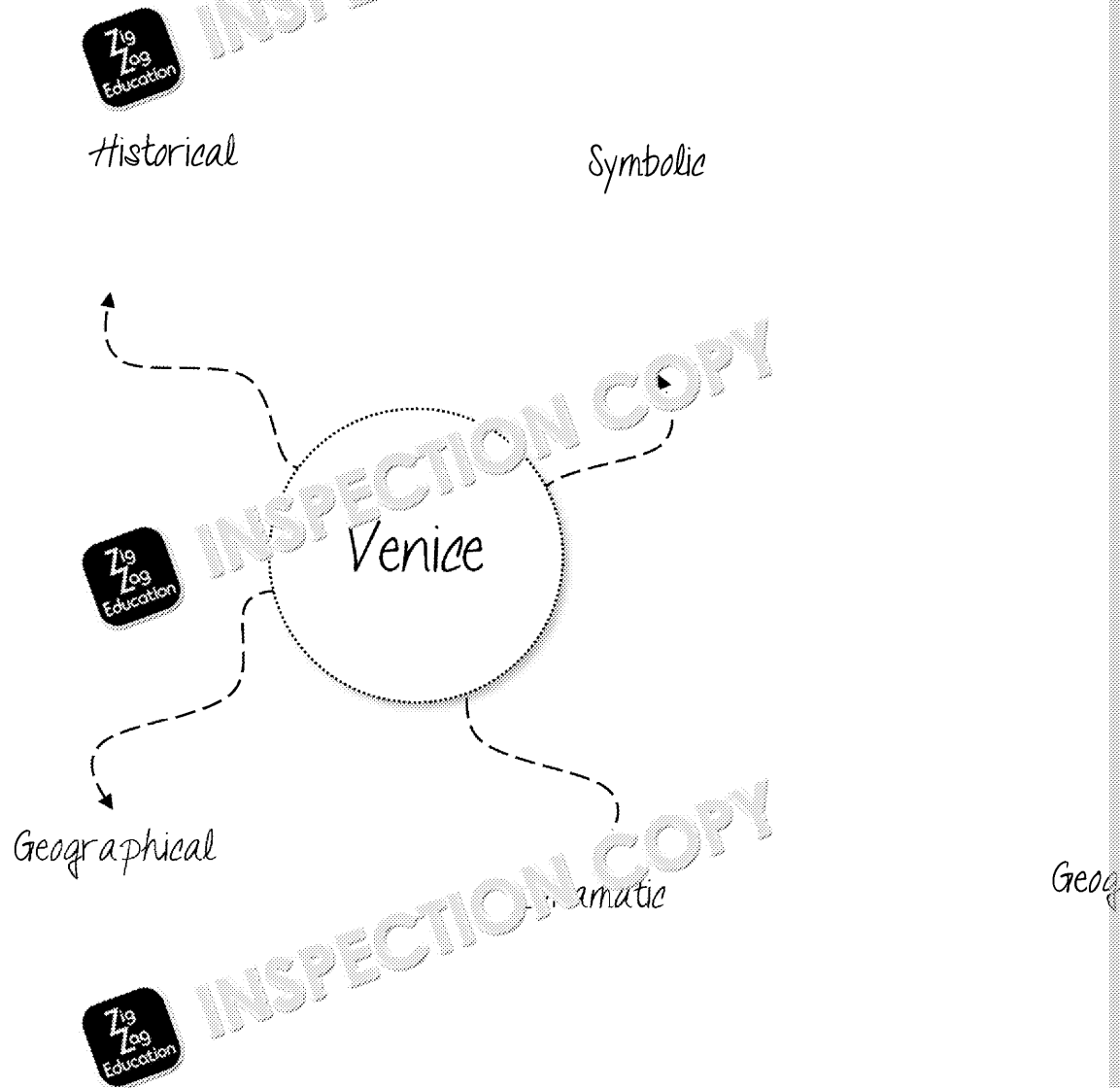
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Revising the Settings of the

Othello is set in two locations: Venice (Act I) and Cyprus (Acts II–V). Venice and Cyprus are significant characters in the play. Complete the mind map with your ideas about their significance, listing them under the four headings.



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Other Settings

In addition to the two key locations in the play, there are other settings in *Othello*.

Night

Key scenes in *Othello* take place at night.

1. Identify the scenes that take place at night.
2. What happens in these scenes? Who are the main characters?
3. What is the significance of these scenes taking place at night? What dramatic effect does this have?

The Council Chamber

Act I, Scene 2 – *Othello* takes place in the council chamber.

1. What is the focus of this scene?
2. Which characters feature in this scene? Who are the most vocal characters?

The Bedchamber

Act IV, Scene 3 and the play's final scene – Act V, Scene 2 – take place in Desdemona's bedchamber.

1. Describe the mood of Act IV, Scene 3. How does it differ from the scenes that follow it?
2. The mood and atmosphere of Act V, Scene 2 varies – describe the atmosphere and how it changes. Why does it change?
3. Which characters feature in this scene? Who are the most vocal? Where does the scene take place?

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Revising the Motifs of the Play

A motif is an image, symbol or even a word or phrase which recurs throughout a text and acquires added resonance as a result.

Activity

For each of the motifs below:

1. trace its appearance in the play (in which scenes? In relation to which characters?)
2. consider which of the play's key themes it relates to
3. explore how the motif achieves dramatic impact



Motif

Handkerchief



1. (a) Desdemona drops her handkerchief and Emilia picks it up (III, 3, 287–301)
 (b) Iago reveals he will drop the handkerchief in Cassio's drink (III, 3, 399–402)
 (c) Iago tells Othello he has seen Cassio wipe his beard with the handkerchief (III, 3, 435–442)
 (d) Desdemona expresses her regret at losing the handkerchief (III, 3, 443–444)
 (e) Othello tells Desdemona of the handkerchief's magic (III, 3, 445–446)
 (f) Cassio asks Bianca to copy the handkerchief's emblem (IV, 1, 10–11)
 (g) Iago inflames Othello's jealousy by repeatedly mentioning the handkerchief (IV, 1, 10–22)
 (h) Othello's epileptic fit is preceded by incoherent rambling about the 'handkerchief' (IV, 1, 35–36)
 (i) Bianca throws the handkerchief at Cassio while Othello watches (IV, 1, 112–113)
 (j) Othello accuses Desdemona of giving the handkerchief to Cassio (IV, 2, 48–67)
 (k) Emilia reveals what really happened with the handkerchief (V, 2, 209–234).
2. **Jealousy:** Iago uses his fabricated tale of the handkerchief to inflame Othello's jealousy. Bianca is also jealous when Cassio asks her to copy the handkerchief's emblem. Iago obtained the handkerchief from another woman.
Love: the handkerchief was Othello's first love-gift to Desdemona.
Identity: the story behind the handkerchief, told by Othello, is part of his self-identity. It has magical powers and contributes to Othello's identity as a Moor.
3. For Othello the handkerchief acts as the 'ocular proof' (III, 3, 445) of Desdemona's infidelity, although there has been no infidelity. It shows Iago's machinations that a 'Trifle light as air' can have the power to destroy (III, 3, 323–325). In the final scene the handkerchief triggers Emilia's revelation that Iago has used her to fulfil his aims. Her revelation forces Othello to realise he has wrongly killed his innocent wife.

The word 'honest'



- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

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Motif	
The action of looking	1. 2. 3.
Storytelling	1. 2. 3.
Black versus white	1. 2. 3.
Animals	1. 2. 3.

Revising Key Images in the Play

Activity

For each of the images below:

- identify where it comes in the play and which characters are involved
- note up to three short quotations which illustrate the power of the image
- comment on the meaning(s) of the image



The storm



Othello's epileptic fit



The island

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Revising the Language of the Play

In addition to the imagery and motifs in the play, there are other significant aspects of *Othello* that you could write about in the examination.

Epithets

An epithet is a word or phrase applied to a character for descriptive purposes. If it becomes automatically associated with the character, as if they are one and the same, it is an epithet. For example, 'Alexander the Great', where 'Great' is the epithet used to refer to Alexander III of Macedon. It can also refer to many characters in *Othello*. The best known one is 'honest' in relation to Iago. There are other examples.



Activity

Scan the play to find epithets that are applied to Othello and Desdemona. Note where they come in the play and who uses them, and consider their significance:

- Desdemona
- Othello

Extension activity

Extend this activity to Emilia and Cassio.

The Language of Manipulation

The principal tool Iago uses to persuade Othello of Desdemona's infidelity is language. See this in III, 3, where there are many examples of Iago's verbal manipulations.

Activities

1. Read III, 3, 93–127
 - (a) Count up the number of times the following words appear in this extract:
 - 'think'
 - 'indeed'
 - 'honest'
 - 'seem'
 - (b) For each word explain how Iago uses it to unsettle Othello.
2. Write short commentaries explaining how the following phrases or lines show Iago's ability to manipulate Othello through language:
 - (a) 'I speak not yet of proof' (III, 3, 198)
 - (b) 'I know our country disposition well' (III, 3, 204)
 - (c) 'She did deceive her father, marrying you;' (III, 3, 208)
 - (d) 'I humbly do beseech you of your pardon / For too much loving you' (III, 3, 214)
 - (e) 'Long live she so, and long live you to think so!' (III, 3, 228)
 - (f) 'My lord, I take my leave.
... [Returning] My lord, I would have entreated your honour / To scan my words' (III, 3, 243–247)



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A Character's Changing Language

Shakespeare frequently uses a change in language to illustrate a change in character; most commonly in Iago, characters who have been in positions of power, but who lose control, and their language, which was previously controlled and fluent, starts to deteriorate. Examples of this can be seen in the character of Othello and Macbeth. It is a similar situation in Othello.

Complete the table to identify how Othello's language changes in the following scenes:

- I, 2, 17–28 and IV, 1, 243–254
- IV, 1, 35–41 and V, 2, 334–352

You should consider language choices, imagery and sentence structure.

	Language choices	Imagery	Sentence structure
I, 2, 17–28			
IV, 1, 243–254			
IV, 1, 35–41			
V, 2, 334–352			

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Prose vs Poetry

Since Shakespeare writes mostly in poetry – blank verse – his occasional use of prose is usually for one of the following reasons:

- Comic purposes
- Low status characters
- To create depth and variety of character (when a character speaks in verse or prose)
- To depict strong emotion – that cannot be contained in regular verse

Activity

Below are some passages of prose in *Othello*. Complete the table to show:

- who is talking
- what they are talking about
- what effect is created by the character speaking in prose at this point in the play

Passage	Who is talking?	What is the subject?
I, 3, 219–224	The Duke speaks to the Senate, and specifically Othello.	The Turkish threat to Cyprus. Othello is ordered to lead Venetian troops against them.
I, 3, 297–364		
II, 3, 239–302		
III, 1, 1–27		
IV, 1, 35–41		
IV, 1, 107–161		

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Revising the Form and Structure of *Othello*

As well as writing about language and imagery, AO2 (Analyse ways in which meaning is created in literary texts) requires you to write about what are conventionally called the 'form' and 'structure' of a text.

Form

The form of a literary text refers to many aspects: the type of text, its genre, its physical form – including the use of prose or poetry, and rhythm and rhyme.

When thinking about the form of *Othello*, that means considering the following:

- **Type of text:** see the section Revising Dramatic Techniques
- **Genre:** see the section Revising *Othello* as a Tragedy
- **Physical form:** see 'Prose vs Poetry' in Revising the Language of the Play

Structure

The structure of a literary text refers to the way the author has organised the material. It encompasses the significance of the opening and the ending; contrasts; echoes (and foreshadowing); turning points.

Opening: The opening of a literary text is vitally important. It sets the scene, introduces characters and relationships and establishes key themes. With a play, all this information is delivered to the audience having no chance to revisit the scene if they miss anything.

Activities

1. *Othello* opens at night. What effect is created by this choice of setting?
2. At line 106, Brabantio informs the audience of where they are – 'This is Venice'. What might an audience in Shakespeare's time have responded to this? What effect might this setting establish in the audience?
3. The play opens with Iago saying to Othello, 'Tush, never tell me, I take it you are not so liberal in your choice of words as you are of your money.' What effect might these opening words have on an audience?
4. Unlike many of Shakespeare's other plays, the main character – Othello – is not introduced in the opening scene. However, he is the main subject of the conversation between Iago and Brabantio.
 - (i) What impression is created of Othello?
 - (ii) What effect is created by Shakespeare choosing to delay the introduction of Othello?
5. What key themes are set up in this opening scene?

Ending: The ending of a literary text is equally important. Conventionally – though not always – loose ends are tied up, leading to a clear conclusion. In a tragedy you would expect a clear moral or lesson, and there is often a sense of a new beginning: traditionally, a good, surviving character is there to begin the new era and put aside the mistakes of the past. A sense of circularity with the end echoing – or alternatively providing a contrast to – the beginning is also common.

Activities

1. Where – and what – is the final scene set? Consider the appropriateness of the setting for the ending.
2. Which loose ends are tied up by the end of *Othello*? Is everything resolved? Are there any unanswered questions?
3. To what extent does the final scene provide a sense of circularity to the play?
4. To what extent does the ending of *Othello* provide hope to the audience and a new beginning?

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Contrasts: Activities on contrasts within *Othello* – of both scenes and characters
Revising Dramatic Techniques.

Echoes and repetitions: Echoes and repetitions of images, events, words and phrases usually referred to as 'motifs'. An activity on this is found in the section Revising

A related technique is 'foreshadowing' when a clue or warning is given to a future event. See Brabantio's comment at I, 3, 288–89: 'Look to her, Moor, if thou hast eyes to see, and may thee.'

Turning points: Turning points in literary text occur when something happens to

- the direction of the plot/storyline
- the behaviour of a character
- the understanding of a character
- the audience or reader's perspective on a character
- one character's relationship with another

Activity

Identify up to six key turning points in *Othello* and the effects they have, whether on other characters or the audience. A couple of ideas have been provided to help

Turning Point	Reference	Effect(s)
Othello makes his first entrance, having been introduced to the audience by other characters.	Act I, scene 1	Othello is painted in a negative light as a man, uncivilised brute when the audience meet him as a peaceful man who is highly respected in the political establishment.
News is brought that the Turkish fleet have turned back, having been battered by the storms.		

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Revising Dramatic Techniques

It is important when writing about *Othello* to show you know it is a play. That means you need to think about what effect it has as a performance that is being watched by an audience, not just as a text that is being read. That is why seeing a performance of *Othello* – even a film of it – will help you think and write about the ways in which Shakespeare creates meaning. You will also meet AO2 (Analyse ways in which meaning is made in literary texts).

Some of Shakespeare's key dramatic methods to make meaning are:

- Soliloquies
- Dramatic irony
- Contrasting scenes
- Character foils

Soliloquies

A soliloquy is a speech that is spoken by a character standing alone on the stage. It is not meant to be heard by the audience. As a result it often creates **dramatic irony** as it provides the audience with information that no other character is privy to.

Iago is the master of the soliloquy in *Othello*. He has three extended soliloquies with specific functions. In them:

- he divulges his plans to the audience
- he works out his plans, using the audience as a sounding board
- he rationalises and justifies his behaviour
- he reveals aspects of his character unknown to other characters

Activity

Read each of the soliloquies below, and make notes on the following:

- At what point it comes in the play
- The main ideas expressed in the soliloquy
- Which of the above functions it performs
- How it creates dramatic irony
- Other points of literary and dramatic interest

- (1) I, 3, 365–386
- (2) II, 1, 267–293
- (3) II, 3, 303–329

Dramatic Irony

Dramatic irony is created when the audience knows more than some, or all, of the characters. In *Othello*, the audience grasps the full significance of certain speeches and events, while the characters are oblivious. On the most basic level, in *Othello* dramatic irony is created because the audience knows Iago's plans and what his true thoughts and feelings are. We thus know more than the characters do, with the exception of Iago himself.

A play provides many opportunities for dramatic irony because it is rare for all characters to be present at the same time. Conversations and events take place and only some characters are present. However, the audience hears every word that is spoken in a play and is a witness to everything that happens. Both the soliloquy and the aside – in which one character speaks to the audience without other characters 'hearing' (in the world of the play) what she or he is saying – are used by Shakespeare to allow the audience to find out additional information that is not divulged to other characters.

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The tragedy of *Othello* depends on dramatic irony; Othello and the other characters plan for them to take full effect. And the audience is placed in a peculiarly position: they know exactly what is going on, yet are unable to do anything about it.

Activity

Remind yourself of the context of the following lines and explain where the dramatic irony lies.

1. 'So please your grace, my ancient / And faithful servant of honesty and trust. / To / I assign my wife,' (I, 3, 279–283)
2. 'I had rather have this from my mouth / Than it should do offence / To you,' (II, 3, 202–203)
3. 'I never loved more kind and honest.' (III, 1, 38)
4. 'I humbly beseech you of your pardon / For too much loving you.' (III, 3, 258–259)
5. 'This fellow's of exceeding honesty / And knows all qualities with a learned / dealing.' (III, 3, 260–262)
6. 'Where should I lose that handkerchief, Emilia?' (III, 4, 19)
7. 'Is he not jealous?'
'Who, he? I think the sun where he was born / Drew all such humours from / His eye.'
8. 'I will be hanged if some eternal villain, / Some busy and insinuating rogue, / Cozening slave, to get some office, / Have not devised this slander;' (IV, 2, 1–4)

The Use of Contrast

Another way in which playwrights create dramatic impact is through contrast. In *Othello*, there are two main ways: contrasting scenes placed side by side for dramatic effect, and contrasting characters.

Contrasting scenes: Adjoining scenes (scenes that are next to one another) may be placed side by side for various reasons including their subject matter, the presentation of characters, the mood and atmosphere.

Activity

Listed below are some pairs of contrasting scenes in *Othello*. Complete the table by explaining how these scenes contrast with one another and consider the effect(s) created. The first row has been completed for you.

Adjoining scenes	Points of contrast	Effect(s) created
I, 1 and I, 2	In I, 1 Othello is described as a wild, animal-like being who has stolen Brabantio's vulnerable daughter; in I, 2 Othello appears on stage and behaves in a calm, rational and civilised manner.	The audience is overturned by Othello's calm and rational behaviour, which contrasts with the audience's expectations of a jealous, violent man.
III, 2 and III, 3		
IV, 3 and IV, 4		
V, 1 and V, 2		

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Contrasting Characters

When thinking about characters who contrast with one another we can use the character who contrasts with another character in order to highlight particular qualities. In *Othello* we see this with the three female characters.

Activity

Complete the table below to show how Shakespeare presents Desdemona, Emilia and Bianca as contrasting characters.

Extension Activity

What particular qualities of Desdemona do Emilia and Bianca highlight through their interactions with Shakespeare?

	Desdemona	Emilia
Relationship to male character(s) in play	Wife of Othello; daughter of Brabantio.	
Social status; position occupied		Respectable but acknowledges her social inferiority. She is her handmaid and refers to her throughout as 'Madam'.
Adjectives to describe character		
Experience of the world and men		
Key quotation(s)		

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Revising *Othello* as a Tragedy

Classical Tragedy

Othello is one of Shakespeare's four key tragedies (the others being *Macbeth*, *Hamlet* and *King Lear*).

The guidelines for what constitutes a tragedy were outlined by the Ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle (384–322 BC) in his *Poetics*. The key features of a tragedy, according to Aristotle, are:

The tragic character: a character of noble rank and high status, with whom the audience can sympathise. The character makes a mistake or error of judgement (*hamartia*) which leads to his or her downfall (tragic fall).

The three unities of time, place and action:

- **Time:** Aristotle believed that the events of a tragedy should unfold over no more than one day and night.
- **Place:** all the events of the tragedy should unfurl in one place.
- **Action:** in a tragedy there should be just one storyline and no subplots.

The plot: as the plot develops it becomes increasingly complex, but then there is a reversal of fortune where the action goes in the opposite direction, leading to the conclusion.

Often the *peripeteia* is caused by the tragic character making a discovery of which they are unaware (*anagnorisis*).

The audience: witnessing the action of a tragedy, and in particular seeing the fate of the tragic character, evokes the emotions of fear and pity in the audience. This then has a purging or purifying effect (*catharsis*) who leave the theatre feeling cleansed.

Activity

Take each of the features of tragedy defined above and make notes on the extent to which they apply to *Othello*.

Tragedy and the Critical Companion

The first four essays in your Critical Companion discuss Shakespearean tragedy. A series of questions will help you focus on the different ideas about tragedy explored by the writers.

Essay 1: David Scott Kastan

Kastan argues that Shakespeare's tragedies are shaped more by medieval theories of tragedy than by Aristotle's.

1. According to Kastan, the medieval definition of tragedy was 'the fall from prosperity to adversity'. To what extent does this definition fit your understanding of *Othello*?
2. Kastan notes that the medieval definition of tragedy does not state who or what causes the fall and thus 'speaks tragedy's fearful incomprehensibility'. Does this apply to *Othello*? Is Othello responsible for Othello's tragic fall? Is there an element of 'fearful incomprehensibility' in *Othello*?

Essay 2: A D Nuttall

Nuttall's essay focuses on the audience response to tragedy and the way it embodies a sense of pleasure and catharsis. It could be read as a development of the Aristotelian idea of *catharsis*.

3. To what extent might an audience find pleasure in the tragic events in *Othello*?

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Essay 3: A C Bradley

Bradley's essay offers a definition of Shakespearean tragedy, drawing on both classical and modern theories.

- Bradley argues that the Shakespearean tragic hero experiences 'exceptional' 'unexpected, and contrasted with previous happiness or glory'. To what extent do these ideas correspond to this definition?
- Bradley also asserts that the hero's sufferings extend 'far and wide beyond his scene a scene of woe'. Discuss this assertion in relation to *Othello*.
- Bradley argues that the Shakespearean 'definition of tragedy includes the motif that 'man is blind and helpless, the plaything of an inscrutable power, called by the other name – a power which appears to smile on him for a little, and then on his pride' to bring him down. Discuss this idea in relation to *Othello*.

Essay 4: Maynard Mack

Mack argues that Shakespeare's tragic characters are all associated in some way with madness. Madness is used as a punishment but also that it provides insight.

- To what extent can Othello be described as mad?
- Mack argues that, like the Greek prophetess Cassandra, Shakespeare's tragic characters are 'cursed' never to be believed. Does this match your understanding of Othello?

Revising the Social and Historical Context

Assessment Objective 3 requires you to 'Demonstrate understanding of the significance of the contexts in which literary texts are written and received'. This section of the revision guide focuses on the contexts in which *Othello* was **written**. In your examination, you need to be able to explain how *Othello* tells us about life in the late sixteenth/early seventeenth centuries. This includes:

- historical and political events that are referenced in the play
- what the play reveals about views of women and gender roles
- how outsiders and different races were viewed

While *Othello*, like many of Shakespeare's plays, set in Italy, Shakespeare is writing from a distance. He certainly never visited Italy in his life. Thus, while the bare bones of the story – a conflict between Venice and Turkey, a brutal crime of passion – may belong to the sixteenth-century Italy, the views and cultural mores are very much part of English life.

Tip

Revising the context of *Othello* does not require you to read books of political, social or cultural history. The information you need is in the play itself. Read and reread the text, glean what you can, and use your imagination to picture a picture of early seventeenth-century life.

Some general points when writing about the historical and social context of *Othello*:

Historical and political events

The late sixteenth century is a time of ongoing military conflict between Venice and Turkey. In 1571, the Venetians were defeated by the Turks, who subsequently conquered the island in 1571. Shakespeare sets the play against this backdrop, but you may have considered when revising the Key Images in the play that the heathen Turks' assault on the Christian Venetian protectorate of Cyprus is more than just a backdrop. As with Shakespeare's other play about an outsider – *The Merchant of Venice* – *Othello* is set in Venice as it was a melting pot of different races at this time. For more on this, see the Settings of the Play.

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Views of women

It is very easy – and also (academically) lazy! – to draw sweeping generalisations about women as presented in Shakespeare's plays. To assume that, for example, because she refuses to blame him for her death in her dying words, women at this time, the misreading of the play. Examiners will reward you for an ability to notice the subtle portrayal of women and to tease out the implications. For example, Desdemona's death of the play is in stark contrast to her earlier actions: Othello accuses her of taking the inheritance (I, 3, 162–165); in front of the Duke and Senate Desdemona professes her love for Othello rather than her father, is now her priority (I, 3, 178–187); she also asks to be allowed to join a military expedition against the Turks ('I will go with him' [I, 3, 255]). Similar point of presentation of women is made in relation to Emilia and Bianca.

Outsiders and 'other' races

The sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were a time of increasing global travel and exploration. 'discovery' of other countries meant exposure to other races and cultures; on the one hand, an exoticisation of, other cultures, seen in 'travellers' tales' from the time. On the other, anxiety about the dilution of cultures (for example, through mixed marriages) and the

Activity

Write short commentaries explaining what each of the quotations below reveals about the social and historical context of *Othello*.

1. 'One Michael Cassio, a Florentine...' (I, 1, 20)
2. 'Zounds, sir, you're robbed;' (I, 1, 87)
3. 'the gross clasps of a lascivious Moor' (I, 1, 125)
4. 'thou hast enchanted her' (I, 3, 63)
5. 'Her father loved me, oft invited me, / Still he did love me the story of my life' (I, 3, 162–165)
6. 'And of the cannibals that each other eat, / The Anthropophagi, and men whose heads / Dwell beneath their shoulders.' (II, 2, 114)
7. 'She thanked me, / And said she was, if I had a friend that loved her, / I should have told my story: / And he would woo her.' (I, 3, 162–165)
8. 'I know your country disposition well: / In Venice they do let God see the punishment / Of their hands' (III, 3, 204–205)
9. 'That handkerchief / Did an Egyptian to my mother give' (III, 4, 51–52)
10. 'A horned man's a monster and a beast' (IV, 1, 60)

Revising the Performance History of the play

With a black character at the heart of the play, the performance history of *Othello* is a complex one. Having some of this knowledge to hand – and being able to refer to it where relevant – is a second aspect of AO3: 'Demonstrate understanding of the significance and influence of literary texts are written **and received**.'

Acting Othello

'Blacking up'

Until relatively recently it was a common for Othello to be played by a 'blacked up' actor. In 1942, Laurence Olivier wore black face paint and adopted a thick Caribbean accent to play Othello in a production. In 1965, Anthony Hopkins 'blacked up' for a BBC dramatisation of the play. In the twenty-first century, the idea of a white actor putting on make-up to play a black character is unacceptable: the UK actors' union, Equity, while not banning the practice, says that 'blacking up [except in] very exceptional circumstances'. (Harry Wallop, 'Simon Pegg: offensive? I don't know' *The Telegraph* 25 April 2016)

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Black actors

Despite the preponderance of white actors playing Othello in the past, there were a few of Othello by black actors in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Ira Aldridge (1807–1867)

Ira Aldridge was the first black actor to play Othello. Born and raised in New York, he moved to Britain where he made his stage debut in London. He played the title role in *Othello* in a theatre in London in 1825, receiving some success. The *Public Ledger* described it as 'one of the finest physical representations of the character ever witnessed'.¹ However, when Aldridge took on the role again in 1833 for a production of *Othello*, he received widespread hostility from the audience, who argued that he should not be allowed to play the role because he was not white. The fact that Aldridge was African American, rather than a light-skinned black actor, was a factor in the hostility. The poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote to imagine 'this beautiful Venetian girl falling in love with a veritable negro'.²

Paul Robeson (1898–1976)

An American bass singer and actor, Paul Robeson played Othello opposite the British actress Desdemona in 1930; he was the first black actor to play Othello in Britain since Ira Aldridge. He received mixed reviews. Robeson subsequently played Othello on Broadway between 1931 and 1932, becoming the first African American to play the part. Robeson's political activism adds an interesting dimension to his career and his performance as Othello. He was strongly critical of the US government's treatment of blacks in the Southern states and was actively involved with the Civil Rights Movement. His unionism and criticism of many aspects of American life and policy led to his being blacklisted during the McCarthy era.

A Photo-Negative Production

These days it is unheard of for Othello to be played by a white actor. However, in 2001 the Shakespeare Company in Washington DC put on a 'photo-negative' production of *Othello* with a white Desdemona and a black Othello. The production was alongside an otherwise completely black cast, including *Star Trek* and *X-Men* actor Patrick Dempsey as Iago.

A black Iago

In 2015 the Shakespeare Company production of *Othello* featured a black Iago alongside Hugh Quarshie as Othello. This could be read as a response to the fact that *Othello* is often seen as a play about racism, an interpretation that many directors and critics challenge.

Activity

Consider the following questions. There are no right or wrong answers; thinking about them will help you create a personal creative response to *Othello*.

1. Do you think *Othello* is a play about racism?
2. To what extent is Iago's hatred of Othello driven by racism? If a black actor played Iago in the RSC 2015 production – what implications does that have for Iago's racist attitudes in the play's opening scene?
3. In recent years it has become increasingly popular for Bianca to be played by a black actress. What reasons can you think of why a director would make this casting choice? What does it add to your understanding of race, class and gender in the play?
4. Nowadays we probably think that a 'blacked up' Othello is unacceptable or inappropriate for a white actor to play Othello? Must Othello be played by a black actor?
5. If you have seen productions of *Othello*, or watch any film versions, as part of your preparation for the production's racial casting and consider the implications.

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¹ Cited at <http://www.historyextra.com/article/culture/ira-alldridge-shakespeare%E2%80%99s-othello>
² Ibid.

Revising *Othello* and the Critics

In your *Othello* examination, Assessment Objective 5 – ‘Explore literary texts in different interpretations’ – carries the most marks. Out of a maximum of 35 marks that you can score in your *Othello* essay, 14 marks are awarded for AO5. This makes AO5 worth double the other Assessment Objectives (AO1, AO2, AO3), and it is vitally important that you discuss different interpretations to meet this objective.

Your principal source for discussing other critical interpretations of *Othello* is the Critical Companion. The ZigZag Companion to the A Level English Literature Shakespeare Critical Anthology (Track 1) is a companion to the Critical Companion, offering a range of activities and questions, plus recommendations to help you tackle the paper.

This section of the Exam Preparation Pack focuses on helping you revise the argument of the Critical Companion. You are not allowed to take the Critical Companion into the examination, so make sure you know the essays very well and can refer closely to them.

Activity 1: Whose critical view?

This activity tests your recall of the different critics' views. Match the critical view to the critic. Since there are more views than critics, some critics will have more than one view.

Critics

- | | | |
|-----------------------|-------|-------------------|
| 1. Maynard Mack | | 5. A C Bradley |
| 2. A D Nuttall | | 6. F R Leavis |
| 3. Ania Loomba | | 7. E A J Honigman |
| 4. David Scott Kastan | | |

Critical Views

- Othello* reflects a range of contemporary ideas about black people and race.
- The fall of the Shakespearean tragic hero brings about a recognition of human powerlessness in the face of the forces of fate and destiny.
- Shakespeare's theory of tragedy was shaped more by medieval views than classical ones.
- Through 'mad' characters Shakespeare can voice criticisms and painful truths that he himself, would lead to his comments being dismissed as the ravings of a madman.
- Othello dies playing his ideal part, that of the man of action.
- Tragic drama embodies an uncomfortable tension between the suffering of the characters and the pleasure experienced by the spectators.
- While Iago may be clever he lacks the wisdom to appreciate the bonds of love that hold humans together: he is thus unable to foresee that ultimately Emilia's love for him and her loyalty she may feel for him, thus leading to his betrayal by her.
- Shakespeare's tragic characters are commonly associated with madness.
- Early seventeenth-century English views of Venice were mixed: while the Italian city's openness which had allowed it to become a hub of international trade – some admired this – this admiration was tempered by a fear that an influx of outsiders could have corrupted the city's morals and manners.
- A Shakespeare tragedy features a character of high rank who experiences a reversal of fortune, leading to death.
- Audience reactions to Iago fluctuate throughout the play: while we condemn him, we also admire his cleverness and even sympathise with him at times.
- Unlike Shakespeare's other tragic heroes, there is no moment of tragic self-realisation: Othello remains the same at the end as he was at the beginning of the play.
- Shakespeare's tragedies resist any clear answers about the causes of tragedy.
- In Shakespeare, madness may function as either a punishment or as insight.
- Part of Othello's tragedy lies in the fact that he believes in the racial hierarchy.

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Activity 2: Developing critical views

To access the higher marks in the exam you will need to do more than refer to a critical view. You will need to develop the point, either through agreeing with it and discussing quotations and episodes that support the critical view, or through refuting it (once again using the quotations and episodes to support your view).

- a) Take three of the above critical views that you agree with and develop them using key quotations or episodes from the play.

e.g. Developing statement (j). 'The fact that, as F R Leavis asserts, Othello remains the play's hero through the similarity between his final speech – 'I have done them wrong' (I, 2, 335) – and his words when he first appears in the play: 'My signiory / Shall out-tongue his complaints' (I, 2, 18–19). In both examples, Othello's reputation can override either criticisms of him or his own mistakes.'

- b) Take two critical views that you disagree with and illustrate through close reading.

e.g. Refuting statement (m). 'While David Kastan asserts that Shakespeare's tragedy is about the causes of the tragedy and of human suffering, the figure of Iago suggests that the tragic events of the play would not take place. From the outset he manipulates Othello's downfall, asserting that he will not stop until he is 'evened with him' (I, 3, 389–90).'

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Advice for Edexcel A Level English Literature

In the examinations for this specification, at A Level only, you will be provided with a text on the play, which you must then relate to relevant contextual factors and ideas from the specification.

A page of sample exam-style questions for the Edexcel specification has been included in the preparation pack.

Advice for answering the Edexcel exam question

- Read both questions carefully and choose the most suitable title for you. As you can think of five or six arguments in relation to the question, then you will produce a good essay. It is highly useful at this stage to underline the key words in the question so that your arguments are sharply focused on the task.
- Remember that, while the question is obviously testing your knowledge of the text, it is also testing your ability to offer close analysis of language, structure and form. If the question asks you to 'analyse', for example, then you must explain what effects it creates for the audience.
- You must avoid retelling the events of the play or paraphrasing any of the content.
- Above all, every argument must be linked back to the exam question and the key words in the question to your arguments.
- Avoid treating the characters as real, they are merely components of a dramatic text.
- Include an introduction which sets out the main argument of your essay, but do not include a conclusion in the introduction.
- Quotations should be kept fairly short and should be relevant to your argument. They should be integrated into your sentences so as not to disrupt the flow of the essay.
- Ensure you have a logical conclusion at the end which neatly summarises your argument and provides a brief but direct answer to the exam question.
- Make sure that you integrate relevant critical reading. This should be used as a basis for developing your own arguments.
- Maintain a high standard of written communication. You should not use any slang or informal language.

Overall, the best preparation for this exam is to ensure that you are familiar with the specification and the suggested list of skills in this area which you must cover in your essay.

For more information, visit www.edexcel.org.uk or www.edexcel.org.uk/471-exam

If, by the end of your study of the text, you can feel confident in demonstrating your understanding of the text, then you should feel confident in tackling your exam!

Also ensure that you are familiar with the Assessment Objectives and Band Requirement Sheet. An Overview Sheet containing this information can be found near the start of this guide. Remember that these are not evenly weighted in the exam and exact percentages can also be found in the Band Requirement Sheet. Remember that for the *Othello* question in the Edexcel exam, only AO1, AO2 and AO3 are assessed.

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Exam Skills Activities

While the preceding sections of this resource pack have focused on helping you read *Othello*, this next section concentrates on helping you develop your exam-taking skills and writing an examination-style essay.

In the Edexcel A Level English Literature exam you will be given a choice of two questions. Each question will ask you to 'explore' Shakespeare's presentation of a theme or character. This will be followed by a statement recommending you to 'relate your ideas to relevant contextual factors and your critical reading'. In your response the examiner will be looking for evidence of AO3 and AO4. For more information see p. 2 of this resource.

Planning and structuring an Essay

There is no one way to plan and structure an English literature essay. Below is just one approach, but there are other approaches that work perfectly well. What is important, however, is to think and plan before you start writing. With 1 hour 15 minutes to write your essay, you should spend between 10 and 15 minutes planning. You are also recommended to follow the plan for at least five minutes at the end to read and check your essay. You may find the plan given on p.38 – to annotate the plan to show where you are meeting the AOs to be useful.

A Suggested Essay Structure

Introduction	<p>Begin with a clear statement about the importance of the theme / focus of the question) in <i>Othello</i> – in effect you are summarising your argument. If necessary, define any key terms. Refer to the areas or subjects you will discuss in your essay so the reader knows where you are going.</p> <p>Extension: You could also make a link to relevant contextual factors. You might also consider summarising some relevant different interpretations.</p>
Main body	<p>Aim to discuss at least five key ideas about the essay topic.</p> <p>Make sure you:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> illustrate the points with reference to specific episodes/quotes comment on the way Shakespeare creates meaning – discuss dramatic impact comment on relevant contextual factors refer to relevant critical reading
Conclusion	<p>Draw together your ideas and sum up your argument. You might like to add a final point either linking the play as a whole to the essay topic.</p>

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Putting it into Practice: Some Suggested Content

Essay question

Explore Shakespeare's use of storytelling in *Othello*. You must relate your contextual factors and ideas from your critical reading.

Introduction

Explain that *Othello* is a play preoccupied with storytelling: the play opens (Iago with storytelling, and stories are woven through the whole play [AO1, AO2].

Signpost the reader by highlighting the five types of storytelling that will be discussed in the body:

- Storytelling to develop character
- Storytelling to provide the audience with background knowledge
- Storytelling to create mood and atmosphere
- Storytelling to deceive
- Storytelling to impress and persuade

Extension: You could comment on the fact that drama tells a story – and refer to drama telling the story of the fall of a noble character (and in so doing also make a point of the 'dramatizing trick' [AO5]. Additionally you could refer to Leavis's essay on *Othello*'s storytelling in the 'dramatizing trick' [AO5].

Main body

Develop the five areas listed in the introduction: the points given below are suggestions, but others could be equally valid.

1) Storytelling to develop character

In I, 1, Iago tells the story of how he was passed over for promotion and through the opening scene it establishes the importance of storytelling in the play [AO1].

2) Storytelling to provide the audience with background knowledge

A play is limited (by time and space) in what can be presented on stage, so storytelling is used to 'fill in the gaps' and providing the audience with key information [AO2], e.g. Othello's account of how he and Desdemona fell in love [AO1].

3) Storytelling to create mood and atmosphere

Some of the most powerful uses of storytelling are to create a certain mood, e.g. in IV, 3 Desdemona's story of her father's maid, Barbary, who died singing the willow song. In this scene it adds an additional layer of poignancy and also heightens the tension as the audience knows that Barbary, Desdemona is also going to die [AO1, AO2].

4) Storytelling to deceive

Probably the key way storytelling is used in *Othello*. Iago tells stories to other characters. In I, 1 he tells Brabantio – truthfully – that Desdemona has married Othello, but the story is distorted by his racist imagery and untruthful language (e.g. telling Brabantio that Desdemona is 'an old Moor' [89]), reflecting contemporary views of other races and attitudes to women [AO1]. This could be made here to Loomba [AO5]. Iago's greatest storytelling feat is his account of Cassio's affair, achieved by playing on Othello's vulnerabilities and through his use of the 'dramatizing trick' [AO2] – see also Loomba on the way Othello has internalised the racial hierarchy [AO1].

5) Storytelling to impress and persuade

Othello is the expert at this type of storytelling: in I, 3 he recounts the story of his military career and Desdemona and, in the process, wins over the Council and the Senate [AO1, AO2]. This is a key feature of the contemporary genre of travellers' tales [AO2, AO3] and reflects another aspect of the play's setting [AO3]. In the final scene, prior to his suicide, Othello recovers his rhetorical disintegration of his language in Acts III and IV [AO2], and returns to storytelling to leave a favourable impression of him [AO1] – on this point see Leavis's essay [AO5].

Conclusion

Summarise the five different ways in which storytelling is used in *Othello*; then take a step back to a wider level by commenting on Shakespeare as a storyteller and the effect he has on his audience. You could also refer to the idea of catharsis, a key principle in Aristotelian tragedy [AO2, AO3]. You might also refer to the audience's conflicted response to tragedy – pleasure and discomfort [AO4].

Activity 1

Using this essay structure – and the template below – plan an essay to answer the examination-style question.

Explore Shakespeare's presentation of ideas about honour in *Othello*. You should refer to relevant contextual factors and ideas from your critical reading.

Introduction

Begin with a clear statement about the importance of the topic / key idea / issue (that is the focus of the question) in *Othello* – in effect you are summarising your argument here. If necessary, define any key terms. Signpost the areas or subjects you will be discussing in the essay so the reader knows where they are going.

Extension:

You could also make a link to relevant contextual factors here.

You might consider summarising some relevant different interpretations or critical readings here.

Main body

Aim to discuss **at least five** ideas about the essay topic.

Make sure

- illustrate the points with reference to specific episodes/quotations
- comment on the way Shakespeare creates meaning – discuss language, structure and dramatic impact
- comment on relevant contextual factors
- refer to relevant critical reading

Conclusion

Draw together your points and sum up your argument.

You might like to hold back a final point, either linking the play as a whole or Shakespeare's craft as a dramatist to the essay topic.

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Writing an Introduction

Writing an essay introduction is difficult, but if you get this part of the essay right you will be writing a successful essay.

A good introduction should outline the argument of the essay and signpost to the points you will be discussing. Avoid vague 'warm-up' sentences and get straight to the point.

Consider this introduction for the essay title:

Explore Shakespeare's use of storytelling in *Othello*. You must relate your analysis to relevant contextual factors and ideas from your critical reading.

Othello is a play preoccupied with storytelling. From the opening scene in which Iago reveals his hatred for Othello, to Othello's story in the final scene designed to leave his impression of him (the 'self-dramatizing trick' as Leavis terms it), the play is a performance of both truth and falsehood. Through discussing the way storytelling is used to develop background knowledge, to both impress and deceive characters and the audience, this essay will argue that, as in all drama, storytelling plays a vital role. In his comments, tragic drama is 'essentially a tale of suffering and calamity conducted by the poet'.

Commentary

In this introduction the candidate has outlined their line of argument, explained an important theme in *Othello* and signposted the main areas that will be discussed. In this paragraph all four AO's have been met:

- **AO1:** knowledge of the play is demonstrated and the paragraph is coherent and uses appropriate terminology.
- **AO2:** reference is made to the play's structure – opening and ending with storytelling.
- **AO3:** reference is made to the play's literary context (tragic drama).
- **AO5:** the critical texts of Leavis and Bradley – are referred to in this introduction.

Activity 2

Using the introduction above as a guide, write an introductory paragraph for the essay planned on the following question.

Explore Shakespeare's presentation of ideas about honour in *Othello*. You must relate your analysis to relevant contextual factors and ideas from your critical reading.

Quotations

You will need to support and illustrate the points you make in your essay by making use of quotations. Because Edexcel is an open-book examination you will have access to your revision pack in the examination room and you do not need to 'learn' quotations off by heart. However, you do not want to be spending valuable thinking and writing time trying to find a quotation. You should know the play inside out so you can go straight to the relevant page to find the quotation you need. Completing the revision pack in this pack, particularly the ones on characters (pp. 12–16), will help you to familiarise yourself with a number of important quotations.

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Writing Clearly and Accurately

At A Level you are expected to write clearly and accurately – and you are rewarded in no doubt, if you know your text well you will write better about it: poor writing is often a sign of being secure in their subject knowledge. However, there are some general tips that can help:

- 1) Always write about literature in the **present** tense, as if the events are unfolding now. (e.g. *Othello* **fears** that Desdemona has been unfaithful to him.)
- 2) However, references to the historical or social context should be written in the past tense. (e.g. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries Venice was a hub of international trade.)
- 3) Show the examiner you know that *Othello* is a play by referring to it as a *play* (not a novel!) and referring to the audience (not the readers).
- 4) To avoid the trap of writing about characters as if they are real people, and to show your understanding of Shakespeare's craft, you might find it helpful to begin sentences with 'Shakespeare...' rather than 'Othello as...'
- 5) Keep your writing formal: do not overuse the first person (I), avoid colloquialisms and contractions (isn't, can't, etc.).
- 6) Keep your quotations short and, where possible, embed them into the sentence. (e.g. Othello's contemporary beliefs about black people being animalistic by referring to Othello as 'an old black ram'.)
- 7) Try to avoid using the phrase 'this shows' after a quotation. It is best avoided as it is often not clear what the 'this' is referring to, and secondly, it is a lazy and overused phrase. (e.g. 'Iago incites Brabantio by telling him that "an old black ram" is "tupping" Desdemona. This shows that Othello considers Othello, as a black person, to be behaving like an animal.'

Try...

'Iago incites Brabantio by telling him that "an old black ram" is "tupping" Desdemona. This imagery conveys the impression that Othello is not fully human and reflects contemporary beliefs about black people being animalistic by referring to Othello as "an old black ram".'

Writing a Conclusion

In your conclusion you could sum up the argument of your essay. You might also consider Shakespeare's craft as a dramatist, to the essay topic.

Consider this conclusion for the essay title:

'Explore Shakespeare's use of storytelling in *Othello*.'

In addition to stories serving to develop character, provide background knowledge, they are instrumental in the development of the tragedy of Othello. Used by Shakespeare, Othello, stories also enable Othello to recover some of his prior nobility before the tragedy. Storytelling on the audience is also significant: Shakespeare, an expert storyteller, uses the journey of both pleasure and discomfort (as expressed by Nuttall), culminating in the ultimate aim of Aristotelian tragedy)

Commentary:

As well as recapping the key points of the essay, the candidate has also made a sophisticated reference to both the literary context of tragedy and Shakespeare's craft as a dramatist.

Activity 3

Write a conclusion for the essay you have planned on honour.

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Sample Questions

Question 1

Explore Shakespeare's presentation of views of, and attitudes towards, war in *Othello*. You must relate your ideas to relevant contextual factors and ideas from your critical reading.

Question 2

Explore Shakespeare's presentation of attitudes to race in *Othello*. You must relate your ideas to relevant contextual factors and ideas from your critical reading.

Question 3

Explore Shakespeare's use of the settings of Venice and Cyprus in *Othello*. You must relate your ideas to relevant contextual factors and ideas from your critical reading.

Question 4

Explore Shakespeare's presentation of jealousy in *Othello*. You must relate your ideas to relevant contextual factors and ideas from your critical reading.

Question 5

Explore how Shakespeare portrays the relationship between state and private life in *Othello*. You must relate your ideas to relevant contextual factors and ideas from your critical reading.

Question 6

Explore Shakespeare's presentation of honesty and deception in *Othello*. You must relate your ideas to relevant contextual factors and ideas from your critical reading.

Question 7

Explore Shakespeare's presentation of relationships between men and women in *Othello*. You must relate your ideas to relevant contextual factors and ideas from your critical reading.

Question 8

Explore Shakespeare's presentation of the importance of reputation in *Othello*. You must relate your ideas to relevant contextual factors and ideas from your critical reading.

Question 9

Explore Shakespeare's presentation of power in *Othello*. You must relate your ideas to relevant contextual factors and ideas from your critical reading.

Question 10

Explore the idea that in *Othello* Shakespeare depicts a breakdown of order. You must relate your ideas to relevant contextual factors and ideas from your critical reading.

Question 11

Explore Shakespeare's presentation of friendship in *Othello*. You must relate your ideas to relevant contextual factors and ideas from your critical reading.

Question 12

Explore Shakespeare's presentation of conflict in *Othello*. You must relate your ideas to relevant contextual factors and ideas from your critical reading.

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Indicative Content for Sample Questions

After each point, the AO/s covered by the point are listed in brackets. As a reminder, the AO/s are listed on the following four AOs:

- **AO1:** Articulate informed, personal and creative responses to literary texts, using appropriate language and coherent, accurate written expression
- **AO2:** Analyse ways in which meanings are shaped in literary texts
- **AO3:** Demonstrate understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which literary texts are received
- **AO5:** Explore literary texts and their reception by different interpretations

Question 1

Explore Shakespeare's presentation of views of, and attitudes towards, women in *Othello*. You must relate your ideas to relevant contextual factors and ideas from your critical reading.

- Women as property of – and subservient to – men (Iago tells Brabantio he's been 'robb'd of his daughter' [I, 3, 178]) [AO1, AO3]
- Common stereotypes of women (Iago's speech in II, 1, 108–111) [AO2, AO3]
- Idealisation vs denigration of women (Cassio speaks of Desdemona in exaggerated terms 'she came on shore!' [II, 1, 83] but treats Bianca with contempt – 'What do you mean by this?' [II, 2, 186]) [AO1, AO2]
- Change in Othello's attitude: at the beginning he treats Desdemona as an independent and bounteous to her mind' [I, 3, 261]; by the end he treats her as an embodiment of evil ('I took you for that cunning whore of Venice / That married with Othello' [IV, 2, 88–89]) [AO1, AO2]
- Women's views of themselves as women: Desdemona believes all women are like her ('I do not think there is any such woman' [IV, 3, 79]); Emilia's view is more pragmatic ('Desires for sport, and frailty, as men have?' [IV, 2, 96–97]) [AO1, AO2]
- Honigsmann: Iago's contempt for Emilia, and assumption that she will place his needs above her loyalty for Desdemona will ultimately lead to her downfall [AO5]
- Loomba: Iago succeeds in deriding Desdemona because Othello is 'predisposed to believe the worst' [AO5]

Question 2

Explore Shakespeare's presentation of attitudes to race in *Othello*. You must relate your ideas to relevant contextual factors and ideas from your critical reading.

- Denigration of black people: viewed as animals, heathen and uncivilised (Iago and Roderigo refer to Othello as 'the Moor' [I, 1, 111–112]; 'the gross clasps of a lascivious Moor' [I, 1, 125]) [AO1, AO2]
- Othello is defined by his race: referred to as 'the Moor' even by characters who are not racist (the first Senator refers to him as 'the valiant Moor' [I, 3, 47] Desdemona calls him 'the Moor' [II, 1, 186]) [AO1, AO2]
- Exoticisation of black people: through his storytelling – which draws on contemporary stereotypes – Othello presents himself as a man whose experiences transcend those of most mortals. Through his experiences he wins Desdemona ('And of the cannibals that each other eat' [I, 3, 142]) [AO1, AO2]
- Brabantio holds Othello in high esteem as a soldier and official ('Her father loved me, / His worth, his boldness, his dear love, / Cannot tolerate the thought of an interracial marriage and the possibility of interbreeding' [I, 1, 92]) [AO1, AO3]
- When Othello is viewed in a positive light, it is despite his race (the Duke says to Brabantio 'Othello's valiant' [I, 3, 285–286]) [AO1]
- Threat to Cyprus from the Moors in Iago's parallel relationship between Desdemona and Othello [AO1]
- Iago exploits Othello's insecurity about himself as a black person in a foreign country [AO1]
- Shakespeare draws on contemporary stereotypes of black people, depicting Othello as a victim of civilisation as his fears and insecurities conquer him [AO2, AO3]
- Loomba: dual interpretations of the presentation of race and interracial relationships in *Othello* [AO5]

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Question 3

Explore Shakespeare's use of the settings of Venice and Cyprus in *Othello*. You must relate your ideas to relevant contextual factors and ideas from your critical reading.

- Early seventeenth-century views of Venice – a hub of international trade, a melting pot of cultures, licentiousness – informed audience's responses to the play [AO3]
- Opening scene introduces Venice as a place where different cultures live side by side 'inter-breeding' [AO1, AO2, AO3]
- Tension between the idea of Venice as a site of civilisation and as a place of chaos and disorder 'My house is not a grange' [I, 1, 106–107] [AO2]
- Iago exploits stereotypes about Venetian women in order to unsettle Othello ('I know in Venice they do let good will to the pranks / They dare not show their husbands' [III, 3, 167–168]) [AO2]
- Cyprus (situated in the Aegean) – under threat from Turkey (a Muslim nation) that sea power Desdemona has been conquered by Othello (as a North African he is likely to be a Muslim) [AO2, AO3]
- Cyprus storyline allows Shakespeare to remove the key characters from their familiar environment and explore the consequences: without their usual support structures Othello is free to pursue Iago's plotting [AO2]
- Othello suggests being in Cyprus has encouraged characters to forget how to behave 'We ourselves do that / Which heaven hath forbid the Ottomites?' [II, 3, 131–132] [AO2]
- Loomba: early seventeenth-century views of Venice, particularly its openness, makes it a place that acts as a warning to England [AO5]

Question 4

Explore Shakespeare's presentation of jealousy in *Othello*. You must relate your ideas to relevant contextual factors and ideas from your critical reading.

- Traditional reading of the play: Othello is destroyed by jealousy (Iago warns Othello 'Beware my lord / The green-eyed monster which doth mock / The meat it feeds on' [III, 3, 167–168]) [AO1, AO2]
- Othello initially rejects accusations of jealousy (Think' that I make a life of jealousy / Otherwise ('I had been happy if the general camp / Flowers and all, had tasted her sweet love' [III, 3, 346–348]), though in his final speech he denies a susceptibility to jealousy being wrought, / Perplexed by the game, [V, 2, 341–342]). [AO1, AO2]
- Desdemona denies that Othello is jealous ('I think the sun where he was born / Drew moisture from his eyes' [III, 4, 20–21]) [AO1]
- Iago reveals himself as jealous through his soliloquies: jealous of Cassio for being awarded the promotion 'Meer prattle without practice / Is all his soldiery' [I, 1, 16–17]); jealous of Cassio may have slept with Emilia ('I do suspect the lusty Moor / Hath leaped into my arms like a poisonous mineral gnaw my inwards'; [II, 1, 276–278]; 'I fear Cassio with my night' [II, 1, 276–278]) [AO1, AO2]
- Emilia's insight into what jealousy is suggests personal experience ('But jealous souls / Not ever jealous for the cause, / But jealous for they're jealous. 'Tis a monster / Begun upon that which grows' [III, 4, 153–156]); significance of her metaphor. [AO1, AO2]
- Bianca's jealousy when Cassio asks her to copy the pattern in the handkerchief ('This is the handkerchief' [III, 4, 175]) [AO1]
- Kastan: Shakespeare resists easy answers about who or what is responsible for tragedy; he ascribes Othello's tragic fall to his jealousy [AO5]
- Mack: role of madness in tragedy (Othello is driven mad through jealousy – epileptic) [AO5]
- Loomba: contemporary beliefs that blacks and Muslims were prone to jealousy [AO5]

Question 5

Explore how Shakespeare portrays the relationship between state and private affairs in *Othello*. You must relate your ideas to relevant contextual factors and ideas from your critical reading.

- *Othello* is a domestic tragedy – a husband's murder of his wife for alleged infidelity – warfarer's private life [AO1]
- Othello is a domestic tragedy because he is respected for his service to the state he will be respected for his private behaviour, e.g. when Iago warns him that Brabantio knows of his private life 'I have done the signior / Shall out-tongue his complaints' [I, 2, 18–19]). [AO1]
- Parallel between I, 2 and the final scene where Othello hopes his public service will be rewarded 'I have done the state some service and they know't' [V, 2, 335]). [AO1]

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- When Desdemona elopes with Othello, Brabantio views this as a matter of state importance. Duke and Senate in I, 3 [AO1]
- Private affairs impact on the state: Cassio's drunkenness may be a personal matter, but he cannot control himself in a military situation and thus he is stripped of his position; Othello's manipulations renders him incapable of behaving in a statesmanlike way (e.g. his behaviour in Venice: IV, 1, 203–253) [AO1]
- By drawing an analogy between the Turkish attempted invasion of Cyprus and Othello's situation, Shakespeare could be suggesting that state and private affairs cannot be kept completely separate.
- Bradley: Shakespeare's tragic heroes are persons of high degree and Othello is no exception. In the Republic, he is seen in the Council Chamber of the Senate at the beginning of the play. His position never leaves him. 'Othello's actions affect the welfare of a whole nation'. [AO1]
- Loomba: the state and private affairs were often 'equated in contemporary political discourse'.

Question 6

Explore Shakespeare's presentation of honesty and deception in *Othello*. You must relate your ideas to relevant contextual factors and ideas from your critical reading.

- At the crux of the presentation of honesty and deception stands the figure of Iago: he presents himself as inherently duplicitous ('I am not what I am' [I, 1, 66]) yet other characters are so to an extent that they repeatedly call him 'honest Iago' [AO1, AO2]
- Iago's soliloquies – do they allow him to be honest to the audience? [AO2]
- The tragedy results from Iago's ability to deceive Othello into believing Desdemona is unfaithful on common stereotypes about women as fundamentally untrustworthy [AO1, AO2]
- Iago admits that he will exploit two fundamentally good and honest people – Cassio and Othello that they are speaking falsehoods (II, 3, 320–329) [AO1]
- In their encounter in IV, 2, Othello charges Desdemona with dishonesty and refuses to believe her honesty and loyalty: her words count for nothing (IV, 2, 32–38) [AO1]
- Iago's plot unfolds when Emilia realises the role the handkerchief played and is compelled to reveal Iago's attempts to silence her (V, 2, 223–230) – resistant woman: ultimately honesty.
- Othello's storytelling – is he anxious about how people perceive him and does not want to be deceived? Or is he complicit in a deception of characters and the audience in his image of himself? Or does he deceive himself about how he is? [AO1, AO5]
- Bradley: Othello's anxiety to be judged by the world [AO5]
- Leavis: Othello's 'astounding trick'; he fails to be honest with himself [AO5]

Question 7

Explore Shakespeare's presentation of relationships between men and women in *Othello*. You must relate your ideas to relevant contextual factors and ideas from your critical reading.

- Relationships lie at the heart of the play and are the trigger of the tragedy [AO1, AO2]
- Contemporary view that the woman, on marriage, passes from the father to her husband. Brabantio in front of the Senate when he asks her to whom she owes obedience (I, 3, 18–21)
- Othello and Desdemona's relationship is initially characterised by love and freedom. Desdemona wooing Othello; she asks to travel with him to Cyprus and Othello asks that permission be bounteous to her mind' (I, 3, 261) [AO1, AO2]
- Thanks to Iago's manipulations, Othello quickly succumbs to stereotypical views of women as 'whores' and 'lascivious' ('Are not you a strumpet?' [IV, 2, 81]). He justifies killing Desdemona as a 'must die, else she'll betray more men.' [V, 2, 6]). [AO1, AO2, AO3]
- Iago depicted as inherently misogynistic: describes women using contemporary stereotypes: 'doors, bells in your parlours... housewives in your beds' (II, 1, 8–11) [AO1, AO2, AO3]
- Iago treats Emilia with little love and much contempt while she appears anxious to please him. 'You have a thing for me? It is a contract with Iago.' [III, 3, 303–304]). [AO1]
- Woman's desire to please is a trait shared by all the female characters: Desdemona ('even his stubbornness, his checks, his frowns – / have grace and favour in them.' [I, 3, 261]) and Emilia ('even his stubbornness, his checks, his frowns – / have grace and favour in them.' [I, 3, 261]) [AO1, AO2]
- Emilia's speech that women's infidelity can be attributed to men's mistreatment of them: 'I do think it is their husbands' faults / If wives do fall' [IV, 3, 82–83]) [AO1, AO2]
- Honigsmann: ultimately Emilia places her love for Desdemona over and above her loyalty to Iago.
- Loomba: *Othello* as a 'fantasy of interracial love'; through Iago's machinations Othello's belief of the 'inherent duplicity' of women; contemporary English view of sixteenth-century women: 'a place for female deviance' [AO3, AO5]

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Question 8

Explore Shakespeare's presentation of the importance of reputation in *Othello*. You must relate your ideas and ideas from your critical reading.

- Reputation is a key concern for many male characters in *Othello* [AO1]
 - Iago: knows he has a good reputation as a military figure and is thus offended by being made deputy over him ('by the faith of man, / I know my price, I am worth no worse a soldier than he. / Cassio and Othello have slept with Emilia suggests he should be concerned about his reputation') [AO1]
 - Cassio: feels he has lost his reputation when Othello demotes him following his drunken brawl ('O, I have lost my / reputation!') [II, 3, 242–243] [AO1]
 - Othello: like Iago, perceives Desdemona's alleged infidelity to be a threat to his reputation as the general commander of the army and all, had tasted her sweet body / So I had nothing left but to / To lose my reputation following the murder of Desdemona so he tries to shape the other characters' and the audience's final impression of him
- Cassio's comments on reputation (II, 3, 242–244) reflect contemporary views of human nature as a mix of animal and spiritual elements ('I have lost the immortal part of myself, and what / remains is bestial') [AO1, AO2, AO3]
- Iago's scornful response to Cassio's concern about his reputation ('Reputation is an idle / show, got without merit and lost without deserving' [II, 3, 247–248]) is in stark opposition to his own actions as he begins manipulating him into believing Desdemona is unfaithful ('he that filches from my poor indeed' [III, 3, 160–162]) [AO1, AO2]
- Bradley: Othello, like all Shakespeare's tragic heroes, is a person of 'high degree'. As a result of his high position, in his final speech he shows a desire 'not to be misjudged by the world' [AO2, AO5]
- Leavis: Othello's final speech is a mode of self-dramatisation (creating a role of a martyr) [AO2, AO5]
- Loomba: reputation of Venice in early seventeenth-century England [AO3, AO5]

Question 9

Explore Shakespeare's presentation of power in *Othello*. You must relate your ideas and ideas from your critical reading.

- Different types of power presented in the play: military, political, physical, racial, rhetorical
- Military: Venice as a naval power in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; Turkish threat; Othello's powerful military figure; Iago's military experience and expertise ('I, of whom his eye / Hath sought out to do the business of Cyprus') [II, 3, 242–243] [AO1, AO3]
- Political: Othello's position as the Duke and the Senate in Venetian society – overrule Brabantio's daughter's husband ('Good Brabantio, take up this mangled matter at the best:' [I, 3, 270–271]) [AO1, AO2]
- Physical: men fighting in the streets (II, 3; V, 1); male power over women – Othello's power over Desdemona – Othello and Iago murder their wives (V, 2); Othello's suicide [AO1]
- Racial: play reflects contemporary view that whites were inherently superior to black people in I, 1; the Duke's comment ('Your son-in-law is far more fair than black' [I, 3, 270–271]) [AO1, AO2]; between white skin and virtue; Iago exploits Othello's status as an outsider to Venetian society ('In Venice they do let God see the pranks / They dare not show their / Othello then internalises this sense of inferiority ('Haply for I am black...' [III, 3, 265]) [AO1, AO2]
- Rhetorical: Othello is the exponent of rhetorical power – wins Desdemona with his story of his past ('the dangers I had passed' [I, 3, 166]), and also wins over the Senate ('I think this tale / Will win the Senate' [II, 3, 170]); at the end he returns to storytelling mode in an attempt to shape the final impression ('Of one that loved not wisely, but too well;' [V, 2, 339–340]) [AO1, AO2]
- Manipulative: Iago deceives Othello through the power of manipulation: his language is designed to make Othello say anything directly ('For Michael Cassio, / I do love him, and I think that he is honest') [II, 3, 242–243] [AO1, AO2]
- Status: Brabantio exerts his high status over Othello and Iago in the opening scene ('I am the Duke of Venice') [AO1, AO2]
- Bradley: Shakespeare's tragedies centre around a person of 'high degree'; the fall of a person from 'power' to 'powerlessness' [AO3, AO5]
- Honigsmann: Iago is undone by the power of love (Emilia's for Desdemona) [AO5]
- Leavis: Othello's rhetorical power at the end of the play [AO2, AO5]
- Loomba: contemporary view of the inferiority of blacks and of Venice as a site of military power [AO3, AO5]

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Question 10

Explore Shakespeare's presentation of the idea of duty in *Othello*. You must relate relevant contextual factors and ideas from your critical reading.

- Duty to the state [AO1, AO3]
 - Othello is a dutiful member of the state ('I have done the state some service' [I, 1, 25])
 - unquestioning obedience to the commands issued by the Duke to go to Cyprus
- Duty to one's superior [AO1, AO3]
 - Othello expects Cassio to be dutiful when on the new watch ('Let's teach our swords / Out-sport discretion' [II, 3, 2–3]) [AO1]
 - after the night-time drunken brawl, Othello reprimands Cassio for forgetting 'all places / That but with duty ought incline us then' [II, 4, 25–26]
 - Iago falsely claims to be acting in the name of duty when revealing his suspicions about Desdemona: 'I have reason / To think the general loves me and duty that I bear you / With franker spirit' [II, 1, 30–32]
- Marital duties [AO1, AO3]
 - Emilia is Desdemona's confidante and reminds her of her duties to her husbands: [AO1, AO3]
 - Desdemona steals Desdemona's handkerchief for Iago (III, 3, 294–301)
 - in I, 3 before the Senate Desdemona confirms that her duty now is to her husband
 - Desdemona's desire to win back Othello after he has lost his temper with her: 'Will't please you I may answer that? / Again?' [IV, 2, 148]
 - the dying Desdemona refuses to blame Othello for her death, telling Emilia to her, 'Nobody; I myself' (V, 2, 125)
 - Othello kills Desdemona because he believes she has been an undutiful wife
 - Emilia suggests that when husbands 'slack their duties' (IV, 3, 83) it is understandable [AO1, AO3]
- Duty and duplicity
 - Iago describes two types of servants: those that are truly 'duteous and knee-crooking' and those that are 'trimmed in forms and visages of duty' (I, 1, 50) and just use duty as a means to gain as a result. Iago belongs to the latter category ('And such a one do I profess' [I, 1, 50]) [AO1, AO2, AO3]
- Bradley: in his final speech Othello reminds the characters on stage – and the audience – of his duty to the state [AO2, AO5]
- Honigsmann: ultimately Emilia places her duty as a friend (to Desdemona) over and above her duty to Iago

Question 11

Explore Shakespeare's presentation of friendship in *Othello*. You must relate your contextual factors and ideas from your critical reading.

- Value placed on male friendships – homosocial bonds – in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England. The sense of duty and loyalty of the central male characters in the play amplifies that sense of friendship. Iago's accusation of sharing a bed with Cassio ('I lay with Cassio lately' [III, 3, 414]) is a serious charge [AO1, AO3]
- Cassio and Othello: Cassio knew of Othello's courtship of Desdemona 'from first to last' [I, 3, 100]. At the end of the play, Cassio describes Othello as 'great of heart' (V, 2, 221) [AO1]
- Desdemona and Emilia:
 - The fact Othello interrogates Emilia about Desdemona's behaviour and possible infidelity ('Did you see her? / When she was last with you?' [IV, 2, 1]) shows he knows the women are close [AO1]
 - Emilia's robust defence of Desdemona to Othello ('I durst, my lord, to wager she is true / And in her womb / I'll prove that she is true' [IV, 2, 11–12]) [AO1]
 - Othello's words imply that Emilia may have sometimes shared a bed with Desdemona ('I'll see thee / There' [IV, 3, 8]) [AO1, AO2]
 - Desdemona seeks advice about men from Emilia – views her as an experienced friend ('I'll tell thee / What I think – tell me, Emilia – / That there be women do abuse their husbands / In such deep lechery' [IV, 3, 20–23]) [AO1, AO2]
 - Emilia's loyalty to Desdemona shown in her response to her murder ('O, the more devil!' [V, 2, 131–132]) [AO1, AO2]
 - Ultimately Emilia's loyalty to Desdemona overrides her loyalty to Iago, and she helps Desdemona escape ('I'll not / And get you home. / I will not' [V, 2, 221]) [AO1]
- Against these two true and enduring friendships (Cassio and Othello; Desdemona and Emilia) Iago generates two false friendships with two other characters: [AO1, AO2]
 - Iago and Roderigo: Iago sees the financial advantage of Roderigo and uses him as a puppet in his pursuit of Desdemona [AO1]
 - Iago and Cassio: Iago gives sound advice to Cassio following his demotion, but only to manipulate him [AO1]
 - Iago and Othello: Iago persuades Othello to believe he has his best interests at heart by manipulating him about Desdemona and Cassio [AO1]
- Honigsmann: ultimately Emilia places her loyalty to, and friendship with, Desdemona above her loyalty to Iago

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Question 12

Explore Shakespeare's presentation of conflict in *Othello*. You must relate your ideas and ideas from your critical reading.

- Different types of conflict presented: military conflict between nations; family conflict; inner conflict [AO1]
- Military conflict
 - Threat posed by Turkey against Cyprus situates the play in the 1570s when Cyprus was attacked and subsequently conquered by the Turks [AO1, AO3]
 - Dramatic function of Venice – Turkey conflict: removes the characters from their strange, unknown place where they are without their support structures (family, friends)
 - Symbolic function of the conflict echoes perceived threat of the relationship between Othello and Desdemona
- Family conflict
 - Conflict between Desdemona and Brabantio over her marriage to Othello [AO1]
 - Brabantio perceives Desdemona to be rejecting him as her father and what he wants is a child than get it' [I, 3, 189]) [AO1]
 - Father–daughter conflict is a recurring theme in Shakespeare plays (Juliet and Paris and Shylock) [AO1, AO3]
- Sexual/marital conflict
 - Conflict between Othello and Desdemona over her alleged infidelity culminates in Othello's murder of Desdemona
 - Iago's conflict with Emilia when she reveals the truth about the handkerchief to Othello
 - Cassio's conflict with Bianca when she becomes jealous over the handkerchief
- Racial conflict
 - Othello's race brings him into conflict with other characters: Iago and Roderigo use stereotypes to upset Brabantio ('an old black ram / Is tupping your white ewe' [I, 3, 189]) Othello must have bewitched Desdemona to make her fall for him [AO1, AO2]
- Inner conflict
 - Othello is torn between wanting to believe Desdemona is pure and faithful and the possibility that she is false, O then heaven mocks itself; / I'll not believe it' [III, 3, 279–280]) [AO1]
 - But, compared to Shakespeare's other tragedies there is less inner conflict in *Othello* as Iago never wavers from his course [AO1, AO3]
- Audience's conflicting responses to the characters: we hate Iago but are also drawn by him; we love Othello but also infuriate and angry with him; we sympathise with Desdemona but are conflicted as her response may have changed over time [AO2, AO3, AO5]
- Nuttall: audience's conflicted response to tragedy (pleasure and horror) [AO5]
- Honigsmann: audience's changing and conflicted response to Iago [AO5]
- Loomba: early seventeenth-century conflicting responses to Venice; conflicting aspects of Othello [AO3, AO5]

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Edexcel A Level Student Self- or Peer-Mark Scheme

This mark scheme takes the ideas given in the A Level Edexcel mark scheme and combines them with this to check your own or your peers' work and identify areas to work on.

Level		Level 1
Key words		Descriptive
Skills to demonstrate in your work	AO1	I demonstrate my knowledge of the text*
	AO1	I present an imaginative and sustained argument in my writing
	AO1	I use literary terminology and concepts in my work
	AO1	I express myself clearly and with precision
	AO1	I use references to the text to support my argument
	AO2	I analyse the language used by the author and how they affect meaning
	AO3	I understand how context is important to the text
	AO3	I create links between context and the text
	AO5	I refer to different interpretations
	AO5	I use different interpretations to support and develop my own ideas

*This does not appear in the Edexcel SAMs mark scheme

NB AO4 is not marked in Paper 1 Section A

Best area:

Areas to work on:

Teachers should refer to the mark schemes given on the Edexcel website for marking and to ensure students

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Essay Answer Breakdown

In this section of the resource you will find focused activities on examination essays. Using sample essay questions listed on p. 50, the activities include selecting quotations and points to include in an essay, and marking and critiquing sample essays.

Question 3

Explore Shakespeare's use of the settings of Venice and Cyprus in *Othello*. Consider relevant contextual factors and how they inform your critical reading.



Activity 1

Listed below are some points that could be included in an essay answering this question. Find at least one quotation or episode from the play to illustrate each point.

	Venice	
Historical context: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reality Perceptions 	Hub of international trade and melting pot of different cultures Sexually lascivious women Italian emotions and passions	Venetian colonialism and the Muslim threat
Dramatic significance and contribution to the plot	Audience's view of Venice creates expectations from outset	Move to Cyprus from their familiar alien setting makes Othello vulnerable Dramatic irony
Symbolic purpose	Venice represents the West / Christian values	Cyprus as a site of attack from the East
Critical views	Idealised Venice and contemporary criticism of perceptions	

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Activity 2

Listed below are points that could be used in an essay answering this question.

Sequence them in the order that you think would make the most effective and persuasive.

a	Venice as a symbol of order and civilisation in contrast to Cyprus.
b	Ania Loomba: an Othello's conflicted response to Venice's openness.
c	By taking his characters from Venice to Cyprus, Shakespeare removes them from their natural environment, placing them in a strange location where they are isolated from their support systems and thus become more susceptible to Iago's machinations.
d	Both Venice and Cyprus were important places at the time <i>Othello</i> was written. Shakespeare draws on the geographical and political significance of these two locations for symbolic and dramatic purposes.
e	Importance of Cyprus's geographical position as a Christian outpost close to the Ottoman Empire under Venetian rule in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries; conquered by the Ottomans in the 1570s.
f	While Shakespeare exploits real historical places in <i>Othello</i> , the greater importance of Cyprus is their symbolic and dramatic significance and how these contribute to the play.
g	Venice's location made it an important trading port between Western Europe and the East, a meeting point of different cultures.
h	Venice was associated with immorality, particularly that of the women. Iago uses this to unsettle Othello.
i	Implied parallel between Cyprus and Desdemona: both under threat from Iago's machinations.

Activity 3

Write the essay.

You may find it helpful to use the points from Activity 2 above to guide you, but you are not constrained by it.

Then compare what you have written with the model answer below. Use the accompanying commentary, and the student-friendly marking scheme, to identify the strengths of your work and areas for improvement. Then take one paragraph of your essay and rewrite it.

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Question 3

Explore Shakespeare's use of the settings of Venice and Cyprus in *Othello*. Use your ideas to relevant contextual factors and ideas from your critical reading.

In the opening years of the seventeenth century *Othello* was written and Venice and Cyprus were important places geographically, politically and culturally. Shakespeare reflects the realities when using these locations in his tragedy, but also exploits them for symbolic purposes.

Situated at the head of the Adriatic Sea, Venice's location had helped it to become a bridge between Western Europe and the rest of the world by the time of *Othello*. As Venice became a 'melting pot' of different cultures, drawing people from far and wide, in the play the audience learns that not only has Cassio, originally from Florence, travelled to Venice (admittedly not a particularly long journey), but so too has Othello, a 'Moor' and a foreigner. The racial diversity of Venice at the time is often highlighted nowadays in film. In the opening scene of Oliver Parker's 1995 film of *Othello*, a black man and white woman, clearly not Othello and Desdemona – are seen together in a gondola. Then in 2008, the director of an RSC production of *Othello* to cast a black actor, Lucian Msamati, could be argued that this casting was done to challenge the conventional reading of racism, it could also be interpreted as highlighting Venice as a place of racial diversity.

Like Venice, Cyprus's geographical position is significant. Situated in the Eastern Mediterranean, between the Muslim world, it was an important territory for the Christian West. Under Venetian rule from the fifteenth century until the late sixteenth century, Cyprus was under repeated attack and was eventually conquered by the Ottoman Empire in the 1570s.

Shakespeare would have known that many in his audiences would have had views on Venice that would shape their response to the play. As the critic Ania Loomba has argued, views on Venice have been conflicted. Venice was admired by the English for its openness, but it was also something to be wary of. While its open borders had brought Venice wealth and power, it also drew foreigners – from different religious and cultural backgrounds – could also create tensions. Shakespeare also explores this in *The Merchant of Venice*. Brabantio could be seen to have a similar response in his attitude to Othello. Othello tells the Duke and Senate that Brabantio 'Still questioned [him] the story of [his] life / From year to year' (I, 3, 36-37). Brabantio cannot endure the prospect of Othello as a son-in-law, accusing him of seducing Desdemona. Considering the course the play takes, it could have been interpreted as a warning of the dangers of being open and welcoming to foreigners.

Venice in particular – and Italy in general – was often viewed by the English as a place of corruption and immorality. Iago draws on this popular view in his manipulation of Othello, telling him 'do let God see the pranks / They will as soon show their husbands' (III, 3, 204-205). Othello's position as an outsider in Venice is also highlighted.

Shakespeare uses Venice positively to symbolise order and civilisation. This is contrasted with Cyprus, where disorder unfolds and characters act in unexpected ways. The order and sobriety and duty in Venice, becomes a drunken lout in Cyprus. Othello, a model husband in Venice, is seen in a different light in Cyprus. In the final scene of the play rebuts Brabantio's attacks on him by telling Iago and Cassio to 'Go, and be damned with your evil tongues'.

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loses his self-control, falling into an epileptic fit and striking Desdemona. As Loomba comments: 'Is this the noble Moor whom our full senate / Call all-in-all the best of Venice, as the home of the characters, is also used by Shakespeare to symbolise an environment from which they are torn. In Cyprus, they are isolated from their world, thus more susceptible to Iago's machinations. Desdemona expresses that sense of isolation when she is killing her, tells her – in error – that Cassio is dead: 'A' ... he is betrayed, and ...'

As well as isolating the characters, and ... ' ... is ... a descent from civilisation to ... the journey from Venice to Cyprus is ... the storm that accompanies it – to ... Because of the storm ... separated from both Cassio and Desdemona – ... separate ... the ... foreshadowing their later separation as a result of Iago's ... gentleman ... that Cassio and Othello were 'parted / With foul and violent ... words can be read metaphorically as well as literally.

The threat that the Turks pose to Cyprus, as well as being a historical fact, also ... the play. It is possible to see a parallel between Cyprus and Desdemona. Just ... from the heathen Turks, so Desdemona is invaded, metaphorically, by the outside ... appropriate, in structural terms, that Shakespeare brings Brabantio to report to ... the Senate and Duke as they are discussing the threatened Turkish invasion of ...

In conclusion, while Shakespeare uses real historical places of geographical, political ... his audiences, he also exploits their symbolic and dramatic significance to add ...

Commentary

This answer seems to best fit ... using the Edexcel mark scheme on p. 49.

- **A01:** the candidate shows detailed knowledge of the text, and uses appropriate ... developed ... line of argument which is clearly and precisely expressed ... and ... appropriately.
- **A02:** there is a clear focus throughout the essay on how Shakespeare is using Cyprus to create a particular interpretation of the text. There is some particular ... structural aspects of the text (contrast, foreshadowing), of symbolism and ... could be some scope to discuss the form of the play as a tragedy.
- **A03:** throughout the essay the candidate demonstrates particularly good knowledge ... (historical details, cultural perspectives) and how they impact on the meaning ...
- **A05:** good use is made of Loomba to discuss contemporary audiences' confidence ... how that might impact on interpretations of the play. The whole essay is ... different ways of reading the significance of the two locations, and there is ... play has been interpreted by film and theatre directors in the twenty-first century.

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Sample Answers with Marking Activity

In this section you will find two answers – one medium and one strong – for two of the four essays in total. Each essay is followed by two activities which will enable you to see how a candidate has done well and also how they could have improved the essay. Compare and develop your essay-writing skills.

Question 4

Explore Shakespeare's presentation of jealousy in *Othello*. You must relate your answer to relevant contextual factors and ideas from your critical reading.

Strong Answer

In Shakespeare's tragedy *Othello*, the protagonist Othello is often viewed as being flawed by a 'flaw' of jealousy. However, this is arguably an over-simplistic reading of the play. While Othello is presented as jealous at certain points in the drama, the jealousy of other characters is even more striking. In this refusal to provide easy answers or to give a straightforward reading of Shakespeare, as the critic Kastan notes, makes his tragedy even more tantalising.

The suggestion that Othello is a character prone to jealousy is created by Iago. In Act I, Iago warns Othello, warning him, 'O beware, my lord, of jealousy / It is the green-eyed monster which doth hide / This mortal beauty under his frown / He is the jealous creature which doth feed / On the green-eyed monster's meat it feeds on' (I, 3, 167–169). In fact, as Loomba points out, it is also a reflection of the beliefs that blacks and Muslims were particularly prone to jealousy.

Othello denies that he is an inherently jealous being: 'Think not that I am made of such stuff / As jealousy is made of' (III, 3, 341–342). In response to Iago's warning, and repeats the warning. At the end of the play, Othello is easily jealous but, being wrought, / Perplexed in 'extreme' (V, 2, 341–342). Othello as 'made of no such base stuff / As jealous creatures are' (III, 4, 23–24) and the handkerchief.

However, as both Desdemona and Othello are naive in their estimation of Iago, it serves to sympathise the inner truth of the man whom neither Desdemona (owing to her love for him) and Othello (a man whom F R Leavis argues is short on self-knowledge) are aware of. Othello is undeniably presented as jealous; for example, when he comments that Desdemona 'the general camp, / Pioners and all, had tasted her sweet body / So [he] had' (III, 3, 348). The supposed knowledge he now has that Desdemona has been unfaithful as the play progresses the signs of jealousy in Othello become more and more apparent. Othello's handkerchief, hits Desdemona in front of Lodovico, and becomes so overwrought that his language breaks down and he falls into an epileptic fit: 'Lie with her? Lie on her? / They belie / her' (IV, 1, 35–36). The epileptic fit, as a culmination of Othello's jealousy, is a version of the madness that the critic Maynard Mack argues afflicts all tragic heroes.

However, while there are points in the play where Othello is depicted as jealous, he is not a classically jealous character who is insecure about his wife's fidelity without any reason. Responding to Desdemona's protestations that she has given Othello no reason to be jealous, Othello responds that 'jealous souls will not be satisfied so, / They are not ever jealous for the cause, / 'Tis a monster begot upon itself, born on itself' (III, 4, 153–156).

In her definition, Emilia presents jealousy as an irrational emotion with no foundation. It becomes self-perpetuating. The fact she speaks with such authority on the subject of her husband, Iago, who is depicted as the truly jealous character in the play.

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From the outset Iago's jealousy is presented as an integral part of his character. He expresses his jealousy of Cassio for being awarded the promotion he believes he deserves. A more significant aspect of Iago's jealousy – considering his manipulation of Othello – is that Othello and Cassio have slept with Emilia. As he openly admits, the thought that his wife 'Doth like a poisonous mineral gnaw [his] inwards' (II, 1, 276–278). This fear provides one possible motive for what he does to Othello. It also challenges the reading of the play as being one in which jealousy is the affliction of the protagonist.

To further challenge any straightforward reading of the play, Shakespeare also introduces a female character, Bianca, who is also jealous. This shows that jealousy is not confined to one sex. Bianca is more like Cassio than Iago's. She only expresses jealousy when Cassio presents her with a handkerchief he has found in his chamber and asks her to copy the work: 'O Cassio, whence came this from a newer friend' (III, 4, 174–175). In fact Bianca's jealousy is arguably the most rational of all three characters, suggesting that it is an affliction that more to do with the image of the cuckolded husband that Othello alludes to when he tells Desdemona 'forehead' (III, 3, 286), a reference to the horns that supposedly grew on the adulterous wife's forehead.

In conclusion, Shakespeare uses jealousy as a mode of characterisation, as a key to render problematic any interpretations of what the play is about or who or what causes the tragic fall.

Activity 1

Annotate the essay showing where the candidate has used the different AOs (remember the Shakespeare essay is only assessed for AO1, AO2, AO3 and AO5).

Activity 2

Using the Edexcel assessment grid on p. 49, decide in which band you would place the essay and write a paragraph justifying your decision.

Medium Answer

Jealousy is a central theme in *Othello*. Many of the characters are afflicted with it, and the protagonist Othello, and it could be argued that it is jealousy that causes Othello's tragic fall.

A recurring image used to describe jealousy in the play is that of a monster. Iago, in his first soliloquy, describes it as 'the green-eyed monster which doth mock / The meagre / Pines and barren bones / Of one who loves it' (I, 3, 168). Later on Emilia gives a definition of jealousy in response to Desdemona's question 'Why do you call him jealous, who is so true?' (III, 3, 153). She says 'But jealous souls will not be satisfied with the cause, / But jealous for they're jealous. 'Tis a monster / Begun upon that which grows / Beyond all reach of reason' (III, 4, 153–56). Both definitions suggest jealousy is not something that can be easily understood or controlled. It is something that feeds upon itself and grows. This is the monster image seen in the play, where jealousy leads to the destruction of the person who experiences the emotion.

Both Bianca and Iago express jealousy at points in the play. When Cassio presents her with a handkerchief he has found in his chamber she is, not surprisingly, jealous. She asks 'O Cassio, whence came this from a newer friend' (III, 4, 174–175). She suggests that Cassio must be betraying her when she returns shortly afterwards and throws the handkerchief at her, saying 'This is some minx's token and I must take out the work? / There, give it her' (III, 4, 147–148). Her portrayal reflects common stereotypes of women as emotional and irrational at the time.

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Iago is another character who is presented as jealous. In the first scene of the play, Cassio has been awarded the promotion he so desperately wanted and feels he has been slighted. Further on in the play he also expresses sexual jealousy. In the same soliloquy he accuses Othello and Cassio of having slept with Emilia. Referring to Othello, he says: 'Hath leaped into my seat, the thought whereof / Doth like a poisonous mineral / Into my mind' (276–278). Referring to Cassio he says: 'I fear Cassio with my night-cap too' (279). Iago only expresses this jealousy in a soliloquy could suggest that he is ashamed of these feelings. It also means that only the audience knows how jealous he is. In his soliloquy, Iago uses a simile to compare his jealousy to a 'poisonous mineral' (II, 1, 278), which is a destructive thing. Iago's jealousy of Othello could well explain why he is so determined to destroy Othello.

Othello is the third character in the play presented as jealous, and his jealousy leads to his tragic fall. Although his jealousy is stirred by Iago's deeds, it does not take long for Othello to act on his jealousy. At the beginning of Act III, Scene 3, Othello says of Desdemona 'I do love thee;' (III, 3, 90–91). However, in less than 400 lines he is talking about 'death' (III, 3, 478) for Desdemona, which shows how quickly the jealousy has taken hold. Othello's decline reflects contemporary views of Muslims and blacks as more jealous than Christians.

In his book of literary criticism, *Poetics*, the philosopher Aristotle described how a fatal flaw which contributes to their fall. In Othello's case it is his jealousy which leads to his fall. At the beginning of the play Othello is held in high esteem by the Duke and Senate of Venice. The Duke calls for when he receives news of the threatened Turkish attack on Cyprus. Othello's jealousy causes him to lose many of the qualities which earn him respect: self-control, loyalty, and honesty. The Venetian Lodovico comments when he sees the jealous Othello strike Desdemona: 'O Moor whom our full senate / Do call all hearts sufficient?' (IV, 1, 255–256).

In conclusion, jealousy is a common theme running throughout *Othello* which leads to the tragic fall of the main characters.

Activity 1

Using the self- or peer-mark scheme (on p. 49), mark this essay.

Activity 2

While this essay has many strengths, the candidate has completely failed to meet the requirements of the task. Identify AT LEAST THREE PLACES in the essay where a critical view and so be inserted.

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Question 11

Explore Shakespeare's presentation of friendship in *Othello*. You must relate relevant contextual factors and ideas from your critical reading.

Strong Answer

While Shakespeare's *Othello* is primarily a play about sexual relationships and jealousy, it can also be interpreted as a play about friendship; what makes a true friend, for example, the ones between Cassio and Othello, Cassio and Desdemona and Emilia), and false friendship that Iago offers to other characters, notably Othello, Cassio and Desdemona.

The presentation of Iago's false friend is established in the opening scene of the play, where Iago tells Othello that, 'for necessity of present life, / [He] must show some love to his lieutenant' (I, 1, 154–155). The audience is thus alerted to his falseness from the outset. The characters, however, do not have this information and remain deceived by Iago for almost the whole play. Desdemona loves Othello, but is herself deceived by Iago, not realising that Iago is using his promises to help the love sick Roderigo gain Desdemona, he benefits from Roderigo's wealth by delivering jewels to Desdemona but failing to do so. It takes Roderigo until Act IV to realise that Iago has deceived him well: 'I do not find that thou deal'st justly with me' (IV, 2, 172). Iago also manipulates Desdemona by making her believe that she must do what he wants done but does not wish to do himself; for example, setting him up to kill Cassio. As Iago himself comments, he does not care who kills whom in this fight: 'Now I'll be true. / Or Cassio him, or each do kill the other, / Every way makes my gain' (V, 1, 20–22). Iago is expendable as he has got what he needs out of them.

That Iago views friendship as expendable and people as pawns to use for his own ends is known only to the audience and not to the characters. Iago gives sound reasons for his demotion by Othello for the night-time brawl in Act II, which he admits – via his soliloquy – is an incident to bring Othello down: 'For 'tis my honest fool / Plies Desdemona to get him to bed for him pleads strongly to the Moor, / I'll pour this pestilence into his ear: That he may lose his lust;' (II, 3, 320–322). In a similar way Iago persuades Othello to believe he has been deceived when telling him of Desdemona's affair with Cassio: 'now I shall have reason to say that I am not a liar' (III, 3, 195–196). However, throughout the play – particularly in his soliloquies – Iago's real nature and true attitude to his so-called friends is known only to the audience, not the characters.

This disparity between what the audience know and what the characters know contributes to much of the tension and dramatic impact of the play. A key way in which Shakespeare achieves this is through the recurring use of the adjective 'honest' by characters to describe Iago. The characters refer to Iago as honest while themselves being the principal victims of Iago's deception.

As well as the dramatic tension that is created through the dramatic irony of Iago's feigned honesty, Iago's false friendships create a striking contrast with the true friendships in the play, notably those between Cassio and Othello, and Desdemona and Emilia.

The close friendship between Cassio and Othello reflects the value placed on male friendship, often referred to as homosocial bonds, in Renaissance Europe. The military context of the play amplifies the focus on male closeness. For example, Iago's imagined scene of Othello with Desdemona – 'I lay with her' (III, 3, 414) – would not have been unusual at this time as the military world is a male world: Desdemona's request to accompany Othello to Cyprus is unexpected, although it is granted. The 2013 National Theatre production of *Othello* in a military setting – Iraq, Afghanistan came to mind – and there was a significant emphasis on a man's world with an emphasis and primacy on male friendships rather than on female ones.

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The closeness between Cassio and Othello is revealed through Iago's questioning, 'Will't please you / Unsettle and manipulate him. Othello admits that Cassio knew of his courtship last' (III, 3, 95). Furthermore, despite everything that happens and the fact that Iago says 'Within these three days let me hear thee say / That Cassio's not alive' (III, 3, 41), Iago does not tell Othello until the end. When Othello kills himself, Cassio says that he feared Othello was 'great of heart' (V, 2, 357). This idea that Cassio understands Othello's behaviour is developed in Oliver Parker's 1995 film *Othello* in which Cassio secretly tells Othello allowing him to commit suicide.

The other positive dimension of friendship in *Othello* is that between Desdemona and Emilia. The hierarchical relationship between the two women – as there is between Othello and Desdemona attending to Desdemona in Cyprus at Othello's request (I, 3, 292), the relationship between mistress and handmaid.

With the men being in Cyprus for military reasons it can be assumed that the women spend time in one another's company. In fact, once the characters arrive in Cyprus, the only time when Desdemona is on stage without Emilia: the only episodes are II, 3, 1–11 and V, 2, 1–85, though in the latter two scenes Emilia is present at certain points. Desdemona and Emilia are portrayed as spending more time in one another's company than Othello and Desdemona, reinforced by the fact that Othello interrogates Emilia about Desdemona's behaviour. 'You have seen nothing then?' (IV, 2, 1) – which suggests he knows the women are together. Desdemona to prepare herself for bed – in advance of his killing her – he tells Emilia (V, 2, 8) which implies the women have shared a bed on occasion.

For Desdemona, Emilia acts as a more experienced friend who can advise her on her relationship with Othello. Emilia whether she believes 'That many women do abuse their husbands / In the bed' (IV, 3, 60). Emilia's pragmatic view is 'where be some such, no question' (IV, 3, 60) – which suggests a naivety and a contrast between the two women as a contrasting pair.

The friendship between Emilia and Desdemona, like that between Othello and Desdemona, is an example of loyalty. Emilia defends Desdemona to Othello when he questions her loyalty, to wager she is honest, / Lay down my soul at stake' (IV, 2, 11–12). Her willingness to wager her soul on Desdemona's innocence is ironic considering that she loses her soul. At the end of the play, Emilia's loyalty to Desdemona overrides her loyalty to Othello for speaking out: 'Be wise and get you home. / I will not' (V, 2, 221). As the play progresses, ultimately Emilia places her loyalty to, and friendship with, Desdemona above her loyalty to Othello. The fact that Iago does not foresee that Emilia may do this highlights that, for Iago, he lacks the intelligence to recognise the importance of friendship and compassion. Emilia and Desdemona's friendship becomes the undoing of Iago.

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Activity 1

This candidate agrees with the critic Honigsmann that Emilia and Desdemona's friendship is the undoing of Iago. Argue against Honigsmann.

Activity 2

While this is a strong essay, it could obviously be improved. Read and mark the candidate three targets for improvement.

Medium Answer

Iago is a false friend to many of the characters in the play. His falseness is most evident when he tells Roderigo that, although he hates Othello, he is going to pretend to be his friend. Whenever Othello is on stage with Iago and thinks Iago likes him irony is created. In these notes, Iago is a very clever villain and his falseness is a key way in which he reveals his true nature.

What is very clever about Iago is that he claims to be helping his so-called 'friend' Othello, which makes it even more difficult for them to realise that he is not. For example, he tells Othello that he is telling him his suspicions about Desdemona's affair (III, 3, 196) he feels that he is helping Othello – and Othello believes him.

A similar thing happens in his friendships with Cassio and Roderigo. Both characters are loyal to him, but he is not. Only the audience knows what Iago really feels and they know that Iago is actually using these characters to help him achieve his ends; friendship is just a tool to exercise his villainy.

In fact, not only do the characters not realise Iago is a false friend, they also mistake him for a good person and a trusted friend. As a result they often refer to Iago as 'my friend'.

Although Iago is a false friend, there are positive depictions of friendship in *Othello*, such as that between Cassio and Othello and that between Emilia and Desdemona.

That Cassio is a trusted friend of Othello is clear from the fact that Othello tells Cassio to look after the courtship of Desdemona from the very beginning. This may explain why Othello chooses Iago, to be his deputy. Othello also entrusts Desdemona to Cassio's care for the night, which shows how much he trusts him.

Although Cassio is demoted by Othello after the night-time brawl in Cyprus, Othello later reinstates him. He is desperate to be reinstated, which is why he follows Iago's plan and asks Desdemona for help on his behalf. At the end of the play, after Othello has killed himself Cassio is promoted to lieutenant (V, 2, 357), which suggests he thinks very highly of him. It was common in Renaissance times to have very close friendships, and Othello and Cassio may be one example of this.

The other positive presentation of a friendship is that between Emilia and Desdemona. Desdemona's handmaiden, Desdemona is very reliant on her for advice. She often asks Emilia how men behave and what she should do in a certain situation. And Emilia is loyal to Desdemona; she tells Othello that Desdemona would not have had an affair, and in the final scene she defends Desdemona to Othello. As the critic Honigsmann argues, although Iago is clever, he is not as powerful as Emilia. Ultimately Emilia will prioritise her friendship with Desdemona over her marriage to Othello.

It is thus clear that friendships are important in *Othello*.

Activity 1

The candidate has not written an introduction for this essay and the conclusion is too long. Bearing in mind the argument(s) in the essay, write an introduction and a new conclusion for this essay.

Activity 2

Take one paragraph of this essay and rewrite it.

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Act Revision

Act	Summary	Key Themes	Setting
One	Iago tells Brabantio of his hatred of Othello, and the two men waken Desdemona's elopement with Othello. The couple defend their love to the Senate when Othello is called to lead a fleet to Cyprus against a Turkish invasion.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Racism Jealousy Love Women's lives 	Venice at night. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scene 1: outside Brabantio's house Scene 2: in the streets Scene 3: in the Duke and Senate's council chamber
Two	After a stormy journey the characters arrive in Cyprus. Iago begins to put his plan into action. He gets Cassio drunk when he is on the night watch. Cassio is dismissed from his duties by Othello.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relationships between men and women Manipulation Good versus evil 	Cyprus <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scene 1: on the shore in the day Scene 2: late afternoon the same day Scene 3: night-time
Three	Iago manipulates Othello into believing Desdemona and Cassio are having an affair. Emilia gives Desdemona's handkerchief to Iago who drops it in Cassio's chamber – he gives it to Bianca.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Jealousy Manipulation Relationships between men and women Views of black people 	Cyprus in the day.

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Act	Key Events	Key Themes	Setting
Four	Othello's jealousy culminates in an epileptic fit. Lodovico arrives in Cyprus from Venice and is shocked at the change in Othello (who strikes Desdemona). Othello's jealousy leads to a scene of being		Cyprus Appears to take place over one day, with Scene 3 being set in the late evening
Five	Iago sets up a night-time brawl between Cassio and Roderigo: the former survives, the latter is wounded by Cassio (and then killed by Iago). Othello kills Desdemona; Iago kills Emilia; Othello kills himself.		Cyprus, at night <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scene 1: in the streets Scene 2: in Desdemona's bedchamber

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Character Revision

Character	Key Ideas	Key Quotations	Language
Iago	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An ensign Name means 'deceiver' Optimistic Manipulative Compelling Quick-witted Persuasive Criminally intelligent Immoral Full of hate Jealous A liar 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'I am not what I am' (I, 1, 66) 'I hate the Moor' (I, 3, 368) 'an old black ram / Is tupping your white ewe' (I, 1, 89–90) 'I follow him to serve my turn upon him.' (I, 1, 41) 'Honest Iago' (I, 3, 290) 'She did deceive her father, marrying you;' (III, 3, 208) 'I speak not yet of proof.' (III, 3, 198) 'And what's he then that says I play the villain, / When this advire is free I give, and honest..' (II, 1, 264–305) 'Now, w'ill you be ruled by me, / Or I will Cassio be your lord, / For I will have the Moor / Turned to the Turk, / For I will have the Moor / Kill the other, / Every way / I take my gain.' (V, 1, 12–14) 'I do suspect the lusty Moor / Hath leaped into my seat' (II, 1, 276–277) 'I hope you will consider what is spoke / Comes from my love.' (III, 3, 218–219) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'I am not what I am' (I, 1, 66) Consistent characterisation Other characters are manipulated Appeals to the audience and reveals his true nature disagrees with the audience villain / parallel to the audience good?' (I, 3, 368) In his speech, he is fuelled by his hatred for the Moor
Emilia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cypriot Desdemona's maid and mother figure Loyal Cynical Worldly-wise Ultimately chooses good over evil 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'Who would not make her husband a cuckold, to make him a monarch?' (IV, 3, 72–73) 'O the more angel she, / And you the blacker devil.' (V, 2, 131–132) 'I have a thing for you' (III, 3, 303) 'But I do think it is / Your husbands' faults / If wives do err.' (III, 3, 32–83) 'You had best be well, / That men must lay / Their hands on your neck' (V, 2, 168–169) 'I will speak as liberal as the north.' (V, 2, 218) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Iago is the villain (III, 3, 368) in which she is the only one who is not IV, 2, 218 mistress brother Emilia's cynical marriage husband (IV, 3, 83)

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Character	Key Ideas	Key Quotes	Language
Desdemona	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Venetian Around 16–18 years old Her name means 'unfortunate' in Greek Determined Intellectual Dignity and respect Loving Loyal Forgiving Pure Able to defend herself verbally At times independent but at others submissive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'A most exquisite lady' (I, 3, 17) '...approve me for the dangers I had passed' (I, 3, 166) 'That I did love the Moor to live with him' (I, 3, 244) 'I'll watch him tame and talk him out of patience' (III, 3, 23) 'Beshrew me if I would do such a wrong' (IV, 3, 74) 'twas that hand that gave away my heart.' (III, 4, 41) 'The heavens forbid / But that our loves and comforts should increase, / Even as our days do grow.' (II, 1, 185–187) 'my love doth so approve him / That even his stubbornness, his checks, his frowns... have grown my food' (I, 3, 252) 'I have not deserved this' (IV, 1, 231) 'I do perceive here a divided duty:' (I, 3, 179) 'Nobody; I myself.' (V, 2, 125) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Brabantio: '...if she is / (I, 1, 87) Animal imagery: 'innocent' (I, 1, 90) Present tense: 'Cassio' (I, 1, 90) Othello: 'Desdemona' (I, 1, 90) 'fair was degenerate' (I, 1, 90) cunning
Roderigo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maltruly Envious Simple Desperate Poor judgement Weak In love with Desdemona 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'Thou Iago, who hast had my purse' (I, 1, 2) 'I'll sell all my land.' (I, 3, 364) 'I do not find that thou dealest justly with me' (IV, 2, 172) 'I will incontinently drown myself.' (I, 3, 301) 'she's full of most... condition.' (II, 1, 235–236) '...that hunts, / but one that fills up the cry.' (II, 3, 330–31) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Brabantio: 'showing' (I, 1, 97) His real present: 'my land' (I, 3, 364) Iago: 're' (I, 3, 364)

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Character	Key Ideas	Key Quotations	Language
Cassio	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Florentine Inexperienced soldier Concerned with reputation and honour Weakness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'Mere practice without practice / Is all his soldiers' (I, 1, 26–27) '... is a most exquisite lady' (II, 3, 17) 'our great captain's captain' (II, 1, 74) 'The riches of the ship is come on shore!' (II, 1, 83) 'Reputation, reputation, reputation!' (II, 3, 242) 'I have very poor and unhappy brains / for drinking.' (II, 3, 28–29) 'So hangs and lolls and weeps upon me, so hales and pulls me.' (IV, 1, 134) 'What do you mean by this haunting of me?' (IV, 1, 142) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Imagery Metaphors Hyperbole His speech 'The riches of the ship is come on shore!' (II, 1, 83) His command Love of his reputation
Brabantio	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Venetian senator High opinion of himself and his status Often difficult to sympathise with him Materialistic Impatient 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'Fathers from hence trust not your daughters' minds' (I, 1, 169) 'She is abused, stolen from me, and corrupted' (I, 3, 60) 'thou foul thief! Where hast thou stowed my daughter?' (I, 2, 62) 'thou hast enchanted her' (I, 2, 63) 'I had rather to adopt a child than get it.' (I, 3, 189) 'She has deceived her father and may thee' (I, 3, 289) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Believes in magic 'My spirit is in command' (I, 1, 10) Accuses Desdemona 'Against my will' (I, 3, 10) Mocks the Duke lose it (I, 3, 20)

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Minor Characters

Character	Scene	Actions / Speech	
Duke	Act I, Scene 3	Oversees the night-time meeting to discuss Venice's response to the Turkish attack on Cyprus. Orders Cassio to lead the attack against the Turks. Promises Brabantio he will take action against the man who has 'stolen' Desdemona, until he discovers that it is Othello – then tries to persuade Brabantio to accept Othello as an acceptable son-in-law.	His response is held in check for his respect for the marriage and tolerant Desdemona's desire to suggest to women
Montano (Governor of Cyprus)	Act II, Scene 1	Speaks to two gentlemen about the terrible storm that has just taken place and greets Cassio, the first to arrive on the island.	The Venetian position of Othello is symbolic and ordered on the basis of the opening (itself a unnatural then ex drunken murder command instrument at the end of the in
	Act II, Scene 3	Orders those on watch to take up their positions after the night-time carousing. Speaks to Iago about Cassio's drunkenness and his concern that Othello places so much trust in Cassio. Tries to stop the drunken Cassio beating Roderigo, and is seriously wounded by Cassio.	
	Act II, Scene 2	Enters in response to Emilia's cries for help on her discovery that Desdemona has been murdered. Responds to Othello's admission that he has murdered Desdemona with 'O monstrous act!' (II, 2, 489). Sets out in pursuit of Iago, after he has absconded having killed Emilia, leaving instructions to others to kill Iago should he return. Returns to the bedchamber with Iago as prisoner, but does not speak for the remainder of the play.	
Clown (Othello's servant)	Act III, Scene 1	He converses with the musicians who, organised by Cassio in an attempt to make amends for his behaviour the night before, are playing outside Othello's bedchamber. His initial comments are full of innuendo, and then he sends away the musicians saying that Othello does not 'greatly care' (III, 1, 16) to hear music. He is then asked by Cassio to take a message to Desdemona saying he would like to speak to her.	All Shakespeare's comic figures the Fool is a much character tragicomic He appears begins his immediate brought declared end the light relief audience appears well being more than noting the Clown
	Act III, Scene 4	In response to Desdemona's question about where Cassio lives, the Clown quibbles, plays on words and refuses to give a clear answer. Desdemona sends him to Cassio to tell him she has pleaded his case with Othello and is optimistic that all will be well.	

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Character	Scene	Actions / Speech	
Bianca	Act III, Scene 4	Bianca complains to Cassio that she has not seen him for the past week. She appears jealous when he gives her Desdemona's handkerchief and asks her to copy the pattern, and appears resigned at the end of their conversation to the fact that she loves him and that he loves her.	A courtier Cassio's female Desdemona only app importan characte
	Act IV, Scene 1	Bianca comes on stage and returns the handkerchief to Cassio, complaining that it must belong to another of his lovers. She gives him an ultimatum: either he dines with her that evening, or he is never welcome again.	Othello gives her She also who, in neglect behavior and abo to and a
	Act V, Scene 1	Bianca hears the cries of the fighting and comes on stage. She is distressed to discover that Cassio has been wounded. Iago accuses her of involvement; both he and Emilia insult her for her profession, calling her 'strumpet' (V, 1, 78, 121?) but Bianca says she leads as 'honest' a life as those who abuse her (V, 1, 122). She exits the stage for the final time.	Another encoura about her behavior which, in play pre also com in a pros purity, th any easy V, 1, she abusers her abus that she another husband have 'aff frailty lik words se
Lodovico (a noble Venetian and relation of Brabantio)	Act IV, Scene 1	Lodovico arrives in Cyprus bringing a letter to Othello from the Duke which summons him back to Venice. Lodovico witnesses Othello's changed behaviour, including him hitting Desdemona, and he comments on how no one in Venice would believe Othello would act in this way. He speculates that Othello may have lost his mind.	Like Mo noble Ve order. He located i
	Act IV, Scene 3	Lodovico enters the stage mid-conversation with Othello and Desdemona and bids them both good night.	Lodovic the play consum to lose h
	Act V, Scene 1	Comes on stage with Gratiano - see below - in response to the sword fight. He expresses his uncertainty about approaching the fight until they have established what is actually happening, and then converses with Iago, whom he describes to Gratiano as 'a very valiant fellow' (V, 1, 52).	Lodovic extent to result of

Character	Scene	Actions / Speech	
Lodovico (a noble Venetian and relation of Brabantio) <i>cont.</i>	Act V, Scene 2	He enters the bedchamber with the wounded Cassio and Iago, who has been caught following his murder of Emilia and attempt to flee. He takes charge of the proceedings, denouncing Othello and ordering that his weapons be removed. He conducts an informal trial, interrogating Iago about the attack on Cassio and disclosing the information that he found in letters on Roderigo's person. He strips Othello of his power, gives Cassio the rule of Cyprus and orders that, if possible, Iago be tortured to force a confession. The final words of the play are his as he discharges his final instructions and then prepares to return to Cyprus and report the dreadful events.	The way proceed his function and order direction Iago in A susceptible anyone
Gratiano (Brabantio's brother)	Act V, Scene 1	He enters the stage with Lodovico in response to the fight. His comments and questions show his attempts to make sense of what has happened and who is involved.	Gratiano very smart have and does not final act
	Act V, Scene 2	He enters the bedchamber with Montano in response to Emilia's cries of 'Murder' (V, 2, 166). On discovering Desdemona is dead he utters a short speech, addressing her directly, and saying he is glad that Brabantio is dead as his rage might have encouraged Iago to commit a mortal sin (murder of Iago, which would have led to his damnation). He challenges Iago for daring to threaten Emilia with his sword and warns Othello not to use a weapon. After Othello kills himself he utters, 'All that's spoke is marred!' (V, 2, 353), suggesting that everything Othello said in his final speech is undone through his act of suicide.	His key close relation and thus personal have lost Gratiano Desdemona (from a her elop tragedy immediate

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Revising the Themes of the Play

- a) Ideas for the mind map might include – but are not confined to:

Jealousy:

- 'O beware, my lord of jealousy: / It is the green-eyed monster which doth mock (III, 3, 167–169)
- Iago's jealousy of Cassio and Othello; Othello's jealousy of Cassio; Bianca's jealousy
- Desdemona believes Othello is not jealous.
- In his final speech Othello describes himself as 'one not easily jealous' (V, 2, 342)

Power:

- Military power: exploited in Othello and Iago.
- Rhetorical power (power to use language to achieve certain ends): Othello (his fall begins with him); Iago (manipulates Othello through suggestion and hints).
- Power of high status: Brabantio, the Duke.
- Power through perceived racial superiority: Iago exploits Othello's otherness as

Identity:

- Othello's concern about his identity: shapes it through his 'storytelling' speeches
- Iago strips away Othello's identity as a civilised man and successful soldier: reduces him to a brute
- Iago pretends to be someone he is not: only the audience knows his true identity
- Many characters embody conflicting identities.

Race:

- Racist abuse of Othello by Iago and Roderigo in I, 1.
- Othello presents himself as an exotic figure through his storytelling in I, 3.
- Othello has earned respect as a military leader, but prejudiced views about inter-racial marriage.
- Iago disparages Cassio for coming from Florence (thus not a Venetian).

Marriage:

- Othello and Desdemona's marriage is presented as loving and voluntary union
- Iago's disdain for Emilia – and women in general (II, 1).
- As Othello's jealousy increases, so does Desdemona with increasing contempt
- Emilia's cynical view of marriage in IV, 3.

Love and Sex:

- Iago and Othello are consumed with jealousy at the prospect of being cuckolded
- Othello and Desdemona's marriage is based on love.
- Iago's references to sex.
- Cassio's relationship with Bianca.

Women's Lives:

- Women as property of husbands or fathers: Brabantio calls Othello 'foul thief' (I, 1)
- Women seeking to please their husbands: Emilia steals the handkerchief for Iago; Othello for killing her; Bianca endures Cassio's abuse of her.
- Desdemona presented as an independent-minded woman: encourages Othello
- Emilia ultimately betrays Iago through her loyalty to Desdemona.

Manipulation:

- Iago's manipulation of others: uses people to his own ends.
- Othello manipulates others' perception of him through his powerful storytelling

- b) Since the template is completed in great detail for the theme of Identity, answers are provided for the other themes: a personal response is required. However, for each theme some pointers are provided – 'The historical and social context' and 'Critical views' – as these may be more difficult to research.

Key Theme: Jealousy	
Historical and social context	Contemporary belief that blacks and Muslims were prone to jealousy. Contemporary views of women as inclined to infidelity and thus liable to be cuckolded; image of the cuckold.
Critical views	Loomba on the link between jealousy and race. Mack on madness (jealousy signalling a loss of control – Othello's epiphany)

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Key Theme: Power	
Historical and social context	The conflict between Venice and Turkey over Cyprus reflects real history. Power of perceived racial superiority of whites over blacks reflects colonialism. Battle for power between men and women.
Critical views	Leavis on Othello's use of rhetorical power to shape his audience's response. Honigsmann on Iago: 'he enjoys a profound sense of power'.

Key Theme: Race	
Historical and social context	Disparaging views of other (non-European) races of the time reflected in the play. Opposition to miscegenation (interbreeding): 'the devil will make a glorious game' (I, 3, 323). Exoticisation of other cultures – Othello's storytelling paints him as an exotic person (reflects some of the travellers' tales of the time).
Critical views	Loomba on race and society in <i>Othello</i> . Leavis on Othello's storytelling.

Key Theme: Marriage	
Historical and social context	Contemporary opposition to miscegenation (interbreeding): Brabantio discovers he is married to Desdemona. Contemporary belief that interracial relationships are unnatural: Brabantio calls Desdemona 'enchanted' (I, 2, 63). Iago exploits the view that women – particularly Venetian women – are easily deceived (III, 3, 204–205).
Critical views	Loomba on Othello's internalised misogyny. Honigsmann on Emilia's prioritising her relationship with Desdemona over her marriage to Iago.

Key Theme: Love and Sex	
Historical and social context	Contemporary attitudes to women: Cassio treats Desdemona as a divine being (II, 1, 73). Possible homoerotic interpretation of Iago's account of the night he seduced Desdemona (II, 1, 250–251). Reflects male military culture and the emphasis on homosocial bonds. Danger of excessive love unrestrained by reason – allowing the animal passions to take over.
Critical views	Loomba on Othello's internalised misogyny. Mack on madness in tragedy.

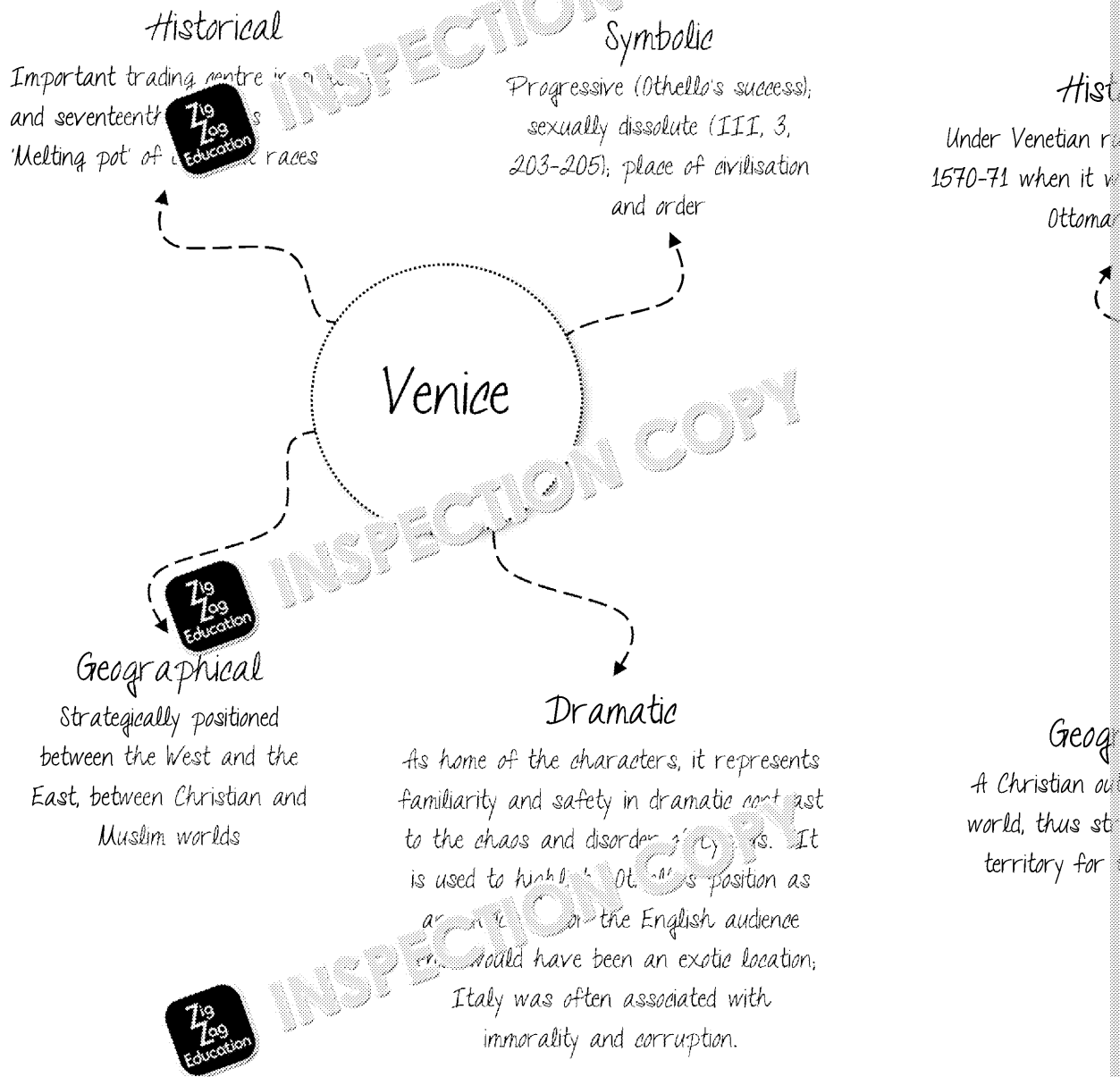
Key Theme: Women's Lives	
Historical and social context	Dichotomous attitude to women throughout the play: either idealised ('divine' [II, 1, 73]) or treated with contempt (Othello calls Desdemona a whore [II, 2, 350]). Always seen in relationship to men: Desdemona's duty is either to her father (I, 3, 176–187) or to her husband (II, 1, 250–251). Iago's commentary on women in II, 1, 100–157 reflects wide-ranging misogyny.
Critical views	Honigsmann on Emilia's ability to outwit Iago – the latter does not consider her a threat. Loomba on the misogyny of Othello.

Key Theme: Manipulation	
Historical and social context	Literary context of tragedy: the manipulation of the audience's response (pity – catharsis).
Critical views	Honigsmann on Iago's manipulation of the audience's responses to his actions. Nuttall on audience's response to tragedy over time.

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The Settings of the Play



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Other Settings

Night

1. **Act I, Scenes 1–3; Act II, Scene 3; Act IV, Scene 3; Act V, Scenes 1–2**
2. **Act I, Scene 1:** Roderigo and Iago wake up Brabantio to tell him Desdemona has eloped.
Act I, Scene 2: Cassio comes to tell Othello he is wanted by the Duke; on the way Othello meets Desdemona.
Act I, Scene 3: the Duke orders Othello to lead an army to Cyprus to repel the Turkish threat that Othello has bewitched Desdemona but Desdemona insists on her free choice of partner and goes back to Othello.
Act II, Scene 3: while on night watch Iago gets drunk and fights with Montano; afterwards he dismisses Cassio from his position.
Act IV, Scene 3: at Iago's bidding, Desdemona prepares for bed aided by Emilia.
Act V, Scenes 1–2: Roderigo's attack of Cassio, orchestrated by Iago, takes place but Roderigo is killed (killed by Iago); Desdemona is murdered by Othello and Emilia by Iago.
3. These night-time scenes are dramatically significant. The play opens with two characters who are the protagonist: the night-time setting is perfect for this atmosphere of conspiracy and the work of evil forces at work.
When events take place at night it can also create a sense of urgency, as seen in the night-time 'war cabinet' meeting to decide what to do about the Turkish threat against Cyprus.
The night-time revelries of Act II, Scene 3 provide the opportunity for Iago to ply Cassio with drink, leading to the fight and Cassio's dismissal. Night is the time when characters lose their civilised way – as Othello says, 'Are we turned Turks..?' (II, 3, 151).
It is thus highly appropriate that Othello kills Desdemona at night, suggesting he has been taken over by the powers of darkness.

The Council Chamber

1. The Duke has called an urgent meeting to discuss the Turkish threat against Cyprus, and a military general, is summoned to the meeting. Brabantio attempts to ambush the messenger but Othello has bewitched Desdemona, but his claim is proven hidden by Othello's story of her infidelity and her confident declaration of her love for her husband. The scene ends with Othello hearing Desdemona being granted her wish to accompany him.
2. The focus is on the Duke, Brabantio, Brabantio and Desdemona, who all speak at length and Othello is clearly the 'winner' as judged by the Duke. Being a 'war cabinet' meeting, it is particularly significant that Desdemona is given such a vocal role. If Iago and Roderigo are on stage for the whole scene, they say nothing until they are dismissed (from line 296), suggesting that, for all their bluster, they are regarded as of little importance.

The Bedchamber

1. Act IV, Scene 3, sometimes known as the 'willow scene', is a quiet, melancholic scene with Emilia – it provides a stark contrast to Act IV, Scene 2 in which Othello attacks Desdemona for infidelity, using the language of the brothel and prostitution. Act IV, Scene 3, by contrast, is innocent and naive Desdemona actually is with regards to sexual relationships. It is in this scene which Roderigo attacks Cassio in the street and then the murder of Desdemona; in the morning before the storm.
2. Act V, Scene 2 opens quietly: Desdemona is sleeping and Othello speaks calmly and of death. As Desdemona wakes at line 23 the atmosphere becomes increasingly agitated with characters speaking short, unfinished lines. As Othello strangles Desdemona at line 280, the conflict between the two characters. The conflict continues throughout the remainder of the scene. As the characters enter the room and Iago kills Desdemona towards the end – line 334 – Desdemona takes control and returns to her controlling mode before killing himself.
3. With the exception of Desdemona and Emilia named characters who are in Cyprus and are still alive, the bedchamber is the final scene. The bedchamber thus acts as a setting to go before the final scene. Othello is a key character in this scene, opening it and controlling it through his storytelling. Emilia's role is significant as she provides the key to reveal Iago's voice, like Desdemona's, is ultimately silenced by her husband. To that end this is a key role in this scene, speaking at length as he issues orders and makes the final decision forward. In contrast to Act I, Scene 3, Iago now exerts power through refusing to speak.

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The Motifs of Othello

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Motif	
The word 'honest'	<p>1. Used repeatedly about Iago by many characters: Othello (I, 3, 280; I, 3, 290; II, 3, 6; II, 3, 158; III, 3, 244; III, 3, 82; V, 1, 26); Cassio (II, 3, 302; III, 1, 38); Desdemona (III, 3, 5); Iago (II, 1, 193; II, 3, 245).</p> <p>2. Manipulation: Iago's powers of manipulation are shown through the belief that he is honest.</p> <p>3. Identity: the repeated use of the adjective 'honest' in relation to Iago for him: to the characters in the play he is honest, but to the audience and motives, he is anything but.</p> <p>4. Out of all Shakespeare's plays, <i>Othello</i> is the one in which the word 'honest' is used most frequently. Othello is led by Iago to believe that his true, pure wife is a figure of honesty – as Iago says of Othello, he 'thinks men honest that see's him as the plumed king'. The soliloquy is the key dramatic technique that gives the audience the sense of what is really going on. The repeated use of the word 'honest' in relation to Iago shows that the audience know that he is not, while the other characters are blind to his true nature.</p>
	<p>1. Iago repeatedly urges characters to look: he tells Brabantio to 'look to [his] bags' (I, 1, 81); as he begins his manipulation of Othello he tells him to 'observe her well with Cassio' (III, 3, 199); he tells Cassio to 'look' at Othello's entrance (IV, 1, 53); he tells Othello what to look out for in Cassio's face: 'fleurs, the gibes, and notable scorns' (IV, 1, 80).</p> <p>2. Jealousy: Iago uses the action of looking to stir up jealousy in Othello.</p> <p>3. Iago tells Othello to look for signs of infidelity in Desdemona and Cassio, 'oracular proof' that 'he is a villain'. Ironically, as Iago points out, 'Quite in the wrong' is what he sees because he is so jealous (IV, 1, 99). In <i>Othello</i>, the action of looking leads to erroneous conclusions is <i>Much Ado About Nothing</i>.</p>
	<p>1. Iago tells Roderigo the story of how he was passed over for promotion in favour of Cassio instead (I, 1, 8–33); the story is his justification for hating Cassio.</p> <p>2. Othello wins over the Duke and the other members of the senate by using the story of how he won Desdemona (I, 3, 127–167).</p> <p>3. Iago tells Othello the story of how the drunken brawl, initiated by Cassio, led to Desdemona's death (III, 3, 414–427).</p> <p>4. Othello tells Desdemona the story that lies behind the handkerchief (IV, 2, 1–10).</p> <p>5. Desdemona tells Emilia the story of her mother's maid, Barbary (IV, 2, 11–15).</p> <p>6. Before killing himself, Othello slips into storytelling mode, comparing himself to an 'Indian' and a 'malignant and turbaned Turk' (V, 2, 334–352).</p> <p>7. Identity: for Othello the stories are a way of projecting a particular image of himself.</p> <p>8. Manipulation: Iago uses stories to manipulate those around him; it is through his storytelling that he is able to manipulate Othello.</p> <p>9. Jealousy: Iago's story of Cassio drinking with Desdemona is designed to stir up jealousy in Othello.</p> <p>10. <i>Othello</i> is a play steeped in storytelling. Othello is a man who gains his power through his storytelling. His stories also serve to project an image of himself. For Iago, stories are a way to manipulate others and gain what he wants. Othello's storytelling is also manipulative: in his final story he says to his men (V, 2, 338) and then instructs them, 'Then must you speak / Of one that loved / Of one that loved' (V, 2, 339–340), using his storytelling to impose a particular view of himself that he wants to be remembered as he wants to be after his death.</p>

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Revising Key Images in the Play

The Storm

- (a) Referred to by the first gentleman at the beginning of Act II, Scene 1. As a result of the storm, Cyprus is separated from the one bringing Cassio and Desdemona to Cyprus; the storm also forces Cyprus into the ownership of Venice.
- (b) 'Our wars are done: / The desperate tempest hath so waded the Turks / That their blood / ... this same Cassio... yet he looks sadly / And prays that the floor be safe; for they were / In the tempest.' (II, 1, 31–34)
- (c) Shakespeare frequently uses storms in his plays to separate characters (e.g. *Twelfth Night*). There is no exception; here it is significant that Othello is separated from Cassio and Desdemona with the storm in the play.

The storm represents the military conflict to be aborted; dramatically this is significant as it occurs on the domestic plane, namely Othello's marriage to Desdemona, without military distraction.

The Bed

- (a) In Act IV, Scene 1 Iago suggests to Othello that he kill Desdemona by strangling her in her bed. This pleases Othello. In Act IV, Scene 2 Desdemona asks Emilia to make her bed with her. In Act IV, Scene 3 Othello tells Desdemona to go to bed, saying he will join her shortly; in the next scene Desdemona prepares for bed. In Act V, Scene 2 Othello strangles Desdemona in the bed. Desdemona dies on the bed.
- (b) IAGO: 'strangle her in her bed, even the bed she / hath contaminated.'
OTHELLO: 'Good, good! The justice of it pleases; very good!' (IV, 1, 195–197)
'Prithee tonight / Lay on my bed my wedding sheets' (IV, 2, 104)
'If I do die before thee, prithee shroud me / In one of those same sheets.' (IV, 3, 23–24)
- (c) The link between the bed and the grave is a well-established one, and Shakespeare, from the audience's perspective, the marital bed is an appropriate place to kill his unfaithful wife – it comes with the judicial execution. Desdemona also associates the bed with the grave, asking Emilia to shroud her. With the entire final scene taking place in the bedroom, with the bed at the centre, and murder comes together.

Othello's Epileptic Fit

- (a) Having been pushed to the breaking point by Iago's insinuations, Othello begins ranting and raving into a fit. In Act IV, Scene 1. Iago lies to Cassio saying that this is the second epileptic fit. When Cassio regains consciousness, Iago sets him up to watch Cassio's encounter with Desdemona and handkerchief to him.
- (b) 'Pish! Noses, / ears, and lips. Is't possible – Confess? Handkerchief? O devil!' (IV, 1, 152)
'My lord is fallen into an epilepsy. / This is his second fit; he had one yesterday.' (IV, 1, 153)
'... he foams at mouth and by and by / Breaks out to savage madness.' (IV, 1, 52–53)
- (c) The epileptic fit is a visible manifestation of the fact that at this stage in the play Othello is losing control as a result of Iago's machinations. For an audience, his fit is shocking to observe on stage as it shows that, if the fit does not run its course, Othello will break into savage madness also his behaviour becomes increasingly savage and uncivilised as the play progresses.

The Island of Cyprus

- (a) The fact that Cyprus – a Venetian colony – is under threat is first mentioned by Cassio. In Act I, Scene 2, Cassio tells Othello he is wanted by the Duke and Othello asks why (though it is worth noting that in the opening scene of the play that he has seen Cassio in a letter from Cyprus [I, 1, 29], so the threat from Turkey is an ongoing one). However, the full details of the threat are not disclosed until Act II, Scene 1. The audience learns that a Turkish fleet has arrived and the Duke has called a night-time meeting with the Venetian senators. In the following scene, the audience learns that the Duke plans to send an army to Cyprus, led by Othello. In the following scene, the Turkish troops arrive in Cyprus. At the end of the play, it transpires the Turkish threat has already disappeared from Cyprus but little has been made of it.
- (b) 'do the Turkish fleet, / A Turkish fleet, and bearing up to Cyprus.' (I, 3, 7–8)
'When we shall see the Turkish fleet / The importance of Cyprus to the Turk.' (I, 3, 19–20)
- (c) There is a symbolic parallel between Cyprus and Desdemona: just as Cyprus is under threat from the Turks, so Desdemona has been conquered by the infidel Othello. The parallel between Brabantio bringing his charges against Othello to the night-time meeting of the Venetian senators and Othello planning the military operation to repel the Turkish threat. Interestingly, Othello in the final scene refers to himself as 'a malignant and... turbaned Turk' who 'Beat a Venetian' (V, 2, 349–350).

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Epithets

Desdemona

- Divine (II, 1, 71 – Cassio); demonstrates Cassio's idealisation of Desdemona (compare with Othello's idealisation of Desdemona)
- Sweet (III, 3, 55 – Othello); Othello recognises Desdemona's purity and innocence
- Obedient (IV, 1, 238 – Lodovico) (IV, 1, 246–247 – Othello); both Othello and Lodovico use the term within a few lines of one another. However, when Lodovico is using the term in it Desdemona's response to Othello's 'Out of my sight!', Othello uses the word 'obedient' whatever one is asked (with a clear sexual overtone).
- Ill-starred (V, 2, 222 – Emilia); by calling the dead Desdemona 'ill=starred', meaning bad luck, Othello most absolves himself of any responsibility for her death

Othello

- Valiant (I, 3, 47 – 1st Senator), (I, 3, 48 – Duke); shows the esteem in which Othello is held as a result of his military prowess
- Brave (I, 3, 287 – 1st Senator), (II, 1, 38 – Montano); as above
- Lusty (II, 1, 276 – Iago); highlights Iago's jealousy as he fears that Othello has slept with Desdemona, a contemporary stereotype of Africans as lascivious
- Black (II, 3, 27 – Iago); highlights Iago's use of Othello's race to undermine him and Desdemona
- Noble (II, 3, 121 – Montano) (III, 4, 22 – Desdemona); shows in what high esteem Othello is held. Desdemona is particularly ironic in III, 4 as the audience knows that Othello is already planning to kill her
- Worthy (II, 3, 171 – Montano), (IV, 1, 205 – Lodovico); Lodovico's use is particularly ironic as Othello has deteriorated so much he is far from worthy
- Good (III, 4, 31 – Desdemona); as with the word 'noble', Desdemona calling Othello 'good' as he is planning to kill her creates dramatic irony
- Sweet (IV, 1, 229 – Desdemona); Desdemona's use of such an affectionate term when Othello is so full of contempt highlights her purity and naivety
- Dull (V, 2, 223 – Emilia); Emilia berates Othello for his stupidity for believing Iago's story
- Cruel (V, 2, 247 – Emilia); in her final, dying speech Emilia reminds Othello that Desdemona was innocent, further his cruelty in killing her

Extension Activity

Since this is an extension activity, a personal response is required from the student. However, to provide some guidance:

Emilia:

- Simple (IV, 2, 19)
- Good (IV, 3, 14)
- Villainous (V, 2, 227)

Cassio:

- Great [Arithmetician] (I, 1, 19)
- Valiant (II, 1, 87)
- Good (II, 3, 1; III, 2, 1)
- Thrice-gentle (III, 4, 116)
- Poor (IV, 1, 100)
- Dear, Sweet (V, 1, 76)

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The Language of Manipulation

1. (a) **'think'** – 8; **'indeed'** – 4; **'honest/y'** – 6; **'seem'** – 3

(b) **'think'** – Othello is unsettled by Iago's repetition of the word 'think' which suggests he is unsure but is reluctant to reveal it. It recalls for him Iago's comments at the beginning of the play that Cassio's behaviour was strange but would not elaborate. This exchange shows Othello as much through what he does not say, as through what he says.

Iago also exploits the uncertainty created by the word 'think' which lacks the definiteness of 'know'. Iago says 'I think' twice that he 'thinks' Cassio is honest (II, 3, 26–27; III, 3, 130).

'indeed' – Iago's first use of 'indeed' is at line 100, following Othello's statement that his marriage to Othello was a mistake. The conversation between the couple, is a masterclass in manipulation. Iago's use of 'indeed' as a question, lies a myriad of doubts and uncertainties in Othello's mind, and a whole host of feelings and thoughts that would be better left unspoken. Iago repeats 'indeed' twice in the next line – and once again at line 103 – shows how effectively he is manipulating Othello.

'honest/y' – with Iago being frequently dubbed 'honest' by his fellow characters, the word has a strong resonance throughout the play. In this passage the word 'honest' is used five times. Iago is telling Othello and Iago debating whether he is or not. Ironically the only time Othello trusts Iago, and conviction, it is in relation to Iago – 'for I know thou'rt full of love and honesty'. Iago's honesty, the audience knows should certainly not be described by that term.

'seem' – at line 127 Iago states that 'Men should be what they seem', implying that this is particularly ironic coming from the mouth of a man who told the audience that Desdemona was unfaithful. The play revolves around people and events seeming to be other than they are.
2. (a) Here the key word is 'yet' – Iago implies there will be proof, but as yet he has no proof.

(b) Iago here exploits Othello's position as an outsider who is not familiar with the Venetian women, act; Iago, in contrast, knows that Venetian women 'do let God see the truth of their husbands.' (III, 3, 204–205)

(c) Iago's line cleverly echoes Brabantio's at the beginning of the play: 'Look to her, Moor, if thou find'st her honest, / I'll give thee my daughter for thy service' (I, 1, 181–182). While Iago does not suggest – as Brabantio does – that deception may trigger another deception, Brabantio's line should evoke the same suspicion in Othello and the audience.

(d) Iago here is not the part of the loyal friend who is only telling Othello of his suspicions. By presenting himself as someone who loves Othello 'too much' he is using emotional manipulation to gain Othello's trust.

(e) This line of Iago's follows on from Othello's declaration that he believes Desdemona is honest. Iago's first remark about Desdemona – long may she be honest – with the second, Iago's honesty is little more an illusion that keeps Othello happy.

(f) Here Iago's power lies less in his language and more in his stagecraft. By leaving out the word 'and' Iago creates the sense that what he has to say is of great importance. By begging Othello to believe him, what he has said he is of course guaranteeing the opposite effect: Othello will believe Iago and Desdemona is being unfaithful to him and will be able to think of little else.

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A Character's Changing Language

	Language choices	Imagery	Sentence forms and structures
I, 2, 17–28	Latinate, complex vocabulary: 'provulgate', 'circumscription'	Metaphors: 'out-tongue', 'unbonneted'	Enjambement Blank verse
IV, 1, 243–254	Limited monosyllabic vocabulary: 'turn', 'weep', 'get you away' Repetition: 'turn', 'weep', 'obedient'	Imagery associated with lechery: 'Goats and monkeys'	Short, fragmented sentences End-stopped lines Imperatives: 'get you away!'; 'Hence, avaunt!'
IV, 1, 35–41	Latinate, complex vocabulary: 'lie', 'kerchief', 'confess'	References to body parts: 'Noses, ears, and lips.' Play on words: 'lie... belie'	Short, fragmented sentences Prose Exclamations and questions
V, 2, 334–352	Latinate, complex vocabulary: 'extenuate', 'medicinable', 'circumcised'	Exotic imagery: 'Like the base Indian', 'Drops tears as fast as the Arabi trees'	Enjambement Poetic: blank verse

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Prose vs Poetry

Passage	Who is talking?	What is the subject?	
I, 3, 297–364	Iago and Roderigo, after the night-time meeting of the Senate.	Roderigo laments the fact he has lost Desdemona and threatens to harm himself. Iago reminds him of such foolishness and reassures him that Desdemona will soon tire of Othello – then Roderigo will have his chance.	The prose scene from the ground preceded in which Iago won Desdemona of her love to highlight the morals and admire about. A similar use of the same character in 171–235.
II, 3, 239–302	Cassio and Iago following Cassio's demotion by Othello following his late-night drunken brawl.	Cassio is in distress feeling he has 'lost [his] / reputation' (II, 3, 242–243). Iago pours scorn on his fears and advises Cassio to speak to Desdemona and she will help him regain his position.	The prose scene distressed him within regularity. The prose scene between Roderigo and Iago is playing the wise advice simultaneously the plot to kill Othello.
III, 1, 1–27	Cassio talks to the Clown and musicians.	Cassio offers the men money to play music outside Othello and Desdemona's room window as part of his plan to gain Othello's favour.	With the exclamation characters the talk is humorous the prose is. See also Desdemona's Clown in III, 1, 1–27.
IV, 1, 35–	Othello.	Othello breaks down and succumbs to an epileptic fit.	The use of great common language commonly is verse shows he lost control of himself.
IV, 1, 107–161	Cassio converses with Iago and then Bianca. Their conversations are commented on by Othello, but only the audience can hear him.	Spied on by Othello, Iago interrogates Cassio about his relationship with Bianca. Bianca has a jealous outburst and throws the handkerchief at Cassio.	Much of the Bianca as a so the prose. Othello's use above – how and his language.

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Structure

Opening:

1. A night-time setting creates a sense of mystery and intrigue; darkness allows forbidden encounters to take place. It is the perfect setting for Iago to begin his evil machinations and the Devil, which seems appropriate for a villain such as Iago.

By waking up Brabantio at night, Iago and Roderigo also create a heightened sense of

2. An early seventeenth-century audience might regard Venice as a hub of international cultures. Venice, an Italian state, was Catholic; English protestant audiences may have seen it as a place of idolatry and superstition. Venetians – including the women – also had a reputation for lasciviousness.

3. The play opens mid-conversation which adds further to the sense of mystery. The audience is eavesdropping on a conversation. Roderigo's reference to 'this' (line 3), which is unclear to the audience, who will keep their ears peeled to find out what is going on: opening mid-conversation is a technique to grab the audience's attention.

4. (i) That he is an inhuman, bestial man – akin to the Devil – who has 'stolen' the young Desdemona.
(ii) The audience builds up an unfavourable picture of him in their minds; this is reinforced by his appearance in the following scene.

5. Racism, envy, jealousy, love and marriage

Ending:

1. Like the opening scene the play's final scene is set at night-time. Now we are in Cyprus. Night-time is an appropriate time for the illegal act of murder – it aligns Othello with the Devil. That the scene takes place in the bedroom highlights that this is ultimately a domestic issue. Othello's failings are in his behaviour as a husband.

2. The truth about Desdemona is eventually revealed to all the characters: Othello knows that Desdemona is unfaithful; Emilia discovers that her husband was the 'eternal villain' who 'slandered' (V, 2, 132) of Desdemona's infidelity. The death of the tragic hero, Othello.

However, there are still some loose ends at the end of the play, specifically in relation to Othello why he acted as he did – 'From this time forth I never will speak word' (V, 2, 270). Othello, despite being privy to his soliloquies throughout the play, may find it difficult to fully understand his actions. While Lodovico says in the play's final speech that Iago will be subject to 'torture' (V, 2, 328), that will loosen his tongue.

3. The final scene shows the catastrophic results of Iago's plotting which begins in the opening scene. Having both scenes set at night-time, a clear link is drawn between them.

Also, Othello – having deteriorated as a man and a speaker in the course of the play – is reduced to a mere figure of his former self (particularly the storyteller of Act I, Scene 3).

4. There is probably less of a sense of hope at the end of *Othello* than at the end of *Shakespeare's* other plays because the chief villain – Iago – is still alive at the end of the play – 'This heavy burden of my sin' (V, 2, 328) up the overwhelming sorrow and sense of loss at the end of *Othello*. However, there is a glimmer of hope when Lodovico appoints Cassio as the ruling figure in Cyprus (V, 2, 328), but the hope is not fully realised.

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Turning Points:

The examples below are simply representative and should not be regarded as the 'best' at

Turning point	Reference	Effect(s)
Othello makes his first entrance, having been introduced to the audience by other characters.	Act I, Scene 2	Othello is painted in a negative light inhuman, uncivilised brute who has no regard for the audience. Let him they encounter with him regarded by the Venetians.
News is brought that the Turkish fleet have turned back, having been battered by the storm.	II, 1, 20–22	With the sudden retreat of the Turks, there is nothing to do in Cyprus. Their 'freedom' for Iago to begin his plotting in a new environment, the characters are more susceptible to manipulations.
Following his drunken brawl, Cassio is stripped of his rank by Othello.	II, 3, 229–230	Stripped of his office, Cassio is desperate. This makes him an easy prey for Iago's plot against Othello.
Othello declares his intention to kill Desdemona.	III, 3, 476–479	This episode may be a turning point for Othello: we now realise that Iago's accusations of Desdemona's infidelity, based on Cassio's respect for Othello may thus diminish.
Cassio verbally attacks Bianca for her jealousy.	III, 4, 177–180	Cassio's exchange with his mistress shows that the audience hasn't seen before. Desdemona with great respect and affection (see II, 1), but now we see that he is a woman of lower status.
Roderigo fails to kill Cassio – and Iago has to kill Roderigo, who has only been wounded.	IV, 1	The opening scene of Act V does not show any action on either Cassio or Roderigo. This could be interpreted as a turning point until this point everything has been the same. For the first time something – kill Roderigo – rather than for him. This suggests the play is now over and survive unscathed.

Revising Dramatic Techniques

Soliloquies

(1) I, 3, 365–386

- At the end of Act I, Scene 3, the scene in which Othello narrates his courtship of Desdemona and Senators, Desdemona proclaims her love for Othello, and Othello is charged with the delegation to Cyprus against the Turks. Immediately before the soliloquy Iago persuades him that Desdemona will soon tire of Othello and he will have a chance to win her.
- Iago admits he is deceiving Roderigo, and only spending time with him in order to get his money.
- He hates Othello because he believes Othello has stolen his position, but knows he cannot win. He will seek to convince Othello that Cassio is too close to Desdemona.
- Iago divulges his plans to the audience. Iago works out his plans, using the audience as a proper man: let me see how, / I'll get his place and plume up my will / In doubtless see.' [I, 3, 374–377]
- The soliloquy shows that Iago is intending to bring down Othello and how he is going to do it. Roderigo is privy to this information.
- Antithetical imagery – compares Othello to an ass that is 'tenderly... led by the nose'. Imagery of darkness and light and of giving birth. Rhyming couplet adds a sense of finality to the end of the soliloquy.

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(2) II, 1, 267–293

- a) Once again, Iago's soliloquy follows on immediately from a conversation between Desdemona, itself following on from the scene in which the Venetians arrive in Othello's love for one another is made clear to the audience and all the characters.
- b) Iago believes Cassio loves Desdemona and thinks it is entirely plausible that Desdemona also confesses his love for Desdemona, which he says is partly revenge for his sister Emilia. His jealous nature is further developed when he expresses his suspicion of his wife. He revels in the fact that as a result of his manipulation, Othello will appreciate the effect making him an idiot.
- c) Iago divulges his plans to the audience, Iago rationalises and justifies his behaviour to the audience.
- d) The soliloquy gives us more information about Iago's plans which no other character has access to facets of his character – here his jealousy – which no one else knows.
- e) The soliloquy opens with two balanced clauses that create a strong rhythm; the speaker moves back and forth between Iago's two enemies (Othello and Cassio) and the idea of 'Till I am evened with him, wife for wife', that idea of payback could be seen as whether it is payback for Othello's supposed affair with Emilia or payback for Othello and Cassio rather than Iago.

Use of lists (rule of three): 'constant, loving, noble' (270); 'thank me, love me, a

Animal imagery: 'making him egregiously an ass' (290)

Rhyming couplet closes the soliloquy.

(3) II, 3, 303–329

- ago's soliloquy immediately follows a conversation between himself and Cassio in Othello's office following the night-time brawl and ago has advised him to ask Desdemona for help on his behalf.
- ago points out that the advice he has given to Cassio – to get Desdemona to plead for him with Othello – is good advice; that being so, it would be unfair to label him a villain. He acknowledges that devils who wreak the most evil by pretending to be good, he then unfolds his plot to Desdemona, his goodness and convince Othello that she is the only reason she is pleading for Cassio is because she loves him.
- ago divulges his plan to the audience; ago rationalises and justifies his behaviour as being in the audience's best interests.
- Othello's position is in a privileged position, being given access to information. We now know why ago has given Cassio the advice he has, and how he plans to achieve his ends. Desdemona's naivety in order to achieve his ends.
- ago uses rhetorical questions at lines 303–306 and 315–317 to suggest that his advice is good advice and that he can, therefore, not be called a villain – the audience must see him as a bare-faced daring.

Contrasting imagery of heaven and hell, good and evil, black and white: ll. 317

Dramatic Irony

1. Othello is speaking to the Duke about Iago and entrusting Desdemona to his care for the night. The audience is already aware of Iago's hatred of Othello and that he is anything but loyal. By his comment in Act I, Scene 1: 'I must show out a flag and sign of love' (155), the audience knows what Iago is planning to do, they know his intentions are not good: Othello's words were a warning and anticipation at what might happen.
2. Iago has been asked by Othello to give his account of the night-time brawl in Cyprus. Iago hates Cassio because he gained the position that Iago so desperately wanted. Iago's claims to Othello to provoke this situation – see Iago's speech in Act I, Scene 2 – his claims of love for Cassio are deeply ironic. Iago knows that his claims to Othello are false, but he has to say what he must to Cassio, whatever his intentions.
3. Here Cassio asks Iago for advising him to seek Desdemona's help in speaking to Othello. The audience knows that Iago's intentions are far from good, and thus can only feel contempt for Cassio for placing so much trust in him.
4. Iago is attempting to convince Othello that Desdemona and Cassio are having an affair. Iago is using the information to his love for Othello. The audience knows both that the information is false and that Iago and Cassio are driven by hatred, not love.

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- These words are spoken by Othello, who is weighing up whether what Iago is suggesting might actually be true. Believing wrongly (as the audience knows) that Iago is honest, Othello takes Iago's words. Where Othello is correct, however, is in his comment that Iago is 'knows all qualities with a learned spirit, / Of human dealings' (III, 3, 260–262). The insight into the way humans behave, allows him to manipulate them to his own ends.
- The audience knows that Emilia has picked up Desdemona's dropped handkerchief. Her answer to Desdemona, 'I know not, madam' (III, 4, 260) is a lie. Desdemona and the audience is thus aware of information that, were Desdemona to know it, might make a difference. At this point in the play the audience also knows – which Emilia does not – what Iago has done (drop it in Cassio's bedroom so that he carries a piece of evidence proving his affair). The play both women are privy to important information, though Emilia has Desdemona's perspective.
- Still lamenting the loss of her handkerchief – as in 6 above – Desdemona notes that Emilia questions that – presumably owing to her personal experience with her own husband – that there is not a shred of jealousy in Othello. For the audience this is deeply ironic. They witnessed Iago driving Othello 'into a jealousy so strong / That judgement cannot see' (III, 3, 477–479). They also know that Iago has used the handkerchief as the requested of Desdemona's infidelity.
- Emilia reports to Iago – in Desdemona's presence – the unjustified cruel treatment Othello has done to her a 'whore' (IV, 2, 89) and treating her like a prostitute. When Iago – ironically – expresses his anger and wonders how he could be so deluded, Emilia says these lines. The irony lies in the fact that what has happened, without realising that the 'eternal villain' is in fact her own husband who

The Use of Contrast

Contrasting Scenes:

Adjoining Scenes	Points of Contrast	Effect(s) Created
III, 2 and III, 3	Brevity of III, 2 – in which Othello sends Iago on a mission – compared with III, 3, a longer scene in the play. In III, 2 Othello is in charge, giving orders to Iago; in III, 3 the balance of power shifts.	The brevity of III, 2, in which Othello compares with III, 3, the longer scene in III, 2 Othello is in charge, giving orders to Iago; in III, 3 the balance of power shifts as Iago, believing Desdemona is having an affair, at the end of III, 3 Othello pronounces the power relationship between them.
IV, 3 and V, 1	A sombre scene featuring only women – Desdemona and Emilia – is followed by a more riotous scene in which Roderigo attacks Cassio, but ends up being fatally injured by Iago.	The gentle calm of IV, 3 prepares for the chaos and violence of V, 1 in which Iago prepares for bed while giving orders to Roderigo – contrasts with the behaviour of V, 1 in which Iago does his threatening male figures: Roderigo.
V, 1 and V, 2	The chaos and riot of V, 1 is contrasted with the calm gentle setting of V, 2 in which Othello prepares to murder Desdemona.	While there is an irony in the fact that the play opens in a calm setting, it highlights the ceremonial as Desdemona (he believes it) contrasts with the chaotic violence of V, 1. Iago does not go as expected for Iago: Iago has to kill Roderigo. The setting of both scenes: the bedchamber and Desdemona's bedchamber.

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Contrasting Characters:

	Desdemona	Emilia
Relationship to male character(s) in play	Wife of Othello; daughter of Brabantio.	Iago's wife.
Social status; position occupied	Venetian nobility; the daughter of a senator.	Respectable but Desdemona's social inferior; she is her handmaid and refers to her throughout as 'Madam'.
Adjectives to describe character	Pure, innocent, confident (I, 3), loving, forgiving, naive, idealistic.	Outspoken, loyal (to Desdemona), worldly-wise, pragmatic, cynical (about men).
Experience of the world and men	Naive and inexperienced.	Experienced and worldly-wise.
Key quotation(s)	'Commend me to my kind lord' (V, 2, 126); her dying words show her unswerving love for Othello even though he has murdered her.	'But I do think it is their husbands' faults / If wives do fall' (IV, 3, 82–83) – shows her realistic, even cynical views on men and women's behaviour.

Extension Activity

What particular qualities of Desdemona, Emilia and Bianca highlight through their positions? Being much more worldly-wise than Desdemona, both Emilia and Bianca highlight her intelligence. Like Desdemona, is a loving wife, whereas Desdemona is adamant she would never be unfaithful, Emilia would do so 'on the whole / world' (IV, 3, 74–75) – and also finds it hard to believe in adultery ('Does conscience think... / That there be women do abuse their husbands' (IV, 3, 60)), Emilia implies she has the capability to be unfaithful should the need arise: 'who would cuckold, to make him a / monarch?' (IV, 3, 72–73).

Bianca is clearly devoted to Cassio, yet her profession as a courtesan means she is clearly aware of the world over the handkerchief Cassio gives her to copy shows her awareness that men are unfaithful in the base environment in which she lives: 'give it your hobby-horse' (IV, 1, 148). Desdemona, in the contemptuous language Othello hurls at her, it being so far beyond her frame of reference, 'I do abhor me now I speak the word;' (IV, 2, 160–161).

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Revising Othello as a Tragedy

Classical Tragedy

While a personal response is required for this question, the following points may prove helpful.

The tragic character: Othello claims his descent from 'men of royal lineage' (I, 2, 22). His marriage to Desdemona's; clearly this leads to his tragic fall. Whether the audience can identify with Othello, original audiences may have struggled to identify with him, owing to his race, whereas modern audiences may identify with his gullibility and distrust of Desdemona and his tragic identification.

The three unities of time, place and action:

- **Time:** While the time scheme of *Othello* is unclear, the events certainly take place over a short period.
- **Place:** The tragedy only takes place in Cyprus, but the seeds are sown in Venice.
- **Action:** *Othello* does have only one storyline.

The plot: It is worth considering at what point the *peripeteia* comes in *Othello*. It could be argued that it is when Othello 'discovers' Desdemona's alleged infidelity, which precipitates the tragic action, or when he discovers the truth in the final scene.

The audience: To what extent does the action of *Othello*, and the fate of the titular character, appeal to the audience?

Tragedy and the Critical Companion

Essay 1: David Scott Kastan

1. Personal response required.
2. Personal response required.

Essay 2: A D Nuttall

3. Personal response required.

Essay 3: A C Bradley

4. Personal response required.
5. Personal response required.
6. Personal response required.

Essay 4: Maynard Mack

7. Personal response required.
8. Personal response required.

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Revising the Social and Historical Context

1. Iago's dismissive comment about Cassio being a Florentine – i.e. an outsider, not a Venetian – reflects his views on other people and anticipates his racist comments about Othello in the same scene. This is a reminder that at this time Italy was not a unified country but a collection of city states.
2. Iago's alarm call to Brabantio reflects the fact that women were perceived as the property of their father. A daughter belonged to her father until she was passed on to him in marriage. Brabantio calls Othello 'thou foul thief' (I, 3, 62).
3. Roderigo's description of Othello confirms a number of racial stereotypes of the time. He refers to him as a 'Moor' – even by characters who have respect for him – rather than by his name, which is his key defining feature. A 'Moor' is a member of the mixed Arab and African race. However, at this time the term was frequently used to refer to anyone from North Africa who was associated with certain characteristics and behaviours: jealousy, sexual voracity, etc. (non-Christian).
4. Brabantio's accusation against Othello highlights another stereotype associated with black magic.
5. The fact that Brabantio's fondness for Othello brought Othello into close contact with Desdemona, allowing the relationship to begin, reflects the complexity of attitudes towards black people. Brabantio clearly has respect for Othello as a soldier and is interested in his background; what he does not have is the idea of Othello being married to his daughter. While not explicitly stated, Brabantio's accusation implies the idea of racial interbreeding (miscegenation).
6. Othello's account of how he won Desdemona through his storytelling of his exotic travels, his 'travellers' tales' from this period, and on popular stereotypes about other races and cultures.
7. At the end of his storytelling Othello reveals that Desdemona was instrumental in initiating the relationship, a contemporary stereotype, promoted by Brabantio, of women as 'never bold;/ Of their own accord' (I, 3, 95). Desdemona also challenges this view when she appears in front of the Senate to answer a question about where she owes obedience, declares that Othello is now her priority.
8. In his manipulation of Othello, Iago exploits Othello's status as an outsider and draws on contemporary stereotypes of Venetian women as promiscuous and unfaithful.
9. Othello fulfils the contemporary stereotype of Moors as superstitious and practitioners of magic. He tells Desdemona that the handkerchief he gave her – which she has now lost – had magical powers. His mother who was warned that, were she to lose it she would lose her husband's love implies that Desdemona will also lose her husband's love should she lose it.
10. Othello refers to himself using the contemporary image of the cuckold, the husband who is sleeping with another man. Contemporary folklore said that a man whose wife had an affair would have a pain on his forehead: everyone who saw him would thus know of his shame. Othello is referring to his forehead when he tells Desdemona that he has 'a pain upon [his] forehead' (III, 3, 286).

Revising the Performance History of the Play

Activity

1. Personal response required.
2. Personal response required.
3. Personal response required.
4. Personal response required.
5. Personal response required.

Revising Characters and the Critics

Activity 1: Whose critical view?

- | | | |
|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| (a) Critic 3 | (f) Critic 2 | (k) Critic 7 |
| (b) Critic 5 | (g) Critic 7 | (l) Critic 6 |
| (c) Critic 4 | (h) Critic 1 | (m) Critic 4 |
| (d) Critic 1 | (i) Critic 3 | (n) Critic 1 |
| (e) Critic 6 | (j) Critic 5 | (o) Critic 3 |

Activity 2: Developing critical views

- a) Personal response required.
- b) Personal response required.

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Activity 1

Explore Shakespeare's presentation of ideas about honour in *Othello*. You must relate your ideas to specific factors and ideas from your critical reading.

While a personal response is required, the ideas below give some idea of suggested indicators.

Introduction

Begin by defining honour – a sense of pride, self-respect, self-esteem.

Explain the importance of honour as a theme in *Othello*, e.g. the principal male characters have a strong sense of honour and react with passion when that honour is threatened [A01].

Outline the main issues to discuss: opening of the play; honour and masculinity; honour and identity; national honour.

Extension:

Link the strong sense of honour to the military society of which the male characters are part.

A common feature of tragic drama is the hero's loss of honour as a result of his tragic fall. Write an essay on the Shakespearean tragic hero [A05].

Main body

Opening of the play:

Iago's honour has been slighted by Othello's passing over him for promotion: in revenge he speaks by racist slurs [A01, A03]. By opening the play in this way, Shakespeare highlights the importance of honour.

Honour and masculinity:

Iago and Othello's masculinity is threatened by the fear/suggestion that their wives have been unfaithful. Othello considers his killing of Desdemona as a judicial execution: 'she must die, else she'll betray more men'. Contemporary image of the cuckold – betrayed husband [A02, A03]. Brabantio feels his rejection of him for Othello [A01].

Honour and reputation:

Cassio's humiliation when Othello demotes him after his night watch brawl [A01].

Honour and identity:

Othello's need to be recognised for his military and achievements: achieved by storytelling. Leavis on Othello's self-dramatisation – suggestion that he is not an essentially honourable man as a man of honour [A01].

National honour

Make the point that honour does not only reside in characters: the Venetian state has its honour at stake in the assault on Cyprus and thus immediate action is taken [A01, A03]; comment on the link between Othello's 'assault' on Desdemona [A02].

Conclusion

Draw together these different ideas about honour in *Othello*: it could be effective to move from the embodied within characters, to ideas of national honour and finish with the idea of honour as a genre of tragedy [A01, A02].

Activity 2

Personal response required.

Activity 3:

Personal response required.

Essay Answer Breakdown

Activity 1: Identifying supporting material for episodes.

Personal response required.

Activity 2: Essay structure activity.

Apart from points (a) and (f), which are clearly introductory and concluding points, there are four main points. A suggested order is given below, but what is most important is to make sure that the points are linked to one another and similar ideas are grouped together.

(d), (g), (e), (b), (h), (a), (c), (i), (f)

Activity 3: Write the essay.

Personal response required.

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Sample Answers

Question 4:

Explore Shakespeare's presentation of jealousy in *Othello*. You must relate your ideas to contextual factors and ideas from your critical reading.

Strong Answer: Commentary

This answer seems to best fit a (low) mark band, according to the Edexcel mark scheme.

- **AO1:** the candidate shows detailed knowledge of the text, and uses appropriate examples of argument, albeit one that follows a traditional reading of the play. The essay is clear and sustained line of argument which is clearly and precisely expressed, using literary terminology and concepts appropriately.
- **AO2:** the candidate uses fluently embedded examples from the text to support their analysis; however, this is probably the weakest aspect of the essay for detailed discussion of language, imagery and genre.
- **AO3:** throughout the essay the candidate demonstrates particularly good knowledge of contemporary views of Moors and women and the mythological figure of the cuckoo, and the meaning of the text.
- **AO5:** the use of critical views is particularly strong in this essay. As well as referring to Kastan, the candidate makes excellent use of Kastan to support their view that it is over-simplistic to read Othello as ultimately destroyed by his jealousy. By challenging common readings of the play the candidate makes a sophisticated argument.

Activity 1

Personal response required, though guidance is provided in the commentary above.

Activity 2

Personal response required, though see the commentary above.

Medium Answer: Commentary

This is a difficult essay to place in a mark band, because some of the AOs are met extremely well. However, as the candidate has not included any discussion of critical views, AO4, cannot be awarded at all. As a result, this answer probably best fits a high Level 3.

- **AO1:** the candidate shows detailed knowledge of the text, and uses appropriate examples of argument, albeit one that follows a traditional reading of the play. The essay is clear and sustained line of argument which is clearly and precisely expressed, using literary terminology and concepts appropriately.
- **AO2:** the candidate displays a sophisticated understanding of the way Shakespeare presents Othello; the essay is thoughtful and appreciative evaluation of the use of imagery and of the impact created by the tragic genre.
- **AO3:** throughout the essay the candidate demonstrates secure understanding of significant contextual factors that shape the presentation of jealousy and the impact on a contemporary audience.
- **AO5:** not addressed.

Activity 1

Personal response required – though see commentary immediately above.

Activity 2

While a personal response is required here, the candidate's arguments in the essay where a critical view is confined to):

- **Paragraph 2:** the candidate's analysis of the monster image as suggesting jealousy's impact on Othello is well supported by Mack's discussion of madness and tragedy.
- **Paragraph 5:** the candidate's final sentence commenting on contemporary views of Othello could be linked to Loomba's essay.
- **Paragraph 6:** rather than providing a straightforward causal link between Othello's jealousy and his downfall, the candidate could draw on Kastan's essay to argue that Shakespearean tragedy resists such a simple reading. The candidate could develop Kastan's point by suggesting other factors that could be discussed.

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Question 11

Explore Shakespeare's presentation of friendship in *Othello*. You must relate your contextual factors and ideas from your critical reading.

Strong Answer: Commentary

This answer seems to best fit a secure Level 5, using the Edexcel mark scheme.

- **AO1:** the candidate demonstrates a very detailed knowledge of the play and uses such a fully developed and interesting line of argument
- **AO2:** throughout the essay the candidate makes close reference to the text and evaluates effects of literary and dramatic features. There is some particularly insightful discussion of tension and contrasts
- **AO3:** there is some thoughtful consideration of the significance of homosocial bonds, though this could probably be developed further.
- **AO5:** while the candidate only refers to Honigsmann from the critical anthology, there is a discussion of the way male friendship has been presented in film and theatre production.

Activity 1

While this answer requires a personal response, points for discussion might include:

- Iago is beginning to lose his power even before the final scene and Emilia's disclosure that Iago is not dealing 'justly' with him, suggesting he is beginning to have suspicion. 13–22 Iago states he will gain from the death of either Cassio or Roderigo, as both are part of his set up does not go according to plan: Cassio survives and Iago is forced to kill Roderigo. That a letter is found on Roderigo's corpse detailing the plans to kill Cassio (V, 2, 305–310) about Iago would have been revealed in the end, whether or not Emilia exposed him.
- It could also be argued that Emilia and Desdemona's friendship actually allows Iago's plan. This friendship gives Emilia access to Desdemona, allowing her to steal Desdemona's handkerchief. Desdemona does not suspect her.

Activity 2

While this answer requires a personal response, the commentary above provides some ideas for discussion:

- **AO2:** more analysis of Shakespeare's language, e.g. the candidate could have commented on the 'sign' image used by Iago and referred to in paragraph 2.
- **AO3:** more discussion of the position of women's lives and the widespread views of women in the Renaissance, in relation to Desdemona and Emilia.
- **AO5:** there could also be some more nuanced discussion of the friendships in the play. For example, Desdemona and Emilia: to what extent is this really a friendship, when Emilia is preparing to reveal the whereabouts of her handkerchief?

Medium Essay: Commentary

This answer seems to best fit a fairly low Level 3, using the Edexcel mark scheme. Its primary problem is that ideas are not fully explored. The essay itself is rather disjointed and lacks fluency. Following the essay, there is no introduction and a very brief conclusion.

- **AO1:** the candidate offers a clear, albeit brief, response to the question and uses relevant evidence to support the points made. The essay is clearly structured and the meaning is clear.
- **AO2:** although the candidate refers to specific episodes in the play there is a lack of analysis. There is insufficient analysis of the text and of the way Shakespeare creates meaning.
- **AO3:** there is some awareness of the significance of contextual factors when the candidate discusses male friendships in the Renaissance.
- **AO5:** the candidate refers to Honigsmann's argument about Emilia's friendship with Desdemona, but does not develop or explore it further.

Activity 1

Personal response required.

Activity 2

Personal response required.

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