

Othello – Act I Study Questions

1. What are Iago and Roderigo arguing about before they wake Brabantio (1.1.39–64)? What reliable information does this exchange provide about their characters—and about Cassio and Othello?
2. What kind of language do Iago and Roderigo use to describe Othello and Desdemona's marriage (1.1.76–134)? How does this language shape our understanding of their attitudes?
3. What effect does this language have on Brabantio (1.1.137–171)?
4. How does Brabantio respond to Roderigo's courtship of Desdemona before and after learning of her marriage to Othello (1.1.92–95; 1.1.172)? What does this shift suggest about Othello's position in Venetian society?
5. Identify discrepancies between Iago's public behavior and his private intentions in this scene. How does the audience's awareness of these contradictions affect our interpretation of later scenes in which Iago appears?
6. How does Othello's behavior in Act I, scene ii differ from what Act I, scene i might have led you to expect?
7. According to Brabantio, how has Othello persuaded Desdemona to marry him (1.2.61–78)? Does Brabantio suggest this explanation earlier (1.1.168–171)?
8. What are the Duke and Senators discussing at the beginning of Act I, scene iii (1.3.1–43)? Why might Shakespeare devote so many lines to their debate about the Turkish fleet's destination?
9. Do the Duke's and First Senator's responses to Brabantio's accusations resemble their earlier discussion of the Turkish threat (1.3.106–114)? In what ways?
10. In what sense does Othello admit guilt regarding Desdemona—both in “stealing” her and in using “witchcraft” (1.3.78–81; 1.3.90–94; 1.3.168)?
11. In 1.3.158, the Folio reads “a world of kisses,” while the Quarto reads “a world of sighs.” Which version seems more consistent with the dramatic situation and with Desdemona's character? Why?
12. What reasons do Othello and Desdemona give for her accompanying him to Cyprus (1.3.243–269)? Which of the two demonstrates greater self-knowledge?
13. What advice does Iago most persistently give Roderigo (1.3.335–367)? Why does he repeat it so insistently?