

Othello – Act II Discussion Questions

1. In what order do the characters arrive in Cyprus (2.1)? What dramatic purposes are served by this sequence of arrivals?
2. Comment on Othello's lines to Desdemona, "If it were now to die / 'Twere now to be most happy" (2.1.187-188).
3. Both Cassio and Iago suggest that Othello is deeply devoted to Desdemona—"our great captain's captain" (2.1.74; cf. 2.3.314–318). What evidence in Othello's behavior upon landing in Cyprus supports this view (2.1.179–210)?
4. Iago claims to suspect both Othello and Cassio of adultery with Emilia (2.1.291–307). To what extent do these suspicions logically follow from the cynical view of women he expresses in his exchange with Desdemona (2.1.127–158)?
5. Comment on Othello's lines: "The purchase made, the fruits are to ensue: / That profit's yet to come 'tween me and you" (2.3.9-10)
6. What is Iago trying to do when he tells Cassio Desdemona is "sport for Jove" (2.3.19)? Where is the humor in this short exchange? What does Iago mean by "happiness to their sheets" (2.3.30)?
7. Are there any echoes between the drunken brawl in Act 2 and the opening scene outside Brabantio's house in Act 1? List the similarities.
8. What is ironic about Iago's claim, "I do love Cassio well and would do much / To cure him of this evil" (2.3.140–141)?
9. As Othello investigates the brawl during the night watch, he remarks that his "best judgment" is nearly overcome (2.3.203–206). What causes this near loss of self-control?
10. What is Cassio saying when he talks about "reputation" (2.3.280)?
11. "So will I turn her virtue into pitch, / And out of her own goodness make the net / That shall enmesh them all" (2.3.360–362). What specific plan is Iago describing? Why does this strategy give him particular satisfaction?
12. What does Iago mean by "Thou know'st we work by wit and not by witchcraft, / And wit depends on dilatory time" (2.3.392-394)?