

Othello – Act IV Discussion Questions

1. What causes Othello to fall into a trance (4.1.54)?
2. In Act IV, scene i, Othello withdraws and directs hostile looks and remarks toward Cassio (4.1.129). Has a similar staging or emotional reaction occurred earlier in the play in Act 2, Scene i?
3. What prompts Othello to exclaim, “But yet the pity of it, Iago. / O Iago, the pity of it, Iago!” (4.1.216)?
4. Othello proposes one method of killing Desdemona, and Iago suggests another. Which method does Othello choose, and why (4.1.228)?
5. Under what circumstances does Othello strike Desdemona, and what motivates this action (4.1.270)?
6. When Othello questions Emilia about Desdemona’s chastity, does Emilia defend her mistress primarily on the basis of evidence or personal conviction (4.2.1–19)?
7. Later in the same scene, Othello treats Desdemona as though she were a _____ and Emilia as a _____ (4.2.27–92). (Complete the blanks and explain.)
8. How do you account for Othello’s reaction to Desdemona’s question, “Alas, what ignorant sin have I committed?” (4.2.69–79)?
9. Describe Roderigo’s brief revolt against Iago and explain how Iago manipulates him into proceeding with the plot against Cassio (4.2.171–245).
10. In some editions, the line “This Lodovico is a proper man.” (4.3.38) is given to Desdemona, in others to Emilia. Do you think this line is out of character for Desdemona, and why?
11. From whom did Desdemona first learn the “Willow” song, and why does she find it impossible to dismiss it from her thoughts (4.3.44)?
12. How do Desdemona and Emilia differ in their attitudes toward adultery (4.3.61–108)?

Lines referring to the Folger Digital Edition: <https://www.folger.edu/explore/shakespeares-works/othello/read/>