

Reflections:

*A Student Response Journal for...*

# *Othello*

*by William Shakespeare*

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*Othello*

**Act I, Scene i**  
**Venice. A Street.**

1. During his opening conversation with Roderigo, Iago explains why he hates Othello. List all of the reasons he provides.
2. If you were Roderigo, would you respond to all these reasons by saying, “I would not follow him (Othello) then?” Write a persuasive argument on why you would or wouldn’t follow Othello.
3. The long speech that Iago makes focuses on his real intent. He ends by saying, “I am not what I am.” If you overheard this speech and wanted to warn Othello about his impending doom immediately, how would you do it? Phone? E-mail? In-person visit? Write a paragraph explaining your decision. What would you say?
4. Roderigo goes along with Iago’s sinister plans to alert Brabantio, a Senator and Desdemona’s father, to the fact that his daughter has eloped with Othello, whom they refer to as a “Barbary horse,” and as the “lascivious Moor.” Brabantio is very upset to find her missing. “She deceives me/Past thought!” he says. He then adds, “How got she out? O treason of the blood!” Imagine you are Desdemona, write a note to leave for your parents attempting to persuade them to accept your decision.

## **Act I, Scene ii**

### **Another Street**

5. Iago is pretending to be a man who defends Othello's honor. Iago claims that when Brabantio "spoke such scurvy and provoking terms" against Othello's honor, Iago came to Othello's defense. Othello answers by saying, "Let him do his spite:/My services, which I have done the signiory [senator]/Shall out-tongue his complaints." What does Othello assume will happen when Brabantio hears about Othello's military victories on behalf of the country? Do you think his assumption is realistic?
6. Brabantio confronts Othello with his sword raised. Othello tells his father-in-law to put down his sword because he "...shall more command with years/Than with your weapons." Is this a compliment or an insult? Write a brief letter to Brabantio explaining Othello's statement.
7. Brabantio's dislike of and prejudice toward Othello the Moor is evident when he says that Othello must have put a spell on his daughter to make her go with him. As Othello, write a dispute to Brabantio's accusation.
8. At the end of the scene, Othello says he should not go to prison as the Duke needs him to help defend the country. Brabantio thinks the Duke will be as offended as he is by the marriage of Desdemona to Othello. Is it likely a Duke will put the marriage of a military leader over the needs of the state? Consider that it is a Senator's daughter and explain your answer.

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**Act I, Scene iii**  
**A Council Chamber**

9. When Brabantio meets with the Duke, he seems to be putting his wants ahead of the State. This seems a little unreasonable. Write a journal entry of a time when you were unreasonable in a request of others.
10. When the Duke asks Othello about the marriage, Othello tells the truth and in turn reveals more about himself. Even when Brabantio comments on Othello's reply, Brabantio reveals more about his daughter. Make a list of the information Othello reveals, and a list of the information Brabantio reveals. Then, write a paragraph describing these revelations.
11. Brabantio tells the Duke about Desdemona. If what Brabantio says is true, what do you imagine life would be like for Desdemona in today's society? Write a letter to Desdemona preparing her for life in the future.
12. Othello asks the Duke and Senators to let Desdemona attest to their love and marriage. Have you ever been in love with someone that your parents did not approve of? Write a dialogue to illustrate a conversation you may have had (or would have liked to have had) with your parents defending the relationship.
13. Othello begins to tell the story of his relationship with Desdemona and Brabantio. If Desdemona were relating the story, it would be from her point of view. Write the speech as if Desdemona were telling the story of her relationship with Othello before their marriage.
14. During this era, it seems that women are impressed by the valor of men and find their victories attractive and their pains in battle cause for sympathy. Write several (at least three) personal dating advertisements that describe the qualities women look for in men today.

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*Response Journal*

15. Desdemona tells her father that although she loves him, her duty is to Othello. What are your thoughts on Desdemona's point of view? What is different about her point of view in comparison with the views of today? Write a magazine article comparing these two points. Discuss the "duties" of love as seen in both time periods. Be sure to include a heading that will entice readers to read your article. Be sure to stay on topic, using examples from the play, as well as specific examples from your own experiences.
16. The Duke aims to calm things between Brabantio and his daughter, saying to the Senator, "To mourn a mischief that is past and gone/Is the next way to draw new mischief on." Write your interpretation of this advice and express your opinion about whether you think it is true or not.
17. Desdemona wants to join Othello when he leaves for war. Should Desdemona be permitted to journey with her husband into such dangerous conditions? Write a speech to deliver on the floor of Congress arguing for or against allowing wives to travel with their husbands serving in a war zone for more than six months. Try to think of alternatives or compromises in an attempt to gain acceptance from Congress.
18. Desdemona has made quite a few rash and brave decisions. If Desdemona were your best friend and chose to elope with Othello, then leave with him, putting herself in harm's way, what would you say to her? Write a letter to Desdemona explaining your thoughts.
19. When Othello assigns Iago to watch over Desdemona for the night, saying that "A man he is of honesty and trust..." With this statement it is learned that Othello is very trusting. Write about a time when you trusted someone that you shouldn't have.
20. Before Brabantio leaves the scene, he tries to cast doubt about Desdemona to Othello. Imagine you are Othello; write a journal entry including all the questions you now have about your wife.

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21. Othello leaves to spend an hour with his wife before he departs. Seeing them go sparks the jealousy of Roderigo and the evil in Iago, and each man discusses the nature of love. How do Roderigo and Iago differ when it comes to defining the nature of love and our ability to control it? Using your experience as a guide, explain who you agree with and why.
22. Iago keeps telling Roderigo to "...put money in thy purse." Why is he telling his friend to do that? Write a letter to Roderigo warning him and explaining Iago's intent.
23. Iago has Roderigo in his control. By the end of the scene, Roderigo is being used to do Iago's will. It must be something in Roderigo's nature that allows him to be controlled in such a way. What do you think is in human nature that allows us to be controlled by others? Think of at least three faults humans have that may allow them to be controlled or used. Using these three faults write a well-organized essay defending your opinion.
24. After Roderigo exits, Iago says, "Thus do I ever make my fool my purse." Then he says to Othello, "He holds me well/The better shall my purpose work on him." Write a brief interpretation of each quotation. Then, write two lists, one for Roderigo and another list for Othello containing the information that will benefit Iago.
25. The closing speech reveals the plot. Iago's hatred for Othello causes Iago to devise a plan in order to defeat Othello. Has there ever been a time when you have used an aspect of someone's character for your own advantage? Write in your journal about this specific time.
26. Iago hates Othello so much that he wants to destroy him. Imagine that you are a psychiatrist and Iago is your client. How would you counsel him if he told you he was afraid he hated a man enough to destroy him?