

# Othello

## *Sample Analytical Paper Topics*

### TOPIC #1

Generally, irony is the literary technique that involves differences between appearance and reality, expectation and result, or meaning and intention. More specifically, verbal irony uses words to suggest the opposite of what is meant. In dramatic irony there is a contradiction between what a character says or thinks and what the audience knows to be true. Finally situational irony refers to events that occur which contradict the expectations of the characters, audience, or readers. Identify the various types of irony used in *Othello* and explain their significance to the plot.

#### **Outline**

**I.** Thesis Statement: *In Shakespeare's Othello, verbal irony, dramatic irony, and situational irony are used to propel the action forward and to intensify the drama as it proceeds.*

#### **II. Act I**

- A. Iago tells Roderigo "I am not what I am."
- B. Iago tells Othello "I lack iniquity / Sometimes to do me service."
- C. Othello discusses how his merits will speak for themselves.
- D. Brabantio wants Othello to go to prison for eloping with Desdemona.
- E. The invasion of Cyprus by the Turkish fleet causes Othello's commission to the island.
- F. Brabantio's insistence on how Desdemona was beguiled by Othello versus Iago's beguiling of Othello.
- G. Othello's comments to the Duke that Iago "is of honesty and trust."

#### **III. Act II**

- A. The storm destroys the Turkish fleet off the coast of Cyprus.
- B. In the humorous praise of women, Iago pretends that he has difficulty imagining ways to praise the various women Desdemona mentions.
- C. Othello tells Desdemona "If it were now to die, / 'Twere now to be most happy."
- D. Desdemona responds to Othello with "that our loves and comforts should increase / Even as our days grow!"
- E. Othello proclaims an evening of celebration of victory over the Turkish fleet and his marriage.
- F. Othello comments to Cassio, "Iago is most honest."
- G. Iago encourages Cassio to "have a measure to the health of black Othello."
- H. Iago tells Othello that he would "rather have his tongue cut" from his mouth "than it should do offense to Michael Cassio."
- I. Iago urges Cassio to ask Desdemona for help to get reinstated with Othello.

#### **IV. Act III**

- A. Iago tells Cassio that he will "devise a means to draw the Moor / Out of the way, that your converse and business / May be more free."
- B. Emilia says that the rift between Othello and Cassio "grieves my husband / As if the case were his."
- C. Desdemona says to Cassio that "thy solicitor shall rather die / Than give thy cause away."
- D. Iago says to Othello, "My lord, you know I love you."

- E. Iago states to Othello that “men should be what they seem; / Or those that be not, would they might seem none!”
- F. Othello comments that “This honest creature doubtless / Sees and knows more, much more, than he unfolds” with reference to Iago.
- G. When Desdemona offers to bind Othello's head with her handkerchief, it falls and Emilia picks it up.
- H. Othello tells Iago, “Thou hadst been better have been born a dog / Than answer my waked wrath” after demanding visible proof of Desdemona's infidelity.
- I. Othello tells Desdemona that to lose or give away the handkerchief “were such perdition / As nothing else could match.”
- J. Cassio gives Bianca the handkerchief for her to copy the design.

## V. Act IV

- A. Iago instructs Othello to eavesdrop on a conversation he has with Cassio about Bianca.
- B. Bianca enters and chides Cassio for giving her the handkerchief.
- C. Lodovico delivers the letter recalling Othello to Venice and appointing Cassio in charge in Cyprus.
- D. Emilia says to Othello that “If any wretch have put this in your head” to “Let heaven requite it with the serpent's curse!”
- E. Iago asks Desdemona “How comes this trick upon him?”
- F. Emilia suggests that “some eternal villain ...devised the slander.”
- G. Othello tells Desdemona to get “to bed on th' instant ...dismiss your attendant there.”
- H. Desdemona sings the “willow” song that preoccupied her mind all day.

## VI. Act V

- A. Roderigo fails to kill Cassio
- B. Othello hears Cassio's cries.
- C. Iago kills Roderigo
- D. Bianca enters the fracas and wants to know what is going on.
- E. Iago tells Cassio “He that lies here ...was my friend.”
- F. Iago states that “guiltiness will speak, / Though tongues were out of use.”
- G. Othello tells Desdemona that Cassio is dead.
- H. Emilia tells Othello that Cassio killed Roderigo.
- I. Iago's final statement is “From this time forth I never will speak word.”

## TOPIC #2

In literature, motivation refers to the reasons that explain or partially explain a character's thoughts, feelings, actions, or behavior. Motivation results from a combination of personality and circumstances with which he or she must deal. Samuel Taylor Coleridge describes the character of Iago in Shakespeare's *Othello* as a “motiveless malignancy,” suggesting that he is a character whose motivation is pure evil. Discuss Iago in terms of the thoughts, feelings, actions, and behavior which result from his experiences.

### Outline

- I. Thesis Statement: *Iago is a manifestation of evil from which emanates a malevolent force that grows wider and deeper, destroying everyone in its path as he reveals himself throughout the play.*

## II. Act I

- A. Roderigo responds to Iago with “Thou told'st me thou didst hold him in thy hate.”
- B. Iago expresses his opinions as to why Michael Cassio was chosen as Othello's lieutenant.
- C. Iago comments that “In following him, I follow but myself.”

- D. Iago urges Roderigo to awaken Brabantio with news of the elopement.
- E. Iago presents images of animal lust to Brabantio.
- F. Iago does not reveal himself to Brabantio.
- G. Iago tells Othello how he had to defend Othello to Brabantio many times.
- H. Roderigo threatens to drown himself, but Iago consoles him with promises of Desdemona.
- I. Iago tells Roderigo, "Let us be conjunctive in our revenge."

### III. Act II

- A. Iago insists that it is difficult for him to easily imagine the praises for women that Desdemona asks.
- B. Iago carefully observes Michael Cassio's greeting of Desdemona.
- C. Iago reveals in an aside that he will "untune" Desdemona and Othello.
- D. Iago informs Roderigo of the greeting which Michael Cassio gave to Desdemona.
- E. Iago enlists Roderigo in a plan to anger Cassio and provoke him to a quarrel.
- F. Iago admits that he suspects Othello of infidelity with Emilia
- G. Iago tells Cassio that Othello relieved them from the watch.
- H. Iago insists on toasting to Othello with Cassio.
- I. Iago informs Montano that Cassio's weakness is drinking.
- J. Iago insitgates Roderigo to provoke a quarrel with Cassio.
- K. Othello hears Iago's version of the scuffle.
- L. Iago urges Cassio to ask Desdemona for help.

### IV. Act III

- A. Iago tells Cassio he will keep Othello away as Michael Cassio speaks with Desdemona.
- B. Iago engages in conversation with Othello regarding his thoughts.
- C. Iago plants thoughts of jealousy in Othello's mind regarding Cassio and Desdemona.
- D. Iago snatches the handkerchief from Emilia.
- E. Iago tells Othello he has seen Cassio with the handkerchief.
- F. Iago promises to follow through with Othello's vow for revenge.

### V. Act IV

- A. Iago feeds Othello with images of lust and love between Cassio and Desdemona.
- B. Iago schemes to have Othello overhear a conversation he has with Bianca.
- C. Iago encourages close observation of Othello's behavior after he strikes Desdemona.
- D. Iago suggests to Desdemona that Othello's behavior is "but his humour."
- E. After Roderigo expresses impatience with Iago, he suggests that Rogerigo get involved in the plan to eliminate Michael Cassio by "knocking out his brains."

### VI. Act V

- A. Iago expresses his attitude toward Cassio's and Roderigo's lives.
- B. In the scuffle between Cassio and Roderigo, Iago wounds Cassio.
- C. Iago cries for help for Cassio after Lodovico and Gratiano come onto the scene.
- D. Iago pretends to search for those responsible for the villainy.
- E. Iago kills Roderigo.
- F. Bianca is implicated in a plot to kill Cassio.
- G. Iago states he will speak no more.

## TOPIC #3

*Othello* is a play in which many contrasts affect the characters' ability to discern the difference between reality and illusion. Identify and trace the contrasts between black and white images, love and lust, and honesty and dishonesty as they are presented throughout the play.

### Outline

I. Thesis Statement: *The juxtaposition of images of dark and light, love and lust, and honesty and dishonesty clouds the characters' perception so much so that they are unable to distinguish the difference between reality and illusion.*

### II. Light and dark

- A. Roderigo refers to Othello as "the thick-lips."
- B. Roderigo awakens Brabantio at night, and Brabantio demands light to seek Desdemona.
- C. Iago suggests that Cassio drink a measure to "the black Othello."
- D. Othello refers to Desdemona's "whiter skin ...than snow / And smooth as monumental alabaster."
- E. Othello comments "Put out the light, and then put out the light!"

### III. Love and lust

- A. Iago comments to Brabantio that he'll have his daughter "covered with a Barbary horse...[his] nephews neigh to [him] and coursers for cousins, and gennets for Germans."
- B. Iago refers to Othello and Desdemona as "making the beast with two backs" with reference to the consummation of their marriage.
- C. Iago tells Roderigo that when Desdemona's appetite for Othello fades she will desire Cassio.
- D. Iago fills Othello's mind with various images of animal acts of copulation to rouse his jealousy.
- E. Othello tells Emilia he killed his wife because "Cassio did top her."
- F. Desdemona and Othello speak in terms of deep love when they meet in Cyprus.

### IV. Honesty and dishonesty

- A. Iago reveals to Roderigo "I am not what I am."
- B. Iago tells Othello that he has defended him to Brabantio many times.
- C. Roderigo is tricked into thinking that all of Iago's plans for him will get him to Desdemona.
- D. Desdemona believes Iago to be an honest man.
- E. Iago tells Cassio to plead his case with Desdemona.
- F. Iago tells Othello to eavesdrop on a conversation he has with Cassio.