*Othello* Act 5



Close Reading Guide

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| **Directions: Answer the following questions fully and in complete sentences to receive credit.** |

**Scene 1:**

1. **Imagery** of darkness and light pervade the play and especially the final act. Describe the setting of Scene 1. What could this setting **symbolize**?

2. For what practical reasons does Iago want Cassio and Roderigo dead?

3. Who dies on the street in Cyprus and by whose hand? In trying to cast suspicion for one character’s death on Bianca, Iago uses a technique that he has relied on throughout the play. What is it? Why is it so successful?

**Act 5, scene 2**

1. Translate the following speech of Othello’s as he is standing over Desdemona preparing to kill her (5.2.1-22).

It is the cause,\* it is the cause, my soul.

Let me not name it to you, you chaste stars.

It is the cause. Yet I’ll not shed her blood,

Nor scar that whiter skin of hers than snow,

And smooth as monumental alabaster.

Yet she must die, else she’ll betray more men.

Put out the light, and then put out the light.\*

If I quench thee, thou flaming minister,\*

I can again thy former light restore,

Should I repent me;\* but one put out thy light,

Thou cunning’st pattern of excelling nature,

I know not where is that Promethean heat\*

That can thy light relume.\* When I have plucked

the rose,

I cannot give it vital growth again;

It must needs wither. I’ll smell it on the tree.

*Kisses her*.

O balmy breath, that dost almost persuade

Justice to break her sword. One more, one more!\*

Be thus when thou art dead, and I will kill thee,

And love thee after. One more, and that’s the last!

So sweet was ne’er so fatal. I must weep,

But they are cruel\* tears. This sorrow’s heavenly;

It strikes where it doth love. She wakes.

2. Find images of light and dark in Othello’s speech (above). How do these contradictory images work to show the reader Othello’s state of mind?

3. How do you feel about Emilia at the end of the play? Discuss her character.

4. Translate Othello’s lines in which he describes his feelings for Desdemona (5.2.272-280):

Now, how dost thou look now? When we shall meet at compt,\*

This look of thine will hurl my soul from heaven,

And fiends will snatch at it. Cold, cold, my girl?

Even like thy chastity.

O cursed, cursed slave!\* Whip me, ye devils,

From the possession of\* this heavenly sight!

Blow me about in winds! Roast me in sulfur!

Wash me in steep-down gulfs of liquid fire!

5. Translate Othello’s final speech (5.2.337-355):

Soft you,\* a word or two before you go,

I have done the state some service, and they know’t

No more of that. I pray you, in your letters,

When you shall these unlucky\* deeds relate,

Speak of me as I am. Nothing extenuate,

Nor set down aught in malice. Then must you speak

Of one that loved not wisely but too well;

Of one not easily jealous, but being wrought,\*

Perplexed\* in the extreme; of one whose hand,

Like the based Judean\*, threw a pearl away

Richer than all his tribe; of one whose subdued\* eyes,

Albeit unused to the melting mood,

Drops tears as fast as the Arabian trees

Their med’cinal gum.\* Set you down this.

And say besides that in Aleppo\* once,

Where a malignant and a turbaned Turk

Beat a Venetian and traduced the state,

I took by th’ throat the circumcised dog

And smote him—thus.

6. What does Othello claim his downfall was in his speech (above)? Do you agree with this assessment or not?

7. Aristotle claimed that a **tragic hero** had three qualities. 1) he must be of noble character 2) his fortunes must go from good to bad and 3) his downfall must be as a result of his **tragic flaw**. In regards to each of these criterions, argue whether or not Othello was truly a tragic hero.

8. List all the characters who died, why they died, and at whose hand.

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| Character | Death | Who Killed Them |
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9. Critics have debated whether or not Othello recovers his former noble stature at the end of the play after he realizes he has made a mistake. What do you think? Support your response with evidence from the text.

10. Evaluate the character of Iago. What were his true motivations? What do you think of his final lines in the play?