



lago

"I AM NOT WHAT I AM."

# Character Questions

What is the character's **role** in the play?

Do the character's qualities make him or her **appealing to an audience**?

Does the character **undergo change** as the play progresses?

What is the character's **relationship with another character** in the play?

# Important Point

- ▶ You will never be asked to provide a basic character sketch of Iago or any other character.
- ▶ The examiner assumes you have learned your notes on each character. Now they want to see how you can use that information.



EXAM



# Questions on Iago



He is a **complex character**, so questions on him are likely to focus on that.



You might be asked if he is an **interesting villain** and why you think this.



You might be asked if you believe he is **responsible for Othello's downfall**.



You might be asked **what drives him to behave the way he does**.



# What is it about Iago that fascinates us?

- ▶ Although Iago is a heinous villain and brings about the downfall of Othello and the death of the innocent and pure Desdemona, he is nonetheless a compelling and fascinating character.
- ▶ He raises more questions than he answers.

## “Motiveless Malignancy”


- ▶ In Act One Scene One, Iago says he is deeply resentful about having been passed over for promotion in favour of Cassio who ‘never set a squadron in the field, / Nor the division of a battle knows’.
- ▶ We might accept this and understand - if not condone - Iago’s desire to follow Othello ‘to serve my turn upon him’.

However, Iago startles us by changing the reason for his hatred of Othello.

In Act 1 Scene 3, Iago says that he fears Othello has cuckolded him: 'It is thought abroad that 'twixt my sheets / He has done my office'.

Later, in Act 2, he says of Desdemona 'I do love her too'. Is he jealous of Othello for securing such a great prize as Desdemona? Does he want her for himself? He claims he does not love her simply 'out of absolute lust'.

Again, he returns to the idea that Othello has slept with Emilia and that he must pay him back 'wife for wife', or at least make him so jealous that he loses his reason.

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- ▶ The intriguing thing is that Iago does not seem to have a genuine reason to hate Othello, certainly not one that could prompt him to go to such lengths to destroy his life.
  - ▶ It is almost frightening to think that a man could be willing to ruin so many people's lives for no real reason.



Is misogyny partly responsible for Iago's actions?

- ▶ Iago seems to hate women and speaks disparagingly to and about them.
- ▶ Why does he repeatedly prevent Othello from spending an uninterrupted night with Desdemona?

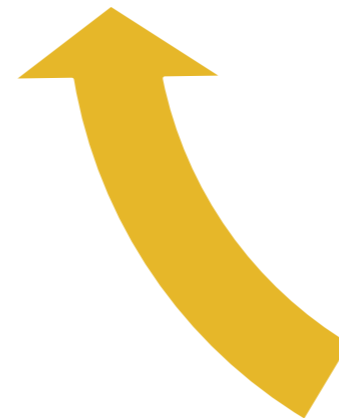


# Amusing

We side with him against Roderigo and laugh with him.



Despite the horror of his actions, Iago is most entertaining in his dealing with Roderigo.



Does he manipulate us, the audience, just as much as he does the characters in the play?



# Honest Iago

Despite his being a liar, Iago inspires trust in those around him and is repeatedly called 'honest Iago'.

Even though he tells Roderigo that he serves no man but himself, Roderigo still puts his trust in him.

# Compelling and fascinating

1

Iago possesses a great ability to manipulate others and turn situations to his advantage.

2

He has a great understanding of human nature but uses this to cause pain and suffering.

3

We are by turns appalled and enthralled by his actions, but it is impossible to ignore his twisted genius.