

## Introduction to the Single Text – Ordinary Level

- This section of Paper Two is worth **60 marks**.
- The Single Text is the first section examined in Paper Two. There are a number of different Single Texts set each year, and these are listed on the first page of your exam paper, along with the relevant page number.
- You are only required to study **one** of these Single Texts.
- Beware: sometimes a book you are studying as part of your Comparative Study will also appear as a Single Text option. It is vitally important that you remember that you are only to answer the questions on your studied Single Text. If you use your Comparative Study text in the Single Text section, you will *not* be able to use it in the Comparative Study section.
- You are required to know your Single Text in far more detail than you know your Comparative Study texts.
- If you are studying a novel rather than a play, you do not need to learn a large number of quotes. However, if you are hoping for a high grade, it would be no harm to familiarise yourself with some of the more important quotes from the book.

## Types of Question Asked

You will be required to answer **three ten mark questions** and **one thirty mark question**. There is no choice in the ten mark questions: you must answer all of them. There is a choice between three different thirty mark questions. You need only answer **one** of these.

### TEN MARK QUESTION

#### **1. Character**

This is undoubtedly the examiners' favourite type of question. You may be asked to comment on one or more of the main characters, and why they act the way they do in the text.

#### **2. Relationships**

These questions generally focus on the central relationships in the text.

#### **3. Plot questions**

In these questions, you may be asked what happens at a particular point in the text. You must be accurate here. Do not give analysis or personal opinion when answering a question on the plot. Look at the sample answers given in this book to see how this type of question should be approached.

#### **4. The world of the text/social setting**

You may be asked questions about the setting of the text and how the time and place in which they live affects the characters.

#### **5. Theme or issue**

You may be asked to comment on the theme of the text. Sometimes this might be asked in a straightforward way, mentioning the theme, and sometimes it might not be quite so clear. For example, if you are asked to choose a different title for the text, the examiner is more than likely asking you to focus in on the main theme or themes and reflect those in your chosen title.

#### **6. An important moment in the text**

You may be asked to describe a

happy/sad/pleasant/disturbing/violent/frightening/important/amusing/enjoyable/dangerous moment. Remember, when describing this moment, to say **why** it is happy/sad etc.

### **7. The ending**

You may be asked to comment on the ending. Was it what you expected? How were things resolved for various characters?

### **8. Writer's attitude towards the subject of the text**

Be sure you are able to say what this attitude is and how it is conveyed to us by his or her writing.

## **THIRTY MARK QUESTIONS**

Many of the questions in this section are similar to the ten mark questions. The principal difference is the length of answer expected.

This type of question is effectively a short writing task, similar to the Comprehension Question B answers. You should bear this in mind when planning and writing your answer. The layout of the letter or diary entry or whatever you may be asked to do is not as important as it is in the Comprehension Question B section, but if you are looking for a high grade, you should make an effort to use appropriate language, show an awareness of your audience and generally demonstrate an understanding of how such a task should be approached.

As it is a thirty mark question, you should be aiming to write around six paragraphs, each containing a valid point.

There is an element of personal response here, but be very careful to ensure that your answer is based on the text. There is occasionally some scope for you to use your imagination, but generally only in the way you express yourself. In other words, if you are asked to pretend you are one of the characters and are writing a diary entry after a significant event, you must be sure to stick to the facts of the event as they are presented in the text. Don't be fooled by seemingly vague questions or by the word 'imagine'.

If you are asked for your opinion of the text, try to be positive. You may not like the text, but it was chosen as a good example of its genre, and you would be unwise to criticise it.

### **1. Character study**

This is a very common question, as it is in the ten mark section. In this question, you may be asked to pretend you are one of the characters in the text, and to write the diary entry he or she might make after a significant event. Or, you may be asked whether or not you could live with one of the characters. Another option may be a question requiring you to write a speech defending or prosecuting a certain character. Of course, the question *may* simply ask you to analyse one of the main characters, but it is more likely to be framed as a short writing task along the lines of those given in Comprehension Question B on Paper One.

### **2. World of the text/Setting**

You may be asked what differences there are between the world of the text and the world in which you live. Would you like to live in the world of the text? What have you learnt about the world of the text from your study? How did the setting/world of the text affect the plot and/or the characters' lives?

### **3. Relationships**

These questions generally focus on the central relationships in the text.

### **4. Review**

You may be asked to write an article, speech or some other task in which you give your opinion of the text. In general, you will be asked to present this speech or article to an audience of your peers. In other words, you should be prepared to tell other students your age what you thought of the book and whether or not you would recommend it to them. Make sure to consider several different aspects of the text when planning your answer. Is the theme one which would appeal to your peers? What about the language? Does the plot move at a fast pace and keep you gripped from start to finish? Are the characters likeable? Could you relate to the issues dealt with in the text? Did you learn anything from the text?

Try to be as positive as you can when answering this question. Refer to the text in every

single paragraph.

### **5. News Report**

Here you will have to imagine that you are a reporter or possibly a police officer, writing a report on an event that has taken place in the text.

### **6. Theme or issue / how studying this theme affects the reader**

What view of life do you get from the text? Is it uplifting or depressing? Are there life lessons to be learnt? What is the author's attitude towards the theme of the text?

### **7. An important moment in the text**

You may be asked to describe, in some detail, a happy/sad/pleasant/disturbing/violent/frightening/important/amusing/enjoyable/dangerous moment. Remember, when describing this moment, to say why it is happy/sad etc.

### **8. Alternative endings**

Occasionally, you are asked to imagine how the events in the text might have turned out if characters had made different choices. This is a difficult question to tackle, as the temptation to wander far from the text itself can be great. Try to base your answer on the text in so far as it is possible to do so. Try to keep the characters' behaviour in keeping with the way they have acted throughout the text.

## Guidelines for Answering Exam Questions

This section is worth 60 marks and should take you a little less than an hour to complete.

- When you read the question, underline the key words: 'describe', 'explain', 'outline' etc.
- Study the question carefully. Try to paraphrase it. What exactly are you being asked? Is the question on plot or character, for example? Is there more than one part to the question? (Look for the word 'and'. This can be an indication that there are two parts to the question.)
- Plan your answer. It is well worth taking the time to do this.
- Think in terms of key moments: this will ensure that you refer to the text and will help you to keep the sequence of events in the right order.
- Do not, under any circumstances, simply summarise the plot.
- Remember that, as a general rule, (although you must be guided by the question first and foremost) five marks equals one well-developed point. One well-developed point equals one paragraph. So, if a question is worth thirty marks, you should try to make at least six points. You may also wish to include a brief introduction and conclusion.

It cannot be stressed enough that, unless you are specifically asked to do so in a recall question, simply retelling the story will not get you marks. Avoid falling into the trap of simply describing the world of the text, for example, without saying what effect it has on the characters' lives.

In order to get high marks, you need to:

1. Answer the question asked (30%)
2. Make sure every paragraph develops that answer (30%)
3. Use varied and appropriate language (30%)
4. Keep an eye on your spelling and grammar (10%).

Look back over the plan. Does each point you are intending to make answer the question? Is each point backed up by an example from the text? Do the paragraphs flow logically one from the other?

## Othello – SEC 2008 Ordinary Level

**1 (a)** Do you feel sorry for Brabantio, Desdemona's father, when he learns that she has married Othello? (10)

**Note:**

There is no right or wrong answer here. You are free to say that you do or do not feel sorry for Brabantio or to give both sides of the argument and say that you find it impossible to decide. The most important thing is that you show the examiner you have thought about and planned your approach to this question. I have given two possible approaches to this question, either of which would be perfectly valid.

Any points you make are valid as long as they can be supported by reference to and quotation from the play. If you think you have a point but have no evidence to support it, you may need to rethink your point.

The general rule is that five marks is equal to one well-developed point, but if you have more to say and the time allows, you should say it. In the first sample answer I have given three points to support my answer. Obviously, the more familiar you are with the play, the more you will be able to write in the time allowed.

**First Option**

**Plan:**

Yes

- At that time, fathers were within their rights to expect obedience from their daughters.
- He is taunted and belittled by Iago and Roderigo.
- He does love Desdemona and we hear at the end of the play that he has died of a broken heart.

### Sample Answer 1:

Yes, I do feel sorry for Brabantio when he learns that Desdemona has married Othello.

Although his reaction to the news might seem unreasonable to a modern audience, we have to remember that Brabantio lived in a different time; that he was taunted and mocked beyond endurance by Iago and Roderigo, and that he truly loved his daughter and wanted the best for her.

A brief introduction outlining the points you will develop in the remainder of your answer is a nice touch, but if you find timing a problem you do not have to include one in a ten mark answer.

In order to understand Brabantio's anger and dismay on hearing that Desdemona has eloped with Othello, we must appreciate the relationship between father and daughter at the time the play was written. Desdemona would have been seen as Brabantio's property, something which Iago refers to when he wakes Brabantio from his sleep and shouts

'Thieves! Thieves! Thieves!' and 'Zounds, sir, you're robbed; for shame, put on / your gown!' The words 'Thieves', 'robbed' and 'for shame' show us how an Elizabethan audience would have viewed Desdemona's elopement and its effect on her father's reputation. Although I do not share Brabantio's view of the role of the head of the family, I can still understand how upset and humiliated he must have felt by his daughter's betrayal.

Short quotes, woven into the fabric of your sentence are best. There is no need to use a separate colour when writing quotes.

Another reason I feel sorry for Brabantio is that he is mercilessly taunted by Iago. Iago has already told

Roderigo that they should 'Rouse him, make after him, poison his delight / Proclaim him in the streets' and he does just this in the most crude and vulgar way. He shouts up to Brabantio that 'an old black ram / is tupping your white ewe' and that his daughter and Othello 'are now making the beast / with two backs'. This, and other references to Othello and Desdemona's relationship as being like animals having sex would distress any father, let alone a father in those times when daughters were supposed to be chaste and obedient.

To taunt someone is to mock or insult them in order to make them angry. It's a good word to use when talking about this incident.

Finally, we see that Brabantio does truly love his daughter as we hear at the end of the play that he died of a broken heart shortly after her elopement. On seeing Desdemona murdered by Othello, Gratiano says he is glad Brabantio did not live to see such a thing as

‘Thy match was mortal to him, and pure grief / Shore his old thread in twain’.

For all of these reasons I feel sorry for Brabantio when he hears his daughter has married Othello. Although his ideas might be old-fashioned, he was a loving father who took his role as head of the household very seriously and pined away when he learned that his efforts had been in vain.

### **Second Option Plan:**

No

- He makes it clear that Desdemona has no say in who she marries
- Racist in that he immediately thinks Othello must have used magic

### **Sample Answer 2:**

I do not feel at all sorry for Brabantio when he learns that Desdemona has married Othello because his reactions show that he is an overly-controlling father and that he is bigoted in his treatment of Othello.

This brief introduction – it is only one sentence – outlines the two points that will be developed in the rest of the answer.

When Roderigo and Iago wake Brabantio to tell him of the elopement, Brabantio is furious and tells Roderigo that he has already told him ‘My daughter is not for thee’. This is our first indication that Brabantio believes it is he who should choose Desdemona’s husband, not Desdemona herself. When he learns that Roderigo is telling the truth, Brabantio immediately says that it is ‘Past thought’ that Desdemona should deceive him and asks ‘how got she out?’ That last question makes it appear that Desdemona is a virtual prisoner in her own house and can only leave with her father’s permission. Although I realise that at the time the play was written fathers did effectively own their daughters, I still find it difficult to have any sympathy for Brabantio and his controlling ways.

Another reason I do not feel sorry for Brabantio at this point in the play is that his reaction to the news that Othello is his son-in-law is to ask ‘Is there not charms / By which the property of youth and maidhood / May be abused?’ This is a dreadfully racist interpretation of the relationship between Othello and Desdemona as Brabantio believes Othello must have used some sort of magic to force her to love him. He goes even further when pleading his case before the Duke, saying that only ‘mixtures powerful o’er the blood’ could have made Desdemona ‘fall in love with what she fear’d to look on’ and go

'Against all rules of nature' in marrying a black man.

For these reasons, I do not have any sympathy at all with Brabantio and I think he left Desdemona with no choice but to elope in order to marry the man she loved.

If you have time, a brief conclusion ties your answer up neatly. One sentence is more than adequate in this instance.

**(b)** From your reading of the play, why do you think Desdemona falls in love with Othello?

**Note:**

In Act 1 Scene 3, Othello tells the Duke and senators why he believes Desdemona fell in love with him. It is worth re-reading that scene before attempting your answer.

You may also wish to mention Desdemona's background and how sheltered she was, which would have made Othello's stories of his travels and hardships even more exciting and exotic in her eyes.

**Plan:**

- Othello's speech in Act 1 Scene 3: stories of battles etc.
- Desdemona's sheltered background makes Othello's tales most exciting and appealing

**Sample Answer:**

I think Desdemona fell in love with Othello because his tales of adventure were exciting and exotic, especially to a girl as sheltered as Desdemona was.

In Act 1 Scene 3, Othello explains to the Duke and senators – including Brabantio – why Desdemona fell for him. Brabantio had often invited him to his house and asked him to tell stories about his life from boyhood on. Desdemona listened to these tales of 'moving accidents by flood and field', of Othello being sold into slavery, escaping and travelling to strange places and meeting 'Cannibals that

When you quote, let Shakespeare's words do the work. Do not paraphrase the quote, but weave it seamlessly into your sentence.

each other eat' and other extraordinary people. Desdemona loved hearing these stories so much that she would rush any household tasks she had to do in order to 'with a greedy ear / Devour up my discourse'. Desdemona eventually hinted to Othello that she had fallen for him by saying that if he knew anyone who loved her they should learn to tell Othello's story 'And that would woo her'.

Othello's stories certainly sound exciting, even to a modern audience, so it is easy to imagine how much more thrilling they must have seemed to a sheltered, upper-class girl whose father describes her as 'A maiden never bold'. Indeed, she shook with fear when she first saw Othello, but his otherness became more exotic and attractive than frightening when he began to tell his colourful stories. Even the Duke understands why Desdemona was charmed by Othello, saying 'I think this tale would win my daughter too'.

Although Brabantio may believe that Othello won Desdemona through some sort of magic, the only charm he needed was his own life story and the ability to recount it in such a way that she 'loved me for the dangers I had pass'd'.

2. 'Yet she must die, else she'll betray more men.'

Describe the murder of Desdemona by Othello in Act 5, Scene 2.

**Note:**

Don't focus on the quote too much here. This is a simple question which asks you to recount the details of the murder. Obviously, you must know the story well and describe the events in the right order.

You may focus on the immediate circumstances of the murder or include the lead up to the event and the aftermath. However, if you try to write about too much of this long scene, you risk running out of time or producing a vague account of the murder.

You are not required to analyse the events, all that you need to do is say what happened.

**Plan:**

- Othello's calm manner as he prepares to murder Desdemona
- Desdemona's fear and despair as Othello shows no mercy
- Othello grieves, Emilia enters, Desdemona dies

**Sample Answer:**

Othello enters the bedroom he shares with Desdemona. She is already asleep and he appears quite calm as he says that he will first put out the candle and then kill his wife. He reminds himself that he must do this as 'It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul'. She has been unfaithful and must pay for it. However, as he leans over to kiss Desdemona, Othello says that her sweet breath 'dost almost persuade / Justice to break her sword'. He begins to cry, and this wakes Desdemona. She asks him to come to bed but he does not, asking her if she has said her prayers. He advises her to repent of any sins now so he does not kill her 'unprepared spirit'.

Desdemona is alarmed and says that even though she is innocent, she is afraid of Othello in this mood. He accuses her of having given Cassio the handkerchief and does not believe her denial. Desdemona tells her husband that she 'never loved Cassio' When she asks him to send for Cassio, Othello says he is dead.

It is best to use the present tense when discussing the action of the play. However, you may use the past tense if you wish. The most important thing is that you stick to your chosen tense throughout your answer.

Desdemona falls into despair on hearing this as she now sees that there is no way of proving her innocence. Othello thinks she is weeping for Cassio and is furious: 'Out, strumpet! - Weep'st thou for him to my face?' Desdemona begs for more time but Othello says it is too late and begins to smother her with a pillow. Emilia calls to him from outside the door, but Othello thinks the cries are Desdemona's and smothers her once again to ensure a quick death.

Once he believes Desdemona is dead, Othello's calm begins to desert him and he grieves for her. He lets Emilia into the room and explains that he had to kill Desdemona. Desdemona is not yet dead, however, and says 'A guiltless death I die', when she sees Emilia. She also says that nobody killed her but that she did it herself. With a last farewell, she dies, innocent and good to the end.

**3 (i).** At the end of the play, Lodovico describes Iago as a *hellish villain*. Do you think this is a fair description of Iago? Support your answer with reference to the play. (30)

**Note:**

As this is a thirty-mark question, you would be expected to write six points. However, if

you can only think of five, then it is better to stick to those rather than trying to pad out your answer with irrelevancies.

**Plan:**

- Has no real reason for what he does
- Calls on forces of darkness, linked to devil
- Tortures Brabantio and uses Roderigo
- Is willing to see the innocent Desdemona suffer and die
- Uses any opportunity to do evil
- Final act of cruelty is his refusal to explain himself

**Sample Answer:**

Yes, I agree with the description of Iago as a 'hellish villain'. Throughout the play we see that he does all he can to ensure the suffering and death of those who trust him even though there is no real reason for him to do so.

The opening line reflects the wording of the question. The rest of the introduction outlines the points that will be dealt with in the rest of the answer.

He also pounces on every opportunity to do evil and calls on the forces of darkness to help him in his devilish plotting.

Although Iago gives a number of explanations for his dreadful actions, they are not very convincing. He says he hates Othello for not making him his lieutenant, yet when he is given that title after Cassio's fall from grace he doesn't even remark on it. Similarly, there is no evidence to support his claim that Othello 'twixt my sheets / Has done my office' or that Cassio too slept with Emilia. Iago seems to jump from excuse to excuse but I believe the real reason for his deciding to torment those around him is that he is an evil person and enjoys manipulating and hurting others.

Iago appears to enjoy the suffering of others and does all he can to bring it about. He encourages Roderigo to wake Brabantio and 'poison his delight' with news of Desdemona's elopement. His treatment of Roderigo is further proof of Iago's maliciousness and villainy. He admits to using Roderigo 'for sport and profit', stealing his money and lying to him about giving jewels to Desdemona. Finally, Iago does not hesitate to kill Roderigo when he is of no further use and when there is a risk he might want his

money back.

Iago himself adds to our impression that he is a 'hellish villain' by calling on the powers of darkness to help him in his evil plotting: 'Hell and night / Must bring this monstrous birth to the world's light'. When he has persuaded Cassio to beg Desdemona to speak to Othello on his behalf, Iago compares himself to devils who appear good while they are filled with 'the blackest sins'. At the very end of the play, when Othello realises what Iago has done, he looks down at his feet to see if he has cloven hooves like the devil. All of these links with hell and devils reinforce just how evil Iago is.

One of the main reasons I think Iago is such a vile person is his treatment of Desdemona. There is no reason whatsoever for him to torment her and encourage Othello to kill her, but he does so. Horrifyingly, he says that he will use Desdemona's goodness against her:

So will I turn her virtue into pitch,  
And out of her own goodness make the net  
That shall enmesh them all.

Desdemona is completely innocent of any wrongdoing, yet Iago is quite willing to see her suffer and die. When Desdemona asks Iago why Othello should call her 'that name', Iago encourages her to repeat the insult, saying 'What name, fair lady?' although he knows how much it upsets her. Despite Desdemona's pleas for help, Iago cruelly betrays her and persuades Othello to murder her.

Whenever the opportunity arises to do something devilishly bad, Iago leaps at it. When he sees Cassio slipping away after a meeting with Desdemona, Iago tells Othello that he cannot imagine why Cassio would 'steal away so guilty-like'. Having planted the seeds of suspicion in Othello's mind, Iago feeds this jealousy by making Othello believe that Cassio's comments about Bianca were about

You do not have to go into detail about every event in the play. The examiner knows it well and will pick up on each reference.

Desdemona and by planting Desdemona's handkerchief in Cassio's room. Iago is such a 'hellish villain' that he sees every twist and turn of fate as a chance to do evil.

Although Iago's cunning means that he escapes detection for a long time, his crimes do catch up with him when Emilia refuses to support him but tells the truth about the handkerchief. Iago has fatally underestimated the power of goodness and love and is appalled to have Emilia stand up to him. He kills her, and Montano calls him a 'notorious

villain'. Finally unmasked, Iago's final act of monstrous cruelty is to refuse to explain himself to Othello who is desperate to know why the 'demi-devil' has engineered such a dreadful murder. Iago says 'From this time forth I never will speak a word' and with this last evil act, he leaves the action of the play, unrepentant and purely villainous to the end.

**3 (ii).** You have been invited to play the part of a character in the production of the play Othello. Describe the qualities of your chosen character which you would wish to make clear to your audience.

Support your answer with reference to the text.

**Note:**

Read the question carefully! You are not asked to comment on how you would play the role, just what characteristics you would like to highlight. Therefore you should think of the six most important things about your chosen character and discuss each of them.

For a question like this, it is best to choose a complex character or somebody who changes over the course of the play. If you chose Roderigo or Bianca, you would probably run out of things to say within a few paragraphs. (This is an example of how important it is to plan your answer: if you discover at the planning stage that you only have two or three points you can abandon the plan and choose another character without having lost more than a couple of minutes of exam time.)

**Plan:**

Othello

- Honest and straightforward
- Possesses a great deal of self-control
- Insecure
- Does not have great insight into human nature
- Deeply jealous
- Impulsive but determined

### Sample Answer:

The character I would most like to play would be that of Othello. I feel it would be important for the audience to see the good and bad sides of Othello's nature and the weaknesses that allow Iago to manipulate him and drive him to murder the woman he loves.

The first thing I would like the audience to be aware of is Othello's honest and straightforward nature. He has nothing to hide and is proud of all he has done. When Iago tells him that Brabantio has learned of his daughter's elopement and is out for revenge, Othello refuses to hide, saying 'Not I – I must be found:/ My parts, my title and my perfect soul /Shall manifest me rightly'. I think this is significant because it shows that Othello believes the natural course of action is honesty and openness. Therefore he believes others will behave the same way. This puts him at the mercy of Iago who is not at all trustworthy but knows Othello 'thinks men honest that but seem to be so'.

Another aspect of Othello's character that I feel should be emphasised is his self-control. We see at the start of the play how composed he is. Iago tries to provoke him by telling him that Brabantio is determined to end his marriage but Othello only says 'Let him do his spite'. When Brabantio himself appears and accuses Othello of using witchcraft to win Desdemona, Othello remains calm and refuses to fight, saying 'Good signor, you shall more command with years /Than with your weapons'. I believe it is vital to show this self-control because it makes Othello's later descent into jealous rage so much more shocking.

Although the question does not explicitly ask you to do so, it is a good idea to give reasons for your choices.

Of course, for Iago's evil manipulation to have any effect, Othello has to have weak spots that he can use to his advantage. One of these is Othello's insecurity. He knows he is an outsider in Venetian society and that Desdemona is a young and desirable woman who has made an unusual choice by marrying an older, Moorish soldier. I would stress his worry about the inequality of the match once Iago has planted the idea in his mind. In the third act, Othello says 'I am black / And have not those soft parts of conversation / That chamberers have'. He also frets that he is 'declined / Into the vale of years'. If Othello were perfectly confident of his appeal, he would not be so easily won over by Iago's cunning lies about Desdemona's will 'recoiling to her better judgement' and making her prefer someone like Cassio.

It is not just Othello's insecurity that makes him vulnerable to Iago's manipulation, it is also his lack of insight into human nature. He is an experienced

Try to include at least one quote in each paragraph.

solider who says himself that his expertise lies in military life rather than in day to day civilian life: 'And little of this great world can I speak, / More than pertains to feats of broil and battle'. He fails to see that Iago is not to be trusted or that Desdemona is not capable of the sort of behaviour he accuses him of. He may be older than Desdemona, but Othello is just as naïve as she when it comes to analysing human behaviour and that side of his character is important as it makes him believe Iago over his own wife.

Othello is, of course, best known for his jealousy. He says of himself at the end of the play that he was 'not easily jealous', but once the emotion takes hold of him he becomes consumed by it and turns into a cruel husband who goes so far as to strike his wife publicly and compare her to a prostitute. He refuses to listen to reason and accuses both Emilia and Desdemona of lying when he questions them about Cassio. This is an ugly side of Othello's nature but it is most important as without the passion and rage brought about by his jealousy Othello could never bring himself to kill his beloved wife.

The final quality of Othello's that I would like to make clear to an audience is his tendency to act without hesitation. He is impulsive and determined which makes him a dangerous enemy. When he decides upon a course of action, nothing can stop him from carrying it out. He has promised to kill Desdemona and refuses to be consider sparing her. He is convinced that she 'must die' and when she protests her innocence and begs for more time tells her 'It is too late'. So determined is he that when he confuses Emilia's cries outside the door with Desdemona's pleas, he smothers her once again, believing that he is being merciful by making sure she is dead. Equally, when he discovers Iago's plot, Othello does not hesitate to take his own life, and falls dead beside his murdered bride.

I would hope that, by showing the audience what a complex man Othello is they would better understand his own assessment of himself as someone who 'loved not wisely, but too well'.

(iii) Write a report putting forward the view that *Othello* is, or is not, a suitable text for Leaving Cert candidates.

**Note:**

There is no right or wrong answer here, but I would caution against an overwhelmingly negative approach. Remember, *Othello* has been on the syllabus every few years for a very long time indeed, and you would need to have a very good reason for saying it is not suitable. If you dislike the play or find it 'boring', choose another thirty mark question. However, if you have valid and considered reasons for considering the play unsuitable, you can voice them, of course.

**Plan:**

Suitable

- Theme of jealousy is one to which we can relate. Relevant today. Not confined to kings and princes, as the other tragedies are.
- Characters are believable and intriguing. Iago is as enigmatic as he was when the play was written.
- Racism and bigotry are as relevant today as they were in Shakespeare's time, unfortunately. Important to address the issue.
- Provides an interesting insight into a different culture. We are fascinated by similarities and differences.
- Plot is fast-moving and thrilling. Shows us that we don't need special effects to keep us on the edge of our seats.
- There is a moral lesson at the end of the play.

I believe that 'Othello' is a suitable text for Leaving Cert students because its themes, exciting storyline, intriguing characters and fascinating insight into a different world and culture.

Although the name of the text will be written in italics on your exam paper, you cannot replicate that in your handwritten answer so must instead put the name of the text between inverted commas.

When we think of 'Othello', we think of jealousy.

This is a theme that is as relevant today as it was in

Shakespeare's time. Unlike the other great tragedies – 'Macbeth', 'Hamlet' and 'King Lear' – 'Othello' is not a story about people trying to rule a country but is about two people who love one another and a third person who is determined to ruin their happiness. That's much easier for a Leaving Cert student to relate to than the problems of kingship!

Another reason why I feel this text is suitable is that the characters are engaging and interesting. Each has his or her own strengths and weaknesses, and it is intriguing to see the role these play in the outcome of the play. Othello is gripping and terrifying in his transformation from loving husband who says that his love for his wife is so great that 'It stops me here, it is too much of joy', to a man so blinded with jealous rage that he believes Desdemona 'must die, else she'll betray more men'. Othello is a great man in many ways, but his insecurities allow him to be manipulated by the fiendishly clever Iago. Iago is a fascinating character and one who is extremely difficult to fully understand. No two people in our class could agree on what exactly it is that motivates this 'demi-devil' who Othello tells us has 'ensnared my soul and body'.

However, we were all agreed on one thing and that is that his enduring mystery and the debate he inspires is reason enough to study this tragedy.

Make sure that you link your points back to the question.

Of course, one of the reasons that Iago is able to play on Othello's doubts and insecurity about Desdemona's love for him is that he knows Othello feels like an outsider in Venetian society because he is a black foreigner. This theme of racism is an important one and is, unfortunately, as relevant today as it was in Shakespeare's time. Through our study of the play, we are given opportunities to discuss this issue and can see for ourselves the tragic consequences of bigotry and racial hatred. It is shocking to hear Iago tell Brabantio that 'the devil will make a grandsire of you', and persuading Othello himself that it is 'foul' that Desdemona didn't marry a man 'Of her own clime, complexion and degree'. Although it is uncomfortable to hear such views expressed openly, it is interesting and worthwhile for

students to examine the issues surrounding interracial marriage and negative racial stereotypes.

Racism is only one aspect of the culture we are exposed to through our study of 'Othello'. It is fascinating to examine the similarities and differences between our world and the society of the time.

Of course, all of the elements I have mentioned are important and do contribute to making 'Othello' a play well worth studying, but even if you were to ignore those, the plot itself is so fast-paced and thrilling that we come to see that special effects and big budgets are not needed to keep us on the edge of our seats.

Finally, it is important to note that there is a moral lesson at the end of 'Othello'. Yes, there is drama, intrigue and violence, but all of this serves a purpose.

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