

Reading Act 3 Scenes 1-3 – Guiding questions

Act 3 Scene 1

- In the first part, Cassio instructs some musicians to play music outside of Othello and Desdemona's bedchamber. It was an Elizabethan custom to wake newlyweds with music outside their bedroom. A clown is also involved in the conversation. Can you identify one pun or joke from this exchange? (Hint: Read the text on the left side of the page to help you):

Pun on 'wind instrument' – first reference is to a musical instrument (a kind of bagpipe) and the second reference to flatulence.

Homophones of 'tail' and tale' – one refers to the bottom (hence the link with flatulence)

- As a director, would you include or cut this comic moment from the play? Why?

Inclusion, because:

- a) *jokes, ambiguities and puns – foreshadow the confusion and misunderstandings that will shortly happen in the play*
 - b) *brief comic relief after Iago's relentless scheming and Othello's beginning change for the worse that the audience has just witnessed*
- What does Iago's phrase "You have not been abed then" suggest about when this scene takes place?

The morning after the drunken party and Cassio's dismissal.

- What does Cassio tell Iago he has done to recover from his loss of reputation?

He has asked to speak to Emilia in order to persuade Desdemona to pledge for him to Othello.

- Iago: And I'll devise a mean to draw the Moor / Out of the way, that your converse and business / May be more free. Why does this line reveal Iago's deception and scheming? Give two meanings:
 - What does he want Cassio to believe: *That Iago is on his side and is helping him to a one-on-one conversation with Desdemona so that he can regain his position*
 - Why does he actually make the suggestion above: *To create a situation when Cassio and Desdemona are alone that he can use to make Othello suspicious and jealous*

- Cassio says of Iago 'I never knew/ A Florentine more kind and honest'. Why is this an example of **dramatic irony**?

Because the audience knows that Iago is all but honest – in this very conversation we have just witnessed his deception of Cassio.

- What is suggested by the fact that Emilia enters the scene after her husband Iago?

= suggests her movement and actions have been directed by Iago – does what her husband tells her and unwittingly helps his plan

Act 3 Scene 2

Key points:

- Iago carries out the distraction of O to orchestrate the interview of C and D
- O's language – reminder of his role as a military leader
 - BUT – this is the last time war is mentioned in the play – from now on his role as husband will take over and destroy the reputation of the skilled military general
 - AND: O has been determined not to let war and love interfere – but ironically he leaves his wife here to attend to his duties only for Iago to push his manipulation of their relationship to the next level

Act 3 Scene 3 – KEY SCENE IN THE PLAY

- What is Cassio worried about in his initial conversation with Desdemona?

That it will take so long until the situation has calmed down that Othello might find another replacement or forget about Cassio

- Desdemona says 'I'll intermingle everything he does/ With Cassio's suit. Therefore be merry, Cassio, /For thy solicitor shall rather die than give thy cause away.' What is she promising she will do for Cassio and why does she refer to herself as a 'solicitor'?

She will keep reminding Othello of Cassio's reinstatement in everything she says because she knows Cassio is an old and loyal friend.

A 'solicitor' = a helper or advocate – because she will pledge for Cassio and persuade O to give him his position again

Why, for the audience, is her statement also **dramatic irony**?

Desdemona will in fact die as a result of her speaking in favour of Cassio to Othello.

- Why does Cassio leave before Othello joins them?

He is embarrassed about his behaviour the night before.

- 'Ha! I like not that.' What do you think Iago is suggesting/implying to Othello?

He simulates an outburst of shock / outrage to draw O's attention to Cassio and Desdemona's intimate conference. He suggests that he sees more in it than a friendly chat.

- Othello asks if it is Cassio who is departing from Desdemona in the distance and Iago replies: 'No, sure, I cannot think it,/That he would steal away so guilty-like, seeing you coming.' Consider Iago's use of the words 'steal away' and 'guilty-like'. How does this reinforce Iago's **connotation** given to Othello when he previously said 'Ha! I like not that'?

He implies that C and D have an affair – and suggests that Cassio wants to hide this from O, so tries to creep away in secret.

- What specifically is Desdemona asking Othello to do about Cassio?

To call him back and reconcile.

- How does Othello react?

He says he cannot deny D anything, but asks her to leave him alone to contemplate matters – he will forgive C at a later point. First signs of his rejection of D!

- ‘Whatever you be, I am obedient’ are Desdemona’s words before she exists. What is she suggesting about herself?

That she is an obedient and dutiful wife – as she in fact is. Foreshadows her obedience during the murder scene.

- Read lines 90-165. What is Iago trying to do at this point?

He is planting jealousy in Othello deliberately, but is acting innocently.

- Identify three techniques Iago employs in these lines to achieve his desired effect:
 - a) *Short, probing questions*
 - b) *Deliberately vague hints and evading language (to suggest he does in fact know more than he lets on)*
 - c) *Reluctance to speak – lets O draw his own conclusions*
 - d) *Clever sequencing – first focuses on a man’s reputation in general, then draws attention to the idea of jealousy and being cuckolded*
 - e) *Exaggerated emphasis on C’s honesty to make O suspicious*

Then look at this extract:

IAGO

O, beware, my lord, of jealousy;
It is the green-eyed monster which doth mock
The meat it feeds on; that cuckold lives in bliss
Who, certain of his fate, loves not his wronger;
But, O, what damned minutes tells he o’er
Who dotes, yet doubts, suspects, yet strongly loves!

1. What is ‘the green-eyed monster’? *A metaphor for jealousy*
2. What is Iago warning Othello of? *Of continuing to love his wife while suspecting her and doubting her honesty*
3. Iago refers to a ‘cuckold’, which is name for a husband whose wife is cheating on him. Why does Iago deliberately use this word to Othello? *Because he will plant the idea that O is a cuckold himself*

4. Consider Iago's use of (i) oxymora combined with (ii) alliteration e.g. loves-doubts, suspects-strongly loves. How does this remind us that Iago is witty and clever?

He links Othello's strong, passionate emotions of love (that we have witnessed when he arrived in Cyprus) with language of doubt and suspicion.

- When Othello claims that he is not a jealous character and is assured of Desdemona's love and faithfulness ("For she had eyes and chose me"), what does Iago do in return?

He uses this as an opportunity to pretend that, since O is not jealous, he can now speak openly: he reveals his 'suspicions' and explicitly suggests an affair between C and D.

- Iago also reminds Othello of Desdemona's 'deception' of her father – find the quote:

She did deceive her father, marrying you.

- Read lines 230-239. What is Iago's main argument about Desdemona here?

That she has only fallen for O due to a crush – soon when she compares his black skin to the white suitors she could have had, she will repent her decision and leave him.

- After Iago's exit, Othello speaks a soliloquy. What do his thoughts reveal about Othello at this point?

He has started to seriously doubt Desdemona and plans that he would cast her off if she has actually betrayed him. However, he refuses to fully believe in her dishonesty.

- In the next little episode between Othello, Desdemona and Emilia, an important prop and symbol in the play is introduced – what is it?

Handkerchief

- Who takes possession of this prop and why does this cause dreadful anticipation in the audience?

Emilia – because we can anticipate that she will pass it on to Iago who will use it as further 'proof' of Desdemona's unfaithfulness.

- When Othello returns to speak with Iago, how does he feel? Offer one example from the text:

He has lost his contentment and worries about his reputation – “Farewell! Othello’s occupation gone.”

- What does Othello demand from Iago to convince him of Desdemona’s deceit?

Ocular proof – “Make me to see’t”

- *I think my wife be honest, and think she is not; / I think that thou art just, and think thou art not* – what does this line spoken by Othello to Iago suggest about Othello’s state of mind?

He is confused and plagued by torturous, contradictory emotions – does not know what to believe anymore.

- Which two stories about Cassio does Iago make up in the next part of the scene to incite Othello’s jealousy further? Summarise each in one sentence:
 - Story 1: *Cassio has in his sleep spoken to Iago as if to his lover Desdemona – he even kissed him.*
 - Story 2: *Iago saw Cassio wipe his beard with the handkerchief that O gave D*
- *“Now do I see ‘tis true”* – what does Othello refer to when he mentions “it”? Why is his statement ironic for the audience?

‘it’ = the accusation of an affair between C and D

Irony – he does not actually see anything at all – only hears Iago’s stories and sees what Iago wants him to see

- How does the scene end?

With Iago and Othello swearing to take revenge – they unite in a vow of revenge that resembles a mock wedding ceremony