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Othello
William Shakespeare



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Response Journal

To The Student

Although we may read a novel, play, or work of non-fiction for enjoyment, each time we read one, we are building and practicing important basic reading skills. In our ever-more complex society, in which reading has become more and more crucial for success, this, in itself, is an important reason to spend time reading for enjoyment.

Some readers, however, are able to go beyond basic reading techniques and are able to practice higher thinking skills by reflecting on what they have read and how what they read affects them. It is this act of reflection—that is, stopping to think about what you are reading—that this journal is attempting to encourage.

To aid you, we have included writing prompts for each section; however, if you find something that you wish to respond to in the book more compelling than our prompts, you should write about that. We hope you enjoy reading this book and that the act of responding to what you have read increases this enjoyment.

After you read the indicated sections, choose the questions to which you will respond. Keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers to these prompts, and there is no one direction in which you must go.

Othello

Act I, Scene i
Venice. A Street.

1. During his opening conversation with Roderigo, Iago explains why he hates Othello. List all of the reasons he provides.
2. If you were Roderigo, would you respond to all these reasons by saying, “I would not follow him (Othello) then?” Write a persuasive argument on why you would or wouldn’t follow Othello.
3. The long speech that Iago makes focuses on his real intent. He ends by saying, “I am not what I am.” If you overheard this speech and wanted to warn Othello about his impending doom immediately, how would you do it? Phone? E-mail? In-person visit? Write a paragraph explaining your decision. What would you say?
4. Roderigo goes along with Iago’s sinister plans to alert Brabantio, a Senator and Desdemona’s father, to the fact that his daughter has eloped with Othello, whom they refer to as a “Barbary horse,” and as the “lascivious Moor.” Brabantio is very upset to find her missing. “She deceives me/Past thought!” he says. He then adds, “How got she out? O treason of the blood!” Imagine you are Desdemona, write a note to leave for your parents attempting to persuade them to accept your decision.

Othello

Act I, Scene iii
A Council Chamber

9. When Brabantio meets with the Duke, he seems to be putting his wants ahead of the State. This seems a little unreasonable. Write a journal entry of a time when you were unreasonable in a request of others.
10. When the Duke asks Othello about the marriage, Othello tells the truth and in turn reveals more about himself. Even when Brabantio comments on Othello's reply, Brabantio reveals more about his daughter. Make a list of the information Othello reveals, and a list of the information Brabantio reveals. Then, write a paragraph describing these revelations.
11. Brabantio tells the Duke about Desdemona. If what Brabantio says is true, what do you imagine life would be like for Desdemona in today's society? Write a letter to Desdemona preparing her for life in the future.
12. Othello asks the Duke and Senators to let Desdemona attest to their love and marriage. Have you ever been in love with someone that your parents did not approve of? Write a dialogue to illustrate a conversation you may have had (or would have liked to have had) with your parents defending the relationship.
13. Othello begins to tell the story of his relationship with Desdemona and Brabantio. If Desdemona were relating the story, it would be from her point of view. Write the speech as if Desdemona were telling the story of her relationship with Othello before their marriage.
14. During this era, it seems that women are impressed by the valor of men and find their victories attractive and their pains in battle cause for sympathy. Write several (at least three) personal dating advertisements that describe the qualities women look for in men today.

Act II, Scene i
A Sea-Port in Cyprus.
An Open Place Near the Quay

27. The men are caught in a violent storm that threatens to drown those who are not sheltered. Pretend you are onboard this ship write in the ship's log. How would you describe your experience? Be descriptive.
28. Cassio arrives and speaks well of Othello, his general, and of Desdemona, who he describes as "...a maid/That paragons description and wild fame;/One that excels the quirks of blazoning pens,". Think about one of the most beautiful/handsome people you know and write a paragraph that extols his or her beauty, so that readers who have never seen this person can envision him or her clearly in their minds.
29. Cassio gives Emilia, a kiss. Iago sees this and says, "Sir, would she give you so much of her lips/As of her tongue she oft bestows on me,/You'd have enough." What does this reveal about Iago's relationship with his wife? Write a dialogue that Iago might have with his psychiatrist about his wife.
30. Iago describes his view of women and wives. This may have been the opinion of many men during Shakespeare's time. Times have changed; opinions have changed. Write an article to your local newspaper discussing how the world views housewives today. You may want to compare the opinion of today with Iago's opinion.
31. Othello enters and with Desdemona, they make it clear how passionate they are about each other. Some actors play Othello as being so content and joyful, that he cries when he says, "It stops me here; it is too much of joy:" Considering what you know of this man, would you direct the actor to cry during this moment or not? Why?

Othello

Act IV, Scene i
Before the Castle

50. Iago feels he is justified for ruining Othello's life and has no guilt about driving Othello mad with jealousy. Get into Iago's character, know what he is thinking, and compose a poem or song expressing these guiltless feelings. Try to capture Iago's character in the words of your poem or song. If you write a poem, it does not have to rhyme.

Act IV, Scene ii
A Room in the Castle

51. The drama of this scene is heightened by Othello's inability to listen to Desdemona. Compose a monologue for Desdemona attempting to prove her innocence to Othello.
Language is extremely important, especially when expressing the emotions of love. Imagine you are Desdemona. The one you love the most in the world believes you have been unfaithful. Gain his trust back. This monologue should be powerful and persuasive.
52. Emilia says she believes someone manipulated Othello to cause this problem, but she doesn't seem to suspect Iago; she does not see what is right in front of her face. Write a dialogue between fictitious characters illustrating someone not seeing the obvious.
53. Iago does not want to get his hands "dirty" so he arranges for Roderigo to kill Cassio. Many devious people get others to do their dirty work for them. Why do you think Iago does not want to go through with this aspect of his plan? Write an email to Iago, telling him exactly what you think of him.