1. What physical reactions does Othello have to the news about Desdemona and Cassio? How might the audience interpret this response?

Othello faints from a seizure. The audience can interpret this fainting as symbolic of Othello’s fall from greatness.

3. How does Othello misinterpret the dialogue between Cassio and Iago? How might an observant person realize that Cassio is speaking of Bianca rather than Desdemona?

Throughout the play, when Cassio has spoken to or about Desdemona, he has done so with a great deal of respect. He has not made jokes about Desdemona or women, and in fact has shown himself to be a gentle and respecting man. When Iago speaks negatively about Desdemona, Cassio refuses to enter in the conversation. In Cassio’s conversation with Iago, Cassio speaks crudely about Bianca and their relationship. If one were to overhear the conversation, he or she would not believe that the conversation was about Desdemona.

Othello believes that Cassio is speaking about his relationship with Desdemona, when really, Iago is asking questions about Bianca.

4. With what does Othello charge Iago? How does Iago further influence Othello as they discuss Cassio’s and Desdemona’s murders?

Othello charges Iago with killing Cassio. Iago continues to influence Othello by determining the way Othello should murder Desdemona. Before, Iago’s persuasion was limited to innuendo and lies, but now his influence is direct.

How has Desdemona and Othello’s relationship changed since the beginning of the play?

At the beginning of the play, Desdemona and Othello act as one. They stand up to Desdemona’s father when he discovers their marriage. Othello is protective and kind, and Desdemona responds by being the dutiful and loving wife. As the play progresses, Desdemona’s role in the relationship does not change, but Othello’s behavior does Therefore, the relationship disintegrates into mistrust. Othello does not even discuss the situation with Desdemona but instead relies on Iago to control their relationship.

Explain the events as they transpire when Lodovico arrives. What do the events illustrate about Othello’s transformation? Cite a textual example that supports this recognized change in Othello’s behavior. How does this contribute to Othello’s ultimate demise?

When Lodovico arrives, Othello and Desdemona greet him. Lodovico inquires about Cassio, and when Desdemona replies, Othello is angered and strikes her. When Desdemona departs, Lodovico asks, “Is this the noble Moor whom our full Senate call all in all sufficient?” (Act IV, Scene I, lines 283 – 284) Not only is Iago responsible for Othello’s loss of love, but he is also responsible for his political downfall.

8. Explain the irony in the following speech. How does Shakespeare continue to highlight the theme of appearance versus reality?

IAGO: Alas, alas!
It is not honesty in me to speak
What I have seen and known. You shall observe him,
And his own courses will denote him so
That I may save my speech: do but go after,
And mark how he continues.

LODOVICO: I am sorry that I am deceived in him. (Act IV, Scene I, lines 299 – 305)
Again, Iago references his own dishonesty, and for the audience, this confession serves as dramatic irony. The audience recognizes that Iago is responsible for Othello’s behavior, so while Iago may be able to ask that Lodovico base his conclusions on Othello’s present behavior, he hides his responsibility in promoting that behavior.
Throughout the play Shakespeare highlights that theme that what we see is not always the reality in the situation.

Scene 2

How does Emilia prove to be a friend to Desdemona? How does her characterization of the cause of Othello’s mistrust parallel Emilia’s beliefs about men and marriage?

Othello questions Emilia about Desdemona’s infidelity. Emilia continues to insist that Desdemona is innocent. Emilia states, “If any wretch have put this in your head, let heaven requite it with the serpent’s curse.” (Act IV, Scene II, lines 17 – 18) In her statement, she unknowingly characterizes her feelings for Iago and marriage in general. Throughout the play Emilia’s attitude about marriage and men in general has been negative.

IV, Scene III

1. Explain the meaning of Emilia’s statement, “I would you had never seen him!” (Act IV, Scene III, line 19) What is the context in which she makes the statement? How does Desdemona respond to Emilia’s statement, and what does this illustrate about Desdemona’s character? Emilia is speaking to Desdemona after Othello has instructed Desdemona to go to bed and dismiss Emilia for the evening. Emilia is telling Desdemona that she wishes Desdemona had never married Othello. Desdemona responds in a way that is only fitting for the loyal and loving person that she is; Desdemona tells Emilia that she still loves Othello.

2. Shakespeare uses foreshadowing in this final scene of Act Four to show what is going to happen to Desdemona. Cite several examples of foreshadowing in the scene and explain what they imply about Desdemona’s knowledge of her death.

One of the first examples of foreshadowing in the scene is when Desdemona states, “If I do die before thee, prithee shroud me in one of those same sheets.” (Act IV, Scene III, lines 25 – 26) This statement implies that Desdemona understand that she is going to die soon.

The second example of foreshadowing is Desdemona’s comparison of her mother’s maid’s life to her own.

The most telling example of foreshadowing in this scene is found in the song that Desdemona sings. Desdemona sings a song that the maid sang once. In the song, a line reads, “Let nobody blame him; his scorn I approve.” (Act IV, Scene III, line 54) The implication is that Desdemona knows that Othello is going to kill her. She does not anyone to punish him or blame him for his actions. She is accepting them.

Explain the purpose of the final conversation between Emilia and Desdemona. Of what do the two women speak?

Desdemona asks Emilia if Emilia believes that there are women who are unfaithful to their husbands. She asks Emilia if she would be unfaithful if it would mean that her husband could have the world. Emilia responds that she would be able to betray her husband. Desdemona admits that she could not. Again, Shakespeare uses Emilia as a foil to Desdemona. Emilia’s responses and actions highlight Desdemona’s honesty and loyalty. This final conversation also evokes reader sympathy for Desdemona.

4. Read Emilia’s final speech in Act Four. What comment do you believe Shakespeare might be trying to make about the relationships between men and women through Emilia’s speech at the end of Act Four? How does Emilia’s speech contrast Desdemona’s beliefs about the relationships between men and women during the Renaissance?

**EMILIA:** Yes, a dozen, and as many to the vantage as would
store the world they played for.
But I do think it is their husbands’ faults
If wives do fall; say that they slack their duties,
And pour our treasures into foreign laps,
Or else break out in peevish jealousies,
Throwing restraint upon us, or say they strike us,
Or scant our former having in despite.
Why, we have galls, and though we have some grace,
Yet have we some revenge. Let husbands know
Their wives have sense like them; they see and smell
And have their palates both for sweet and sour,
As husbands have. What is it that they do
When they change us for others? Is it sport?
I think it is. And doth affection breed it?
I think it doth. Is’t frailty that thus errs?
It is so too. And have not we affections,
Desires for sport, and frailty, as men have?
Then let them use us well; else let them know,
The ills we do, their ills instruct us so. (Act IV, Scene III, lines 89 – 108)

Throughout the play, Desdemona’s character has reflected the typical Renaissance view of relationships between men and women. Even though Desdemona was an outspoken woman, she was faithful to Othello and declared her faithfulness to those around her. Othello could not have asked for a better woman to have married. On the other hand, Emilia serves as a foil to Desdemona’s character. Her final speech illustrates her beliefs that women should not allow themselves to be treated poorly simply because they are women. Emilia believes that men and women are basically the same and that both have the same desires and needs. Shakespeare allows Desdemona to be killed in spite of her best intentions, which may perhaps be his comment about what women should or should not do when they are treated unfairly. Emilia represents a progressive attitude toward the role of women in the Renaissance and women’s abilities to be outspoken and have feelings, interests, and ideas independent of men.