

**E OTHELLO – William Shakespeare<sup>1</sup>**

**(i) “Desdemona and Emilia are weak characters who fail to gain our sympathy.”**

**To what extent do you agree or disagree with this view of Desdemona and Emilia? Support your answer with reference to the play, *Othello*.**

Candidates are free to agree and/or disagree with this view, but they should consider (though not necessarily equally) both Desdemona and Emilia and the extent to which either or both are weak characters. Candidates should also consider whether or not these characters gain our sympathy.

**Indicative material:**

- Desdemona is a sympathetic figure: strong-willed, loving/dignified/idealistic/loyal
- Desdemona can also be seen as naïve, passive, an unfortunate/pitiful victim
- Emilia is a likeable/engaging survivor – worldly, dutiful, pragmatic, ultimately heroic
- Emilia is also self-serving, cynical/expedient/submissive, crucially fails Desdemona
- audience can understand characters’ motives while condemning their actions
- our sympathy varies throughout the play and can be tempered by modern views **Etc.**

**(ii) “The values evident in *Othello* have a profound influence on the outcome of the play.”**

**Discuss this view, supporting your answer with reference to at least two of the values evident in the text.**

Candidates are free to agree or/and disagree with this view, but they should engage with at least two values evident in the play and discuss the extent to which these values influence the outcome of the play. Allow for a broad interpretation of “values”.

**Indicative material:**

- plot driven by overt/underlying racism and prejudice influencing behaviour
- characters embody/reflect/reject the principles/beliefs/attitudes of society, influencing outcomes
- cultural conflict – outsiders/insiders – propel the tragic outcome
- events/outcome shaped by Venetian values/norms: status, reputation, duty, honour
- values of loyalty/disloyalty influential throughout, help determine the play’s tragic outcome
- action throughout the play is affected by military/patriarchal/misogynist views
- decisive moments/relationships influenced by the play’s implicit/explicit values **Etc.**

<b>60 marks</b>	<b>A+</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>E-</b>
100%	60 – 51	42	33	24	23 – 0
30%	18 – 16	13	10	8	7 – 0
10%	6 – 5	4	3	3	2 – 0

Expect candidates to engage with the balance of responsibility for the tragedy, focusing on Othello's foolishness and Iago's cleverness. Candidates are free to agree and/or disagree, but they must engage with both aspects of the statement, though not necessarily with equal emphasis.

"Foolishness" may be interpreted as naivety, innocence, jealousy, etc.

Candidates may employ focused narrative to illustrate the points they make.

Code FT+/- for Othello's foolishness leading/not leading to tragedy.

Code CT+/- for Iago's cleverness leading/not leading to tragedy.

**Possible points**

- Iago's superb insight exploits Othello's tragic weakness
- naive Othello trusts "honest" Iago
- Iago is an opportunist but Othello is easily duped
- Iago's clever soliloquies/asides influence our vision of Othello's tragedy
- Othello's foolishness can be seen in the context of Iago's exploitation of others
- fate diminishes Othello but elevates Iago

**Etc.**

**Possible points:**

- Othello trusts "honest" Iago
- Roderigo is duped by Iago
- Cassio seeks advice from the man who plots his downfall
- initially Emilia evaluates her husband incorrectly
- Iago's deceptions depend on his clever judgement
- Desdemona's judgement is questionable

**Etc.**

