

Answers to questions on drama should address relevantly the central concern(s)/theme(s) of the text and be supported by reference to appropriate dramatic techniques such as: conflict, characterisation, key scene(s), dialogue, climax, exposition, dénouement, structure, plot, setting, aspects of staging (such as lighting, music, stage set, stage directions . . .), soliloquy, monologue . . .

3. Choose from a play a scene in which tension builds to a climax. Explain how the dramatist creates and develops this tension, and discuss the extent to which the scene has thematic as well as dramatic significance.

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“Othello” by William Shakespeare is a play in which the tension of the final scene builds to a tragic climax when the main character, Othello, kills his loyal and loving wife Desdemona after being twisted into a jealous fury by the duplicitous Iago. The tension of the scene is built throughout the play as Iago slowly manipulates Othello into believing his wife has betrayed him with his own lieutenant. The scene is made even more tense as Othello stalks his sleeping wife and Shakespeare tantalisingly delays the inevitable tragic act.

Act 5 Scene 2 is a tense and dramatic climax to the play. As the scene begins, Othello stalks a sleeping Desdemona and must convince himself that her death is necessary, and that he should not be distracted by her beauty. The tension in this opening soliloquy becomes almost unbearable for the audience as they anticipate the tragic climax.

O balmy breath, that dost almost persuade / Justice to break her sword. One more, one more! / Be thus when thou art dead, and I will kill thee, / And love thee after. One more, and that's the last. / So sweet was ne'er so fatal.

Shakespeare's use of paradox in this speech effectively communicates the turmoil in the mind of Othello. He says, “I will kill thee, / And love thee after,” which demonstrates his confusion as he suggests he will love her after she is dead, as if in killing her he will destroy what he believes is the reason for her death. The contrast of “sweet” and “fatal” in the last line of the speech continues this confusion, the internal conflict about what Desdemona means to him apparent in his speech. The tension in the scene now really begins to build to a climax as Othello nears the moment that he

will strangle his wife. The tragic irony is that Othello's jealousy, stirred by Iago throughout the play, is what leads to the murder of the innocent Desdemona.

The tension of the scene continues to build as Othello carries out the act he went there to commit and strangles his wife. The tension of the scene increases, however, after her death as Emilia reveals Iago's role in deceiving Othello and inciting his jealousy. As the tension, and the play, reaches its climax, Othello requests forgiveness for what he has done and tries to restore his former honour.

When you shall these unlucky deeds relate, / Speak of me as I am. Nothing
extenuate, / Nor set down aught in malice. Then must you speak / Of one that
loved not wisely, but too well; / Of one not easily jealous, but being wrought, /
Perplexed in the extreme.

At last, Othello seems to recognise his flaws as a character. He refers to himself loving "not wisely, but too well," clearly referring to the misplaced trust he put in Iago and the lack of faith he put in Cassio and Desdemona. He also recognises his fatal flaw of jealousy and realises the tragedy it has brought upon him. The tension of the play's final scene is brought to a climax as Othello draws a concealed weapon and kills himself and lies down next to his wife. This final tragedy draws this fraught scene and the play to a sombre close.

The play begins by establishing the key theme of jealousy which appears in many forms throughout the play leading to the tense final scene. As the play begins, Iago and Roderigo are discussing Cassio's appointment as Othello's Lieutenant over Iago. Iago confesses that he is jealous of Cassio's position and hates both men and intends to only appear to show them loyalty.

I am not what I am.

The contradiction of this statement clearly establishes Iago's duplicity early in the drama: how he appears throughout the play is very different from the reality of his beliefs and motives. He is motivated by his jealousy of both men and starts to plot his revenge which leads to the tense and tragic final scene.

His plan becomes clearer in Act 2 Scene 1. After Desdemona's ship arrives safely at Cyprus she is greeted by Cassio. Iago spots an opportunity to exploit Othello's jealous nature in Cassio's enthusiastic welcome.

[*Aside*] He takes her by the palm. Ay, well said, whisper! With as little a web as this will I ensnare as great a fly as Cassio.

Iago sees his chance for revenge in the behaviour and actions of Cassio. Even though he is acting according to the etiquette of Venetian polite society, Iago sees a more sinister and lascivious side to his actions. The use of imagery here is extremely effective, referring to his plan as a "web," painting himself as the dangerous spider who plans to trap his prey in an invisible trap. He is clearly using his own jealous motive to instigate Othello's jealousy over the relationship between Cassio and Desdemona which leads to the events of the fraught final scene of the play.

Another key scene in the play leading to the tense final scene is Act 3 Scene 3, which is the turning point in the action, where Iago manages to persuade Othello that Desdemona has been unfaithful to him. Iago has managed to stir Othello's thoughts enough that he demands Iago tell him what he is thinking. Iago ironically warns him of the dangers of jealousy.

O beware, my lord, of jealousy! / It is the green-eyed monster, which doth mock / The meat it feeds on.

Having subtly introduced the idea of guilt and attached it to Cassio and Desdemona, Iago now refers to the idea of "jealousy" and directs his accusation to Othello. Iago allows these powerful ideas to come together in Othello's mind so that when he finally mentions the possibility of Desdemona's unfaithfulness, Othello already believes it as plausible, if not entirely certain. Iago also uses imagery to perfectly encapsulate the effects of jealousy, as the audience will witness in the coming scenes. He says it "doth mock / The meat it feeds on," suggesting that if Othello gives into jealousy, it will eventually destroy him. Tragically, this is precisely what happens in

the tense final scene of the play, as it is in Act 3 Scene 3 that Othello gives in to these jealous thoughts and decides to murder his wife.

William Shakespeare's "Othello" is a play with a fraught final scene where the tension builds to a climax. The tension is built throughout the play as Iago uses his duplicity and manipulates Othello into a jealous rage. He swears to kill his wife and this is what creates the tension of the final scene which is only relieved when Othello completes the tragedy and kills himself.