

AP Language and Composition
The Rhetoric of *Othello*

Iago is one of Shakespeare's most overt villains. We know from the beginning of the play that Iago is deliberately plotting the downfall of Othello: "I follow him to serve my turn upon him" (1.1.45). Iago moves quickly from disgruntled employee to arch-villain, even accepting in his own mind an idea ("twixt my sheets/'Has done my office" [1.3.430-1]) that may be false because being angrier can help him gain revenge.

We will talk in our Zoom call today about Iago's motivations and what characteristics of Othello he preys upon.

You have watched the RSC *Othello*, which plays with Iago's racism by making him black. This move is interesting, but it is not what Shakespeare would have done. You, with this basic assignment—that you will analyze Iago's rhetoric—in mind, have annotated your book as you have followed the play via the production. Thus, you have located some places in the text you might want us to discuss in full. We will do that on the Zoom call. Use your annotations and your knowledge of rhetoric and rhetorical devices to complete the rhetorical analysis called for below.

The assignment

In a five-paragraph essay, analyze, in detail, Iago's manipulation—his means and his end—of Othello or, alternatively, Iago's use of certain devices to manipulate several characters.

To give the piece shape, focus either on the character Othello or on a particular goal or kind of move. Be careful not to equalize Othello, Roderigo, and Cassio, for example, because their emphases are far different in the play. Instead, if you want to follow a device across several characters, that might lead to a fully successful essay.

That is, one way forward might be to look at the play chronologically, focusing on the character of Othello. How does Iago manipulate him to the point where he kills Desdemona?

Another possibility is to look at one or more methods Iago uses—animal imagery, equivocation, his ethos as "honest Iago," his focus on Othello as outsider (complicated somewhat by the RSC production), etc.—and to analyze their effectiveness. If there is development of across the play, it is possible to trace that development, but you should take care to make sure your piece is balanced within the essay.

Your essay may be handwritten or typed and should be double spaced. Please upload your finished piece to the turn-in/assignment in Jupiter.