

Summer Reading English Literature 1-2 AP
12th Grade – 2010/11

The summer texts for English Literature 1-2 AP are *Decline and Fall* by Evelyn Waugh and *Emma* by Jane Austen.

There is no writing assignment for *Emma* (expect an exam), but you are assigned to complete a book report on *Decline and Fall*. Attached are the *Decline and Fall* assignment, rubric, and a sample book report on *Othello*.

In addition to bringing a copy of your report on the first day, please submit your report on www.turnitin.com as well. Go to my google site for a tutorial on getting started with turnitin:

<http://sites.google.com/site/turnitinsmhs/>

Use the following info to enroll in my class on turnitin:

class id: 2730930

password: earwax

I am also including the book list for 7/8AP for those who want to get ahead:

Pride and Prejudice (Austen)

Much Ado About Nothing, Othello (Shakespeare)

Dubliners (Joyce)

The Oedipus Cycle (Sophocles, trans. Fitts/Fitzgerald)

Hamlet (Shakespeare)

As I Lay Dying (Faulkner)

Book Report: *Decline and Fall*

Due: 1st day of class

There are six basic categories for Book Reports. The importance of each of these depends upon the text you are reviewing; for *Decline and Fall*, for example, it is not necessary to do an entry on symbol.

1. Significance of Title
2. Setting(s): Llanabba Castle, King's Thursday, Blackstone Gaol
3. Characters: at least four important characters (start with an adjective as central characteristic)
4. Theme(s): at least four major themes
5. Author's technique: Satire, black comedy
- (6.) Important symbols (not necessary for this book report)

For each entry,

- a. begin with a central assertion (about the title, character trait, etc.) expressed as a **thesis statement**;
- b. in support of each thesis, as outline or bullet points, provide 2-3 chunks of supporting details (with citations) and commentary.

Refer to the sample book report on *Othello* as a model.

Book Report Rubric

Components	Proficient	Adequate	Poor
<p>Central Assertions</p> <p>Central ideas are relevant and clear connections to the novel/play, as well as the assigned categories.</p>			
<p>Supporting Details</p> <p>Supporting chunks are specific in text reference (cited), with examples spread throughout the book.</p>			
<p>Commentary</p> <p>Commentary demonstrates effective close reading, examining specifically how the chosen supporting details serve to develop the idea in the thesis statement.</p>			
<p>Mechanics</p> <p>Report is formatted correctly, with minimal errors in grammar, punctuation, spelling.</p>			

Book Report: *Othello*

Settings:

1. Venice

The setting of the first act of the play, Venice is ostensibly honorable but truly corrupted; the irony of the setting indicates an environment where the outside appearance is inherently deceiving.

-Having been passed over for promotion, Iago derides the cronyism that corrupts Venice:

“Preferment goes by letter and affection,/And not by old gradation” (I,i,54-55). In Iago’s eyes, important decisions in Venice are made by selfish interest and personal connections rather than merit. It is Venice itself that is such a corrupting influence on Iago’s character; it seems as though anything is justified by one’s power, and Iago will be bent on preserving his power by any means necessary.

-Although rich in diversity, Venice’s multiculturalism is a fraud; calling Othello “Moor,” “Barbary horse,” and “thick-lips,” Iago invokes many racial stereotypes about Othello that he knows will appeal to Brabantio (I,i,61,70,81). Drawing on Brabantio’s greatest fear, that his “fair” daughter has eloped with a Moor, Iago calls on the hypocrisy of the Venice elite that has placed Othello high in power. Although they may show their support for their great combat general, Venice’s senate is inherently racist about Othello, viewing him as well beneath them in stature.

-As much as the aristocracy may pretend to value nobility and honor, it is money that they hold most sacred; Iago relates this idea to Roderigo when he implores him to “put money in [his] purse” (I,iii,180). Iago knows well that money and bribes run everything in Venice, and that when Desdemona falls out of love with Othello she will seek a large bank account to give her what she needs. In his declaration to Roderigo, Iago seems to reduce love to nothing but financial gain, a sad statement on the condition of marriage and courtship in Venice.

Characters:

1. Iago – conniving

Denied the lieutenantcy he greatly desires, Iago expresses his anger and hatred for patronage through a series of plots to ruin Othello’s reputation, marriage, and livelihood; the conniving Iago cunningly juggles multiple fronts in order to achieve his evil objectives, which he does by taking advantage of others’ flaws.

- In partnership with Roderigo, one of Desdemona’s former suitors, Iago calls up to Brabantio, Desdemona’s father, to tell him that “an old black ram is tugging [his] white ewe”, referring to Desdemona’s relationship with Othello (I,i,97-98). As Iago has calculated, the obscene words inflame Brabantio, and Iago uses this to attempt to destroy Othello and Desdemona’s relationship. Iago takes advantage of the racism in their society to invoke hatred, highlighting Othello’s race by calling him a “black ram”, and associating his race with beastly, animal like behavior. Iago shows cunning awareness of social tensions and uses this in his favor to cast Othello in a villainous light in Brabantio’s eyes.
- In a soliloquy, Iago plots “to get [Cassio’s] place” (I,iii,436) by “double knavery”(437), playing Cassio off on Othello by telling Othello that Cassio is “too familiar” (439) with his wife. This one subtle trick will ultimately ruin two characters as Othello will no longer trust his lieutenant, while Othello will ruin his relationship with Desdemona. Iago is such a conniving and villainous character that he is willing to ruin the lives of two in “double knavery” to achieve his goals. Furthermore, Iago exposes his cynical thoughts when he comments that this will be too easy of an act to carry out because Othello “will as tenderly be led by th’ nose as asses are” (444-445), undermining Othello’s pride and calculating the response of others to his plot.

- Iago plots to end Cassio's lieutenantancy by taking advantage of his "infirmity" (II,iii,42), a weakness to alcohol, and tells his "sick fool Roderigo" (52-53) to take advantage of his drunk character to provoke him to a fight. Depraved and pitiless, Iago purposefully seeks out the weakness of his enemies to use it against them, and is willing to poison Cassio with this "infirmity", underscoring his villainy. Moreover, to complete this plan, he also takes advantage of another weak character, Roderigo, who is a "sick fool" in love with Desdemona, and uses Roderigo's desperation to convince him take part in his villainy.

2. Desdemona – vulnerable (because of her feminine suppliance)

In *Othello*, Desdemona is a weak, frail character who cannot escape the binding roles of gender and race in society, and is killed by her own husband after Iago villainously takes advantage of her weakness; Desdemona is a vulnerable character who fails to protect herself from social conflicts and ends up to be a tragic product of this play.

- Iago convinces Roderigo that he has a chance to win Desdemona's love despite her marriage to Othello because "her eyes must be fed" (II,i,246) and her "very nature will instruct her" (255) and "compel her to some second choice" (256). Iago can make such claims because Desdemona's marriage to Othello, a Moor, puts her in a socially vulnerable position in which she is taking a gamble at an interracial marriage in a racist society. She neglects to protect herself from the image of misgivings in her marriage, and so allows a character like Iago to use it to his own advantage to portray a fragile marriage cracking under social tensions.
- Desdemona carelessly loses her handkerchief, and puts herself at risk for manipulation and many misunderstandings. Although it might be a mere accident, this one token escalates Othello's jealousy, and Desdemona agitates him when instead of admitting it is lost, pushes Othello to reinstate Cassio's lieutenantancy. Though Desdemona does not do this purposefully, she is unaware of the cause of Othello's agitation and so uninformed, provokes Othello to believe her infidelity with Cassio. Desdemona is easily cast in doubt by Othello because of her oblivion.
- In distress after Othello has "bewhored her" (IV,ii,134), Desdemona runs to Iago for help, "kneel[ing]" (179) in front of him in a vulnerable position. She is unaware of Iago's villainy and gives him encouragement in his plans by pouring out her distress and unconditional love for Othello. Furthermore, she physically puts herself beneath Iago in a prone position, allowing him to take advantage of her misgivings and frail state, and willingly exposes her weakness to a villain who has been taking advantage of her for his own purposes. Then, perhaps, Desdemona's greatest weakness is her inability to recognize her own enemy.

3. Othello – insecure (because of his alienation as a Moor in Venice)

Despite being the commander of a Venetian army and a having a highly reputable name, Othello has misgivings and doubts about himself as an outsider in his society; these insecurities lead Othello to become obsessive about demonstrating his power and ultimately drive him into a pit of jealousy because he cannot trust the faith of his relationship with Desdemona.

- Othello arrives at the scene of Cassio's drunk brawl, and proclaiming that because Desdemona, his "love" (II,iii,266) is "raised up...[He]'ll make [Cassio] an example" (266-267), dismissing Cassio from the lieutenantancy. It seems as if Othello felt the need to establish his power in front of Desdemona to secure her opinion of him. That he does this at a severe price for Cassio shows insecurity in his character as he destroys one person's title for his own, a selfish quality that does not define a leader.
- Othello's insecurity becomes ever the more apparent in the way he allows Iago to provoke him and to easily led to believe Desdemona's infidelity. Like a baited fish, Othello clings to Iago's insinuations of Cassio's dishonesty in doubtfully stating that he "dare be sworn [he] think that [Cassio] is honest"(III,iii,145), and his cautions against "the green-eyed monster"(196) and the "cuckold"(197). Though Iago has no sound proof of Desdemona's infidelity, Othello assumes that

Iago, who sounds confident in his words, is speaking the truth and falls into doubt about his marriage, Desdemona's loyalty, and his command over others.

4. Roderigo – gullible

Still quietly simmering over his wounded pride, hurt by Desdemona's past rejection, Roderigo easily falls prey to Iago's evil schemes; without stopping to consider the huge gaps in Iago's lies, Roderigo gives in to his own gullibility and thus plays right into Iago's hands.

- Roderigo takes the first step to becoming Iago's puppet when he lets Iago convince him that "Desdemona is directly in love" (II,i,240) with Cassio because he has a novelty about him that "inflamm[s]" her blood again and "give[s] satiety a fresh appetite" (249-250). Roderigo knows from seeing Desdemona and Othello together that he "cannot believe that" because he knows she is "full of most blessed condition" (271-272), yet he only cares to live in the moment, and chooses to believe Iago because that is the supposed truth of the moment. Roderigo, gullible and impressionable, doesn't even seek further proof from Iago other than a verbal communication, and without ruminating over the lack of physical evidence of an affair between Desdemona and Cassio, chooses to hurdle straight into Iago's plan for revenge against Cassio by stripping him of his lieutenancy.
- After finally realizing that perhaps Iago has not "dealt...directly" or justly with him (IV,ii,240), Roderigo confronts Iago, angry and prepared to ask Desdemona whether she has received his jewels and gifts; yet Iago is able to appease him easily by complimenting him as having "purpose, courage, and valor" (247) to kill Cassio. Allowing himself to believe Iago's compliments, Roderigo falls into Iago's trap one final time, and agrees to murder Cassio, believing from Iago's words that doing so is the best course of action to delay Desdemona and Othello's departure for Mauritania. Although this idea sounds far-fetched, absurd, and extreme, Roderigo once again falls into the trap of gullibility, which ultimately is his fatal flaw.

5. Cassio – foolishly naïve

Cassio's personality is a dangerously naïve mix; both inexperienced and unsuspecting, he turns to the wrong people for help when he needs it, never realizing that his choices, while appearing smart on the surface, are in reality poor moves.

- After an inebriated evening, marked by a violent brawl between Cassio and Montano, Cassio turns to Iago, who craftily tells Cassio to "confess [himself] freely" to Desdemona (II,iii,337-338), which will help the "crack" between Cassio and Othello "grow stronger" (344-345). Cassio quickly agrees, remarking that Iago "advise[s]...well" (346). Cassio, naïve and inexperienced, does not stop to wonder why the suspicious Iago immediately tells him to ask Desdemona for help, when Desdemona is not even involved in the matter of Cassio's lost lieutenancy. If Cassio possessed more common sense and a keener mind, perhaps he would have suspected Iago's eagerness in doling out advice – advice ultimately proves to be faulty.
- Following Iago's suggestions, Cassio beseeches Desdemona for help in regaining Othello's good favor; she agrees almost too wholeheartedly, saying she will "intermingle everything [Othello] does with Cassio's suit" (III,iii,27-28), and yet Cassio doesn't stop to think that such persistent pleas may have the opposite of his desired effect. Inexperienced in such matters, Cassio doesn't realize that perhaps one solid case of pleading from Desdemona may be much more effective than nonstop begging. Indeed, without instructions from Cassio to do otherwise, Desdemona persistently implores Othello to rethink his decision of withdrawing Cassio's lieutenancy, which only annoys and further angers Othello, whose mind has been poisoned by Iago's clever ministrations.

6. Emilia –tragically loyal

Emilia is a woman living in a society in which men are seen as superior; despite the sexist undercurrents of her Venetian society, Emilia remains loyal to Desdemona to the very end, defending her even against Othello and Iago, dominant males in her life that she chooses not to submit to.

- When Othello questions Emilia about Desdemona's whereabouts, she firmly tells him that she would "lay down [her] soul at stake" to "wager [Desdemona] is honest" (IV,ii,13-14). Although Othello is clearly her superior, Emilia is so loyal to Desdemona and so truly convinced of her purity that she is unafraid to stand against Othello. Although Othello is trying to pull sordid details of Desdemona's supposed affair with Cassio, Emilia has such full faith in Desdemona that she doesn't even think of the affair as a possibility.
- After discovering that Othello has murdered Desdemona, Emilia angrily argues with him, nobly and loyally defending Desdemona, maintaining that Iago's words about her and Cassio's affair were a "lie, an odious, damned lie" (V,ii,216). Even faced with her husband Iago's anger, and Othello's towering rage, which is fortified by his honor and prestige, Emilia refuses to be silenced, as a less strong-willed woman might have been in her place. Emilia, a true friend to Desdemona, shows the extent of her deep loyalty as she verbally fights Iago and Othello to help preserve her dead mistress' honor and respect.

Themes:

1. Iago is a conniving character who takes advantage of the gullibility of others to attempt to achieve a title of respect and on the way, to destroy Othello; the characters who fall prey to Iago's plans believe too willingly in the honesty of this villain and highlights the human nature to look for and rely on a confident, supportive figure in times of distress.

- Upon finding out that Desdemona is to go to Cyprus with Othello, Roderigo threatens to "drown" (I,iii,347) himself, and allows Iago to take advantage of his state of despair. Drowning in self-pity, Roderigo allows himself to be convinced that Desdemona "cannot...long continue her love to the Moor" (385-386), and that if he will be patient, even if he cannot win Desdemona, Iago will join him to "be conjunctive in...revenge against [Othello]"(410-411). Although revenge against Othello is not his first priority, Roderigo is in such despair and of such low self-esteem that he is willing to attach himself to any cause, and wrongly convinces himself that Iago will help him.
- Desperate to win Desdemona's love, Roderigo is easily deceived by Iago who slyly leads him to believe that Desdemona's act of "courtesy" is "lechery", "an index...of lust and foul thoughts", convincing him that she is in love with Cassio (II,i,278-280). Although Roderigo himself had observed the act as one of social etiquette, Iago easily skews his perception to believe otherwise. Roderigo has chased Desdemona to Cyprus, and is so desperate that he is willing to believe Iago's assumptions without questioning his motives, even agreeing to commit murder in order to remove "the impediment" (301) that is Cassio.
- Already in anguish over his doubts of Desdemona's infidelity, Othello watches a scene constructed by Iago to show Othello that Cassio makes a joke of his affair with Desdemona, and is convinced by this act of his wife's infidelity. Seeing "Cassio's smiles, gestures, and light behaviors" (IV,i,119), Othello assumes he is speaking of his affair with Desdemona, since Iago had directed him to "mark the fleers, the gibes" (97-98) of Cassio's expression. Othello is already so agitated that he is easily misled to believe the worst of the situation, and his gullibility plays easily into Iago's plans as he vows to take revenge on his wife.

2. Jealousy is a central theme in this play and acts as a driving force that has a component in the many aspects of Iago's plans and Othello's demise; the tragic end of this play serves to show how allowing jealousy to be the central force that dictates one's life ultimately leads to unfortunate ends.

- Iago is enraged by Othello who, "horrible stuffed with epithets of war"(I,i,15), has assigned Cassio, "a great arithmetician" (20) to be his lieutenant, while he is a mere ensign, and vows for revenge.

Driven by this envy and his villainous character, Iago sets out to become a plague in Othello's life by ruining his marriage, ruining Cassio's reputation, and manipulating Roderigo to do his dirty work. However, Iago is so focused on his machinations that he allows it to consume him entirely, driven to insanity without the humane, nourishing emotions needed in one's life.

- Brabantio grows jealous of Othello for having "stol'n" (I,iii,73) Desdemona, his precious daughter, the prize of Venice, and irrationally accuses him of using "witchcraft" (77) to enchant her. Brabantio is so attached to his daughter that he cannot stand to have her married to another man, moreover, a Moor like Othello, and so accuses him in an absurd manner in front of the Duke and senators, appearing almost crazy. Brabantio is so caught up in his grief and unable to surrender his daughter, destroys himself while she is distanced from him even more in Cyprus with Othello.
- Iago continues to torment Othello with vivid images of Desdemona's infidelity, driving Othello deeper into jealousy until he is mad and falls into an epileptic trance. "Boding" (IV,i,25) over Othello's mind are the images of Cassio "lying" on her and the handkerchief, both of which serve as constant reminders of Cassio and Desdemona's disloyalty. Othello allows these images to continue to escalate his jealousy until he is insane, and ultimately cannot escape these dark, passionate emotions until he has killed both his wife and himself.

3. Social conformity is a driving force in *Othello* that leads characters to make poor choices; more concerned with fitting in to their society and the people around them, characters in the play do not look beyond the superficial, and fail to see how social conformity carries them down the wrong path.

- In the opening scene of the play, Iago tells Roderigo to call up to Brabantio's window to "rouse him", "poison his delight", and "plague him with flies" over Desdemona's sudden marriage to Othello (I,i,75,78). Although this is a terrible way to inform the honorable Brabantio about his daughter's marriage, Roderigo gives in to Iago's demands. Even when Iago makes obscene comments about Brabantio's "daughter covered with a Barbary horse" (125), Roderigo doesn't reveal Iago's identity, which would put him in Iago's bad graces. More concerned with social conformity than putting Iago's bad credit where it is due, Roderigo is already taking the first steps to becoming Iago's puppet, which will ultimately lead to his demise.
- Although Iago doesn't blatantly admit it, much of his resentment comes from his inability to conform to his society, and, seeing Othello as a symbol of a society in which he has floundered, Iago targets him as the main subject of his evil plans. Although he clearly cannot "endure" Othello, Iago still admits that the Moor has a "constant, loving, noble nature" (II,i,310-311), qualities that Iago himself greatly lacks; he also knows that despite his race, Othello has to a certain degree assimilated into Venetian society, a feat he has never accomplished himself. Although Iago isn't a Moor, he is old enough to suffer from the impact of Venetian ageism, and the discrimination he endures is proof of his inability to conform socially. All of these factors add up to Iago's great frustration and his choice of destroying Othello, which in the end becomes his own personal downfall as well.
- Although Cassio knows that he is "unfortunate in the infirmity" of drinking and shouldn't "task [his] weakness" (II,iii,42-43), he gives in when Iago and Montano press him to have another "little one" of wine (69), which makes him very drunk. Cassio caves in to peer pressure, although he clearly knows that drinking alcohol causes him to lose control of his actions, reflected in the fight between him and Montano shortly after he becomes drunk. The brawl causes the first major splinter between him and Othello, and their relationship eventually spirals out of control, due to Cassio's submission to social conformity that fateful night.

Author's Technique:

1. Tragic hero/ flaw

Shakespeare applies the idea of the tragic hero to both Othello and Desdemona, who are some of the most respected, notable social figures that ultimately face a down fall; this technique enhances the tragedy of the plot while also producing irony in that the best characters in the play contribute to their own demise, reminding the audience that perhaps the idea that there is too much of a good thing is true.

- Despite having flourished as a Moor in racist Venice, insecurity plagues Othello's character as he is driven to jealousy when Iago manipulates his weakness to believe Desdemona's infidelity, and ultimately kills both himself and Desdemona. His last words in which he asks the men around him to "speak of [him] as [he is]...of one that loved not wisely but too well; of one not easily jealous but being wrought, perplexed in the extreme", reminds the audience that despite his shortcomings, Othello was a proud man who overcame the greatest odds in society. Despite the tragedy of his life, greatness can still prevail in memories, and his death serves to show that perhaps he became too great, gathering the envy of men like Iago and rising too fast to be comfortable in his own role.
- Desdemona is a heroine until the end, refusing to accuse her husband of murder, and shows utter devotion to her role as a female and a wife. When Emilia enters the room, Desdemona does not blame the murder on Othello who is standing nearby, and instead, dies "a guiltless death" (V,ii,150) done by "[her]self"(152), protecting Othello. Desdemona's death is made more pitiful by her loyalty to Othello, but also shows how her utter devotion to her husband did not pay off as he did not trust the strength of their relationship.

2. Dramatic irony

In *Othello*, Shakespeare primarily uses Iago as a vehicle for dramatic irony; as the audience or reader watches on helplessly knowing what schemes he has set in motion while some characters do not, the use of dramatic irony underscores the feeling of inevitability in the play, as the characters are unable to escape the web that has already been spun for them.

- Suffering from an epileptic fit, Othello can only watch as Iago and Cassio hold a conversation which he believes is about Desdemona; while the reader can see that the conversation is really about Bianca and that Iago is only baiting Othello to believe it's about his wife, Othello is fully convinced Michael Cassio is laughing over his affair with Desdemona and how "she plucked him to [his] chamber" (IV,i,159). Frustratingly enough, Othello is mere feet away from Iago and Cassio as they hold this conversation, yet out of hearing range, and this sets up a dramatic irony that stirs up Othello to a murderous rage. With his mind already poisoned by Iago, Othello is merely a puppet being pulled along, and the dramatic irony underscores the atmosphere of helplessness and inevitability of the play.
- Othello's soliloquy before he kills Desdemona rings of dramatic irony; set in motion by Iago, Othello is so convinced of her infidelity and "cunning'st pattern of excelling nature" (V,ii,11) that he wants to kill her. The reader or audience, fully aware of Desdemona's true purity, can only watch as Othello goes on to strangle her. Just as Iago had intended all along, Othello jumps to conclusions and acts on his violent nature to solve his problems; lost in his own fury, Othello is helpless in the situation as Iago strings him along using maddeningly blatant and faulty lies.

3. Soliloquy

Shakespeare uses soliloquies to give deeper glimpses into the mindsets of certain characters; while illuminating, they can also be chilling words that may set up maddening dramatic ironies.

- After convincing Roderigo that Cassio is in love with Desdemona and must be torn from Othello's good graces, Iago's soliloquy shows the full extent of his mental perverseness, as he convinces himself that Othello has "leaped into [his] seat" (II,i,318) and had an affair with his wife Emilia, which gives him incentive to seek revenge against Othello, "wife for wife" (321). As evidenced by his soliloquy, Iago is such a bitter and disappointed man that his mind has become twisted enough

that he can lie to himself and believe his own lies. This soliloquy provides a look into Iago's thought process and illuminates the sheer absurdity of his own twisted mind and logic.

- Right before he wakes and kills Desdemona, Othello has a soliloquy, revealing his inner turmoil as he is torn between killing the love of her life, whose features are as "smooth as monumental alabaster" (V,ii,,5), worthy of eternal immortalization, and revenging her alleged infidelity, which he believes comes out of her "cunning pattern of excelling nature" (11). Othello's soliloquy reveals the depth of his affection and admiration of Desdemona, which persist even though he believes her sins unforgivable, and show that although he still loves her, Othello has allowed his insecurities and violent side to overshadow the loving, caring aspect of his personality. Unfortunately, Othello still remains in the dark about Desdemona's faithfulness, which is accented and made even more tragic by his heart-wrenching soliloquy.

Important Symbols:

1. Handkerchief

A gift to Desdemona from Othello, the handkerchief is misplaced and manipulated by Iago to convince Othello of Desdemona's infidelity; the handkerchief embodies fidelity and chastity in Othello and Desdemona's relationship, but misused, it becomes a haunting symbol of disloyalty and deception that causes jealousy.

- To anger Othello and heighten his jealousy, Iago lies to Othello and tells him that he has seen "Cassio wipe his beard with" (III,iii,498) it, using the handkerchief to depict a gross image of Cassio with Othello's prized gift. Iago's words clearly tell Othello that not only has Desdemona given away his gift, but Cassio has violated its symbol of chastity. Here, the handkerchief becomes a glaring symbol of infidelity and a tool for Iago to jeopardize Othello's relationship with both Desdemona and Cassio, enraging Othello and heightening his jealousy to the extent that he vows to "black vengeance" (507) and to kill his wife.
- Othello idealizes the handkerchief as a symbol of loyalty in a story of the handkerchief's origins, telling Desdemona that it was given to his mother by an Egyptian "charmer" (67) to "make her amiable and subdue [his] father entirely to her love" (III,iv,70-71). While Desdemona had preciously guarded the handkerchief as a token of Othello's love, it also becomes a tangible object of fidelity, that is now misplaced as if to prove Iago's stories of her infidelity. Moreover, Othello begins to see this handkerchief as the ultimate symbol of her loyalty, and upon Desdemona's failure to produce it, he becomes obsessed and concludes this as the final proof of her affair with Cassio.
- Iago sets up a scene for Othello in which he perceives Cassio laughing about Desdemona, and when Bianca marches in with Othello's handkerchief, Othello believes that Desdemona "gave it him, and [Cassio] hath giv'n it his whore" (IV,I,195-196). This scene is crucial as the handkerchief becomes a powerful tool because of its visibility and its power as an image fixed in Othello's mind. The images Iago had painted earlier of Cassio with the handkerchief become a reality, and Othello is convinced more than ever that both Cassio and Desdemona are disloyal and mock him. The handkerchief as a visible symbol proves to be effective perhaps because of Othello's tendency to rely on his sight.

2. Willow Song

The Willow Song, a melancholy melody Desdemona sings, is a symbol of women's sorrows as a result of a male-dominated society; the song laments the sadness of a woman's life when she submits herself to her husband, who then in turn ruins her.

- As Emilia helps her get ready for bed, Desdemona sings the Willow Song, which she learned from one of her mother's maids, named Barbary, whose object of affection "proved mad and did forsake her" (IV,iii,29-30); similarly, Desdemona sings, "The poor soul sat sighing by a sycamore tree, Sing all a green willow" (43-44) now that Othello believes she has had an affair with Cassio. The lyrics are very representative of her situation for Othello, for Desdemona, the "poor soul", sings about a

“green willow” in her lament – willows traditionally represent sadness, and like a green willow, Desdemona is young, inexperienced, and naïve, and thus easily manipulated by the scheme Iago has set up.

- The lyrics of the song directly mirror Desdemona’s own experience with Othello, as she sings, “Let nobody blame him, his scorn I approve” (IV,iii,56). Although Desdemona knows she has always been true to Othello, she doesn’t show much initiative in fighting back against him. Othello’s male dominance prevents Desdemona from defending herself more vocally, and thus, like the ironic lyrics say, “let nobody blame him”, for she is partially at fault, because by being passive about the situation, Desdemona has in a way “approve[d]” his scorn.
- After being fatally wounded by Iago, Emilia’s last words include a line of the Willow Song; she cries out, “Willow, willow, willow. Moor, she was chaste. She loved thee, cruel Moor” (V,ii,298-299). Emilia’s dying words are still in defense of Desdemona, but her use of the Willow Song may also reveal the sadness in Emilia’s death. Emilia sings “willow, willow, willow” for Desdemona, but perhaps also in part for herself. Although she loyally defends Desdemona until the end, Emilia doesn’t speak out about Iago’s lies until right before she dies, a sign that perhaps the strong-willed Emilia also has submitted to the dominance of her husband, letting his sins steal by under her nose while she turned a blind eye.

3. Wedding Sheets

In *Othello*, Desdemona’s wedding sheets represent Desdemona’s true purity, and act as a sign of her honesty and faithfulness to Othello; however, the symbol comes too late in the play for Othello to recognize it as a sign of her love, and, blinded by his irrational rage, he ignores the wedding sheets and continues down the path for destruction Iago has crafted.

- After discussing Othello’s rage over her alleged infidelity with Emilia, Desdemona tells Emilia to “remember” to “lay on [her] bed [her] wedding sheets” that night (IV,ii,122). The wedding sheets, which are probably white, are a symbol of Desdemona’s purity and chastity, two aspects which she no doubt wishes to remind Othello of. After all his fiery accusations, Desdemona probably hopes that Othello will remember her beauty and purity upon seeing the wedding sheets, which also represent their wedding night, a night when they were very much in love and made vows to always stay faithful and take care of each other.
- Desdemona, Emilia, and Othello’s dead bodies all lie on Desdemona’s wedding sheets by the end of the play, but perhaps Othello’s parting words are the most haunting; he reveals that he finally realizes Desdemona was faithful all along, and right before committing suicide, he laments the fact that he “threw a pearl away richer than all his tribe” (V,ii,407-408). As he stabs himself, Othello falls onto the bed, which is covered in Desdemona’s wedding sheets; it seems that dying on her wedding sheets is a sign that he finally has acknowledged the truth of her purity and faithfulness, and that although he has made many tragic mistakes, he will once again join her on their wedding sheets, where on the night of their wedding they enjoyed an untainted love.