

AP English Literature
Othello Literary Analysis Essay Topics and Guidelines

You will be writing a literary analysis on Shakespeare's *Othello*. In your essay, you will take a position on ONE of the following essay questions and you will support your position with evidence from the text. Although the play, *Othello*, will serve as your primary source, you must also find an outside or secondary source to help you with supporting your thesis statement for your paper.

Essay Guidelines:

- 5-6 Typed Pages
- MLA Style: doubled spaced, Times New Roman, 12pt Font
- 1 Page Outline
- Works Cited Page: Includes *Othello* and a secondary source
- Include at least 6 quotes from *Othello* and 2 quotes from a secondary source (book or article from online database)
- Has a clear beginning, middle and end
- Each paragraph begins with a main idea statement that supports the thesis
- Correctly cites primary and secondary sources

Free Response Essay Questions (SELECT ONE):

A. A recurring theme in literature is the classic war between a passion and responsibility. For instance, a personal cause, a love, a desire for revenge, a determination to redress a wrong, or some other emotion or drive may conflict with moral duty. Choose a literary work in which a character confronts the demands of a private passion that conflicts with his or her responsibilities. In a well-written essay show clearly the nature of the conflict, its effects upon the character, and its significance to the work

B. From a novel or play of literary merit, select an important character who is a villain. Then, in a well-organized essay, analyze the nature of the character's villainy and show how it enhances meaning in the work. Do not merely summarize the plot.

C. According to critic Northrop Frye, "Tragic heroes are so much the highest points in their human landscape that they seem the inevitable conductors of the power about them, great trees more likely to be struck by lightning than a clump of grass. Conductors may of course be instruments as well as victims of the divisive lightning." Select a novel or play in which a tragic figure functions as an instrument of the suffering of others. Then write an essay in which you explain how the suffering brought upon others by that figure contributes to the tragic vision of the work as a whole.

D. In a literary work, a minor character, often known as a foil, possesses traits that emphasize, by contrast or comparison, the distinctive characteristics and qualities of the main character. For example, the ideas or behavior of a minor character might be used to highlight the weaknesses or strengths of the main character. Choose a novel or play in which a minor character serves as a foil for the main character. Then write an essay in which you analyze how the relation between the minor character and the major character illuminates the meaning of the work.

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AP Literary Analysis Rubric General Writing Rubric

9-8 (50 Points)

These well-focused and persuasive essays address the prompt directly and in a convincing manner. An essay scored a 9 demonstrates exceptional insight and language facility. An essay scored an 8 or a 9 combines adherence to the topic with excellent organization, content, insight, facile use of language, mastery of mechanics, and an understanding of the essential components of an effective essay. Literary devices and/or techniques are not merely listed, but the effect of those devices and/or techniques is addressed in context of the passage, poem, or novel as a whole. Although not without flaws, these essays are richly detailed and stylistically resourceful, and they connect the observations to the passage, poem, or novel as a whole. Descriptors that come to mind while reading this essay include: mastery, sophisticated, complex, specific, consistent, and well-supported.

7-6 (45 Points)

These highly competent essays comprehend the task set forth by the prompt and respond to it directly, although some of the analysis may be implicit rather than explicit. The 7 essay is in many ways a thinner version of the 9-8 paper in terms of discussion and supporting details, but it is still impressive, cogent, and generally convincing. It may also be less well-handled in terms of organization, insight, or vocabulary. Descriptors that come to mind while reading these essays include: demonstrates a clear understanding but is less precise and less well-supported than a 9-8 paper. These essays demonstrate an adherence to the task, but deviate from course on occasion. The mechanics are sound, but may contain a few errors which may distract but do not obscure meaning. Although there may be a few minor mis-readings, the inferences are for the most part accurate with no significant sustained mis-readings. An essay that scores a 6 is an upper-half paper, but it may be deficient in one of the essentials mentioned above. It may be less mature in thought or less well-handled in terms of organization, syntax or mechanics. The analysis is somewhat more simplistic than found in a 7 essay, and lacks sustained, mature analysis.

5 (40 Points)

These essays may be overly simplistic in analysis, or rely almost exclusively on paraphrase rather than specific, textual examples. These essays may provide a plausible reading, but the analysis is implicit rather than explicit. These essays might provide a list of literary devices present in the literature, but make no effort to discuss the effect that these devices have on the poem, passage, or novel as a whole. Descriptors that come to mind when reading include: superficial, vague, and mechanical. The language is simplistic and the insight is limited or lacking in development.

4-3 (35 Points)

These lower-half essays compound the problems found in the 5 essay. They often demonstrate significant sustained misreadings, and provide little or no analysis. They maintain the general idea of the writing assignment, show some sense of organization, but are weak in content, maturity of thought, language facility, and/or mechanics. They may distort the topic or fail to deal adequately with one or more important aspects of the topic. Essays that are particularly poorly written may be scored a 3. Descriptors that come to mind while reading include: incomplete, oversimplified, meager, irrelevant, and insufficient.

2-1 (30 Points)

These essays make an attempt to deal with the topic but demonstrate serious weakness in content and coherence and/or syntax and mechanics. Often, they are unacceptably short. They are poorly written on several counts, including numerous distracting errors in mechanics, and/or little clarity, coherence, or supporting evidence. Wholly vacuous, inept, and mechanically unsound essays should be scored a 1.

0

A zero is given to a response with no more than a passing reference to the task.