

Worksheet 13 – The Pirates and Hamlet’s Sea Change

Review

Answer these questions about the previous video lecture to check how much you remember.

1. What does Ophelia use to communicate in her madness?
 - a) Clothing
 - b) Flowers
 - c) Darkness
 - d) War

2. What does John McRae state that we know that Hamlet doesn’t?
 - a) Laertes’ return to Denmark.
 - b) Horatio’s continued presence at court.
 - c) Ophelia’s madness and death.
 - d) The Norwegian army returning from Poland.

3. Who does John McRae state developed the concept of catharsis in tragedy?
 - a) Machiavelli
 - b) Shakespeare
 - c) Elizabeth 1
 - d) Aristotle

Recall

Answer these questions after watching the video lecture to check how much you remember.

4. What type of valour does Hamlet have to ‘put on’?
 - a) Completed
 - b) Compelled
 - c) Forced
 - d) Diplomatic

5. How many men on Hamlet’s ship bound for England manage to board the Pirates’ ship?
 - a) 3
 - b) 7
 - c) 2
 - d) 1

6. Which part of Hamlet’s personality is being developed or demonstrated through this encounter with the pirates?
 - a) His ability to think deeply and consider things.
 - b) His ability to feel emotions but overcome them.
 - c) His ability to fight and be a man of action.
 - d) His ability to think of others in the heart of the moment.

Analysis :

7. Let's look again at what John McRae says about the letters that Hamlet sends whilst he is away. Re-watch from 1.10 – 5.10 where he discusses the letter to Horatio and to the King. You need to re-read both of them in Act 4 scene 6 Lines and Act 4 scene 7 Lines 43-46 and 49 – 51.

These are not the only letters in the play so I want you to look back at the letter he writes to Ophelia in Act 2 scene

Draw a table with three columns.

Letter to Ophelia	Letter to Horatio	Letter to Claudius
Where written?	Where written?	Where written?
Private or shared	Private or shared	Private or shared
Purpose for characters	Purpose for characters	Purpose for characters
Purpose for audience	Purpose for audience	Purpose for audience

Then write a paragraph that shows what the difference in purpose and privacy is? Try to use quotations to prove your ideas.

Extension:

Look at the methods of sealing letters used in Elizabethan times. What does this tell you about the times and the security of written communication?

<https://www.bl.uk/ebli/2021/articles/pdf/ebliarticle112021.pdf>

Evaluation

8. The inclusion of pirates might feel unusual and somewhat surprising in this play but read the following information about the numbers of pirates at the time and see if this helps you to re-evaluate your ideas.

<https://www.elizabethan-era.org.uk/famous-pirates.htm>

There are many of Shakespeare's plays that feature the sea although pirates only feature in Hamlet and Pericles.

However, the sea acts as a divider and disruptor in terms of plot. People are divided from each other in plays such as Twelfth Night and The Comedy of Errors where family members believe each other to be dead. In The Tempest and Pericles people are cast adrift. Fortune is lost at sea in The Merchant of Venice. The sea also features in Othello, Measure for Measure, Two Gentlemen of Verona, The Winter's Tale and Cymbeline.

Have a look at this map of the country and the attacks that happened by sea during the Tudor reign.

We have already looked at the threat that came across the sea with our exploration of the Spanish Armada.

Let's have a read of this article that looks at the importance of trade and exploration.

Make notes as to how this relates to our study of Hamlet. Although Hamlet is set in Denmark, the threat from the ocean is clearly in the Elizabethan psyche.

<https://www.bl.uk/shakespeare/articles/exploration-and-trade-in-elizabethan-england>

The idea that ships at sea were so vulnerable works to Claudius' advantage. Whilst his plan to send Hamlet to England has a diplomatic purpose, the danger at sea was too unreliable to plan for Hamlet's removal. The plan to execute Hamlet is secondary.

Hamlet's actions in negotiating with the pirates is just one example of how he is able to use things as they come along. This is a pattern that we have seen throughout the play but it's a good idea to put these ideas together.

Have a look at the following and see how Hamlet is able to use these to his advantage:

Horatio

Ophelia

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern

The Players

The Pirates

The Gravediggers

Extension:

Carry out some further research into famous pirates in Elizabethan England and look for the routes that they patrolled.

Does this make the episode with the pirates more believable?

What theories do you have about why the pirates are not seen on stage but are featured off-stage?

Try to write a scene between Hamlet and the Pirates who have brought him back to Denmark.

How do we think that Hamlet would behave with the pirates and what would it say about his royal abilities?

Glossary

Turning point – a time at which a decisive change in a situation occurs, especially one with beneficial results.

Valour- great courage in the face of danger, especially in battle.

Mantle – cloak or envelop.

Wimp – a weak and cowardly or unadventurous person
Admiration –

Compelled – force or oblige (someone) to do something.

Costume - a set of clothes in a style typical of a particular country or historical period.