 Group analysis task

Task one

Theme: People have an innate desire to connect with others

Extract: Chapter 21. Prospero’s goblins (pp 126-131)

In your group, consider how this theme can be interpreted from multiple perspectives. You may like to consider how Felix’s relationship with the prisoners is as much about human connections as it is about ‘imprisonment’. How? Explore the importance of Miranda’s character as an intangible presence in the background of the unfolding plot, and what she reflects about the universal but deeply complex need for human connectedness.

Key Questions:

1. how does the play’s prison setting, and the subjectivity of the Fletcher inmates, affect the way in which the novel comments on human connections? What is the comment? How is the prison a ‘humanising’ force in the plot?
2. what does this chapter’s dialogue about Shakespeare’s play, which includes both agreement and disagreement, reflect about the way in which we can become trapped by certain perspectives in how we relate to texts and stories? How do these human connections affect the way in which stories are told and ‘performed’ in the play?
3. Felix’s performance relies on his argument in this chapter being successful. How does he create a world in which he ‘turns the tables’ on his prisoners’ entrapment?
4. examine the chapter preceding this extract, ‘Most scurvy monsters’. How does Miranda’s presence represent the notion of human connectedness? What is Felix trying to connect to, and what does this desire have to do with his revenge plot and the prison?

Your group will present a detailed analysis of this theme and the extract, should make links to Atwood’s style and context. You should also engage closely with language and how it makes meaning, and use your earlier visual representations of the Module’s ideas to crystalise your analysis.

Task two

Theme: Control is power

Extract: Chapter 29. Approach (pp 177-180)

As a group, unpack how Felix’s revenge plot positions him as powerful in the story, and how Atwood conveys this power and control as complex.

Key Questions:

1. the description of Felix at the start of this chapter, and his internal monologue, convey the effect/toll of power. What imagery can you find that supports this?
2. Prospero is characterised as a kind of powerful ‘magician’ in this chapter. Coffee is his potion, the Internet is his magic spells, and he even dons a magic robe and takes up a magic staff. What else makes him magical? Does his ‘magic’ give him power, or take it away?
3. we see Felix step into the shoes of the character he is playing, Prospero, for the first time in this chapter. How does this description comment on the process of representation? How can we also compare Felix’s attempt to ‘become’ Prospero to Atwood’s relationship to Shakespeare? Consider how power affects the representation process, and also how this moment is one that serves to highlight Felix’s imprisonment.

Your group will present a detailed analysis of this theme and the extract, should make links to Atwood’s style and context. You should also engage closely with language and how it makes meaning, and use your earlier visual representations of the Module’s ideas to crystalise your analysis.

Task three

Idea: Revenge

Extract: Chapter 17. The isle is full of noises (pp 106-110)

As a group, consider Felix’s characterisation within the context of the revenge plot, and also the role of his imagined Miranda.

Key Questions:

1. how is Felix cast as the ultimate ‘outsider’ in this sequence of the novel? What effect does his characterisation as a ‘plotting recluse’ have on the novel’s exploration of revenge? How does this conform to the traditional revenge trope in literature?
2. in this chapter, what does Felix’s moment of doubt regarding his revenge plot reflect about his character? How does this change his relationship to the reader, and how might this be said to depart from the conventional revenge trope?
3. Atwood’s exploration of revenge through Felix’s character has a lot to do with loss, grief, and fantasy. How is idea of revenge inextricably linked to Felix’s loss of a child, and how does this impact our interpretation of his character?

Your group will present a detailed analysis of this idea and the extract, should make links to Atwood’s style and context. You should also engage closely with language and how it makes meaning, and use your earlier visual representations of the Module’s ideas to crystalise your analysis.