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Module A - Textual
Conversations: The Tempest &
Hag-Seed - Year 12 English
Advanced

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Excerpts from the MOD A presentation

For access to more detailed notes purchase the ETA Module A program and booklet.

Key concepts

The key concepts of Module A that you need to appreciate are:

- **Context:** The times and experiences - personal, social, cultural and historical - when a text is composed and the values of the composer shape language, forms and features of texts.
- **Perspective:** The way we see the world is shaped by our values, attitudes and assumptions. It is a culturally learnt position that shapes the reader's view of a text. It creates a position of preferred reading.
- **Adaptation:** Taking a text from one context and using it in another context. The process can allow new insights into the original text and emphasise contextual differences. Adaptation also gives extra insight into the newly created or used text.
- **Intertextuality:** The associations or connections between one text and other texts. Intertextual references can be explicit and self-conscious. They can take the form of direct quotation, parody, allusion or structural borrowing. Being able to discuss how ideology is constructed in the former text through its intertextual dialogue lifts the quality of the response to the texts.



Renaissance humanism	Providentialism
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Man's will – self determinism▪ The ontological search for knowledge achieved through questioning and introspection▪ Pico and Erasmus▪ Montaigne (Man's flaws are the issue)Machiavelli (Power)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ God's will▪ Fate and destiny are predetermined▪ Faith, trust and acceptance▪ The Church▪ Divine Right of Kings▪ Grace and virtue

V.S

Ideas

When you consider both texts together what are the main ideas that are evident?
Consider how Atwood adapts *The Tempest's* ideas and adds a modern twist.

Imprisonment – real and imaginary

“The last three words Prospero says are “Set me free.” But free from what? In what has he been imprisoned? I started counting up the prisons and imprisonments in the book. There are a lot of them. In fact, every one of the characters is constrained at some point in the play. This was suggestive. [...] So I decided to set my novel in a prison” (Atwood, 2016).

Atwood has deliberately amplified *The Tempest's* prismatic entanglements of captivity. Imprisonment in both texts is literal and metaphorical.

Prospero and Miranda have been confined to a *‘poor cell’*. Ariel and Caliban have had their freedom curtailed by Prospero. Imprisonment for Prospero has enabled him to refine his Art and re-discover his humanity. Felix is confined to the hut where he lives as the retired schoolteacher Mr Duke and the correctional facility itself where he prepares his *Tempest* - *“This is the extent of it, Felix muses. My island domain. My place of exile. My penance. My theatre”*.

Felix states *“Oh, the actors will relate to it, all right ... It's about prisons”* and at the end of the play he says *“... The Tempest is a play about a man producing a play – one that's come out of his own head, his “fancies” – so maybe the fault for which he needs to be pardoned is the play itself ... The last three words in the play are “set me free”, says Felix. ‘You don't say “set me free” unless you're not free. Prospero is a prisoner inside the play he himself has composed. There you have it: the ninth prison is the play itself.”*

Felix has been exiled for 12 years away from the world of theatre. He is a prisoner of his grief and guilt. He believes that the production of *The Tempest* would set his Miranda free but she is ironically trapped in his imagination - *“And the photo of his Miranda, of course. He always kept it near him... And now she would have to stay locked behind the glass, because, with the destruction of his Tempest, the new*

Miranda – the Miranda that he'd been intending to create, or possibly to resurrect – was dead in the water."

Revenge

Atwood focuses on *The Tempest's* theme of revenge and, like Shakespeare, conveys how it is not revenge that instigates change, it is forgiveness of the self and then others.

The novel's focus on revenge is evident in the epigraphs:

"The three epigraphs in the novel are quotes from Sir Francis Bacon, Charles Dickens and Percy Bysshe Shelley. Bacon's quote from "On Revenge" reads, "This is certain, that a man that studieth revenge,/ keeps his own wounds green, which otherwise/ would heal, and do well."". Taken from Charles Dickens is the quote: "... although there are nice people on the stage, there are some who would make your hair stand on end."". The quote by Shelley are from "Lines Written Among the Euganean Hills": "Other flowering isles must be/ In the sea of Life and Agony: / Other spirits float and flee/ O'er that gulf..."". The epigraphs work dialogically as they highlight the theme of revenge..." (Jayendran, 2018).

During the Jacobean period, vengeance was discouraged with the advent of King James' version of the Bible that is more about compassion and forgiveness rather than a wrathful God. Yet, Prospero is determined to avenge the loss of his dukedom at the hands of a brother he trusted – *"these, mine enemies, are all knit up"*. Caliban whose control of the island he loves has been usurped by Prospero also seeks revenge *"Batter his skull, or paunch him with a stake, / Or cut his wezand with thy knife."*

Felix's desire for revenge has been spurred by Tony's betrayal. Thus, the *"sole drift of [Felix's] purpose doth extend"* is to make Tony and Sal (the Heritage Minister) atone for their wrongdoing. *"Suddenly revenge is so close he can actually taste it. It tastes like steak, rare."* Felix torments his enemies in a drug-infused real-life production of *The Tempest* in a similar fashion to the banquet for Prospero's enemies.

Prospero and Felix realise that seeking retribution does not set them free.

Hubris

Prospero and Antonio both suffer from hubris – excessive pride and arrogance. Prospero refers to himself as a “*Prince of power*” and Antonio delights in his ability to manipulate and fool others. He does not expect to fail - “*O, that you bore/ The mind that I do!*”

Felix is very similar to Prospero. He believes that he is the most creative and talented director and is quick to anger, as does Prospero, when others questions him.

Tony is as evil and driven as Antonio. They both delight in the wielding of power and in their own actions that are not tempered by their conscience.

Loss as a catalyst for transformation

Loss becomes a potent catalyst for self-knowledge in the play and novel. Prospero acknowledges that he contributed to his own downfall – “*I, thus, neglecting worldly ends...in my false brother/ awakened an evil nature...*” Alonso believing that he has lost his only son blames his own treachery and ambition – “*Thee of thy son, Alonso, /They have bereft...Ling’ring perdition – worse than any death.*”

Felix has lost his starring role in the theatre, his wife and his daughter who died when she was three. He blames himself for her death. His loss is far more tragic than Prospero’s.

Compassion, humanity and reconciliation

Atwood has demonstrated through her novels and poetry that she privileges compassion, empathy and humanity. Many of her novels are about fighting for human rights. She states in an interview when discussing *The Tempest*,

“The Tempest has that wonderful hinge moment in which Ariel, who is not a human being, says to Prospero, ‘These people that you’ve enchanted are really suffering, and they make me feel very sad, and my affections are moved and so should yours be.’ And Prospero says, ‘Oh, really.’ And Ariel says, ‘Mine would, sir, were I human.’ So, what is it to be human? What is it to be human? According to Ariel, to be human is to have empathy; among other things. And without empathy, there are no human rights...”

Shakespeare, reflecting his Christian perspective, reminds the audience of the importance of being compassionate and forgiving others. His flawed characters experience loss and suffering before they find their own humanity.

Miranda in both texts personifies love, pity and compassion. The audience is morally guided by her compassion in *The Tempest*. She contributes to Prospero's and Felix's moral and psychological transformation.

Prospero repents and begrudgingly forgives his brother but he does discover that *'the rarer action is/ In virtue than in vengeance...'*

This is the same for Felix - *"Anyway I succeeded," he tells himself. "Or at least I didn't fail." Why does it feel like a letdown? The rarer action is/ In virtue than in vengeance, he hears her inside his head. It's Miranda. She's prompting him.'* Felix learns to forgive himself but not his enemies who *"had suffered, which was a pleasure."* But he begrudgingly states *"under these conditions I pardon all of you, and we'll let bygones be bygones"*. However, Felix is using extortion to achieve his agenda meaning that he does not seriously consider absolution, contrary to what he announces. Furthermore, Felix keeps the memory stick where the footage is stored in case it *"might prove crucial at some future time, because you never know."*

Both characters must let go in order to escape their prisons. Like Prospero, Felix accepts that *"everything is ephemeral"*.

Pursuit of power

For Shakespeare, there was a clear understanding of power structures established through the contextual concept of the Great Chain of Being, in which a person's position in society and their gender automatically established the level of power which could be achieved. Confident that his ruling position as Duke of Milan gave him unquestioned power, Prospero failed to adequately use this power to establish firm political governance, leading to his usurpation – *"with volumes that/ I prize above my dukedom."*

Once exiled to the island, Prospero determines that he will maintain power as "ruler" of this new kingdom and this is shown in ways which would have been understood by a Jacobean audience, such as:

- Exercise of paternal power over his daughter
- Power to control native inhabitants of the island as would be expected of a 17th century European conqueror
- Power to challenge any suitor for his daughter to prove his worth
- Power to seek revenge on those who had conspired against him to remove him from his dukedom
- Ultimately, power to seek justice or to forgive.

Prospero criticises his brother for his usurpation while ignoring the fact that he himself is a usurper of Caliban's island. Caliban, '*I am subject to a tyrant, a sorcerer, that by his cunning hath cheated me of the island.*'

Atwood, in her 21st century adaptation, continues to have the "wronged" protagonist seek return to the powerful position from which he had been overthrown. However, one of the most noticeable contextual changes is evident in the role of Miranda who becomes "*a motivator of action rather than a receiver of patriarchal power*" (Aldoory, 'Atwood's Recreation of Shakespeare's Miranda in *The Tempest*). Rather than the limited power she has in the original text, the spirit of Miranda becomes Felix's motivation to continue with his production against all the odds. In *Hag-Seed*, the spirit of Miranda has power over Felix in an almost symbiotic relationship which is very different to the powerlessness she has as the flesh and blood daughter in *The Tempest*. In the play, she embodies the extension of Prospero's authority but only if, by remaining a virgin, she serves as a suitable bride for the husband of his choice.

MOD A: Essay writing success checklist

- The question must drive and shape your response.
- Your thesis or line of argument centred on the question through the lens of textual conversations – must be developed and sustained.

When responding to the texts you will need to be able to demonstrate:

- understanding of how composers are influenced by another text's concepts and values
- evaluate the relationships between texts and contexts

Introduction

- My thesis addresses the key elements of the question through two ideas or more. The thesis will reflect the focus of textual conversations and the significance of context and values.
- My opening paragraph includes:
 - The ideas in response to the question through both texts.
 - An overview of the influence of *The Tempest* and the context and an acknowledgement of how *Hag-Seed's* reimagining and changes have been influenced by Atwood's purpose, perspective, values and context.
 - A final sentence that adds another dimension in response to the question or addresses the second part of the question or adds a "However..." sentence and brings both texts together.

Body

- I present a perceptive understanding of the role that context and the composer's purpose, perspective and values play. My contextual references are meaningful and connect directly to Atwood's adaptation of the relevant aspects of the original play. These references are woven through the essay.
- I refer to the textual conversation between the texts and how this conversation informs my understanding of the key ideas and any changes or innovations that have been made by Atwood.
- I address through a critical intertextual analysis of the texts what is being said: the content, values and ideas through well-chosen detailed textual evidence.
- I refer to the textual links between the characters using key moments in the texts. I include why and how Atwood has made any changes to the representation of the characters.
- I analyse critically HOW it is being said: genre, form, structure and language.
- I use connecting words, such as 'Furthermore', 'Similarly', 'In contrast'... and my paragraphs are cohesively linked.
- I use strong verbs to direct the response.

Conclusion

- I return to the question with a strong concluding statement that also reflects my last sentence in the introduction.

Marking Guidelines (NESA)

The guidelines are adjusted for specific questions.

Criteria	Marks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explains skilfully how composers are influenced by another text’s style, concepts and/or values • Evaluates skilfully the relationship between texts and contexts using detailed textual references from the prescribed texts as appropriate to the question • Composes a perceptive, sustained response that incorporates the stimulus (if relevant) using language appropriate to audience, purpose and form 	17-20
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explains effectively how composers are influenced by another text’s style, concepts and/or values • Evaluates effectively an understanding of the relationship between texts and contexts using detailed textual references from the prescribed texts as appropriate to the question • Composes a coherent, sustained response that incorporates the stimulus (if relevant) using language appropriate to audience, purpose and form 	13-16
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explains adequately how composers are influenced by another text’s style, concepts and/or values • Explains adequately an understanding of the relationship between texts and contexts using some relevant textual references from the prescribed texts as appropriate to the question • Composes a sound response using language appropriate to audience, purpose and form 	9-12
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describes some aspects of how composers are influenced by another text’s style, concepts and/or values • Demonstrates some understanding of the relationship between texts and contexts • Composes a limited response 	5-8
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attempts to describe some aspects of how composers are influenced by another text • Attempts to describe aspects of texts and context • Attempts to compose a response to the question 	1-4

Resources

- Opensource Shakespeare:
https://www.opensourceshakespeare.org/views/plays/play_view.php?WorkID=tempest&Act=1&Scene=2&Scope=scene (You will be able to check on the lines of the characters here and jump to key scenes.)
- Summary of *The Tempest*,
<http://absoluteshakespeare.com/plays/tempest/tempest.htm>
- Informative analysis of *The Tempest* -
<http://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/Annex/Texts/Tmp/intro/GenIntro/default/>
- Complete performance of *The Tempest* -
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=czFoUWwd6ml>
- “A perfect storm: Margaret Atwood on rewriting Shakespeare’s *Tempest*”, Margaret Atwood. (September 2016).
<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/sep/24/margaret-atwood-rewriting-shakespeare-tempest-hagseed>
- “Margaret Atwood’s Hag-Seed: Performing Wonders in the new Millennium.” Laura Giovannelli. http://www.dislocazioni-transnazionali.it/download/HAG-SEED_Giovannelli.pdf (Excellent read!)