 Annotation of Hag-Seed

Title of text: Hag-Seed

Type of text: Prose fiction

Author: Margaret Atwood

Merit and cultural significance

* Margaret Atwood is the Booker Prize-winning author of more than 40 books of fiction, poetry, and critical essays, including The Blind Assassin and Cat’s Eye.
* Atwood’s body of work has resulted in her being seen as ‘one of the most impressively ambitious writers of our time’. (The Guardian)
* Using a prison theatre group, Margaret Atwood’s Hag-Seed reimagines William Shakespeare’s The Tempest; a play of enchantment, vengeance and second chances.

Needs and interests of Students

* The Tempest examines political and ethical questions relating to ambition, usurpation, authority, power and captivity, while also dealing with family loyalties and personal dilemmas and struggles.
* The novel is a complex conversation with The Tempest that takes the reader into the worlds of the play – a heart-broken father, a medium security prison, the imagination and ourselves – as The Tempest is performed for new audience.
* Students will enjoy the innovation, humour and vitality in Atwood’s novel. The playful use of Shakespeare’s language as the characters in the Fletcher Correctional facility are directed to only use Shakespeare’s insults in their interactions with one another throughout the rehearsal process, brings the language to life for a new audience.

Opportunities for challenging teaching and learning

* Students can critically examine how the characterisation of Prospero is enhanced by the characterisation of Felix, or Mr Duke, throughout his twelve years of self-imposed exile. This can be extended to the survivors of the shipwreck who are caught in Prospero’s plot, Felix’s nemesis, Tony, and the inmates of Fletcher Correctional.
* Through the exploration of the parallel revenge plots, students investigate how the implicit and explicit intertextuality develops values such as power and authority, and assumptions about superiority. As the perspective of Felix, the vengeful, eccentric theatre director is revealed,

insights into Prospero’s perspective and motivations are further enhanced. This can be developed further by contrasting social, historical and cultural context, including notions of post colonialism.

* The epilogues created by the Fletcher players offer rich opportunities for students to examine how voice is created and to experiment with their own voice as they express personal understanding of the texts.