

Cast Away



Discussion:

Tomorrow you will be taken to a desert island. You are going to spend the next five years of your life there. You are only allowed to take five things with you. Remember that there is no electricity (and therefore no internet!) or housing, no food or clothing.

Now tell your teacher what those five things are and explain why you would take each one.

Ask your teacher what he / she would take.

Cast Away: Vocabulary

Look at the following words and link them to their meaning:

- Collaborate
- Contemporary
- Excess
- Imbued
- Integrated
- Integrity
- Lose out
- Plaintive
- Reunite
- Salvaged
- Surpassed

1. Something that is modern, current and up to date can be called this.
2. This is a phrasal verb which describes a situation where you have missed an opportunity.
3. This is a word that describes when you have too much of something.
4. When two or more people, such as film makers, work together on a project they do what?
5. When you go beyond or exceed what is expected of you, you can use this verb to describe what you have done.
6. When you have an honest and reliable commitment to a person or a project then you can say you have what?
7. When you put many things together that works to make one 'thing' then you can say that the many parts have done what?
8. When you recover or rescue something you can say that you have done what with it?
9. You can use this word to describe what you have done when you fill or permeate something.

Reading: Cast Away

Robert Zemeckis, writer, director and producer has been described as one of the fifteen most intelligent people working in Hollywood for the past 25 years. He has collaborated with other film makers, such as Spielberg and Lucas, yet his body of work, while impressive, is small. The first part of his professional life as a film maker include films such as Romancing the Stone, the Back to The Future trilogy, Who Framed Roger Rabbit and Death Becomes Her and has pushed the boundaries of special effects whilst not losing sight of good story telling and narrative. His middle period concentrated on drama, with films that many believe showcase his best work: Forrest Gump, Contact, What Lies Beneath and Cast Away. His later period of film making has concentrated on pushing the envelope with 3D - digital film making and a new technique called 'performance capture' with films like The Polar Express, Beowulf and A Christmas Carol.

Cast Away reunites Zemeckis with his Forrest Gump star Tom Hanks in this simple story of survival, a retelling of Daniel Defoe's famous 1719 novel, Robinson Crusoe, in which the main character, Chuck Noland, a Fed Ex supervisor, becomes a castaway on a desert island.

The film is in two parts. The opening of the film establishes the Noland character, his commitment to his girlfriend and his job, the plane crash and his first few weeks of survival on the island by himself. **(A)** The second half of the film concentrates on his escape from the island, his integration back into society and how his experience on the island affects his life after that.

Hanks, in the character of Noland, who has to survive challenges to both his body and soul, carries the film for 1 hour and 23 minutes where he alone is the only character on screen. With little or no dialogue, it is a testimony to Hanks' acting ability that he's able to absorb you with the daily trials and tribulations of his struggle to keep himself alive both physically and mentally. **(B)**

What is remarkable about this film is the fact that Zemeckis made the first half of the film and then stopped for a year to make another film (What Lies Beneath, with Harrison Ford and Michelle Pfeiffer). During this time Hanks lost an incredible 23 kilos and grew his hair and beard long after which Zemeckis made the second half of the film. Along with Zemeckis' pacing and direction, it is Hanks' integrity, passion and commitment which makes Cast Away a truly awesome film and imbues it with the vitality it possesses. **(C)**

There is a lot of symbolism in this film. For example, the film begins and ends at a crossroads, symbolising the decisions we have to face in life, the salvaged Fed Ex package that the main character holds on to for most of the film, works as a metaphor for life's awaiting opportunities and the actual title of the film, Cast Away (not castaway) refers to the way Noland is literally cast away by family and loved ones after being missing for so long. **(D)** Surprisingly, the film has no music at all until the last 35 minutes of the film, giving the film a realistic feel. There is a single, plaintive, solitary theme played by the oboe, which captures the feelings of the main character's complete isolation.

Although some critics of the film complained at the time that the excessive references to FedEx often made the film feel more like an extended commercial for the American courier company and suggested that the film was over long, this is not a traditional, Hollywood, happy-ever-after kind of movie. It is a serious film that comments on the isolation of man in his struggle to survive, whether it be on a desert island or in contemporary society, and how our experiences in life shape our future.

Zemeckis and Hanks, who both won Oscars in 1994 for *Forrest Gump*, lost out during the Academy Awards ceremony in 2000, though many feel this film surpasses their previous achievement. *Cast Away* is a film that is worth repeated watching, if only for the magnificent performance of Tom Hanks.

Advanced Course Reading 1: Cast Away - Questions

1. How would you categorise this essay?

- a. An academic piece of writing based on the film
- b. A movie review found in a film magazine
- c. Information found in a cinema to encourage people to see the film
- d. An essay to highlight the achievements of the film's director

2. What genre does the film Cast Away fall into?

- a. A comedy
- b. An action film
- c. A romantic film
- d. A drama

3. What is this text mainly about?

- a. It shows an example of how film makers often work on differing projects at the same time
- b. It presents an example of what actors are willing to subject themselves to in the name of their art
- c. It outlines the achievements of the people involved in this film
- d. It provides numerous reasons why this film deserves viewing

4. Which of the following statements about Robert Zemeckis is true?

- a. He always works with Tom Hanks
- b. He is only interested in making films about true stories
- c. He won an Oscar for Cast Away
- d. He won an Oscar for Forrest Gump

5. What can be inferred about the film Cast Away?

- a. How special effects used judiciously in a film can move a story forward
- b. How a person can live on the same diet for five years and yet live
- c. How drama in a film can symbolise changes in direction in a person's life
- d. How easy it is to make a film when there is only one main actor

6. What can be said about Tom Hanks?

- a. He likes to win Oscars
- b. He is dedicated to his art
- c. He has a preference for making action films
- d. He likes to work alone

7. Why is the main musical theme played by the oboe?

- a. It is a woodwind instrument
- b. It is capable of evoking a feeling of solitude
- c. It is the instrument that Noland's girlfriend plays
- d. The director insisted on the composer using it

8. Being at a crossroads in life means what?

- a. When you are faced with a life altering decision
- b. When you are confused
- c. When something in your life changes
- d. When you need to understand the rules of the highway code as a motorist

9. Why do film makers use symbolism in films?

- a. The use of symbolism in a film indicates that the film director wants to add a degree of propaganda in his or her film
- b. The use of symbolism helps the audience identify with the main themes and characters of the film
- c. The use of symbolism in a film ensures that the film will be nominated for serious awards, such as Oscars
- d. The use of symbolism in a film means that the director doesn't have to provide as much music for the dramatic parts

10. Why did Robert Zemeckis stop working on Cast Away for one year?

- a. He wanted to make another film
- b. The musical score needed to be composed
- c. To allow time for the physical change in his lead character to take place
- d. He wanted the film to have a happy ending

11. Where in the text would you place the following sentence?

With only a picture of the girl he loves, an unopened Fed Ex package he is determined to deliver and his unlikely friendship with a volleyball he names Wilson, he manages to survive the rigours of life on the desert island.

- a. A
- b. B
- c. C
- d. D

12. Which word best describes isolation from paragraph six?

- a. Accomplishment
- b. Realistic
- c. Inclusion
- d. Seclusion

Follow-on Discussion

The text deals with how decisions we make in life affect our future.

- **What kind of decisions do we make that affects our future?**
- **Think about one decision that you have made that has affected your life. It could be a good or a bad decision.**
- **In what ways did it affect your future?**
- **What were the effects? Were they positive or negative? Can you explain how?**

Advanced Course Listening 1: Ray Mears

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XbBqgst0yRE>

Ray Mears is an English woodsman, writer and expert on bushcraft and survival techniques. You are going to listen to an excerpt of one of his TV shows in which he shows how to survive on a desert island.

Questions for Discussion:

1. Why has Ray Mears decided to go to the Philippines to make this programme?
2. What can be said about the journey to the island?
3. Why does Ray Mears like arriving at his destination in the dark?
4. Why is it important to choose where you sleep carefully?
5. What is the first priority of a castaway?
6. What do we learn from Ray Mears about Robinson Crusoe?

7. Why was military survival training important in 1945?
8. Who were John and Frank Craighead and what did they do during the Second World War? Were they successful?
9. Because the training they gave was a hit and miss affair, what did the US government ask the Craighead brothers to do after the war?
10. What item of equipment would Ray Mears take with him to survive on a desert island?.

Follow-on Discussion

- What kind of things can people approaching the golden years of their lives do to keep their minds from atrophying?
- What kind of activities or hobbies would you like to do, but have not yet found the time yet?