

Film Worksheet 2.4

Cast Away and *Robinson Crusoe*

Knowledge base

1. Review your knowledge of the story of *Robinson Crusoe*.
 - a. Read the brief summary of the storyline.
 - b. Say how long Crusoe is on the desert island, how he survives, who he saves and how he eventually escapes.

Summary

Robinson Crusoe is shipwrecked but manages to survive and reaches dry land. It is an uninhabited island and he is alone. Determined and rational, Crusoe survives on his island for about twenty-eight years by becoming master of his environment. He builds a shelter, domesticates animals and hunts for food. He realises that indigenous peoples visit his island and one day saves a young man from being killed by them. He teaches the young man, who he names Friday, English and converts him to the Protestant religion. Friday becomes his slave. Finally, one day Crusoe sees a ship offshore but then learns there has been a mutiny on board. He rescues the captain and regains control of the ship. By way of reward, he is taken back to England.

2. You are going to compare Crusoe's fight with the rough sea to reach land after the shipwreck with the equivalent moment for the protagonist of the film *Cast Away* after his plane crash.

- a. Find out who in the class has been swimming or playing in the sea when there were big waves. What did it feel like?
- b. Find out if anyone has been in a rough sea in a boat. What was it like?

First impressions

3. Read the text extract from *Robinson Crusoe* (Chapter III).
 - a. The events are described as a fight. Who or what are the two protagonists in the fight?
 - b. What do you learn about Crusoe's personality from the fight? Is he active or passive? Fatalistic or determined? Clever and resourceful or panicked and reckless?

Daniel Defoe

Robinson Crusoe (1719)

Nothing can describe the confusion of thought which I felt when I sank into the water; for though I swam very well, yet I could not deliver myself from the waves so as to draw breath, till that wave having driven me, or rather carried me, a vast way on towards the shore, and having spent itself, went back, and left me upon the land almost dry, but half dead with the water I took in. I had so much presence of mind, as well as breath left,

Mentre scendevo in fondo al mare come un affogato, nessuno può dire per quanto tempo s'oscurò la mia mente. Mi fu impossibile respirare, uscire dall'onda, per quanto nuotassi assai bene, finché l'onda stessa non mi spinse, o meglio mi trascinò, per una lunga distanza verso la riva, poi si esaurì, si ritirò, lasciandomi lungo il litorale quasi in secca soffocato per l'acqua bevuta. Ma mi resi conto d'essere più

that seeing myself nearer the mainland than I expected,
 10 I got upon my feet, and endeavoured to make on
 towards the land as fast as I could before another wave
 should return and take me up again; but I soon found it
 was impossible to avoid it; for I saw the sea come after
 me as high as a great hill, and as furious as an enemy,
 which I had no means or strength to contend with: my
 business was to hold my breath, and raise myself upon
 the water if I could; and so, by swimming, to preserve
 my breathing, and pilot myself towards the shore, if
 possible, my greatest concern now being that the sea,
 20 as it would carry me a great way towards the shore
 when it came on, might not carry me back again with it
 when it gave back towards the sea.

The wave that came upon me again buried me
 at once twenty or thirty feet deep in its own body, and
 I could feel myself carried with a mighty force and
 swiftness towards the shore—a very great way; but I held
 my breath, and assisted myself to swim still forward
 with all my might. I was ready to burst with holding my
 breath, when, as I felt myself rising up, so, to my
 30 immediate relief, I found my head and hands shoot out
 above the surface of the water; and though it was not
 two seconds of time that I could keep myself so, yet it
 relieved me greatly, gave me breath, and new courage.
 I was covered again with water a good while, but not so
 long but I held it out; and finding the water had spent
 itself, and began to return, I struck forward against the
 return of the waves, and felt ground again with my feet.
 I stood still a few moments to recover breath, and till
 the waters went from me, and then took to my heels
 40 and ran with what strength I had further towards the
 shore. But neither would this deliver me from the fury
 of the sea, which came pouring in after me again; and
 twice more I was lifted up by the waves and carried
 forward as before, the shore being very flat.

The last time of these two had well-nigh been
 fatal to me, for the sea having hurried me along as
 before, landed me, or rather dashed me, against a piece
 of rock, and that with such force, that it left me
 senseless, and indeed helpless, as to my own
 50 deliverance; for the blow taking my side and breast,
 beat the breath as it were quite out of my body; and had
 it returned again immediately, I must have been
 strangled in the water; but I recovered a little before the
 return of the waves, and seeing I should be covered
 again with the water, I resolved to hold fast by a piece
 of the rock, and so to hold my breath, if possible, till the
 wave went back. Now, as the waves were not so high as
 at first, being nearer land, I held my hold till the wave
 abated, and then fetched another run, which brought
 60 me so near the shore that the next wave, though it went
 over me, yet did not so swallow me up as to carry me
 away; and the next run I took, I got to the mainland,
 where, to my great comfort, I clambered up the cliffs of
 the shore and sat me down upon the grass, free from
 danger and quite out of the reach of the water.

vicino a terra di quanto sperassi, ebbi abbastanza
 presenza di spirito e fiato per alzarmi in piedi, cercai
 di affrettarmi a raggiungere la riva prima che un'altra
 onda giungesse e mi afferrasse. Però vidi subito che
 non era possibile: vidi il mare avanzare alle mie spalle
 alto come una grande collina, furioso come un nemico
 contro cui non avevo né forza né mezzi per battermi,
 la mia sola risorsa era trattenere il respiro, poi
 riemergere potendo sopra l'acqua, ritrovare il respiro
 nuotando, dirigermi se possibile verso la costa: il mio
 problema era quindi che l'onda, dopo avermi
 trasportato per un buon tratto arrivando verso la
 terra, non mi riportasse indietro tornando verso il
 mare.

L'onda che adesso arrivò su di me
 nuovamente mi seppellì di colpo nella sua massa a
 una profondità di venti o trenta piedi, mi sentii
 trascinare con violenza e con estrema rapidità per un
 grande tratto verso la terra: ma trattenni il respiro,
 nuotai con tutte le forze in avanti nella stessa
 direzione. Mentre stavo scoppiando nel trattenere il
 respiro sentii che risalivo, con grande sollievo la mia
 testa e le mie mani tornarono a riemergere sopra
 l'acqua. Non potei restare così più di due secondi per
 quanto ciò m'abbia fatto bene, ridandomi fiato e
 coraggio: nuovamente fui sepolto dall'acqua di colpo.
 Ma tenni duro ancora una volta, sentii che l'onda
 cedeva cominciando a rifluire, tagliai la corrente,
 toccai, mi alzai in piedi. Per qualche istante rimasi
 immobile per riprendere le forze e per attendere che
 l'onda si allontanasse.

A questo punto presi slancio, cominciai a
 correre verso la terraferma. Ma questo scatto non mi
 sottrasse alla furia del mare che mi sommerse di
 nuovo. Per altre due volte le onde mi trascinarono via
 e, come prima, mi lasciarono lontano essendo la riva
 del tutto piatta. La seconda di queste due volte mi fu
 quasi fatale perché il mare m'aveva portato ancora
 più lontano, l'onda mi gettò a terra, scagliandomi anzi
 contro uno spuntone di roccia, lasciandomi svenuto e
 nell'impossibilità di cercare ancora salvezza. Ma fu
 una fortuna che il colpo al fianco e al petto mi avesse
 per così dire spento il respiro, se l'avessi ritrovato
 subito sarei annegato: respirai invece poco prima che
 l'onda tornasse, poi vedendo che ancora poteva
 raggiungermi decisi di aggrapparmi alla roccia, di
 trattenere il respiro finché fosse passata. Ma siccome
 la terra era ormai più vicina e il mare non si alzava
 più come prima, mi tenni stretto finché l'onda
 arrivata un po' attutita non si ritrasse. Allora ripresi la
 corsa, m'avvicinai tanto alla terra che una nuova
 ondata mi sbarrò il passo ma non poté inghiottirmi
 abbastanza da potermi trascinare. Infine, dopo un
 ultimo sforzo, raggiunsi la Terra vera e propria.

M'arrampicai sulla scarpata rocciosa della
 riva con gioia, mi lasciai cadere sull'erba, sottratto ai
 pericoli, al riparo da tutte le insidie del Mare.

(Source: Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, traduzione
 di Alberto Cavallari, Milano, Feltrinelli, 1993.)



Cast Away

(see film clip
on the Class Video DVD)

In more detail

Lighting

Shots

Conclusions

4. Now watch the film clip for the first time.

Does the protagonist seem equally resourceful and determined as Crusoe? What makes you think so?

5. Watch the clip again and focus on how the film makes clever use of lighting.

- a. Lighting is used to represent the storm. Explain what effects are used and what atmosphere they create.
- b. Lighting also represents the protagonist's state of consciousness. How is this achieved?

6. Different types of shot are used. Watch the clip for the third time.

- a. Sometimes the shot focuses on the protagonist. What kinds of shot are used and why?
- b. At other times the shots are of the sea and plane wreck. What kind of angle is used and to what effect?
- c. A very high angle sequence is also used. What does it emphasise?

7. Consider the two media used to describe similar events — the novel (representation through words) and the film (visual representation).

- a. How is the experience different for the reader and the viewer?
- b. Which do you prefer?
- c. Have there been times you were disappointed by the film version of a book you had read? Explain.

8. Read the information about the film adapted from *Wikipedia* and answer the questions.

- a. How long is Chuck stranded on his island? How does that compare with Crusoe's ordeal?
- b. In the latter part of the film, how did the production manage to make it look like Chuck was a person who had been on a desert island for years?
- c. Who or what becomes Chuck's companion on the island? Does this character have an equivalent in *Robinson Crusoe*?
- d. Was the film a success? What do you know about the success or failure of *Robinson Crusoe* as a novel?



Cast Away is a 2000 drama film directed by Robert Zemeckis and starring Tom Hanks. Hanks portrays a fictional FedEx employee, Chuck, who is stranded on an uninhabited island after his plane crashes on a flight over the South Pacific. The film depicts his attempts to survive on the island using remnants of his plane's cargo. After four years, he has become an expert at spearing fish

and making fires and has regular conversations and arguments with Wilson, a 'companion' he has created out of a volleyball. He eventually builds a raft and escapes the island. After some time he is found by a passing cargo ship and returns home.

The film was not shot consecutively. Hanks gained fifty pounds in weight during pre-production to make him look like a pudgy, middle-aged man. After the majority of the film was shot, production was halted for a year so that Hanks could lose weight and grow his hair and beard to look like he had been living on the island for years.

Cast Away was filmed on Monuriki, a member of the Mamanuca Islands. It is in a subgroup of the Mamanuca archipelago, which is sited off the coast of Viti Levu, Fiji's largest island. The island became a tourist attraction following the film's release.

Cast Away was acclaimed by critics, with particular praise for Tom Hanks, and was a success at the box office, earning over \$529,632,142 worldwide.