

Drink The Air: Teacher Notes by Richard Yaxley

Pre-Reading

1. What do you understand by the word *grief*?
2. What are some of the different ways that grief might affect people?
3. What's the most important thing about family?
4. 'Schools can be the kindest, and most unkind, places in the world.' Debate this statement in a group.
5. In your life, what do you most *hope* for?

Post-Reading

1. 1 Boy: Summarise Tom's memories of his father. Are they positive memories?
2. 1 Girl: Why is Zooley in a cocoon? What does she mean by this?
3. 2 Boy: Tom sees his father's death in heroic terms. Why does he do this?
4. 2 Girl: What kind of person was Kat? In what ways was she 'different'?
5. 3 Boy: What does the 'life is beautiful' incident suggest about Tom's state of mind?
6. 3 Girl: Re-read *Toxic*. What is the parallel drawn between the bush-fire and Zooley's household and life?
7. 4 Boy: How does Tom's grieving affect his behaviour in this section? Are his actions justifiable?
8. 4 Girl: Why must Zooley become a 'pebble in the stream'? Research how this relates to Taoism.
9. 5 Boy: How does Tom react to the 'truth' of his father's death? What advice does his mother give him?
10. 5 Girl: At this, the midpoint, of the novel, a note of hope is introduced in the final poem. What is it? To what Christian story does it relate, and why is this significant?
11. 6 Boy: Summarise Tom's feelings about his home town in this section. What's the main reason that he wants to leave?
12. 6 Girl: Re-read *Come And Play*. In what ways does Zooley question the existence of God?
13. 7 Boy: How does Ms Carponi help Tom in this section? What, in your view, is her motivation in doing so?
14. 7 Girl: What does Zooley's poem in *The Fence Around My Field* reveal about her state of mind?
15. 8 Boy: What does the final line in this section – a quote from *The Tempest* – suggest about Tom's involvement in the play?
16. 8 Girl: How is *The Production of Voice* symbolic of Zooley's improvement?
17. 9 Boy: Why does Tom return to the ocean, and the island?
18. 9 Girl: What does *Dolce Domum* (a Latin term) mean? How is it significant in this section?
19. 10 Boy: What is the significance of the story of Exodus in this section?
20. 10 Girl: What is the significance of Zooley's conversation with Kat in this section?
21. Drink The Air Part 1: What is the most important line in this poem? Why?
22. Drink The Air Part 2: What is the most important line in this poem? Why?

Some Big Questions

1. Consider the title of this novel, which comes from Act 5 Scene 1 of William Shakespeare's play *The Tempest*. Ariel was formerly imprisoned by the witch Sycorax but was freed by Prospero and became his servant. Now Prospero has decided to release him. When Prospero asks Ariel to perform one more task, the spirit says that he will "drink the air before me, and return / Or ere your pulse twice beat."
How does the idea of freedom, of 'drinking the air', relate to the action of the novel?
2. The novel is organised into twenty alternating sections (ten groups of three poems for each character) and completed with a couplet (a final poem for each character).
 - a) How does this structure affect our knowledge of the characters?
 - b) Is it an effective structure? Why or why not?
3. In the world of art, a triptych is a set of three panels, side by side, with related pictures on each panel. Is *Drink The Air* a series of triptychs? Why or why not?
4. This work is classified as a verse novel. What does this mean? How poetic is the writing? Give examples with your answer.
5. Imagine that *Drink The Air* is being turned into a film. Write the script for the film trailer (you may have to research this genre). What key images would you include in the trailer? Why?

Essay Topics

- Above all else, this is a novel about hope; the importance of remaining positive and true to yourself no matter what happens. Discuss.
- Discuss the significance of place in the novel, with reference to the towns, the city, the ocean, the island and school.
- Both Tom and Zooney are let down by their parents. Do you agree or disagree? Discuss, citing examples from the novel.