

Teaching “Ghost Ship”

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Before Reading:

Teaching genres. It can be helpful to discuss the difference between science fiction and fantasy. One useful distinction is that science fiction stories contain an element or elements that do not exist in our world but are scientifically possible. Fantasy stories contain an element or elements that do not exist on our world and do not appear scientifically possible. Space ships that travel to other planets are scientifically possible while magic is not. A class exercise that can be done quickly is to have the students create a list of films they are familiar with and classify them as science fiction or fantasy. You may find a spirited debate about films that straddle the line, like some of the Marvel Comics films that contain some elements that appear science fictional and some that are supernatural. After reading, students can decide if “Ghost Ship” is a science fiction or fantasy.

Discussing themes: An approach that can get the students involved with the story is to discuss or have students journal on some of the story’s elements or thematic topics before they read. Some questions that can be fruitful include these:

- What images or stories do you think of when someone says “pirate”?
- A famous observation is “Everyone is the hero of their own story.” This means that even though most stories are about one or two characters who are the “heroes,” all the other characters think they are the main character. The guard who gets knocked out in the first five minutes, the nameless soldiers who march behind their general, the people answering the phones or handing the surgeon a scalpel all believe the story is about them. Imagine the life of an ordinary sailor on a pirate ship. How would they think of themselves as the hero?
- Imagine what a ghost does when there is no one around for them to haunt.
- Do you believe in redemption? Are there crimes for which there should be no forgiveness? Can you think of examples in your own life where you deserved forgiveness earlier than you received it?

Introducing vocabulary: One approach to vocabulary is to ask students to note words they either are unfamiliar with or find interesting as they read. Asking student to find ten words that fall into those two categories can help them focus more closely on the text.

Another approach is to identify words in the story you believe might trip students up and pre-teach them. The vocabulary in “Ghost Ship” should not be difficult for an average middle or high school student. Words for students with weaker vocabulary who may need extra support include the following:

- Superstitious
- Bilge
- Perpetual
- Batten
- Shroud
- Corduroy
- Quarterdeck
- Apparition
- Brigantine
- Founder

“Ghost Ship” Quiz

Name _____

- 1) Who or what haunts the ghost ship, the *Wild Swan*?

- 2) What did the captain of the *Wild Swan* do that earned him and his men the curse that made them a ghost ship?

- 3) What is Arima’s relationship to the sailors on the ship? Why do they fear her? Based on how she behaves on the ship, should they fear her?

- 4) Arima cannot stay on the *Wild Swan* forever. What has happened that forces her to change her day to day behavior?

- 5) The *Wild Swan* is an anachronism: it is a ship that is out of it’s time. Based on information from the story, what time does the story appear to be set in?

- 6) Why do you suspect that the captain ordered the *Wild Swan* to follow the Royal Caribbean ship, the *Independence of the Seas*?

- 7) The best characters in stories often are the ones who struggle against fate. A character who does not struggle is harder for the reader to care for. How does Arima struggle against her fate, even though she’s not successful at first?

- 8) Write the missing scene to the story. Using dialogue and actions, continue the story to show readers what happened when Arima finally meets someone on shore.

“Ghost Ship” Quiz Key

- 1) Who or what haunts the ghost ship, the *Wild Swan*? *Arima, a young girl who is not a ghost. Some readers may wonder how she came to appear on the ship, and why if this is a ghost ship that she can move about the ship as if it is real. The story never tells us why she is on board, but it's reasonable to assume she may be suffering under some curse of her own. Certainly something supernatural is at work.*
- 2) What did the captain of the *Wild Swan* do that earned him and his men the curse that made them a ghost ship? *In his hurry to make a shipment in record time, he broke one of the rules of the sea, which is that he didn't aid a ship in distress. All the crew on the ship he didn't help died.*
- 3) What is Arima's relationship to the sailors on the ship? Why do they fear her? Based on how she behaves on the ship, should they fear her? *She tried to communicate with them without success. She tidies up after them. They fear her because they are superstitious. As far as they are concerned, she's the ghost! Arima's is not trying to frighten the men. They should not fear her.*
- 4) Arima cannot stay on the *Wild Swan* forever. What has happened that forces her to change her day to day behavior? *She is running out of food.*
- 5) The *Wild Swan* is an anachronism: it is a ship that is out of its time. Based on information from the story, what time does the story appear to be set in? *The appearance of the Royal Caribbean ship The Independence of the Seas suggests the story is set in modern times. The story says that the Wild Swan has been sailing for two-hundred years.*
- 6) Why do you suspect that the captain ordered the *Wild Swan* to follow the Royal Caribbean ship, the *Independence of the Seas*? *The only explanation that makes sense is that he knows his “ghost” belongs with the people of the world he and his men can no longer be a part of. He's trying to help her get home.*
- 7) The best characters in stories often are the ones who struggle against fate. A character who does not struggle is harder for the reader to care for. How does Arima struggle against her fate, even though she's not successful at first? *Arima struggles in various ways. She tries to communicate with the sailors. She talks to the captain. The most obvious example of her struggle is her attempt to build a raft.*
- 8) Write the missing scene to the story. Using dialogue and actions, continue the story to show readers what happened when Arima finally meets someone on shore. *There are many ways to write Arima's first encounter with someone on shore. The best examples will try to stay true to Arima's plucky character.*

“Ghost Ship”

Post-reading Activities

One of the most productive ways to approach a discussion of literature is to give students the chance to respond to the story as readers first and as students of literature second. Giving students an opportunity to say what they thought or felt about the reading, or to talk about issues that the story raised before digging into analysis valorizes their opinions. Although not untypical for some teachers, it’s a pretty peculiar student whose first thought about a story is “I wonder what its theme was?” or “How did the characters develop through the story’s events?”

A useful approach to opening discussion can be to use the grading of the quiz as a springboard for talking about the story. Since the questions are open-ended, students can argue for different interpretations of the piece. By the time students finish grading the quiz, they’ve covered 90% of the story.

Journal Prompts (some of these prompts could be turned into formal essays)

- It would be easy to argue that only the captain on the *Wild Swan* deserved to be on the ghost ship. Defend the idea that the entire crew also deserved the captain’s fate.
- Expand your answer on the quiz where you wrote the last scene to the story. How would the newspapers write about Arima? She’s been missing for some time, and she has a fantastic story to tell. Write your version of the news story that reports on her return to our world.
- What happened to the captain and the crew of the *Wild Swan* are left vague. Explain what you think happened to them.
- Illustrate a key scene from the story in your journal. Explain why you chose this scene and why it is important to the story.

For a huge list of writing responses to stories, go to <https://www.centergrove.k12.in.us/page/115>

Literary Analysis Questions

- Redemption is a compelling theme within literature. How does this story create a theme about redemption?
- How does Arima develop and grow as a character in the story? How do her actions demonstrate that she has changed by the end of the story?
- Compare and contrast “Ghost Ship” to other ghost stories you know. What elements does it contain that are similar to other ghost stories? How is it different?
- How does the author use weather to indicate a change in mood in the story?
- How does the setting in the story contribute to the atmosphere and tone?