Act 2 stage directions – analysis

This resource is based on the stage directions for Act 2 and should reinforce students’ understanding and use of genre, as well as using relevant literary and linguistic terms.

1. The first line of the stage direction refers to ‘sappers’ as Friel reminds his audience of the military perspective against which the play is set.

Students should be encouraged to discuss this element of the play, and why soldiers are making a map. The line also refers to the passing of time, the implications of which may be discussed.

2. Naming of places is an important part of this scene, and the text as a whole. It is useful for students to dedicate a section of their notes to names and naming, and add to it each time a reference is made to the subject. Discussion here focuses on:

   a) Anglicising place names.
   b) Translating place names from Irish to English.
   c) Transliterating place names.
   d) Standardising the names.

Each process is different and students need to understand the processes involved as Friel uses them to show how a sense of place is directly linked to the place name.

3. Time is referred to again, as it is now ‘some days later’. How has the passage of time affected the work, and the relationship between Owen and Yolland? Why does Friel bring these changes about? What is their dramatic significance?

4. Another dimension of the sense of place occurs with the reference to ‘... an improvised clothes-line...’ Comparisons may be drawn with the improvised schoolroom in Act 1, with the lack of female influence over this activity similar to the lack of a female hand in the arrangements in the hedge school, and also with the fact that washing clothes is a necessary but homely activity used to highlight the increasing ease felt between Yolland and Owen and the merging of public and personal activities.

5. Recording of names in official places is an important point in this scene. Students may discuss the implications of: ‘...the Name Book’, ‘a large map’, ‘...a church registry’. They may be encouraged to reflect on the parts of Irish society which will be affected by the map and the changing of place names. Extension of the subject may include how the Irish will feel about the places they know once the names have been changed.
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6. The two characters mentioned in the stage directions are Owen and Yolland. Students should reflect on how these characters have changed since they were first introduced. An interesting discussion can focus on which characters change during the course of the play, where this happens, and why. These characters can then be contrasted with those who do not change at all. Conclusions can follow regarding Friel’s purpose in his character delineations.

7. Yolland is resting against a ‘creel’. Friel writes that ‘...he is at home here now.’ Why is the washing on a makeshift ‘clothes-line’ when there is a ‘creel’ fit for purpose? What is the message about Yolland here, and why are there two separate references to washing? Students should be encouraged to talk about literal and symbolic aspects of washing. (The subject may be cross-referenced to page 46 when Yolland is washing and Doalty passes him carrying a scythe.)

8. Students may list the ‘props’ used in the stage setting: the Name-Book, clothes-line, cart, nail, shirts and socks, a large map, a creel, reference books, a bottle of poteen, cups. They may:

   a) Draw the scene depicted.
   b) Write about the significance of the articles chosen by Friel.
   c) Be encouraged to set a stage scene for other important places in the text.
   d) Work in groups to make a stage set for other students to ‘read’ the part of the text referred to by their props.
   e) Bring in props which suggest a character (e.g. a copy of The Odyssey for Jimmy Jack Cassie).