

LOST – PILOT



The idea of the castaway is one that has been popular in the Western imagination since at least the days of Shakespeare – in his play “The Tempest”, some castaways found themselves on a magical island populated with magical beings and spirits – and some people believe that this play was in part based on the story of real British castaways in the Caribbean during his time.

Western literature and culture is full of stories about castaways on desert islands – Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), Johann David Wyss' *The Swiss Family Robinson* (1812), and William Golding's *The Lord of the Flies* (1954). These stories have been traditionally used to explore questions about the nature of humans, and the relationship individual human beings and groups of people have with both nature, and with society.

There have also been many film and television programs that have used the desert island theme, too: comedies like “Gilligan's Island”, dramas like *Cast Away*, the reality-TV program “Survivor”, and SF shows and movies like “Lost in Space”, *Pitch Black*, and *Enemy Mine*.



Stories about desert islands often suggest one of two ideas about castaways: first, in utopian stories, castaways become self-sufficient – they can survive on their own, or as a group, and create a good, healthy society by living in nature. They don't need their societies to be civilized, and might even be more civilized living in the woods than living in a city.

Other desert island stories tell a more frightening story: they suggest that without society to restrict people, we would regress into savagery – that people eventually would become like violent animals if they were to be removed

from “civilization”.

The most recent incarnation of the desert-island castaway theme in television is the program “Lost”. It tells the story of a group of passengers on a plane that crashes on a desert island. Part of the reason that the program is so popular is that it mixes and matches so many elements of the desert-island story together – tensions between the castaways, conflicts and cooperation between many interesting characters of different nationalities and backgrounds, puzzling mysteries about the nature of the island itself, and more.

Before we view the “Lost” pilot, let's answer a few questions based on your research since last class. You will discuss in two groups, but share answers with the other group since everybody researched something different.



1. Which of the stories mentioned in the text above were utopian? Which involved a regression into savagery?
2. Who is the historical Locke, and why would a character in the program be named after him?
3. Why would a program like “Survivor” be set on a desert island?
4. Which theory do you think is correct? Would castaways on a desert island become “savage” if they stayed lost for a long time, or would they build themselves new mini-civilization?
5. What does “every man for himself” mean, and do you think it leads to utopia, or to savagery?

Sections of this handout were based on information found in the Wikipedia website: (<http://www.wikipedia.org>).

Post-viewing questions:

1. Is there any one character who seems like the “hero” of the story so far? Who is it, and why? (There can be more than one “hero”, by the way.)
 2. Is there any character who seems like the potential “villain” of the story so far? Who is it, and why? (There can be more than one “villain”, too.)
 3. Given what you have seen, do you think the castaways are more likely to move towards utopia or savagery?
 4. Why do some castaways not trust Sayeed?
 5. What do you think of the interaction between Jin and Sun and the other characters on the island, considering their apparent language/culture barrier?
 6. What the heck do you think a polar bear is doing on the island?
 7. If you heard the message from the French woman, would you tell the other castaways, or not?
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