Wuthering Heights: (e) A tragic tale?

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Lesson focus: To examine how far the novel fits into the pattern of a tragedy. This scheme should be followed after the whole novel has been studied.

Opening exercise: Revise the main elements of tragedy.

(A-Z General Definitions > Tragedy)

- Write a list of the characteristics you would expect on the board.

Textual examination: Ask students to find specific examples from the novel to illustrate as many of the tragic features you have listed as they can.

- In what ways does the novel not fit into your expectations of tragedy? (Structure in Wuthering Heights > Wuthering Heights as a five-act tragedy)

- (The context of Wuthering Heights > Literary context of Wuthering Heights > Emily Brontë and the novel > Tragedy)

Discussion ideas: Re-read the final chapter.

- Discuss what is meant by the final sentence.
- Does this ending fit into your understanding of a tragedy? (Wuthering Heights synopses and commentary > Chapter 34)

- Summarise your conclusions from the textual examination and discussion above.

Recreative task: Improvise or write a short conversation in which one person claims that Wuthering Heights is a tragedy, and the other sees it as a romance.

(Critical task: A critic has said: 'The ending of Wuthering Heights is deliberately ambiguous. Evidence is provided for at least two points of view: that Heathcliff and Catherine are now peacefully asleep or that they 'walk' the moors.'

- Respond to this view, making clear your own ideas about the ending in whatever ways you think are relevant.
  - You should refer back to at least two earlier parts of the novel (perhaps including the novel's opening).
  - You must come to some kind of conclusion.

(Extension task: Research other tragedies and compare Wuthering Heights with them.

- Ideally use some traditional tragedies and some modern examples.
- How does Wuthering Heights compare with either of these types of tragedy?

(Religious / philosophical context of Wuthering Heights > Religion in Wuthering Heights)

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