



## STOCKCERO TEACHING KIT (162)

TEXT: *Una isla llamada Virgilio*

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### PART 1: CONTEXT & CRITICAL ANALYSIS

#### 1. VIRGILIO PIÑERA: A MULTIFACETED CUBAN VANGUARDIST:

This collection of essays, testimonies, and poems celebrates Virgilio Piñera (1912-1979), a key Cuban poet, playwright, narrator, and essayist. It aims to explore novel approaches to his work, with a particular focus on his poetry and narrative, challenging traditional understandings of his place in Cuban literature.

Piñera's work is characterized by its experimental nature, exploring themes of the body, tragedy, and the absurd, often intertwined with his personal experiences and intellectual connections.

#### 2. CONNECTIONS AND CRITIQUES:

The volume delves into Piñera's relationships with other cultural figures, such as Wilfredo Lam and the *Orígenes* group, as well as his collaboration with Witold Gombrowicz in Buenos Aires. These connections highlight the international scope of his influence and intellectual curiosity.

Piñera's critical essays on figures like Gertrudis Gómez de Avellaneda and Paul Valéry reveal his intellectual development as a poet and essayist, demonstrating his astute observations on literature and aesthetics.

#### 3. THE PARADOX AT THE HEART OF PIÑERA'S WORK:

A central element in Piñera's writing is the pervasive use of paradox. This serves not only to address philosophical questions (as in *El conflicto*) but also to critically examine national identity (as in *La isla en peso*) and the very institutions of art and culture.

His "poetics of destruction" (as he termed it) and his exploration of the "paradox of the eternally ephemeral" are vital to understanding his unique style and his challenging relationship with reality and representation.

#### 4. AFROCUBAN AND GEOGRAPHICAL INFLUENCES:

The collection explores the Afrocuban presence in Piñera's work, particularly in poems like *La isla en peso*, linking his exploration of the body and identity to the rich tapestry of Cuban culture.

His writing is deeply connected to Cuba's insular geography and its natural elements, presenting a "profoundly Caribbean" Piñera who reveals the island in all its chaos, death, and splendor, making explicit the role of the island as a significant literary and symbolic space.

#### 5. PIÑERA'S ENDURING LEGACY AND ETHICAL STANCE:

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Through a selection of testimonies and celebratory poems by contemporaries like José Lezama Lima and Severo Sarduy, the book affirms Piñera's lasting influence. He is portrayed as a lucid, ethical writer whose work continues to inspire new generations and secures his place in literary posterity, despite the controversies and marginalization he faced during his lifetime.

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## PART 2: TOPICS FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

**Piñera's Multidisciplinary Approach:** Virgilio Piñera was a poet, dramatist, narrator, and essayist. How do these different facets of his intellectual and artistic life converge in his work, as explored in the essays in this collection?

**The Concept of "Isla":** The title of this book and the introductory poem "Isla" (by Piñera) are central. Discuss the significance of the island motif in Piñera's work and in Cuban literature in general. What does it symbolize (e.g., isolation, identity, a state of being)?

**Paradox and the Absurd:** How does Piñera utilize paradox, oxymoron, and antithesis in his writing? Provide examples from the discussion to illustrate how these rhetorical devices help him reflect on national identity, culture, and existence.

**Piñera and the Afrocuban Element:** Explore the connections between Piñera's work and Afrocuban culture, particularly in relation to his poem *La isla en peso*. How does his writing reflect or interpret the Afrocuban presence in Cuban identity?

**Literary Criticism and Personal Ethics:** The introduction discusses Piñera as a critic of poetry. How does his critical approach, and his own "poetics of destruction," relate to his broader ethical stance and his challenge to established cultural norms?

**"Una isla llamada Virgilio" in the "Caribbean & Central America" Bundle:** How does this collection, focused on a single author, contribute to a bundle exploring "Voices from the Caribbean & Central America"? What does Piñera's unique voice add to the region's literary landscape?

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## PART 3: SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- **Jambrina, Jesús E. (ed.).** *Una isla llamada Virgilio*. Stockcero, [Year of publication].
- **Piñera, Virgilio.** *La isla en peso*. La Habana: Ediciones R, 1961.
- **Anderson, Thomas.** "Piñera corresponsal: Una vida literaria en cartas." In *Una isla llamada Virgilio*.
- **Casamayor-Cisneros, Odette.** "Piñera, Lam y los origenistas: Suspenso, tragedia o comedia de enredos con fondo tropical." In *Una isla llamada Virgilio*.
- **Lezama Lima, José.** "Virgilio Piñera cumple 60 años." In *Una isla llamada Virgilio*.
- **Sarduy, Severo.** "Pido la canonización de Virgilio Piñera." In *Una isla llamada Virgilio*.
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## PART 4: QUIZ BANK (Multiple Choice)

*Virgilio Piñera's work is celebrated for its extensive use of which literary device?*

- A) Hyperbole and grandiosity.
- B) Simple, direct realism.
- C) Paradox and the absurd.
- D) Traditional epic narratives.

**Correct Answer: C**

*According to the introduction, Piñera's poem *La isla en peso* explores which central theme?*

- A) The joys of Cuban tourism.
- B) The relationship between Cuban identity and its insular geography.
- C) The history of Cuban sugar production.
- D) A critique of European avant-garde movements.

**Correct Answer: B**

*The essay by Odette Casamayor-Cisneros in this collection explores the connections between Piñera's work and:*

- A) The political movements of the 19th century.
- B) The visual art of Wilfredo Lam and the *Orígenes* group, particularly regarding the body.
- C) The economic history of Cuba.
- D) The culinary traditions of the Caribbean.

**Correct Answer: B**

*What does the introductory poem "Isla" (by Piñera) metaphorically describe?*

- A) The transformation of a person into an island.
- B) A journey across the Caribbean Sea.
- C) The challenges of island agriculture.
- D) The discovery of a new, uninhabited island.

**Correct Answer: A**

*Piñera's approach to national identity and culture is characterized by:*

- A) An uncritical embrace of traditional Cuban folklore.
- B) A focus on the superficial aspects of modernity.
- C) A nuanced exploration of Cuban identity through its complexities and contradictions, often challenging official narratives.
- D) An attempt to fully assimilate Cuban literature into European models.

**Correct Answer: C**



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