

Year 8 English Autumn Term

Exploring Shakespeare and His World: *The Tempest*

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<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Plot</u></p> <p><i>The Tempest</i> is a play about magic, betrayal, love and forgiveness. It is set on an island somewhere near Italy where Prospero, the one-time Duke of Milan, and his beautiful daughter, Miranda, live with a sprite called Ariel and a strange wildman called Caliban. Prospero is a powerful magician who creates a storm, or tempest, that sets the scene for the play. In the events that follow we see a plot to murder the King of Naples, a drunken scheme to kill Prospero and a romance between Miranda and the King's son, Ferdinand. In the end everyone is forgiven and they all set sail for home.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A ship is caught in a tempest and begins to sink. • Prospero tells Miranda that he caused the storm. • Ariel fetches Ferdinand, who falls in love with Miranda. • Antonio and Sebastian plot to kill Alonso, the King of Naples. • The ship's jester and butler meet Caliban and feed him alcohol. • Caliban suggests that they should kill Prospero, and Ariel overhears. • Prospero uses magic to scare Alonso and spoil Caliban's plot. • Prospero forgives the passengers for their former betrayals. 	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Key Quotations</u></p> <p>"You taught me language, and my profit on't Is I know how to curse. The red plague rid you For learning me your language!" (I.ii.366-368)</p> <p>"Be not afeard. The isle is full of noises, Sounds, and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not. Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments Will hum about mine ears, and sometime voices That, if I then had waked after long sleep Will make me sleep again; and then in dreaming The clouds methought would open and show riches Ready to drop upon me, that when I waked I cried to dream again." (III.ii.130-138).</p> <p>"Our revels now are ended. These our actors, As I foretold you, were all spirits, and Are melted into air, into thin air; And, like the baseless fabric of this vision, The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces, The solemn temples, the great globe itself, Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve; And, like this insubstantial pageant faded, Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff As dreams are made on, and our little life Is rounded with a sleep". (IV.i.148-158)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Key Themes</u></p> <p>Freedom: Throughout the play, we see examples of characters seeking their freedom and often experiencing the opposite, ie imprisonment. The island setting for the play makes everyone trapped to a certain extent. Following the shipwreck (and before Ariel steps in) there is no immediate escape from the island for any of the characters. Prospero and Miranda have been trapped on the island for twelve years. When they first arrived, Prospero rescued Ariel from a prison that the witch Sycorax had locked him in. Ariel becomes Prospero's servant and asks early on in the play when he might be granted his freedom. Caliban is another character who lacks freedom. Prospero threatens him with punishments if he does not do his work. However, Caliban seems destined to be a slave. When he meets Stephano, he bows down at his feet and promises to be his loyal servant. Prospero's very last words in the play are set me free (Act 5 Epilogue) which shows the importance of this theme to all the characters.</p> <p>Empathy and Forgiveness: Empathy is the ability to put yourself in someone else's shoes and understand how they might be feeling. In order to forgive someone it is quite useful to be able to feel empathy. Some characters in <i>The Tempest</i> seem skilled at this, whilst others struggle to think of anyone but themselves. Miranda seems to have a very natural sense of empathy. When she sees the ship caught in the storm she shows empathy for the crew. She gets upset about the suffering that she imagines they must have gone through. Prospero on the other hand seems to learn empathy as the play progresses. When we first see him with Ariel, the spirit is asking for his liberty which Prospero has promised. However, instead of showing understanding for his servant, Prospero seems to become angry. He reminds Ariel that he rescued the spirit from his prison in a tree. Later in the play, Prospero becomes softer in his manner towards Ariel, calling him dainty and chick. When Ariel tells him he should feel sorry for the king and his followers, Prospero takes his advice. Instead of taking revenge Prospero offers forgiveness.</p> <p>Nature Vs Nurture: The theme of nature versus nurture is presented on a number of levels in <i>The Tempest</i>. There is the natural beauty of the island, that Caliban tells us about with the sounds and sweet airs (Act 3 Scene 2). Then there is the comparison between what is natural and what is civilised. Miranda represents a natural innocence and naivety, whereas Caliban represents something savage, uncivilised and unnatural. Gonzalo, in Act 2 Scene 2, talks about a commonwealth where nature and man would work together more harmoniously. At the same time the supposedly civilised men, shipwrecked on the island, are mostly shown as greedy drunkards and traitors.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Context</u></p> <p>The most influential writer in all of English literature, William Shakespeare was born in 1564 to a successful middle-class glove-maker in Stratford-upon-Avon, England. Shakespeare attended grammar school, but his formal education proceeded no further. In 1582 he married an older woman, Anne Hathaway, and had three children with her. Around 1590 he left his family behind and travelled to London to work as an actor and playwright. Public and critical success quickly followed, and Shakespeare eventually became the most popular playwright in England and part-owner of the Globe Theatre. His career bridged the reigns of Elizabeth I (ruled 1558-1603) and James I (ruled 1603-1625), and he was a favourite of both monarchs. Indeed, James granted Shakespeare's company the greatest possible compliment by bestowing upon its members the title of King's Men. Wealthy and renowned, Shakespeare retired to Stratford and died in 1616 at the age of fifty-two.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>Key Characters</u></p> <p>Prospero - The play's protagonist, and father of Miranda. Miranda - The daughter of Prospero. Ariel - Prospero's spirit helper. Caliban - Another of Prospero's servants. Ferdinand - Son and heir of Alonso. Alonso - King of Naples and father of Ferdinand. Antonio - Prospero's brother. Sebastian - Alonso's brother. Gonzalo - An old, honest lord. Trinculo & Stephano - Trinculo, a jester, and Stephano, a drunken butler, are two minor members of the shipwrecked party.</p>	

