

The Tempest

Synopsis

As the play opens, a tempest-tossed ship is wrecked upon the shores of an enchanted isle whereon dwell Prospero and his lovely daughter, Miranda, alone save for Caliban, a deformed and brutish half man/half beast whom Prospero has enslaved, and Ariel, a dainty spirit of the winds and Prospero's servant. After the ship is split apart on the rocks and as the tempest begins to subside, Prospero tells his daughter of his past life: Formerly duke of Milan, Prospero allowed his affairs of state to lapse in order that he could study magic. Eventually his dukedom was usurped by his wicked brother, Antonio, and Alonso, the king of Naples. The conspirators then set Prospero and Miranda adrift in a "rotten carcass of a boat," where they would have perished except for a humane Gonzalo, who provisioned their craft with enough food and water for them to reach the island. During the twelve years of their exile, Prospero has perfected his magical arts, gained control of the various spirits and creatures that inhabit the island, and educated Miranda.

Knowing through his magic that his ancient enemies are in the wrecked vessel, Prospero brings the voyagers safely ashore and scatters them in groups about the island. Ariel, at Prospero's bidding, leads Ferdinand, gallant son of the king of Naples, to the cave of Prospero—and Miranda, who does not remember ever having seen any other man than her father, immediately is smitten with the handsome prince. Prospero, who had hoped the two would fall in love, pretends to frown upon him, subdues him with magic arts, and sets him to work hauling logs.

On another part of the island, Alonso, his brother Sebastian, Antonio, and others wander sadly, convinced that the young Prince Ferdinand is dead. All but Sebastian and Antonio are lulled to sleep by Ariel, but these two remain awake to plot the death of the sleeping king and their taking over of his kingdom. They might have succeeded had not the watchful Ariel awakened the intended victim just in time.

On a third isolated part of the island, Trinculo, the king's jester, is reeling drunk. He encounters Caliban, and they are soon joined by the butler, Stephano, who so delights Caliban with "moon-liquor" that Caliban swears to follow him forever. The three then make their own drunken plot to break free, through force, of their various masters, but Ariel, who has heard every word, lures them astray with magical music.

Meanwhile Miranda and Ferdinand have exchanged vows of love, and Prospero, who is now convinced of their true love, blesses their engagement. While the lovers are conversing, Prospero and Ariel mock the king's court with a lavish banquet which vanishes as soon as they try to eat. They then rebuke them for their crimes against "good Prospero . . . and his innocent child."

Finally, after Miranda and Ferdinand are treated to a prenuptial masque enacted by the spirits of Iris, Ceres, Juno, and their nymphs, Prospero decides that all have suffered enough and that it is time to forgive for injuries of the past. Spellbound by Ariel's magic, everyone, for the first time, is brought before Prospero, where he reveals himself as the wronged duke of Milan. Prospero first brings in Prince Ferdinand, supposed dead, and announces his engagement to Miranda. He then frees his faithful servant, Ariel, and returns the island to Caliban. The crew of the ship, which is magically afloat again, arrives to take all back to Milan, and Prospero renounces his magical powers, with a last order to Ariel to command "calm seas and auspicious gales" for the voyage ahead.

Themes

Theme of Magic

- Prospero's magical power and ability to control spirits seems closely connected to his books. Caliban, for example tells Stephano, 'Remember / First to possess his books, for without them / He's but a sot, as I am, nor hath not / One spirit to command' (Caliban, 3:2). He also has a staff and cloak that help his magic.
- Moments of theatrical magic are when, for example, a character like Ariel is invisible to other characters on stage in Act 3 Scene 2, or when Ariel emerges from the banquet as a harpy in Act 3 Scene 3. Why do you think moments like this are enjoyable for an audience?

Theme of Betrayal

- Prospero's deep sense of betrayal drives much of the plot of The Tempest. He tells Miranda in Act 1 Scene 2 the story of how his brother Antonio betrayed him, leading to their exile from Milan. It is Prospero's desire for revenge that brings Antonio, Alonso and the others to the island.
- Prospero and Miranda feel their trust and friendship was betrayed by Caliban's attack on her which later leads Caliban to plot against them with Stephano and Trinculo.
- Alonso's trust in Antonio and Sebastian is betrayed by their plot to kill him and Miranda even feels she is betraying her father by falling in love with Ferdinand.

Theme of Power and Control

- The play opens with the power of nature shown by the storm, against which the power of the king and his nobles is useless. We soon realise, however, that the storm is being controlled by Ariel who is being controlled by Prospero. Prospero's power as Duke of Milan was taken from him by Alonso and Antonio and now he uses his powers, obtained through magic, to control them and everyone else on the island. What Prospero can't control is how people feel. He hopes Miranda will fall in love with Ferdinand and acts hostile towards Ferdinand to test how they feel about each other. In this case his actions seem successful but is the same true with Alonso or Caliban, for example?

Characters

- **Prospero:** Prospero used to be the Duke of Milan and now rules the island. He is Miranda's father.
- **Miranda:** Miranda is Prospero's daughter. She lives on the island with her father.
- **Ariel:** Ariel is a spirit of the island and Prospero's servant.
- **Caliban:** Caliban is the son of Sycorax, a witch. He was born on the island and is Prospero's slave.
- **Ferdinand:** Ferdinand is the prince of Naples, son of Alonso.
- **Trinculo:** Trinculo is Alonso's jester and Stephano's friend.
- **Stephano:** Stephano is Alonso's butler. He is friends with Trinculo.
- **Alonso:** Alonso is King of Naples and Ferdinand's father.

- **Antonio:** Antonio is Prospero's brother. He became Duke of Milan after overthrowing his brother.
- **Gonzalo:** Gonzalo is Alonso's counsellor and trusted advisor.

For Discussion

(or ideas to be used as writing prompts)

Before your workshop:

- Why does a person betray another? Why does a person remain loyal to another?
- How do you think Prospero's use of magic is linked to the theme of power and control?
- What is magic? Do you consider it good or evil?
- If you came upon a near-deserted island with not-quite-human inhabitants, how would you behave towards them?

After your workshop:

Questions for Elementary Students:

- At the very end of the play Prospero decides to forgive his enemies. Why do you think he does this?
- Have you ever been angry with a friend or sibling? Has a friend or sibling ever been angry with you? How upset were you? How did you deal with your anger? Looking back on the experience, would you have done anything differently? How did Prospero deal with his anger? Did he deal with it appropriately?

Questions for Middle/High School Students:

- What is power? Why do people want power? How do people go about obtaining power? Is the quest for power worth it at all costs? How does Prospero go about regaining his power? Are his methods just? If you could obtain your ultimate power what would it be and how would you go about obtaining it?
- The idea of forgiveness and revenge is a major theme in *The Tempest*. Find a major example of each in the text and use it to answer the following question. Is it better to forgive your enemies or give them a taste of their own medicine?

Visual Art Prompts

Storming on Shakespeare's Stage

It's no surprise that a play named *The Tempest* opens in the middle of a huge storm at sea. But how can a director and a team of designers create that storm onstage?

In the past, there have been many different attempts by directors to portray the opening storm on stage. Royal Shakespeare Company's 1982 production, directed by Ron Daniels, designed the set itself to be that of the ruined ship on which Prospero and his daughter had arrived on the island 12 years before. This set, with appropriate lighting, doubled for the storm-tossed ship in the play's opening scene.

In 2006, Rupert Goold and his team opened the play with a shipping forecast and a gauze showing a radio. Through the radio's speaker, the audience glimpsed the last moments on-board before the shipwrecking. Projections of waves on moving curtains created atmospheric scene changes.



How does the budget affect the staging of the storm? How realistically should the storm be staged?

Activity: Ask students to brainstorm different ways to present the storm and shipwreck onstage. Then break the class into three groups and assign each a budget—one group has a high school drama club budget, one has a regional theatre budget, and one has a Broadway theatre budget. Each group should develop a concept or proposal for the storm scene, complete with lights, set, sound, props, and costumes, considering their respective budgets. Have each group present their ideas to the class.

Drama Activities

Who Controls the Magic?

In the following activity, students will explore Act 1 scene 2, looking at the relationship between Prospero and Ariel but also experimenting with using visual imagery in performance.

1. Organise students into pairs and provide each of them with the copy of the scene.
2. Ask them to read it together first, aloud. Invite pairs to read through the scene again, thinking about how the characters interact. Ask the student playing Ariel to remain in one place, while Prospero moves freely around the space. Then, ask them to do the same thing but with Prospero standing in one place and Ariel moving.
 - Encourage students to think about their movements as they make them. Do they make use of their movement? Are they close to the other character or far away? Is it difficult for the character standing still to be in one place, does it feel right? Did they move up or down at all?
3. Reflect with the whole group on what they think is happening in this scene. Who do they think holds the most power? What clues in the language reveal this? Ask each pair to try the scene again, now they are more familiar with it, trying it in the following ways:
 - With Prospero unable to speak.
 - With Ariel unable to speak.
4. In both these versions encourage students to use their bodies, hand signals, mimes or any physical images to convey their responses. Invite some of the pairs to perform their versions of the scene for the rest of the group.

Post-Activity Discussion: Reflect together on what these scenes reveal. Which character was more visual in their language and was easier to create images for? What does this show about them? Was it equally difficult; do you think these characters understand each other? What is their dynamic? Thinking back to their first reading of the scene, ask students to consider the same question as the company did: who really has the power in this relationship? Who really controls the magic on the island?

Staging the Gods

In *The Tempest* there is a scene where Prospero presents a masque to Ferdinand and Miranda. In it, the goddesses Juno and Ceres appear and are joined by the messenger Iris. This was the moment in the play in which the traditional masques of Shakespeare's era would have been seen on stage. In the following activity students will be able to think about how the characters of Juno, Ceres and Iris would move and interact on stage given their power and status, and also how they would show Iris' lower status.

1. Ask students to move around the space, balancing it so there are no obvious gaps or spaces.
2. Explain to students that in the play Juno is recognised because of her 'gait' or the way she moves. Challenge them to start moving around the room, not like themselves but as if:
 - They are the Goddess of the Earth
 - They are the Goddess of Love and Relationships
 - They are a messenger to the Gods
3. Reflect with students on how they think these characters might move differently.
4. Invite students to move around the space again, but this time explain that you will appoint one person to act as one of the Goddesses and everyone else should react to them with the line from the text below.
 - When you appoint a Juno they should say 'I am the Goddess of Love and Relationships' and everyone else should reply 'Highest Queen of State, Great Juno'.
 - When you appoint a Ceres they should say 'I am the Goddess of the earth' and everyone else should reply 'most bounteous lady'.
 - When you appoint an Iris they should say 'I am the Goddess of the Rainbow, messenger to the gods' and everyone else should reply 'Hail, many coloured messenger'.
5. Discuss with students what they think of the different reactions; which character commands the most authority and respect? Who do they think has the most status?
6. Repeat the same activity, but this time students should appoint themselves and make the same statement. Other students should still reply to them and move towards them. If they can't remember the right line for that character they can simply say 'Hail!'
7. Explain to them that if they put themselves forward they will have to make some choices about how they make people listen to them; can they stand in particular way that will help them to be listened to, perhaps on a chair or standing tall? Do people hear them when they speak quietly or does it take volume to make the room listen when they state who they are?
8. Reflect with students on how it felt. Which was the most effective method of making people listen? Which was the most powerful stance?
9. Ask students to form a circle and explain to them that they are going to stage the entrance of the goddesses using one line in particular. This line is one of the lines Ceres

delivers to Iris when she enters, 'Hail, many-coloured messenger, that ne'er / Dost disobey the wife of Jupiter'

10. Following on from exploring this entrance, you may want to invite students to think about the whole scene and how the three characters might interact. In Royal Shakespeare Company's 2016 production the three performers who portray these characters are also opera singers.
11. Discuss with students what other ways they can think of that could be used in their versions to make these characters seem god-like and magical.

Post-Activity Discussion: Reflect with students on what it tells us about Prospero that he can call these figures to the island to bless Miranda and Ferdinand. How strong is his power do they think?

Writing Prompts

Slaves and Servants

In *The Tempest*, Ariel and Caliban both serve Prospero and Miranda. In the Folio version of the play, Caliban is described as a "savage and deformed slave." Given that Ariel and Caliban are "natives" of the island, what class issues does their relationship to Prospero bring up? What responsibilities does a director have in staging *The Tempest* for a contemporary audience? Are Ariel and Caliban positive or negative characters? How would you portray them today?

Ariel and Caliban in Visual Art (NOTE: this can also be used for Visual Art Prompt above instead of brainstorming how to visually represent the opening storm)

Ariel and Caliban, two of Shakespeare's non-human characters, have left much room for interpretations in how they can be portrayed. The nineteenth century produced a number of artists who were inspired by Shakespeare and put scenes of his play on canvas. Visit http://www.english.emory.edu/classes/Shakespeare_Illustrated/TempestPaintings.html and find a painting depicting Ariel or Caliban from *The Tempest*. Compare how you expected these characters to look with the artist's rendering. How do artists take ideas from literature and incorporate them into their own work.

Ask students to create their own work of art based on character descriptions. Keep these images in mind when you see the play and compare all three interpretations.

Additional resources/ Sources for this study guide

Shakespeare on the Saskatchewan: www.shakespearesask.com

Royal Shakespeare Company, *The Tempest*: <https://www.rsc.org.uk/the-tempest/>

Royal Shakespeare Company, *The Tempest* Learning Zone:
<https://www.rsc.org.uk/shakespeare-learning-zone/the-tempest>

Royal Shakespeare Company, *The Tempest* Teacher Pack:

<https://cdn2.rsc.org.uk/sitefinity/education-pdfs/teacher-packs/edu-thetempest-teacherpack-2016.pdf?sfvrsn=2>

Stratford Festival, *The Tempest* study guide:

<https://www.stratfordfestival.ca/learn/studyguides/2018/the-tempest-study-guide>

Utah Shakespeare Festival, *The Tempest* study guide:

<https://www.bard.org/study-guides/the-tempest-study-guide>