

Advanced Placement in
English Literature and Composition

Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

The Tempest

by William Shakespeare

written by Elizabeth Osborne

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The Tempest

Objectives

By the end of this unit, students will be able to:

- define the basic elements of Renaissance tragedy and Renaissance comedy.
- define the Elizabethan Romance as a combination of Renaissance tragedy and comedy.
- identify and discuss the distinctly Shakespearean motifs of this play.
- discuss the island as a metaphor for colonialism in the New World.
- discuss character relationships in this play that exemplify conflicts among social classes.
- discuss the significance of this play in relation to popular culture of the Elizabethan era.
- identify the instances in this play in which the conventions of social class structure are challenged.
- analyze the characters of Alonzo, Prospero, Miranda, Caliban, Ferdinand, and their relationships to one another.
- analyze Shakespeare's use of comic relief
- analyze the techniques Shakespeare uses to convey character and character relationships to his audience.
- respond to multiple choice questions similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition Exam.
- respond to writing prompts similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition exam.
- offer a close reading of *The Tempest* and support all assertions and interpretations with direct evidence from the text, from authoritative critical knowledge of the genre, or from authoritative criticism of the play.

The Tempest

Introductory Lecture

The Roots of *The Tempest*

Written late in Shakespeare's career, around 1610, *The Tempest* is an example of Shakespeare's refined craft, if only because it catalogs the motifs and themes common to most Shakespeare plays.

The Tempest is a hybrid of both comedy, tragedy, and romance—it is a tale of revenge, but it is also the story of naïve love and absolute forgiveness and reconciliation. Regal characters of terrible potential are juxtaposed against bumbling clowns and naïve young adults, and it all occurs in an enchanted setting that seems to exist somewhere outside of reality.

The Tempest was performed for the marriage of Elizabeth, daughter of King James, in 1612. In the years that followed, it was transformed to reflect the changing artistic preferences of the English audience. Playwrights of the Restoration period, in subsequent decades, revised the play to include more roles for women and more music. In the Victorian Era, at the end of the 19th century, the play was returned to its original form, but elaborate special effects were added.

Modern poets, novelists, and visual artists continue to find the play fascinating. Film adaptations of *The Tempest* have been set during the Civil War and in a science-fiction distant galaxy. There is an animated *Tempest*, and many musical pieces have been inspired by the play and by Ariel's songs.

The setting of *The Tempest* reflects the zeitgeist of Elizabethan culture, which was rife with imagination about undiscovered lands and strange peoples beyond the oceans. Specifically, the wreck of the *Sea Venture* is thought to have inspired *The Tempest*. The *Sea Venture* was a Virginia Company supply ship lost in a storm while en route to the Jamestown colony. The ship, carrying the newly appointed governor of Jamestown, ran aground in Bermuda. The crew spent months surviving and repairing the ship, and the account of the lost governor returning to his appointed post in Jamestown quickly captured the imagination of England.

The Tempest likewise offers fascinating insights into Shakespeare's psyche—about the world outside of England and the complexities of human nature. Eighteenth-century Shakespearean scholar and critic Edward Capell was the first to suggest that Shakespeare may have been familiar with the works of French statesman, philosopher, and essayist Michel de Montaigne. An English translation of Montaigne's most famous work *Essais* (*Essays*) was available in London as early as 1603, while Shakespeare was most likely writing *King Lear*.

Suggested Writing and Discussion Topics

1. How does language affect the characters' understanding of one another as members of a society?
2. What conclusions do Ferdinand and Miranda come to about what it means to be free? Does Caliban feel the same way?
3. What does the play suggest about free will, as opposed to fate or providence?
4. In Act IV, Scene I, Prospero tells Ferdinand that he is troubled, but urges him not to worry: "Be not disturbed with my infirmity/If you be pleased, retire into my cell/And there repose. A turn or two I'll walk/To still my beating mind." Explain the link between the storm within Prospero's mind and the title of the play.
5. Caliban is a major part of two of the three groups in the play. Does he play the same role in both groups? Compare the scenes involving Caliban, Miranda, and Prospero with those involving Caliban, Stephano, and Trinculo.
6. Explain how Ariel's songs relate to the mood or character of the person hearing it.
7. Consider Caliban as symbolic of a native inhabitant of the island and Prospero as symbolic of colonial presence. If the play is commentary on the act of Western colonization, what are the implications?
8. Prospero forgives Alonso, Antonio, and Sebastian for their offenses, but Antonio and Sebastian do not seem to offer any expiation. Considering that Antonio and Sebastian were prepared to murder the sleeping Alonso and Gonzalo, is Prospero's mercy good enough to bring catharsis to *The Tempest*? What are the implications of Antonio and Sebastian going unpunished? How does it contribute to the themes of *The Tempest*?

The Tempest

Act I, Scene I

1. On what kind of note does the play open? What does Shakespeare accomplish with this?

2. How does this scene already begin to challenge the status quo of social rank and authority?

3. Describe the tone established in the opening scene of *The Tempest*.

4. What are the implications of the boatswain's remark, "What cares these roarers for the name of king?"

5. What is the tone of the boatswain's comments to his passengers? Give some examples.

Act II, Scene I

1. What are the sources of comedy in this scene?

2. Describe Gonzalo's vision for the development of the island, were he made king. What is ironic about his vision? What archetype does his vision call to mind?

3. What is the cause of Alonso's grief?

4. Explain the allusions to Carthage, Dido, and Aeneas.

5. What evidence of a Euro-centric, colonial attitude is there in this scene?

Act III, Scene I

1. What literary archetype does Ferdinand's labor call to mind?

2. How is Ferdinand's enslavement different from Caliban's?

3. How has Ferdinand's presence begun to change the personal dynamic between Miranda and Prospero?

4. How is Miranda's reaction to meeting Ferdinand ironically similar to Caliban's encounter with Stephano? How is it different?

5. Is Miranda's offer to be Ferdinand's maid misogynistic? Is Shakespeare portraying women as weak and subservient?

6. Ferdinand's expressing his love for Miranda by swearing to heaven and earth is an example of what figurative device?

Act IV, Scene I

- 1. Prospero tells Ferdinand that he has given him a third of his own life, which refers to Miranda. Explain what the other two thirds of Prospero's life would be.

- 2. Describe the political consequences of Miranda's marrying Ferdinand.

- 3. Identify the goddesses who appear in the masque?

- 4. What issue exists between Ceres and Venus so that Ceres has foresworn Venus' company?

- 5. What does Prospero mean by his famous line: "We are such stuff / As dreams are made on, and our little life / Is rounded with a sleep."

- 6. What is significant about the circumstances under which Prospero ends the masque?
