

2014 Study Guide for *The Tempest* by William Shakespeare

Before seeing/reading the play

1. What is revenge? What needs are satisfied by revenge? Whom does revenge hurt? Why? When is revenge, if ever, justified?
2. What elements characterize the Shakespearean form called romance? How do romances incorporate aspects of both comedy and tragedy while being neither? Why do romances demand that the playgoer suspend the need for logic? What emotional effects does a romance produce? These and other web sites provide information:
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Shakespeare's_late_romances
<http://cla.calpoly.edu/~dschwart/engl339/romance.html>
3. *The Tempest* is one of only two plays by Shakespeare that abides by the classical “unities” of time, place and action (*The Comedy of Errors* is the other). Research the unities. Who devised the unities? How are past actions represented when the unities are observed? How do the unities enhance dramatic storytelling? How might they hamper it? This and other websites provide information:
<http://ise.uvic.ca/Library/SLT/drama/unities.html>
http://www.ehow.com/info_8187974_three-unities-greek-theater.html
4. Research alchemy in Shakespeare’s time. How did the Elizabethans regard magic? How did they regard witches? These and other websites provide information:
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alchemy>
<http://www.123helpme.com/view.asp?id=149851>
<http://www.cyberwitchcraft.com/witchcraft-in-elizabethan-england.html>
5. What are the “four elements?” According to the Elizabethans, to what aspect of a human’s makeup does each element correspond? These and other websites provide information:

<http://classweb.gmu.edu/rnianian/humours.html>

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Classical_element

6. Research Elizabethan literature about discoveries in the New World. Recommended are *The Bermuda Pamphlets*, *Discovery of the Bermudas*, *True Reportory of the Wrack* and Montaigne's essay *Of Cannibals*. Pay special attention to the mysteries, wonders, fantastical tales of the unexplored lands, beliefs about the indigenous people, and descriptions of how they were treated. These and other websites provide information:
http://myweb.dal.ca/dhevans/4400/Bermuda_pamphlets.html
<http://www.williamstrachey.com/reportory-of-the-wracke>
<http://oregonstate.edu/instruct/phl302/texts/montaigne/montaigne-essays--2.html>
7. Research the symbolism of storms during the Elizabethan era. What was the connection between changes in weather and the mental and emotional state of the main characters in Shakespeare's works? What did setting a play during a storm say about the environment that these characters inhabit? This and other websites provide information.
<http://www.english-lecturer.com/lecturer-blog/shakespeare-storm-imagery/>
8. Research the Japanese art form of Butoh. Why was it created? What was this style of performance a reaction to? How did the Japanese company, Sankai Juku, advance the influence of Butoh outside of Japan? These and other websites provide information.
<http://globalshakespeares.mit.edu/glossary/butoh/>
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sankai_Juku

Resources

Sankai Juku performs:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NdwL27NzIVg>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZxT-v9cxf7g>

Learn more about Shakespeare's life and times at the following websites:

<http://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/Library/SLT/index.html>

<http://www.folger.edu/template.cfm?cid=865&CFID=6230886&CFTOKEN=25420173>

<http://www.shakespeare.org.uk/explore-shakespeare.html>

<http://shakespeare.palomar.edu/life.htm>

<http://www.bardweb.net/man.html>

After seeing/reading the play

1. Refer to your research on Elizabethan literature about discoveries in the New World. How might this literature have served as Shakespeare's inspiration for *The Tempest*?
2. Refer to Montaigne's essay *On Cannibals*. How does he depict nature and native people? In what ways does Shakespeare's depiction of nature and native creatures on the island correspond to Montaigne's? In what ways do they differ? How do the colonized subjects in the play (Ariel, Caliban, Sycorax) behave in a barbarous manner? How do these subjects behave in a civilized manner? In what ways do the shipwrecked Europeans behave in a civilized manner? In what ways do they behave barbarously? What conclusions might Shakespeare be drawing about modern civilization in the play?
3. What is a tempest? What could a tempest mean metaphorically? As the play begins with the storm of the title, what coincidences make this the perfect time for the storm? How is the storm raised? What is its purpose? Refer to your research on the symbolism of storms. What does the storm mean to each character? What lives are tossed about, shaken, or broken by the storm? What beliefs must be reassessed because of the storm? What does each character lose in the storm? What does each gain?
4. Review your research on the "four elements." Which characters in the play embody which elements? How does Prospero treat these beings? What does his treatment of them tell you about his feelings about the elements and the human traits to which they correspond?
5. Refer to your research on the classical "unities" of time, place and action. In a sentence, describe each unity with reference to *The Tempest*, for example, how much time does it cover, what are the locations, what are the actions? Note any aspects of

the play that fall outside the umbrella of unity. At what point in the larger story does the play begin? How are the actions that precede the play presented? What is the result of this kind of dramatic compression?

6. Refer to your research on Shakespearean romances. In what ways is the play a comedy? In what ways is it a tragedy? How is it a play about revenge? What supernatural elements contribute to the ultimate outcome of the play? In what ways does the play fulfill the elements of a romance? How do the events of the play challenge your sense of rational thought?
7. What is the significance of the characters' names? Pay special attention to opposites ("Pro-" and "Ant-"), the anagrams (Caliban - Cannibal, Miranda - Admired, Prospero - Oppressor), the implied meaning (Ariel), the reference to an historical figure (Ferdinand Magellan). You can find help at <http://www.behindthename.com/>.
8. Refer to your research on alchemy. What are Prospero's magical powers? What are the sources of his powers? To what ends does he employ them? What are the differences between Prospero the magician and Sycorax the witch (Caliban's mother)? What are the similarities? If the goal of alchemy is to transform one substance to another, what are the transformations in the play?
9. In Act I, scene ii of *The Tempest* how does Prospero describe himself as ruler of Milan? How does he describe Antonio as ruler? In what ways is Prospero responsible for his own overthrow?
10. Find descriptions of Ariel in the text. What is his history? Describe his relationship with Prospero. What qualities and powers does he possess? What is his bargain with Prospero? What happens to him after the play ends? How does Ariel change Prospero?
11. Find descriptions of Caliban in the text. What is his history? What qualities does he possess? Caliban is called "monster" dozens of times. Who calls him that? Why is he given the name? To what extent does he deserve it? To whom else might the name be applied and why?

12. What are the servant/master relationships in the play? Do any of these roles ever switch? In what ways are these relationships disrupted by the servants? In what ways are they disrupted by the masters? When is being a servant positive? When is being a master positive?
13. Referring to the text, describe the relationship between Prospero and Miranda. What does she depend on him for? What does he expect of her? What does she expect of him? What do you think is Prospero's ultimate wish for Miranda's life?
14. How is Miranda a product of nature, as opposed to civilization? How has being raised on an island with no other human women formed her thoughts, attitudes, language, and behaviors? How do you think the circumstances of her upbringing causes other characters to view her? How has being removed from most societal influences of "how a woman should behave" made her more desirable to Ferdinand? How does she defy comparison to other women? If you have read or scene other plays by Shakespeare, in what ways is Miranda unique among other women in his plays?
15. What is the significance of Prospero's books? What is his relationship to them in his past? How does he use them in his present? How will his relationship to them change in his future? What does he mean by "I'll drown my book?"
16. The play contains songs as well as numerous references to music. How does music contribute to the "magic" of the play? What is the purpose of each song? How does each create harmony or dissonance with the events of the scene where it occurs? How do the characters regard the uses of music? What occasions call for music? What is the role of music in restoring harmony to the world of the play?
17. Find each instance in the play when Prospero uses his magic. What is his purpose each time? To what extent do things go according to his plan? To what extent is he obliged to improvise?
18. Read Caliban's speech about the sounds of the island (Act III, scene ii, 135-143). What are the qualities of the island that he describes? How do they affect him? Why do you think Shakespeare chose to give those words to Caliban? What is the effect of having such an eloquent statement spoken by a character described in such unflattering terms?

19. In *The Tempest*, a number of individuals want to be “king.” Who are these individuals? What does kingship mean to each? Why does each want to rule? What is each willing to do to achieve kingship? Do those characters achieve kingship in the play?
20. In Act II, scene i, Gonzalo describes his ideal society. Refer to Montaigne’s essay *Of Cannibals*. How does Gonzalo’s hypothetical society reflect Montaigne’s opinions of barbarianism? What role would nature play in this society? How does the island have potential to be the type of utopian society that Gonzalo describes?
21. Describe the relationship of Miranda and Ferdinand. What are their first impressions of each other? How do they come to regard each other? What do they want from each other? What does their union mean to Prospero? What does their union mean to the rest of the characters?
22. There are two sets of brothers in *The Tempest*; Prospero and Antonio, and King Alonso and Sebastian. How does Antonio behave in a non-brotherly manner toward Prospero? How does Sebastian behave in a non-brotherly manner toward Alonso? What is the ideal outcome of Antonio’s plot? What is the ideal outcome of Sebastian’s plot? How successful is Antonio’s plot? How successful is Sebastian’s plot?
23. What are the purposes of the subplot involving Caliban, Trinculo and Stefano? How does it mirror the main plot?
24. Referring to the text, describe what freedom means to Ariel, Caliban, Alonso and Prospero. What acts must each perform in order to become free? What must each give up? Why does each want freedom?
25. In the course of the play, Prospero metes out punishment to a number of (in his opinion) wrongdoers. Who are they? How has each transgressed? What punishment does each receive? Should any of these punishments be harsher? Should any be lighter? How does Prospero justify each case?
26. One of the principal movements of the play is toward forgiveness. Who needs to forgive? Who needs to be forgiven? What occurrences bring Prospero to the place of being able to forgive? How are characters and actions reconciled in the end?

27. In the play, Prospero has experienced some great changes in his life. What are they? How is he changed by each? How have undergoing these changes allowed him to say of Caliban in Act V, scene i, 275-276, “...this thing of darkness I/Acknowledge mine.”?
28. One of the principal themes of the play is the tension between illusion—created by fear, by magic, or by intoxication (both literal drunkenness and figurative)—and reality. List the illusions and intoxications in the play. Who experiences them? What happens in each case when reality presents itself?
29. To whom does Prospero speak at the end of play? What does he ask for?
30. *The Tempest* is often called Shakespeare’s “farewell to the theatre.” Make the case that this is so. Find parallels between Shakespeare’s art and Prospero’s.
31. Refer to your research on Butoh. How does the use of this performance style create the magic of the play?
32. If you are also seeing *The Comedy of Errors*, know that of all Shakespeare’s plays he observes the three classical unities in only these two. How are the unities expressed in *The Tempest* versus *The Comedy of Errors*? Why might Shakespeare have chosen to adhere to the unities in both his first play and one of his last plays?

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