



Oregon  
Shakespeare  
Festival

# 2022 Study Guide



## Shipwreck of 1609

Shakespeare is believed to have been inspired to write *The Tempest* by the report of a shipwreck off the coast of Bermuda.

In 1609 a London Company ship carrying men and fresh supplies to Jamestown in the New World was struck by a strong storm while sailing near Bermuda.

In what was seen as a miracle at the time, everyone survived the wreck.

In 1610 the repaired ship sailed into Jamestown. The crew was well fed, having found plenty of food and all the raw materials to repair their boat. They reported that the island where they were shipwrecked was not only richly fertile but beautiful.

Accounts of this wreck, notably one by the ship's secretary, William Strachey, made their way back to London—and presumably to William Shakespeare.

**What characters may have been inspired by the historical shipwreck?**

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## *The Tempest* by William Shakespeare



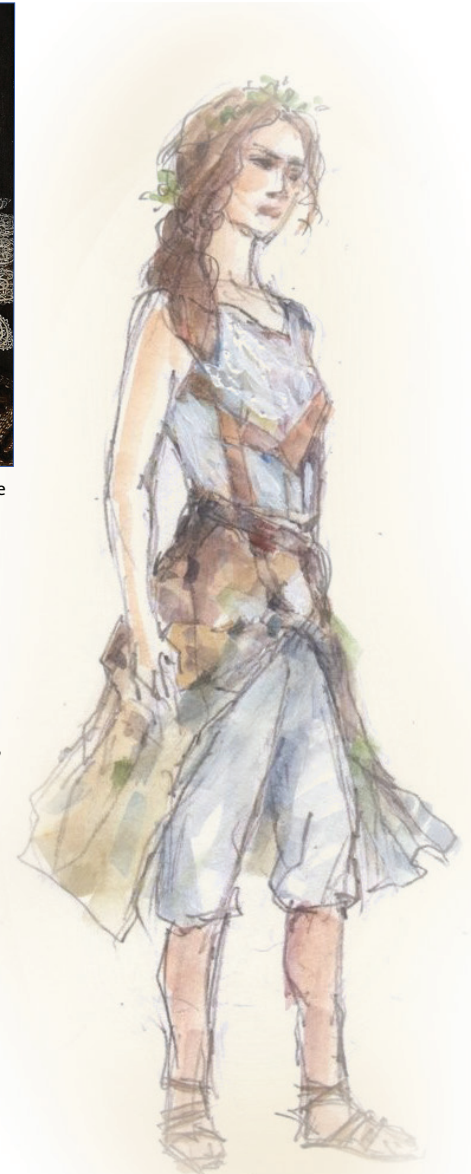
William Shakespeare

*The Tempest* was written around 1610 – 1611.

Shakespeare had returned to Stratford-upon-Avon after living for years in London. His wife, two grown daughters, and grandchildren were in Stratford.

It is one of the few plays in which the plot line is totally original to Shakespeare.

Many believe *The Tempest* is the last play Shakespeare wrote and consider it his farewell to theatre because of Prospero's final speech after the play is over, where he asks the audience "let your indulgence set me free."



2022 costume design for Miranda  
by Helen Q. Huang

## Before seeing/reading the play

1. What is revenge? What needs are satisfied by revenge? Whom does revenge hurt? Why? When, if ever, is revenge 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 websites provide information: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William\\_Shakespeare's\\_late\\_romances](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Shakespeare's_late_romances)  
<http://cola.calpoly.edu/~dschwart/engl339/romance.html>
3. *The Tempest* is one of only two plays by Shakespeare that abide 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? These and other websites provide information: [http://www.ehow.com/info\\_8187974\\_three-unities-greek-theater.html](http://www.ehow.com/info_8187974_three-unities-greek-theater.html)  
<https://www.eng-literature.com/2018/07/three-unities-of-drama-literary-term.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>  
<https://www.bl.uk/shakespeare/articles/prospero-a-renaissance-magus#>
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://www.gnosticmuse.com/the-four-classical-elements/>  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Classical\\_element](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Classical_element)
6. Research Elizabethan literature about discoveries in the New World. Recommended are *The Bermuda Pamphlets*, *A Discovery of the Bermudas*, *A 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: <https://shakespeareoxfordfellowship.org/bermuda-shipwreck-of-1609/>  
<https://www.bl.uk/collection-items/strachey-a-true-reportory-of-the-wreck-in-bermuda>

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/>

We are such stuff as  
dreams are made  
on...

Prospero, Act IV, sc. 1

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&C-FID=6230886&CFTOKEN=25420173>
- <http://www.shakespeare.org.uk/explore-shakespeare.html>
- [http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/tudors/shakespeare\\_early\\_01.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/tudors/shakespeare_early_01.shtml)
- <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 your research on the symbolism of storms. 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? 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?
3. 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?
4. 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?
5. 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?
6. What is the significance of the characters’ names? You can find help at <http://www.behindthename.com/>.
7. 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)?

8. 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?
9. 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?
10. 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? Who else could be called a monster, and why?
11. 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?



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12. 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?
13. 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 seen other plays by Shakespeare, in what ways is Miranda unique among other women in his plays?
14. What is the significance of Prospero's books? What was 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?"



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15. 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?
16. 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?

O brave new world,  
that has such people  
in't.

Miranda, Act V, sc. i

17. 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?
18. 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? What, ultimately, does kingship mean in the play?
19. In Act II, scene i, Gonzalo describes his ideal society. What role would nature play in this society? How does the island have potential to be the type of utopian society that Gonzalo describes?
20. 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?

21. 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?
22. What are the purposes of the subplot involving Caliban, Trinculo, and Stefano? How does it mirror the main plot?
23. 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?
24. 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?
25. 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?
26. In the play, Prospero has experienced some great changes in his life. What are they? How is he changed by each? How has undergoing these changes allowed him to say of Caliban in Act V, scene i, 275-276, "...this thing of darkness I/Acknowledge mine."?
27. 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?
28. To whom does Prospero speak at the end of play? What does he ask for?
29. *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.
30. If you are seeing *How I Learned What I Learned*: Both Prospero and the Actor reflect back on defining events from their youth. Compare and contrast their journeys and what each of them learns.
31. If you are seeing *Once on This Island*: Both plays begin with a storm. Compare and contrast the effect of the storm on the characters and events of the play.



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