*The Tempest*

Study Guide

English 10H

**

***William Shakespeare***

**I**n 1611, the year that *The Tempest* was first

performed, William Shakespeare was forty-seven

years old and had written more than thirty-five

plays. Considered the greatest dramatist of his

time, he was an accomplished actor, part-owner of

the best theater in London, the greatest lyric poet

of his time, and the monarch’s favorite playwright.

He was also a wise investor and a wealthy man.

With all these accomplishments, perhaps it is not

surprising that Shakespeare’s thoughts had begun

to turn toward retirement and a quieter life in the

country with his family.

Even though more facts are known about

Shakespeare than any other writer of his time, we

know little about the man compared to what we

know about later literary figures. Shakespeare was

born in Stratford-upon-Avon, a bustling country

market town about seventy-five miles northwest of

London. His birthday is celebrated on April 23,

although no records exist to prove this is his date of

birth. His father was a glove maker, grain merchant,

and local political leader. In 1582, at the age of eighteen,

Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway. They

had three children, one of whom died at age eleven.

By 1592 Shakespeare had moved to London

and was working as an actor. He had also begun

to write plays. Around this time, Shakespeare’s

name appears in a pamphlet in which a university-

educated playwright calls him “an upstart

crow.” The educated playwright pokes fun at

the thought that a lowly actor without a good

education would dare to write plays. Two years

later Shakespeare joined an acting company, the

Lord Chamberlain’s Men, for whom he eventually

wrote most of his plays. His early works were,

for the most part, based on English history. Other

early works include comedies and a few tragedies.

Shakespeare went on to write the plays that

earned him great recognition. From the mid-

1590s to about 1607, he wrote masterpieces such

as *Romeo and Juliet, Julius Caesar, Hamlet, Othello,*

and *Macbeth.* All were produced by Shakespeare’s

acting company in the famous Globe Theater.

Shakespeare was a shareholder in the Globe,

which was located just outside London.

In Shakespeare’s day, his plays were

immensely popular, probably because they held

appeal for all levels of English society, from peasants

and poor city folk, to other writers and university

graduates, to Queen Elizabeth I herself.

Shakespeare’s heroes left his audiences in awe, his

heroines melted their hearts, his villains froze

them in horror, and his clowns and comic figures

left them in stitches. The language of his dramas

ranges from the most delicate and elevated poetry

to clever puns and bawdy jokes.

In spite of this acclaim, Shakespeare chose to

leave the stage at the height of his success. His

final four plays—of which *The Tempest* is considered

the greatest—all share a melancholy sense of

things ending, but all four also focus on happiness

lost and then regained.

In 1610 Shakespeare left London to retire

to his large home in Stratford. He lived his final

years as a wealthy man and town leader, dying

on April 23, 1616, at the age of fifty-two. On

his tomb in Stratford’s church rests a sculpted

bust, one of only two authentic likenesses of

the man regarded as the greatest writer who

ever lived.

***Introducing the Play***

*“’Though with their high wrongs I am struck to*

*th’quick,*

*Yet with my nobler reason ’gainst my fury*

*Do I take part. The rarer action is*

*In virtue than in vengeance.”’*

***—The Tempest,* Act 5, Scene 1**

With these words, Prospero, the magician and

main character of *The Tempest,* makes a crucial

decision to forgive his enemies. Like the man who

wrote these words, Prospero has struggled in life

but is now prepared to leave behind both his triumphs and his failures. He is ready to turn his eyes toward the future.

Fresh winds were blowing across Europe when

Shakespeare was writing *The Tempest,* his final

play. European countries were exploring the

boundaries of the known world and founding new

settlements in America. Europeans were coming

into contact with people from other parts of the

world and wrestling with the questions such contact raised. The Renaissance, a period of reawakened interest in the learning of ancient Greece and Rome and in human achievements in general, had spread from Italy to England. Scientific discoveries about the solar system and the world threatened to undermine traditional ways of looking at people and their station in life.

In England itself, momentous changes were

occurring. The nation had broken with the

Roman Catholic Church less than a century

before, shattering the unity the Church had

forged. England was on its way to becoming a

great power, although the people were troubled by the death of their great queen, Elizabeth, who was succeeded by James I in 1603. The English language had grown during the 1500s into a rich and flexible tool, one used effectively by playwrights and appreciated by audiences.

One change that strongly influenced

Shakespeare as he was writing *The Tempest* was the public’s taste for romances. Lighter in tone and containing more music, dance, and spectacle than the tragedy, the romance became Shakespeare’s favorite form for his final plays. Romances often took as their theme the need to be patient and trust in providence during times of misfortune. Romances featured such fairy tale–like elements as magic, shipwrecks, young lovers reunited after various trials,

exotic settings, and supernatural creatures. In general, characters in romances are not as well developed as those in tragedies. Shakespeare’s romances lacked the profound psychological portraits of tragic characters like Hamlet, Macbeth, and King Lear. All of these changing currents influenced Shakespeare’s final works, of which *The Tempest* is considered the greatest.

Many critics and readers detect in the play a melancholy feeling of retirement, withdrawal from life, and wistful resignation. In fact, historical records indicate that just before finishing *The Tempest,* probably in 1611*,* Shakespeare retired to Stratford to live a quiet life with his family. The play’s main character, the magician Prospero, is frequently identified with the author himself. In fact, one famous speech by Prospero at the end of *The Tempest* is often referred to as Shakespeare’s farewell to the stage.

However, other admirers of the play caution

against viewing the play as semiautobiographical.

They argue that Shakespeare was only in his midforties when he returned to Stratford and that it was far too early for him to be making a farewell

to the stage he dominated. These readers suggest

that Shakespeare was merely proving that he

could write in any style, including the romance—

the latest fad at the court of King James I. As the

greatest and most versatile writer of his age, he

seemed to succeed at anything he tried.

Whether one sees autobiographical elements

in *The Tempest*, its theme of suffering, repentance,

and forgiveness is powerful. In a society where bloody revenge was common and even admired, the meaning of *The Tempest* was radical. Even the fact that the supernatural elements facilitate forgiveness does not hide an important message of the play—the real magic of forgiveness springs from within the human heart.

The fairy-tale world of *The Tempest* has important

lessons for those in the real world, both of Shakespeare’s time and today. It is better to choose forgiveness and belief in a brighter future—what Prospero calls “the rarer action”—than to choose vengeance. It is better to spread the magic of human love than to practice the magic of spells, enchantments, and “airy charms.” And it is better to choose life in the real world, even with its terrifying freedom, heartbreaks, and evil, over life in a fairy tale.

THE TIME AND PLACE

The setting of *The Tempest* is an isolated island in

the Mediterranean Sea, somewhere between Italy

and the north coast of Africa. The play takes

place roughly during Shakespeare’s time, the

early 1600s. Unlike Shakespeare’s earlier

plays, *The Tempest* is not set in the real

world but in an enchanted fairy-tale world

of the imagination that blends everyday people and elements with monsters and spirits.

Theaters of Shakespeare’s time were different

from our own. Knowing how *The Tempest*

would have been staged during the early 1600s

will help you understand the actions of the

characters and visualize how they looked on

stage. The first difference that you would probably

notice is that there were no actresses.

Males played all the parts, including the female

roles. Ariel, the sprite in *The Tempest*, probably

would have been acted by a young boy.

Most theaters of Shakespeare’s time were

six- or eight-sided buildings without roofs.

Three galleries housed the audience. The

galleries faced an open courtyard. The simple

stage extended out into the yard. At the back

of the stage were a balcony, two doors, and

a trapdoor leading into a space underneath

the stage.

Because the sets were simple, the texts of

the plays described the time of day, the setting,

and other important information. (Notice,

for example, in *The Tempest* how often someone

asks what time it is.) Costumes had to be

elaborate to help audiences differentiate characters.

Most of Shakespeare’s plays were performed

in the Globe, the theater his company

built on the River Thames across from London.

Another theater used by Shakespeare’s

acting troupe, the King’s Men, was the

Blackfriars. Many scholars believe *The*

*Tempest* and Shakespeare’s other late

romances were written for the Blackfriars

and performed there. Unlike the Globe, this

theater had a roof. The enclosure allowed

stagehands to create artificial lighting with

candles. Admission prices were up to five

times higher than those for the Globe. As a

result, a more cultured audience came to the

Blackfriars, one familiar with the popular new

romances. *The Tempest* was also performed in

1611, indoors at the court of King James I,

and two years later, to celebrate the wedding

of the king’s daughter.

As you read *The Tempest,* try to imagine

what it would have been like to see the play in

1611—no actresses, no realistic sets, no

electric lights, and no sound system to amplify

voices or provide background music. Though

stagecraft was in its infancy, Shakespeare’s

audiences would probably have been

impressed by special effects like the disappearing

banquet in Act 3 and the flying chariot of Act 4.

*Name\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_*

*English 10H – Poetic Meter*

*Directions: Indicate the poetic meter of each example. (i.e. iambic pentameter, etc.) Please indicate the stressed syllables ( / ) and the unstressed syllables ( ~ ) in each foot.*

1. If music be the food of love, play on.

2. Dark behind it rose the forest.

3. And today the Great Yertle, that Marvelous he

Is King of the Mud. That is all he can see.

4. The woods are lovely, dark, and deep,

But I have promises to keep.

5. Nor any other wold like Cotswold ever sped,

So rich and fair a vale in fortuning to wed.

6. I am master of this college

What I don’t know isn’t knowledge.

7. Like the leaves in the forest when Summer is green,

That host with their banners at sunset were seen.

8. Who knows his will?

Who knows what mood

His hours fulfill?

His griefs conclude?

9. How oft, when thou, my music, music play’st

Upon that blessed wood whose motion sound.

10. Half a league, half a league

Half a league onward.

***The Tempest* Characters**

|  |
| --- |
| **Prospero:** The main character of this play, Prospero used to be the legitimate Duke of Milan. Unfortunately his treacherous brother Antonio stole his title and banished Prospero to a Mediterranean island with his daughter Miranda. A great lover of the arts and in particular books, Prospero has harnessed the powers of magic whilst in exile.  **Miranda:** Prospero's daughter. Attractive and young at the tender age of fifteen years, Miranda has lived with her father in exile for twelve years. Aside from her father, she has seen few men in her life, and quickly enchants the shipwrecked Ferdinand.  **Ariel:** An airy spirit, Ariel serves his master Prospero well in his many tasks of magic on Prospero's island. Once enslaved by a witch (Sycorax), Ariel wants his freedom now from Prospero.  **Caliban:** A giant misformed beast, Shakespeare describes Caliban as "a savage and deformed slave." Hating his master Prospero, Caliban works for him out of fear of Prospero's magic.  **Iris, Ceres, Juno, Nymphs and Reapers:** Spirits that appear by Prospero's will.  **Characters who arrive at Prospero's Island by shipwreck:**  **Alonso:** The King of Naples. When Prospero's brother Antonio, usurped (took) Prospero's dukedom, it was Alonso who recognized Prospero's brother, sealing Prospero's fate of living in exile.  **Ferdinand:** The much-loved son of the King of Naples. Shipwrecked, but alive, Ferdinand falls instantly in love with Miranda, when he first sees her on Prospero's island.  **Sebastian:** The brother of Alonso, the King of Naples. He plots to kill his king and take his title with the scheming Antonio.  **Antonio:** The brother of Prospero, he took Prospero's title from him when Prospero trusted him to manage his affairs. Having replaced his brother, he now encourages Sebastian to do the same to his brother, Alonso.  **Gonzalo:** An honest old counsellor. When Prospero was to have starved to death when exiled by boat, it was Gonzalo who provided food, clothing and books to comfort Prospero and the then three year old Miranda.  **Stephano:** A drunken butler, he attempts to kill Prospero and take the island for his own. Trinculo and Caliban whom he fools into believing he is a God help him.  **Trinculo:** A jester, who tries to kill Prospero.  **Master of a ship, Boatswains, Mariners:** Sailors who fight Prospero's storm but are ultimately shipwrecked on his island. |

**Themes**

Please keep track of how these themes are developed throughout the course of the play.

1: Forgive and forget.

2: Repent your sins.

3: The New World (America) is a raw, untamed wilderness. Prospero's island may have symbolized America, or the islands off the coast of America, with Caliban representing the uncivilized native population.

4: Exploration of new lands often results in mistreatment of native populations. It has been suggested that Caliban represents indigenous peoples exploited by Europeans during the Age of Discovery.

5: The storms of life are followed by peace and calm.

6: Friends in need are friends indeed. Thanks to his friend Gonzalo, Prospero and his daughter survive their ordeal at sea.

7: Freedom must be earned. Everyone in The Tempest is a slave or a captive–socially, emotionally, geographically or otherwise. For example, Prospero and Miranda, victims of treachery, are captives of their environment. The shipwrecked adversaries of Prospero are captives of guilt, ambition or desire for revenge. Ariel, a free spirit of the air, is Prospero's slave. Caliban, a misshapen half-human, is a prisoner of unruly instincts. Only through ordeal, tribulation, and demonstrations of humanity do these characters redeem and liberate themselves.

Act I

Act I Pre-reading Writing Prompt: If you had the magical powers to create a little world just as you wanted it, what would you include? Write down five things that you want to make part of your world. Then explain why each of these things is important to you.

Act I Writing Response: Caliban and Ariel are both “natives” of the island and Prospero’s servants. However, Shakespeare contrasts them in many ways – in their interests, their actions, their language, their personalities, and their relation to Prospero. Reread their first long speeches and write a 2-3 paragraph essay response about the differences between the two. Explain the motivations that give rise to their contrasting natures. Use MLA citations. Please type and submit to turnitin.com by \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

Act II

Act II Pre-reading Writing Prompt: What do you think makes a person truly civilized? Is it dress, proper behavior, knowledge of culture, or other attributes? Respond to this question in a paragraph or two.

Act II Writing Response Questions: The themes of a play are the central ideas that it explores. One of the key themes of *The Tempest*, inspired by Montaigne’s essay “On Cannibals,” is the true nature of civilization. Caliban is an “uncivilized” native of Prospero’s island; his kinship to animals is suggested when Stephano, seeing Caliban and Trinculo under the coat, takes them for “some monster.” Yet this scene is ironic about the Englishmen as well. They are as foolish as Caliban although they have the “advantages” of a civilized upbringing.

1. How does the island cause the nobly born Europeans to reveal their true natures as well?

2. How would you describe the “civilization” of Antonio and Sebastian?

3. Is there anything appealing about Caliban’s barbaric nature? Explain.

Act III

Act III Pre-reading Writing Prompt: Which do you feel is more important in forming a person’s character, nature or upbringing? In your response, jot down experiences and observations that support your point of view.

Act III Writing Response Questions: Answer these in the space provided.

1. What plan does Caliban suggest for killing Prospero? Paraphrase his speech (page 66).

**ORIGINAL TEXT** **PARAPHRASED TEXT**

Why, as I told thee, 'tis a custom with him \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

I' th' afternoon to sleep: there thou may'st brain him, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Having first seiz'd his books; or with a log \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Batter his skull, or paunch him with a stake, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Or cut his wezand with thy knife. Remember \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

First to possess his books; for without them \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

He's but a sot, as I am, nor hath not \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

One spirit to command: they all do hate him \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

As rootedly as I. Burn but his books; \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

He has brave utensils,—for so he calls them,— \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Which, when he has a house, he'll deck withal: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

And that most deeply to consider is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

The beauty of his daughter; he himself \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Calls her a nonpareil: I never saw a woman \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

But only Sycorax my dam and she; \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

But she as far surpasseth Sycorax \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

As great'st does least. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

2. On pages 72-73, the harpy suggests that ‘“heart-sorrow, And clear life ensuing”’ will protect Alonso, Sebastian, and Antonio from the wrath of the gods. What does this mean? How might this lesson fit with Prospero’s plans?

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3. Caliban and Alonso have similar speeches in Act III. Caliban speaks his on page 68 (‘“Be not afeard…”’) and Alonso speaks his on page 73 (‘“Oh, it is monstrous…”’). Both discuss their feelings about the island’s illusions.

* In your own words, briefly summarize each speech.
* Write a few sentences describing the images and mood of Caliban’s speech; do the same for Alonso’s.
* What similarities do you notice? What’s different? Why?

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Act IV

Act IV Pre-reading Question: Describe a moment when something you had worked hard to create or organize failed because of someone’s interference. How did you feel? What did you do?

Act IV Response: The Renaissance masque was a spectacle in which courtiers, dressed in elaborate costumes, acted and danced a vision of harmony and order. On occasions, masques celebrated engagements, as Prospero’s does here. If one interprets the masque as Prospero’s ideal vision of marriage, many of the details make sense.

1. Why should Juno and Ceres – respectively, the queen of the gods and the goddess of fertility – be involved in the masque?

2. A Renaissance audience saw its own ideals and beliefs reflected in masques. What modern kinds of performances or spectacles symbolize our beliefs?

Act V

Act V Pre-reading Question: Discuss a time when you gave up something you loved because you felt there was something more important that made such a sacrifice necessary.

Act V Response: Please answer TWO of the following questions. Please write in paragraph form (each response should be at least one paragraph), and use textual evidence (as well as proper MLA in-text citations) to support your answers.

1. In many ways, Prospero is like a god. In other ways, he is not. List characteristics that make him seem both like and unlike a god.

2. Prospero forgives all of the men who have wronged him, even those who have not repented. Was he right or wrong to forgive all of them? Apply your answer to real life. Under what circumstances should people convicted of crimes be paroled or pardoned?

3. It has been said that except for Ariel and Miranda, all the major characters undergo significant change during the course of this play. To what extent is that true? Give specific examples.

4. Explain how the island is a \*microcosm of the world at large.

5. Due to the presence of strong females in his plays, many critics believe that Shakespeare’s good friend, Queen Elizabeth I, helped to write his works. Give two examples from the play that may prove this theory.

*\*Microcosm - a representation of something on a much smaller scale; human beings, humanity, society, or the like, viewed as an epitome (a representative or perfect example of a class or type*) *or miniature of the world or universe.*

**Mini-research / Fishbowl assignment**

Prospero calls Caliban ‘“a born devil, on whose nature / Nurture can never stick”’ (Shakespeare IV.i.83). He is referring to the debate over the relative influences of education and society (nurture) and the traits, personality, and abilities we were born with (nature). Modern-day terms for these two important influences are *environment* (nurture) and *heredity* (nature). Read the articles about modern theories of the nature-nurture dichotomy (a division into two especially mutually exclusive or contradictory groups or entities). Which do you think has a greater role in determining who we are: heredity or the environment? **Create a claim/counterclaim and provide evidence from the articles to support your answers**.