

The Tempest – Themes Revision

MAGIC

- ◆ In Shakespeare's time there was widespread belief in magic.
- ◆ There are many transformations in The Tempest.
- ◆ People used to find mystery and magic in the church.
- ◆ Priests were seen as almost supernatural.
- ◆ They could change bread and wine to Jesus.
- ◆ The reformed church removed much of magic from religion.
- ◆ People missed the magic of religion.
- ◆ They looked for magic in people like witches and magicians.
- ◆ Other Shakespeare plays, like Macbeth, use magic.
- ◆ The items and trappings of magic mattered e.g. cloaks.
- ◆ Prospero mentions the power of his wand.
- ◆ He also attributes power to his books.
- ◆ When he gives up his powers he says he will break his staff.
- ◆ He also says he will drown his books.
- ◆ The island itself is connected to magic.
- ◆ Caliban's mother, Sycorax, a witch was banished there.
- ◆ Ariel and other spirits belong to the island.
- ◆ Prospero's powers developed on the island.
- ◆ Prospero uses spells through the play.
- ◆ The plot is removed from real life/reality.
- ◆ Magic is a central theme in the play.
- ◆ It holds the plot together.
- ◆ Prospero commands so much power due to magic.
- ◆ He creates the Tempest with magic.
- ◆ Eventually he brings his enemies to be reconciled.
- ◆ Prospero is willing to give up his magical powers at the end of the play.

POWER

- ◆ Antonio and Sebastian desire power.
- ◆ Prospero seems powerless when he is cast to sea.
- ◆ Prospero's magic gives him great power.
- ◆ He can't change the nature of Caliban or Ariel with his power.
- ◆ Sycorax had power over Ariel through magic.
- ◆ Prospero gives up his magical power to resume power in Milan

GOD AND HUMANITY

- ◆ Does Prospero represent God?
- ◆ Is this a version of Cain and Able (Antonio wicked brother)
- ◆ Are there religious messages in the play? (The rainbow- Iris)
- ◆ The end is about forgiveness
- ◆ Many of the characters suffer to reach forgiveness

LOVE

- ◆ Parents and children love each other
- ◆ Ferdinand and Miranda fall in love.
- ◆ Antonio is not a loving brother
- ◆ Ariel is a loving slave but Caliban isn't.
- ◆ Gonzalo shows devotion to the king

NATURE AND NURTURE

- ◆ Prospero's attempt to nurture Caliban failed.
- ◆ Nurture was meant to control Caliban.
- ◆ Caliban truly understands nature.
- ◆ Prospero values education.
- ◆ Education did not help Prospero to keep his Dukedom.
- ◆ We debate whether the educated people behave worse than the uncivilised.

SEA CHANGE/TRANSFORMATION

- ◆ The island and magic have transformed Prospero.
- ◆ He tries to change Caliban
- ◆ Ariel tries to seek freedom – changing roles.
- ◆ Ariel can take on many forms and images.
- ◆ Alonso repents and changes.
- ◆ Antonio and Sebastian do not seem to change.
- ◆ The Island seems to change those who come to it.
- ◆ Magic can be used to transform things.
- ◆ The storm changes to a calm sea symbolising peace.
- ◆ Alonso's despair turns to joy.
- ◆ The Masque is about changing seasons.

APPEARANCE AND REALITY

- ◆ Alonso thinks Ferdinand is dead.
- ◆ Prospero doesn't trust what he sees.
- ◆ The play begins with an illusion.
- ◆ Many characters can't trust their eyes.
- ◆ Nothing is what it seems
- ◆ Alonso can't believe it when he sees Prospero.

COLONIALISM

- ◆ There are sources for this play that suggest Colonialism.
- ◆ A man called Shirley wrote of travels to Greek islands.
- ◆ A pamphlet was produced about discovery of Bermudas.
- ◆ Travellers told tales of a New World.
- ◆ Some travellers thought that the native people could be treated like slaves. Caliban may be such an example.
- ◆ Shakespeare may be exploring these themes and values.

SLEEP AND DREAMS

- ◆ Prospero sends Miranda to sleep.
- ◆ Ariel makes Alonso and Gonzalo sleep.
- ◆ The sailors sleep all the play.
- ◆ Caliban has wonderful dreams.
- ◆ The character's experiences are like dreams.
- ◆ The Masque is dream like.
- ◆ Gonzalo dreams of a perfect Commonwealth.

THE IDEA OF A PLAY

- ◆ Prospero is like a theatre director
- ◆ He controls the action on his island stage
- ◆ He manipulates people like puppets
- ◆ He stages the storm like a theatrical illusion
- ◆ He brings the action to a close.

FORGIVENESS
AND
RECONCILIATION

- ◆ It is not clear what Prospero intends to do to his enemies.
- ◆ Does he desire revenge?
- ◆ Does he desire reconciliation?
- ◆ Iris in the Masque may mean mercy.
- ◆ Iris is the Goddess of the rainbow.
- ◆ Rainbow is the sign of a new start.
- ◆ Like the Noah story?
- ◆ The Tempest ends in forgiveness.
- ◆ This comes after great suffering.

IMPRISONMENT AND FREEDOM

- ◆ Prospero and Miranda are exiled.
- ◆ Caliban is enslaved.
- ◆ Ariel is imprisoned by Sycorax.
- ◆ Ariel has to serve Prospero.
- ◆ Ferdinand is forced to carry logs.
- ◆ People are tormented by spirits.
- ◆ Sailors are confined below deck.
- ◆ Caliban takes Stephano as a master.
- ◆ Prospero sets Ariel free.
- ◆ Prospero's last words are "Set me free".