

The Tempest Study Guide

Name:

Date:

Instructor:

ACT I

1. Why is it significant that the play begins with a storm at sea?
2. Why does Miranda have such immediate empathy for the men in the ship? Since we learn that she has lived on a deserted island with her father since childhood, where would she have learned these ideas of pity and mercy?
3. Why is she so merciful towards the shipwreck victims but has only contempt and hatred for Caliban? Where and how would she have gotten her ideas?
4. What does it mean that Prospero has to take off his robe, his “magic garment,” before he can tell Miranda about her history?
5. Think about how you might tell your own child or a close friend the story of your past. How would you tend to characterize yourself and your actions in your story? What about Prospero’s story? Does he take any responsibility for what happened to him? Should he?
6. What crimes does Antonio, Prospero’s brother, commit? What motivates him? For which crimes is he most responsible? How do you judge him?
7. In Prospero’s questioning of Ariel, we learn that the storm is part of Prospero’s design. Does he want to punish the conspirators or lead them to repentance?
8. Ariel was imprisoned by Sycorax. Why? How does the physical description of Sycorax compare to your impressions of Ariel?
9. What connection does Shakespeare establish between outward appearance and inner spirit? Do you think this is true? Why or why not?
10. What is your reaction to Prospero’s treatment of Caliban? Does Caliban have a legitimate complaint against Prospero?
Why does Prospero keep Caliban as his servant even when he despises him? Why do you think Caliban attempted to “violate the honor” of Miranda? Did he or is this the way his acts were interpreted by Prospero and Miranda?
11. Prospero is happy that when Miranda first sees Ferdinand she is immediately captivated by his appearance? Why? What is his plan?
12. Ferdinand and Miranda fall in love at first sight; Prospero says, “They have changed eyes.” Why does this seem feasible, given the emotional state of the two young people?

ACT II

1. What type of person is Gonzalo? What was his role in the plot against Prospero? Does his behavior seem consistent with how he acts now?
2. Sebastian and Antonio ridicule Gonzalo. What does this tell us about their characters?
3. What is Gonzalo's idea of the type of government or life style that could be possible on this island? Why does he say this at this time?
4. Antonio incites Sebastian to kill his brother and take the crown of Naples. Why? What does this tell us about Antonio's motives? What does Sebastian's response tell us about him? What could Shakespeare be saying about human nature?
5. Is it surprising that Caliban willingly worships Stephano and desires to give him control of the island when he resents Prospero for usurping what he considers his rightful claim to the island? What does this show about Caliban?

ACT III

1. How has Ferdinand's and Miranda's love deepened from their first attraction? What is Shakespeare suggesting about the true nature of love?
2. What does Caliban hope to accomplish by his plot against Prospero? Why does Shakespeare include this subplot mirroring the conspiracy of the nobles?
3. How does the apparition of the banquet affect Alonso and his retinue? How is the banquet used as a symbol? Why aren't the men allowed to eat the food? Is this an effective moment for Ariel to accuse them of their sins?

ACT IV

1. How is Ferdinand different from Caliban in his relationship to Miranda? Why does he pledge to keep her honor safe?
2. Why is Miranda's virginity so important to Prospero?
3. What is the overall impact of the Masque-like? How is it supposed to affect the two young lovers? What is its message about the sanctity of the marriage bond?
4. Why does the masque suddenly disappear when Prospero remembers the plot against him by Caliban and his crew? What is Shakespeare suggesting by contrasting these two events?

5. How are Stephano and Trinculo distracted from their plot? What does this show about their natures? What does Caliban think about their behavior?

ACT V

1. Why does Prospero decide to show mercy to his enemies? Why is Ariel the first to speak of mercy? Do you think Prospero had planned to forgive them from the beginning?

2. Why does Prospero decide to give up magic? What does his choice show about what he thinks happened in the past? How does he plan to live in the future? What has Prospero learned? Has he changed in any fundamental way or had the change already occurred before the beginning of the action?

3. Are Caliban and Prospero reconciled?

4. Are Alonso, Antonio, and the other conspirators truly sorry for their plot against Prospero? Has their ordeal on the island changed them?