

Q4 - The Tempest

Perspectives And Their Implications: A Tempestuous Exploration

UNIT OVERVIEW

The Tempest is generally regarded as Shakespeare's last play, first performed in 1611 for King James I and again for the marriage festivities of Elizabeth, the King's daughter, to Frederick, the Elector Palatine. Scholars attribute the immediate source of the play to the 1609 shipwreck of an English ship in Bermuda and travelers' reports about the island and the ordeal of the mariners.

The period in which it was written, the seventeenth-century age of exploration, the circumstances of its performance at court, and the context of the playwright's writing career suggest immediately some of its rich themes and ambiguities. *The play can be read as Shakespeare's commentary on European exploration of new lands.* Prospero lands on an island with a native inhabitant, Caliban, a being he considers savage and uncivilized. He teaches this "native" his language and customs, but this nurturing does not affect the creature's nature, at least from Prospero's point of view. But Prospero does not drive Caliban away, rather he enslaves him, forcing him to do work he considers beneath himself and his noble daughter.

As modern readers, sensitive to the legacy of **colonialism**, we need to ask if Shakespeare sees this as the right order; what are his views of imperialism and colonialism? What are our twenty-first-century reactions to the depiction of the relationship between the master and slave, shown in this play?

The theme of Utopian-ism is linked to the explorations of new lands. Europeans were intrigued with the possibilities presented for new beginnings in these "new" lands. Was it possible to create an ideal state when given a chance to begin anew? Could humans hope to recreate a "golden age," in places not yet subject to the ills of European social order? Could there be different forms of government? Would humans change if given a second chance in an earthly Paradise?

The play emphasizes dramatic effects. Because it was performed at court, there is a lot of stage business: music, dance, masque-like shows. The role of the artist is explored through Prospero's use of his magic, and parallels can be drawn to Shakespeare's own sense of his artistry.

Finally, knowing that this is Shakespeare's last play, it is intriguing to explore autobiographical connections. Does he see himself in Prospero? Does he feel somehow isolated, in need of reconciliation? How is this play a culmination of other themes he has explored?

ANTICIPATION GUIDE QUESTIONS

Complete the following questions as preparation for our exploration of *The Tempest* by William Shakespeare.

1. Complete the following questions:

Posed Question:	Your Answer:
List two facts you know about the life of William Shakespeare.	
List the titles of as many Shakespearean plays as you remember.	
Using the play you remember most clearly, list three things you remember about it.	
Have seen a Shakespeare play performed? What was the play, and what did you enjoy about the performance?	
Have seen a Shakespeare play in a movie version? What was the play, and what did you enjoy about the production?	
Describe what you think when you hear the phrase " <i>Elizabethan or Shakespearean language</i> ." List words or phrases that come to mind when you think of Shakespearean language.	
What words that we use today do you identify with the Elizabethan period?	
The <i>Tempest</i> was first performed in 1611, the seventeenth century. List three facts you know about this historical period.	

What do you already know about the play <i>The Tempest</i> ?	
Just looking at the title, what might you suspect this play is about?	
This play is often classified as a romance, what might you suspect will happen in the play?	

2. Watch [Why should you read Shakespeare's "The Tempest"?](#) - Iseult Gillespie and answer the questions below:

What is your general understanding of the plot summary from this video?

Relate 2-3 arguments the video makes for reading *The Tempest* ?

What is your overall anticipation of this upcoming Shakespeare unit?