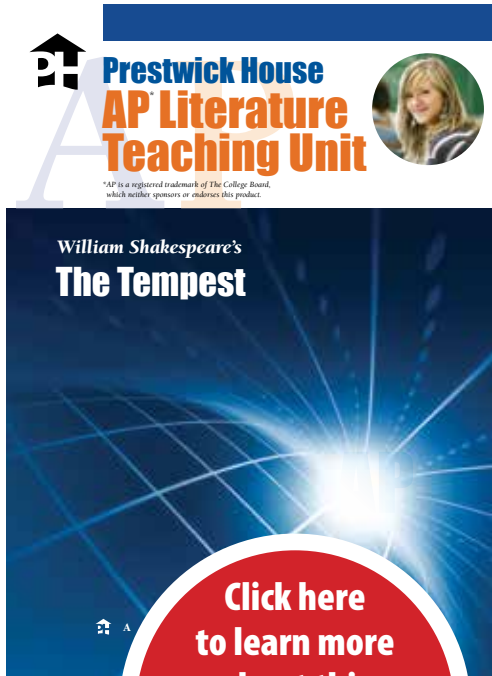




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Teaching Unit

The Tempest

by William Shakespeare

written by Elizabeth Osborne



Prestwick House

Item No. 303090

The Tempest

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, students will be able to:

1. define the basic elements of Renaissance tragedy and Renaissance comedy.
2. define the Elizabethan Romance as a combination of Renaissance tragedy and comedy.
3. identify and discuss the distinctly Shakespearean motifs of this play.
4. discuss the island as a metaphor for colonialism in the New World.
5. discuss character relationships in this play that exemplify conflicts among social classes.
6. discuss the significance of this play in relation to popular culture of the Elizabethan era.
7. identify the instances in this play in which the conventions of social class structure are challenged.
8. analyze the characters of Alonzo, Prospero, Miranda, Caliban, Ferdinand, and their relationships to one another.
9. analyze Shakespeare's use of comic relief
10. analyze the techniques Shakespeare uses to convey character and character relationships to his audience.
11. respond to multiple choice questions similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition Exam.
12. respond to writing prompts similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition exam.
13. offer a close reading of *The Tempest* and support all assertions and interpretations with direct evidence from the text, from authoritative critical knowledge of the genre, or from authoritative criticism of the play.

Introductory Lecture

THE ROOTS OF *THE TEMPEST*

Written late in Shakespeare's career, around 1610, *The Tempest* is an example of Shakespeare's refined craft, if only because it catalogs the motifs and themes common to most Shakespeare plays.

The Tempest is a hybrid of both comedy, tragedy, and romance—it is a tale of revenge, but it is also the story of naïve love and absolute forgiveness and reconciliation. Regal characters of terrible potential are juxtaposed against bumbling clowns and naïve young adults, and it all occurs in an enchanted setting that seems to exist somewhere outside of reality.

The Tempest was performed for the marriage of Elizabeth, daughter of King James, in 1612. In the years that followed, it was transformed to reflect the changing artistic preferences of the English audience. Playwrights of the Restoration period, in subsequent decades, revised the play to include more roles for women and more music. In the Victorian Era, at the end of the 19th century, the play was returned to its original form, but elaborate special effects were added.

Modern poets, novelists, and visual artists continue to find the play fascinating. Film adaptations of *The Tempest* have been set during the Civil War and in a science-fiction distant galaxy. There is an animated *Tempest*, and many musical pieces have been inspired by the play and by Ariel's songs.

The setting of *The Tempest* reflects the zeitgeist of Elizabethan culture, which was rife with imagination about undiscovered lands and strange peoples beyond the oceans. Specifically, the wreck of the *Sea Venture* is thought to have inspired *The Tempest*. The *Sea Venture* was a Virginia Company supply ship lost in a storm while en route to the Jamestown colony. The ship, carrying the newly appointed governor of Jamestown, ran aground in Bermuda. The crew spent months surviving and repairing the ship, and the account of the lost governor returning to his appointed post in Jamestown quickly captured the imagination of England.

The Tempest likewise offers fascinating insights into Shakespeare's psyche—about the world outside of England and the complexities of human nature. Eighteenth-century Shakespearean scholar and critic Edward Capell was the first to suggest that Shakespeare may have been familiar with the works of French statesman, philosopher, and essayist Michel de Montaigne. An English translation of Montaigne's most famous work *Essais* (*Essays*) was available in London as early as 1603, while Shakespeare was most likely writing *King Lear*.

In *Essays*, Montaigne claims to describe man, especially himself, with “utter frankness.” Many of his observations—and much of his own life—seem to be echoed in certain plot and character developments in *The Tempest*:

In his own time, Montaigne was better known for his public service than for his literary endeavors. Having studied law in Toulouse, a city in southwest France, he pursued a highly successful legal career. He:

The Tempest

Act I, Scene I

1. On what kind of note does the play open? What does Shakespeare accomplish with this?

2. How does this scene already begin to challenge the status quo of social rank and authority?

3. Describe the tone established in the opening scene of *The Tempest*.

4. What are the implications of the boatswain's remark, "What cares these roarers for the name of king?"

5. What is the tone of the boatswain's comments to his passengers? Give some examples.

Act III, Scene I

1. What literary archetype does Ferdinand's labor call to mind?

2. How is Ferdinand's enslavement different from Caliban's?

3. How has Ferdinand's presence begun to change the personal dynamic between Miranda and Prospero?

4. How is Miranda's reaction to meeting Ferdinand ironically similar to Caliban's encounter with Stephano? How is it different?

Act III, Scene II

1. Why is Caliban so ingratiating to Trinculo and Stephano?

2. How does Stephano use alcohol as a tool, and what are the social implications of his action?

3. In what ways does this scene recall Gonzalo's vision of an island utopia in Act II, Scene I?

4. What comic conventions are operating in this scene?

5. Why is this scene in mostly in prose?

6. What does Caliban say about the island's noises? What does this reveal about his relationship with nature?

7. What evidence is there in this scene that Caliban is not the ignorant brute everyone seems to take him for?
