

The Tempest Reading Comprehension

'The Tempest', one of William Shakespeare's later plays, explores complex themes of revenge, forgiveness, power and the supernatural. The story unfolds on a mystical island where magic and intrigue shape the fate of the characters. It is a tale of redemption, with Prospero (the exiled Duke of Milan) at its centre, striving to regain his power and come to terms with his past. This is a captivating story depicting how even those with great power can learn the strength of forgiveness. Read the plot overview, then answer the questions that follow.

Plot Overview

The play begins with a dramatic storm, conjured by Prospero, who has been exiled to an island with his daughter, Miranda, for over a decade. Prospero was once the Duke of Milan; however, his brother Antonio betrayed him, taking his dukedom with the support of Alonso, the King of Naples. Now stranded on a distant island, Prospero has become a powerful sorcerer, mastering the magic of the island and gaining control over its spirits, including Ariel (a spirit of the air), and Caliban (son of the witch, Sycorax).

Seeking justice, Prospero commands Ariel to create the tempest (a literal storm and metaphorical upheaval) that brings his enemies, including Alonso, Antonio and other noblemen to the island. As they arrive, each character faces their own internal struggle, confronting the consequences of their past actions.

Miranda, who has grown up isolated on the island, meets Ferdinand, the King's son, after he is separated from the others by the storm. The two fall in love instantly. Prospero, identifying a chance for reconciliation and alliance, pretends to be wary of their romance, whilst secretly hoping it will unite the families.



Meanwhile, Ariel leads the shipwrecked noblemen through a series of visions and illusions that force them to confront their guilt and betrayal. Ariel reminds Alonso and Antonio of their roles in Prospero's exile, stirring remorse in Alonso, though Antonio remains unrepentant. The conspirators' guilt is contrasted with Caliban's resentment toward Prospero, who he believes has wrongfully claimed the island.

In a subplot, Caliban joins forces with two drunkards, Stephano and Trinculo, in order to plot against Prospero. However, their bumbling antics and inability to act with conviction ultimately reveal the futility of their rebellion, adding a touch of humour to the play's more serious themes.

As the play progresses, Prospero's plan unfolds. He watches as his enemies suffer the consequences of their actions and he comes to understand the weight of their betrayals. In the climax, Prospero finally confronts Alonso and Antonio but instead of exacting revenge, he chooses forgiveness. Recognising that holding onto anger will only bring him further pain, he releases Ariel from servitude and renounces his magic, symbolically breaking his staff and casting aside his magical books.

In the final scenes, Prospero reveals himself to the noblemen, forgives them for their past wrongs and reclaims his position as Duke of Milan. Alonso is overjoyed to discover that his son, Ferdinand, is alive and engaged to Miranda, sealing the families' bond. Caliban is freed, granting him the ability to rule the island on his own terms, while Prospero prepares to return to Milan, leaving behind the life he has known for so long.



Comprehension Questions

Use full sentences to answer the following questions in your exercise book.

1. Identify what drives Prospero to create the tempest at the beginning of the play.
2. Describe Prospero's relationship with Ariel and how it changes throughout the play.
3. Identify how Miranda feels when she first meets Ferdinand.
4. Outline Prospero's reaction to the attraction between Miranda and Ferdinand.
5. Identify why Prospero chose forgiveness instead of revenge by the end of the play.
6. Explain the significance of the island as a setting for the play's themes of power and transformation.
7. Identify the role Caliban plays in the story.
8. Explain how Caliban may represent a different perspective on the island.
9. Describe how the illusions created by Ariel influence Alonso and Antonio's attitudes toward Prospero.
10. Explain how 'The Tempest' explores the consequences of betrayal and the possibility of redemption.
11. Identify how the union between Miranda and Ferdinand reflects Prospero's hopes for the future.
12. Explain the message Shakespeare conveys through Prospero's decision to renounce his magic and free Ariel.

