

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Tempest

The Tempest, written around 1611, is the last play Shakespeare wrote. (He may have collaborated on at least two other plays after *The Tempest*.) Many believe that Prospero's final speech in the play's epilogue is Shakespeare's own farewell speech as a playwright.

This play is one of Shakespeare's four romances (the other three are *Cymbeline*, *Pericles*, and *The Winter's Tale*). A major theme of romances is a restoration of losses. In *The Tempest*, Prospero regains his dukedom, and Alonso, the king, regains his son. Other themes include illusion versus reality, civilization versus nature, and power—the power of nature, the power of magic, the power to forgive, the power to enslave and set free, and dreams of power.

The Tempest is one of only a few of



Shakespeare's plays that do not appear to have a single source. Shakespeare wrote the play at the time that the English were exploring the New World.

Shakespeare was aware of these explorations, and had heard tales of shipwrecks and stories about the natives; all of these probably contributed in some way to his writing of this play.

Activity: Divide students into small groups. Have each group write what they know about how Prospero left Milan and ended up on the island. Then, using these facts as a starting point, have each group write a mini-play detailing the events that led up to Prospero and Miranda leaving Milan and eventually landing on this island.

BARD CARD

The Tempest

Plot Summary: *The Tempest* is the story of a wise old magician who, with the help of the fates, regains his stolen dukedom and betroths his daughter to the Prince of Naples. This romance or tragicomedy takes place on an island in the 15th century.

Main Characters

- Prospero:** former and rightful Duke of Milan
- Miranda:** Prospero's daughter
- Ferdinand:** son of the King of Naples
- Ariel:** Prospero's spirit servant
- Caliban:** Prospero's slave
- Alonso:** King of Naples
- Antonio:** Prospero's brother, the wrongful Duke of Milan
- Sebastian:** Alonso's brother
- Gonzalo:** an honest man from Naples who saved Prospero and Miranda's lives
- Trinculo:** Alonso's jester
- Stephano:** Alonso's drunken butler

Glossary

- allay:** calm
- auspicious:** favorable
- bellowing:** shouting in a deep voice
- boatswain:** a naval officer
- bondage:** captivity
- celestial:** heavenly
- charge:** command
- cherubim:** angel child
- din:** a loud ongoing noise
- elements:** the four substances—air, water, fire, and earth—formerly believed to make up the physical universe
- entreat:** plead; beg
- gales:** winds
- manacle:** bind; shackle
- piteous:** compassionate
- ratify:** formally approve
- supplant:** replace by force or treachery
- tempest:** a violent storm
- trod:** walked
- vexations:** troubles
- yare:** set for action