

AQA AS Level English Literature

Activities and Exam Practice

The Tempest

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(Sample pages)



Debating the themes

Many themes have already been discussed in the introduction. This section demonstrates some ways in which themes can be investigated in more detail.

The main theme of the play is **power**. Everything else is connected to this. It is what drives the play. **Magic** is part of this power. This is Prospero's art.

The spirits appear to create some 'vanity' of Prospero's art.

'He ... serves in offices that profit us' – this demonstrates the theme of power and authority.

The activity which follows gives some possible thematic debates. Each theme poses a question.

Activity: Debating/notes

Debate 1: Does Prospero use his power wisely?

By thinking about Prospero's power, we are considering the nature of magic, as well as exploring the theme of rulers. Look at Gonzalo's speech in Act 2, scene 1 and compare it to what Prospero has done to Caliban. Read Gonzalo's lines carefully. They are actually full of contradictions.

Debate 2: What is the nature of magic in the play?

You might want to research different theatrical productions to explore how Prospero, the controller of this magic, has been portrayed. For example, he might be a wizard, a scholar, an avenger, a theatre director, a father, and so on.

Debate 3: Nature v. nurture.

Can people change, or are their characteristics fixed at birth? This debate also relates to power – the power we might have over people to change or educate them.

Debate 4: Antonio and Caliban can be seen as having good and bad qualities. Can each be redeemed?

Debate 5: Should crimes be punished harshly?

Is Prospero justified in the types of punishment he dishes out? Caliban is 'given stripes' (whipped) if he is disobedient. Antonio is not punished as such for his crime except for suffering the torments that Prospero puts on him. Yet at the end he makes no apology.

Activity: Notes

Try to identify the following types of love in the play:

- | | | |
|-----------------------|------------------|----------------------|
| ➤ Love at first sight | ➤ Friendship | ➤ Love of study/work |
| ➤ Paternal love | ➤ Master/servant | ➤ Acclaim. |

Be aware of the subtle complications. For example, Ariel says 'Do you love me master? No.'

- What sort of love is Ariel talking about?
- As a spirit, what would love mean to him?
- Prospero loves Miranda his daughter, but if this extends to making her marry a man of his choosing, is he exerting too much control?
- Explore other themes in the same way. For example, what different types of punishment are there?

Finding the themes in a passage

Many examination questions will focus on a particular section of the play. It is important that you read such passages closely and consider

how they relate to key themes in the rest of the play.

Activity: Acting – shadowing a scene or speech

One or more students could say the lines and others ‘shadow’ them by repeating key words or phrases that relate to a particular theme. Themes could be shared among the group. The rest of the class could underline those words in their text. Some suitable scenes are:

Act 3, scene 3, lines 1–17

Act 4, scene 1, lines 139–63

Act 2, scene 1, lines 191–231

Activity: Writing

Choose a section of dialogue in the play and say how it helps your understanding of characters and themes.

Characters

You will have explored some of the characters while reading the play. Rather than now look at individuals, we are going to explore generic ways in which you can explore any character.

First impressions (*‘What is’t? A spirit?’*)

How are character introduced to us? For example, we know Prospero must be powerful, because Miranda says:

*‘If by your art my dearest father you have
Put the wild waters in this roar, allay them.’*

Look at how other characters are introduced. What impression does the audience get of them?

Character and language (*‘My language! Heavens!’*)

Characters are given a distinctive way of speaking. Shakespeare is particularly good at this. It is a poetic way of showing us other facets of their character. For example, look at two aspects of Caliban’s language. In Act 1, scene 2, and at the beginning of Act 2, scene 2, his language is full of insults, but also *natural* words.

Activity: Notes

Make a list of Caliban’s *nature* words and categorise them. They refer to plants, animals and the weather. He also uses violent images, such as in Act 3, scene 2, lines 86–99. Yet his language is almost poetic a few lines later (133–41). What does this tell the audience about his character? What can you say about other characters’ ways of speaking? Consider:

- Ferdinand in Act 1, scene 2
- Stephano in Act 2, scene 2
- Prospero in Act 5, scene 1
- Ariel in Act 3, scene 3.

Teachers' notes

This resource is divided into three parts. Each contains a number of tasks, which could be:

- **Notes** – Students working on their own to explore an aspect of the play. These tasks could be set as homework or for independent study.
- **Exploration tasks** – Students working in groups to explore the play.
- **Discussion tasks** – These can involve the whole group, in order to encourage a close reading of the text, followed by students giving their own opinions.
- **Written tasks** – These may be questions based on requirements of the specification.
- **Acting** – Putting the scene to the test and giving it a particular focus. Most of these tasks can also be achieved through discussion, if time or space does not allow for more practical work. It is not a bad idea to use acting with some of the other tasks where relevant, as it helps students remember what they have done. It may also be useful to photograph or video practical work, as this provides a visual reference for discussion or revision.

Differentiation

There are a number of tasks for each section. The first tasks are usually the easiest and cover essentials for that section. Notes can be made on all tasks.

There are also some extension tasks which require a wider understanding of the text and may not be suitable for all ability levels.

Line references

All line references are to the Arden edition.

Section 1

For use while reading the play, this contains tasks that –

- help students to understand the characters, plot, language and structure of the play
- encourage a close reading of the text
- give opportunities for discussion and allow students to see alternative approaches
- encourage extended writing which will relate to exam-type questions
- give room for independent work
- help students cross-reference in the text and relate a single scene or section to themes of the whole play.

Section 2

This is designed to be used mainly after the whole play has been read. It contains activities that cover areas similar to those of section one, but which relate to the whole play. The emphasis is geared towards structure and themes, as these are difficult to focus on without knowledge of the whole play. Students will also –

- make links between characters and themes
- recognise how the structure of the play might influence audience understanding
- see the play as a piece of theatre
- debate key themes and explore alternative performance interpretations.

Section 3

This is tailored to AQA Specification A and deals with specific areas of knowledge, as well as examination technique and sample essays.