



Jumpstart into the Play

5 insights you want to know about *THE TEMPEST*

To Forgive and Be Forgiven

At the heart of *The Tempest* is the desire to forgive and be forgiven. Many of the characters are poised on various thresholds within the cycle of life, and Prospero recognizes that the only way to move forward with life's tasks is to try and make peace through forgiveness.

By creating an elaborate storm, Prospero draws the various loose threads of his past into one place to not only tie up unfinished business, but also to make sure that those he loves will be taken care of and be allowed to move on with their lives.

Seattle Shakespeare Company is approaching *The Tempest* as a symbolic and personal story told through Prospero's perspective. The fluidity of Prospero's memory as he wrestles with his mortality is something to keep in mind.

Water, Water Everywhere

At the time when Shakespeare wrote *The Tempest*, chronicles of fantastic, myth-filled voyages across the Atlantic were being circulated. That great body of water was the divide between the new and old worlds.

In *The Tempest*, water is an instrument of change. It is both chaotic and cleansing, a barrier and a bridge. It is an element to be reckoned with as well as a source for some great imagistic language in the play.

Dueling Impulses

In our production of *The Tempest*, the characters of Ariel and Caliban are more than just magical beings; they represent competing and perhaps cut off parts of Prospero's personality.

Caliban is the primitive and irrational part. He is a base earth force with violent and sexual impulses. Ariel is an air spirit. She is refined and rational, but without intellectual rigor. Both forces pull on Prospero's psyche as he attempts to complete his final lifecycle tasks. Issues of control and the release of control play out in the interaction between these three characters.

Stage Unities and the Ticking of the Clock

From the moment the storm hits the ship, the clock starts ticking towards a resolution of the play. Shakespeare rarely observed Aristotle's unities of Time, Place, and Action in his plays, but *The Tempest* is an exception.

The action all takes place in one day in one location. Although it's a theatrical conceit, this choice helps add to the urgency in the play. Time slipping away does create a sense of dramatic tension, especially when Prospero knows there's still much to be done. Listen for the urgent references to time when you see the play.

Now You're Talking Shakespeare!

Here are a few phrases that may be familiar to you or that you may have spoken at some point. All of them were originally coined by Shakespeare in *The Tempest*. Listen for them when you attend the production.

**These three have robb'd me, and this demi-devil—
For he's a bastard one—had plotted with them
To take my life. Two of these fellows you
Must know and own; **this thing of darkness** I
Acknowledge mine.**

— *The Tempest* Act 5, scene 1

**Alas, the storm is come again! My best way is to creep
under his gaberdine; there is no other shelter here—
about: misery
acquaints a man with **strange bedfellows**. I will here
shroud till the
dregs of the storm be past.**

— *The Tempest* Act 2, scene 2

We are **such stuff
As dreams are made on; and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.**

— *The Tempest* Act 4, scene 1

**How many goodly creatures are there here!
How beauteous mankind is! **O brave new world,**
That has such people in't!**

— *The Tempest* Act 5, scene 1

