

Year 7 English - 'The Tempest' by William Shakespeare



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Prospero used to be Duke of Milan, but his brother Antonio overthrew him with the help of Alonso, King of Naples.

Prospero was cast out to sea in a boat with his three-year-old daughter Miranda and they landed on a magical island which they made their home.

Now, Alonso is on a ship sailing near to the island. He is with his son Ferdinand, his brother Sebastian and Prospero's brother Antonio. Prospero knows this and uses magic to create a sea storm.



Miranda watches the storm and the ship from the shore of the island and asks Prospero to calm the storm down.

Prospero has developed magical powers. He created the storm with the help of Ariel, a spirit who has become his servant.



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Characters

Prospero:

- Betrayed
- Powerful
- Magical
- Protective

Miranda:

- Loyal
- Kind
- Naïve
- Curious

Ariel:

- Indebted
- Trapped
- Dutiful
- Powerful

Caliban

- Bitter
- Immoral
- Fickle
- Inhuman



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The Purpose and Function of Dramatic Irony

What is Dramatic Irony?

Dramatic Irony is where one of the characters reveals information to us that they do not tell other characters. This means that sometimes we can see things coming before the characters can. Essentially, the characters are kept in the dark creating tension for the audience as we can guess what is about to happen but remain powerless to do anything about it.

Why do writers use dramatic irony?

Dramatic irony is a structural tool used in both drama and fiction texts to add to the sense of tragedy or humour. For an audience (or reader) dramatic irony adds to the emotional appeal, but it can also lead to a series of deliberate humorous misunderstandings. It can make readers feel as though they are in a privileged position of knowledge or understanding compared to the characters.

Where can we see dramatic irony in The Tempest?

In Act 1, Scene 2, Miranda and Ferdinand take Prospero's criticisms seriously and believe he is genuinely cross with Ferdinand:

'Speak not you for him: he's a traitor. Come; I'll manacle thy neck and feet together: Sea-water shalt thou drink.'

However, the audience would know that Prospero has arranged the meeting between Ferdinand and his daughter in the hope that they will fall in love and thus heal the conflict between Naples and Milan. The punishment is so that Ferdinand will not feel that Miranda is won too easily, and Miranda will begin to feel sorry for Ferdinand.

Ariel does what Prospero asks him to and makes sure all the people on the ship get washed up on the island. He also makes sure Ferdinand is separated from his father Alonso.



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Useful 'translations' from Shakespearean to modern English:

thee and **thou** = you

thy = your

('thee', 'thou' and 'thy' were more informal versions of 'you' in Shakespearean times. Characters are more likely to use 'you' and 'your' when they are being respectful or polite, e.g. when speaking to someone with a higher status than them.)

art = are (e.g. in 'We are less afraid to be drowned than thou art?')

brave = splendid, fine, excellent, impressive

cur = as scruffy, aggressive mongrel / a scoundrel, wrong-doer, rogue.

hath = has

morn = morning / dawn

o'er = over

oft = often

office = task, service, duty, responsibility

prate/prattle = talk / chat

prithie = Please, may I ask

thy = your

'twixt = between

vex'd = angry

wench = girl



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KEY QUOTES EXPLAINED

Even though Prospero tried to help Caliban by teaching him how to communicate with words, Caliban is ungrateful and claims he will only use these words to hurt and insult.

'You taught me language, and my profit on't Is, I know how to curse.'

Prospero has two servants and although he has failed to set Ariel free, as per his request, Ariel continues to be loyal to Prospero. Meanwhile, Prospero's "poisonous slave" Caliban behaves very differently towards him. Prospero treats Caliban much more cruelly because he intended to harm Miranda. Prospero no longer treats Caliban kindly because he only takes advantage when shown compassion.

Later Prospero refers to Caliban as 'a devil, a born devil, on whose nature nurture can never stick...' Prospero is furious with Caliban who has plotted to kill him. His words here are topical as during Shakespeare's time many believed indigenous people were savage and violent. Caliban does not have any redeeming qualities and it is unlikely that any theatre-goers would have sympathy for him.

Prospero then reveals to Alonso that Ferdinand is still alive and is engaged to Miranda. Ariel punishes Caliban, Stephano and Trinculo for trying to harm Prospero and also reveals that the ship is safe and ready to sail back to Naples.



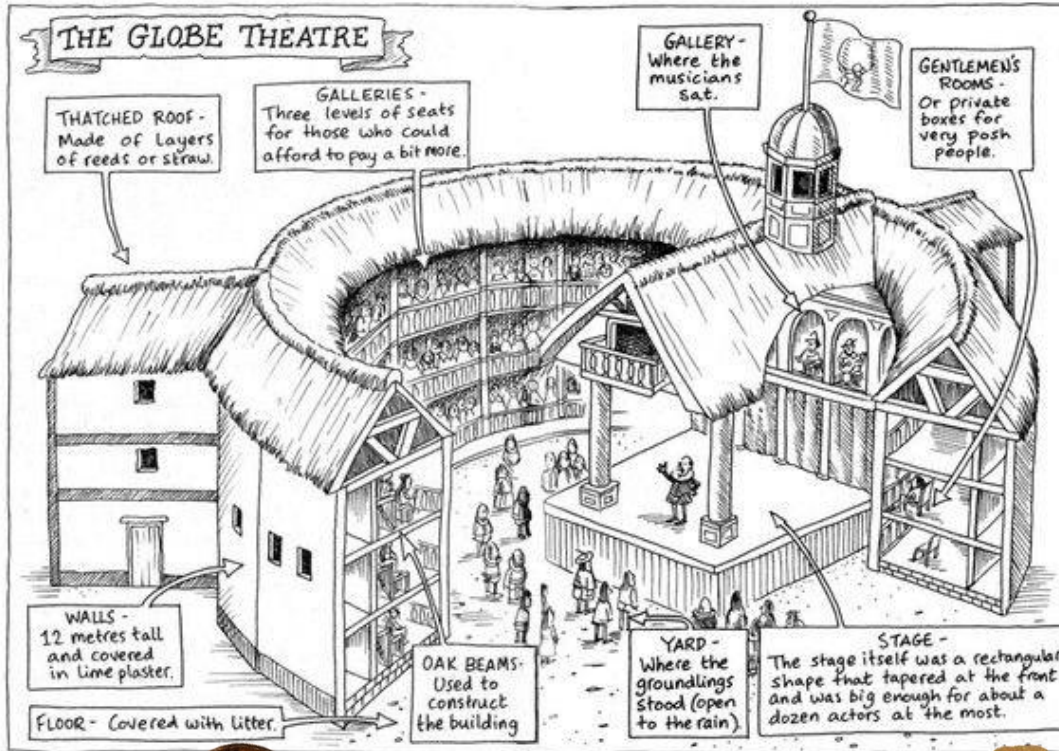
Ariel appears to Alonso and his nobles and tells them they are being punished for how they treated Prospero. Alonso apologises to Prospero and makes him Duke of Milan again.



Miranda and Ferdinand see each other and fall in love. Prospero pretends not to agree to them getting married straight away and tests Ferdinand's love.



Two of Alonso's servants, Stephano & Trinculo, also get shipwrecked on the island. They meet Caliban, a creature from the island who Prospero treats like a slave. Caliban hopes Stephano and Trinculo will help him get rid of Prospero.



POWER: The play is full of examples of power taken by force. Antonio and Alonso's overthrow of Prospero leads to Antonio and Sebastian's plot to overthrow Alonso, just as Prospero's overthrow and enslavement of Caliban leads Caliban to seek revenge.

Ultimately, it is only when Prospero breaks the cycle of violence by refusing to take revenge tensions in the play are calmed. *The Tempest* suggests that compromise and compassion are more effective political tools than violence, imprisonment, or even magic.



MAGIC: *The Tempest* is full of Prospero's magic and illusions. The play begins with Prospero's magic (the tempest), and ends with Prospero's magic (his command that Ariel send the ship safely back to Italy). In between, the audience watches as Prospero uses visual and auditory illusions to manipulate his enemies and expose their true selves. At nearly every point in the play, Prospero's magic gives him total control—he always seems to know what will happen next, or even to *control* what will happen next. At one point, Prospero evenges so far as to suggest that all of life is actually an illusion that vanishes with death: *'We are such stuff as dreams are made on, and our little life is rounded with a sleep'* (4.1.156-158).

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Shakespeare's audience and Theatre.

Shakespeare's plays were enjoyed by people from all walks of life, from the royalty and the very wealthy right through to the servants, porters and carters. The Globe often had up to 3000 people in the audience at any one time. Theatres had to compete for audiences with other forms of entertainment such as, cock-fighting and bear-baiting. Many of the performances covered topics which would be of interest to people at the time, such as: foreign travel, magic and witchcraft, religion and regicide. Plays would often include humour, violence, special effects and music to keep audiences interested. The open air theatres would charge 1d (equivalent to 1 penny). For the cheapest ticket, you would get a place amongst the 'groundlings' standing in the yard directly before the stage. For 2d you would be able to have a seat on one of the benches in the lower galleries surrounding the yard. For 3d more you would get a cushioned seat. The most expensive seats with the best viewing would be in the 'Lord's Room' which would be a private box up in the gallery.

You could buy food and drink during the performance from the vendors. The floors were often covered with ash or sand and there were no toilets. Visitors often complained that (due to poor hygiene and lack of sanitation in Shakespeare's time) it was often very smelly in the 'groundlings' area in front of the stage.

Unlike today, people did not watch the performance in a quiet and respectful way, instead audiences would clap, cheer, boo the villains. Pickpockets often roamed amongst the theatre-goers stealing from them whilst they were distracted by the performance.



LOSS AND RESTORATION: Prospero's attempt to recover his lost dukedom of Milan drives the plot of *The Tempest*. But Prospero isn't the only character in the play to experience loss. Ariel lost his freedom to Sycorax and now serves Prospero. Caliban, who considers himself the rightful ruler of the island, was overthrown and enslaved by Prospero. By creating the tempest that shipwrecks Alonso and his courtiers on the island, Prospero strips them of their position and power, and also causes Alonso to believe that he has lost his son to the sea.

Through their reactions to these losses, the play's characters reveal their true natures.