

Discussion Questions for *The Tempest*

1. *The Tempest* was Shakespeare's last play. A number of critics have speculated that Shakespeare is bidding farewell to his audience in the play, and that the character of Prospero, is in reality, Shakespeare. Do you believe that this theory is correct? Why or why not? Please provide examples from the text.
2. There are a number of farewell speeches in the play, the first of which occurs in Act IV, scene i, lines 148 – 158, which begins "These our actors,/As I foretold you . . ." A second farewell speech occurs in Act V, Scene i, lines 50 – 57 "But this rough magic/I here abjure . . ." The final farewell scene occurs in the Epilogue, where Prospero declaims: "Now my charms are all o'erthrown. . . ." Do these speeches lend credence to the idea that Shakespeare is saying farewell to his audience? Why or why not?
3. The play takes place on a deserted island, referred to as a new world. On the island, Ariel is the servant of Prospero as a result of Prospero freeing Ariel from the services of Sycorax. Is Ariel's captivity an allegory for slavery in the New World? If so, is it an effective allegory? Why or why not?
4. In Act V, scene i, lines 182 – 187, Miranda, first seeing the visitors from the boat exclaims: "O, wonder! /How many goodly creatures are there here! /How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world, /That hath such people in't." To which Prospero replies "'Tis new to thee." How does Prospero's reply, given almost to himself, modify Miranda's speech? Are we to place more stock in Miranda's observation or Prospero's? Can Miranda's speech be viewed as the optimism of youth, whereas Prospero's speech can be viewed as the pessimism of old age?
5. The play is often classified as a romance, that is, a play including elements of tragedy and comedy. Because the play ends with a marriage scene, it was originally classified as a comedy. There are a number of darker elements in the play, including Prospero's banishment and the treachery of his brother. How would you classify the play?
6. There are a number of events and characters that are doubled in the play. As an example, Prospero is betrayed by his brother, who is then betrayed by Antonio. Caliban, Stephano and Trinculo attempt to kill Prospero, which parallels Antonio and Sebastian's attempt to usurp Prospero's station in Milan. Prospero frees Ariel, and later in the Epilogue, asks the audience to free him. Do the doublings help or hinder the action of the play? Are the doublings effective? Are the parallels effective in creating dramatic tension in the play?
7. The play deals with the themes of magic, reality and unreality. These themes are made more evident by the fact that there is a play within the play itself, and the audience is aware that they are watching a play, based upon the three farewell speeches made by Prospero. Ariel and Caliban are both supernatural creatures, and Prospero is portrayed as a magician. Yet, for all the hints at the unreality of the play, the play creates a suspension of disbelief on the part of the audience. Is the play itself a testament to Shakespeare's ability to create magic? Is Shakespeare hinting that the line between reality and unreality what we make it?
8. The play has been read as an allegory for the discovery of the New World, or as a new Eden (see Act II, Scene i, lines 167 – 168 by Gonzalo comparing the island to the Garden of Eden). At the end of the play, the Europeans leave for Naples and Milan, leaving only Ariel and Caliban remaining on the island. If the play is read as an allegory for the New World, is Shakespeare

saying that the Europeans should leave and allow the native inhabitants to rule in the New World? Is the play an allegory for the discovery of the New World? What other interpretations could you develop for the play as an allegory of the discovery of the New World?