Your notes

GCSE English Literature: revision notes

The Tempest

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Plot

- Prospero, the overthrown Duke of Milan, has lived on an island for twelve years with his daughter Miranda, the spirit Ariel and Caliban, son of the witch Sycorax.
- Prospero uses magic to raise a storm and shipwreck his enemies: his brother Antonio, who took his dukedom, and Alonso, King of Naples, with Sebastian, Gonzalo and Alonso's son Ferdinand.
- Ferdinand and Miranda fall in love. Antonio and Sebastian plot to kill Alonso, and Caliban plots with Stephano and Trinculo to kill Prospero; both plots fail.
- Prospero forgives his enemies, frees Ariel, gives up his magic and returns to Milan. In the **epilogue** he asks the audience to set him free.

Themes and context

- Power and control, **colonialism** (Prospero takes Caliban's island), forgiveness and revenge, magic, freedom and imprisonment.
- Written around 1610–11, when Europeans were exploring and settling the Americas; accounts of a shipwreck on Bermuda (1609) may have inspired it.

Form

- A late play (**romance**) that mostly follows the unity of time: the action takes about the length of the performance.

How to get top marks

- Have an idea about power: Prospero controls everybody on the island, then chooses to give it up.
- Use Caliban to write about colonial ideas: is he a monster or a victim? Argue it, with evidence.
- Use the ending, with its forgiveness and the **epilogue**'s appeal to the audience, as a final point.

Key terms

Usurp	To take power wrongly, as Antonio took Prospero's dukedom.
Colonialism	One people taking control of another's land.
Epilogue	A speech at the end of a play.
Romance	A late Shakespeare play mixing danger, magic, forgiveness and reunion.

Quick questions

Cover the answers and test yourself: remembering is what makes it stick.

1. Who is the overthrown Duke of Milan in The Tempest?
2. Who is Prospero's daughter?
3. What kind of being is Ariel?
4. Who claims the island was his before Prospero came?
5. Who plots to kill Alonso?
6. How does the play end for Prospero?
7. What starts the action of the play?
8. Which theme does Caliban's treatment raise?

Answers

1. Prospero
2. Miranda
3. A spirit who serves Prospero
4. Caliban
5. Antonio and Sebastian
6. He forgives his enemies and gives up his magic
7. A storm raised by Prospero's magic
8. Colonialism

What to do next

Practise 10 questions on this topic

Try 3 exam questions, with mark schemes

Your notes

Read the lesson, one step at a time

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