

Area of Study – Response Sheet

Title: The Tempest
Form: Play
Composer: William Shakespeare
Date: 1611

Context & Values:

The author of the play itself, William Shakespeare lived in England during the Jacobean era. It was a period of post-colonialism and this had a large bearing on the way Shakespeare wrote *The Tempest*. During the period, many European countries were venturing out in search of new 'worlds.' The attitude of these explorers was that any natives of the lands they 'discovered' were to be considered too primitive to rightfully own the land, hence justifying the takeover of their land and allowing the settlers the moral argument which would enable them to be self-appointed rulers of the island. This comes through in the text as Prospero forcefully takes the island from its rightful owner, Caliban.

Concepts or Ideas Conveyed about Journeys:

The main theme evident in the play is the social, political and moral questions raised by the overtaking of other cultures. The journey represented in this is Prospero's journey of power, from the loss of it in Milan, to seizing power of the island from Caliban, to reclaiming his position in Milan at the end of the text. Prospero goes on a journey both physically and metaphorically as he aims to restore his dukedom.

The other theme relevant to journeys is that of the link between undertaking a journey and the association of power. Those with power are the ones who are forced or chose to take journeys, and all the journeys have the potential to give or take power away from the traveller.

Journey – Describe the nature of the journey; imaginative, physical or inner:

There are two themes concerning the nature of the journey conveyed in the play. The first is the minute reference to a physical journey. Prospero, when he is usurped as Duke of Milan, is sent out on a raft on a physical journey. The party travelling back from Tunis is also taking on an actual physical journey.

However, the main nature of the journey in *The Tempest* is that of imaginative journeys. Both the characters and the audience are taken on an imaginative journey. The characters are travelling along a relatively well worn path by Jacobean standards, when they are met by an unnatural storm raised by Prospero. They are then transported to an island which only exists for the duration of the play itself.

The audience is also transported on this imaginative journey. For the average citizen of the time, travelling to such an exotic place was merely a dream, an unachievable dream at that, and so, by viewing the play they are taken away from their own existences and transported to a magical, inviting place.

Language/filmic/visual/aural features:

Discuss how the composer conveyed the inner or physical or imaginative journey. Identify the feature, exemplify and explain how it conveys or creates the journey and extrapolate by discussing its impact on the responder. Draw comparisons/contrasts between this text and other texts you are discussing in your response. Include quotes from the text.

There are many features which help to convey the idea of both physical and imaginative journeys.

The first such feature is the links to real society. Prospero was ousted from a real city, and the sea-faring travellers were coming from and going to a real place. This adds realism to the story and suggests that the play may be about an actual physical journey.

However, the idea of *The Tempest* becoming a physical journey is quickly squashed by the overwhelming number of language features supporting an imaginative journey concept.

One of the most obvious features used is the portrayal of Caliban as “in-human” and as a “monster.” A beast such as Caliban does not exist in the ‘real’ world, therefore showing his whole existence as far-fetched.

Another language feature that portrays *The Tempest* as an imaginative journey is the analogy used by Ariel in the beginning of the play. He describes the tempest raised by Prospero as not dissimilar to the “still-vexed Bermudas.” This links the situation faced by Antonio, Alonso, Gonzalo, Sebastian, Ferdinand and others to the actual place of the Bermuda triangle, a patch of ocean on the coast of America (where Miami is now) notorious for ensnaring ships.

Another technique employed by Shakespeare is his use of superlative degree. Prospero describes Caliban as the “most lying slave,” an extreme end of the untrustworthy scale. This further adds to the surrealism as the audience assumes that no person could be really so untrustworthy and therefore cannot be real. Prospero adds to this “evil” portrayal of Caliban with the use of repetition and alliteration in the line “a devil, a born devil, on whose nature nurture can never stick.” This line further portrays Caliban as “inhuman” and surreal.

Shakespeare also uses indentation and ellipses to present an image of the unknown and allow the audience to fill in some of the more fantastic details. The absence of text reinforces Shakespeare’s idea that even in the most imaginative of journeys, some detail must be left out to add to the mysterious aura that surrounds the play.

The use of fantastic, imaginative and positive connotations concerning the island also helps to add to its mystique. Caliban describes the island as full of “sounds and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not,” going on to say he enjoys listening to the “thousand twangling instruments” that “hum” about his ears. These extremely imaginative connotations once again make the island appear more surreal.

Throughout the text, the metaphor of Prospero’s “cell” is used in relation to the island. This adds to the imaginative aura as the audience begins to wonder why Prospero would feel trapped in a prison cell when he is fortunate enough to live on a beautiful, tropical island. This adds to the surrealism by suggesting that only in a dream world would someone not be satisfied by living in such paradise.

All these features help to portray Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* as a classic imaginative journey which takes both the characters and the audience along for the ride.

Describe the journey and the consequences of the journey:

The consequences of the journey are relevant to both the audience and the characters in the play.

For those characters in the play, they face the possible consequence of a loss of their power. Antonio, who seized power from his brother Prospero, faces the possibility of his dukedom being re-taken by Prospero. All the travellers who are shipwrecked on the island face the consequence of never returning from their quest or being trapped on the island forever. Their lives are in Prospero's hands and he ultimately decides their fate.

For Ariel, if he fulfils Prospero's bidding he will be granted freedom by Prospero. If Prospero is not pleased with Ariel's efforts he could continue to enslave him forever.

The main character, Prospero, faces the consequence of being shipwrecked on the island forever, or being murdered by the many enemies who plot against him, if his plan to regain his dukedom fails. Alternatively, if his plan does succeed, he will have restored his dukedom for himself and his family for generations to come.

The audience is also taken on a journey to a magical island that only exists for the duration of the play itself. The audience faces the consequence of having their values changed in regards to colonisation and the concept of terra-nullius, if their standpoint is one that can be influenced.

Linking & Synthesising: Discuss what you have discovered or learned about physical, inner or imaginative journeys from the texts. Compare and contrast the texts.

Through the text, *The Tempest*, Shakespeare has allowed the responder to learn a lot about the concept of imaginative journeys.

Shakespeare allows both the audience and the characters to travel on an imaginative journey and experience the same situations as each other.

The Tempest can also be compared to Margaret Atwood's *Journey to the Interior* in that both texts invite the responder to question their own attitudes towards certain issues inside themselves. Atwood's poem encourages the responder to examine their own 'dark' side and question human nature itself. *The Tempest* invites a responder to question their attitudes toward colonisation after Caliban is given some of the most artistic lines in the play.

It is also similar to the cover of Victor Kelleher's novel, *The Ivory Trail*, in that both it and *The Tempest* are journeys that occur on a grand scale and encompass the entire globe.

However, *The Tempest* does vary from the R.E.M. song *Leaving New York*. In *The Tempest*, Prospero is the central character around which all the action is located. He is the catalyst for the whole series of events. In *Leaving New York*, there is no central character but the song is sung from the point of view of an omniscient narrator who is removed slightly from the events.

All in all, *The Tempest* is the classic imaginative journey that continues to develop and transform our understandings of the concepts of the genre.