

# The Tempest

## *Sample Analytical Paper Topics*

The following paper topics are designed to test your understanding of the play as a whole and analyze important themes and literary devices. Following each question is a sample outline to help you get started.

### TOPIC #1

In “Full Fathom Five” the image of Alonso’s “sea-change” symbolizes the change he goes through on the island and reflects one of the central themes of the play which is repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation. Write an essay tracing the progress of Alonso’s “sea-change” as his suffering brings him to the realization of his sin and guilt and to his subsequent regeneration.

#### *Outline*

- I. **Thesis Statement:** *Alonso who suffers a “sea-change” on the island as he mourns the loss of his children, reaches an awareness of his sin and guilt, and repents for his past deeds which lead him to a reconciliation with Prospero.*
- II. **Mourns the loss of his children.**
  - A. Mourns the supposed death of Ferdinand.
    1. Ferdinand was the heir to the throne.
    2. Suffers the loss of his loving son.
  - B. Regrets the loss of his daughter.
    1. He has lost his daughter through her marriage to the King of Tunis.
    2. She has moved so far away that he is afraid he will never see her again.
  - C. Alonso becomes despondent.
    1. He longs for sleep to shut out his thoughts.
    2. He loses hope in his search for his son.
- III. **Reaches an awareness of his sin and guilt.**
  - A. Alonso becomes aware of his sin against Prospero.
    1. His conspiracy with Antonio in the usurpation of Prospero’s dukedom.
    2. Prospero and Miranda were left to die at sea.
    3. Ariel appears, telling him to repent.
  - B. Alonso becomes aware of his guilt for his son’s death.
    1. He feels his son’s death is his punishment for his sin against Prospero.
    2. He feels his son’s death is his punishment for his sin against Miranda.
  - C. Alonso entertains thoughts of suicide.
    1. He longs to join his son at the bottom of the sea.
    2. Symbolically, the sea will reunite father and son.

#### IV. Alonso's repentance and reconciliation.

- A. Asks Prospero to forgive his sin against him.
  - 1. The sin of the usurpation of Prospero's dukedom.
  - 2. Alonso's sin against Miranda.
  - 3. Prospero forgives Alonso.
- B. Restore's Prospero's dukedom.
  - 1. Alonso is regenerated as a result of his repentance.
  - 2. He has lost his madness.
- C. Alonso accepts the marriage of his son to Prospero's daughter.
  - 1. Is desirous of Miranda's forgiveness.
  - 2. Wishes Ferdinand and Miranda were king and queen of Naples.

- V. Conclusion:** Alonso's "sea-change" is symbolic of the inner tempest that rages inside of him as he suffers a period of grief and loss, accompanied by despondency and thoughts of suicide. Because of Ariel's warning, Alonso becomes aware of his sin against Prospero which is followed by his repentance and Prospero's forgiveness. Alonso restores Prospero's dukedom and accepts the marriage of Ferdinand and Miranda which leads to his reconciliation with the former duke and makes his change on the island complete.

#### TOPIC #2

*The Tempest* is filled with music, containing more songs than any other Shakespearean play. Write an essay analyzing the function of the songs in the play in relation to theme, dramatic action, characterization, and the natural setting on the island.

##### Outline

- I. **Thesis Statement:** *The songs in The Tempest function for the purpose of assisting the dramatic action, delineating character, depicting themes, and lending atmosphere to the island.*
- II. **The songs assist the dramatic action.**
  - A. "Come Unto These Yellow Sands" and "Full Fathom Five" lead Ferdinand onto the island.
    - 1. The song allays the tempest.
    - 2. The song calms Ferdinand's passion concerning his drowned father.
  - B. "While You Here Do Snoring Lie" moves the action along.
    - 1. Wakes the sleepers, Alonso and Gonzalo.
    - 2. Prevents the murder of the king and Gonzalo.
  - C. "Honor, Riches, Marriage-blessing," the masque song, lifts the action out of the play. Ferdinand and Miranda are shown their future life in Naples.
- III. **The songs delineate character.**
  - A. "The Master, the Swabber, the Boatswain and I" delineates Stephano's character.
    - 1. Stephano represents uninhibited sensuality.
    - 2. Stephano embodies discord on the island.
  - B. "Where the Bee Sucks" delineates Ariel's character.
    - 1. Ariel is "dainty."
    - 2. Ariel is a natural being of the island.

C. “No More Dams I’ll Make for Fish” delineates Caliban’s character.

1. Caliban is a raucous natural man.
2. Caliban is a “howling monster.”

#### IV. The songs depict themes of the play.

A. “Full Fathom Five” depicts the theme of Alonso’s “sea-change.”

1. Through suffering Alonso recognizes his sin, repents, is forgiven and is regenerated.
2. Metaphorically, the “sea-change” represents Alonso’s change throughout the play.

B. “Where the Bee Sucks” and “No More Dams I’ll Make for Fish” depict the theme of freedom.

1. Caliban’s freedom from Prospero’s servitude.
2. Caliban’s servitude to Stephano is an illusion.
3. Ariel is given a well-earned freedom at the end of the play.

C. “Honor, Riches, Marriage-blessing” depicts the theme of hope for a future “brave new world.”

1. The song promises a world based on love.
2. The song promises a world of pastoral abundance and fruition.
3. Together, Ferdinand and Miranda will kiss “the wild waves whist” or still the tempest of hatreds and political rivalries of the play.

#### V. The songs lend atmosphere to the island.

A. An atmosphere of peace, tranquillity, and freedom from fear.

1. “Be not afeard, the isle is full of noises,/ Sounds, and sweet airs.”
2. “Come Unto These Yellow Sands” depicts a pastoral scene with dogs barking and roosters crowing.

B. An atmosphere of beauty.

1. “Where the Bee Sucks” depicts Ariel’s world of cow slips, owls, and bats.
2. “Full Fathom Five” depicts the sea with its beautiful pearl and coral.

**VI. Conclusion:** In *The Tempest* the songs are not mere “ditties” meant to entertain but function to assist the dramatic action, delineate character, depict themes, and lend an atmosphere of peace and natural tranquillity to the island. The songs are an artistic success in the play, adding beauty and functioning as an integral part of the poetic drama.

### TOPIC #3

Shakespeare portrays Caliban as a natural man “on whose nature/ Nurture can never stick.” Write an essay contrasting Caliban’s nature to that of the civilized characters on the island as they interact with one another.

#### Outline

**I. Thesis Statement:** *Caliban, “a savage and deformed slave,” is seen in stark contrast to the civilized characters in the play with regard to education, social mores, leadership, and a respect for nature.*

#### II. Contrast in Caliban and Miranda’s education.

A. Prospero has taught both Caliban and Miranda.

1. Miranda benefits; she recognizes the nobility in Ferdinand and in the “goodly creatures” of her future “brave new world”.
2. Caliban was taught language, and his only benefit was that it taught him “how to curse.”

B. Educating Caliban was useless.

1. “Good natures/ Could not abide to be with” Caliban.
2. All efforts to educate him have been frustrated.

### **III. Contrast in Caliban and Ferdinand's social mores.**

- A. In their relationship to Miranda.
  - 1. Caliban violates Miranda's honor.
  - 2. Ferdinand does not allow his honor to turn into lust.
- B. In their attitudes toward log-bearing.
  - 1. Caliban views it as punishment.
  - 2. Ferdinand bears logs in the service of his mistress.

### **IV. Contrast in Caliban and Prospero's leadership abilities**

- A. Caliban has been his own king who inherited the island from the evil witch, Sycorax, his mother.
  - 1. Prospero arrives to be lord on it.
  - 2. Prospero takes Caliban as his slave.
- B. Caliban leads Stephano and Trinculo in a plot to kill Prospero.
  - 1. Caliban's plan is aborted.
  - 2. Caliban admits he had poor judgement in seeing Stephano as a god.

### **V. Contrast in attitudes toward nature among Caliban and his fellow conspirators.**

- A. Caliban is unimpressed with the duke's royal clothing.
  - 1. Thinks the royal robes are "trash".
  - 2. Begs Stephano and Trinculo to stop doting on the duke's luggage.
- B. Caliban is in tune with the music of the island.
  - 1. Stephano and Trinculo are afraid of Ariel's music.
  - 2. Caliban consoles his friends with "be not afeard, the isle is full of noises,/ Sounds, and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not."
  - 3. Caliban speaks the poetry of the island in verse.
  - 4. Stephano and Trinculo speak in the prose given to servants.

### **VI. Conclusion:** Caliban is the "natural man" of the island. He is portrayed as a savage who cannot benefit from the civilizing influence of Prospero's education which has only taught him "how to curse." He views Miranda as a natural female to be pursued and overtaken. Though he has been his own king on the island, his powers cannot match Prospero's sophisticated art. He is, however, in tune with the natural rhythms of the island which "give delight and hurt not."