Islands and storms

1. What is a tempest?

2. Why might a tempest be an effective opening to a play? Consider dramatic effect, structure, language, characterisation and symbolism.

3. All of the characters in *The Tempest* find themselves together on an unnamed and otherwise uninhabited island as a consequence of various different projects, punishments and accidents which you will come to learn about. Make a list of all of the books, plays, films and television programmes that you can think of which are also set on islands.

4. Why do you think islands make such an effective setting in film and literature? Consider the ways in which an island setting would influence the structure, characterisation, language and plot of a text.

5. If you were going to be stranded on an uninhabited island for an indefinite period of time, what three items would you most want to take with you?

6. What five things would you most want to have on the island before your arrival (people and electricity are not allowed) and why?

7. Who would you most want to be stranded with on your island and why?

Power, hierarchy and disruption

The Tempest begins with a ship caught up in a sea storm. On the ship are the following characters, listed in no particular order:

The royal court	**The ship's crew**
Trinculo, a jester	Master, the captain
Sebastian, Alonso's brother	Boatswain, ship's officer
Adrian and Francisco, lords	Mariners
Stephano, a drunken butler	
Alonso, King of Naples	
Ferdinand, Alonso's son	
Antonio, Prospero's brother, the usurping Duke of Milan	
Gonzalo, an honest old councillor	

The word **hierarchy** refers to a ranking system according to status or authority. Shakespeare's society was strictly hierarchical and a person's rights and even his or her behaviour and language would be highly regulated according to his or her position in the hierarchy.

1. Re-write the character list above according to what you would imagine to be each character's position in the hierarchy, starting with the most important character at the top.

2. Now, use your list to help you make some predictions about what happens to the characters during the storm.

    - Which character(s) would be most likely to set the agenda?
    - Which character(s) would be most likely to give orders?
    - Which character(s) would be most likely to use insults?
    - Which character(s) would be most likely to speak most
    - Which character(s) would be most likely to speak least?
    - Can you make any other predictions about what happens, and the kind of syntax and vocabulary that will be used during the storm?

3. Your teacher will assign roles so that you can do an initial reading of the first scene of *The Tempest*. When you have done this, look again at the predictions that you made above. How far were they accurate? Any surprises?

4. On your copy of Act 1, Scene 1 use different colours to highlight the following:

    - Orders (imperatives)
    - Insults
    - Threats
    - Curses
    - Repetition

    Which characters use these and under what circumstances?

5. What do your responses to questions 3 and 4 reveal about particular characters (especially Sebastian and Antonio) and their attitudes and behaviour? Does their use of language indicate disruption in the hierarchy?

Thou and you

'Thou' is a more disrespectful or informal word for 'you' (a bit like 'tu' and 'vous' in French or 'du' and 'Sie' in German). Generally speaking, a person in Shakespeare's times would use 'you' when speaking to a social superior.

Have a look at which characters use 'thou' and 'you' and consider how and why this varies according to which characters they are addressing and in what circumstances.

Challenges to authority

Authority and rebellion and order and disorder are important themes in *The Tempest*. You will have seen how the Boatswain threatens the authority of his social superiors on the ship and noticed how Antonio and Sebastian use language which may be considered inappropriate for characters of their status. As you read the play, keep track of all of the challenges to authority you come across.