

STUDY GUIDE

This guide accompanies Peter Davison's adaptation of *The Tempest*, a play by William Shakespeare. In this unusual version of the play, Peter is the story-teller and the "actors" are objects found around the house—mop, pair of old shoes, parasol, toy dagger, ball, bottle . . . to name a few.

By mixing Shakespeare's words, his own narration, and skills in object theatre, dance, and juggling, Peter has created a "do it yourself" theatrical spectacle with modest ingredients.

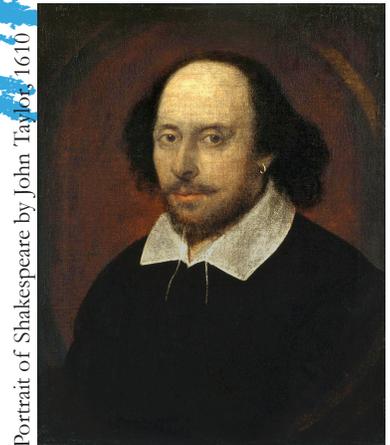
Why Do This?

When Peter was a kid, like others of his age, he enjoyed playing with objects around the house, using his imagination to bring those objects to life in small stories or scenes inspired by some book, movie, or TV show. Now in his 50's, Peter sees no reason to stop playing this way.

Of course inspiration for any creation comes from somewhere. Things called *original* usually mix existing things in a new combination. Peter has long been interested in juggling, dancing, choreography (dance-making), making funny faces and strange voices, and storytelling. When Peter looked for a story to tell that could include all of these interests, he quickly realized Shakespeare's *The Tempest*—a tale of magic and vivid characters—could be just right. The play was Peter's inspiration and guide. And what fun-hard-work it was to put it all together!

About Shakespeare

William Shakespeare (1564 - 1616) was an English actor and writer who became the world's best-known playwright (maker of plays) because he wrote so many popular plays that have stood the test of time. His nickname is The Bard of Avon, or simply The Bard. (A bard is someone who recites poems about heroes. He was born in the town of Stratford-Upon-Avon.) The characters and themes in Shakespeare's



Portrait of Shakespeare by John Taylor 1610

plays are timeless and even today, over four hundred years later, people all over the world can relate to the stories, character types, and emotions in his plays.

Fun Fact

A number of phrases and terms that we use today were coined by Shakespeare:

For goodness sake • *Neither here nor there* • *Knock knock! Who's there*
A wild goose chase • *A heart of gold* • *What the dickens*
Danish into thin air • *Fanny* • *All of a sudden* • *Own flesh and blood*
And many more!

About The Tempest

Shakespeare wrote *The Tempest* around the year 1611. It is thought to be inspired by an actual news item from 1610—a ship bound for north America was blown off course by a storm and the crew became marooned on an uninhabited island in the Bermudas. The crew easily survived on the lush, temperate island for many months until they built a boat and sailed to their original destination.

The Story



In a nutshell

Prospero, Duke of Milan, and his daughter, Miranda, are banished to a remote island by the King of Naples. Prospero is replaced by his scheming brother, Antonio. On the island Prospero finds two servants, the light-hearted spirit Ariel, and the surly, treacherous Caliban. Prospero possesses magic powers. He causes a storm that wrecks a ship carrying the King of Naples, his son Ferdinand, Antonio, and other characters, mostly comic types. The shipwreck victims are separated by the storm, but all find themselves on Prospero's island, all believing the others dead. The characters meet in various funny ways. Ferdinand and Miranda fall in love. The King of Naples restores Prospero's dukedom. Prospero forgives Antonio and releases Ariel and Caliban from servitude. A happy ending for everyone.

The Language

The language spoken by Shakespeare and his audiences is called *Elizabethan English*, in honor of Queen Elizabeth I. This language sounds different, and includes more words, than the English we normally speak today. For example:

thee or thou = you • *thy or thine* = yours • *hast* = has • *bid* = tell
din = loud noise • *beseech* = ask urgently • *wench* = young woman

Shakespeare's plays are a mix of prose (speaking normally) and verse (speaking in rhythm). It's fun to hear the sounds and rhythms of Shakespeare's carefully chosen words.

Fun Fact

Due to antiquated ideas about femininity in England during Shakespeare's time, it was illegal for women to act in professional theater companies. Female characters were portrayed by men. Fortunately, that law was abandoned long ago. Nowadays, any character might be played by an actor of any gender.

About Object Theatre

Object theatre is similar to puppetry, but uses un-altered, found objects instead of specially made puppets. The nature of the objects themselves and the characters they represent determine how the objects move. A large plastic bag can swirl and float through the air, like the spirit Ariel. A worn pair of shoes can appear to walk, and then become the cursing mouth of the earthy beast Caliban. The objects may look like the character they play, or represent the character in some other way. Here are more examples from Peter's version of *The Tempest*:



The mop head resembles long, white hair, like that of an aging Prospero.



The bottle is an object the drunken butler Stephano would often carry. And its shape is chubby, like Stephano.



King Alonso is represented by a chair, which resembles a throne. The chair is also sturdy and upright, like a king should be.

Discuss the play

- Ariel and Caliban are very different, though they are both servants to Prospero. How would you describe their differences?
- Caliban is an angry, mean character. But is he all bad?
- At the end of the play Prospero forgives his enemies. Why do you think he does this?
- Do the objects in the play ever seem excited, sad, angry, or thoughtful even though they are really inanimate? If so, what makes them seem that way?

Learn more!

Your local library is a great place to find more info. Or go online:

More about Shakespeare

<https://www.shakespeare.org.uk/explore-shakespeare/shakespedia/>

More about object theatre and puppetry

<https://thedramateacher.com/object-theatre/>

More about Peter

<https://poetofmotion.com>