Daily Bard

QUOTATION SHEET

The Tempest: key quotes and analysis

The 10 The Tempest quotations worth knowing by heart, each with a plain-English reading, an analysis of its language, space for your notes, and a fill-the-gap test.



How to use this sheet

These are the 10 key quotations from the The Tempest study guide, set out for revision. Part one gives each quotation with a plain-English reading, a short analysis of what the language is doing, and space for your own notes. Part two prints them again with a word missing from each line, so that you can test yourself.

- [ ] Read the quotation aloud twice. Sound helps memory more than staring does.
- [ ] In the note space, name one method (a device, a word choice, a feature of the verse) and the effect it has.
- [ ] Add one link: to a theme, to another moment in the text, or to a point of context.
- [ ] A day later, cover part one and complete part two from memory.

Part one: the quotations

> Me, poor man, my library
> Was dukedom large enough.
>
> PROSPERO · ACT 1, SCENE 2 · 1.2.130-131

Plain English: In my brother's view, my books were all the kingdom I needed.

Prospero voices Antonio's contempt, but the line convicts him too. The metaphor turns a library into a state, showing how fully study had replaced government, and "poor man" betrays self-pity. Use it to argue that Prospero helped to make the usurpation possible, which complicates any reading of him as pure victim.

Your notes:

Links to: _____

> Hell is empty,
> And all the devils are here.
>
> FERDINAND, REPORTED BY ARIEL · ACT 1, SCENE 2 · 1.2.252-253

Plain English: The devils have all left hell and come to this ship.

Ferdinand's cry as he leaps overboard is hyperbole born of terror, and it carries dramatic irony. The devils he sees are Ariel's illusions; the real wrongdoers are men of his own party.

Your notes:

Links to: _____

> This island's mine by Sycorax, my mother,
> Which thou tak'st from me.
>
> CALIBAN · ACT 1, SCENE 2 · 1.2.396-397

Plain English: I inherited this island from my mother, and you have stolen it.

Caliban speaks blank verse and the vocabulary of lawful inheritance. The plain monosyllables "mine" and "tak'st" set possession against theft. Prospero never answers the argument; he replies with insult and accusation. This is the central text for postcolonial readings: the usurped duke is, on the island, a usurper.

Your notes:

Links to: _____

> You taught me language, and my profit on 't
> Is I know how to curse.
>
> CALIBAN · ACT 1, SCENE 2 · 1.2.437-438

Plain English: You taught me to speak, and all I gained is the ability to curse you.

The commercial word "profit" turns the gift of education into a bad bargain, and enjambment delays the bitter conclusion to the second line. Caliban turns his masters' language against them, which undermines their claim that he cannot learn. Link it to nurture and to the colonial belief that teaching language was kindness.

Your notes:

Links to: _____

> Nothing of him that doth fade
> But doth suffer a sea change
> Into something rich and strange.
>
> ARIEL · ACT 1, SCENE 2 · 1.2.477-479

Plain English: Everything in him that would decay is being transformed by the sea into something precious and wonderful.

Ariel's song misleads Ferdinand, since Alonso lives, but it states the play's pattern of loss turned to gain. The short rhymed lines sound unlike the surrounding blank verse and mark the moment as enchantment. "Suffer" means undergo and also endure pain: change here is never painless, as Alonso's repentance shows.

Your notes:

Links to: _____

> Be not afeard. The isle is full of noises,
> Sounds and sweet airs that give delight and hurt not.
>
> CALIBAN · ACT 3, SCENE 2 · 3.2.148-149

Plain English: Do not be frightened. The island is full of sounds and sweet music that please and do no harm.

The "monster" comforts two frightened Europeans in lyrical verse while they speak prose. Each line ends on an extra unstressed syllable (a feminine ending), which softens the rhythm, and the sibilance of "Sounds and sweet airs" imitates what it describes. His wish "to dream again" makes his longing fully human.

Your notes:

Links to: _____

> We are such stuff
> As dreams are made on, and our little life
> Is rounded with a sleep.
>
> PROSPERO · ACT 4, SCENE 1 · 4.1.173-175

Plain English: We are made of the same material as dreams, and our short lives are surrounded, and ended, by sleep.

The phrase is "made on", not "made of". With the masque vanished, Prospero extends the image from a show to the world and to life itself. "Rounded" suggests both encircled and completed. The calm cadence is deceptive, because he is "vexed" and has just remembered danger. A key text for art and illusion.

Your notes:

Links to: _____

> The rarer action is
> In virtue than in vengeance.
>
> PROSPERO · ACT 5, SCENE 1 · 5.1.35-36

Plain English: It is a finer and less common thing to act well than to take revenge.

The alliterative antithesis of "virtue" and "vengeance" compresses the play's moral choice. "Rarer" means nobler and also more unusual, an admission of how seldom people manage it. Because the decision follows Ariel's prompting, it marks a change in Prospero, not a fixed trait: the hinge between revenge plot and romance ending.

Your notes:

Links to: _____

> MIRANDA O, brave new world
> That has such people in 't!
> PROSPERO 'Tis new to thee.
>
> ACT 5, SCENE 1 · 5.1.217-219

Plain English: Miranda: What a splendid new world, with such people in it. Prospero: It is only new to you.

"Brave" means fine or splendid. Miranda's exclamations express unguarded wonder; her father's four dry monosyllables deflate it. The dramatic irony is sharp, since the people she admires include Antonio and Sebastian. Innocence meets experience and neither is declared wrong, which tempers the happy ending with doubt.

Your notes:

Links to: _____

> This thing of darkness I
> Acknowledge mine.
>
> PROSPERO · ACT 5, SCENE 1 · 5.1.330-331

Plain English: This dark creature, I admit, belongs to me.

On the surface Prospero merely identifies his servant. But the line break strands "I" at the end of the verse, so that darkness and the speaker sit together for a moment, and "Acknowledge" can mean confess as well as claim. Readers hear an owner's label, an admission of responsibility, or a recognition of his own darkness.

Your notes:

Links to: _____

Part two: test yourself

Fill each gap from memory, then check against part one. Mark the ones you missed and come back to them tomorrow.

> Me, poor man, my _____
> Was _____ large enough.
>
> PROSPERO · ACT 1, SCENE 2

> Hell is _____,
> And all the _____ are here.
>
> FERDINAND, REPORTED BY ARIEL · ACT 1, SCENE 2

> This _____ mine by Sycorax, my mother,
> Which thou _____ from me.
>
> CALIBAN · ACT 1, SCENE 2

> You taught me _____, and my profit on 't
> Is I know how to _____.
>
> CALIBAN · ACT 1, SCENE 2

> _____ of him that doth fade
> But doth _____ a sea change
> Into _____ rich and strange.
>
> ARIEL · ACT 1, SCENE 2

> Be not _____. The isle is full of noises,
> Sounds and sweet airs that give _____ and hurt not.
>
> CALIBAN · ACT 3, SCENE 2

> We are such _____
> As _____ are made on, and our little life
> Is _____ with a sleep.
>
> PROSPERO · ACT 4, SCENE 1

The rarer _____ is
In virtue than in _____.

PROSPERO · ACT 5, SCENE 1

_____ O, brave new world
That has such _____ in 't!
PROSPERO 'Tis new to thee.

ACT 5, SCENE 1

This thing of _____ I
_____ mine.

PROSPERO · ACT 5, SCENE 1

Next steps

For more quotations, sorted by theme and analysed: **power and colonialism**, **forgiveness**, **magic and illusion**. Turn three of these quotations into full paragraphs with the **essay planner**, and check your method against the **close reading toolkit**. For a small daily dose of the language, **Daily Bard** shows one passage each morning with a plain-English reading on the back of the leaf.



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