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## What happens in the tempest act 1 scene 1

A violent storm rages around a small ship at sea. The master of the ship calls for his boatswain to rouse the mariners to action and prevent the ship from being run aground by the tempest. Chaos ensues. Some mariners enter, followed by a group of nobles comprised of Alonso, King of Naples, Sebastian, his brother, Antonio, Gonzalo, and others. We do not learn these men's names in this scene, nor do we learn (as we finally do in Act II, scene 1) that they have just come from Tunis, in Africa, where Alonso's daughter, Claribel, has been married to the prince. As the Boatswain and his crew take in the topsail and the topmast, Alonso and his party are merely underfoot, and the Boatswain tells them to get below-decks. Gonzalo reminds the Boatswain that one of the passengers is of some importance, but the Boatswain is unmoved. He will do what he has to in order to save the ship, regardless of who is aboard. The lords go belowdecks, and then, adding to the chaos of the scene, three of them—Sebastian, Antonio, and Gonzalo—enter again only four lines later. Sebastian and Antonio curse the Boatswain in his labors, masking their fear with profanity. Some mariners enter wet and crying, and only at this point does the audience learn the identity of the passengers on-board. Gonzalo orders the mariners to pray for the king and the prince. There is a strange noise—perhaps the sound of thunder, splitting wood, or roaring water—and the cry of mariners. Antonio, Sebastian, and Gonzalo, preparing to sink to a watery grave, go in search of the king. Read a translation of Act I, scene 1 → Analysis Even for a Shakespeare play, The Tempest is remarkable for its extraordinary breadth of imaginative vision. The play is steeped in magic and illusion. As a result, the play contains a tremendous amount of spectacle, yet things are often not as they seem. This opening scene certainly contains spectacle, in the form of the howling storm (the “tempest” of the play’s title) tossing the little ship about and threatening to kill the characters before the play has even begun. In terms of stagecraft, it was a significant gamble for Shakespeare to open his play with this spectacular natural event, given that, in the early seventeenth century when the play was written, special effects were largely left to the audience’s imagination. Shakespeare’s stage would have been almost entirely bare, without many physical signs that the actors were supposed to be on a ship, much less a ship in the midst of a lashing storm. As a result, the audience sees Shakespeare calling on all the resources of his theater to establish a certain level of realism. For example, the play begins with a “noise of thunder and lightning” (stage direction). The first word, “Boatswain!” immediately indicates that the scene is the deck of a ship. In addition, characters rush frantically in and out, often with no purpose—as when Sebastian, Antonio, and Gonzalo exit at line 29 and re-enter at 33, indicating the general level of chaos and confusion. Cries from off-stage create the illusion of a space below-decks. Read more about water and drowning as a motif. But in addition to this spectacle, the play also uses its first scene to hint at some of the illusions and deceptions it will contain. Most plays of this era, by Shakespeare and others, use the introductory scene to present the main characters and hint at the general narrative to come—so Othello begins with Iago’s jealousy, and King Lear begins with Lear’s decision to abdicate his throne. But The Tempest begins toward the end of the actual story, late in Prospero’s exile. Its opening scene is devoted to what appears to be an unexplained natural phenomenon, in which characters who are never named rush about frantically in service of no apparent plot. In fact, the confusion of the opening is itself misleading, for as we will learn later, the storm is not a natural phenomenon at all, but a deliberate magical conjuring by Prospero, designed to bring the ship to the island. The tempest is, in fact, central to the plot. Read a plot analysis of The Tempest. But there is more going on in this scene than initially meets the eye. The apparently chaotic exchanges of the characters introduce the important motif of master-servant relationships. The characters on the boat are divided into nobles, such as Antonio and Gonzalo, and servants or professionals, such as the Boatswain. The mortal danger of the storm upsets the usual balance between these two groups, and the Boatswain, attempting to save the ship, comes into direct conflict with the hapless nobles, who, despite their helplessness, are extremely irritated at being rudely spoken to by a commoner. The characters in the scene are never named outright; they are only referred to in terms that indicate their social stations: “Boatswain,” “Master,” “King,” and “Prince.” As the scene progresses, the characters speak less about the storm than about the class conflict underlying their attempts to survive it—a conflict between masters and servants that, as the story progresses, becomes perhaps the major motif of the play. Read more about masters and servants as a motif. Gonzalo, for instance, jokes that the ship is safe because the uppity Boatswain was surely born to be hanged, not drowned in a storm: “I have great comfort from this fellow: methinks he hath no drowning mark upon him; his complexion is perfect gallows” (1.1.25–27). For his part, the Boatswain observes that social hierarchies are flimsy and unimportant in the face of nature’s wrath. “What cares these roarers,” he asks, referring to the booming thunder, “for the name of king?” (1.1.15–16). The irony here, of course, is that, unbeknownst to the occupants of the ship, and to the audience, the storm is not natural at all, but is in fact a product of another kind of power: Prospero’s magic. Read about the tempest as a symbol. The introductory scene of The Tempest’, though short, yet plays a crucial role in the play. It is a sort of exposition, in which some important characters are introduced. It starts with a fierce storm, strong enough to wreck the ship in which some royal personages are travelling. The crew strains to control the ship and the passengers are in a state of panic. The boatswain gives instructions to work hard and also admonishes those who interfere with unnecessary questions. Only Gonzalo keeps a calm demeanour, sometimes even making some sarcastic comments on the boatswain who seems to be arrogant towards the royal travellers. The scene ends with the desperate cries of the mariners shouting, only prayers can save them. The others also cry. “We split, we split” indicating the imminent destruction of the ship. Critical Analysis of The Tempest Act 1 Scene 1 The scene justifies the title of the play, ‘The Tempest’. It gives a dramatic beginning with the howling storm, cries of the passengers and frantic efforts to save the ship. A sense of danger is indicated, which makes the audience sit on the edges of their seats, wondering about the events that are going to follow. Dramatic relief is given by Gonzalo’s witty remarks. The way the boatswain treats the royal entourage makes us smile because to him the priority is to save the ship rather than pleasing the king and his companions. Word-Meanings boatswain: a petty officer on a merchant ship; tempestuous: characterized by violent emotions or behaviour; mar: spoil; hap: take place, happen; blasphemous: grossly irreverent toward what is held to be sacred; impious; uncharitable: unkind, mean; gallows: an instrument from which a person is executed by hanging; glut: swallow; gape: wide open; furlongs: one-eighth of a mile or 220 yards. Tags English Literature Summary The Tempest LitCharts assigns a color and icon to each theme in The Tempest, which you can use to track the themes throughout the work. Magic, Illusion, and Prospero as Playwright The play opens on the deck of a ship that is sailing from the north African city of Carthage to the Italian city of Naples. The stage can be set or divided in many ways. The actors are usually center stage in this section. Others enter from the same wing. A clap of thunder sounds, light flashes, the dialogue begins between the Master of the boat and the Boatswain. The two characters run around trying to secure the rigging of the ship in the storm. Alonso, the King of Naples, steps from the wing to ask what is going on. He is accompanied by his counselor, Gonzalo and Antonio, the reigning Duke of Milan. The royal passengers ask the Boatswain about the status of the storm, and he orders them to get below the deck. Gonzalo warns him to be wary of the stature of the men on board, but the Boatswain is indignant: "BOATSWAIN None that I love more than myself. You are a councillor; if you can command these elements to silence and work the peace of the present, we will not hand a rope more - use your authority. If you cannot, give thanks you have lived so long, and make yourself ready in your cabin for the mischance of the hours, if it so hap" Act 1, Scene 1, lines 20 - 25. Gonzalo exits, remarking that the Boatswain is more fit for dying than drowning, as he continues to order the sailors. He returns with Antonio and Sebastian, Alonso's brother. The Boatswain demands to know why the three men have come back on deck and Sebastian insults him : "A pox o' your throat, you bawling, blasphemous, incharitable dog!" Act 1, Scene 1, line 40 Chaos continues as the storm ravages the deck of the ship. The mariners enter the stage and lament. Antonio asks if they are "merely cheated of our lives by drunkards" Act 1, Scene 1, line 55 and the Boatswain exits. A clamor of shouts and cries is heard from within the boat and the royal passengers exit to die with the king. Gonzalo ends the act, wishing that he would not have to die at sea: "Now would I give a thousand furlongs of sea for an acre of barren ground, -long heath, broomwn, furze, anything. The wills above be done, but I would fain die a dry death" Act 1, Scene 1, lines 65 - 68. The curtains closefall and the stage is reset for the island scene. Topic Tracking: Authority 1



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