

Witchcraft and Magic in *The Tempest* – ANSWER SHEET

During the Elizabethan and Jacobean era, magic, religion and science were seen as equally valid doctrines to explain how the world worked. Elizabethans believed in the power of magic and felt it was very real. Magic was accepted by the educated and elite: King James I wrote a book exploring the topic called *Daemonologie* in 1603, approximately eight years prior to the performance of *The Tempest*.



The purpose of *Daemonologie* was to prove the existence of magic and witchcraft and to assert what punishments should be put into place for those who practised these devilish crafts; for King James I, the only viable punishment was death.

Daemonologie puts the ratio of female to male witches at 20 to 1, and this figure went on to form the basis for the witch hunts that took place in the 16th and 17th centuries within Europe and the American colonies.

King James I explains why there's an abundance of *female witches* in the second book of his text:

'That sexe is frailer then man is, so is it easier to be intrapped in these grosse snares of the Deuill, as was ouer well proued to be true, by the Serpents deceiuing of Eua at the beginning, which makes him the homelier with that sexe sensine.'

1. In your own words, explain why King James I thinks there are more female witches than male? Do you agree with his belief?

- Women were seen as the weaker sex, thus easily entrapped by the devil's machinations.

- This can be seen from the story of the Garden of Eden in the Bible when Eve was deceived by the snake, and broke God's commandment not to eat from the tree of knowledge.

2. Which supernatural being allows witches to have their magical powers? What would Christians have felt about witches?

- The devil gives witches their magical powers.

- Christians would have felt that witches were abominable and worshippers of the devil. They would have felt witchcraft was an evil act, leading to eternal damnation.



3. In *Daemonologie*, King James writes that witches can "rayse stormes and tempestes in the aire, either vpon Sea or land".

What skills does King James think witches have? Who has these skills in *The Tempest*?

- **Witches can raise storms and tempests.**
- **Prospero has this skill in *The Tempest*.**

4. Look at the descriptions below, decide which character they relate to: Sycorax, Prospero or both.

	Sycorax/ Propsero/ Both
Uses toads, beetles and bats to perform magic	Sycorax
Exiled from Milan to the island	Prospero
Died on the island	Sycorax
Can control the moon and tides	Sycorax
Banished from Algiers to the island	Sycorax
Use books to perform magic	Prospero
Raises a tempest	Prospero
Enslaves people with their magic	Both
Returns to their homeland of Milan	Prospero
Imprisons Ariel in a pine tree	Sycorax
Charms Miranda to sleep	Prospero
Gives up their magic	Prospero
Releases those enslaved by magic and gives them their freedom	Prospero

5. a) How is the magic performed by Sycorax and Prospero similar and different?
b) Why do you think Sycorax is seen as a 'bad witch' and Prospero as a 'good magician'?
Think about their actions.

- **Both enslave others to get their deeds completed. However, Prospero also uses magic to right a wrong and then gives it up. Sycorax uses magic throughout her life until her death, thus, not renouncing this 'devilish' act.**



6. Prospero is described as a 'magician' whereas Sycorax is described as a 'witch'.
- Do these descriptions have the same connotations?
 - Which one is seen in a more positive light?
 - How might this fit with the themes/characterisations Shakespeare is exploring/developing?

a/b) A magician has more positive associations than a witch. The word 'witch' has connotations of evil, devilish powers and would rarely be seen in a positive light. However, magicians can be categorised as good or evil depending on how they use their sorcery.

c) The connotations of these words, 'witch' and 'magician', parallel the characterisations of the two main sorcerers. Sycorax is seen as evil for using magic and is never offered redemption, whereas, whilst Prospero uses the same tools to achieve vengeance, he is offered redemption at the end of the play when he forgives his brother and renounces the use of magic.

7. Why do you think Prospero gives up his magic at the end?
- Think about King James I's view of magic.

A good Christian would not practise magic and would give it up if he had the abilities. The fact that Prospero gives up magic endorses King James I's view that one should not practise it, it was irreligious and dangerous to society.

Extension Activities:

- The Tempest* was Shakespeare's last play. How could Prospero's magic be compared to that of a playwright? How would that change your view of the ending (Prospero denouncing magic) and its message?
- Research the trial of the Pendle witches in 1612. Do you think they were committing witchcraft? What fate did they face?