

Twos and threes

The Tempest only has a small cast of main characters, and most of these are matched in pairs. Antonio with Sebastian, for example, or Miranda with Ferdinand.

Although there are many such pairings in the play, the characters can also be formed in groups of three – Antonio and Sebastian being linked with Alonso to make one group of three ‘desperate’ men.

In the same way Caliban, who could be paired with Ariel as a servant of Prospero’s, is linked into a group of three on stage with Stephano and Trinculo (another pair).

Prospero could be paired with Alonso though he is most often linked in a group of three on stage with Miranda and Ferdinand. Sometimes, however, he is linked into other groups of three with either Miranda and Caliban or Miranda and Ariel.

This arrangement into pairs and groups of three gives *The Tempest* a formal, patterned quality, in some ways like a masque. As it is, the masque in Act 4 Scene 1 is performed by one group of three, watched by another group of three and broken up when Prospero remembers the plotting of a third group of three.



Talking points:

How many scenes (or parts of scenes) are there in which only three actors appear on stage? How many scenes (or parts of scenes) are there in which only two or four actors appear on stage? What is Miranda doing while Prospero talks with Ariel in Act 1 Scene 2?

Antonio and Sebastian always appear on stage as a pair. Who is a pair for Alonso on stage?



In performance:

Bring out the masque-like qualities of *The Tempest* by creating a dance in which characters begin in pairs, combine into groups of three, merge into the whole and separate back out into pairs.

If you can, link these movements to the rising and falling of the sea – so that the separation into pairs at the dance’s end becomes the ‘calm seas’ Prospero promises at the ending of Act 5.

