



Prospero's monologue

Be cheerful, sir.

Our revels now are ended. These our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits and
Are melted into air, into thin air;
And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.

Ask pupils to work in groups and investigate the question 'What is Prospero / Shakespeare saying in these lines?'

Contextualise this by explaining that it comes at the end of the masque celebration of Miranda and Ferdinand's marriage. Prospero is effectively telling Ferdinand that the play he has just seen has been an illusion created by him and Ariel. However, there is more to it than this.

What else can pupils discover? They might suggest (with varying degrees of support):

- It comes near the end of the play, when Prospero is contemplating bringing his enemies to justice, but ultimately forgiving them. The insubstantiality and insignificance of the anger and feelings of revenge that Prospero has been feeling, gives way to a desire for resolution, restitution, and forgiveness.
- It comes at a point where Prospero is contemplating leaving the island and his magic behind - are these the words of a man saying goodbye to the home he has lived in for the last twelve years, and the companions he has had there?

- It comes at a point where Prospero is contemplating giving up his daughter to her marriage - is there a sense of sadness that life is transitory, and that different stages of life (including having a child with you) is transitory too.
- It is also close to the end of Shakespeare's own career as a playwright and theatre-maker. Some say that this is Shakespeare's own farewell to the theatre. Does this sound right to your pupils?