1. The "unnatural" behavior of the brothers Antonio and Sebastian is mirrored by the comic subplot of the drunken butler Stephano, the jester Trinculo (whose name also implies drinking), and Caliban (more on him below), who enlists their aid to help him kill Prospero.  Here the themes of treachery, plotting, and fitness to rule are treated on a burlesque mode.  However, these characters also serve as foils to the protagonists.  Note ways in which the comical subplot mirrors darker, more serious events in the play as a whole.  Do they get what they deserve?  Is Caliban's punishment at the end of the play fitting?
2. Caliban is native to the island and claims to be its rightful ruler.  He welcomed the shipwrecked  Prospero and the infant Miranda to his island, found them food and drinking water, taught them to survive.  He is sensitive to the beauty of Ariel's songs, and his own speeches can be surprisingly poetic.  Note the passages in which this side of Caliban is expressed.  Yet he is also presented as a monster, a "thing of darkness," the offspring of the witch Sycorax and the Devil.  He is said to be "ungrateful" to Prospero and Miranda, who have done "everything" for him -- after all, they brought him civilization and language -- and he responded by trying to rape Miranda!  From Prospero's perspective (as well as Miranda's), this barbaric ingratitude is sufficient justification for enslaving Caliban, causing him to be tormented by invisible spirits which pinch him to keep him in line (note passages which express their point of view).  But from Caliban's perspective, Prospero is the ungrateful one, and a tyrant to boot.  It was Caliban's island before Prospero arrived there; it was Caliban who did "everything" for the newcomers -- after all, without him, they would have perished.  What then could be more "natural" than the union of Caliban, the island's only eligible bachelor, with Miranda, the only human female?  (Who else is she supposed to marry -- her own father??)  Consider the relative merits of these two positions and perspectives and pay attention to the passages in which they are expressed.
3. Shakespeare seems to have shied away from painting a picture in "black and white" -- both Caliban and Prospero are richly ambiguous figures.  Caliban is at least half human -- and Shakespeare takes care to remind us of it, imbuing him at times with a surprising nobility.  Prospero on the other hand cannot be considered an entirely blameless monarch.  He is the rightful duke of Milan, but was he a good and responsible ruler?  What did he care about most?  (What are the only things he took with him to the island of his exile?)  Did Antonio have some justification in usurping the throne?  On the island, Prospero governs with absolute authority -- a strength he did not show as duke of Milan.  Is that why he regains his throne?  (Having learned to govern "correctly," does he now "deserve" to be duke?)  What is the **source of his power** upon the island?  Is there a relationship between that power and his weakness in Milan?  Why must he abjure his magic and "drown his book" (V.i.57) before returning to Milan?  Could Prospero also be acknowledging his *own* dark side when he says (of Caliban), "this thing of darkness I/ acknowledge *mine*" (V.i. 275-276)?  Both the "monster" [Caliban](http://cla.calpoly.edu/~dschwart/engl339/tempest.html#caliban) *and* the "good" [Ariel](http://cla.calpoly.edu/~dschwart/engl339/tempest.html#ariel) serve the "tyrant" Prospero unwillingly and chafe against his rule, and Prospero calls them both his "slave" (see I.ii.270, 344, 351, 374).
4. What is the play's attitude towards uncontrolled sexual desire on the one hand and unregulated political ambition on the other? Key scenes include: the story of Caliban's attempted rape of Miranda (I.ii.347-50); Gonzalo's imaginary commonwealth (II.i.146-70); and the betrothal masque (IV.i). In each, what is the relation between law, erotic desire, and political ambition? How might Freud have used The Tempest as an example of "civilization and its discontents"?

1. Prospero presents himself as the civilized discoverer of a desert island, with Caliban and Ariel as its not-quite-human inhabitants. How does Caliban's history of the island differ from Prospero's? Whom do you think Shakespeare agrees with, Prospero or Caliban? Whom do you agree with, Prospero or Caliban? Give textual evidence in working out your answers.

2. How does the island function as a laboratory for testing human nature? For Prospero? For Shakespeare?

3. How does Trinculo and Stephano's discovery of Caliban resemble aspects of Prospero and Miranda's first encounters with him? What do these scenes of discovery reveal about the political, religious, or social attitudes of each character?

4. What are the goals of the conspiracy staged by Trinculo, Stephano, and Caliban (II.ii, III.ii)? What does each party want to get out of it? Do you ever feel that they are likely to succeed? How (if at all) does the playwright let us know whose side he's on?

6. What do you think happens on the island once the Italians leave? What kind of community, society, or form of life can you imagine Ariel and Caliban forming either together or alone?