

## Elements of Drama - Study Guide

**1. Plot** - the sequence of events or incidents of which the story is composed.

**A. Conflict** is a clash of actions, ideas, desires, or wills.

**1.** Person against person.

**2.** Person against environment - external force, physical nature, society, or "fate".

**3.** Person against herself/himself - conflict with some element in her/his own nature; may be physical, mental, emotional, or moral.

**B. Protagonist and Antagonist** - the protagonist is the central character, sympathetic or unsympathetic. The forces working against her/him, whether persons, things, conventions of society, or traits of their own character, are the antagonists.

**C. Artistic Unity** - essential to a good plot; nothing irrelevant; good arrangement.

**D. Plot Manipulation** - a good plot should not have any unjustified or unexpected turns or twists; no false leads; no deliberate and misleading information.

**2. Character**

**A. Direct Presentation** - author tells us straight out, by exposition or analysis, or through another character.

**B. Indirect Presentation** - author shows us the character in action; the reader infers what a character is like from what she/he thinks, or says, or does. These are also called dramatized characters and they are generally consistent (in behavior), motivated (convincing), and plausible (lifelike).

**C. Character Types** –

**Flat character** is known by one or two traits;

**Round character** is complex and many-sided;

**Stock character** is a stereotyped character (a mad scientist, the absent-minded professor, the cruel mother-in-law);

**Static character** remains the same from the beginning of the plot to the end; and **Dynamic (developing) character** undergoes permanent change. This change must be

a. within the possibilities of the character;

b. sufficiently motivated; and

c. allowed sufficient time for change.

**3. Theme** - the controlling idea or central insight. It can be: a revelation of human character; may be stated briefly or at great length; a theme is not the "moral" of the story.

**A.** A theme must be expressible in the form of a statement - not "motherhood" but "Motherhood sometimes has more frustration than reward."

**B.** A theme must be stated as a generalization about life; names of characters or specific situations in the plot are not to be used when stating a theme.

**C.** A theme must not be a generalization larger than is justified by the terms of the story.

**D.** A theme is the central and unifying concept of the story. It must adhere to the following requirements: **1.** It must account for all the major details of the story. **2.** It must not be contradicted by any detail of the story. **3.** It must not rely on supposed facts - facts not actually stated or clearly implied by the story.

**E.** There is no one-way of stating the theme of a story.

**F.** Any statement that reduces a theme to some familiar saying, aphorism, or cliché should be avoided. Do not use "A stitch in time saves nine", "You can't judge a book by its cover," "Fish and guests smell in three days", and so on.

#### 4. Points Of View

**A. Omniscient** - a story told by the author, using the third person; her/his knowledge, control, and prerogatives are unlimited; authorial subjectivity.

**B. Limited Omniscient** - a story in which the author associates with a major or minor

character; this character serves as the author's spokesperson or mouthpiece.

**C. First Person** - the author identifies with or disappears in a major or minor character; the story is told using the first person "I".

**D. Objective or Dramatic** - the opposite of the omniscient; displays authorial objectivity; compared a roving sound camera. Very little of the past or the future is given; the story is set in the present.

**5. Symbol** - a literary symbol means more than what it is. It has layers of meanings. Whereas an image has one meaning, a symbol has many.

**A.** Names used as symbols.

**B.** Use of objects as symbols.

**C.** Use of actions as symbols.

**Note:** The ability to recognize and interpret symbols requires experience in literary readings, perception, and tact. It is easy to "run wild" with symbols - to find symbols everywhere. The ability to interpret symbols is essential to the full understanding and enjoyment of literature. Given below are helpful suggestions for identifying literary symbols:

1. The story itself must furnish a clue that a detail is to be taken symbolically – symbols nearly always signal their existence by emphasis, repetition, or position.
2. The meaning of a literary symbol must be established and supported by the entire context of the story. A symbol has its meaning inside not outside a story.
3. To be called a symbol, an item must suggest a meaning different in kind from its literal meaning.
4. A symbol has a cluster of meanings.

**6. Irony** - a term with a range of meanings, all of them involving some sort of discrepancy or incongruity. It should not be confused with sarcasm which is simply language designed to cause pain. Irony is used to suggest the difference between appearance and reality, between expectation and fulfillment, the complexity of experience, to furnish indirectly an evaluation of the author's material, and at the same time to achieve compression.

**A. Verbal irony** - the opposite is said from what is intended.

**B. Dramatic irony** - the contrast between what a character says and what the reader knows to be true.

**C. Irony of situation** - discrepancy between appearance and reality, or between expectation and fulfillment, or between what is and what would seem appropriate.

**Drama** - Drama has one characteristic peculiar to itself - it is written primarily to be **performed**, not read. It is a presentation of action

**a.** through **actors** (the impact is direct and immediate),

**b.** on a **stage** (a captive audience), and

**c.** before an **audience** (suggesting a communal experience). Of the four major points of view, the dramatist is limited to only one - the objective or dramatic.

The playwright cannot directly comment on the action or the character and cannot directly enter the minds of characters and tell us what is going on there.

But there are ways to get around this limitation through the use of

1. **Soliloquy** (a character speaking directly to the audience),
2. **Chorus** (a group on stage commenting on characters and actions), and
3. **One character** commenting on another.

**Tragedy - Aristotle's definition of tragedy:** A tragedy is the imitation in dramatic form of an action that is serious and complete, with incidents arousing pity and fear wherewith it effects a catharsis of such emotions. The language used is pleasurable and throughout appropriate to the situation in which it is used. The chief characters are noble personages ("better than ourselves," says Aristotle) and the actions they perform are noble actions.

Central features of the Aristotelian archetype:

1. The tragic hero is a character of noble stature and has greatness. If the hero's fall is to arouse in us the emotions of pity and fear, it must be a fall from a great height.
2. Though the tragic hero is pre-eminently great, he/she is not perfect. **Tragic flaw**, hubris (excessive pride or passion), and hamartia (some error) lead to the hero's downfall.
3. The hero's downfall, therefore, is partially her/his own fault, the result of one's own free choice, not the result of pure accident or villainy, or some overriding malignant fate.
4. Nevertheless, the hero's misfortune is not wholly deserved. The punishment exceeds the crime. The hero remains admirable.
5. Yet the **tragic fall** is not pure loss - though it may result in the hero's death, before it, there is some increase in awareness, some gain in self-knowledge or, as Aristotle puts it, some "discovery."
6. Though it arouses solemn emotion - pity and fear, says Aristotle, but compassion and awe might be better terms - tragedy, when well performed, does not leave its audience in a state of depression. It produces a **catharsis** or an emotional release at the end, one shared as a common experience by the audience.

**Comedy** - Northrop Frye has said, lies between satire and romance. Is the comic mask laughing or smiling? We usually laugh at someone, but smile with someone. Laughter expresses recognition of some absurdity in human behavior; smile expresses pleasure in one's company or good fortune. The essential difference between tragedy and comedy is in the depiction of human nature: tragedy shows greatness in human nature and human freedom whereas comedy shows human weakness and human limitation. The norms of comedy are primarily social; the protagonist is always in a group or emphasizes commonness. A tragic hero possesses overpowering individuality - so that the play is often named after her/him (*Antigone*, *Othello*); the comic protagonist tends to be a type and the play is often named for the type (*The Misanthrope*, *The Alchemist*, *The Brute*). Comic plots do not exhibit the high degree of organic unity as tragic plots do. Plausibility is not usually the central characteristic (cause-effect progression) but coincidences, improbable disguises; mistaken identities make up the plot. The purpose of comedy is to make us laugh and at the same time, help to illuminate human nature and human weaknesses. Conventionally comedies have a happy ending. Accidental discovery, act of divine intervention (*deus ex machina*), sudden reform is common comedic devices. "Comedy is the thinking person's response to experience; tragedy records the reactions of the person with feeling." - Charles B. Hands

**Melodrama** - arouses pity and fear through cruder means. Good and evil are clearly depicted in white and black motifs. Plot is emphasized over character development.

**Farce** - aimed at arousing explosive laughter using crude means. Conflicts are violent, practical jokes are common, and the wit is coarse. Psychologically farce may boost the reader's

spirit and purge hostility and aggression.

**Playwright:** Author of a play

**Actors:** People who perform a play

**Cast:** Sets of actors that perform a play

**Script:** Text of a play, with dialogue and directions for actors

**Acts:** Units of action in a drama. Acts are divided up into scenes

**Scenes:** Small parts of an act. Most of the time they each have a different setting

**Characterization:** Playwright’s technique for creating believable characters

**Dramatic Speech:** Advances the stories action. Most important. Two types:

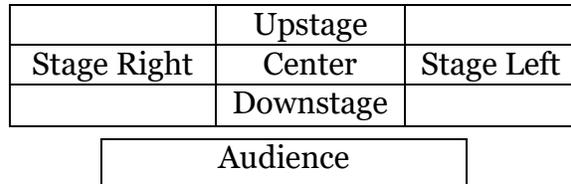
Dialogue and Monologue:

**Dialogue:** Conversation between or among characters

**Monologue:** Long speech that is spoken by a single character. Often reveals a character’s private thoughts

**Stage Directions:** The playwright’s instructions about how the actors are to move and behave. Sets of bracketed information that describe the scenery and how the characters should move and speak. Some playwrights use abbreviations

- **Center Stage** – C
- **Stage Left** – L
- **Stage Right** – R
- **Upstage or rear of stage** – U
- **Downstage – front of stage**



**Set:** Construction on the stage that suggests the time and place of the action. Scenery is another word for it

**Props:** Small movable items that the actors use to make their actions look realistic

**Types of Drama: 3 Types**

- Comedy
- Tragedy
- Drama

**Comedy:** Form of drama that often features everyday characters in funny situations

**Tragedy:** Events lead to the downfall of the main characters. Character can be an average person, but is often a person of great significance

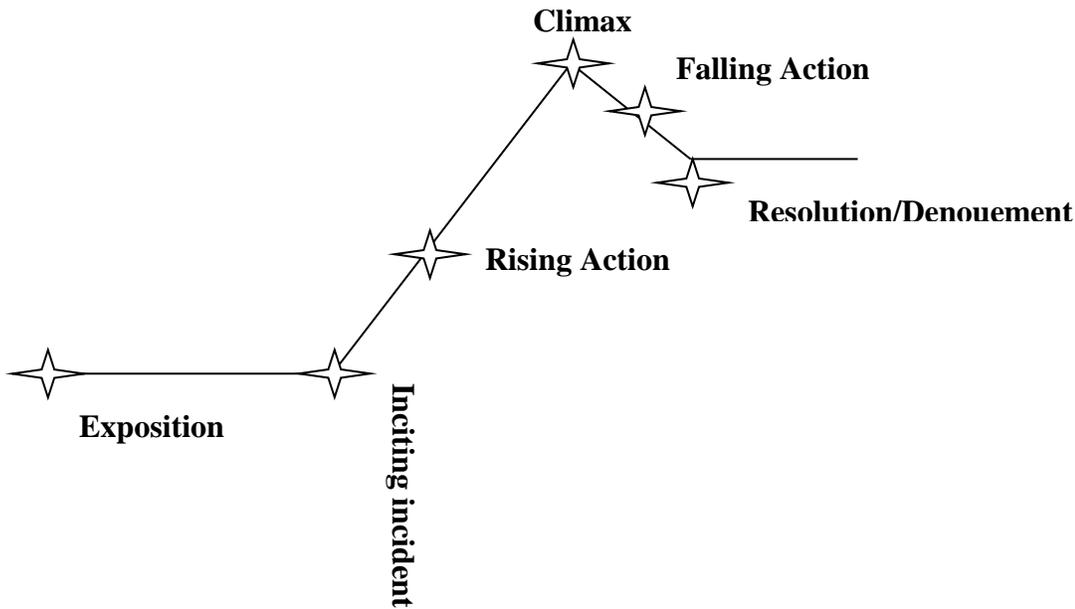
**Drama:** A word that is often used to describe plays that address serious subjects

**Screenplays:** Scripts for films. Includes camera angles and can allow for more scene changes than a play

**Teleplay:** Scripts written for television. Similar to screenplays

**Radio Plays:** Written to be performed as radio broadcasts. Include sound effects and require no set, stage or directions that explain movement.

**Plot Diagram – Drama**



**Plot:** The author’s arrangement of incidents in the play.

**Exposition:** Introduces the characters and setting. It may also give hints, or foreshadows, the main conflict or problem in the story A narrative device, often used at the beginning of a work, that provides necessary background information about the characters and their circumstances.

**Rising Action:** Builds suspense and shows how the conflict becomes complicated

**Climax:** The most emotional or suspenseful moment, usually when the main character makes a decision or action that affects the outcome of the story.

**Falling Action:** Reveals the outcome of the story's climax, the consequences

**Resolution/ Denouement:** Finishes the story by tying up loose ends and may give a moral. Denouement is a French term meaning “unraveling” or “unknotting,” used to describe the resolution of the plot following the climax.

**Theme:** The central idea or meaning of the play. “What the play means as opposed to what happens (the plot). Sometimes the theme is clearly stated in the title. It may be stated through dialogue by a character acting as the playwright’s voice. Or it may be the theme is less obvious and emerges only after some study or thought.

## Analyzing the Play

Here are some general questions you can ask about drama, classified under the various elements of drama.

### Plot:

- What is the overall importance of the plot or pattern of action? Does the play arouse suspense? Is the plot intricate, perhaps including a subplot as well as the main plot? How is the subplot related to the main plot?
- Does the plot of the play cover a broad span or a narrow segment of time? Why has the playwright chosen to depict these particular events, and not others that occur before and after? What significant events occur before and after the action of the play, and how are they conveyed or suggested to the audience?
- What main conflicts are depicted in the play? Are they primarily conflicts between characters, within characters, or between characters and other non-human forces? Do you see parallels or contrasts between the various conflicts? Are the conflicts resolved?

### Characterization:

- What is the overall importance of characterization in the play? Are the characters complex, and do they absorb your main interest as you watch or read the play?
- How are the characters revealed—by what they say, what they do not say, what others say about them, what they do or choose not to do? Do the stage directions throw any light on the characters?
- Do the characters resemble or contrast with each other; is one character a “foil” to another because they have obvious similarities but significant differences?
- What motivates the characters? What are their goals?
- How far does a particular character change or develop, and why?
- Does the character adopt a mask, or appear to be other than he or she really is? <sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub> Does the character reach a significant recognition or insight?

### Structure:

- Does the play have formal structural divisions (acts or scenes)? If so, how are they related to each other? If not, where do the main divisions or breaks in the action fall?
- If the playwright has departed from chronological order in structuring the play (using the technique of flashback, for example), why has she/he done so?
- Can the play be analyzed in terms of the traditional sequence of exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution? Does the play have one climax, or more than one?

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### Setting:

- How essential is the setting to the play? Is the world of the play limited to a particular place or time, or to a particular social class (the leisured upper class in eighteenth-century London, for example)? Could a director choose to set the play in a different place or time, as directors of Shakespeare plays often do?
- What do you learn about the setting from the characters' language, dress, and behaviour?
- Do the stage directions specify a set design? If so, is it realistic or symbolic?
- What is the characters' relationship with the setting? Do they feel influenced by it, or trapped by it?
- How does the setting of the play contribute to its atmosphere?

### Theme:

- What images recur in the play and what associations are built up around them?
- Does the play include discussions or debate about ideas?
- Do the specific characters and action appear to represent more general, perhaps universal characters, forces or qualities?
- How does the atmosphere of the play convey the playwright's view of life?