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**Drama**

A drama, or a play, is a piece of writing that is presented almost exclusively through a dialogue. Like a short story or novel, it has a setting, characters, plot, and even symbolism. However, the way in which they are presented to the audience is different, because unlike a short story or novel, the play is meant to be performed in front of an audience.

Plays are not written in paragraphs like a novel or short story. Instead, they are written as lines of dialogue in the form of a script. The actors are told exactly what to say for the dialogue. Typically, these scripts are broken down into one or more acts, or major divisions of the play. And each act is then subdivided into a scene, or smaller divisions within the act. The two iconic masks of drama—the laughing face and the crying face—are the symbols of two of the ancient Greek Muses: Thalia, the Muse of comedy and Melpomene, the Muse of tragedy.



**1) Elements of Drama**

**1. Script:**

The text of a play. It includes stage directions, characters, dialogue and scenes.

**2. Stage Directions:**

a direction by the playwright to the actors in the script. It indicates how the actor should speak and/or move during a particular line or scene. It also provides

descriptions of what the stage should look like in terms of furniture, weather, lighting, music, etc.

### **3. Setting:**

It refers to the time and place in which a story takes place.

### **4. Scene:**

A scene can refer to the actual action that takes place in a specific and single setting and moment in time. It usually begins with the entrance of an actor (which starts the action) and ends with the exit of the actor (the signal of the end of action). Scene headings are expressed in capitalized letters in the script and has an ordinal numeral as a companion (unlike Act that is followed by Roman numeral).

**NB:** The scene displays the setting in terms of time and place of the action.

### **5. Plot:**

This is what happens in the play. Plot refers to the action; the basic storyline of the play.



- Exposition = Gives audience information about earlier events + the present situation + the characters.
- Rising Events = Question of potential conflict + complication + discoveries + decisions = Change the course of action.
- Climax = Crisis = Turning point. Concealed information is partly revealed and answers the dramatic question.

- Falling events = possible solutions + Release of tension.
- Denouement = Disengage = Resolution = Final part of the play to satisfy the expectations of the audience.

## **6. Theme:**

While plot refers to the action of the play, theme refers to the meaning of the play. Theme is the main idea or lesson to be learned from the play. In some cases, the theme of a play is obvious; other times it is quite subtle.

## **7. Cast of Characters:**

Characters are the people (sometimes animals or ideas) portrayed by the actors in the play. It is the characters who move the action, or plot, of the play forward. The list of characters is provided at the beginning of the play's script so the audience knows who is who before the action begins.

## **8. Dialogue:**

This refers to the words written by the playwright and spoken by the characters in the play. The dialogue helps move the action of the play along.

## **2) History of Drama:**

- a. **Pagan** Drama: From its beginnings, drama and religion have been connected. Some critics argue that drama dates back to old religious rituals and festival celebrations where stories of battles and hunting trips were retold and acted.
- b. The Ancient **Greeks** took their entertainment very seriously and used drama as a way of investigating the world they lived in, and what it meant

to be human. The three genres of drama were comedy, satyr plays, and most important of all, tragedy.

**Comedy:** The first comedies were mainly satirical and mocked men in power for their vanity and foolishness. The first master of comedy was the playwright Aristophanes. Much later Menander wrote comedies about ordinary people and made his plays more like sit-coms.

**Tragedy:** Tragedy dealt with the big themes of love, loss, pride, the abuse of power and the fraught relationships between men and gods. Typically the main protagonist of a tragedy commits some terrible crime without realizing how foolish and arrogant he has been. Then, as he slowly realizes his error, the world crumbles around him. The three great playwrights of tragedy were Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides. Aristotle argued that tragedy cleansed the heart through pity and terror, purging us of our petty concerns and worries by making us aware that there can be nobility in suffering. He called this experience 'catharsis'.

**Satyr Plays:** These short plays were performed between the acts of tragedies and made fun of the plight of the tragedy's characters. The satyrs were mythical half-human, half-goat figures and actors in these plays wore large phalluses for comic effect. Few examples of these plays survive. They are classified by some authors as tragicomic, or comedy dramas.

With the coming of the Roman Civilization, it came the Roman Catholic Church . we found that it made it the point that theatre must be banned because according of them, theatre deviate people from worshipping God.

- c. **Medieval Drama:** In England, drama was introduced with the arrival of the Normans. Mummer plays which were used to retell old folk tales such as St. George and the Dragon and Robin Hood were common in the form of street plays moving between towns. This form of plays was performed in return of money. During the 13th century, the church started using drama for didactic purposes resulting in two new forms of theatre:
  - **Mystery Drama:** First appeared in the 13th century and was performed by priests and clergymen. Mystery plays were used to deliver biblical stories to illiterate people. These plays were performed at the steps of churches and then moved to small stages called pageant.

- **Morality Drama:** At the end of the 14th century, this new type of drama evolved. Morality drama is an allegorical play where actors impersonate characters like Hope, Truth, Death, Falsehood, etc. in order to teach the audience lessons in life. Everyman is an example of a morality during the 15th century (c. 1490).

d. **Renaissance Drama:** In this period, drama became a source of entertainment to both royals and commoners instead of being limited to religious purposes. As the Tudors aspired to catch-up with the rest of Europe, culture and arts were considered important. It was during the reign of Elizabeth I that the greatest dramatists appeared, like William Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe, and Ben Jonson. Themes like inner struggles (struggles inside the character's mind), man's consciousness, and individuality were commonly discussed during this period, especially through the developing use of monologues and asides that help in accessing the characters' thoughts and feelings. Moreover, during the Renaissance period, the first English comedy play, *Ralph Roister Doister* by Nicholas Udall (1552-1553), and the first tragedy, *Gorboduc* by Thomas Norton in 1561, were performed.

e. **Jacobean Drama** was a dark form drama in English literature. It was a period of James I (1603- 1625), was also known as Jacobean Theatre. Although Shakespeare was still writing major works until around 1611, the leading dramatist of this Jacobean period was Ben Jonson. The comic dramas of the Elizabethan theatre give way to harsh satire, led by Ben Jonson: the Elizabethan tragic dramas give way to an obsession with moral corruption and violent stories of revenge. In both forms the dramas of the time show a cynical and pessimistic outlook on life. (War of Theatre)

Theatre was banned again in the Puritan period. (a religious movement in England)/(1642-1660)

f. **Restoration Drama:** After the Puritan movement (a religious movement in England) and its closing down of theatres, King Charles II encouraged the re-opening of theatres which resulted in the flourishing of the dramatic field

during this period. The reopening of theatres provided a new space for dramatists to delve into, especially for women who joined dramas as actresses for the first time. While Restoration drama is known for its comical and satirical themes, it also reflects on complicated and tragic stories because of the political and religious conflicts taking place during that period. Works of playwrights, such as John Dryden for instance, try to address the conflict between actions and emotions through narrating stories of soldiers and their deadly battles. Restoration Drama is considered as inferior form of drama.

- g. 20th Century Drama: While in the 18th and 19th centuries dramatists reproduced and retold Shakespearean dramas and Restoration plays and focused on musicals, 20th century drama addressed technological advancement, wars, and questions on humanity. Nevertheless, the largest focus is the daily life problems, whether social or political. George Bernard Shaw, Samuel Beckett, and Harold Pinter are among the main British playwrights who used realism in their works.
- h. Theatre of the Absurd, dramatic works of certain European and American dramatists of the 1950s and early '60s who agreed with the Existentialist philosopher Albert Camus's assessment, in his essay "The Myth of Sisyphus" (1942), that the human situation is essentially absurd, devoid of purpose. Absurdist playwrights, therefore, did away with most of the logical structures of traditional theatre. There is little dramatic action as conventionally understood; however frantically the characters perform, their busyness serves to underscore the fact that nothing happens to change their existence.

### **3) Types of Drama:**

#### **a. Tragedy**

One of the oldest forms of drama, which started in Greek theatre during the 6th and 5th century B.C. Aristotle, in *Poetics* (c. 335 B.C.), identifies tragedy as a representation of serious and complete actions that create a sense of pity, sympathy, and horror in the audience.

Throughout history, the meaning of tragedy drama kept changing. In Greek culture, it used to refer to historical dramas that narrate the downfall of a great man. However, in modern drama, tragedy is used to refer to stories that does not have a happy ending. As Aristotle's definition, tragedy drama deals with themes related to death, revenge, betrayal, and so on. In this type of drama, the tragic hero is a character with an inner weakness that allows outside forces to easily control them.

E.g. Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

#### **b. Comedy**

Any play that causes laughter among the audience is a comedy drama. Often, comedy drama deviates from the ordinary use of actions, characters, and speeches to create a humours impact. In modern theatres, comedy drama addresses real life situations and problems from an ironic perspective. Unlike the tragic hero, the comic hero is simple, innocent, and with less complicated background.

E.g. Shakespeare's *As You Like It* and *Midsummer Night's Dream*.

#### **c. Tragicomedy**

As the name shows, this drama is a combination of the two main types: tragedy and comedy. Characters in this type of plays are exaggerated, there could be a happy ending after a fatal serious event. Furthermore, jokes in this type of drama are relied on to lighten the seriousness of the tone. The tragi-comedy drama is used to deliver a realistic image of life where both tragedy and comedy coexist.

E.g. *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett.