

Dramatic Devices to Know

Act: A major division in a play. An act can be sub-divided into scenes. (See scene). Greek plays were not divided into acts. The five act structure was originally introduced in Roman times and became the convention in Shakespeare's period. In the 19th century this was reduced to four acts and 20th century drama tends to favor three acts.

Antagonist: A character or force against which another character struggles

Aside: Words spoken by an actor directly to the audience, but not "heard" by the other characters on stage during a play. Example: In Shakespeare's Othello, Iago voices his inner thoughts a number of times as "asides" for the audience. **Blocking:** Movement patterns of actors on the stage. Planned by the director to create meaningful stage pictures

Catharsis: The purging of the feelings of pity and fear. According to Aristotle the audience should experience catharsis at the end of a tragedy.

Climax: The turning point of the action in the plot of a play and the point of greatest tension in the work.

Comic Relief: Comic relief does not relate to the genre of comedy. Comic relief serves a specific purpose: it gives the spectator a moment of "relief" with a light-hearted scene, after a succession of intensely tragic dramatic moments. Typically these scenes parallel the tragic action that they interrupt. Comic relief is lacking in Greek tragedy, but occurs regularly in Shakespeare's tragedies. Example: The opening scene of Act V of Hamlet, in which a gravedigger banters with Hamlet.

Diction: According to the Cambridge Dictionary, diction is "the manner in which words are pronounced." Diction, however, is more than that: it is a style of speaking. In drama diction can (1) reveal character, (2) imply attitudes, (3) convey action, (4) identify themes, and (5) suggest values. We can speak of the diction particular to a character.

Dramatic Irony: A device in which a character holds a position or has an expectation reversed or fulfilled in a way that the character did not expect but that the audience or readers have anticipated because their knowledge of events or individuals is more complete than the character's.

Dynamic Character: Undergoes an important change in the course of the play- not changes in circumstances, but changes in some sense within the character in question -- changes in insight or understanding or changes in commitment, or values. The opposite is a static character who remains essentially the same.

Flashback: An interruption of a play's chronology (timeline) to describe or present an incident that occurred prior to the main time-frame of the play's action

Flat Characters: Flat characters in a play are often, but not always, relatively simple minor characters. They tend to be presented through particular and limited traits; hence they become stereotypes.

Foil: A secondary character whose situation often parallels that of the main character while his behavior or response or character contrasts with that of the main character, throwing light on that particular character's specific temperament.

Foreshadowing: Anton Chekhov best explained the term in a letter in 1889: "One must not put a loaded rifle on the stage if no one is thinking of firing it." Chekhov's gun, or foreshadowing is a literary technique that introduces an apparently irrelevant element introduced early in the story; its significance becomes clear later in the play.

Fourth Wall: The imaginary wall that separates the spectator/audience from the action taking place on stage. In a traditional theatre setting (as opposed to a theatre in the round) this imaginary wall has been removed so that the spectator can "peep" into the fictional world and see what is going on. If the audience is addressed directly, this is referred to as "breaking the fourth wall."

Verbal irony: the opposite is said from what is intended. It should not be confused with sarcasm which is simply language designed to wound or offend.

Situational Irony :discrepancy between appearance and reality, or between expectation and fulfillment, or between what is and what would seem appropriate.

Linear Plot: A traditional plot sequence in which the incidents in the drama progress chronologically; in other words, all of the events build upon one another and there are no flashbacks. Linear plots are usually based on causality (that is, one event "causes" another to happen) occur more commonly in comedy than in other forms.

Monologue: A speech by a single character without another character's response. The character however, is speaking to someone else or even a group of people. (see soliloquy below)

Motivation: The thought(s) or desire(s) that drives a character to actively pursue a want or need. This want or need is called the objective . A character generally has an overall objective or longterm goal in a drama but may change his or her objective, and hence motivation, from scene to scene when confronted with various obstacles.

Point of attack: The point in the story at which the playwright chooses to start dramatizing the action; the first thing the audience will see or hear as the play begins.

Prologue: (1) In original Greek tragedy, the prologue is either the action or a set of introductory speeches before the first entry of the chorus. Here, a single actor's monologue or a dialogue between two actors would establish the play's background events. (2) In later

literature, the prologue serves as explicit exposition introducing material before the first scene begins.

Props: [Property] Articles or objects that appear on stage during a play. Props can also take on a significant or even symbolic meaning.

Reversal: The point at which the action of the plot turns in an unexpected direction for the protagonist- from failure to success or success to failure.

Round Characters: A round character is depicted with such psychological depth and detail that he or she seems like a "real" person. The round character contrasts with the flat character who serves a specific or minor literary function in a text, and who may be a stock character or simplified stereotype. If the round character changes or evolves over the course of a narrative or appears to have the capacity for such change, the character is also dynamic. In longer plays, there may be several round characters

Scene: A traditional segment in a play. Scenes are used to indicate (1) a change in time (2) a change in location, (3) provides a jump from one subplot to another, (4) introduces new characters (5) rearrange the actors on the stage. Traditionally plays are composed of acts, broken down into scenes.

Soliloquy: A speech meant to be heard by the audience but not by other characters on the stage (as opposed to a monologue which addresses someone who does not respond). In a soliloquy only the audience can hear the private thoughts of the characters. Example: Hamlet's famous "To be or not to be" speech.

Stage Direction: A playwright's descriptive or interpretive comments that provide readers (as well as actors and directors) with information about the dialogue, setting, and action of a play. Modern playwrights tend to include substantial stage directions, while earlier playwrights typically use them more sparsely, implicitly, or not at all

Static Character: A dramatic character who does not change.

Suspension of Disbelief: In its most basic form the term means that we accept something as real or representing the real when it obviously is not. In drama this is a crucial condition, as we must put aside our disbelief and accept the premise presented as real.

Stock Character: A recognizable character type found in many plays. Comedies have traditionally relied on such stock characters as the miserly father, the beautiful but naïve girl, the trickster servant.