

Elements Of Drama



Similarities of stories and plays

Stories have

- ▶ Characters carrying out a series of actions
- ▶ driven by a conflict of some kind
- ▶ Plot

Plays have

- ▶ Characters carrying out a series of action
- ▶ driven by a conflict of some kind
- ▶ Plot

Stories Vs. Plays

Stories

- ▶ A prose narrative
- ▶ Narrator describes characters, actions, settings
- ▶ The characters' words are marked by "quotation marks"

Plays

- ▶ Consist entirely of characters' words and actions.
- ▶ The playwright may describe the characters and settings in the script, but the audience never hears these stage directions.
- ▶ The audience sees and hears only the actors' interpretations of them.

What Is Drama?

A **play** is a story acted out, live and onstage.



Features of plays

- A **script** is the written text of a **play**. The play has the following elements:
 - **Setting:** The environment in which the story takes place.
 - **Dialogue:** The words that the characters speak in the play.
 - **Characters:** The people involved in the story:
 - **Stage Directions:** Directions that tell the actors how they should perform the play, where they should move, how they should look, act, dress, etc.
- Plays are divided into sections called **Acts**
- Acts are divided into sections called **Scenes**.
- **Plays** are meant to be acted out by **Actors**.

The Stage Crew

Besides the actors **actors** a team is needed to bring the **play** to life, these people are the **stage crew**, and their job is to:

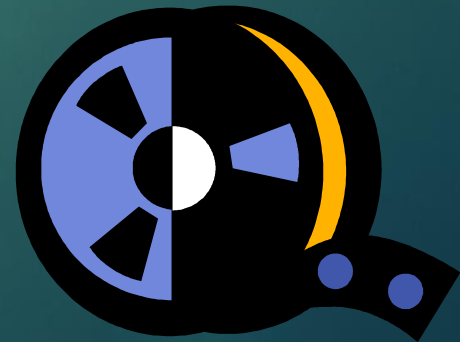
- ▶ Design and create
 - ▶ costumes
 - ▶ scenery
 - ▶ lighting
 - ▶ Makeup
 - ▶ props

Technical Elements

Scenery (set): the theatrical equipment, such as curtains, flats, backdrops, or platforms, used in a dramatic production to communicate environment

Costumes: clothing and accessories worn by actors to portray character and period.

Props: Any article used as part of a dramatic production; any moveable object that appears on stage during a performance, from a telephone to a train.



Technical Elements

Lights: the placement, intensity, and color of lights to help communicate environment, mood, or feeling

Sound: the effects an audience hears during performance to communicate character, context, or environment

Makeup: costumes, wigs, and body paint used to transform an actor into a character.



Performance of a Play

Plays are meant to be performed. A play comes to life in each unique performance. ▾

Stage Directions

Playwright describes setting and actions ▾

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graph TD; A[Stage Directions] --> B[Interpretation]; B --> C[Performance];
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Interpretation

Actors, directors, and designers interpret these directions creatively ▾

Performance

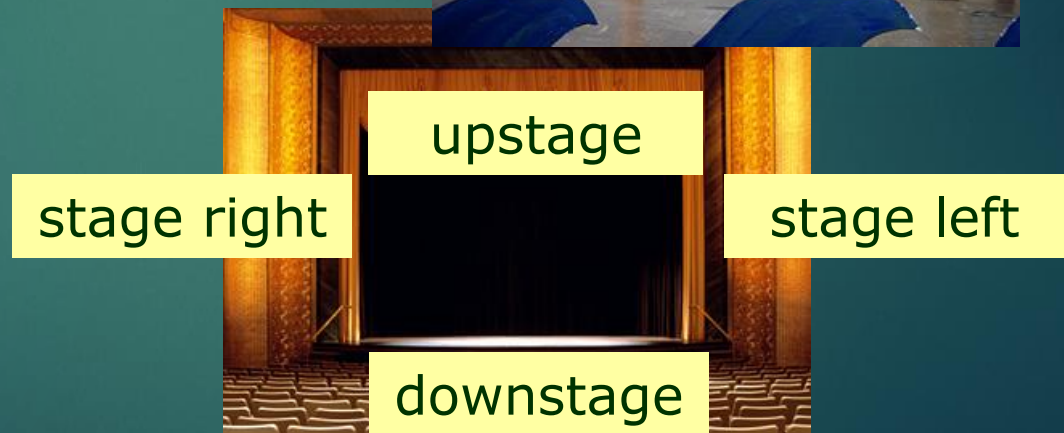
Audience experiences the story through the actors' speech and actions

[End of Section]

The Stage

A **stage** is like a small world unto itself. A stage ▼

- can be grand or intimate ▼
- has its own coordinates



The Stage

The stage's **set** might be ▼

realistic and detailed



abstract or minimal



A set can be changed from scene to scene—sometimes with machinery and sometimes with just a change in **lighting**. ▼

The Stage

Other important elements of set design are costumes and props. ▼

- **Costumes** tell us about the characters and the time and place. They can be elaborate or minimal. ▼



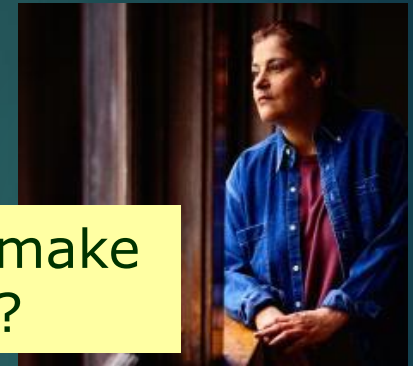
- **Props** are items that the characters carry or handle onstage.

[End of Section]

The Characters

The actors and director bring characters to life by ▼

- deciding how to interpret and speak the lines of the play ▼
- building on the playwright's **stage directions** for actions and movements



Mary: Can I make it on my own?

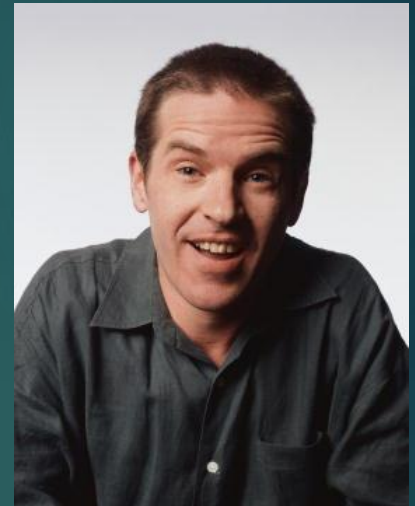


[Mary takes off her jacket and faces the audience.]

The Characters

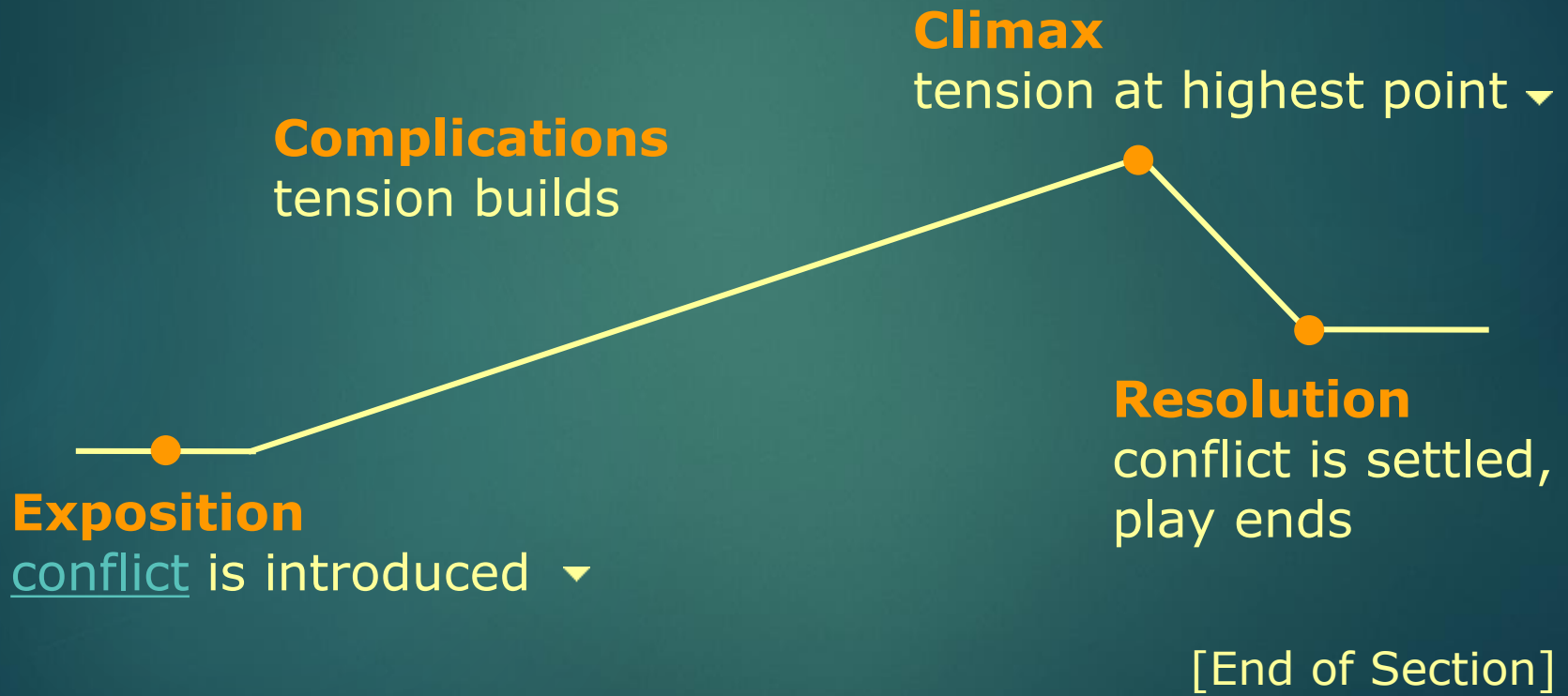
Characters' speech takes the form of

- **Dialogue**—conversation between characters
- **Monologue**—a long speech by one character to one or more other characters
- **Soliloquy**—a speech by a character alone onstage, speaking to himself or herself or to the audience
- **Aside**—Sometimes a character speaks to the audience or to another character in dialogue that is not supposed to be heard by the other characters onstage.



Structure of a Drama

Like the plot of a story, the plot of a drama follows a rising-and-falling structure. ▼



Kinds of Plays

A play may be a tragedy, a comedy, or, in modern drama, a mixture of the two. ▼

- A **tragedy** depicts serious and important events that end unhappily. ▼
- A **comedy** ends happily. Although most comedies are funny, they may also make us think and question.



Tragedy

Most classical tragedies deal with serious subjects—fate, life, and death—and center on a tragic hero. **Tragic heroes** ▼

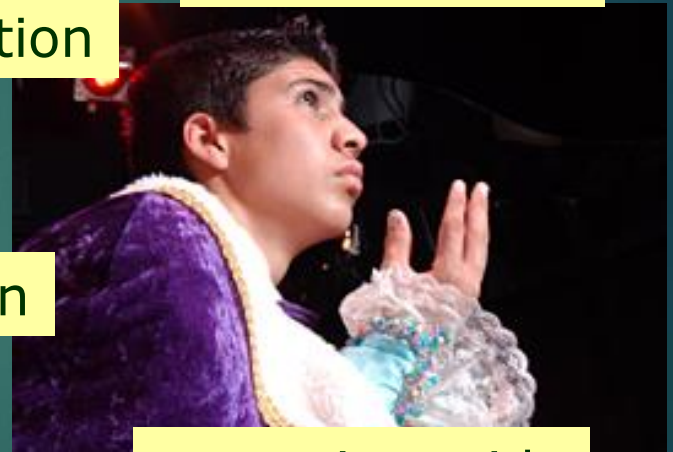
- are usually noble figures ▼
- have a **tragic flaw**, a personal failing that leads to their downfall ▼

ambition

rebelliousness

passion

excessive pride



[Innocent heroes](#)

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Comedy

In a comedy, the characters usually face humorous obstacles and problems that are resolved by the end of the play. **Comic heroes** ▼

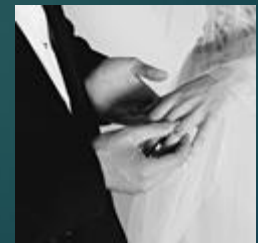
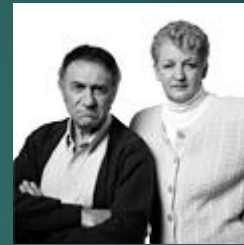
- may be ordinary people instead of nobility ▼
- eventually overcome their flaws and achieve happiness



Comedy

The conflict in comedies is usually romantic. ▼

- Someone wants to marry but faces an obstacle—opposing parents or rival suitors. ▼
- Complications can involve misunderstandings, mistaken identities, disguises, or transformation. ▼
- The obstacle is always overcome.



[End of Section]

Review

Quick Check

[Gwendolen and Cecily are at the window, looking out into the garden.]

Gwendolen. The fact that they did not follow us at once into the house . . . seems to me to show that they have some sense of shame left.

Cecily. They have been eating muffins. That looks like repentance.

Gwendolen. [After a pause.] They don't seem to notice us at all. Couldn't you cough?

from *The Importance of Being Earnest* by Oscar Wilde

What are the stage directions in this passage?

Answer

Is this more likely to be a comedy or a tragedy? Why?

Answer

[End of Section]