

Drama Terminology 12

This list of terms builds on the preceding lists you have been given in grades 9-11. It contains all the terms you were responsible for learning in the past, as well as the new terms you are now responsible for learning for the exam.

- *The new terms are marked with (NT): New Term.*
- *Government exam terms are marked with an asterisk (*).*

General Terms

- **Drama***: In the most general sense, “drama” is work designed to be represented on a stage by actors. More strictly, however, a drama is a serious play (though it may end either happily or unhappily) dealing with a problem of importance.
- **Dramatic Form***: This refers to the organization of the writing in a script, whereby the speakers are listed, their speech is written, and stage directions tell the actors how to deliver their lines. The beginning of each scene or act also has information detailing what the stage should look like.
- **Dramatis Personae**: The list of characters in a play so the audience knows who is who before the action begins. Provided at the beginning of the play’s script.
- **Play**: The performed dramatic production seen on stage in live theater
- **Script**: The words printed on paper spoken by the actors
- **Act**: A chunk of the play’s action. Shakespeare’s plays always have five acts that are noted with a large Roman numeral.
- **Scene**: A division of action within an act. Shakespeare’s plays have a variety of numbers of scenes that are noted with a small Roman numeral.
- **Line**: A single line of writing in a play noted with Arabic numbers.
- **Pathetic Fallacy**: This is an artistic device whereby Nature reflects a character’s feelings and/or the mood of the events in the literature, which means pathetic fallacy is a setting reinforcement. Because it is just a reflection, pathetic fallacy also falls short of full personification. Pathetic fallacy carries over the moods and passions of a human being to inanimate objects or, more particularly, mirrors human emotion in nature, animals, or objects. For example: "Nature must be gladsome when I was so happy"; or “nature weeps” for a given character’s sorrow (as a reference to rain).
- **Stage Direction**: 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.

- **Monologue***: A single fictional speaker—usually a performance actor—gives an extended speech, either as if alone on stage (like a Shakespearian soliloquy) or as if speaking to a fictional audience. The personality of the character and significant events in his/her life are revealed by the speech. If the speaker delivers the monologue to a fictional audience, the reader also gets information about that audience, because the monologue’s comments and questions allow the reader to infer information in that area. Also known as monodrama.
- **Dialogue***: When two or more speakers speak to one another; the spoken exchanges that comprise a play.
- **Interior monologue***: The depiction of the thoughts and feelings that flow, with no apparent logic, through the mind of a character. Although the term is essentially interchangeable with stream of consciousness (see the story terms handout), it has been argued that an interior monologue is an even more direct depiction of the character’s consciousness. (NT)
- **Pathos***: The quality in a work of literature that evokes feelings of pity, tenderness, and sympathy from the reader. A pathetic object, such as Lady Macbeth, by the end of the play in Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, usually suffers helplessly, but a tragic hero’s death is too great a fall to be described as pathetic (which is why it is tragic). (NT)
- **Dramatic Irony***: When a character says something, but the audience knows more than the character does about other characters or events, so the statement comes across with a double meaning that the audience “gets” and the character doesn’t. It is dramatic irony when Juliet first sees Romeo and says if she can’t marry him, she will die, because the audience knows that by the end of the play she does marry him, and she dies anyway. The character’s expectations and the audience’s knowledge differ in dramatic irony.
- **Farce ***: This word refers to any play which evokes laughter by such devices of low comedy as physical buffoonery, rough wit, ridiculous situations, or slapstick behaviours. Farce is not concerned with character subtlety or plot probability; farce is simply out to get a laugh any way it can. (NT)
- **Melodrama***: In terms of character, melodrama is a play of extremes. The incredibly evil villain plots against the supremely virtuous hero or heroine in an action that depicts the conflict between the polar opposites of good and evil. There is little subtlety in a melodrama, and little complexity of character, but extremes of emotion attract the audience. (NT)

Terms Derived From Studies of Shakespeare

- **Blank Verse***: Unrhymed iambic pentameter. Shakespeare’s plays are mostly written in blank verse. See below for a definition of iambic pentameter.
- **Aside***: When a character says something privately to another character while other characters are also on stage. The line(s) are meant for one character’s ears alone. Sometimes asides are addressed to the audience.

- **Comic Relief** *: A humorous scene, incident, or remark within an essentially serious or even tragic drama. Following scenes of intense emotion, comic relief evokes laughter as a release from the tension of the serious action.
- **Iambic Pentameter** *: A line of poetry that is ten syllables in length. The syllables follow a pattern in which an unstressed syllable is followed by a stressed one (such as the word “giraffe”), so the line of poetry bounces gently along (soft- hard-soft-hard-soft-hard-soft-hard-soft-hard). For example, when Romeo says, “O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright” (*Romeo and Juliet*, I.v.44), he is speaking in iambic pentameter. The following is an example of iambic pentameter (in this case, blank verse) from *Hamlet*:
 - To tell the secrets of my prison-house,
 - I could a tale unfold whose lightest word
 - Would harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood,
 - Make thy two eyes like stars start from their spheres,
 - Thy knotted and combined locks to part... (I.v.14-18)
- **Prologue** *: An opening section of a longer work such as a novel or a play. The prologue may perform a number of functions: establish and/or anticipate character, theme, action or setting, etc. *Romeo and Juliet* opens with a prologue, which is in the form of a sonnet. See your poetry terms handout for the definition of sonnet.
- **Pun** *: This is a play on words in which a word or phrase can be taken to mean more than one thing.
- **Soliloquy** *: When a character speaks his/her true thoughts and feelings while alone on stage. Soliloquies reveal the character’s “real” thoughts on a subject.

Terms Derived From Studies of Greek Drama

- **Catastrophe** *: The concluding action of a drama, especially a classical tragedy such as those written by the ancient Greeks or by Shakespeare. The catastrophe follows the climax and contains a resolution of the plot. The catastrophe of a play is like the denouement of a short story. In the case of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, the catastrophe is Puck’s speech at the end.
- **Chorus** *: Originally a group of masked male dancers who sang or chanted as part of ceremonies in Greek drama, the chorus was imitated by the Elizabethans and often reduced to a single figure. In Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* the chorus speaks the prologue and introduces Act 2. Choruses are rare in modern plays.
- **Comedy** *: Any literary work, but especially a play, that commonly has a happy ending. Modern comedies tend to be funny, while Shakespearean comedies simply end well. Shakespearean comedy also contains items such as misunderstandings and mistaken identity to heighten the comic effect. Often, comedies end in marriage(s). *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* is a comedy.
- **Tragedy** *: Aristotle defines tragedy as an imitation of a complete action “of high importance” (trans. L. J. Potts). Tragedy is a form of drama exciting pity and/or fear

in the audience; as a result, viewers are provided with an experience of *catharsis* or cleansing of emotions. Not only should a tragedy's action be single and complete, it should be written in poetry embellished with every kind of artistic expression, involve persons of stature, and present a reversal of Fortune.

- *Romeo and Juliet* (grade ten) and *Macbeth* (grade eleven) are tragedies. *Hamlet* is a tragedy, and many argue that *Death of a Salesman* is a tragedy as well.

- **Tragic Hero:** A tragic hero is a person of high estate who has the potential for greatness. The person is pre-eminently virtuous and just, but his/her misfortune is brought about, in part, by an error in judgement. The tragic hero has a flaw in his/her character, which contributes to his/her destruction. In traditional Greek tragedies, often the tragic flaw is *hubris*, an excessive pride that causes the hero to ignore a divine warning or to break a moral law. The downfall of the tragic hero frequently involves the element of fate. Overall, the tragic hero has the potential for greatness; however, s/he does not achieve this greatness because of the combined forces of the tragic flaw and fate. Once the tragic hero has committed him/herself to a course of action, there is no turning back. A chain of events occurs because of this commitment, leading to his/her final destruction. Despite shortcomings, the tragic hero "falls" with dignity. The audience empathizes with the tragic hero because of the contrast between the potential greatness of the hero and the reality of what actually occurs to him/her. It has been suggested that because the tragic hero's suffering is greater than his offence, the audience feels pity. (NT)
- **Tragic Flaw:** The protagonist of a tragedy has a serious fault, the tragic flaw, that leads to his/her downfall and death. (NT)
- **Hubris:** In traditional Greek tragedies, the tragic hero's tragic flaw is often pride to excess, which is called hubris. (NT)
- **Catharsis:** The terror and pity felt by the audience of a tragedy produce *catharsis*, a cleansing or purifying of emotion. The audience should feel empty and limp after watching, reading, or otherwise participating in a tragedy; that feeling of emptiness is *catharsis*. (NT)