

# Dramatic Irony

## Definition of Dramatic Irony

Dramatic [irony](#) is an important stylistic device that is commonly found in plays, movies, theaters, and sometimes in poetry. Storytellers use this irony as a useful plot device for creating situations in which the [audience](#) knows more about the situations, the causes of conflicts, and their resolutions before the leading characters or actors. That is why readers observe that the speech of actors takes on unusual meanings.

For instance, the audience knows that a [character](#) is going to be murdered, or will make a decision to commit suicide; however, one particular character or others may not be aware of these facts. Hence, the words and actions of characters would suggest a different meaning to the audience from what they indicate to the characters and the story. Thus, it creates intense [suspense](#) and [humor](#). This speech device also emphasizes, embellishes, and conveys emotions and moods more effectively.

## Examples of Dramatic Irony from Literature

---

### Example #1: *Macbeth* (By J William Shakespeare)

---

“There’s no art  
To find the mind’s construction in the face:  
He was a gentleman on whom I built  
An absolute trust.”

This is one of the best examples of dramatic irony. In this case, Duncan says that he trusts Macbeth, not knowing about the prophecy of witches that Macbeth is going to be the king, and that he would kill him. The audience, on the other hand, knows about the prophecy. This demonstrates dramatic irony.

---

### Example #2: *There's Something About Mary* (By Jonathan Richman)

---

"I've done it several times before."

"It's no big deal."

Jonathan Richman's [comedy](#) movie, *There's Something About Mary*, contains several instances of dramatic irony. For instance, when Ted thinks that the police have arrested him for picking up a hitchhiker, the audience knows that the police are actually interrogating him about a murder. Therefore, when Ted delivers these seemingly-innocuous lines, it is comedic to the audience.

---

### Example #3: *Othello* (By William Shakespeare)

---

"Othello: I think thou dost.

And for I know thou 'rt full of love and honesty

And weigh'st thy words before thou giv'st them breath..."

This is another very good example of dramatic irony, when Iago manipulates Othello, and Othello puts his faith in Iago as an honest man. However, Iago is plotting against him without his knowledge. Again, the audience knows that Iago is deceiving, but Othello does not.

---

### Example #4: *Oedipus Rex* (By Sophocles)

---

"If someone knows the killer is a stranger,  
from some other state, let him not stay mute...

I pray, too,

that, if he should become an honoured guest

in my own home and with my knowledge,

I may suffer all those things I've just called down  
upon the killers."

Oedipus Rex presents one of the best examples of dramatic irony of all time. In the play, Oedipus seeks to expose the murderer of King Laius to solve a [riddle](#); nonetheless, he himself is the murderer. Here, he declares that the murderer, who has killed Laius, might also kill him, not realizing the fact that he himself is the murderer.

---

#### **Example #5: *A Doll's House* (By Henrik Ibsen)**

---

“To be able to be free from care, quite free from care; to be able to play and romp with the children; to be able to keep the house beautifully and have everything just as Torvald likes it!”

Nora is delightedly looking forward to those moments when she would be able to pay off her debts to Krogstad. This reflects that she would be free. However, her speech shows the use of dramatic irony when the readers know that her freedom is, in fact, bondage, which she comes to realize by the end of the story.

### **Function of Dramatic Irony**

Many writers use dramatic irony as an effective tool to sustain and excite the readers' interest. Since this form of irony creates a [contrast](#) between situation of characters and the episodes that unfold, it generates curiosity. By allowing the audience to know important facts ahead of the leading characters, dramatic irony puts the audience and readers above the characters, and also encourages them to anticipate, hope, and fear the moment when a character would learn the truth behind events and situations of the story.

More often, this irony occurs in tragedies, where readers are lead to sympathize with leading characters. Thus, this irony emphasizes the fatality of incomplete understanding on honest and innocent people, and demonstrates the painful consequences of misunderstandings.

---

**Related posts:**

---

[10 Examples of Irony in Shakespeare](#)

[Verbal Irony](#)

[Situational Irony](#)

[11 Examples of Irony in Children's Literature](#)

[My Kingdom for a Horse](#)

[12 Thought Provoking Examples of Irony in History](#)

[15 Irony Examples in Disney Movies](#)

[Frailty, Thy Name is Woman](#)

[To Thine Own Self Be True](#)

[The Quality of Mercy is Not Strain'd](#)

[Ignorance is Strength](#)

[Brevity is the Soul of Wit](#)

[Lady Doth Protest too Much](#)