

CHAPTER 4 INTRODUCTION TO DRAMA

What is Drama?

Drama is another important type or genre of literature. It is normally a story or play meant to be acted on stage. It can also be described as a work of art in which actors represent the characters on stage. Drama is said to be the richest of all the literary forms. In addition to reading it in form of a book, it is also acted out and performed on stage.

Uses of Drama

As a branch of literature, drama is very useful. The following are some of the uses of drama:

1. It teaches moral lessons. After watching a play, one may learn some lessons from the experiences of the actors.
2. It educates people. From drama, people learn and get information they did not know before.
3. It expands our views of life, people and things.
4. It enriches our imagination.
5. It is a source of amusement and it reduces boredom.
6. It teaches us to curb our excesses or stop our bad habits.
7. It teaches team spirit and tolerance for one another.

Types of Drama

There are different kinds of drama. Some of them include tragedy, comedy, tragi-comedy, farce, burlesque, epic drama, historical drama, melodrama, opera, closet drama and pantomime.

Tragedy

This is a serious play that ends sadly or sorrowfully. In most cases, the hero or heroine dies at the end due to error of judgment or flaws in his nature. In other cases, he or she suffers great misfortune. Examples of tragedy are William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and Ola Rotimi's *The Gods are not to Blame*.

Comedy

A comedy is a light and humorous play that ends happily. It is the opposite of tragedy. Examples of comedy include William Shakespeare's *As You Like It* and Oliver Goldsmith's *She Stoops to Conquer*.

Tragi-comedy

This is a play that combines the serious aspect of the tragedy and the happy ending of the comedy. The play would normally have a serious subject matter which will eventually end happily. A good example of the tragi-comedy is William Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*.

Farce

This is a humorous play that causes excessive laughter. The actions, characters and situations of this type of play are usually difficult to believe.

Satire

Satire is a play in which human vices, e.g. wickedness and greed, are criticised. The general aim of satire is to mock or ridicule those who are involved in such vices in order to correct them in society. An example of satire is Wole Soyinka's *The Trials of Brother Jero*.

Burlesque

Burlesque is a form of exaggerated play or performance that is full of excessive humour. In general, the performance makes something look very ridiculous.

Other Types of Drama

The following types of drama are variations of comedy and tragedy that you may find useful.

Historical Play: Another name for historical play is chronicle play. It is normally based on actual events that happened in the past. This type of play deals with societal problems in a realistic way. They expose social ills and stimulate thought and discussion.

Melodrama: In this type of play, events are exciting and too exaggerated to be real.

Opera: This is a dramatic work in which all or most of the words are sung to music.

Closet Drama: This type of drama is meant more to be read than to be acted because it may have very little action or it may have too much dialogue to be interesting when acted on stage.

Dumb Show or Pantomime: In this type of drama, the scenes are played with body movements and gestures. No word is uttered. It is also called mimic drama.

Characteristics of Drama

There are primarily five elements of drama. They are plot, characterisation, setting, theme and language. There are also special terminologies or expressions that are used in drama. We are going to study as many of these features as possible. Try to study and understand these terminologies as they would greatly help you to appreciate and enjoy drama.

Playwright or Dramatist

The writer of a play is called a *playwright*. Note the spelling. A dramatist writes and also directs plays written by others. You should note that writing a play is the work of one man but presenting a play on stage is the work of many people. These people include the following: actors, directors, promoters, costumiers, set designers, technicians, make-up artists, propsmen and others.

Dialogue

This is the method of artistic expression used in drama. It involves discussion or conversation between persons. Other branches of literature used other forms like verse or stanza for poetry and paragraphs and chapters for prose.

Acts and Scenes

These are the main divisions in a play or drama. Acts and scenes are to drama what paragraphs and chapters are to prose, and what stanzas are to poetry.

Character

The character is the person around whom the playwright weaves his story. There are different types of characters in plays. These are major and minor characters, and round and flat characters. Their types are determined by the roles they act in the play.

Major Character: He or she is assigned an important part in the play.

Minor Character: This character plays very little part in the play.

Round Character: This is usually a major character that is well developed. He is made to undergo important changes in his life in the course of the play.

Flat Character: This is a character who is not well developed or who does not develop throughout the course of a play. The flat character is usually an unrealistic or less important character in a play.

Actors and Actresses

These are the real people who impersonate or represent the characters created by the playwright. They are called upon to act out particular roles assigned by the director of a play.

Dramatis Personae or Cast

They refer to a list of all the actors and actresses who play different roles in a play.

Characterisation

This is the process of assigning different roles and attributes to each character to make him or her appear the way the writer wants. Some characters are made to behave well while others are made to be badly.

Theme in Drama

It is the general points and truths about human beings that can be interpreted from a play. It is the main message the writer wants his readers to learn. It is derived from the subject matter of a play and the major idea in a work of art.

Plot in Drama

This is the chronological or orderly arrangement of events in a story. Some writers do not always observe the above mentioned rule. They start their stories from the end or even from the middle. Plot can also be described as the story line of a play. There are three types of plot. These are simple plots, compound plots and complex plots.

Diction in Drama

Diction is an aspect of language. It refers to the writer's choice of words. It may be easy or difficult to understand. Diction can be used to differentiate between a poor character and a rich one, an educated character and an illiterate one. While some characters speak correct English, others speak pidgin English or even their native language.

Language in Drama

Language comprises such elements as allusion, symbolism, imagery and other literary devices.

Setting in Drama

There are different types of setting. **Physical setting** is the physical space where the events of the play take place. **Social setting** is the environment in which the culture and the language of the play are revealed. **Setting in time** refers to the period the events occur. This is also known as **temporal setting**.

Costume

They are clothes worn by characters while acting in the play. They help to make the roles and story to look realistic.

Stage

This is a raised platform where a play's performance takes place. Almost every school hall has a stage where entertainment activities take place.

Flashback

It is a reference to a past event or happening that would help the reader understand what will happen in future. This device helps writers to give any information that was left out.

Foreshadowing

This is the opposite of flashback. The device drops a hint on what is going to happen in future to prepare the reader or the audience.

Soliloquy

Soliloquy occurs when a character reflects upon a situation by thinking aloud and talking to himself on stage. His speech may be to the hearing of other characters and audience.

Aside

When a character talks to himself on stage only to the hearing of the audience, it is described as an aside. Aside is usually meant to cause a change or reaction to the views or actions of other characters in the play.

Digression

Digression is the practice of diverting from the main storyline and telling an entirely new story. This new story within a story must have a beginning and an end. It is used to remove boredom.

Satire

Satire is a type of drama that uses humour to criticise the ills or evils in the society. Satires are written to improve society through the use of laughter and mockery. *The Trials of Brother Jero* by Wole Soyinka is an example of satire.

Theatre

Theatre is a house where plays are staged for the public to watch. This is because a theatre should have all the facilities needed to present a play.

Dilemma

Dilemma arises when a very difficult situation is faced and the character finds it difficult to take a decision.

Villain

The villain in drama is the bad character who enjoys doing bad things to people. He is usually the cause of all the problems in a play.

Humour

It is a device used by a writer to amuse the audience and induce laughter. Everybody enjoys humour in a play.

Audience

They are the people that assemble to watch or play or those for whom a work of art is intended.

Catharsis

This is the release of pent-up emotions of fear, anger, and pity felt by the audience during the play.

Protagonist

This is a term used for the hero or the heroine. The protagonist is the main or principal character around whom all the actions revolve.

Antagonist

It is the opposite of protagonist. The antagonist is always working against the protagonist.

Conflict

This refers to the tension caused by the difference between the protagonist and the antagonist. It is the struggle or the disagreement the protagonist must face in the course of the play.

Flaw

This is a fault or weakness in the nature of a hero which will lead to his downfall.

Irony

Irony occurs when a character says the opposite of what he or she means.

Dramatic

Irony is a situation when the audience knows more than the character. It helps to heighten the suspense in the play.

Comic relief: It is a humorous scene in a play intended to ease tension and reduce boredom.

Sarcasm: It is a bitter remark intended to wound feelings.

Clown

The duty or work of a clown in a play is to create humour and laughter.

Prologue

This is the introductory or starting part of the play. The playwright uses the prologue to give the audience important information they need to know to help them understand the play.

Epilogue

This is the opposite of the prologue. This appears at the end of the play. It serves as the concluding part of the play and gives further information about the performance.

Apostrophe

This happens when an actor talks to a person or object that is not present on the scene.

Chorus

It is a group of people who comment on or explain the unfolding scenes in a play in the form of a song.

Rhetorical Question

This is a question that does not demand or need an answer because the answer is already known.

Climax

Climax is the moment of greatest tension, interest and excitement in a play. It is regarded as the peak of the complication or crisis.

Denouement or Resolution

It is at the point of the denouement that every complicated situation is resolved. It is a time of solution to all the problems created.

Summary

Anytime you read a play, try to identify the following features which will help you understand the play better.

- Background of the playwright
- Type of play
- Plot
- Themes
- Characterization
- Language
- Style
- Figures of Speech used

Revision Questions

1. Define drama.
2. Differentiate between an actor and an actress.
3. Give two uses of drama.

4. Mention two types of drama.

5. How do we differentiate drama from other types of literature?

Objective Questions

1. An epic drama deals with the activities of

A. great men. B. actors. C. poor men. D. women only.

2. An opera is a type of play that is

A. humorous. B. sung to music. C. watched on TV. D. boring.

3. Foreshadowing tells us what will happen

A. soon. B. in the future. C. in the past. D. among the actors.

4. Another word for hero in drama is

A. villain. B. protagonist. C. antagonist. D. chief actor.

5. The opposite of prologue in drama is

A. antaloge. B. monologue. C. Synelogue. D. Epilogue.

6. Pick the odd item from the list below:

A. Tragedy B. Comedy C. Tragi-comedy D. Epic

7. A group of actors in a play is called the

A. characters. B. cast. C. chorus. D. group.

8. A play is a story that is meant to be

A. studied. B. memorized. C. acted. D. learnt.

9. Mime is the art of acting that involves the use of

A. songs only. B. speeches only. C. gestures only. D. dance only.

10. The main female character in a play is called

A. heroine. B. hero. C. fiancée. D. personae.

Answers

1.A 2.B 3.B 4.B 5.D 6.D 7.B 8.C 9.C 10.A