

Dramatic terms

- Act:** marked divisions within the play, often comprised of scenes. Shakespeare's plays have five. In Greek plays, these are called **episodes** and are broken up by the Chorus' recitations called **stasimons**
- Actions:** may be indicated in the stage directions, but simply, the physical motions and movements of the characters which enhance the effect of their words/dialogue
- Aside:** words spoken by a character but not directed at another; often intended to address the audience and reveal further information about the unfolding action or other characters
- Chorus:** common in ancient Greek theatre, a collective group that enters early in the drama (during the **parados**), remains onstage throughout the rest of the play
- Comic relief/comedy:** a play lighthearted in theme and content, meant to amuse the audience; thus ensuring a happier-than-not ending; there are different types of comedies: **satires** (intent on conveying a message about society and/or social systems); **romantic** (love stories); **farce** (mocking by way of imitation and ridiculous exaggeration); **tragic** (a serious story and theme that has a sudden light-hearted twist to ensure the happy ending)
- Dialogue:** conversation between two or more characters in the scene; drama is largely dialogue driven
- Epilogue:** opposite of prologue; comes at the end of the play; often a character addresses the audience in a form of wrap-up. Think of Puck speaking directly to the audience at the end of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*
- In medias res:** in the middle of the action; play opens with the situation already ongoing rather than at the very start of something
- Monologue:** lengthy speech by one character; some plays are nothing but monologues
- Motivation:** in drama, the reason why a character enters or exits a scene
- Prologue:** the opening of the play which sets up all subsequent action; may involve a character addressing the audience; in the Theban Plays, establishes the dilemma affecting the key characters

- Scene:** consider this the **setting** of a play; time, place and circumstances; influential on the actions and dialogue of the characters
- Screenplay:** script written for productions on television and movies; will have additional information about such elements as lighting, camera angles, etc.
- Script:** the text of the play; often includes stage directions (*written in italics*), cast of characters, sometimes with information concerning their ages, appearances, etc. Scripts are written by **playwrights**.
- Soliloquy:** speech in which a character speaks solely to him/herself, often when alone on stage, which serves to reveal innermost thoughts, comment upon the unfolding action, foreshadow future events
- Stereotype:** a character whose actions and words are readily (often intentionally) identifiable with a particular group
- Stage directions:** instructions embedded in the script indicating such things as how/where a character should move, how a character should talk; how the stage should be set
- Tragedy:** dramatic work that deals with heavy subject matters and often involves death, frequently that of the main character (**protagonist**); intent to provoke the audience into reflection on these themes and, in the case of ancient Greek theatre, lead to a sense of emotional release (**catharsis**)
- Tragic hero:** a character of great standing in his/her community who through a series of events, some beyond his control and some of his making, loses everything by the end of the play; thus falling from great position and power to exile or death. Tragic heroes are linked with such terms as **hubris**; **hamartia**; **fate** and **destiny**

Note: plays often follow the same pattern as stories – from exposition to resolution –thus it is useful to review these terms for both forms of writing