

4.1 History of English Drama

What is drama?

Drama is a composition in verse or prose to be acted on the stage, in which a story is related by means of dialogue and action and is represented with, accompanying gesture, costume and scenery as in real life'.

- Shorter Oxford Dictionary

'Drama is a composition designed for performance in the theatre in which actors take the roles of the characters, perform the indicated action and utter the written dialogue'.

- A Glossary of Literary Terms by M.H. Abrams

The Elements of Drama:

The elements of drama are:

(1) Plot: This is the plan, scheme or pattern of the play. It is a series of events occurring in the play and has a beginning, a middle and an end.

(2) Characters: The characters are an important element of the drama. The protagonist is the main character in a play. The character opposing the main character is the antagonist. Other characters are major and minor, static and dynamic, flat and round, caricatures.

(3) Characterization: This means to highlight and explain the details about the characters in a story, to reveal their peculiarities. This is done by what they say and how they say it, their body language, and their interactions with the other characters.

(4) Dialogue: It involves two or more characters in conversation with one another. Dialogues are used to convey information, to develop the characterization and to carry the plot forward.

A 'monologue' means a long speech by one person. A 'soliloquy' means the act of speaking one's thoughts and feelings aloud when one is by oneself, regardless of any hearers.

(5) Setting: Setting is an important element in drama. It includes both the time and place (geographic location) of the drama. It may also include culture, historic period, etc.

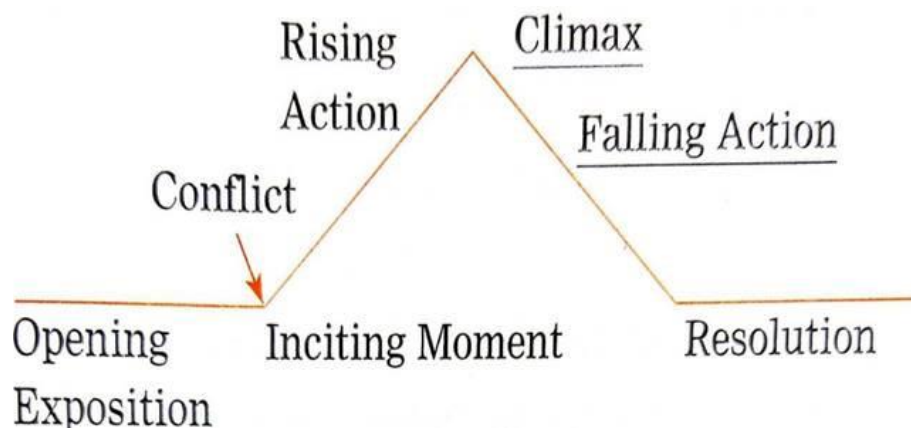
(6) Stage directions: Stage directions are guidelines and suggestions given by the dramatist. They allow the actors to know who should enter the stage, and from where they should enter or exit the acting area. Stage directions also tell the

actors where to sit, stand, and move about, and how to use the props on the stage.

(7) **Conflict:** Conflict is a literary element that involves a struggle between two opposing forces, usually a protagonist and an antagonist. Conflict is needed in order to create interest in the audience. It creates challenges in the narrative and anxiety whether the goals would be achieved.

(8) **Theme:** Theme is the main idea or point of a play, which may be stated directly or indirectly. The theme of a literary work may deal with an abstract idea or concept, like pride, love, revenge, etc.

(9) **Structure:** The structure of a play including the exposition, conflict, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution.



(10) **Language:** Language is the spoken text in the play. Language can also be in the form of verse or sung. It can be in modern or old English. It can be full of puns, witticisms, rhetoric, etc. The choice of language in performance is crucial, as in addition to the other elements, it is a major means of communicating the story to the audience.

Types of Drama:

The types of drama are -

(1) **Tragedy:** Tragedy is a drama which has an unhappy ending. In it the main character is brought to ruin or suffers extreme sorrow, generally as a result of some terrible flaw, moral weakness, or inability to cope with the circumstances. It is a type of drama where the characters go through some form of suffering.

(2) **Comedy:** Comedy is a humorous story with a happy ending. It is a type of dramatic work that is amusing and satirical in its tone, It represents triumph over unpleasant circumstances by creating comic effects, resulting in a happy or successful conclusion. Types of Comedy:

- (1) Romantic Comedy
- (2) Sentimental Comedy
- (3) Classical Comedy
- (4) Comedy of Honour
- (5) Comedy of Manners.

(3) Tragicomedy: A play that blends elements of both tragedy and comedy is known as a tragicomedy. A tragicomedy can make you laugh and cry. It might be a serious drama interspersed with funny moments, or a serious drama that has a happy ending.

Objective Test

1. Name any four periods of History of British Drama.

Ans. (1) Medieval Period

- (2) Renaissance Period
- (3) Restoration Period
- (4) Victorian Period.

2. List the four elements of drama.

Ans. (1) Plot

- (2) Characters
- (3) Characterization
- (4) Dialogue
- (5) Setting
- (6) Stage directions
- (7) Conflict
- (8) Theme

3. State a type of drama each from any four periods of history.

Ans. (1) Medieval Period - Didactic plays

(2) Renaissance Period - Revenge plays

(3) Restoration Period - Heroic drama

(4) Modern Period - Poetic drama

4. Compare the features of comedy and tragedy.

Ans. Tragedy

(1) Tragedy is a drama which has an unhappy ending.

(2) Such dramas are full of sorrowful events and pitiable conditions of characters.

(3) It is a type of drama where the characters go through some form of suffering.

Comedy

(1) Comedy is a humorous story with a happy ending.

(2) It is a type of dramatic work that is amusing and satirical in its tone.

(3) The characters in such dramas are generally shown in joyful mood.

(4) It represents triumph over unpleasant circumstances by creating comic effect, resulting in a happy or successful conclusion.

5. State the difference between poetry and drama.

Ans. Poetry is language expressed in rhythm and metre. Drama is the specific mode of fiction represented in performance. A play, opera, mime and ballet are performed in a theatre, on radio or on television.

6. State the difference between drama and novel.

Ans. Drama is a medium of expression, whereby performers express themselves artistically. The performance is based on a script which is in the form of dialogues, whereas a story or a novel is written in the narrative form.

7. Define drama.

Ans. 'Drama' is a composition in verse or prose to be acted on the stage, in which a story is related by means of dialogue and action and is represented with accompanying gestures, costumes and scenery as in real life.

8. Explain the term 'plot'.

Ans. 'Plot' is the series of events occurring in a play. It means the plan, scheme or pattern. It has a beginning, middle and end.

9. Differentiate between characters and characterization.

Ans. The characters in a play are the protagonist, who is the main character, and other major and minor characters. Characterization is the fleshing out of the personality of the characters, revealing their peculiarities, values, feelings, etc. It is to gain insight into their personalities, and establish connection with them.

10. List a few reasons for watching a drama live on the stage.

Ans. (1) It is a thrilling experience.

(2) There are feelings of tension and anticipation.
One wonders what is going to happen next.

(3) The atmosphere in the theatre is charged; the audience is able to actually feel the emotions of the actors.

(4) The lighting, music, special effects, etc. keep the watcher enthralled, and he never forgets the story or what has been enacted.

(5) There is also the knowledge that anything can happen; the actors can forget their lines, the lights could go off or something on the sets may stop working.
There is a certain excitement in knowing all this.

(6) The audience can also participate in what is going on by giving applause or keeping silent at the right moments.