

## **BA I – Eng Opt IV – Sem IV: Understanding Drama in English**

### **WHAT IS DRAMA?**

Drama can be defined as a literary prose or verse that actors present on stage. A story is dramatized, which means the characters and events in the story are brought to life through a stage performance by actors who play roles of the characters in the story and act through its events, taking the story forward. In enacting the roles, actors portray the character's emotions and personalities. The story progresses through verbal and non-verbal interactions between the characters, and the presentation is suitably supplemented by audio and visual effects.

Drama is a literary composition to be acted by players on a stage before an audience. Its successful portrayal depends on the cooperation that must exist among writers, actors, producers and audiences in accepting the limitations and the conventions of the stage.

Since the turn of the twentieth century, modern drama has become the greatest form of mass entertainment in the western world. Experimentation and innovation are basic to this century's dramatist. Through movies and television, everyone has experienced the excitement and emotional involvement that gives the drama its important place in our lives today.

The drama is difficult to read because it is meant to be **seen, not read**. It demands much imagination and attention on the part of the reader to enable him to hear the tones and see the actions of the actors against an imaginary background. The reader has only the dialogue form which to visualize the costumes, the situation, the facial expressions, and the movements of the actors.

The drama is also difficult to write because the playwright must be aware of the interests and opinions of the actors and producer as well as his audience. He must also recognize the limitation of the stage and work within the many conventions and restrictions it imposes on the actions of his characters and the locations of his settings.

### **WHAT ARE THE BASIC ELEMENTS OF DRAMA?**

Through the characters involved, the story has a message to give. It forms the central theme of the play around which the plot is built. While some consider music and visuals as separate elements, others prefer to club them under staging which can be regarded as an independent element of drama. Lighting, sound effects, costumes, makeup, gestures or body language given to characters, the stage setup, and the props used can together be considered as symbols that are elements of drama. What dictates most other dramatic elements is the setting; that is the time period and location in which the story takes place.

Following are the basic elements that are found in most of the plays in any language.

- A. Setting
- B. Plot and Plot structures
- C. Characters and Characterization
- D. Conflict
- E. Theme
- F. Dialogue

- G. Performance
- H. Spectacle
- I. Music

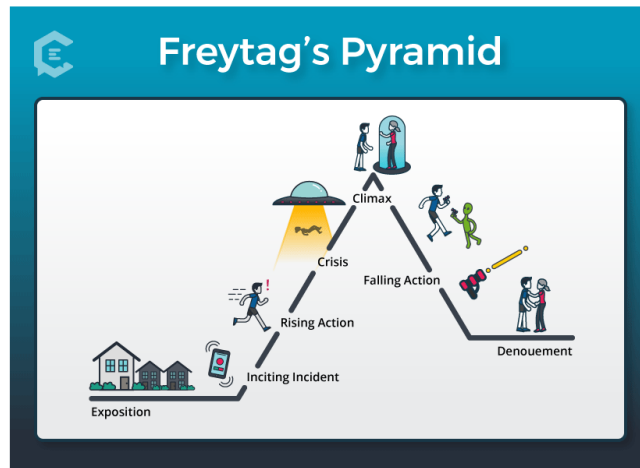
The literary elements of the drama include **setting, plot, characters** and **theme**. Essential to the effective presentation of these elements are **conflict, structure, suspense, performance and spectacle along with the music**. Each of these elements are inherent in any narrative composition, but drama adds extra elements of **stage direction, lighting effects, and the visual presence of the actors, the set and costumes**.

### 1. Setting

The time and place where a story is set is one of its important parts. The era or time in which the incidents in the play take place, influence the characters in their appearance and personalities. The time setting may affect the central theme of the play, the issues raised (if any), the conflict, and the interactions between the characters. The historical and social context of the play is also defined by the time and place where it is set. The time period and the location in which the story is set, affect the play's staging. Costumes and makeup, the backgrounds and the furniture used, the visuals (colors and kind of lighting), and the sound are among the important elements of a play that dictate how the story is translated into a stage performance. *The Merchant of Venice* has been set in the 16<sup>th</sup> century Venice. *Romeo and Juliet* has been set in the era between 1300 and 1600, perhaps the Renaissance period which is the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries.

### 2. Plot and Plot Structures

The order of events occurring in a play make its plot. Essentially, the plot is the story that the play narrates. The entertainment value of a play depends largely on the sequence of events in the story. The connection between the events and the characters in them form an integral part of the plot. What the characters do, how they interact, the course of their lives as narrated by the story, and what happens to them in the end, constitutes the plot. A struggle between two individuals, the relation between them, a struggle with self, a dilemma, or any form of conflict of one character with himself or another character in the play, goes into forming the story's plot. The story unfolds through a series of incidents that share a cause-and-effect relationship. Generally, a story begins with exposing the past or background of the main and other characters, and the point of conflict, then proceeds to giving the central theme or climax. Then come the consequences of the climax and the play ends with a conclusion. This is best described diagrammatically using Freytag's Pyramid as shown below:



### What is a Freytag's Pyramid?

**Gustav Freytag**, the 19<sup>th</sup> Century German playwright and novelist, drew a simple triangle to represent dramatic structure and highlighted seven parts he considered necessary to storytelling: exposition, inciting incident, rising action, climax, falling action, resolution, and denouement (French for “the ending”).

### 7 elements of dramatic structure in Freytag's Pyramid:

1. **Exposition:** The storyteller sets the scene and the character's background.
2. **Inciting Incident:** The character reacts to something that has happened, and it starts a chain reaction of events.
3. **Rising Action:** The story builds. There is often a *complication*, which means the problem the character tried to solve gets more complex.
4. **Climax:** The story reaches the point of greatest tension between the protagonist and antagonist (or if there is only one main character, the darkness or lightness of that character appears to take control).
5. **Falling Action:** The story shifts to action that happens as a result of the climax, which can also contain a *reversal* (when the character shows how they are changed by events of the climax).
6. **Resolution:** The character solves the problem or conflict.
7. **Denouement:** French for “the ending,” the denouement is often happy if it's a comedy, and dark and sad if it's a tragedy.

### 3. Characters and Characterisation

The characters that form a part of the story are interwoven with the plot of the drama. Each character in a play has a personality of its own and a set of principles and beliefs. Actors in the play have the responsibility of bringing the characters to life. The main character in the play who the audience identifies with, is the protagonist. He/she represents the theme of the play. The character that the protagonist conflicts with, is the antagonist or villain. While some characters play an active role throughout the story, some are only meant to take the story forward and some others appear only in certain parts of the story and may or may not have a significant role in it. Sometimes, these characters are of help in making the audiences focus on the play's theme or main characters. The way in which the characters are portrayed and developed is known as characterization. Here is a list of characters in Romeo and Juliet.

#### 4. Conflict

Irish playwright George Bernard Shaw once said “No conflict, no drama”. Conflict is the basis of all good theatre and should therefore be an essential component of drama. Drama without conflict is usually very dull, or in other words, there is no drama without any conflict in it.

*Conflict generally occurs when a character cannot achieve an objective due to an obstacle. This obstacle may be internal or external – between characters or between characters and their environment. Conflict can be shown in a variety of ways, for example through physical, verbal or psychological means. Conflict can be embedded in the structure of the drama.*

There are seven types of narrative conflict that we find in drama. A play may have many of them at a time in its structure or may have only one out of the following:

1. Person vs. Fate/God
2. Person vs. Self
3. Person vs. Person
4. Person vs Society
5. Person vs. Nature
6. Person vs. Supernatural
7. Person vs. Technology



#### 5. Theme

The theme of a play refers to its central idea. It can either be clearly stated through dialog or action, or can be inferred after watching the entire performance. The theme is the philosophy that forms the base of the story or a moral lesson that the characters learn. It is the message that the play gives to the audience. For example, the theme of a play could be of how greed leads to one's destruction, or how the wrong use of authority ultimately results in the end of power. The theme of a play could be blind love or the strength of selfless love and sacrifice, or true friendship. For example, the play *Romeo and Juliet*, is based on a brutal and overpowering romantic love between Romeo and Juliet that forces them to go to extremes, finally leading them to self-destruction.

#### 6. Dialogue:

The story of a play is taken forward by means of dialogs. The story is narrated to the audiences through the interaction between the play's characters, which is in the form of dialogs. The contents of the dialogs and the quality of their delivery have a major role to play in the impact that the play has on the audiences. It is through the dialogs between characters that the story can be understood. They are important in revealing the personalities of the characters. The words used, the accent, tone, pattern of speech, and even the pauses in speech, say a lot about the character and help reveal not just his personality, but also his social status, past, and family background as given by the play. Monologues and soliloquies that are speeches given to oneself or to other characters help put forward points that would have been difficult to express through dialogs. "What's in a name? That which we call a rose By any other name would smell as sweet" from *Romeo and Juliet* in which

Juliet tells Romeo of the insignificance of names or "To be, or not to be", a soliloquy from *Hamlet* are some of the greatest lines in literature.

7. **Performance:** It is another important element of drama, as the impact that a story has on the audiences is largely affected by the performances of the actors. When a written play is transformed into a stage performance, the actors cast for different roles, the way they portray the characters assigned to them, and the way their performances are directed are some important factors that determine the play's impact. Whether an actor's appearance (includes what he wears and how he carries himself on stage) suits the role he is playing, and how well he portrays the character's personality are determinants of how well the play would be taken by the audiences. Different actors may play the same roles in different renditions of a play. A particular actor/actress in a certain role may be more or less accepted and appreciated than another actor in the same role. As different actors are cast for different roles, their roles are more or less appreciated depending on their performances. The stage performances of a play's characters, especially those in lead roles, directly affect the success and popularity of a play.

### 8. Spectacle / Visual elements

While the dialog and music are the audible aspects of drama, the visual element deals with the spectacular scenes, costumes, and special effects used in it. The visual element of drama, also known as the spectacle, renders a visual appeal to the stage setup. The costumes and makeup must suit the characters. Besides, it is important for the scenes to be dramatic enough to hold the audiences to their seats. The special effects used in a play should accentuate the portion or character of the story that is being highlighted.

9. **Music:** Although considered as a part of the staging, music is also considered as the necessary element of drama. Music includes the use of sounds and rhythm in dialogs as well as music compositions that are used in the plays. The background score, the songs, and the sound effects used should complement the situation and the characters in it. The right kind of sound effects or music, if placed at the right points in the story, act as a great supplement to the high and low points in the play. The music and the lyrics should go well with the play's theme. If the scenes are accompanied by pieces of music, they become more effective on the audiences.

=====

### References

<https://www.clearvoice.com/blog/what-is-freytags-pyramid-dramatic-structure/>

<https://englishsummary.com/elements-drama/>

<https://entertainism.com/elements-of-drama>

www.dr-prafull.ga