

Crucial Concepts for Study and Discussion of Literature (Genre and Related Terms)

- **literature:** written (also spoken) compositions designed to tell stories, dramatize situations, and reveal thoughts and emotions, and also to interest, entertain, stimulate, broaden, and ennoble readers or listeners.
- **genre:** the category to which a literary work belongs.
- **fiction:** narratives, characters, and speeches based in the imagination of the author, not in literal, reportorial facts.
- **invention:** the process of making up situations and stories out of the imagination, derived by the writer from life experiences and thought
- **fantasy:** the creation of events that are dreamlike or fantastic, departing from ordinary understanding of reality because of apparently illogical location, movement, causation, and chronology
- **verisimilitude** (at one with truth)/ **realism:** a characteristic of literature whereby the characters, dialogue, actions, and outcomes in a literary work are designed to seem true, lifelike, real, probable, and believable
- **imitation:** the idea that literature is derived from life and is an imaginative duplication of life experiences; closely connected to verisimilitude and realism
- **prose or narrative fiction:** novels, short stories, and shorter prose works that generally focus on one or a few characters who undergo some sort of change or development as they interact with other characters and deal with their problems.
- **narrative:** any work of literature, written or oral, that tells a story
- **short story:** a compact, concentrated narrative that may also contain description, dialogue, and commentary. Poe used the term “brief prose tale” for the short story, and emphasized that it should create a powerful single impression.
- **novel:** a long work of prose fiction using the same basic elements as the short story
- **allegory:** a narrative or dramatic story which may be applied to a parallel set of situations while maintaining its own narrative integrity
- **fable:** a short, pointed story illustrating a moral truth
- **parable:** a brief narrative designed to illustrate a moral, ethical, or religious truth
- **didactic literature:** a literary work that is meant to instruct, give advice, or convey a philosophy or moral message
- **persuasion:** writing that tries to convince the reader or listener to think or act in a certain way
- **drama:** a play or group of plays; a literary form written to be acted
- **poem/poetry:** a variable literary form which is, foremost, characterized by the rhythmical qualities of language; a work or works characterized by rhythmic, compressed language that uses figures of speech to appeal to emotions and imaginations.
- **nonfiction:** prose writing that narrates real events.
- **autobiography:** a work of nonfiction that relates and account of the writer's own life
- **biography:** a work of nonfiction that gives an account of a person's life written by another person
- **essay:** a short piece of nonfiction prose that examines a single subject from a limited point of view.

Crucial Concepts for Prose (Plot, Conflict, Plot Structure)

- **plot:** a plan of development for the actions or incidents, sequential or chronological, which occur in a fictional work
- **actions/incidents:** the things that characters do in works of literature; the events or occurrences
- **conflict/dilemma:** the essence of plot--struggle between opposing “forces” (**external:** person vs. person; person vs. society; person vs. nature; person vs. fate, and **internal:** person vs. self: conflicting desires or perceived needs with responsibilities, etc.; conflict is a “contest” between characters or forces of approximately equal strength causing doubt about the outcome, thus creating tension in a work)
- **protagonist:** the principal character in a work, the human center of interest, who is involved in the major conflict.

- **antagonist:** the character opposing the protagonist. The conflict between a protagonist and human or nonhuman force is antagonism.
- **structure:** the arrangement and placement of materials within a narrative or drama; the way in which the work is laid out and given form or shape to bring out the conflict; the study of structure is about the causes and reasons for how the author “arranges ” things in his/her work--placement, balance, recurring themes, juxtapositions, true and misleading conclusions, suspense, and imitation of models of forms like letters, conversations, confessions, etc.; it’s the study of why things are where they are in the work
- **aspects of structure** (common to all genres):
 - exposition:** “laying out” of materials in the work (setting, characters, etc.); while usually at the “beginning”, can occur throughout a work
 - inciting moment/exciting force:** incident, statement, etc. that sets the plot in motion beginning the rising action
 - rising action/complication:** onset of the major conflict (plot)
 - climax:** the turning point of the action, in which the conflict and the consequent tension are brought out to the fullest extent; the point at when all the rest of the action becomes firmly set; the “beginning of the end”
 - resolution/denouement:** resolution (releasing, untying) or denouement (untying) is the set of actions bringing the story to its conclusion

(**crisis:** usually seen as the separation between what has gone before and what will come after, is usually a decision or action undertaken to resolve the conflict which, however, may not have the intended results--these belong to climax)

N.B. Many narratives vary from this “ideal” one while maintaining all of its elements.
- **flashback:** a narrative or dramatic episode that presents past action (often through memory) in the present.
- **framing (enclosing) method:** the repetition of an element, such as action, setting, or situation, at both the beginning and ending of a work so that the work itself is “framed” or “enclosed”.
- **epiphany:** in a literary work, a moment of sudden insight or revelation that a character experiences

Crucial Concepts (Setting and Mood)

- **setting:** the natural and artificial environment in which characters in literature live their lives; the sum total of references to physical and temporal objects and artifacts; may be natural or manufactured (things built by people or the things they possess)
- **uses of setting:**
 - creating credibility** or believability for the world of the work
 - making a statement** (author’s use setting like painters use certain images to create ideas)
 - interacting with character** (authors underscore the importance of place, circumstances, and time upon human growth and change)
 - organizing action** (movement from place to place all interconnecting; framing or enclosing--using the same setting at beginning and end)
 - creating mood/atmosphere**
 - creating irony** (when setting does not “coincide” with characters or events)

Crucial Concepts (Character and Characterization)

- **character:** an extended verbal representation of a human being, the inner self that determines thought, speech, and behavior
- **trait:** a typical or habitual mode of behavior
- **protagonist:** the principal character in a work, the human center of interest , who is involved in the major conflict.

- **antagonist:** the character opposing the protagonist. The conflict between a protagonist and human or nonhuman force is antagonism.
- **round character:** usually the major figure in a work, but in fact any fictional character endowed by the author with many individual and dynamic traits. The essence of roundness is that a character undergo some sort of growth or change as a result of experiences developed in the story.
- **dynamic character:** a character with the capacity to adapt, change, and grow.
- **flat character:** a character, usually minor, who is not individualized and rounded but who is relatively undeveloped, static, and unchanging. The role of a flat character is not to be the center of interest.
- **static character:** a character, usually minor, who remains the same and undergoes no growth or change in the work.
- **foil:** a type of character who sets off or highlights aspects of the protagonist
- **parallel:** characters who share similar experiences, beliefs, etc. in the service of helping to create thematic ideas
- **catalyst:** a character who affects another character, the situation, or the outcome in some way
- **stock character:** a character, usually flat and static, who performs predictably in repeating situations.
- **stereotype:** a stock character who seems to have been stamped from a mold; a highly conventionalized, unchanging character.
- **nonrealistic character:** an undeveloped and often symbolic character without full motivation or individual identity.
- **methods of characterization:** ways used by an author to present information about characters-
 - INDIRECT--what the characters themselves say
 - what characters think (if the author expresses their thoughts)
 - what the characters do
 - what other characters say about them
 - descriptions of the characters
 - DIRECT--what the author says about them, speaking as a storyteller or observer

Crucial Concepts (Point of View)

- **point of view:** the position from which details in a narrative are perceived and related to the reader; the “voice” of a story, the speaker who is doing the narration; the means by which the reality and truthfulness of a story are made to seem authentic; the focus or angle of vision from which things are not only seen and reported but also judged.
- **authorial voice:** name given to the speaker of a story when the speaker is not otherwise identified; used to distinguish the speaker from the author.
- **speaker/voice/persona/narrator:** a fictitious observer, the point-of-view narrator of a story or poem, often a totally independent character who is completely imagined and consistently maintained by the author
- **dramatic/objective/ or third-person objective point of view:** a third-person narration reporting speech and action, but rigorously excluding commentary on the action and thoughts of any of the characters.
- **first-person point of view:** the “I” narrator who may acquire authority because of close involvement in the action or because of being an observer.
- **limited (limited omniscient) point of view:** a third-person narration with the focus made on one particular character’s activities and thoughts.
- **omniscient point of view:** a third-person narrative in which the speaker not only describes the actions and speeches of all of the characters, but also enters their minds to explain their thoughts.
- **point-of-view character:** the central figure in a limited-point-of-view narration, the character about whom events turn, the focus of attention in the narration.
- **second-person point of view:** a narration employing the “you” personal pronoun. Rarely used.
- **third-person point of view:** a method of narration in which all things are described in the third person and in which the narrator is not introduced as a identifiable persona.

Crucial Concepts (Tone)

- **tone:** the methods used by writers to convey and control attitude about their material and their readers. While specific characters may exhibit certain tones/attitudes, there is also the overall tone of the work based on the way the author manipulates all elements.
- **irony:** the use of language and situations which are widely inappropriate or opposite from what might be ordinarily expected; the situations and expressions by which a writer conveys a specific idea or attitude by stating something apparently opposite or contradictory.
- **major types of irony:**
 - verbal:** language stating the opposite of what is expected, where one thing is said and another is meant; some devices:
 - understatement/litote** (using words that “underplay” more significant experiences),
 - overstatement/hyperbole** (deliberate exaggeration for effect),
 - double-entendre** (deliberate ambiguity wherein what is said suggests more than one meaning)
 - situational:** a type of irony emphasizing that human beings are enmeshed in forces beyond their comprehension or control, so that whatever they do, their efforts are minimal or ineffective; when what happens is different from what is expected (Special type: **cosmic irony** or **irony of fate** where it seems that the universe is indifferent to individuals, who are subject to blind chance, accident, perpetual misfortune, & misery.
 - dramatic irony:** a special kind of situational irony in which a character perceives his/her plight one way while both the reader (audience) and possibly one or more of the other characters understand it in greater perspective.

Crucial Concepts (Style)

- **style:** the manipulation of language, the way in which writers tell the story, develop the argument, dramatize the play, or compose the poem; the placement of words in the service of content; the right words at the right time in the right circumstances..
- **diction:** a writer’s word choice, types of words, and level of language to create a specific effect.
- **levels of diction:**
 - formal or high:** proper, elevated, and elaborate language characterized by complex words, correct word order, the absence of contractions, and a lofty tone.
 - middle, neutral, or plain:** correct language and word order without elaborate words or a lofty tone; still standard vocabulary, but shunning longer words; may include the use of contractions.
 - informal or low:** relaxed, conversational, colloquial, or substandard language.
- **jargon:** words or phrases that are characteristic of a particular profession, trade, or pursuit
- **dialect:** a way of speaking that is characteristic of a particular region or group of people
- **specific language:** references to a real thing or things that may be readily perceived or imagined.
- **general language:** words referring to broad classes of persons or things.
- **concrete diction:** words that describe specific qualities or conditions, such as ice-cream being “cold,” “sweet,” and “creamy.”
- **abstract diction:** language that refers to broad and unspecified qualities, such as ice cream being “good” or “great.”
- **denotation:** refers to the actual “dictionary” meaning of words without associations or overtones.
- **connotation:** the emotional, psychological, or social overtones or implications that a word carries in addition to its denotation.

- **rhetoric:** the art of persuasive writing; more broadly, the general art of writing.
 - counting:** by “counting” the number of words in a sentence, or the number of specific parts of speech, or the number of syllables in relation to the total number of words, provides an “opening” into the “tendencies” of a writer’s style.
 - sentence types:** identifying the sorts of sentences (**simple, compound, complex, and compound-complex**) that passages and works contain; provides another “clue” when examining style
 - parallelism:** the repetition of the same grammatical form to balance expressions, conserve words, and build up to climaxes.
- **mood:** the overall feeling or atmosphere evoked by a work, usually as a result of the quality of the descriptions.
- **figures of speech/figurative language:** expressions that conform to a particular pattern or form, such as metaphor, simile, antimetabole, personification, etc.
- **image/imagery:** an “image” is language referring to sensory impressions, creating vividness and immediacy; “imagery” refers to a number of images in a single work or a number of works
- **epithet:** an adjective or other descriptive phrase that is regularly used to characterize a person, place, or thing.
- **motif:** in literature, a word, character, object, image, metaphor, or idea that recurs in a work or in several works.
- **allusion:** unacknowledged references to people, places, events, symbols, things, ideas, etc. that the author expects to the reader to recognize and connect to the story in some way.
- **stream of consciousness:** a modern writing style that tries to depict the random flow of thoughts, emotions, memories, and associations rushing through a character’s mind.

Crucial Concepts (Symbolism and Allegory)

- **symbol/symbolism:** a specific thing that may stand for ideas, values, persons, or ways of life; a symbol always points beyond its own meaning toward greater and more complex meaning
- **cultural (universal) symbols:** generally or universally recognized symbols embodying ideas or emotions that the writer and the reader share in common as a result of their social and cultural heritage
- **private (contextual or authorial) symbol:** a symbol which is derived not from common historical, cultural, or religious materials, but which is rather developed within the context of an individual work
- **allegory:** is like symbolism in that both use one thing to refer to something else; allegory, however, puts symbols into consistent and sustained action resulting in not only a self-sufficient narrative, but also in a work that had another series or level of meaning; some works are total allegories, while some may contain only sections or episodes that are allegorical in nature
- **special types of allegorical narratives:**
 - fable:** a short, pointed story illustrating a moral truth
 - parable:** a brief allegorical narrative designed to illustrate a moral, ethical, or religious truth
 - myth/mythology:** a story that explains a specific aspect of life or a natural phenomenon, based in religion, philosophy, and collective psychology or various groups or cultures; **mythology** refers to a tribal or national group of myths, or to all myths collectively
- **allusion:** universal or cultural symbols and allegories often allude to other works in western cultural heritage, such as the Bible, Greco-Roman mythology, or classical literature which, when “unlocked” by the reader help to add resonance and impact to the text

Crucial Concepts/Terms (Poetry)

Types of Poems -- (poiema [Greek]: "something made/fashioned (in words)")

- **Closed-form poetry:** traditional forms determined by some combination of meter, rhyme scheme, line length, and stanza form (sonnets, ballads, common measure/hymnal stanza, song/lyric, ode, haiku, epigram, and limerick, to name the most common)
- **Open-form poetry:** avoid ready-made patterns among which may be rhyme schemes or regular meters; nevertheless, there is always some pattern to the way letters, words, lines, and sentences are arranged to accomplish effects. (**Free Verse:** unrhymed lines without regular rhythm was the term formerly used for this type of poem.) (some forms are: prose poems, visual poetry, concrete verse, and shape verse)
- **Narrative Poem:** tells a story (epic, ballad)
- **Lyric Poetry (Melic Poetry):** Greek - pure lyric: a free stanzaic form where the structure and rhyme scheme of the first stanza are duplicated in all subsequent stanzas.
 - A. monody - a poem sung by one person accompanied by a musical instrument in a variety of meters and on a wide range of subject matter; its diction was simple and elegant; its tone, personal and intimate
 - B. ode (the choral ode - Greek): more complex than the original monody, have varying rhyme schemes and line lengths; characterized by elevated style and elaborate form, these were addressed generally to some person or thing. The dithyramb was performed by the dancing chorus at public festivals in honor of Dionysus, and ceremonial odes were performed at public events
- **Prose Poem:** a poem with its own principles of structure, relying on the cadences of language and the progression of images to convey the poetic experience; so named because these works often look exactly like prose writing.
- **Ballad:** a narrative poem composed of quatrains in which lines of iambic tetrameter alternate with iambic trimeter; normally only the second and fourth lines of each stanza contain rhyming words.
- **Ballade:** French poetic form, usually having three eight-line stanzas (*ababbcbc*), concluding with a three-line *envoy* (*bcbc*); three rhymes with no rhyming word repeated
- **Cinquain:** five-line unrhymed form, with twenty-two total syllables as follows-- first line (2); second line (4); third line (6); fourth line (8); fifth line (2)
- **Elegy:** a poem that mourns the death of a person or laments something lost or the decline of a situation
- **Epic:** long narrative poem, usually telling of heroic deeds, events of historical importance, or religious or mythological subjects
- **Grue:** short, humorous, gruesome poems, not to be taken literally
- **Haiku:** a form of Japanese poetry, composed of seventeen syllables (in a 5,7,5 pattern) in three lines that evokes a complete mood or impression through the juxtaposition of a natural physical element with a phrase to suggest a season or emotion.
- **Limerick:** an often humorous poem with five lines and a sing-song rhythm of three beats in the 1st, 2nd, and 5th lines, and 2 in the remainder; typical rhyme pattern *ababba*
- **Pastoral:** poem about country life (originally about shepherds)
- **Pictogram:** poetry arranged in lines that form a shape or make a picture about the subject; sometimes called a shape poem
- **Prose Poem:** a poem with its own principles of structure, relying on the cadences of language and the progression of images to convey the poetic experience; so named because these works often look exactly like prose writing.
- **Romance:** poetry dealing with chivalry, love, romance, and religion
- **Rondeau:** French verse form with a set pattern of fifteen lines in three stanzas, with two rhymes throughout the poem--first stanza (*aabba*); second (*aab* plus refrain); third (*aabba* plus refrain)
- **Rondel:** French verse form with a set pattern of thirteen lines in three stanzas with two rhymes throughout the poem (*abba abab abbaa*)

- **Sestina:** six-stanza form with a three-line *envoy*
- **Sonnet:** a rigid 14-line form with variable structure and rhyme scheme according to type (Petrarchan, Spenserian, Shakespearean)
- **Tanka:** a classic form of Japanese poetry with five lines in a 5,7,5, 7,7, syllable pattern that reduces, because of its form, all poetic raw material to the concentrated essence of one event, mood, image, etc.
- **Triolet:** eight-line French form with two rhymes throughout the poem (*abaaabab*)
- **Villanelle:** a nineteen-line poem divided into five tercets (three-line stanzas), each with the rhyme scheme *aba*, and a final quatrain with the rhyme scheme *abaa*.

Lines, Meter and Arrangement in Poetry

- **Meter** is a poem's rhythm or its pattern of stressed and unstressed syllables. It is measured in units of feet. Metrical units are the building blocks of lines of verse; lines are named by the number of feet they contain.
- **Scansion:** the analysis of these mechanical elements within a poem to determine meter. Metric feet make up lines, which make up stanzas.
- **Foot:** rhythmic unit within a line of verse.
- **Verse:** a "line" of poetry.
- **Stanza:** a poetic unit made up of lines grouped together by rhyme and/or meter
- **Quatrain:** a stanza or poem of FOUR lines.
- **Octave:** an EIGHT line poem or stanza
- **Couplet:** TWO consecutive lines of poetry that rhyme
- **Tercet:** a stanza consisting of three lines
- **Cinquain:** five lines, unrhymed
- **Sestet:** a SIX line poem or stanza
- **Blank Verse:** unrhymed iambic pentameter
- **Burns Stanza:** six lines containing two miniature or short lines, according or a set pattern; also called Tail-Rhyme because of the short "tails"
- **Chaucerian Stanza (Rime Royal):** seven lines of iambic pentameter with *ababbcc* rhyme scheme
- **Ocatavia Rime:** eight lines of iambic pentameter with *abababcc* rhyme scheme
- **Spenserian Stanza:** nine lines (eight lines of iambic pentameter, followed by a ninth lines of iambic hexameter) with *ababbcbcc* rhyme scheme

Major Types of Metrical Feet

iambus (u /)
trochee (/ u)
anapest (u u /)
dactyl (/ u u)
spondee (/ /)
pyrrhic (u u)

Types of Verses

1 foot = monometer 5 feet = pentameter
2 feet = dimeter 6 feet = hexameter
3 feet = trimeter 7 feet = heptameter
4 feet = tetrameter 8 feet = octameter

Sound in Poetry

- **Rhyme:** the repetition of like sounds at regular intervals
- **Exact/Perfect rhyme**-- rhyming words in which both the vowel and consonant sound rhyme
- **Slant rhyme** (near/approximate)-- words that almost rhyme, usually with different vowel sounds and similar consonant sounds
- **Sight/Eye rhyme** -- in a position in a poem where rhyme is expected, eye-rhyming words look as though they should rhyme exactly, but do not
- **End Rhyme**--occurs at the END of a line of verse
- **Male Rhyme**--rhyme in which only the last syllables agree (dismayed, paid, stayed)

- **Internal Rhyme**--contained WITHIN the line of verse
- **Rhyme Scheme**--the PATTERN of rhymes within a unit of verse (end rhyme sounds represented by letters)
- **Assonance**--repetition of two or more VOWEL sounds within a line
- **Consonance**--repetition of two or more CONSONANT sounds within a line
- **Alliteration**--repetition of two or more INITIAL sounds in words within a line
- **Onomatopoeia**--technique of using a word whose SOUND SUGGESTS its meaning
- **Euphony**--use of compatible, HARMONIOUS sounds to produce a pleasing effect
- **Cacophony** (Dissonance)--use of HARSH and INHARMONIOUS sounds
- **Caesura**-- short or heavy pause separating cadence groups (meaningful groups)
- **Cadence**--rhythmic rise and fall of sound
- **End-stopped Lines**--lines of verse with end punctuation
- **Enjambment**: a line of poetry having no real end punctuation but running over into the next line

Poetic Devices and Figurative Language

- **Figurative Language**-- expressions that conform to particular patterns and arrangements of thought. Also called **rhetorical figures or devices**. The most important are: metaphor and simile. Others include: paradox, apostrophe, personification, synecdoche and metonymy, synesthesia, the pun (paronomasia), and hyperbole (overstatement) and litote (understatement).
- **Allusion**--reference made to an outside fact, event, or other source
- **Antithesis**--contrasted ideas in parallel form
- **Apostrophe**--addressing a person or personified object not present
- **Catalog**--technique of "listing"
- **Contractions**--shortening words by leaving out letters for poetic effect or other effect
- **Hyperbole**--gross exaggeration for effect; overstatement
- **Invocation**--a call to a Muse, god, or spirit for inspiration
- **Imagery**--the use of words that trigger the imagination to recall and recombine images: old and new mental "pictures" of
 - sights (**visual imagery**)
 - sounds (**auditory imagery**)
 - tastes (**gustatory imagery**)
 - smells (**olfactory imagery**)
 - sensations of touch (**tactile imagery**)
 - general motion (**kinetic imagery**)
 - human or animal motion and activity (**kinesthetic imagery**)
- **Irony**--contrast between actual meaning and the suggestion of another meaning
- **Litote**--deliberate underplaying or undervaluing of a thing for emphasis
- **Metaphor**--figure of speech that makes a comparison of two UNLIKE things by identification or substitution:
 - Implied Metaphor**--a suggested comparison not directly stated
 - Extended Metaphor**--used throughout the poem
 - Mixed Metaphor**--use of two or more inconsistent metaphors in one expression (no-no!)
 - Conceit**--a kind of metaphor that makes a comparison between two startlingly different things, but provides a framework for the entire poem
- **Metonymy**--figure of speech in which something very closely associated with a thing is used to stand for the thing itself
- **Oxymoron**--figure of speech that combines OPPOSITE or contradictory ideas or terms
- **Paradox**--statement which appears self-contradictory, but underlines a basic truth
- **Personification**--figure of speech in which objects/animals have human qualities
- **Pun** (Paronomasia)-- a word play in which writer reveals that words with different meanings have similar or identical sounds
- **Simile**--direct comparison of two UNLIKE objects using LIKE or AS
- **Symbolism**--the use of one object to suggest another (hidden) object or idea
- **Synecdoche**--figure of speech that substitutes a PART for the WHOLE

Aspects of Poetry

- **Character**-- the speaker/narrator/persona (point of view character); the listener; the reader; the participant or subject
- **Condensed Thought and Feeling**--distilling the idea, feeling, emotion, etc. to its essence through choice of exactly the right words (prose = cologne; poetry = perfume)
- **Diction**--a writer's choice of words, particularly for clarity, effect, and precision (words and specific types of words chosen to produce a desired effect). Diction can be formal or informal (level); types of words can be specific or general, abstract or concrete. Attention must be paid to not only the denotation of words, but also their connotation (loaded words). The language of a poem can be simple or ornate.
- **Form**--the shape a poem takes: "like a vase" = strict adherence to a set pattern (concrete poems); "like a tree" = unique expression not adhering to any set pattern (free verse)
- **Mood/Atmosphere**-- the emotional aura evoked by the poem
- **Setting**-- the time, place, thought, social conventions, general circumstances of the figure(s) in a poem
- **Sound**--the combination of words to create a sound based upon meter and rhyme to create an intended effect
- **Syntax**-- word order and sentence structure for effect. Also repetition (repeating the same phrase or structure several times) and parallelism (a rhetorical figure in which the same grammatical forms are repeated in the same order) may play an important role.
- **Theme**--the author's major idea or meaning (sometimes can be the subject matter of the poem)
- **Tone**--the means by which poets reveal attitudes and feelings
- **Unique Vision**--the poet's perception of the world
- **Voice/Persona**--the speaker or point of view

Crucial Concepts (Drama)

The Nature of Drama

- **drama:** the word is derived from the Greek word *dran*, which means “to do” or “to act”. Thus in many ways this “doing” or “acting” is the definitive quality of drama. While drama as a literary genre is an art of words, unlike fiction and poetry, the words are in dialogue. Drama imitates the action of life (Aristotle’s *mimesis*) by developing interaction and dialogue among a group of characters. Because no narration or description exists in drama, except occasionally as a part of a speech or a whole speech spoken by a character, plot and characters are discovered through dialogue and action.
- **dramatic conventions:** traditional or customary methods of presentation (often unrealistic) accepted by the audience or reader. They are based, in part, on the stage conventions of the age in which a play is written. Most dramatic conventions reflect either the physical conditions of the theater or the prejudices of the society in any given age.

Play Texts

- **dramatist/playwright:** one who writes a script/play
- **dialogue:** conversation among two or more characters
- **monologue:** speech delivered by a single character usually directed at the stage or viewing audience (**soliloquy** has no “audience”)
- **aside:** in Shakespearean/Renaissance drama, a comment or speech heard by the audience but not by other characters on the stage
- **stage directions:** in modern plays, the playwright’s instructions to the actor and/or director

Basic Elements of Dramatic Literature

Plot, Action, and Character

- **plot:** in drama as in fiction, is the ordered chain of physical, emotional, or intellectual events that ties the action together; a planned sequence of interrelated actions that begins in a state of imbalance, grows out of conflict, and resolves into some new situation; often complicated and complex, dramatic plots may have “double plots” or a combination of a “main plot” with one or more “subplots.”
- **conflict:** the “mainspring” of the plot, can be physical, psychological, social, or all three. Most commonly, the conflict of a play is a combination of the major types of literary conflict.
- **plot structure:** most plays contain a five-stage progression of the action--
 - exposition** (essential background information--characters, setting, situation conflicts..)
 - inciting moment/exciting force** (the “impetus” for the beginning of the action proper)
 - rising action/complication** (the build-up of conflict as the action progresses)
 - climax/crisis** (the turning point of the play; action can only be resolved in one direction)
 - falling action/catastrophe** (events following climax usually after some discovery or event)
 - resolution/denouement** (follows the moment at which “all the pieces fall into place” and leads to the resolution or end of conflict)

N.B. The “pyramid” diagram used to graph the placement/position of these stages is called the Freytag Pyramid of Plot Structure. It should be noted that not all plays follow this plan exactly, but that most contain, in some way or another, all of the stages.

- **character: a person/entity created by the playwright to carry the action, language, ideas, and emotions of the play. As in other fiction, there are the following kinds:**
 - round or dynamic characters** (who are fully developed and undergo some change in the course of the play)
 - flat or static characters** (who tend to be undeveloped and/or unchanging)
 - protagonist** (the main character[s]; usually round/dynamic)
 - antagonist** (one or more characters in opposition to the main character)
 - foil character** (one whose behavior, traits, and/or attitudes contrast in some way in order to help “set off” or define another)
 - parallel character** (one whose similar situation or attitude toward a situation reinforces the main theme)
 - catalyst character** (one whose actions serve to complicate the plot, change the course of another character’s actions, or make possible the tragic or happy ending)
- **point of view:** playwrights employ the dramatic point of view in which the audience only receives the information communicated by the characters; the audience is given the “objective raw materials”-- the action and the words--but is not overtly guided towards any conclusions as with a first or third person narration.
- **setting, sets, and scenery:** in drama serves to place the action in a specific time and place and helps create the appropriate mood. In the script, setting is often described in words in the stage directions. In production, it is “brought to life” through scenery, props, and lighting.
- **diction, imagery, style, and language:** words give plays their emotional impact and meaning. Most of what the audience learns about characters, conflict, relationships, and ideas is conveyed through language.
 - the language must be appropriate to the play (fit the time, place, and characters)
 - the words and rhetorical devices delineate character, emotion, and theme (characters may use similes, metaphors, etc. that contribute “symbolically” to the play as well as delineating character)
 - the language may include accents, dialect, idiom, jargon, or clichés to help create characters in a specific milieu
- **tone and atmosphere:** in drama, as in other literature, signifies the way moods and attitudes are created and conveyed. Reading a play posing particular problems in assessing tone:
 - while in modern plays, stage directions may indicate the tone of specific lines, nevertheless, readers must carefully examine diction, tempo, imagery, and context as clues to the tone of specific speeches and whole plays
 - tone may be used to create an atmosphere or mood that dominates a play
 - in dealing with tone, readers must be careful to distinguish between the tone of an individual character and the playwright’s tone
 - dramatic irony is often one of the tools used by the playwright to create tone (created when the audience knows more than the characters or when one or more of the characters know more than most of the others)
- **subject and theme:** the aspects of the human condition explored by the playwright constitute the subject of a play. The ideas about these aspects that the play dramatizes make up its theme or meaning. Theme is the end result of all the elements of a drama put together. It is often difficult to isolate and identify because playwrights rarely make explicitly thematic statements. Also, plays may explore any number of diverse themes.
- **Elements of tragedy** (according to Aristotle):
 - Tragedy is an **imitation (*mimesis*)** of a **single, unified action** that is **serious, complete, probable**, and of a **certain magnitude**.
 - It concerns the **fall** of a person whose **character is good, believable, and consistent**.
 - The fall is caused in part by some **error of judgment** or **frailty** in the protagonist (***hamartia***), and not by vice or depravity.
 - The **language** is **embellished** with each kind of **artistic ornament**.
 - The tragedy is presented in the form of **action, not narrative**.
 - It arouses in the **audience** the emotions of **pity and terror (*pathos*)** resulting in a **purging/release (*catharsis*)** of these emotions.

- **agon:** conflict or struggle
- **hamartia:** the “tragic flaw” in a character’s nature
- **hubris/hybris:** one type of hamartia/tragic flaw--excessive pride or arrogance
- **peripeteia/peripety:** the reversal of fortune for the protagonist from “good” to “bad”
- **anagnorisis:** the movement from ignorance to knowledge (discovery) on the part of the protagonist
- **apotheosis:** the “deification” of the protagonist; while not in most cases actually becoming “god”, the character demonstrates some sort of courage, moral or physical, that makes him heroic
- **mimesis:** the imitation of action
- **chorus:** the group of players, who in Greek drama, participate in the play as members of a particular segment of the population involved in or affected by the play’s action.
- **Three Unities:**
 - Unity of Time:** action takes place in a twenty-four hour period
 - Unity of Place:** action takes place in one location or setting
 - Unity of Action:** the imitation of an action that is complete--having a beginning, middle, and end, with a causal relationship in the different parts of the play.

N.B. The only unity actually enjoined by Aristotle is that of action. The other two were “developed” later by interpreters of the *Poetics*.

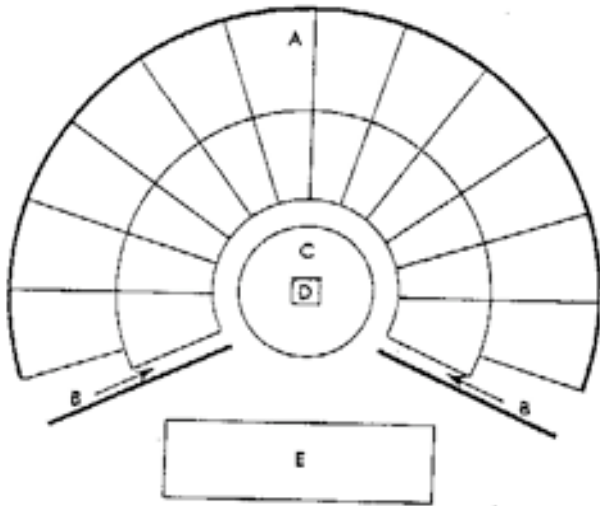
- **pathos:** the feelings of pity and terror aroused in the audience by the play’s action
- **catharsis:** the purging/release/cleansing of the feelings of pity and terror
- **tragic hero:**
 - a protagonist worthy of interest, concern, or sympathy
 - a protagonist who is neither a paragon of virtues, nor evil or depraved, or too “dull and stupid” or young to understand what is happening
 - has hamartia (tragic flaw) and/or commits an error of judgment
 - has a “noble cause”
 - undergoes peripeteia, anagnorisis, and apotheosis
- **structure of Greek tragedy:** Collectively, throughout the *Poetics*, Aristotle divides his analysis into six basic parts: plot-making , character delineation, thought and language, speech, song/music, and spectacle. Aristotle confined most of his analysis to play-making, mentioning the final three merely as components of the whole.
 - The plot consists of parts or types of incidents in the beginning, middle, and end of the play.
 - Prologue/Prologos** (exposition)
 - Parados** (entry-ode of the chorus)
 - Episodes/Episodia** (“scenes” involving character dialogue)
 - Choral Odes/Stasima** (odes wherein the chorus reacts, comments, and/or questions)

N.B. paeon is the term for the ode known as the song of praise for the god

Exodos (final “scene” including the exit-ode [final statement] of the chorus)

- **City Dionysia:** festival held in honor of the god Dionysus at which “drama” was first presented
- **dithyramb:** hymn sung by the **satyr chorus** in honor of Dioysus, the “twice-born” god; also called “**tragoedia**”, the song of the goat

- **Parts of the Greek Theater**



A. theatron
E. skene

B. paradoi
F. proskenion

C. orkestra
G. paraskenia

D. thymele

- **mechane:** crane-device that lowered a god onto the stage
- **deus ex machina:** "god from machine"--a device whereby all conflicts and tangles in characters' lives are resolved
- **ekkyklema:** platform on wheels rolled out to show offstage deaths or for indoor scenes
- **cothurnus:** elevated (platform) shoes worn by actors in Greek tragedies
- **soccus:** soft, ballet-type "slippers" worn in Greek comedy
- **onkus:** mask-headress worn by actors in Greek tragedy
- **Aeschylus:** first great Athenian dramatist; wrote the *Oresteia*, a trilogy based on the fate of house of the Greek king, Agamemnon
- **Sophocles:** second great Athenian tragic playwright; wrote what is called the *Oedipus Cycle* or the "Theban Plays" which relate the story of the fortunes of the house of Oedipus
- **Euripides:** third great Athenian dramatist; wrote innovative plays which often challenged existing conventions and ideas; created tales of great female tragic heroines--Medea, Phaedre, etc.
- **Aristophanes:** great Athenian writer of comedies such as *Lysistrata*, *The Birds*, *The Clouds*, etc.
- **Greek Old Comedy:** such as that written by Aristophanes, provides commentary on contemporary society, politics, literature, and war; this kind of play may have developed from the songs performed by the satyr chorus which became known as the "satyr plays"; the action was often boisterous and suggestive and satyr plays were often used as comic interludes between tragic plays; while not certain, many scholars see a link between the original form known as comedy (*komos oedia*) and the satyr play because of the critical view it takes of society; our word *satire* owes its origin to the satyr chorus and early Greek comedy.