WHAT IS A PLAY?
The Play

- The event that happens in the Theatre.
- What other events happen in the Theatre?
  - Music concert
  - Dance
  - Musicals
  - Magic shows
- The play is the action not just the words in the script.
Drama

- The Greek word for drama is “Dran”
  - Something done
  - It includes all forms of human activity
    - Argument, persuasion, passion, laughter
    - Speech/dance
  - What is happening from moment to moment.
- Conflict is created and resolved.
- Characters create human struggle with each other and themselves.
- Role models are created
  - Both positive and negative
- The play offers themes and ideas that inform the audience.
- A Play is life unfolding on stage that has been shaped into a work of art.
What is the typical Length of a Play?
How Long Is A Play?

- What is the standard length of a play?
  - 1-2 hours
  - Why?

- The shortest play on record is Samuel Beckett’s *Breath*. 1 minute long.

- Cultural influence effects the length of plays.

- Angels in America
  - Two parts lasting 7 hours.

- Coast of Utopia
  - A trilogy lasting nine hours.
Genre
Genre

- Come from the French word for “kind”
- A way of classifying what type of play we will be reading or watching.
- It gives insight to what is to come.
- The two basic types of drama, according to Aristotle are
  - Comedy
  - Tragedy
Tragedy
Tragedy

- Ends with a death of a main character
- Basic Theme revolves around human life and or society
- Usually based on a character of high ranking
  - King
  - Queen
- Contains a protagonist and antagonist.
- Some negative revelation occurs which leads to the characters fall.
Tragedy and Aristotle

- The Greek Philosopher who first described a tragedy.
- 384-322 B.C.
- Was famous for The Poetics.
Tragedy

- Protagonist
  - Carrier of the action
  - Has huge misfortune
  - Suffers more than he should
  - Bold human attack against insurmountable odds.

- Antagonist
  - Opposes the action
  - Super human
Tragedy

- Tragic figures should not sadden us. They may fall at the end, but not before they challenge the elements.
- Why does tragedy belong to an earlier era? Give examples and be specific.
Tragedy

- Modern plays don’t have god like antagonist.
- The struggle is against other humans not super human antagonist.
- Tragedy demands a larger than life context.
Comedy
Comedy

- Sometimes serious and sometimes not.
  - Bawdy jokes
  - Satirical skits
  - Erotic singers and dancers
  - Full stage chases
  - Clever devices
- Ordinary life situations and character development.
- Pursuit of love, ambition, social status.
Aristophanes wrote the first known comedies
Other Genres

- Mystery plays: bible plays
- Morality plays: Characters representing mankind.
- Tragicomedy: serious themes from a comic point of view.
- Dark comedy: funny beginning, depressing ending.
- History plays
  - Based on historical figures
  - Can be a tragedy.
  - Ex. Shakespeare’s *Henry IV*, Brecht’s *Galileo*. 
Melodrama

- Outwardly serious but full of spectacle, flamboyant dialogue, and suspense.
- Exaggerated plots.
- Stock characters.
- Accompanied by music.
Dramaturgy

- The action of a play has specific patterns.
- A play has a beginning, middle and ending which creates a unique patterns within the structure of the play.
- The action provides the thrills and excitement.
- The dramaturgy provides the insight and meaning that’s makes us want more.
- These patterns are called dramaturgy.
- We analyze a play using two intersecting axis.
  - Vertical axis
    - Major components of play
  - Horizontal axis
    - Tempo and structure of the play
Major components of play (Vertical axis)

6 components (According to Aristotle)

- Theme
- Spectacle
- Music
- Diction
- Characters
- Plot
Theme
Theme

- Central idea of the play
- Plays can have multiple themes that run through the story.
- Usually can be summed up in one or two words.
  - Love
  - Death
- Common types are
  - Coming of age
  - Conflict between people
  - Conflict in society
- The play must say something so the audience walks away with a message.
Spectacle
Spectacle

- Includes all visual aspects of the production
  - Light
  - Scenery
  - Costumes
- The overall look of the play.
- The visual element exist to help support the plot and the characters.
  - Helps with theme
Music
Music

- Greek plays where usually sung or chanted.
- Music can be heard in almost every production.
- Helps support the climax and further the story.
- Music can be incidental and used for transitions and background.
- Music can also be used as a soundscape that furthers the action and story of the production.
Diction
Diction

- Poetry of the play
  - Rhyme
  - Verse
  - Metaphor

- The diction comes from both the playwright and the actor.
  - The diction of a play will change from production to production.
Characters
Characters

- People who take acceptance of the plot.
- The character of the plot performs the actions of the play.
- Guides the audience through the story and understand the plot.
- Characters need to be three dimensional and interesting.
  - We need to love and hate the characters.
Plot
Plot

- The story is the narrative, the plot is a timeline of discoveries. The events that make up the story.
  - Time line of story
  - Cause and effect
  - The order of entrances and exits
  - Discoveries

- The inner and outer actions of the play

- Aristotle considered the plot (mythos) the most important element in drama.

- This is how we describe the play to others.
Conventions
Conventions

- An added component that was not included by Aristotle.
- what the audience expects
- The audiences ability to suspend disbelief and be sucked into the world of the play.
  - Light change on stage.
  - Exits through a door
  - Birds chirping in the background.
- What will the audience accept on stage before they stop believing.
Horizontal Action

- The structure or timing of a play.
- This is the dramatic structure of the play.
- This is broken down into three major groupings.
  - Preplay
  - Play
  - Postplay
Pre Play

- How do we attract the audience.
  - This idea dates back to the Greek ages.
  - **Preplay** refers to the procession in the ancient Greek theatre and the gathering of the audience in the modern theatre.
  - Elizabetian theatre would raise the flag to inform the people that a performance was going to happen.
A play has identifiable elements that happen throughout the script.

- Exposition
- Conflict
- Climax
- Denouement
Exposition

- This is the audiences introduction to the characters and their story.
- Background information is revealed that clarifies what is about to happen.
- In Greek plays a prologue was very common. Usually a speech was given to inform us as to what will happen.
- This was very common for Shakespeare as well.
Conflict

- The driving force in the play.
- A play with no conflict would be extremely boring. Nothing would happen and nothing would be resolved.
- These are the occurrences that build towards the point of greatest interest.
- Ex. Oedipus vs. himself
- Oedipus Vs. fate
Climax

- The conflict of the play taken to the most extreme.
- The conflicts must conclude or be resolved.
- This is the moment that has the most tension.
- Conflicts are resolved.
- The turning point in a play.
Denouncement or Resolution

- The final resolution of the play.
- The resolution of conflict.
- Sometimes said with a single word or statement.
Postplay

- The curtain call
- This event takes the audience out of the world of the play and returns them to reality.
- After the show comes the criticism. What did we think?