

INTRODUCTION TO PLAYWRITING

WHY PLAYWRIGHT RATHER THAN PLAYWRITE:

"Wright" implies a builder or maker of something--a craft--techniques and tools--commitment and years of apprenticeship.

HOW DOES THE PLAYWRIGHT COMPARE WITH OTHER WRITERS:

1. The novelist records life.
2. The essayist seeks to correct life.
3. The poet responds to life.
4. The playwright constructs a work which imitates life. The work therefore appears to be life.

HOW IS THEATRE UNIQUE AMONG THE ARTS:

1. Theatre imitates life. Imitates people and actions from life. Primary source material is human experience. Can't moralize like novelist, poet and essayist or stray from main action.
2. Theatre is temporal and transient. Like music or dance things seem to be happening now. Present tense. Time limitations. Clarity and sense of destiny. Never the same twice.
3. Theatre is interpretive. Like music and dance performers interpret the piece. Can allow for varied and misinterpretations. Living presence of actor. Mistakes.
4. Theatre is a collaborative effort. Process through which contributors mold together. Not complete until performed before an audience.
5. Theater is communal. Grew out of public celebration as a shared experience. Group experiences together as opposed to isolation of artist and spectator.

WHAT ARE THE ELEMENTS OF THEATRE:

1. The audience: its function, its general makeup, and the background which each spectator brings to a performance.
2. The performances of the actors and actresses and the director's supervision of the production.
3. The work of the playwright in creating dramatic structure and dramatic characters.
4. The purpose of a theater piece and the point of view adopted by those who create it.
5. The environment or space in which a production occurs together with the visual effects and sound.

WHO WAS ARISTOTLE AND IN WHAT WAY WAS HE INSTRUMENTAL IN THE UNDERSTANDING OF THEATRE:

Greek philosopher--4th Century B.C.--wrote Poetics--dealt with play forms and elements.

WHAT ARE THE ELEMENTS OF PLAYWRITING:

1. Plot
2. Characters
3. ~~Theme~~ Thought
4. Diction
5. Spectacle
6. Music

WHAT FACTORS INFLUENCE THE AUDIENCES' ROLE AND THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN DRAMA AND DRAMATIC ART:

1. Aesthetic distance
2. Willing suspension of disbelief
3. Histrionic Sensibility
4. Empathy vs. sympathy
5. Observed vs. participatory theatre
6. Psychodrama and sociodrama

AS A PLAYWRIGHT--RULES TO REMEMBER AND NEVER FORGET:

1. Your first task is to entertain the audience--entertain means "to divert consciousness from present concerns."
2. The art of drama is showing, not telling, what meaning lies within the actions.
3. Plays must have dramatic action and conflict is the essential ingredient of dramatic action (conflict, crisis, resolution = action cycle).
4. The rising action of the play is constructed of "building blocks."

ASSIGNMENT #1

1. Look around you until you notice an interaction or behavior between people that you find interesting. Describe what happened between the people involved vs. what was said. 20 pts
2. Write a personal credo--a personal statement of convictions. A credo's is the writer's beliefs concerning topics he or she feels are highly important--portions of life that concern the writer the most--topics about which the author has a deep emotional attitude--topics can be anything--religion, politics, morals, values, humanity, relationships, world issues, etc. Begin each statement with "I believe . . ." and make statements positive rather than negative. List at least ten statements. Select one and write a short essay expanding on your convictions concerning this belief. 30 pts

~~Wednesday~~
Tuesday

PLOT

WHAT IS PLOT:

The accumulative organization of the play's actions--the series of actions and resultant reactions that combine to express the play's thought and characters.

Plot - The Wizard of Oz (WOO)

Structure

Balanced Situation - a sense of equilibrium, of harmony, the world of the play, the rules

(WOO -- a literal and metaphoric storm is brewing)

Attack/Inciting Incident/The Big Butt...!

Everything's going along fine BUT...!

The initial event that sets the play in motion.

Upsets the balance and forces the main character to restore balance and harmony.

A jolt that sets the main character into action: he/she must develop a plan (objective) in order to get things back to the way they were before the attack.

THE MAJOR DRAMATIC QUESTION is established.

WOO - Dorothy runs away to save Toto, TORNADO, her house lands on and kills the Wicked Witch of the East

Protagonist/Objective (Plan)

The central character.

The character that drives the play forward by his plan/goal and creates most of the action by his desire to resolve this conflict.

WOO - Dorothy is the protagonist and her plan is to get home!

Every action she pursues (follows the yellow brick road, challenges the Wizard of Oz, seeks and kills the Wicked Witch of the West) supports her objective -- to get back home!

Obstacle

Anything that blocks the protagonist from achieving their goal. They change or extend the direction of the action. They can come from inside the character or outside the character. (Another person, forces of nature, discovering the truth, their own inner demons)

WOO - The big *obstacle/antagonist* is the Witch!

Other complications (shifts in strategy and action) occur:

The Wizard requires Dorothy get the witch's broomstick as proof of her death.
It turns out he's not a wizard after all.
The balloon takes off without Dorothy, who discovers that clicking her heels will do the trick after all.

Turning Point

The moment in the play, where the protagonist has only one choice left in their efforts to obtain their goal. It's now or never.

WOO - the aborted rescue and chase around the witch's castle, while the sand dial ekes out the last few moments of Dorothy's life

Climax

The most exciting moment of the play. When the protagonist meets up with their biggest obstacle. And where the MAJOR DRAMATIC QUESTION is answered.

WOO - "I'm melting" (action climax)
"Click your heels and say 'there's no place like home'" (literary climax)

Resolution

The play winds down, balance is restored, a new world with new rules and awarenesses is created. A change in the character is evident.

WOO - "You all were there...there IS no place like home."

HOW DOES PLOT RELATE TO THE PLAY:

- A play is a series of happenings, small and large. Plot provides those happenings.
- A play is a series of choices and decisions. Plot provides opportunities for those decisions and forces characters to change.
- A play is a series of meetings between people. Plot plans those meetings, arranges them to be happy or disastrous and makes those meetings highly significant or casual.

FUNCTIONS OF PLOT

1. Plot is conflict. Without conflict there is no dramatic action --no clash of wills between characters--no falling down or rising up.
2. Plot must be an integral part of the whole. Should be indistinct from rest of the script--art consists of hiding craft.
3. Plot creates, interacts with, and results from character. Incidents affect characters--they respond and have to change.
4. Bickering is not conflict. Bickering is not plot because there is no change in direction of action and intensities of characters' emotions; characters seem shallow because there is no revelation of inner secrets or discoveries about self and others.
5. Plot orders the actions. Puts the events into an order which best serves playwright's intent and forces audience's attention upon issue playwright wants to emphasize.
6. Plot develops suspense and surprise. Well-plotted twists and turns, reversals and discoveries, new events.
7. Plot is active. Stimulus/response--plot creates actions.
8. Plot creates building blocks. Builds through suspense and tensions to climax of play--each new event hurls the play forward.
9. Plot shows the play's thought. Selects and emphasizes points--shows actions that communicate the intellectual quality of the whole.
10. Plot awakens audience responses. Expertly hides information from the audience, slowly disclosing small hints in a way that forces the audience to piece the whole together. Creates audience response by drawing them into the action of the play.

APPENDIX A

BLAH, BLAH, BLAH

(A is standing looking out an imaginary window stage right. B is sitting in a chair center stage.)

Blah, blah, blah.

A

Blah, blah, blah.

B

(There is a knock at the door. A crosses to the door and opens it. C enters.)

Blah, blah, blah.

C

Blah, blah, blah.

A

Blah, blah, blah.

C

(C crosses down and stands to the right of B.)

Blah, blah, blah.

C

Blah, blah, blah.

B

Blah, blah, blah.

C

Blah, blah, blah.

B

Blah, blah, blah.

C

(Standing.) Blah, blah, blah.

B

Blah, blah, blah.

C

(B crosses toward door and stops and turns back around.)

Blah, blah, blah.

B

(B exits. C crosses and sits in the chair. A crosses and stands next to the chair.)

Blah, blah, blah.

A

PLAYWRITING RESIDENCY
CHARACTER

Qualities of Dramatic Characters

1. The creation of characters is taken directly from life rather than imitating others art.
2. Character is action: Characters and their relationship to other characters is shown through action. Conflict is shown through action.
3. Characters are constructed of playable emotions: Even philosophical/intellectual characters should have some emotional need to be involved with their topic areas.
4. Strong and often contrasting emotions will build strong, three-dimensional characters: Major characters go through a range of emotions.
5. Drama shows characters from life in situations requiring emotional actions and reactions which can be comic or tragic.
6. Characters' emotions and actions illuminate the play's meaning. The characters' intelligence seldom knows the play's meaning.
7. Emotions need to be of appropriate size for the play. Emotions too large tend to result in farce and unlike life. Emotions too small make the play seem unimportant and dull.
8. Emotions are necessary for audience identification: The audience responds to characters' emotions. Once involved the audience can respond to ideas of the play.
9. Primary characters must face crucial, pivotal decisions that will affect the rest of their lives and possibly also the lives of others: The choices we made yesterday create the world we live in today. Drama puts characters into situations and then increases the stakes. We can make decisions without realizing we are making them or without knowing the consequences of the decision.
10. The most important pivotal decisions belong to the protagonist or central character: Often this character will "discover" the significance of the decision.
11. Dramatic characters can only act when motivated and their actions and reactions will be of equal size to the motivation: Lack of motivation or results in character reactions which seem artificial and lack plausibility. If characters react in large terms to small motivations, that too will appear

artificial. Also, small reactions to large stimuli appear to lack plausibility.

12. Dramatic characters and their actions must be plausible.
13. Plot, character and thought are interwoven: Plot causes character to respond; character provides the plot with complications. The actions from both character and plot give the play its intellectual meaning.
14. Actions speak louder than words. We learn things about the character from the following:
 - A. What actions the character takes.
 - B. What actions the character does not take (action through inaction).
 - C. What emotions the character displays and feels.
 - D. What emotions are markedly absent from the character.
 - E. What the character says or does not say.
 - F. What responses (usually emotional) the character elicits from others in the play.
 - G. What descriptions the character prompts from others in the play.
15. A dramatic character is interesting and usually likable in some way.
16. Dramatic characters are contrasting: Contrast gives dimension and dynamics to character. Contrast between characters provides opportunities for conflict and puts each in better focus.
17. Dramatic characters need to change or make the decision to not change: There must be appropriate motivation for changes.
18. A piece of character should be shown in every speech. It is the accumulation of little pieces that give a character great dimension.

ASSIGNMENT #3

1. Determine a situation and two characters that offers opportunities for action and activity.
2. Write descriptions of your two characters which include contrasts between characters as well as internal contrasts.
3. Determine how your scene will end, how it will develop and how it will end (the completed scene should be 3 - 4 pages).
4. Write your scene.

Wednesday - Write
Thursday - Read

Playwriting

This exercise asks you to write a 28-line scene for two characters. Each line has a specific word limit; the scene must occur in one setting; only two speaking characters are allowed, but non-speaking characters may be added. All the details are up to the playwright, but try to write a coherent story with beginning, middle, and end.

Setting _____

Object _____

Character Notes

A. _____

B. _____

(two to four words:)

A. _____

B. _____

A. _____

B. _____

A. _____

B. _____

A. _____

B. _____

A. _____

B. _____

(four to six words)

A. _____

B. _____

A. _____

B. _____

(one to two words)

A.

B.

A.

B.

(twenty to twenty-five words)

A.

B.

(four to six words)

A.

B.

A.

B.

(three to five words)

A.

B.

title?

(Contractions count as one word. *Can't, won't, she's, it's, they're...*)