

The elements of drama

These are the ingredients that give work its shape and character.

Plot

This is the story, or through-line of the piece. A storyline is often called a **narrative**. Without any narrative the work might be on one level, failing to keep the interest of the audience.

Most stories have a beginning, middle and an end. However, drama doesn't have to run in this **linear** order. Some work is **non-linear** in structure. This means that it doesn't follow a chronological sequence but moves about in time.

A play may contain more than one plot. A separate storyline running parallel to the main story is called a subplot.

Fractured narrative

Some drama contains many stories and moves between them. This is called a **fractured narrative**.

Linear and non-linear plots

In a linear plot, events are shown in chronological order while a non-linear plot may begin with the ending: Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice* can be broken down into four subplots which weave in and out of each other throughout the play before coming together at the end.

Characters and characterisation

Who is in the play? What are they like? How do they interact with others?

Action in drama

The action of the drama is the events that are contained within it. It's what happens between characters in a scene and in the play. It could be a sword fight in *Macbeth* or a tense discussion during which neither character moves physically at all.

Content

This is what the drama is about. It's the themes, issues and ideas it contains. For example, the action of the piece might be two sisters arguing, but the content is the exploration of sibling rivalry.

Dramatic forms

A form is the method you select to tell your story and explore themes when presenting your work. Remember, form is the thing itself and the style is the way you present it. In the case of a 'comical mime' the dramatic form used is mime and comical is the style in which it's done.

Common forms of drama are:

- Mime/mute
- Choral work
- Physical theatre
- Musical theatre
- Farce
- Satire
- Commedia dell'arte
- Dance

Climax and anti-climax

This is the building and release of tension in drama.

Tension is a growing sense of expectation within the drama, a feeling that the story is building up towards something exciting happening.

A climax is when the tension within a scene builds to its highest point. It's the most exciting moment. An anti-climax is the release of tension. It happens after the tension has reached its highest point and then suddenly drops.

Imagine a scene where a hostage has escaped their captors. They realise what has happened and search the room where the hostage is hiding. Pauses build the tension and the hostage is very close to being caught so the audience are on the edge of their seats. When the hostage is seconds away from having their hiding place discovered, the captors decide to leave and search somewhere else. The audience breathe a collective sigh of relief for the hostage.

This is an **anti-climax**. The tension has built and has been released. Serial dramas and television soap operas often finish just before or at the point of climax so that the audience will tune in again to see what happens next. This is called a **cliffhanger** or the 'duff duff' moment on account of the music at the end of each episode!

Contrast

Contrast is a marked difference between two or more things placed side by side for dramatic effect, e.g. stillness next to activity. When two opposing things are placed next to each other their impact is strengthened.

For example, a woman is lonely and miserable after the death of her beloved husband. Creating a flashback memory of their joyous times together, laughing, and playing with their children contrasts with the present and makes her loss more intense and moving for the audience. They fully understand what she's lost.

Cross-cutting (moving from one scene to another and back again) is also an effective way of exploring contrast in any drama.

Dramatic conventions

A convention is a technique employed regularly in the drama so that the audience come to attach specific meaning to it. When a technique is used repeatedly in a drama the audience recognise its significance:

- slow motion
- soliloquy (a solo speech by an actor that gives an insight into what they are thinking)
- adding narration
- use of an 'aside' (when a character directly addresses the audience to comment within a scene)
- breaking into song (as in Musical theatre)
- using a chorus to comment upon the action
- splitting the stage so that different spaces represent different locations
- using placards (signs) to give additional information to the audience
- split role or multi-role
- using music to underscore the drama

Using symbols

A symbol is something which stands for, or represents something else. Symbols are often used in drama to deepen its meaning and remind the audience of the themes or issues it is discussing. A prop often has a particular significance that an audience will instantly recognise when used symbolically in the work.

For DP2 you will read some plays:

"Master Harold" ...and the Boys by Athol Fugard

Othello by William Shakespeare

***“Master Harold” ...and the Boys* by Athol Fugard**



Context

Research task

1. What was Apartheid?
2. Create a timeline of the political background of the play (South Africa - 1939 – 1953)
3. Find examples of Apartheid laws. Take notes.

How did people respond?

4. Create a timeline of South African responses to Apartheid.
5. What was the Sharpeville Massacre?
6. When did the Soweto Uprising take place? Why did it happen?
7. How did the rest of the world respond to Apartheid?

Athol Fugard | Biography

Early Life

Playwright, novelist, director, and actor Athol Fugard was born Athol Harold Lanigan Fugard on June 11, 1932, in the small town of Middelburg, South Africa. His mother was an Afrikaner—a South African of Dutch descent who spoke the Dutch dialect Afrikaans. Fugard's father was a South African of English descent. His family moved to Port Elizabeth when Fugard was three years old. The city is Fugard's present-day home and the setting for many of his plays, including "Master Harold"... and the Boys.

Fugard studied philosophy and social anthropology at the University of Cape Town. He left before graduating and hitchhiked through Africa and spent time as a seaman in East Asia. In 1956, back home in South Africa, Fugard married the actress Sheila Meiring. Together they founded an experimental theater group, and the couple wrote material for the stage together. In 1958 Fugard and his wife moved to Johannesburg, South Africa. Here Fugard worked in court where pass law violations were tried. The so-called pass laws mandated every South African to carry a passbook that determined, according to their race, where they could live and work. Fugard's experiences with the law court influenced his later plays, including a drama he wrote collaboratively with two actors, *Sizwe Banzi Is Dead* (1972), which concerns the injustice of the pass laws. Fugard has recalled that his time in the court showed him "more suffering than [he] could cope with." It also taught him "how [his] country functions."

Plays and Other Works

Fugard's first major play was *Blood Knot* (1961), about two brothers of mixed-race parents in South Africa; one of whom was light-skinned and the other dark. Fugard himself played the light-skinned brother, Morris, at its premiere in Johannesburg, October 23, 1961, and for its subsequent six-month tour in 1962. South Africa had no laws against the performance of plays with multiracial casts in front of nonsegregated audiences at the time, but once the play closed, such performances were banned by legislative law.

The play was later performed in London and New York—as well as adapted for television—and has been adapted for amateur educational performances as a reader's theater presentation. *Blood Knot* formed the first of Fugard's Family Trilogy Plays, the subsequent ones being *Hello and Goodbye* (1965) and *Boesman and Lena* (1969). In 1973 the trilogy was published under the title *Three Port Elizabeth Plays*.

Many of Fugard's plays deal with apartheid, the system of racial hierarchy that benefited the white minority of South Africa from 1950 to the early 1990s. In the 1970s he produced plays that began with "a cluster of images"—in Fugard's words—instead of a script. These include the

political plays *Sizwe Banzi Is Dead* (1972), *Statements After an Arrest Under the Immorality Act* (1972), and *Orestes* (1978). Fugard's work was never directly censored in South Africa, but his passport was taken away from 1967 to 1971. His passport was later returned to him on a restricted basis.

Autobiography is another major strand of Fugard's work and became more pronounced after apartheid was dismantled in South Africa in 1990–91. His autobiographical plays include "Master Harold"... and the Boys (1982), *Playland* (1992), *Valley Song* (1996), and *The Captain's Tiger* (1997). He also published a memoir, *Cousins* (1994).

Fugard's off-stage achievements include his novel *Tsotsi* (1980), which was made into a feature film in 2005. The motion picture won an Academy Award in the United States for Best Foreign Language Film of the Year in 2006. His journals were published in *Notebooks, 1960–1977* (1983). In 2011 Fugard received the lifetime achievement Tony Award. Other recognition for his plays include awards from the New York Drama Critics' Circle and the Drama Desk Award for "Master Harold"... and the Boys in 1982. The play also garnered the Standard Award for Best Play in 1983. Today Fugard is internationally known for his plays about South African society, particularly the intersection of personal and political in response to apartheid.

While Reading Questions

1. a) When and where does this story take place?

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- b) Why is this information important in understanding the underlying message of the play?

2. Describe the following characters:

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- a. Hally

b. Willie

c. Sam

3. In your opinion, record the quote that best represents each character's values:

a. Hally:

b. Willie:

c. Sam:

4. a). What is a “man of magnitude”?

b). How is this debate significant in this particular play?

c). Whom do you consider a “man of magnitude?” Explain your choice.

5. What is the significance of the story about the kite?

6. How does Hally feel about his father? How do you know this?

7. How does Hally feel about Sam? How do you know this?

8. a) Why do you think there are so many references to ballroom dancing?

b) Why is ballroom dancing important to the play?

c) How are the references to “bumping” or colliding” significant? (Think about what is happening socially and politically in South Africa in the 1950s):

“There’s no collisions out there Hally. Nobody trips or stumbles or bumps into anybody else. That’s what that moment is all about. To be one of those finalists on the dance floor is like...like being in a dream about a world in which accidents don’t happen.”

What is Sam trying to explain to Hally, and how does ballroom dancing serve in his explanation? Bearing in mind the political climate in South Africa in 1950, as well as Sam’s relationship to Hally, what might ballroom dancing represent? Might it mean something different to each character?
