



Key Words (Drama Specific Language)

Key words and terms - listed alphabetically - which will help in your understanding of all things dramatic!!!

Accent - particular sound made in pronouncing words which suggests the place or background of the speaker.

Agitprop - theatre where the main function is to make a political point, to address a perceived social wrong, or to create a change in society through influencing large numbers of people. The name "agitprop" comes from the words "agitation" and "propaganda". It was linked with the "Workers' Theatre Movement" in Germany and Russia in the late 1920s and 1930s and had very specific intentions for its audience. It wanted to move away from traditional play audiences, the rich and the comfortable, and to reach the masses of the workers. Its intention was to give a more robust and realistic view of life and of social issues. It went out to its audiences, whether they were on the street corner, in the park or in their workplace. It had a very direct approach to the audience so that they felt a part of what was happening, and that the actors understood they were suffering.

Allegory - a story or picture in which the meaning is represented through symbols.

Attack - term used informally to describe strong delivery of speech on stage.

Annotation - hand-written notes or sketches around a script or other text.

Black comedy - gets its humour from the macabre and gruesome.

Blocking (1) - organisation of movements on the stage.

Blocking (2) - a barrier/something in the way which interrupts the view of the audience.

Brecht - drama practitioner (playwright) who rejected Stanislavski's viewpoint as being a means of hypnotising the audience, taking away their capacity to think and act, and not allowing them to make up their own minds. Brecht was of the opinion that the audience should view what was happening as a spectator, remaining detached, looking on rather than looking in. His audience should sympathise but not empathise: understand but not become involved.

Broadway - centre of commercial theatre in New York.

Character - part being played in a drama / a role created by an actor or writer as part of a presentation, which will be exemplified by external physical features and internal motivation. The character may be defined by, for example, his/her status, class, beliefs, personality, history, job and attitude.

Chorus - one or more characters who comment on the action.

Collage - selection of diverse images or pieces of text.

Comedy of manners - gets its humour from observation of the way characters behave. It is usually set in a historical period when there may have been strict rules of social behaviour.

Commedia dell'Arte - mainly improvised drama (developed in Italy in the 16th century) which has stock characters and uses masks. It also involves tumbling and other skills of a physical nature.

Commentary - thoughts about performance or other work.

Context - the situation or circumstances in which a piece of drama is set or devised, which may have historical, cultural or social influences.

Contrast - difference or opposite.

Convention - agreed way of doing things.

Designer - the person who creates an overall "look" for the piece of drama, including consideration of set, costume, lighting, make-up, sound, props and furniture.

Deviser - the person who creates the piece of drama, whether it is improvised or scripted.

Dialogue - any speech on stage.

Director - the person with overall guidance of a piece of drama towards its conclusion in performance.

Documentary theatre - drama which looks at historical events, significant people from the past and issues of the day that may cause comment or concern. This style of drama sometimes uses authentic press cuttings, perhaps people's speeches, and genuine factual information to develop dialogue and design elements.

Duologue - speech between two characters.

Diaphragm - pit of the stomach.

Dramatic irony - refers to the audience knowing something that the characters do not.

Dynamic - relationship between two or more things or people.

Element - part.

Empathy - sense of being able to "put yourself in someone else's shoes".

Emphasis - added strength given to a word, sound or action.

End-on stage - type of stage in which the "fourth wall" is created by the audience.

Entrance - point or place where the actor comes in.

Evaluation - reflection about the success of a piece of work.

Exit - point or place where an actor leaves.

Exploration - development of ideas through questioning and trying out possibilities.

Focus - attention on specific detail.

Form - shape or pattern of the drama.

Fourth wall - the invisible wall between the stage and the audience. The audience can peep in and see what is going on on the stage but the actors do not take any notice of the audience and do not acknowledge their presence in any way.

Framing - image created by the whole view of the stage or a group of actors.

Genre - particular style of the drama.

Gesture - physical movement.

High comedy - sophisticated and usually set in high social class situations, where the comedy comes from detail of characterisation, the cleverness of the language and use of wit.

History plays - plays which tell a tale of or from a historical period.

Hot-seating - technique whereby actors are questioned in role about their behaviour etc.

Improvisation - developing drama from initial stimulus, usually without script.

Interplay - the way two or more characters act and speak together

Interpretation - particular belief/decision about the way a text should be performed.

Irony - using language that reflects the opposite of what is actually happening - a form of sarcasm.

Kitchen sink drama - refers to a type of drama that developed as a reaction to the context that provided most of the settings for plays in the 1940s and 1950s - middle class, drawing room, polite drama. In direct contrast, kitchen sink drama could be set anywhere, including the kitchen, used realistic language, involved the working class and used anything for its content.

Light opera - musical drama often with comic elements.

Low comedy - in this type of drama there is a reliance on the vulgar and the coarse; the comedy is unlikely to come about through clever wit or detailed characterisation, but through obvious means like clowning and crude jokes.

Melodrama - highly- stylised and sentimental drama/ comedy where the actors over-act and shout and declaim, and no-one really takes it seriously.

Metaphor - using the imagination to describe something by comparing it to something else or saying it is something else.

Mime - non-speaking movement work.

Minimalist - drama with few props and little set or scenery.

Monologue - single speech by one character directed to someone(s).

Montage - a series or collection of stage pictures, often used when showing a series of events where the spectacle is as important as the characters, or as the plot, if there is any.

Narrative - story or plot.

Naturalistic - imitating real-life. The drama is devised and presented on the basis that the action is to be believed in as if it was something that was really happening. It treats the audience as if they were peeping in through the keyhole, or as if the division between stage and audience was a wall impervious to the actors, but see-through for the audience. The audience come to identify with and believe in the characters and the setting presented to them.

Nativity - child-like drama about the birth of Christ, often performed by children.

Non-naturalistic - the drama is presented in a way that does not require the audience to believe in the characters or in what is happening. The audience is there as observers or commentators, witnessing and experiencing rather than becoming part of what is going on.

Performer - the person who "does" the drama / communicates the drama to the audience through role, character and sometimes symbol.

Physical - relating to body or movement work.

Pace - speed

Pitch - level.....high or low as in music

Plot - story or narrative.

Polished Improvisation - when a piece of improvised drama has been rehearsed several times over, each time trying to improve the outcome, and is then ready for presentation.

Political theatre - drama which makes the audience consider a certain event and why it occurred, then come to a decision as to whether it was right and reasonable. The playwright may push the audience in a certain direction by the way the material is presented.

Promenade Theatre - a type of staging where the audience walks around from one set to another, or follows the actors as they move from one location to another ... often outdoors.

Prop - object used on stage.

Prose - continuous text.... not verse.

Process - continual development of work.

Proscenium/arch - traditional stage form in which audience view action through "arch" made in the stage wall.

Restoration plays - plays from the era of King Charles II which have very specific features, usually related to the comedy of manners (see above).

Rhythm - beat and regular pattern of sounds.

Ritual - presentation developed over time of religious or cultural concerns.

Romantic comedy - although usually applied to plays where the subject is love and it all ends happily, it can also be applied to plays where sentiment is at the core, and even to plays that have high imaginative content.

Satire - the use of ridicule, irony or sarcasm to expose foolishness or wrong-doing, or to send up or make fun of an individual. It is often used to make fun of political characters.

Sequence - related or repeated set of actions in a logical or comfortable order.

Sight lines - view from various angles of the stage or the actors.

Soliloquy - single speech by one character to themselves, or god.

Spontaneous Improvisation - drama which is devised on the spot.....without any planning or preparation.

Stage directions - notes for actors or directors regarding where and when the cast enter, leave etc.

Stance - position taken by an actor on stage.

Stanislavski - drama practitioner (playwright) who wanted his audience to identify with his characters. He wanted his audiences to see the play as a snapshot of real life. The expression "the fourth wall" is often used to describe this concept (see above). The drama is devised so that the audience empathises with what is going on - they are able to identify with the characters, feel what they are feeling, cry when they cry.

Status - level of power.

Story board - set of drawn images used to describe a story.

Stream of consciousness - in this style of devising there is no structure except to follow the flow. The "flow" may be a series of ideas and almost random episodes. The style may be used in improvisation work when wanting to explore an idea or situation, and where the participants want to see where things might lead.

Stress - emphasis on sounds or words.

Symbol - object which suggests or represents an idea or set of ideas.

Tableau - group of performers creating a frozen picture.

Technique - presented skill.

Tempo - speed or pace.

Theatre in Education (TIE) - when a visiting theatre company comes into a school and presents a drama, often based on a subject connected with the health and safety of young people. The subject matter may be drugs, the prevention of smoking, road safety or the dangers of talking to strangers. Whatever the topic, the purpose is to educate the audience, to make a difference, to change outlooks.

Theatre in the Round - sometimes known as "Arena". A method of staging where the performance space is in the centre of the audience and is surrounded by them on all sides. The shape may be circular or square - indeed any shape.

Thrust stage - stage surrounded on three sides by audience.

Tragedy - drama that has a serious subject, with a sad, unhappy or disastrous ending/classically a story in which a great person is brought down by a fault in their character.

Traverse - where the acting area is positioned between two opposing sets of seating.

Verse - lines laid out as poetry; as opposed to prose.

Vignette - a short, evocative episode, which may focus on a particular character or event.

Warm-up - preparatory exercise used before main work.

West End - centre of commercial theatre in London.