Handout – An Introduction to Drama

Drama is a composition, especially one telling a serious story, that is intended for representation by actors impersonating the characters and performing the dialogue and action.

Important Terms:
1. Playwright/Dramatist – A playwright or dramatist is a person who writes plays.
2. Script – The script is the text of the play.
3. Lines – Lines are the words the playwright has written for the actors and actresses to speak.
4. Cast – Consists of the actors and actresses in a play.

The Structural Elements of Drama:
1. Act – An act is a major division in a play. In an act, there is usually a major development which begins, has its climax, and ends.
2. Scene – A scene is a subdivision of an act. In a scene, a specific development takes place
   i) at a specific time, and ii) in a specific place.
3. Exposition – At the beginning of a play the dramatist often gives a certain amount of essential information about the plot and the events which are to come. Information can also be given about what has already happened in the exposition.
4. Conflict – Conflict is the tension in a situation between characters, or the actual opposition of characters.
5. Climax – The climax is the point at which a crisis is reached; it is the most intense part of the conflict.
6. Denouement – The denouement is the event/s following the major climax, or the resolution of the conflict.
7. Peripeteia – Peripety is a reversal of fortune, a fall. In drama, usually the sudden change of fortune from prosperity to ruin, or vice versa.
8. Characterization - Characterization is the method used by a playwright to develop a character. The method includes: (1) showing the character's appearance (costume, etc), (2) displaying the character's actions (stage directions), (3) revealing the character's thoughts (soliloquy/monologue), (4) letting the character speak, and (5) getting the reactions of others.

The Features of Drama:
1. Dialogue – This refers to the conversation between two or more characters in a play.
2. Soliloquy/Monologue – A soliloquy is a speech, often of some length, in which a character, alone on stage, expresses his thoughts and feelings.
3. Aside – An aside is a few words or a short passage spoken in an undertone or to the audience. The audience is to accept that the character’s speech is not heard by the other actors on stage.
4. Stage Direction – Stage directions are the most common method used by the playwright to influence what is said, how things are said, and how and where the persons in the play move while these things are being said, when these characters enter and when they leave the stage, what happens, and where things are placed on stage. They can also include instructions about lighting and sound.
5. Chorus – A chorus is a group of players who support the main performers by acting as crowds, etc. They are called the chorus and are normally chosen for their ability to sing and dance.
6. Dramatic Unities – The dramatic unities are: 1. Unity of time, 2. unity of place, 3. unity of action. They ensure that plays imitate reality as closely as possible.
7. Disguise – Disguise is the change of an actor’s physical appearance, which leads to mistaken identity.
8. Stage Conventions:
   a) Costume – Costume refers to wardrobe or dress used by actors. Costumes help to create the ‘reality’ on the stage. They identify characters occupation. They can also help to establish a setting and weather.
   b) Lighting – This refers to lighting changes and cues during a play.
   c) Sound Effects – These are sounds produced artificially for theatre. Eg. Thunder.
   d) Movement – Movement refers to the progress of events in a play.
e) Backdrops – Backdrops are the painted cloths hung at the back of a stage as a part of the scenery.
f) Set – The set describes the things that are placed on the stage to establish the scene and for actors to sit or lie on, etc.
g) Stage Properties/Props – Props are items the actors use while on-stage.

Dramatic Techniques:
1. Suspense – Suspense is a feature of drama in which the playwright creates an anxious, uncertain or expectant mood about what is going to happen.
2. Irony – Irony refers to a statement or situation where the meaning is contradicted by the appearance or presentation of the idea.
3. Dramatic Irony – Dramatic irony is a situation in which the audience knows more about the past, present or future circumstances than a character in a play.

Types of Plays:
1. Tragedy – This type of play generally captures and maintains a mood that emphasizes that it is about something serious, even though there may be moments of comic relief. Such plays usually feature a tragic hero, an exceptional yet flawed individual who is brought to some disaster. The hero’s fate raises questions about important concerns such as the meaning of life, the nature of fate, morality, social and family relationships, power, love and friendship.
2. Serious Drama – Like tragedy, this has a serious tone and a serious purpose. The main differences lie in the fact that serious drama can end happily and also that the main character does not have to affect other people.
3. Melodrama – In this type of drama there is a villain whose actions threaten the well-being of other characters with whom the audience sympathizes. The situations in these plays tend to be extreme and are often violent. The good characters are clearly differentiated from the bad, and in the end good usually triumphs over evil. As a result these plays end happily.
4. Comedy – The writers of this type of drama treat the topics with which it deals in a light-hearted manner (at least on the surface). In comedy, we are sometimes made to laugh at the villain, who in the end, either sees his mistakes and reforms or gets some form of punishment. Fun is generally made of people who are conceited, bossy, foolish, overbearing, or outright villainous.
5. Farce – Farce is like comedy in that it arouses laughter. The main difference is that, in farce, the situations are exaggerated. It also uses clowning and unrealistic situations which broaden the humour.

Types of Stages:
1. The End Stage and the Proscenium Arch Stage
2. The Arena Stage
3. The Thrust Stage

Backstage

Stage Areas

WINGS

AUDIENCE

Sources:
1. Carlong English B for CSEC
2. Carlong Caribbean Drama
3. The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory