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**2.0 OBJECTIVES**

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**In this unit we shall be**

- Familiar with the drama form, its components and the types of drama.

**By the end of this unit you should be able to:**

- Explain what the drama is
- Understand what goes into the making of a drama
- Identify how many types of drama are prevalent today
- Understand the historical background of the drama form

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## 2.1 INTRODUCTION

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The word drama is very much familiar with almost all. But, if we were to ask the layman what a drama is, perhaps, he/she would not be able to explain the word. However, a student of literature should be able to explain it well. In this unit we shall try to explain what a drama is, and what goes into making of a good drama and various types of the drama form. We shall also try to answer questions like: what is a drama? What are its main ingredients/components? How many types of drama are there? What is the difference between a play and a drama? How old is the form? How does it exist in the context of Indian literature? etc...

Moreover, we shall also make you familiar with the main characteristics of a drama that may help you in appreciating and analysing the drama that you read.

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## 2.2 VARIOUS DEFINITIONS OF DRAMA

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Some standard dictionaries explain drama thus:

“a composition in verse or prose intended to portray life or character or to tell a story usually involving conflicts and emotions through action and dialogue for theatrical performance...”

(Merraim-Webster)

“a play for acting on stage or for broadcasting”

(DK Illustrated Oxford Dictionary)

How do literary theorists look at drama? To begin with, Aristotle, the Greek philosopher, should be considered the pioneer in elaborating the meaning of a drama. During his times the prevalent form of the drama was tragedy. Therefore, he has described tragedy, in his *Poetics* in the following manner:

“Tragedy is a [representation](#) of a serious, complete action which has magnitude, in embellished speech, with each of its elements [used] separately in the [various] parts [of the play] and [represented] by people acting and not by [narration](#), accomplishing by means of pity and [terror](#) the [catharsis](#) of such emotions.”

([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poetics\\_\(Aristotle\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poetics_(Aristotle)))

Dryden defines Drama as:

“Just and lively image of human nature, representing its passions and humours, and the changes of fortune to which it is subject, for the delight and instruction of mankind.”

(<https://sites.google.com/site/nmeictproject/reflections/2-2-1-definition-of-drama>)

The students of literature may explore various definitions on their own and they need to understand finer points of the world of drama.

Did you come across any other dictionary meaning of a drama or a definition by any other author? If so, write your response here below:

- **Check your progress 1:**

**Q.1 Answer the following questions in approximately 250 to 300 words.**

1. What similarities do you find in the above given definitions?

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2. What is Aristotle speaking about in his definition?

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3. According to Dryden, what should be the function of a drama? What does a drama represent?

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### **2.3 COMPONENTS OF DRAMA**

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Drama is, thus, a particular mode of fictional literature presented in a specific manner, with the help of the performances either in theatres or elsewhere. Now, let us think about how a drama is made or what goes into the making of a drama. You must have seen some performances on stage (or in a movie or TV programme). What do you see there? Some actors present themselves as particular characters. They present a story (fiction, with or without a message) through a closely-knit plot with the help of their actions and dialogues, as they come and go on and from the stage. They are dressed (mostly) in a typical costume suitable to their characters. Like stories, too, they have a suspense and conflict in them.

Thus, the chief components of drama that we come across are character, plot, action, conflict and dialogue. As all the literary artists write their genre, the dramatist prepares his script in dialogues with intermittent breaks and instructions for performers. Initially dramas were written in verse form. Therefore, music is also considered to be the important element. But as they progressed through centuries, the form has seen many changes evolving either in characters, plot construction diction etc. However, the form remained the same and its components, with little variations, have borne through rough and good times together and have

remained, more or less the same. Aristotle's components of a drama such as, plot, character, thought, diction, spectacle, and song, have been upheld by almost all. Therefore, taking cue from the old masters let us discuss all of them, besides a few others at length.

### **2.3.1 Plot:**

The plot in a drama is plan of action (design or scheme of things to tell a story) or arrangement of events in such a manner so that interest of the spectators and readers, loosely speaking. Well-knit story always sustains interest. Clumsily arranged events in the story, howsoever great, may not attract the attention of the readers. A good author always *conspires* to tell the secret in the end of the story. So, in a way, the writer or the dramatist is a conspirator.

### **2.3.2 Character:**

*Dramatis Personae*, or (the list of) characters in a drama, is a typical practice every dramatist undertakes to enlist when presenting his/her drama to the readers or spectators. These personalities or characters make the stage alive with performances. Characters are the ones who represent the persons there in the minds of the dramatists. They may be belonging to a class of people, or, typically, to individuals for that matter. After all, characters are performers to carry out the fictional varieties the dramatist wants to convey. The Greek philosopher Heraclitus rightly said, "Character is destiny." What becomes of a person is mostly because his or her actions in relations to other characters in life. Drama is just a representation of life. So are the characters.

### **2.3.3 Action:**

A drama is a presentation of people/characters in action. The term play itself suggests some kind of action in it. Here, the action does not only mean physical action but it also involves the action from 'within'. The inner working of a character is also put on stage through various techniques like soliloquy, monologue, declamation etc. Physical action is also very important as it takes the larger share of actors performing on the stage. However, the modern-day drama has come up with many experimental techniques. The theatre of the absurd is one such thing.

### **2.3.4 Theme:**

The central idea or a leitmotif is the theme in a drama. Tragedies, comedies and other dramatic renderings are often propelled by some subject matter that may appeal to the reader or the spectator. However, a good dramatist leaves the theme to be interpreted by the respective audience. The direct theme may not carry that much weight as would a theme interwoven with other dramatic art and performance. Many times it becomes interesting to watch what the readers think the theme to be and how the treatment of the subject matter may change his/her final verdict about theme.

### **2.3.5 Music/Song:**

To heighten the dramatic effect the dramatists have been using this element in drama lavishly. The Greek masters and the subsequent writers all have effectively used music or songs in their plays. Shakespeare became popular because of his love songs and music. Our own Bollywood movies are power packed drama of music and songs combined. The melancholy and the happy, both get representation in drama.

### **2.3.6 Dialogue:**

Conversations between characters/actors on the stage are dialogues. This becomes a medium for the author to pass on his idea/theme/subject-matter to the reader. The dialogue exposes a character and at the same time it also tells us what a character feels or wants others to feel is often conveyed through dialogues. The writer makes use of realistic conversational styles to make it look authentic. Sometimes slangs and swear words also take place in modern day drama. Spoken words propel us to actions. So, the words used on stage are also the vehicle for actions by the characters. A lot depends how a writer chooses his words. The dialogue should show us the tension/feelings/situations in the drama instead of telling us about. Sometimes poetry and songs are also incorporated in the drama to make the work more effective or sometimes as a means to give a breather to the characters on the stage.

### **2.3.7 Setting:**

Setting refers to the arrangement on the stage or off the stage whether the drama is to be performed or not. The writer normally suggests the properties to be brought on the stage and how and when they should be displayed. At the same time, each and everything that is shown on the stage must have the important use in context of the drama. If there is a window displayed on the stage, it is argued, that it should have a purpose. The play requires many-fold preparations beforehand. The setting thus becomes an important element of the drama.

### **2.3.8 The Three Unities:**

Every dramatist has to consider these elements of drama i.e. three unities, such as the unities of time, place and action (movement). These classical unities became guiding principles for the dramatists following Aristotelian and post-Aristotle theories of drama. They may be explained thus:

- **The unity of Time:** A play should have a time-frame of a day so that reader/spectator does not have to time-travel with the story of the drama as it may happen in a story or a novel.
- **The unity of Place:** Geographically speaking, the play should be performable within one single place requiring not many changes of place, so that **Settings** are not disturbed much.
- **The unity of Action:** A play should have a singular action culminating into a whole story that avoids sub-plots. The Unity of Action limits the supposed action to a single set of incidents which are

related as cause and effect, "having a beginning, middle, and an end." No scene is to be included that does not advance the plot directly. No subplots, no characters who do not advance the action. (<https://sites.google.com/site/nmeictproject/home/unity-of-action>)

The students of this unit must study, in detail, these unities and how the ancient and the modern-day drama differ in their treatment of applying these unities. There have been many experiments going on in the modern-day drama, which, incidentally, defy all the classical rules of writing drama.

• **Check your progress 2:**

**Q.1 Answer the following questions.**

1. Enlist the six main components of a drama and describe them in one sentence each

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2. Why, do you think, setting is important in a drama?

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3. Explain, in your own words, the three unities in a drama.

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**Q.2 State whether following statements are true or false in the context of the components of drama as described above.**

1. The components of a drama have undergone many changes since the ancient times.
2. The plot is to generate interest in the story or suspense of a drama.
3. There can be a play/drama without the element of characters.
4. A play comprising multiple sub-plays is considered a good play.
5. *Settings* is just the other name of stage decorations.
6. Addressing the ills of society can be a theme of the drama.

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## 2.4 TYPES OF DRAMA

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Though many types of drama exist today, previously, there were, largely, two types i.e. Tragedy and Comedy, depending on the treatment of the theme. The Greek tragedies and Roman comedies are most popular examples of the types available from our ancient masters. The formation of the drama chiefly consisted of five or three acts (parts) and the drama till the Shakespearean age was written in verse. The prose drama is the relatively a modern variant.

*Tragedy* is a play dealing with the serious themes which cause distress, destruction, and devastation either in the life of a (important) person or the state. Again, we need to remember the Greek masters who pioneered in writing of the tragedies and of course, Shakespeare, who, in his turn culminated the tragedy to new heights. There were gripping tragedies written during ancient and medieval times. In contemporary time period, the shift that is visible in tragedy is in the treatment of the subject. The common man and mundane things have become the subjects of tragedy on place of an important or stately persona in contemporary tragedies.

*Comedy*, the second type here, is just opposite to what we have said about tragedies. Its principle function is to make the audience laugh. The trivialities and follies of a man are presented in a manner which is not serious. World famous playwright Shakespeare was not just a known figure for tragedies but also wrote some of the best comedies ever.

*Tragicomedy* is the third type of drama known to the world. As the name suggests, it is a queer mixture of serious and light elements, and all the early masters of this genre have attempted this type, as the life is not only a matter serious nor it is made only of laughter.

*Farce, Melodrama, Musical Play, Kabuki, Kitchen Sink, Kathakali, Morality Play, Mystery Play, Shadow Play, Theatre of the Absurd, Bhavai and Street Theatre* among many others, are the types of plays very famous around the globe, and the students need to study them as per their choice.

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## 2.5 HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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The western world welcomed the drama through their Greek and Roman masters. It was Aristotle first, who differentiated between epic and lyrics from the drama genre in his *Poetics*. This work is considered to be the first ever systematic work for the drama form, which was primarily divided in two masks; namely, tragedy and comedy. The Roman classical drama followed the footsteps of its predecessor, i.e. the Greek drama (mostly, rendered into a comic genre). Plautus and Terence pioneered the Roman classical comedies followed by tragedians Quintus Ennius, Marcus Pacuvius, and Lucius Accius. From among the tragedians, the

best known is the work of Seneca, and his *Phaedra* was based on Euripides' *Hippolytus*.

The Church also helped in spreading and popularising the drama form as it acquired the status of being a Moral Play, the favourite medium for spreading the messages of the church in the whole of Europe, and it prepared the base of early Elizabethan English drama. The 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries saw the rise of English drama with the playwrights like all-time master Shakespeare, Ben Jonson and Christopher Marlow among others. Shakespeare indirectly tells us, in one of his plays, that a drama is a "tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." The Restoration comedy or the Comedy of Manners was also on the rise during this period magnifying social ills and taboos in the manner suited to a satirist or a caricaturist. The modern and the post-modern drama had a novel idea to propagate, i.e. the drama of the absurd or a realist or a modernist.

The rise of the drama right from the time of its Greek masters till date may have a kind of interrelatedness or the otherwise, a student must study the history of the drama in its totality to develop the understanding of the form in its entirety.

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## 2.6 LET US SUM UP

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In the above discussion about the drama form, you could have noticed the following:

- The discussion about drama as a literary genre
- Various definitions of a drama
- Various dictionary meanings of the form
- The components or elements like plot, character, theme, music and dialogue, among others, which go into the making of a drama and the three unities to be observed by the dramatists
- Tragedy, Comedy and Tragicomedy and many other types of drama as propagated by the classicists and neo-classicists as well as the modern-day play-writes, and
- The historical perspective looking into the background of the drama form.

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## 2.7 KEY WORDS

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<b>Drama</b>	In Greek the term meant simply to act or perform, and the definition is still valid; all others are derivative and of limited historical significance.
<b>Comedy</b>	It arouses and vicariously satisfies the human instinct for mischief. The playing of tricks on unsuspecting victims, whether by other characters (e.g. Palaestrio in Plautus's <i>Miles Gloriosus</i> ) or quirks of chance (e.g. Goldoni's <i>I due Gemelli veneziani</i> ) or both, recurs continually in comedy.
<b>Subplot</b>	A separate storyline or strand of narrative that runs alongside the main plot

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## 2.8 BOOKS SUGGESTED

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- Nicoll, Allardyce. *British Drama*. New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 1978. Print.
- Kennedy, Dennis (Ed.). *The Oxford Companion to Theatre and Performance* London: OUP, 2011. Print.
- Abrams, M H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Boston: Heinle & Heinle, 1999. Print.

### Answers:

#### Check your progress 2:

Q.2 False, True, False, False, False, True