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| Drama Vocabulary | Definition |
| Acting area  **IGCSE Drama Glossary** | The area within the performance space within which the actor may move in full view of the audience. Also known as the playing area. |
| Acting Style | A particular manner of acting which reflects cultural and historical influences. |
| Action | The movement or development of the plot or story in a play; the sense of forward movement created by the sense of time and/or the physical and psychological motivations of characters. |
| Analysis | In responding to dramatic art, the process of examining how the elements of drama – literary, technical, and performance – are used. |
| Antagonist | The opponent or adversary of the hero or main character of a drama; one who opposes and actively competes with another character in a play, most often with the protagonist. |
| Apron | The area between the front curtain and the edge of the stage. |
| Arena stage | Type of stage without a frame or arch separating the stage from the auditorium, in which the audience surrounds the stage area. |
| Articulation | The clarity or distinction of speech. |
| Aside | Lines spoken by an actor to the audience and not supposed to be overheard by other characters on stage. |
| Back projection | A method of projecting images onto a translucent screen from behind. Often used for projected scenery or special effects. Because the projector is usually close to the screen, special lenses are needed to ensure that the image seen by the audience is large enough. |
| Backdrop | A flat surface the width of the stage, hung upstage of the acting area, upon which scenery is usually painted. |
| Backlight | Light coming from upstage, behind scenery or actors, to sculpt and separate them from the background. |
| Barn doors | A rotatable attachment consisting of two or four metal flaps (hinged) which is fixed to the front of a Fresnel spotlight to cut off the beam in a particular direction(s). |
| Battens | Compartmentalised floodlights set up so as to allow colour mixing. Low voltage battens are commonly used as light curtains and for colour washes. Known in the US as a strip light. |
| Bifocal spot | Profile lantern with two sets of shutters, one of which produces a hard edge, and one a soft edge. |
| Black box | A one-room theatre, without a proscenium arch; interior is painted black, including walls, floor, and ceiling, and any drapes are also black. |
| Blackout | A lighting cue where all stage lights go off simultaneously. |
| Blocking | The path formed by the actor’s movement on stage, usually determined by the director with assistance from the actor, and often written down in a script using commonly accepted theatrical symbols. |
| Box set | A set with three walls and a ceiling, leaving the fourth wall to be imagined by the actors. The box set represents a real room with doors and windows that work. |
| Business | A piece of unscripted or improvised action, often comic in intention, used to establish a character, fill a pause in dialogue, or to establish a scene. An author may simply suggest 'business' to indicate the need for some action at that point in the play. |
| Catharsis | A theory advocated by Aristotle in his Poetics which attempts to describe thefeeling of release felt by the audience at the end of a tragedy; the audienceexperiences catharsis, or is set free from the emotional hold of the action, afterexperiencing strong emotions and sharing in the protagonist’s troubles. |
| Character | A person portrayed in a drama, novel, or other artistic piece. |
| Characterisation | How an actor uses body, voice, and thought to develop and portray a character. |
| Choreography | The movement of actors and dancers to music in a play. |
| Chorus | A group of performers who sing, dance, or recite in unison; in Greek drama, the chorus was the group of performers who sang and danced between episodes, narrated off-stage action, and commented on events. |
| Climax | The point of greatest intensity in a series or progression of events in a play, often forming the turning point of the plot and leading to some kind of resolution. |
| Cloth | A piece of scenic canvas, painted or plain that is flown or fixed to hang in a vertical position. A backcloth (or backdrop) hangs at the rear of a scene. A floor cloth is a painted canvas sheet placed on the stage floor to mark out the acting area, or to achieve a particular effect. A front cloth hangs well downstage, often to hide a scene change taking place behind. |
| Colour filter | A sheet of plastic usually composed of a coloured resin sandwiched between two clear pieces. The coloured filter absorbs all the colours of light except the colour of the filter itself, which it allows through. A colour filter is sometimes known as a ‘gel’, after ‘gelatine’, from which filters were originally made. |
| Colour mixing | Combining the effects of two or more lighting gels. |
| Comedy | A play that treats characters and situations in a humorous way. Low comedy is physical rather than intellectual comedy; high comedy is more sophisticated, emphasizing verbal with more than physical action. |
| Comic relief | A break in the tension of a tragedy provided by a comic character, a comic episode, or even a comic line. |
| Concentration | The actor’s focus, also called centering; focusing on the work at hand, being in character, or being in the moment. |
| Conflict | The internal or external struggle between opposing forces, ideas, or interests that creates dramatic tension. |
| Contrast | Dynamic use of opposites, such as movement/stillness, sound/silence, and light/ darkness. |
| Cross fade | Bringing another lighting state up to completely replace the current lighting state. Also applies to sound effects/music. Sometimes abbreviated to Xfade or XF. |
| Cyclorama | A fabric drop hung from a curved or segmented batten, or a curved wall at the back of the stage, upon which light can be cast to create effects (cyc for short). |
| Denouement | The moment in a drama when the essential plot point is unraveled or explained. |
| Development | Progression of the plot or conflict in a play. |
| Dialogue | Spoken conversation used by two or more characters to express thoughts, feelings, and actions. |
| Downlight | A light from directly above the acting area. |
| Dynamic | The energetic range of, or variations within physical movement or the difference between levels of sound. |
| End on | Traditional audience seating layout where the audience is looking at the stage from the same direction. This seating layout is that of a proscenium arch theatre. |
| Ensemble | The dynamic interaction and harmonious blending of the efforts of the many artists involved in the dramatic activity of theatrical production. |
| Exposition | The part of a play that introduces the theme, chief characters, and current circumstances. |
| Farce | An extreme form of comedy that depends on quick tempo and flawless timing and is characterised by improbable events and farfetched coincidences; from the French meaning ‘to stuff’. |
| Flashback | In a non-linear plot, to go back in time to a previous event; a flash forward would move the action into the future. |
| Flat | A wooden frame, usually covered with painted cloth, used to create walls or separations on stage. |
| Flood | To wash the stage with general lighting. The name given to a basic box-shaped lantern with a simple reflector used to achieve this effect. |
| Focus | In lighting, the adjustment of the size and shape of a stage light and/or the direction in which it is aimed; in acting, the act of concentrating or staying in character. |
| Fourth wall | The invisible wall of a set through which the audience sees the action of the play. |
| Fresnel spotlight | Adjustable spotlight giving a diffused light, created by the construction of its lens of ‘concentric circles’. Used with Barn doors. |
| Genre | A category of literary or dramatic composition; drama is a literary genre. Drama is further divided into tragedy, comedy, farce, and melodrama, and these genres, in turn, can be subdivided. |
| Gesture | Any movement of the actor’s head, shoulder, arm, hand, leg, or foot to convey meaning. |
| Groundrow | Compartmentalised floodlights set up on the stage floor so as to allow colour mixing. Commonly used to light curtains and for colour washes. See also Batten. |
| Hand props | Properties such as tools, weapons, or luggage that are carried on stage by an individual actor. See also Personal props, Props. |
| House lights | The lights that illuminate the auditorium before and after the performance and during intermission. |
| Imaging | A technique which allows performers to slow down and focus individually on an issue. The performers, sitting quietly with eyes closed, allow pictures to form in their minds. These images may be motivated by bits of narration, music, sounds, smells, etc. |
| Improvisation | The spontaneous use of movement and speech to create a character or object in a particular situation; acting done without a script. |
| Inflection | Change in pitch or loudness of the voice. |
| Interaction | The action or relationship among two or more characters. |
| Irony | An implied discrepancy between what is said and what is meant. There areseveral forms of irony. Verbal irony is when a writer or speaker says one thingand means something else (often the opposite of what is said). When theaudience perceives something that a character does not know, that is dramaticirony. Situational irony can be described as a discrepancy between expectedresults and the actual results. |
| Isolation | Control of isolated body parts; the ability to control or move one part of the body independently of the rest. |
| Kinesthetic | Resulting from the sensation of bodily position, presence, or movement. |
| Language | In drama, the particular manner of verbal expression, the diction or style of writing, or the speech or phrasing that suggests a class or profession or type of character. |
| Lantern | The generic term for a stage spotlight. |
| Light set | A term used to describe a situation where no physical set is used on stage. The ‘set’ is created entirely by means of lighting. |
| Mannerism | A peculiarity of speech or behaviour. |
| Melodrama | A style of play, which originated in the 19th century, relying heavily on sensationalism and sentimentality. Melodramas tend to feature action more than motivation, stock characters, and a strict view of morality in which good triumphs over evil. |
| Mime | Acting without words. |
| Mirroring | Copying the movement and/or expression or look of someone else exactly. |
| Monologue | A long speech made by one actor; a monologue may be delivered alone or in the presence of others. |
| Mood | The tone or feeling of the play, often engendered by the music, setting, or lighting. |
| Motivation | The reason or reasons for a character’s behaviour; an incentive or inducement for further action for a character. |
| Movement | Stage blocking or the movements of the actors onstage during performance; also refers to the action of the play as it moves from event to event. |
| Naturalism | A style of drama that developed in the late 19th century as an attempt to represent real life on stage faithfully and without artifice; the actions of characters tend to be dominated by determinism (societal or environmental forces). |
| Pace | Rate of movement or speed of action. |
| Parody | A mocking or satirical imitation of a literary or dramatic work. |
| Performance elements | Includes acting (e.g. character motivation and analysis, empathy), speaking (breath control, vocal expression and inflection, projection, speaking style, diction), and non-verbal expression (gestures, body alignment, facial expression, character blocking, movement). |
| Personal props | Small props that are usually carried in an actor’s costume, such as money or a pen. See also Hand props, Props. |
| Pitch | The particular level of a voice, instrument or tune. |
| Plot | The events of a play or arrangement of action, as opposed to the theme. See also Story line. |
| Plot development | The organisation or building of the action in a play. |
| Posture | Physical alignment of a performer’s body, or a physical stance taken by aperformer which conveys information about the character being played. |
| Profile lantern | A focusable spotlight having an ellipsoidal lens which enables a sharp-edged beam of light to be projected. |
| Prompt | To give actors their lines as a reminder; the prompter is the one who assists actors in remembering their lines. |
| Props | Short for properties; any article, except costume or scenery, used as part of a dramatic production; any moveable object that appears on stage during a performance. See also Hand props, Personal props. |
| Proscenium | A frame or arch separating the stage from the auditorium. The proscenium opening was of particular importance to the Realistic playwrights of the 19th century, such as Ibsen and Shaw, for whom it was a picture frame or an imaginary fourth wall through which the audience experienced the illusion of spying on characters. |
| Protagonist | The main character or hero in a play or other literary work. |
| Proxemics | Contemporary term for ‘spatial relationships’ referring to spatial signifiers of the relationship between different performers or a performer and elements of the set which convey information about character and circumstances. |
| Realism | An attempt to represent everyday life and people as they are character motivation, costume, setting, and dialogue. Plays from this period (from 1820 to 1920) seek the truth, find beauty in the commonplace, and focus on the conditions of the working class. |
| Resolution | How the problem or conflict in a drama is solved or concluded. |
| Rhythm | Measured flow of words or phrases in verse forming patterns of sound. Regularity in time or space of an action, process or feature. |
| Ritual | A prescribed form or ceremony; drama grew out of religious ritual. |
| Role | The character portrayed by an actor in a drama. |
| Role playing | Improvising movement and dialogue to put oneself in another’s place in a particular situation, often to examine the person(s) and/or situation(s) being improvised. |
| Satire | A play in which sarcasm, irony, and ridicule are used to expose or attack folly or pretension in society. |
| Scene | A small section or portion of a play. |
| Scenery | The theatrical equipment, such as curtains, flats, backdrops, or platforms, used in a dramatic production to communicate environment. |
| Scenography | The art of creating performance environments using one or more components including light, costume, set, space and sound. |
| Scrim | A drop made of fabric that seems almost opaque when lit from the front but semitransparent when lit from behind. |
| Set | The physical surroundings, visible to the audience, in which the action of the play takes place. |
| Set designer | The person who designs the physical surroundings in which the action of the play takes place. |
| Setting | When and where the action of a play takes place. |
| Sightlines | Imaginary lines of sight that determine what areas of the stage are visible to the audience from any given seat in the house. |
| Soliloquy | A speech in which an actor, usually alone on stage, speaks the inner thoughts of his/her character aloud. |
| Sound | The effects an audience hears during a performance to communicate character, context, or environment. |
| Sound effects | Recorded: often abbreviated to FX. There are many sources for recorded sound effects, from CDs, to downloading from the internet. May form an obvious part of the action (train arriving at station) or may be in the background throughout a scene (e.g. birds chirping). Live: gunshots, door slams, and offstage voices (amongst many others) are most effective when done live. |
| Sound elements | Music, sound effects, actors’ voices. |
| Space | A defined area. |
| Spatial relationships | (Or spatial awareness). Traditional term for what is currently referred to as proxemics, referring to spatial signifiers of the relationship between different performers or a performer and elements of the set which convey information about character and circumstances. |
| Special effects | Visual or sound effects used to enhance a theatrical performance. |
| Stage presence | The level of comfort, commitment, and energy an actor appears to have on stage. |
| Staging | Another term for blocking; deliberate choices about where the actors stand and how they move on stage to communicate character relationships and plot and to create interesting stage pictures. |
| Stock characters | Characters who represent particular personality types or characteristics of human behaviour. Stock characters are immediately recognisable and appear throughout the history of theatre, beginning with Greek and Roman comedy and elaborated upon in Commedia dell’ Arte. |
| Storyline | The plot or plan of action. |
| Structure | The arrangement of and relationship between the constituent parts of a whole as in ‘prologue, exposition, dénouement’ or scenes and acts within a play. |
| Stylisation | The shaping of dramatic material, settings, or costumes in a deliberately nonrealistic manner. |
| Suspense | A feeling of uncertainty as to the outcome, used to build interest and excitement on the part of the audience. |
| Symbolism | The use of symbolic language, imagery, or colour to evoke emotions or ideas. |
| Tableau | A technique in creative drama in which actors create a frozen picture, as if the action were paused; plural is tableaux. Not to be confused with freeze frame, which is a term used in film and video production and which should not be used when discussing drama. |
| Tempo | Relative speed or rate of movement in pace over time, e.g. the speed at which the music for a dance should be played. Can be applied to dramatic contexts such as in ‘tempo rhythm’. |
| Tension | The atmosphere created by unresolved, disquieting, or inharmonious situations that human beings feel compelled to address; the state of anxiety the audience feels because of a threat to a character in a play. |
| Text | The basis of dramatic activity and performance; a written script or an agreed upon structure and content for an improvisation. |
| Theatre games | Improvisational exercises structured by the director or teacher to achieve a specific objective, such as breaking down inhibitions or establishing trust. |
| Theatre-in-the-round | An acting area or stage that may be viewed from all sides simultaneously. |
| Theme | The basic idea of a play; the idea, point of view, or perception that binds together a work of art. |
| Thrust | A stage that extends into the audience area, with seats on three sides of a peninsula-shaped acting space. |
| Timbre | The distinctive character or quality of a musical or vocal sound apart from its pitch or intensity such as in a nasal voice quality. |
| Timing | Includes setting cues for effects and lighting, synchronising two or more things that must happen simultaneously, and establishing the pace at which lines will be delivered or the play performed. |
| Traverse | Form of staging where the audience is on either side of the acting area. |
| Turning point | The climax or high point of a story, when events can go either way. |
| Upstage (verb) | To deliberately draw the audience’s attention away from another actor or actors by overacting, using flashy bits of business, or other means. |
| Vocal expression | How an actor uses his or her voice to convey character. |
| Vocal projection | Directing the voice out of the body to be heard clearly at a distance. |
| Voice | The combination of vocal qualities an actor uses such as articulation, phrasing, and pronunciation. |
| Wings | Offstage areas to the right and left of the acting/onstage area. |