

## **Dramatic Techniques and Conventions**

**Anagnorisis:** the point in a play, novel, etc., in which a principal character recognizes or discovers another character's true identity or the true nature of their own circumstances.

**Catharsis:** The purging of the feelings of pity and fear. According to Aristotle the audience should experience catharsis at the end of a tragedy.

**Conflict:** There is no drama without conflict. The conflict between opposing forces in a play can be external (between characters) or internal (within a character) and is usually resolved by the end of the play.

**Dramatic Irony:** A device in which a character holds a position or has an expectation reversed or fulfilled in a way that the character did not expect but that the audience or readers have anticipated because their knowledge of events or individuals is more complete than the character's.

**Foreshadowing:** Anton Chekhov best explained the term in a letter in 1889: "One must not put a loaded rifle on the stage if no one is thinking of firing it." Chekhov's gun, or foreshadowing is a literary technique that introduces an apparently irrelevant element introduced early in the story; its significance becomes clear later in the play.

**Hubris:** The Greek term hubris is difficult to translate directly into English. This negative term implies both arrogant, excessive self-pride or self-confidence, and a lack of some important perception or insight due to pride in one's abilities. This overwhelming pride inevitably leads to a downfall.

**In medias res:** "In the midst of things" (Latin); refers to opening a plot in the middle of the action, and then filling in past details by means of exposition or flashback.

**Inciting Incident:** The first incident leading to the rising action of the play. Sometimes the inciting incident is an event that occurred somewhere in the character's past and is revealed to the audience through exposition.

**Irony:** In general, a term with a range of meanings, all of them involving some sort of discrepancy or incongruity between what is expected or understood and what actually happens or is meant. Irony is used to suggest the difference between appearance and reality, between expectation and fulfillment, and thus, the complexity of experience.

**A. Verbal irony:** the opposite is said from what is intended. It should not be confused with sarcasm which is simply language designed to wound or offend. Verbal irony, also called rhetorical irony, is sometimes viewed as a figure of speech, since it is a rhetorical device that involves saying one thing but meaning the opposite. Verbal irony is the most common kind of irony and is characterized by a discrepancy between what a speaker (or writer) says and what he or she believes to be true. More specifically, a speaker or writer using verbal irony will say the opposite of what he or she actually means.

**B. Dramatic irony:** the contrast between what a character believes and/or says and what the audience knows to be true. Dramatic irony (sometimes referred to as tragic

irony when it occurs in a tragedy) may be used to refer to a situation in which the character's own words come back to haunt him or her. However, it usually involves a discrepancy between a character's perception and what audience (or reader) knows to be true. They reader possess some material information that the character lacks, and it is the character's imperfect information that motivates or explains his or her discordant response.

**C. Irony of situation:** discrepancy between appearance and reality, or between expectation and fulfillment, or between what is and what would seem appropriate. This includes both dramatic & cosmic irony

**Linear Plot:** A traditional plot sequence in which the incidents in the drama progress chronologically; in other words, all of the events build upon one another and there are no flashbacks. Linear plots are usually based on causality (that is, one event "causes" another to happen) occur more commonly in comedy than in other forms.

**Motivation:** The thought(s) or desire(s) that drives a character to actively pursue a want or need. This want or need is called the objective . A character generally has an overall objective or longterm goal in a drama but may change his or her objective, and hence motivation, from scene to scene when confronted with various obstacles.

**Stage Direction:** A playwright's descriptive or interpretive comments that provide readers (as well as actors and directors) with information about the dialogue, setting, and action of a play. Modern playwrights tend to include substantial stage directions, while earlier playwrights typically use them more sparsely, implicitly, or not at all.

**Static Character:** A dramatic character who does not change.

**Tragedy:** A type of drama in which the characters experience reversal of fortune, usually for the worse. In tragedy, suffering awaits many of the characters, especially the hero.

**Tragic flaw:** A weakness or limitation of character, resulting in the fall of the tragic hero. Example: Othello's jealousy and too trusting nature is his tragic flaw.

**Tragic hero:** A privileged, exalted character of high repute, who, by virtue of a tragic flaw and/or fate, suffers a fall from a higher station in life into suffering.