

Theater Glossary

Acting. The process of creating roles and characters in dramatic context. (see Characterization).

Aesthetics. The branch of philosophy that deals with theories of art and beauty.

Aesthetic Distance. The perspective of a member of the audience in relation to performance. A work is "distanced" so that it can be seen aesthetically and not confused with reality. Aesthetic distance permits objective response even in the face of subjective experiences.

Aesthetic Qualities. Those characteristics of a work that place it somewhere on the scale of beautiful to ugly.

Aesthetic Response. A person's reaction to the emotional values and cognitive meanings of a work of art (e.g., a theatre experience).

Artistic Discipline. Adherence to beliefs, values, and behaviors deemed accepted in the artistic field.

Audience. One or more persons who observe actors in a scene or play in a classroom or a theatre. In theatre education, audience is sometimes loosely used to mean the reflective performer as well as classmates, other students, faculty, or the public.

Character. A person, animal, or entity in a story, scene, or play with specific distinguishing physical, mental, and attitudinal attributes.

Character Dimensions. Physical aspects (e.g., sex, age, external traits), social aspects (e.g., family, occupation), and psychological aspects (e.g., attitudes, motivation, values) of a character.

Characterization. The process of exploring the physical, social, and psychological aspects of a role in order to create a believable character. (see Acting)

Communication. Verbal or nonverbal interaction between persons to share meaning.

Concentration. The ability to focus and maintain attention upon an object, image, idea, action, or experiences while excluding distracting factors.

Concept (Design). The designer's interpretation of the director's vision in scenery, properties, lighting, sound, costumes, and makeup.

Concept (Directional). A vision which the director develops about the meaning and significance of a play which is then rehearsed to fulfill that vision. The test of the validity of the director's concept is the degree to which it clarifies the meaning and enhances the power of the text.

Concept (Production). The unified, physical expression that fulfills the director's vision.

The Arts Vocabulary – Theatre/Drama

Costume. An actor's stage clothing.

Creative Drama. (see Drama/Theatre and Dramatic Activities)

Dialogue. Words spoken by the characters in a play to communicate their thoughts, feelings, and actions.

Directing. The process of guidance, both external and internal, incorporating the development of leadership skills; the unification of a production from its basic interpretation through all the acting and technical phases up to the time of performance.

Drama. A piece of writing intended for stage presentation. (see Drama/Theatre and Dramatic Literature)

Drama/Theatre. Drama/Theatre is used to represent two ends of a continuum in theatre education.

Drama refers to an improvisational process-centered form of theatre in which participants are guided by a leader to imagine, enact, and reflect upon human experience. The primary purpose of drama in the classroom is to facilitate learning by the participants, rather than to create a performance for an audience. The essences of this definition is known variously as creative drama, improvisational drama, developmental drama, classroom or educational drama.

Theatre refers to the study of art form through performance-centered activities involving an audience. As an academic discipline, theatre traditionally includes the study of acting techniques, scene study, dramatic literature, theatre history, technical design and stagecraft, playwriting, play production, theatre attendance, aesthetics and criticism.

Dramatic Activities. Such activities as pantomime, creative movement, improvisation, creative drama, storytelling, choral speaking, story dramatization, theme oriented drama, story theatre, readers' theatre, role playing, theatre games, and puppetry.

Dramatic Experiences. Dramatic play, dramatic activities, movement, and processes involved in personal expression through creative drama as well as attendance at, observation of, and participation in theatrical performances.

Dramatic Literature. Compositions in prose or verse presenting in dialogue or pantomime a story involving conflict or contrast of character and intended to be acted on the stage; a play.

Dramatic Play. Spontaneous free play in which children explore their universe, imitating the actions and character traits of others. Make-believe and fantasy may be part of the experience. Considered educationally valuable for the child as a natural way of exploring and expressing thoughts and feelings, it is play for the child's own enjoyment and not for performance.

Elements of Drama. Six major elements of drama according to Aristotle: plot, character, theme, dialogue, music, and spectacle.

The Arts Vocabulary – Theatre/Drama

Emotional Perception. The detection and apprehension of emotional states, feelings and reactions both in oneself and others.

Emotional Recall and Expression. Emotional perceptions elicited from past experiences which can be used in understanding, portraying, and reflecting on the human condition and human behavior.

Empathy. Ability to feel with another person or to put oneself in another's position; to vicariously experience the sensual and emotional state of another person. To empathize is to "walk in the shoes" of another. Empathy feels with a character; sympathy feels for a character.

Enact. The process and fulfillment of creating a believable being outside oneself.

Ensemble. The dynamic interaction and harmonious blending of the efforts of the many artists involved in a dramatic activity or theatrical production.

Evaluation. Analysis and appraisal of personal efforts and the efforts of others.

Exercises. Individual and group activities designed by the drama/theatre leader to teach process, skills, and concepts.

Fantasy. The use of imagination to create strange, unusual, or nonrealistic characters or settings.

5 W's. Who refers to roles and characterizations. Where refers to setting, locale, environment. What refers to dramatic action. When refers to time of day, year. Why refers to motivation.

Focus. The concept of guiding the attention of the players and audience to a particular place or person at a given moment.

Formal Drama. Dramatic activity designed for presentation with the focus on the final production and audience reception.

Guided Dramatic Play. Imaginative play stimulated by a trained leader.

Image. The sensory record of a object or experience that remains in the mind's eye in the absence of the actual object or experience.

Imagery. The mental reconstruction of an experience without the original sensory stimulation.

Imagination. The ability to develop original or novel images by relating one image to another, altering or combining images from previous experience.

Improvisation. The spontaneous use of movement and speech to create a character or object in a particular situation.

Informal Drama. Dramatic activity of any sort that is not designed for presentation.

The Arts Vocabulary – Theatre/Drama

Interpersonal Skills. The development of the individual through interaction with others and self enhancement while participating in, observing, and studying drama/theatre. (see Ensemble)

Language. The use of vocal sounds in meaningful patterns and corresponding written symbols to form, express, and communicate thoughts and feelings.

Lighting. The illumination of the stage by means of artificial light.

Makeup. Cosmetics used to change the appearance of the face and other exposed surfaces on the body in order to emphasize characteristics appropriate to a role.

Metaphor. A symbolic comparison where one thing stands for another thing:
an image which synthesizes two meanings.

Motivation. The actor's justification for doing or saying something.

Movement. A flow of action combined with an awareness of space, time, and direction. Movement includes gross and fine motor skills employed in nonverbal communication.

Multicultural. Composed of many different cultures and nationalities.

Music. Vocal and instrumental rhythmic sound used in a play. Any rhythmic or melodic element such as a patterned arrangement of words.

Narrative Pantomime. An activity in which the group pantomimes a story as it is narrated by the drama/theatre leader.

Nonverbal Communication. Communication without words using facial expression, gestures, and body language.

Oral Expression. The ability to communicate with words.

Pantomime. Action without words; nonverbal communication through body movement, gesture, and facial expression.

Perception. The process by which people receive, recognize, integrate, and interpret sensory stimuli.

Performance. The imitation of life in front of at least one other person. In a broad sense, performance refers to the presentation of any kind of entertainment--from play to rock concert, from solo presentation to ensemble collaboration.

Playing. Improvising or acting out characters in a scene or story.

The Arts Vocabulary – Theatre/Drama

Playing in Role. A technique used by the creative drama leader during the playing, in which the leader enacts a role that allows for some authority and control, to heighten and advance the playing.

Playing Space and Audience Space. An area for dramatic activities. This may be simply the space surrounding a student's desk or a cleared space in a classroom without a designated place for observation by an audience. Theatrical production clearly establishes an acting area, or stage, and a designated audience area: proscenium (one side), thrust (three sides), area (four sides).

Playmaking. Playmaking is a term used to describe dramatic activities that lead to improvised drama with a beginning, middle, and end employing the general form and some of the elements of theatre. The product may or may not be shared with others.

Playwriting. Playwriting is the act of creating the plot, theme, characters, dialogue, spectacle, and structure of a play and organizing it into a playscript form. It involves the ability to imagine the entire production scene by scene and to put it into written form so that others may interpret it for the stage.

Plot. Plot is the structure of the action of the play; it is the arrangement of incidents that take place on the stage as revealed through the action and dialogue of the characters. Plot structure usually includes a beginning, a middle, and end with a problem, complications, and a resolution.

Portray. The process of representing a character.

Props. Properties; objects used by actors on stage (e.g., fan, wallet) or objects necessary to complete the set (e.g., furniture, plants, books).

Puppetry. The animation of objects, ranging from hands and paper bags to dolls, creating characters in dramatic situations.

Receptive Language. The ability to understand word concepts.

Replaying. Enacting a scene or play again while attending to improvement noted in the evaluation; roles are sometimes exchanged so students have the opportunity to play more than one character.

Response. Reaction to stimulus presented by character, event, or environment.

Role. The characteristic and expected social behavior of an individual in a given position (e.g., mother, employer). Role portrayal is likely to be more predictable and one-dimensional than character portrayal.

Role-Playing. Enacting a person other than oneself in an improvisation based on a given dramatic situation.

Rubric. An established set of standards used for the purpose of evaluation.

The Arts Vocabulary – Theatre/Drama

Scene. Set; the arrangement of scenic elements (e.g., curtains, flats, drops, platforms), properties, and lights to represent the locale in a dramatic performance.

Script. The written dialogue, description, and directions provided by the playwright.

Self-Concept. A sense of knowing and appreciating oneself; an awareness of one's potential, values, strengths, and weaknesses; an understanding of one's image as perceived by others.

Sensory Perception. Heightened awareness of physical sensations and emotional states.

Sensory Recall. Sensory perceptions elicited from past experiences.

Setting. The time and place in which the dramatic action occurs.

Social Discipline. Adherence to those beliefs, values, and behaviors deemed acceptable by the group.

Spectacle. All visual elements of production (scenery, properties, lighting, costumes, makeup, physical movement, dance).

Spontaneity. A free, direct, immediate response to an experience.

Story Dramatization. The process of improvisationally making an informal play based on a story. Young children are often guided by a leader who tells or reads a story while the children take on all the roles, working in their own spaces. Older children generally assume specific roles and collaborate to dramatize a story, often interchanging roles and experimenting with ideas.

Story Theatre. This form of theatre combines the art of storytelling with improvisational acting. Using stories from the oral tradition (folk and fairy tales, myths, and legends), story theatre allows the characters to narrate in the third person, speak the dialogue in the first person, and carry out physical actions called forth in the story.

Style. The characteristic manner of speaking, writing, designing, performing, or directing. Style is a relative term that encompasses literary movements (e.g., romanticism, realism, naturalism), the method of individual playwrights, or anything that displays unique, definable properties in construction or execution. Stylized usually means anything which deviates from whatever is considered realistic at a given time. It is possible to have a dramatic style (provided by the playwright) and a theatrical style (provided by the director and collaborators).

Subtext. The unspoken meaning or intention behind the actions and dialogue of a text or performance which is implied largely by nonverbal behavior and subtleties in vocal qualities.

Teaching in Role. A technique used by the drama leader during the playing of a scene in which the leader enacts a role with the students in order to heighten or advance the playing.

The Arts Vocabulary – Theatre/Drama

Technical Elements. The aspects of theatre involved in the creation of spectacle (scenery, properties, lighting, sound, costumes, and makeup).

Text. The basis of dramatic activity and performance. Text can be a written script or an agreed-upon structure and content (as in improvisational work or a theatrical piece which uses planned, set, disparate components).

Theatre. An art form based on the interpretation of dramatic literature combining, playwriting, acting, directing, and stagecraft. A building intended for the presentation of plays or other dramatic performances. (see Drama/Theatre)

Theatre Arts. An umbrella term used to embrace all aspects of the discipline of theatre.

Theatre Games. Acting exercises which involve group agreement to the rules of the game and group interaction in pursuit of solving the dramatic problem; frequently used for warm-up, motivation, and exploration of character and subtext.

Theatre Heritage. Theatrical literature, history, lore, conventions, and taste that have accumulated across the centuries.

Theatre History. Generally refers to those major eras in which significant theatrical contributions have been made (e.g., fifth century Greece, the Elizabethan era, the French neoclassic periods, the Restoration, late nineteenth century, twentieth century).

Theatre Management. The administrative aspects of theatre (e.g., stage management, budgeting, public relations, box office, house management).

Theatre Production. The staging of a dramatic work for presentation before an audience.

Theatrical Design. The conception and planning of the technical aspects of a production to achieve spectacle. (Theatre spectacle commonly refers to performance, space, scenery, properties, lighting, sound, costumes, and makeup.)

Theme. The central thought, idea, or significance of action with which a play deals.

Theme-Oriented Drama. An improvised drama developed around a problem, issue or theme to be explored. Participants are led to identify with a common concern of a group of people (e.g., slaves and the underground railway, chivalry and medieval knights, the responsibilities of citizenship).

Transformation. The internal or external changing of a person or object into another through imagination.

Vocal Characteristics. Those traits which determine one's voice: pitch, volume, rate, quality.

The Arts Vocabulary – Theatre/Drama

Vocal Qualities. The characteristics of tones which distinguish them from all others. In voice, qualities are most closely associated with mood and feeling.

Voice. Sounds produced by the expiration of air through vibrating vocal cords and resonance within the throat and head cavities.

Warm-up. An activity in which the student focuses attention on limbering up the body, voice, imagination, or intellect.