**Creative Writing 20: Introduction to Drama**

In this unit we will be experimenting with a variety of different types of dramatic writing; most of the writing will be of short scenes, and will follow the scriptwriting style.

The focus of the writing will be on **character development**, **conflict**, **dramatic action and consequences**, **dialogue**, and “what if” questions that have the ability to drive the plot forward.

Dramatic Plot

A dramatic plot begins with a concept. A concept can be described in a complete sentence of two. For example, a prince decides to avenge his father’s murder. He becomes so obsessed with his mission that he brings about the downfall of the whole family. Dramatic questions include: Who did this? What is happening? Will he succeed? Will he find out what we know? Most dramas move from one dramatic question to another so the audience wonders about both immediate and final outcomes.

Character Development (questions by Mark Readman)

In a drama, think about introducing a character in a brief description that includes:

* The impression they create (their appearance);
* Their attitude (personality; temperament);
* The world they inhabit (where and how they live).

When you can visualize your character and their world, consider the following questions:

* What would this character do if her husband was kidnapped and a ransom was demanded?
* What would this character do if a homeless man had a heart attack in front of him?
* What would this character do if he were mugged?
* What would this character do if she were offered a bribe to betray company secrets?
* What would this character do if he had a chance to cheat on his girlfriend?

Conflict

All dramas have a major conflict which will likely be between the protagonist and the antagonist. It may be an **internal conflict** (i.e. the struggle between love and hate, courage and fear, or an ethical position where s/he is attracted to two different people). It is a challenge to reveal what goes on in the mind of the character through only dialogue and action – sometimes a tool writers use is providing a confidant the character can confide in, at other times writers create monologues for their characters. **External conflict** may also be present and is usually some kind of obstacle that causes issues for the protagonist (i.e. a law, natural disaster, an illness).

Dramatic Action

* **Clear**: the playwright must set down clear action through dialogue.
* **Strong**: a character must know what s/he wants or the audience will lose interest.
* **Incorporated into the dialogue itself**: in most cases, playwrights do not depend on stage directions for providing the action needed.

Types of Action:

* *Discovery action*, where the main interest is to find something out
* *Persuasive action*, where a character wants to get someone to do something
* Goal action, where a character can want something concrete (money) or abstract (power)
* *Revenge action*, where a character has a strong desire to get even at someone
* *Escape action*, where someone needs to get away
* *Testing action*, where a character finds out something about someone (can s/he be trusted?
* *Choice action*, where a character must decide between two major actions in the play

In screenwriting, story structure almost always follows three steps:

* Act I: set up
* Act II: confrontation
* Act III: resolution

Dialogue

Phil Parker, in *The Art and Science of Screenwriting*, provides some pointers on good dialogue in a screenplay:

1. It has a clear dramatic function (advances the story, reveals character)
2. It relates to the visual aspect of the moment (should relate to what people would be seeing on screen)
3. It is character specific (it should be clear who is speaking even if you can’t see their names)
4. It is economical (short and to the point)
5. It reflects the style of narrative (the way each character speaks fits with the worlds they inhabit)
6. It delivers only what action cannot
7. It is speech, not prose (the illusion of real speech)

Raymon Frensham, in *Teach Yourself Screenwriting*, offers a list of ‘don’ts’:

1. Avoid ‘passing-the-time-of-day’ dialogue: greeting, polite nothings, goodbyes, etc.
2. Don’t repeat information in dialogue that has already occurred elsewhere
3. Avoid dialect and writing phonetically
4. Never italicize dialogue to create emphasis and try and avoid exclamation marks
5. Not every question asked in dialogue needs to be answered. The use of silence, a reaction or non-reaction can be as, or more powerful than dialogue.

Major difference between a stage play and a screenplay:

SARAH enters stage left

vs.

Sarah enters carrying bags of groceries, her cell phone tucked in the crook of her neck Revision

Questions:

* Are the characters interesting and convincing?
* Is the dialogue effective?
* Does the script display originality?
* Does the play have the dramatic impact it should? Are the dramatic questions strong enough to hold audience interest?
* Has the plot come together effectively (cause and effect, actions and consequences)?
* Are changes or epiphanies experienced by the characters logical? Are they the result of the play’s dramatic action?
* Is the structure appropriate and does it allow for meaning to be revealed as I wish it to be?
* Might an audience be able to construct meaning in a satisfying way?
* Are the themes well developed, and will they reach or challenge the audience in some way?
* Have I created the best possible ending for my drama?