

Experiencing Stanislavsky Today – Website Worksheet

Play Analysis

Climatic Plot Structure

Understanding dramatic, episodic, and epic plot structures gives you a lot of elements to identify and work with in staging a play or scene. Please note that playwrights often combine elements from both or make up their own structures.

Definitions:

In the **climatic play structure** the other play elements (character, theme, language, spectacle, rhythm) are unified through the plot. The climactic plot is selected events carefully ordered for dramatic effect where a series of crises lead to a deciding climax.

In the **episodic play structure** the play elements may be linked by theme, characters, locations, or parallel situations rather than by a unifying plot. An episodic play is often a series of stories or chapters that do not need to be offered in a linear arrangement of cause and effect, and may not be in a linear time sequence.

A. THOUGHT/THEME

Every play holds ideas the author is weighing and trying to get her audience to consider. They may be obvious, or they may be concealed and revealed in intriguing ways. The author may want the audience to ponder a question and he may or may not offer his own answer to that question. The author may have multiple points of view on the topic expressed through multiple characters all of which help to round out the *theme*, but will generally side with one over the others in the end.

Worksheet - Theme

The theme will emerge in more depth as you work on the play but to gain a starting picture it is helpful to try to figure out the following

1. What is the *topic* of the play? Can you describe the topic in one word or a short phrase?
2. What is the author's point of view on this subject? (This is the *theme* of the play)
3. What do you suppose was the author's reason for writing the play, the effect they might have wanted to have on the audience?

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4. What might be your reason for doing it? What do you hope to contribute to your audience and/or the greater community?

This would be the supertask (sometimes called the super, super objective of the play). In other incarnations of the system it was referred to as civic duty.

5. Are there minor and major themes? Do some of them repeat throughout building and reframing with each glimpse?

While the theme represents the content, the *plot* is a key part of the structure of the play. The plot is the carefully selected and arranged events that the author uses to reveal the story of the play in an interesting and dramatic manner. For the purposes of beginning play analysis, we are going to assume that the plot is composed in the most common structure – a climatic (sometimes called dramatic) plot. Later in your work as an actor, you will need to learn to dissect plays in Epic and other play structures. For now, reread the play to understand the context of the scene you are going work on in relationship to the entire play. When telling a story in the form of a play in a theatrical production, we must ensure we understand the key plot points so that we can help the author tell the story in a way that important parts of it are not missed by the audience. A quick way to get a picture of the play is to see how the author unveils the story through a series of events constructed into a plot.

Worksheet - Plot Analysis

1. What *dramatic question* focuses the action? This may be what you were wondering as you read the play.
(Examples: Will Romeo and Juliet find a way to be together? OR Will Romeo and Juliet's love triumph over the hatred of their families?)

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2. What happens first in the play, and then what happens, and then what? Make a brief description of the *key events*. You should have one to three events for each scene. Give a title to the main event in each scene. This is the *named event*. (Examples of *named events* include the following: tightrope, new life, abyss, the web, quagmire, celebration, swamp, on the rocks, devastation, aftermath, war, victory, dark victory, the betrayal, conflagration, reunion, surprise, revenge, reconciliation, seduction, destruction.)

3. Which is the *event without which this play would not exist*?

4. How does the scene you will work on fit into this series of events? What goes before? What does the scene lead to later in the play?

5. What is the *point of attack*? Where in the story does this author chose to start the play? What is the very first event?

6. What is the *main conflict*? What type of conflict is it? Woman/Man v. woman/man, man v. nature, man v. society, man v. the supernatural, man v. the machine? There must be at least two forces in opposition to have a conflict, name them specifically in this play.

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<p>7. Which character(s) do you identify with on reading the play? Is this character the <i>protagonist</i> (character the play is about)? Is this character the <i>antagonist</i> (character opposing the main character)?</p>
<p>8. What is the <i>inciting incident</i>? The incident that sets the conflict in motion.</p>
<p>9. What <i>crises</i> happen – small but indecisive battles between the two opposing forces?</p>
<p>10. What <i>foreshadowing</i> happens to help build suspense? (Hints about things to come.)</p>
<p>11. What are the major <i>obstacles</i> for the protagonist (Note: it is important to understand this even if you are not playing one of the main characters)? (These are things that impeded the protagonist from achieving his objective.)</p>
<p>12. What <i>complications</i> arise?</p>
<p>13. What <i>discoveries</i> does the main character make?</p>

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14. What *revelations* are offered?

15. Is there a *reversal* of fortune (status change) or of purpose or main action of the protagonist, or a change of mind or point of view by any characters?

16. What is the *climax* – the final decisive battle between the two forces?

17. What is the *denouement* also known as *resolution*?

An example of identifying main events from Act I Scene I of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*

The lower ranked Montague and Capulet men fight in the street

- *Benvolio tries to make peace but Tybalt arrives and attacks him*
- *The Prince reprimands the two families*
- *Romeo Montague denounces the fighting and confesses to his cousin Benvolio that the cause of his pain is his unrequited love for Rosaline*
- *Romeo and Benvolio discover that the Capulets are having a party*
- *Benvolio convinces Romeo to crash it to try to cheer him up*
(This the main event of the scene, as it is at the party in Act I, scene V that Romeo meets Juliet - the event without which there would be no play.)