

Experiencing Stanislavsky Today – Website Worksheet

Play Analysis

Episodic Play 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.

Episodic Play Structure Description:

It does not conform to the unities of time, place and action:

Time: Often begins earlier in the story and can extend to many years

Action: Does not compress the action but expands it encompassing many subplots or parallel plots (plots of equal importance). Does not need connect various part of the play with cause and effect (plot elements) but often rather with theme or character or story.

Place: may range over a number of locations

Characters: often has many characters, characters may be thrown in for just one scene as a device and we do not need to understand everything about them or their relationships to the other characters. They are less tightly bound to one another through exposition.

Plot: Rather than cause and effect, it might use contrasts (private with public scenes, longer with short scenes, one group to an opposing or related group, comic with serious scenes)

All of the components coalesce to form a whole, often more like a collage. The whole can be a powerful emotional impact, or a compilation of events that force an action (rather than a single main throughline of events leading to a cathartic climax).

Examples of playwrights who used episodic structure – Shakespeare (uses elements of both in different mixes for different plays), Goethe, Buchner, Ibsen (mostly his earlier work based on Norse myths such as Peer Gynt), Genet, Brecht (actually has a variation called Epic structure)

How to Analyze:

A. THOUGHT/THEME *(You can start in a similar way to climatic structure but in the episodic structure theme may be more complicated and more of a driving force for the action than in climatic plot structure. In fact, it may be the only thing that is providing cohesion between disparate parts of the play.)*

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

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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?
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?

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B. Episodic Structure

1. **What makes up the different components of this play?** *For example, it may be separate stories, separate groups of characters, different people in the same location, the same event in different locations or a different time period, a slew of different parallel or subplots that may or may not overlap directly, or some other type of segment. They may be in bursts, or snapshots, or they may be separate stories woven together each with its own throughline of events (even if the story is not revealed in order).*
2. **Is there a *dramatic question* that focuses the entire play? If not what questions are you asking about each different throughline?** *This may be what you were wondering as you read the play.*
3. **How are the scenes/sections arranged?** *For example, the segments may be in or out of time order or have no sense of time or their may be contrasts (private with public scenes, longer with short scenes, one group to an opposing or related group, comic with serious scenes).*
4. **If there are specific groups of characters, do they interweave or are they keep entirely separate?**
5. Even though the events are often not connected in a cause and effect, linear way in episodic structure, **try to name the main event for each scene.**
(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)
(The named events can go into chart below)

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6. **Make a chart** to track each of the components, for example:

Act I	page	ACT I - Action	Characters	Type of Dramatic Event	Location
Sc 1	p7	Prologue <i>phil sings - haunting/familiar street sounds, traffic, trains, far away sirens</i>	Philomel	Song	Street
Sc 2	p7	Fate of the Lydian Sailor /story of Oklahoma boy	D	narrative monologue	figure/face from darkness
Sc 3	p9	List of Minor Gods and Goddesses	All	Soundscape in dark	Street/dark
Sc 4	p10	How Eurydice <i>crosses the river of forgetfulness</i> (becomes fence?) (<i>crossing for most of scene??</i>)	Eurydice, Perephone, Orpheus	cross to land of dead dialogue	River of Forgetfulness ancient trash
Sc 5	p16	Narcissus' story <i>End echo follows him off</i>	Narcissus, Echo	monologue with an echo	hall mirrors/ street?

7. What **parallels** do you notice between types of scenes, types of characters or other echoes of one part of the play in another?
8. Within the sections of the play which of them **link together** or are **reflected** in other sections? How are the seemingly disparate parts **connected**?
9. Which are the most **important events** in the play?
10. How does the scene you will work on **fit** into this series of events? What goes before? What does the scene you are working on lead to later in the throughline of the component it is connected to?

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11. What **conflict or struggles** are in this play? Are they Woman/Man v. woman/man, man v. nature, man v. society, man v. the supernatural, man v. the machine? Numerous difference forces may be in conflict, try to pinpoint the most important struggles.

12. Is there one specific **climax** or does each component peak separately?

13. Which **character(s) do you identify with** on reading the play? How does the playwright use this character to break open the theme?

14. What **complications** arise?

15. What **discoveries** does the main character make?

16. What **revelations** are offered?

17. Is there a **reversal** of fortune (status change) or of purpose, or a change of mind or point of view by any characters?