# Drama glossary

A

actor

In drama, an actor is a performer whose role is to portray character(s) in a devised work or in the interpretation of a script. Actors use expressive and performance skills to establish character and to maintain and/or manipulate an actor–audience relationship.

actor–audience relationship

Actor–audience relationship is a performance skill in drama. In drama, actors present their work to audiences. In creating dramatic works, actors consider the intention of the drama, the playwright, the space in which the drama is being presented and the impact they wish to have on an audience. Actors work together to create a particular relationship with an audience, which can be established, maintained and manipulated through the use of expressive and performance skills and the application of design areas.

aesthetic knowledge

An understanding of how the conventions, materials and techniques of a drama work or theatre production work together to influence the mood or emotion. Aesthetic knowledge can contribute to creating visual, aural or physical appeal to evoke an emotional response from an audience. Aesthetic knowledge can also be related to the style and form of a drama or theatre work.

artist

A creative person involved in theatre-making, including actors, devisors, directors, dramaturgs, playwrights and designers of costumes, props, sets, lighting, sound, make-up and hair, and technologies.

arts experience

An experience that engages the senses. Drama and theatre can be experienced in person and/or digitally, for example by attending a performance in a theatre or other performance space, or by engaging with a digital recording of a performance.

artwork

An artwork is an outcome of an artist’s practice. In drama, an artwork may be a completed product or a work in progress.

audience(s)

Individuals or groups of people who experience drama and theatre presentations and performances in a range of settings and contexts (formal, informal, virtual or interactive) through intellectual, emotional and social engagement. Social and cultural factors, and the context of the creation and viewing of drama and theatre can all alter the way audiences view, engage, interpret and respond to drama works.

C

Character and relationships

Character and relationships is an element of drama. In drama, this refers to the roles played by actors, and are created during devising or in a presentation or performance to an audience. Characters are inherent in scripts and plays from early theatre forms to contemporary theatre forms and are central to stories and storytelling. Students create character(s) in drama and consider their function, purpose, objective(s), motivation(s), status, and traits or qualities. When developing, creating and sustaining character, actors also consider the relationships of that character to self and others.

climax

Climax is an element of drama. In drama, climax can occur as the most significant moment of tension or conflict. There may be more than one climax in a drama.

concept

A thought, idea or notion related to a theoretical construct. A concept can be more complex than a general idea. A concept is generally the primary idea or influence behind a drama work and can contribute to the overall theme of a series of drama works.

Conceptual drama works are often based on ideas and experiences with little representation of physical subject matter. The idea or concept behind the work is often more important than the finished work.

conflict

Conflict is an element of drama. In drama, conflict generally occurs when a character cannot achieve an objective or purpose due to an obstacle. The obstacle may be something within themselves, such as a feeling, or it may be external and between characters. It may also be between a character and their environment or greater situation. Conflict may be shown in a variety of ways, through physical or verbal means or through the use of design areas.

context

Context is an element of drama. The context in drama is the frame of reference that allows the meaning of the drama to be interpreted. Interpretation of the meaning of a drama work can evolve from the context. The context of a drama work or theatre performance can be the location and time in which it is made, presented or viewed. Context can also be the economic, philosophical, historical, social or cultural influences on the practices of the artist/playwright, the artist’s/playwright’s intentions, and their communication of ideas, values and beliefs in the drama or theatre performance.

contrast

Contrast is an element of drama. Contrast presents aspects or moments that are dissimilar in a drama, created to highlight or emphasise differences between characters, settings, times, themes, design areas or styles. Contrast may be shown through differences within expressive and performance skills such as voice, movement, gesture, focus and mood.

conventions

Traditionally, stylistically or culturally accepted ways of doing things. Each art form has hundreds of conventions built up over time. Conventions are dynamic and ever-changing. In drama, conventions refer to the combination of practices of particular theatre styles or forms and may include direct address, asides, caricature, exaggerated movement, stylised movement, tableau, heightened use of language, pathos, dramatic metaphor, satire, song, stillness and silence.

copyright

Legal rights in creative work (e.g. text, images, music, computer programs, sound recordings, film). The creator or copyright owner has the right to prevent others copying the work without permission.

Country

The physical environment that a particular Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples’ group has a relationship with. Referring to this territory as ‘Country’, rather than land, indicates a reciprocal and deep relationship and one where Country both owns and is owned by the People. The concept of Country includes lands, waters and sky.

critical and creative thinking

Critical and creative thinking involves the application of skills, behaviours and dispositions such as reasoning, logic, imagination and innovation. This capability can be consciously developed through the application of metacognitive skills.

D

devising

In drama, devising is the process whereby students work with given stimulus material and frameworks that provide a starting point for the structure of a drama work. They use a range of processes and play-making techniques including play, improvisation, rehearsing and refining. They devise in response to a range of stimuli in order to shape their work, communicate meaning and have an impact on their audience in specific and intentional ways.

design areas

In drama, design areas are creative areas that contribute to the meaning, style, form and presentation and/or performance of drama and theatre. Design areas include costume, make-up and hair, props, set and set pieces, sound and lighting.

director/direction

A director shapes and manages the creation of a dramatic work or theatre production. They assist the actors to move in the space and make creative decisions about how to say their lines, and work with designers to ensure that design areas complement the intention of the dramatic work or final theatre production.

dramatic meaning

Dramatic meaning is an element of drama. Dramatic meaning refers to the ideas and intentions that are conveyed to an audience, and how the audience understands these from watching a presentation or performance. Dramatic meaning can be conveyed through dialogue, movement, character, structure, form, actor–audience relationship and use of design areas.

dramatic play

A child-structured form of pretence, where children create fictional situations, adopt roles, establish spaces and symbolically transform objects.

E

elements of drama

The elements of drama are character and relationships, climax, conflict, context, setting, contrast, dramatic meaning, mood, sound, space, time, symbol and tension. Each of these terms are described within this glossary.

energy

Energy is a performance skill in drama. Energy is the intensity an actor brings to a presentation or performance through the use of voice, gesture, movement and space as well as other expressive skills and elements. An actor may use low energy to create a particular mood. Conversely, an actor may use high energy to create a moment of tension.

ensemble

In drama, an ensemble is a group of actors that comes together to collaborate and create drama works. An ensemble may comprise as few as 3 actors or as many as an entire class depending on the drama work being undertaken. Learning to be an ensemble requires cooperation, collaboration and communication, sharing ideas and making creative decisions in relation to the work.

expressive skills

In drama, expressive skills are manipulated by an actor to achieve character, create meaning and demonstrate intention in drama works and theatre performances. In drama, expressive skills are voice, movement, gesture, facial expression, and stillness and silence.

F

facial expression

In drama, facial expression is an expressive skill. The manipulation of physical facial expressions to communicate emotions and meaning.

focus

Focus is a performance skill in drama. Focus is the ability of an actor to commit to their presentation or performance, to use concentration to sustain character and to guide an audience’s gaze and attention towards a specific place. It may also be used to create an implied character and to assist an actor or actors to develop an effective actor–audience relationship.

form

In drama, form is aligned with specific drama practices and performance styles, particularly in relation to contemporary drama practices. Form in a drama work may draw on conventions of styles to shape the final form of the work.

found objects

A found object is a natural or human-created object, or fragment of an object, that is found by an artist and kept because of some intrinsic value the artist sees in it. In drama, a found object may be incorporated into a performance for the purpose of enhancing meaning.

G

genre

A type of theatre or drama that represents a particular form, culture or historical era. For example, Ancient Greek theatre, Elizabethan theatre, American realism, French comedy or contemporary Indigenous theatre.

gesture

In drama, gesture is an expressive skill. Gesture relates to the way an actor uses the body, commonly the arms and hands, to convey meaning with or without words when portraying a character. Gesture may be verbal, non-verbal and/or symbolic.

I

idea

A thought, notion or impression. A drama work can represent a number of ideas, which can be interpreted differently by audiences based on their experience, background, values and beliefs. Linked ideas can be termed as a theme (e.g. globalisation, horror, or city or country life).

improvisation

Improvisation is a technique for creating drama. It is based on play and playfulness, whereby actors draw on stimuli or prompts to make work that is created spontaneously. When improvising, actors may create dialogue, action, story and characters ‘on the spot’ and these unfold in present time. Improvisation enables ideas to be explored when creating a drama work.

Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP)

The rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to own and control their cultural heritage. It refers to all aspects of cultural heritage, including the tangible (e.g. cultural objects) and intangible (e.g. knowledge).

interdisciplinary

The creation and production of artworks using more than one arts discipline. Across the Arts curriculum, students can make artworks using the knowledge of the practices of various arts disciplines, for example the creation of performance works using the knowledge and skills of music, drama and visual arts.

M

materials

In drama, materials may include fabric, specific set pieces and furniture, props (both practical and as part of set), sourced costume items, make-up, rostra boxes, found objects, lights, amplification, screens, mark-up tape, tools and implements for installing. In drama, safe use of materials is required and sustainable use of materials is encouraged.

mood

Mood is an element of drama. Mood is the overall feeling or emotion that a presentation or performance may evoke for an audience. Mood may be achieved through the application of particular conventions, the manipulation of expressive and performance skills, and design areas.

movement

In drama, movement is an expressive skill. Movement involves the use of the body to express character, tell story and convey meaning. Movement can be achieved through the gait or walk, posture and stance of a character. Movement may be lyrical or heightened and may include use of space and levels. It may be individual or presented in unison as part of an ensemble in presenting drama or theatre. Movement may also mean stillness and silence; the deliberate choice not to move for effect or to enhance meaning.

N

narrative

In drama, narrative refers to the story told in and by the work. Narrative can be dependent on the style of the drama. Narrative works generally depict daily life or tell a moral story to the audience.

P

performance skills

In drama, performance skills are used to communicate story, enhance meaning and realise intention in drama works and theatre performances. In drama, performance skills are actor–audience relationship, energy, focus and timing.

Place

‘Place’ is significant for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

For Torres Strait Islander Peoples, ‘Place’ is a space mapped out that Torres Strait Islander individuals or groups occupy and regard as their own and that has varying degrees of spirituality. It includes lands, waters and sky.

For Aboriginal Peoples, ‘Place’ refers to the special places that exist within Country, the purposes of which vary significantly. They can include places of ceremony and initiation, birth and the provision of healing and health care; places of learning; and places for Sorry Business. These places vary greatly over the various landscapes and seascapes across the continent. There are some parts of Country that have landmarks that directly relate to the ancestor spirits and the creation of existence. These are especially important as culturally significant places and need to be cared for. There are also other places on Country that are important for ceremony, as mentioned above, which are also considered especially important for Aboriginal communities.

playwright

A playwright is someone who writes plays with the intention of them being performed for an audience.

practices

The application of arts skills and knowledge to create, represent, communicate, make, produce and respond in a specific arts discipline, form, tradition and/or genre. In any arts discipline, the practices of making and responding are interdependent and interactive. For example, the practices of interpreting, analysing, comparing, contrasting, reflecting, evaluating and appreciating can inform the art-making process.

process drama

In process drama, the teacher and students create an imaginary world and work to address challenges or events through the creation of situations, characters and roles and improvisation. The teacher introduces a pre-text, which could be a story, an image, a headline or a song to act as a stimulus for creating the drama and addressing a challenge. In process drama, it is common for the teacher to take on a role within the drama that establishes the environment, shapes sequences and improvisation, models behaviour and generally supports students. Process drama is not concerned with performance and may take place over a number of sessions.

prop

Formerly known as a (theatrical) property, a prop is an object used by an actor. It can be anything that is portable on a stage or set. A prop might be held, used and/or manipulated by an actor or it may be left ready on stage and then used in the performance.

protocols

Rules, practices and customs of a group. Respectful ways of interacting with and experiencing the arts, including protocols for protecting Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) rights.

processes

The methods and steps used to make artworks using materials, tools and technologies.

R

refine

To bring together the ideas and elements of a drama, particularly through the use of technical skill and processes such as playmaking, expressive and performance skills, rehearsing and editing.

rehearsal

The process of practising to refine skills and knowledge for presentation or performance.

representation

The use of images and symbols to represent ideas, concepts and meaning.

resolve

A final step in the creation or production of an artwork where the artist considers how to finalise the expression and representation of ideas using conventions, materials and techniques.

S

setting

Setting is an element of drama. Setting refers to the location and place within the drama or theatre work.

sound

Sound is an element of drama. Sound is used to enhance meaning. Sound may be created live by a performer during a presentation or performance through voice, body percussion such as clapping or striking the body, the use of objects, or a combination to create an audible effect. Sound could also include live accompaniment. In design areas, sound generally relates to the creation of recorded sound design or soundtrack.

space

Space is an element of drama. Space involves the way a performance area is used to communicate meaning, define a location, represent the status of characters and create an actor-audience relationship.

stillness and silence

In drama, stillness and silence is an expressive skill. Stillness and silence is found when there is a simultaneously sustained absence of sound and movement.

stimulus material

Anything that acts as inspiration for generating or developing ideas for artworks, including the world of the student, images, experiences, observations, provocations, sounds and texts.

storytelling

The communication of a narrative and/or story through creative expression.

style

In drama, style refers to theatre styles and recognised conventions. These may relate to historical and contemporary practices in the theatre and may include particular theatre practitioners, scripts and design areas. Styles are informed by cultures, times, places or other contexts.

symbol

Symbol is an element of drama. Symbol refers to the creation of meaning that is representational rather than literal. Symbol can be created through the use of actions, gesture, language, movement, facial expressions, objects, costumes, set, lighting and sound.

T

technologies

In drama, technologies may be manual, mechanical, electrical or digital. Technologies are used by artists to make drama and theatre works, to convey particular styles and to enhance meaning. Technologies may include lighting hardware, sound design equipment, moving set pieces, practical props that can be switched on and off, projection, microphones and stage revolves.

tension

Tension is an element of drama. Tension is the suspense that holds an audience’s attention as a presentation or performance unfolds. Tension can be created through the use of space, silence, performance energy, sound or other, and may have comic or dramatic effect.

theme

The principal idea or connection of ideas and concepts in a drama work or performance.

Time

Time is an element of drama. Time describes the fictional time or setting in a drama performance.

Timing

Timing is a performance skill in drama. It refers to the timing (pace, rhythm and tempo) of one moment to the next.

transformation

In drama, transformation refers to techniques or methods used by actors to transform or transition between characters, place and/or time in front of an audience. Actors may use their voice, movement, gesture, level changes, the manipulation of an object or prop, sound, a word or other technique to enable the transformation to occur. Transformation techniques may be associated with particular theatre styles.

V

viewpoints

Viewpoints are an inquiry tool to consider ideas, concepts, practices and processes used to create artworks. Viewpoints allow students to investigate artworks and art practices from multiple perspectives.

voice

In drama, voice is an expressive skill. Actors can use and manipulate their voice in a number of ways, for example, through accent, diction, pitch, pace, tone, resonance, muscularity and other vocal sounds.