The Elements of Drama are the foundational theory by which dramatic works, theatre and film, can be analyzed and evaluated. Varying authors may have differing terms; but they all are used for the same purpose. The elements are the building blocks of drama. Whenever possible the definitions below are taken from the KET Drama Toolkit, which was created in partnership with the Kentucky Department of Education.

The Elements of Drama are divided into three components: Literary Elements, Technical Elements and Performance Elements.

- **LITERARY ELEMENTS:** these elements provide structure and organization to the texts that are created and performed. These terms are also regularly used in ELA classes. Literary elements in drama differ from the same terms in ELA as they always lead to some type of formal or informal performance or discussion of how the story was or would be performed.

- **TECHNICAL ELEMENTS:** these elements define and organize the production components of drama/theatre.

- **PERFORMANCE ELEMENTS:** these elements define and organize the tools performers use to successfully create and perform, bringing the text, story or improvisation to life.

Students who create a project for a class outside of the arts greatly benefit from authentic instruction and feedback from teachers about their artwork as well as the academic content area. This quick reference guide provides non-drama/theatre content teachers with a few basic concepts and terminology that will assist them guiding instruction and feedback in their classrooms.

**LITERARY ELEMENTS:**

- **PLOT:** the events of a play or arrangement of action, as opposed to the theme.

- **CHARACTER:** a person portrayed in a drama, novel, or other artistic piece.

- **STORY ORGANIZATION:** the plan of action; beginning, middle, end.

- **PLOT STRUCTURES:** include rising action, climax or turning point, falling action, etc.

- **CONFLICT:** the internal or external struggle between opposing forces, ideas, or interests that creates dramatic tension.

- **SUSPENSE:** a feeling of uncertainty as to the outcome, used to build interest and excitement on the part of the audience.

- **THEME:** the basic idea of a play; the idea, point of view, or perception that binds together a work of art.
**LANGUAGE:** in drama, the particular manner of verbal expression, the diction or style of writing, or the speech or phrasing that suggests a class or profession or type of character.

**STYLE:** this refers to the historical time period or culture that the dramatic text reflects.

**DIALOGUE:** spoken conversation used by two or more characters to express thoughts, feelings, and actions.

**MONOLOGUE:** a long speech made by one actor; a monologue may be delivered alone or in the presence of others.

**TECHNICAL ELEMENTS:**

**SCENERY (SET):** the theatrical equipment, such as curtains, flats, backdrops, or platforms, used in a dramatic production to communicate environment; the physical surroundings, visible to the audience, in which the action of the play takes place.

**COSTUMES:** clothing and accessories worn by actors to portray character and period.

**PROPS:** short for properties; any article, except costume or scenery, used as part of a dramatic production; any moveable object that appears on stage during a performance, from a telephone to a train.

**LIGHTS:** the placement, intensity, and color of lights to help communicate environment, mood, or feeling.

**SOUND:** the effects an audience hears during a performance to communicate character, context, or environment.

**MAKE-UP:** costumes, wigs, and body paint used to transform an actor into a character.

**MUSIC:** instruments or vocal used during a play to enhance or establish mood, setting, feelings and changes in action.

**PERFORMANCE ELEMENTS:**

**ACTING:** use of face, body, and voice to portray character.

**CHARACTER MOTIVATION/ANALYSIS:** the reason or reasons for a character’s behavior; an incentive or inducement for further action for a character/understanding the character through clues within the text, back-story and relationships.

**EMPATHY:** the capacity to relate to the feelings of another.

**SPEAKING:** use of the voice while acting.
**BREATH CONTROL:** proper use of the lungs and diaphragm muscle for maximum capacity and efficiency of breath for speaking

**VOCAL EXPRESSION AND INFLECTION:** how an actor uses his or her voice to convey character.

**PROJECTION:** how well the voice carries to the audience.

**SPEAKING STYLE:** the mode of expression or delivery of lines.

**DICTION:** selection and pronunciation of words; clarity of speech.

**NON-VERBAL EXPRESSION:**

**GESTURES:** any movement of the actor’s head, shoulder, arm, hand, leg, or foot to convey meaning.

**BODY ALIGNMENT:** physiologically correct posture and use of the body to ensure the maximum capacity and efficiency of breathing and movement.

**FACIAL EXPRESSION:** expressions by the actor to express the thoughts, ideas and feelings of the character using the eyes, mouth and other parts of the face.

**CHARACTER BLOCKING:** the path formed by the actor’s movement on stage, usually determined by the director with assistance from the actor and often written down in a script using commonly accepted theatrical symbols.

**MOVEMENT:** stage blocking or the movements of the actors onstage during performance.

**The purposes of Drama/Theatre**
The arts have played a major role throughout the history of humans. As the result of the power of the arts to communicate on a basic human level, they continue to serve a variety of purposes in society. The arts are used for artistic expression to portray specific emotions or feelings, to tell stories in a narrative manner, to imitate nature, and to persuade others. The arts bring meaning to ceremonies, rituals, celebrations, and commemorations. Additionally, they are used for recreation and to support recreational activities.

**Special Note:** If it seems to you as if the purposes overlap, you’re right! They do! As appropriate let students know that they may find themselves creating, performing and responding to performances that seem to fall into one or more of these categories. Encourage your students to think about their role, audience member, performer, designer, or technician and decide which purpose might be primary, based upon their perspective and their unique relationship to the drama/theatre piece.
**SHARING THE HUMAN EXPERIENCE:** to express or communicate emotion, feelings, ideas, and/or information through dramatic works (e.g., storytelling, role playing, narrative works).

**PASSING ON TRADITION AND CULTURE:** to express or communicate feelings, ideas, and/or information (e.g., narrative, storytelling, folktale, myths and legends).

**RECREATIONAL:** drama for entertainment (e.g., drama/theatre as a hobby).

**ARTISTIC EXPRESSION:** drama created with the intent to express or communicate emotion, feelings, ideas, and/or information (e.g., dramatic works created and performed by actors in a theatrical setting for an audience).

Creating/Composing in Drama/Theatre for a Project

Using drama to show comprehension of content material can be an effective and enjoyable tool for students to demonstrate acquisition of knowledge. For example, students can create scenes, short videos or short plays that include knowledge in another subject area and there are many creative drama exercises (games) that can be used to provide proof of learning. For example, students can create a character map instead of writing a character analysis, students can design and create a certain type of environment (i.e. desert or tropical climate) instead of answering multiple choice questions, students can use tableaux to “write out” and answer division problems instead of writing numbers on paper, or students can role play a town meeting playing the roles of town council members, mayor, and interested citizens who are debating a specific issue to demonstrate understanding of government instead of writing an extended response.

When integrating the arts into a lesson or asking for an arts-based product as proof of learning, teachers will want to have objectives in both the art discipline and academic area. Students will need to explore the elements of drama/theatre during instructional time. As with creating any type of artwork, dance, drama, music or visual arts, teachers and students should consider three “C’s,” Composition (a conscientious use of elements of music), Craftsmanship (how appropriately the material is delivered) and Concept (how it shows understanding of the content).

**CONSCIENTIOUS USE OF THE ELEMENTS OF DRAMA/THEATRE:** In the assignment objectives, require that students use the elements of drama in the creation of their product. Decide which set of elements, literary, performance or technical are primarily being used and ask that students apply their knowledge of those elements in an intentional fashion. For example, if students create short scenes or videos, how these are put together, i.e. the structure of the story, would lend itself to intentional use of the literary elements.

For example for intermediate students studying Colonial America you might use language such as “Create a scene with a clear beginning, middle, end where the characters take opposite sides with regards to the Stamp Act.” In this example the teacher would be looking at story organization (beginning, middle end), conflict (characters are on opposite sides of the issue), and character. If students perform this scene the teacher would be looking at performance elements and could ask that students use gestures, facial expression, movement and vocal expression to clearly communicate their understanding of the Stamp Acts. With this same example students could create costumes, props or scenery. If this is the case the teacher would want to have students demonstrate their intentional use of these technical elements.

In each case the focus for student learning becomes the intentional exploration and/or application of the appropriate elements of drama.
CRAFTSMANSHIP: Craftsmanship involves students working at a high level of accomplishment. Sometimes teachers are uncomfortable evaluating whether students are applying the elements of drama at a high level. When looking at craftsmanship teacher can look at the STIC principle:

- **S** – is the work SPECIFIC and detailed. If students are working at a high level they will be focused and detailed both in process and product.
- **T** – Is the student TELLING the story and TAKING risks? Drama/theatre, even short theatre games or creative drama involves some kind of a story. Ask yourself “did the story get told clearly and were students engaged and focused throughout”? Students who take risks demonstrate the ability to work at increasingly higher levels and their products will demonstrate the ability to think outside of the box surprising the teacher by taking their work to the next level.
- **I** – Is the work creative and IMAGINATIVE?
- **C** – Does the student COLLABORATE successfully? Theatre is a collaborative art form and students often work in groups in classroom dramas. Students who collaborate successfully are working at a high level of craftsmanship.

CONCEPT: How well has the student shown comprehension of the content (both drama/theatre and cross-curricular content)? Can the student use the elements of drama to express a deep level of understanding of the other academic area? Has the student created an original work? Is there evidence of both critical and creative thinking in the process and product? Keep these questions in mind as you evaluate the work for both academic content and artistic merit.

**Rubric**

In the beginning, create a standard rubric to assess the projects with. Perhaps the drama/theatre teacher and content teacher could collaborate on this. Be sure that students know that the appearance and artistic merit of their work is going to be a part of the assessment as well as the content. Students will achieve in both areas at a higher level if they know that both the artistic and content is going to be assessed. It goes without saying that projects should be formatively assessed to inform the student about progress with the work.

Eventually, content teachers may wish to have students develop rubrics together or individually.

**Validation**

Student projects should be validated beyond being turned in and graded. Make every effort to have students perform their work for a variety of audiences. Simple performances can be done during literacy night, at other special school events, or videoed and displayed on a school web site. Classes can perform for each other or during opening or end of the day assemblies. Students who know from the beginning their work will be performed for the school or even the community will have a higher level of concern for doing the project well.

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