

# 3

## THE ELEMENTS OF DRAMA: A FRAMEWORK

### WHY STUDY THE ELEMENTS OF DRAMA?

The elements of drama are the essential, integrated ingredients of drama, and help actors, directors, playwrights, designers and students of Drama to make engaging performance work and to respond to performance work. You have already begun to work with the elements of drama in chapters 1 and 2, and in this chapter you will look closely at each element and complete activities to communicate your understanding.

This chapter is divided into the following units:

- 3.1 What are the elements of drama?
- 3.2 The human context: characters, roles and relationships, and situation
- 3.3 Tension and focus
- 3.4 Communicating through the elements of drama and staging
- 3.5 Performance task: creating dramatic meaning

### OUTCOMES

In this chapter you will:

- list and define each of the elements of drama
- collaborate to ask and answer questions about the elements of drama in both the making and performance of drama
- communicate dramatic meaning by effectively integrating the elements of drama in a short performance.





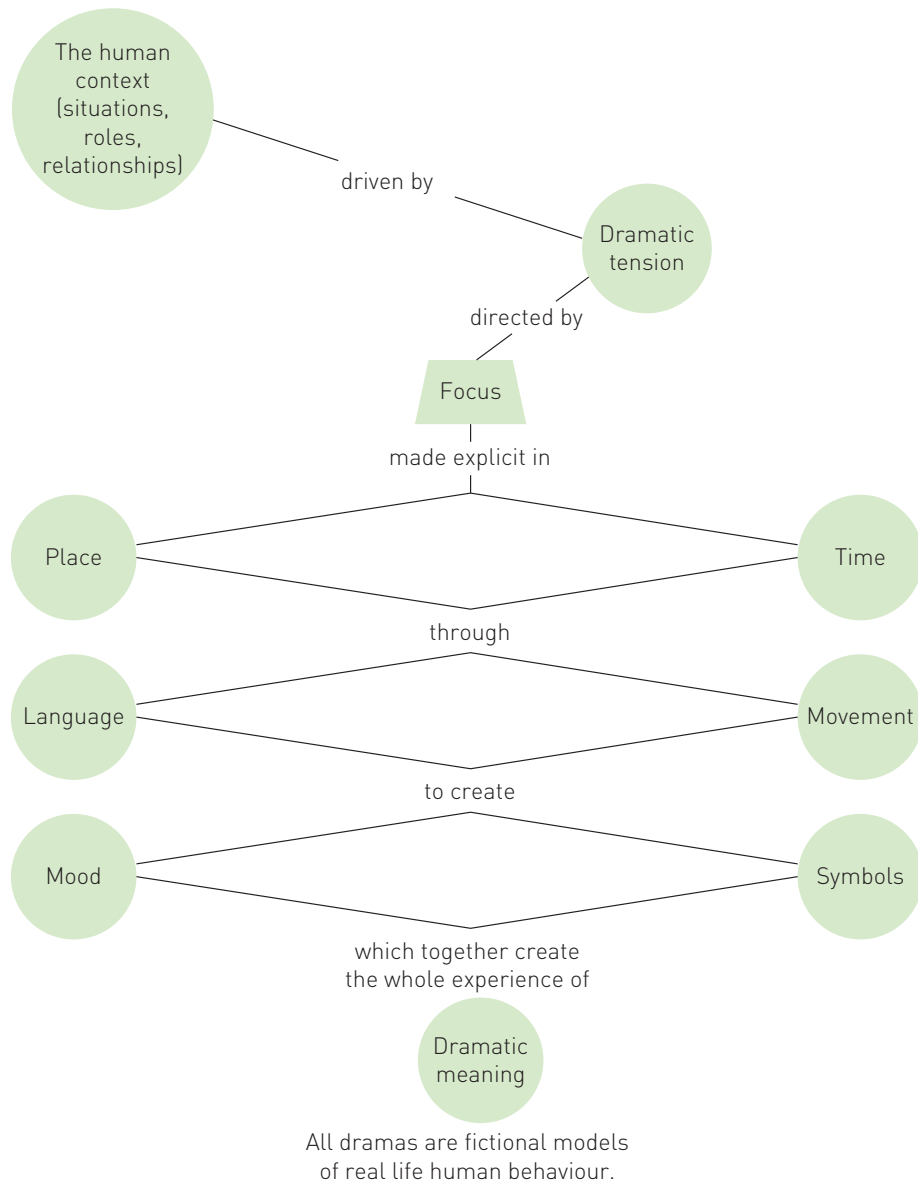
iStockphoto.com/eltkor

### 3.1 What are the elements of drama?

For a long time, many thinkers tried to find ways to define drama and theatre, and literary scholars used the written script as the only basis for understanding drama. To others this was a problem because these studies ignored many of the aspects of drama and theatre that make it unique as a live performance.

Two Australian researchers and teachers of Drama, Professor John O’Toole and Professor Brad Haseman, created their own model of the elements of drama to try to capture and explain what might be common to all drama and theatre. Over time, this model has been very helpful to students of Drama and has been adapted and included in the Australian Curriculum for the Arts: Drama.

The elements of drama referred to in *Centre Stage* help to define what drama is in contrast to other art forms such as film, dance, music or visual arts. While there are some similarities across art forms, drama is unique in that the making and performing of drama and theatre is a collaborative process and performances are dynamic, happening at a specific moment in time, affecting the audience and the participants in many complex ways.



Haseman and O’Toole’s model of the elements of drama has been adapted and used by Drama teachers to help students understand the components of drama and theatre in performance.

## THE IMPORTANCE OF STORY AND STAGING

All performance work relies on telling a story, be it realistic, non-realistic, comic or dramatic. The staging of stories relies on all the elements of drama working dynamically together to focus dramatic action and create dramatic meaning. All Drama students need to develop skills in constructing narratives and skills in staging stories. By developing a knowledge and understanding of the features of narrative (story) and the elements of drama, you will create powerful and engaging performance work.

### Directors, playwrights and the elements of drama

The best way to understand the features of creating narratives and the use of the elements of drama is to actually make drama and theatre. While it is very important that you learn how to act, it is also very useful to develop skills as directors and playwrights, as these practitioners in particular see the play from the audience's perspective. When you are working with the material in *Centre Stage*, you will need to work not only as actor but also as director and playwright. This will mean switching 'hats' during rehearsal and in reflection time so that you can see the development of your play from many different perspectives. By becoming more aware of these practitioner perspectives and how these practitioners manipulate the elements of drama, you will make your own decisions as playwrights and directors more effectively.

### WHAT DO WE ALREADY KNOW ABOUT THE ELEMENTS OF DRAMA?

The following activities will help you as a class to work out what you already know about this topic. This is helpful because gaps in knowledge or skill can be identified and existing knowledge can be built on. This helps challenge you and keeps your learning interesting.



### COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

- 1 Think individually about what you consider to be the essential ingredients of drama and theatre. You might like to conduct an Internet search for images and/or pages under the heading 'the elements of drama'. It does not matter if you have extensive experience in drama and theatre or not. Jot some of your ideas down.
- 2 Work with a partner and share your ideas.
- 3 As a class, write up all the ideas that came to mind. If someone shares an idea that lots of other people have, mark this idea as a popular one.
- 4 Group the ideas into categories and eliminate items that you feel are not as important as others. Debate why some ideas are more essential than others.
- 5 In groups, choose one element of drama and talk about how this element might be an aspect of a live theatre performance. Use an imaginary performance or a performance everyone in the group might have seen to help you.
- 6 In groups, using large sheets of paper or giant sticky notes and pens, draw diagrams to show all of the elements of drama and how you think they might be connected to each other.



#### HINT

As you work through the elements in this chapter and in other chapters, you'll notice that the elements overlap. For example, character and relationship conflict creates tension. This affects how actors use voice and movement and also creates a certain mood and atmosphere.

## 3.2 The human context: characters, roles and relationships, and situation

### WHAT IS THE HUMAN CONTEXT?

Learning about how the elements of drama can be grouped together points out the importance of seeing the elements of drama as a dynamic integrated, moving framework rather than a list. The human context is the combination of one element of drama, characters, roles and relationships with another element of drama: situation. Read the following explanations and the performance examples. Complete the exercises that follow to develop your understanding.

### CHARACTERS, ROLES AND RELATIONSHIPS

Humans have always watched each other represent stories as live performance. The heart of any story lies with the characters, the ‘who?’ of the plays. Just as important are the characters’ relationships with each other, with their environment and their relationship with ideas and beliefs.

Actors, playwrights and directors think critically and creatively to know as much as they can about characters and/or roles in terms of their values, attitudes, intentions, and actions and relationships. Thinking about relationships is important because it is the connections and interactions between people, ideas, places and situations that affect the dramatic action. Here are some questions you might ask to help you create or understand character/role and relationships.

#### Context and status

- Who are the characters and roles in this play?
- Who are the protagonist/s and antagonist/s?
- How are the characters/roles connected to each other?
- How much or how little power (status) do they have?
- What are the characters’ relationships with each other and/or with the ideas at hand and/or with the situation and/or with the environment?
- How do they feel about what is happening?

#### Objectives and motivations

- What do they want?
- Why do they want this?

#### Beliefs, values and attitudes

- What are their values, attitudes and beliefs?

### EXAMPLE

The main characters in this imaginary play are three scientists. They are different to each other in age, gender and cultural background. Each has very different scientific knowledge to contribute to the task, and this influences their relationships with each other.



Unsure about their ability to achieve the task. Believes their location is a constant threat to success.

Wants to improve the environment. Loves working in danger.

Wants fame for their achievements. Has great respect for the environment.



#### HINT

The difference between a role and a character is that a role focuses on type and stereotype; characters are detailed and specific.

## SITUATION

Added to the ‘characters, roles and relationships’ element of drama is another important element, ‘situation’.

Situation includes the characters, setting and circumstances. Circumstances can include where, when, what has happened, what might happen and what is happening. Dramatic action is created through the combining of circumstances, character wants, needs, values and relationships. Some questions you can ask to create or to understand the situation are:

- What is happening?
- Where is it happening?
- When is it happening?
- Why is it happening?

See if you can find the answers to these questions by looking at the example.

## EXAMPLE

Three scientists are on a remote volcano searching for a small, almost-extinct creature. The creature’s saliva is believed to contain incredible medicinal properties that could help save the lives of many thousands of people who have become ill with a mysterious and highly contagious disease.



## EXERCISE

### THE HUMAN CONTEXT

- Divide into small groups. Each group member individually creates three original characters and three original situations. Write down ideas for character details including age, occupation, social status and your ideas for situations. What is happening? Where is it happening? Why is it happening? When is it happening?
- From the collection of characters and situations created by the group, randomly select one character for each group member and one situation for the group. Group members cannot play a character they created. Spend some time discussing how these characters might be connected and how they might show their status, beliefs, values and attitudes in the situation. You can also do this visually by placing the situation in the centre of a page or your screen and the characters around this. Draw lines of connection similar to a family tree and write brief notes to explain the links.
- When you have finalised your ideas, create and rehearse a short three-minute role-play, making sure that each character has a moment of focus. Present the role-plays to the class.



## COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

When each group presents their role-play, each class member is to choose one character and respond to the following questions:

- Who is the character? How do you know?
- What is their status and why do they have this relationship with the characters in the scene? Give an example as evidence to support your opinion.
- What is the main relationship the character has with a belief, value or idea? Give an example to show how you know this.

An example of a student's reflection:

I chose to write about the character of the language translator. They were connected to the ambassador as a new employee and the other workers at the embassy seemed to not like them. Their status was low because they were needed to help translate at an important meeting, but did not have the skills to do this. In fact, in the end, they had a lot of power because you realised that they didn't have a motivation to do the job well so it didn't matter if they made a mistake or not. From my viewpoint, I thought that they seemed incompetent because you should be motivated to do a job well. You could see the translator's lack of enthusiasm in their use of body language. They slouched, and from the way they rolled their eyes and turned their head away from what they were meant to listen to, they seemed disinterested. This made me think their objective was to get the job done as quickly as possible. This objective was in conflict with their employer, who wanted to have a highly successful meeting. I am wondering if the boss had a strong connection to developing relationships between the two countries but the translator was not so connected to this idea. I wonder why he felt this way?

## 3.3 Tension and focus

### TENSION: THE ENGINE OF DRAMA

Tension is the engine of drama as it drives the dramatic action forward. A simple example is an action movie where the audience is engaged by the battle between good and evil. Even though they know that good will probably win, it is still exciting to watch the battles. Usually, action films contain a series of battles starting with smaller confrontations and gradually leading to the biggest confrontation towards the end of the story. Each battle is its own little narrative in itself, containing a beginning, middle and end. Tension is built by the sequencing of the dramatic action to show two opposing forces in competition with each other—sometimes it seems like one side will win and then it seems like the other side will. This leads to the audience feeling anticipation and excitement as they wonder, 'Who will win? What will happen?'



**DRIVEN BY**

Some points about tension:

- 1 Tension is responsible for how the audience engages with the performance and how they emotionally respond to and think about the dramatic action.
- 2 Tension is not only in serious dramas—tension is also an important aspect of comedy.
- 3 The level or degree of tension is not fixed and changes constantly during a performance.
- 4 Usually, tension increases as the dramatic action progresses to a climactic point somewhere near the conclusion; this is referred to as ‘rising tension’.

Tension can be created through:

- conflict **within** characters
- conflict **in** character relationships
- a **mystery**
- **tasks** that need to be achieved
- moments of **surprise** when the unexpected happens
- **dramatic irony** where the audience is aware of things that the characters are not, which gives the audience a different understanding to that of the characters
- the individual audience members’ **connections** between the performance and their own lives.

Some questions you might ask yourself to create or understand tension are:

- What was at stake for the characters in this play? What did they lose or gain and why?
- How did I feel at different times during the performance? (For example, hopeful, excited, nervous, fearful, curious, surprised.) Why did I feel this way?
- Why did the choices of the characters and the action of the drama contribute to me feeling this way?
- If I was making my own play, how might I manipulate the elements of drama to create a feeling of tension for an audience?
- What questions do I want the audience to ask themselves, or what questions about the characters/plot/ideas/messages will help to create tension?
- What problems do or did the characters face?
- What made or would make the problems more difficult to overcome?

## EXAMPLE

The task for the three scientists is to search and find an almost-extinct creature at a remote volcano. The volcano is threatening to erupt, which may prevent the scientists from safely capturing the creature and saving it from extinction. The audience anticipates a disastrous moment as time runs out for the scientists to complete this task. This tension pushes the characters and the situation to the climax.



## HINT

Dramatic irony is a literary device used in theatre and film to heighten tension. When dramatic irony is used, the audience knows more about the causes and circumstances of the dramatic action than the characters do. An example of this might be that the audience sees a character alone in a room secretly hiding a knife under their coat. When another character arrives in the scene, the audience feels suspense as they wonder what the character with the knife will do to the other character.





## HINT

The actor's focus, rather than the element of drama focus, is their ability to show conviction through their use of imagination and concentration to pretend to be in the world of the play. By committing to the moment of acting in this way the actor helps the audience believe in the world being created in performance.

## FOCUS

In the elements of drama, focus has two interpretations:

- 1 Framing the action
- 2 Highlighting a dramatic moment.

### Framing the action

Choosing a central question or statement that the play is asking the audience creates a particular viewpoint. For example, a play about a crime might ask the big question, 'Is crime ever justifiable?' What you and your fellow collaborators think about this question is informed by who you are, where you live, what your culture is and what your experiences are. Your thoughts and ideas in relation to your play are your viewpoints, and it is likely that these viewpoints will be communicated through how you manipulate the elements of drama in conjunction with your ability to create a narrative or story.

Selecting what is shown to the audience in the dramatic action or narrative (story) and how it is sequenced is referred to as 'framing the action', and this communicates your viewpoints to the audience. Framing the action is also essential in creating tension as it directs the audience to consider, anticipate and wonder about what will happen in the performance. Here are some possibilities for framing the action in a play about a crime:

- 1 The plot of the play could focus and frame the action around the criminals to explore a viewpoint and idea about how our upbringing can affect our choices.
- 2 Tension directed by focus: A focus on the consequences of the criminal's upbringing might direct the audience to feel a sense of dread and concern as they know the criminal cannot escape their past without help.
- 3 The dramatic action could focus on the crime as it happens and explore viewpoints and ideas about how different genders respond in a crisis.
- 4 A focus on the crime as it happens might direct the audience to feel fear for the bystanders' safety and to wonder who will be able to escape.
- 5 The play might focus and frame the action around only those people who know the criminals, exploring viewpoints and ideas about how communities can contribute to people's actions and behaviours.
- 6 A focus on the communities connected to the criminals might direct the audience to feel concern for society's responsibility for others and to wonder how this might be avoided.

Each of these options presents a different viewpoint and focuses, and 'frames the action' in a different way. Some questions you might ask to create a focus to frame the action are:

- What was the question that the audience was asked to consider?
- What are our ideas and viewpoints about this question?
- How did the moments and situations in the dramatic action create tension and maintain a focus on our core question, express our viewpoints and ideas, and challenge the audience to think more deeply about the issues?

### EXAMPLE OF FOCUS: FRAMING THE ACTION

Our play example of the three scientists frames the action using the question 'How can we work together to save the environment and prevent disease?' This focus question frames the action to emphasise the relationships between the scientists and their ideas

and values. By making the focus of the play a question about how to cooperate with each other in difficult circumstances and the importance of sharing knowledge and skills, the dramatic action is then centred on the scientists and the choices they make. The audience wants the scientists to cooperate but is directed to wonder if this is possible given the difficult circumstances. This framing of the action creates messages about how people can work together to find good solutions in the face of danger, and how humankind needs to understand and foster the natural environment for everyone's benefit.



### Highlighting a dramatic moment

This second meaning for focus refers to how directors, playwrights, performers and designers manipulate staging to draw the audience's attention to a particular point of focus in a dramatic moment. This can be achieved in a number of ways including the use of:

- the actor's gaze
- gesture
- contrast; for example, one actor moving while the others are still
- proxemics, such as spatial arrangement and levels
- production elements, such as lighting, sound, set, properties and costume.

It is also important to remember that unlike a point of focus in a photograph or painting, in theatre (and in film) the point of focus can be moving as well as still. Some questions you might ask to create a focus to highlight a dramatic moment are:

- Where was the audience's attention at key moments in the play?
- How did the actors' use of body, voice and ensemble focus the audience's attention?
- How were the stage space and spatial relationships used to create points of focus for the audience?
- Why were these moments important for the audience?

### EXAMPLE OF FOCUS: HIGHLIGHTING A DRAMATIC MOMENT

Let's continue with our play of the three scientists and their search for the creature. Just as the tension of the play increases, the volcano begins to erupt and the scientists feel they will not find the creature, they discover the creature has secretly climbed into one of the scientist's backpacks to escape the danger of the volcano. This is a moment of surprise and changes the tension as the scientists are no longer under pressure and can escape. The mood shifts from a fearful feeling to a hopeful feeling as this moment of discovery heightens the scientists'



### HINT

'Proxemics' is a term used to cover how spatial relationships between characters and objects in an environment or space create meaning. For example, if someone stands very close to someone else, this might be interpreted as closeness, but could also be seen as intimidation depending on other messages we read such as body language.

excitement that their plan may be realised. This moment is made clear to the audience through the placement of the actors in the stage space and their use of gaze, body language and gesture to draw the audience's attention to the moment of finding the creature in the backpack. The proxemics of the placement of the scientists on stage shows their individual status has changed from the start of the play. Now they are standing close together and on roughly equal levels.

## EXERCISE

### TENSION AND FOCUS ACTING EXERCISE

Work in small groups. Choose one of the following ways to create tension. Create a question to focus and frame the action, and end the scene using focus to highlight a dramatic moment. Collaborate to create, prepare and rehearse a three to five minute scene. Some examples are provided in the following table. You might like to use and adapt these examples for your performance.

WAY TO CREATE TENSION	EXAMPLE	QUESTION TO FOCUS AND FRAME THE ACTION	END SCENE USING FOCUS TO HIGHLIGHT A DRAMATIC MOMENT
1 CONFLICT WITHIN CHARACTERS	Some friends insist that one friend lies to their parents so they can go out. The friend is not sure about doing this but does not want to be rejected by the group.	Who has more influence, parents or friends?	In the last moment of the scene, the friend is forced to make a choice. They are placed centre stage facing the audience. As the other friends exit upstage left, the lights dim except for the light on the remaining actor. They pause, thinking about what has been said to them and then make a decision.
2 CONFLICT IN CHARACTER RELATIONSHIPS	A relative is asked to babysit their nieces and nephews, and the children don't respect their authority.	Why won't children respect their elders?	At the last moment of the scene, the relative faints from exhaustion down stage left. The children, who should be in bed, are standing upstage of the relative one behind the other. The parents open the door and their gaze increases the focus on the relative who has fainted.





3 A MYSTERY	A man has gone missing and no one can contact him.	What happens when you break trust?	At the last moment of the scene, the detective solves the crime. A gun is discovered in the desk drawer located down stage right. Everyone on stage looks in this direction and the gun is held up high to give it more focus, emphasising its importance.
4 TASKS THAT NEED TO BE ACHIEVED	A husband and wife renovation team are desperate to win the 'renovate your dog kennel' competition	What is the cost of ambition?	At the last moment of the scene, the couple are fighting over choices of design for the dog kennel and they destroy what they have built so far.
5 MOMENTS OF SURPRISE WHEN THE UNEXPECTED HAPPENS	Backpackers are camping on a mountaintop. When they go to leave, the rope bridge suddenly gives way.	Where does courage come from?	At the last moment of the scene, one backpacker leaps onto a dangling, frayed rope and saves the group by swinging to the other side of the mountain.
6 DRAMATIC IRONY	A young shop worker, who has been fighting with their boss, decides to steal money as revenge. Before the boss arrives, we see the worker taking money and hiding it under the bench. The boss arrives and, unexpectedly, apologises and thanks the shop worker for all their hard work and then leaves.	Can revenge be justified?	At the last moment of the scene, the shop worker pulls out the money from under the bench, hesitates for a moment, and then decides to put the money in their bag.



## COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

Watch each group's performance and respond using the following questions.

- 1 What type of tension was used in the scene? Was there more than one type used?
- 2 How did the tension change and why?
- 3 What are you wondering after watching the scene? Find answers to these questions.
- 4 How did the group use the stage space, levels, movement and voice to create a strong final moment of focus on the dramatic action?
- 5 To help the group improve, what feedback can you give them?

## 3.4 Communicating through the elements of drama and staging

During playwriting and collaborative rehearsals, the creators of drama experiment with the materials of theatre. These include voice, movement, facial expression, gesture, posture and the elements of production including props, costumes, lighting, sound, multimedia, staging equipment and performance spaces to create dramatic meaning. The following elements of drama make use of these materials to help tell the story on stage. As an audience of theatre and drama, we are engaged not only by what we know in terms of ideas and viewpoints but by what we see, hear and feel. The manipulation of these materials shapes language, movement, symbol, space and mood to suit a performance intention, usually linked to the focus question and what needs to be communicated in terms of viewpoints, beliefs and values.

### SPACE AND TIME

Space is an essential element of drama to consider as how the space is manipulated suggests location and place, and this contributes to the mood and atmosphere. Plays can be performed in a variety of spaces, which directly affects how the audience engages with the performance. Some spaces are very small and require the audience to sit facing a certain area, while others might ask the audience to move through a variety of different spaces. Space also refers to the setting and proxemics. Setting can be created through the use of set, props, lighting or multimedia, and by the placement actions of the performers. The setting includes the past, present, future, indoor/outdoor, time of day and season.

Time can be the year in which the play is set. It can also refer to how time in the world of the play is shaped by the playwright or by the performers to develop the dramatic action. Sometimes this can affect the structure of the play with the use of flashbacks, leaps in time, looping of time, and so on. Some questions you can ask to help you interpret space and time include:

- What was the performance space and how did this space affect the way the audience engages with the play?
- How were various locations and settings represented in the performance space?
- How do the spatial distances between characters convey meaning about relationships?
- When was the play set?
- How was time manipulated to create narrative or to contribute to the pace, rhythm and flow of the performance?
- How did the flow of the performance use pace and rhythm to add tension and/or create mood?

### EXAMPLE

The play involving the three scientists follows a linear narrative within the time frame of four days. The last hours of the first day are shown in the first scene, followed by jumps in time of several hours to key moments of dramatic action. The whole stage area is used by the performers to suggest travelling distances. Ramps and boxes are used to create the edge of the crater. The performers also use the boxes to suggest that the scientists scale the side of the volcano, which helps to build tension. As the play gets closer to the climax, the scenes become much shorter and the scientists increase the pace of their search, which builds energy and excitement.



## LANGUAGE, VOCAL SOUND AND MOVEMENT

How performers express the characters and story involves the use of verbal language, vocal sounds, body language and movement. Some questions you might ask to create or interpret the use of voice and movement include:

- How did the performers use voice to create personality, location and add to tension through vocal delivery and/or sounds?
- How did the language (words) used by the characters create ideas, show their personality/background and reveal subtext (the thoughts underlying ideas)?
- What type of mood/feeling did the sound of voice create?
- How did the performers use movement to create personality, create locations, add tension and show emotional responses to situations?
- What type of mood/feeling did the movement create?

## EXAMPLE

The scientists in the play use scientific jargon to show their knowledge. Their body language shows how they feel about each situation and the status relationship between the scientists. The scientists' movements are often hurried, and the delivery of lines is loud and rapid to indicate the urgency of the task.







## MOOD AND ATMOSPHERE

This element of drama refers to the emotional feeling associated with a situation. Mood and atmosphere can be created in a number of ways, such as through the movement and voice of the actors, through colour, texture and shape used in lighting, set and costume design, and through live and/or recorded sound. Mood and atmosphere adds much to the element of drama tension. Some questions you can ask to create or interpret mood and atmosphere include:

- What was the mood and atmosphere of the dramatic action?
- How was this created?

### EXAMPLE

As the scientists' task becomes more difficult, the lighting illuminates less of the stage area to create an oppressive and claustrophobic feeling. The lighting is also very intense using 'hot' colours such as orange and red to suggest heat. This oppressive mood and atmosphere is added to by the weariness in the sound of the characters' voices and the atmospheric background sound of steam escaping from the volcano.



## SYMBOLS

Symbols can be created using objects, language, performers and design elements to represent ideas or meanings beyond the literal interpretation. For example, the Australian flag might represent great pride in our country in a scene involving courage and risk, or it might represent grief at the loss of many soldiers during the First World War. Some questions you might ask to interpret or create symbols include:

- What are the ideas, themes and messages of the play?
- What symbols were included to communicate these ideas, themes and messages?
- How did the symbols used during the performance add to the dramatic meaning?
- How might a symbol's meaning change or evolve during the performance?

### EXAMPLE

In the play with the three scientists, the set design creates a suggestion of a volcano that threatens to erupt. The volcano could symbolise the conflict between the scientists and the danger that humankind faces if the scientists do not succeed in making the wonder drug.

## EXERCISE

### LANGUAGE, MOVEMENT, SYMBOL, PLACE AND MOOD

Work in groups of three or four. Create a short role-play using the title 'A day of celebration'. The role-play must include the following:

- Three different characters with clear status levels and objectives, which are to be communicated through the words they choose to speak and their body movement. Each character can only say two complete sentences. These do not have to be in sequence.
- The mood of the scene must be very clear; for example, happy, sad, tense, relaxed or threatening.
- The stage space must be used to create a clear location that engages the audience.
- Rhythm and pace are to be explicitly used to influence the mood of the scene or a moment in the scene.
- A piece of coloured fabric must be used to represent or symbolise how a character feels at one moment in the scene.



## COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

Watch the group presentations. Choose one of the following elements of drama to identify and reflect on: *language, movement, symbol, place, mood*.

- 1 Describe how the group manipulated the element of drama and what meaning this created for the audience.
- 2 What are you wondering about this element of drama?
- 3 What was effective about the group's manipulation of the element of drama?

## DRAMATIC MEANING

Dramatic meaning is like the '=' symbol in maths. It is the combination of all the elements of drama that creates dramatic meaning. As we noticed as an aspect of tension, what the audience brings to the performance in terms of their life experience and culture generates an individual response, sometimes intended but sometimes not. Often some of the most rewarding performances create powerful and positive reactions that were unexpected. Some questions you might ask about dramatic meaning are:

- What are the messages of the play?
- How has the focusing to frame the action contributed to communicating this meaning?
- Were there any unexpected audience responses to the play? Why?

## EXAMPLE

In the story of the scientists, the dramatic meaning may be interpreted as the potential of people to work together to overcome difficulties. This is how the performer manipulates the actor–audience relationship to achieve a specific response. The performers act using a 'fourth wall' approach to help the audience believe in the characters and the situation.





# PERFORMANCE TASK

## 3.5 Performance task: creating dramatic meaning

### The task

The audience should be engaged by the way that an effective narrative communicated through acting, design and staging creates messages for them to consider. In this task you will create a short role-play to explore and show your understanding of the elements of drama and how they can create dramatic meaning.

You will create an original play with a clear narrative by choosing one image and one quote from the options below. Use these as inspiration for your role-play by combining ideas and viewpoints from the group. Use these to create the narrative of your role-play. The story needs to be simple and brief so that you can identify and explain each element of drama after you perform.

### Inspiration photos

#### Inspiration quotes

*'Better three hours too soon than a minute too late.'*

*'Throw kindness like confetti.'*

*'Nothing will come of nothing.'*



Shutterstock/suhendri



Shutterstock/Oleksiy Mark



Shutterstock/Federico Rostagno

## Using the elements of narrative story and the elements of drama

The elements of a narrative are:

**Beginning** – Introduction of characters, situation, place and time; establishing the focus and the tension

**Middle** – Tension rises as problems interfere with objectives, usually in a series of events that are connected by cause and effect; one thing happening ‘causes’ an effect, possibly a change of action, beliefs, knowledge or behaviour

**End** – The tension has reached its peak; the worst problem or confrontation or issue is resolved.

In your preparation for rehearsal, decide on the statement you will use and create ideas for narratives. It is better to do this individually first, and then share your ideas with the group. Once all ideas have been shared, choose one to stage for your performance. Show your knowledge and manipulation of the elements of drama using the table below as you rehearse.



### COLLABORATE AND THINK CRITICALLY

#### Creating story and applying the elements of drama

- 1 Work with a partner or individually. Using the elements of drama template below, respond to the questions to help you define, create and describe the drama elements in your performance work. In the first phase of your planning you will only be able to write about characters, situation and tension. Once you are happy with your choices, begin rehearsing and complete the table as you go. Be prepared for changes!

ELEMENT OF DRAMA	SOME GUIDING QUESTIONS	YOUR RESPONSES
Characters, roles and relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Who are the characters in this play and how do they feel about each other?</li><li>• What do they want and why?</li><li>• What is their relationship to the place they are in?</li></ul>	
Situation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What is happening?</li><li>• Where and when is it happening?</li><li>• Why is it happening?</li></ul>	
Tension	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What type/s of tension are used in the performance?</li><li>• How did I feel or how do I want the audience to feel at different points in the performance?</li><li>• How are the use of the elements of drama contributing to me feeling this way?</li><li>• What problems do the characters face?</li><li>• What is at stake? What are the risks?</li></ul>	
Focus: framing the action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• What is the question that the audience is asked to consider?</li><li>• How will the moments and situations in the dramatic action contribute to this focus?</li></ul>	





ELEMENT OF DRAMA	SOME GUIDING QUESTIONS	YOUR RESPONSES
Focus: highlighting a dramatic moment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How might the actors' use of body and voice focus the audience's attention?</li> <li>How will the stage space be used to create points of focus for the audience?</li> </ul>	
Language, voice and movement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How might the performers use voice to create personality, location, and add to tension through vocal delivery and/or sounds?</li> <li>How might the performers use movement to create personality, create locations, add tension and show emotional responses to situations?</li> </ul>	
Space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What is the performance space and how will this space affect the way the audience engages with the play?</li> <li>How will various time periods, locations and settings be represented in the performance space?</li> </ul>	
Time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How will time in the world of the play be manipulated?</li> <li>How will the flow of the performance use pace and rhythm to add tension and/or create mood?</li> </ul>	
Mood	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What is the mood and atmosphere of the dramatic action?</li> <li>How might this be created?</li> </ul>	
Symbol	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What symbols might be included to communicate ideas, themes and messages?</li> <li>How will the symbols used during the performance add to the dramatic meaning?</li> </ul>	
Dramatic meaning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What are the messages of the play?</li> <li>How has the focusing to frame the action contributed to communicating this meaning?</li> </ul>	

**2** Complete the following sentence reflecting on your learning about the elements of drama.

'Before we started working on the elements of drama I used to think \_\_\_\_\_ but now I know that \_\_\_\_\_.'





## Performance task: creating dramatic meaning

Student ..... Teacher .....

Group names .....

By completing this task you should be able to:

- list and define each of the elements of drama
- collaborate to ask and answer questions about the elements of drama in both the making and performance of drama
- communicate dramatic meaning by effectively integrating the elements of drama in a short performance.

Key learning areas	Level of achievement			
	Beginning	Consolidating	Mastering	Excelling
<p><b>Creating, making and presenting ideas using skills, knowledge, techniques and processes</b></p> <p><b>Have you prepared for your performance by:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• using the images and quotes to find a specific viewpoint that your play is exploring?</li> <li>• demonstrating that you can define and manipulate the elements of drama to suit your purpose?</li> <li>• recording all planning, rehearsals and decisions in writing?</li> </ul> <p><b>Have you selected and included the skills of voice and movement by:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• effectively communicating character through the use of body language, movement and mime?</li> <li>• incorporating voice to suit character and to create mood?</li> </ul> <p><b>Have you planned, selected and modified your presentation by:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• considering the available space and how it can be used to suit your purpose?</li> <li>• using direction to help arrange actors in the stage space to create stage action and provide a clear point of focus when required?</li> </ul>				
<p><b>Responding</b></p> <p><b>Have you used your critical thinking and communication skills to:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• effectively reflect on the development, rehearsal and shaping of performance work with reference to the elements of drama?</li> <li>• describe and explain the use of the elements of drama in a clear and succinct manner?</li> </ul>				

Comments

---



---



---



---



---

