

English Through Drama – Handout #1

What is **drama**?

Drama means many things: it can mean “action”; it can mean “acting”. It is related to the telling of a *story* involving *characters*. For our purposes, drama will mean stories that are told through the acting out of a script.

What is a **character**?

A character is an imaginary person who is part of a story. The character can be *based on* a real person, completely imaginary, or some mixture of the two.

Most characters are meant to be like real human beings: they have weaknesses, strengths, desires, fears, and problems. This is what makes them interesting. Consider Superman as an example.

One of the best definitions of what a character is was told to me this way: a character is a person with a problem.

What is a **story**?

This is a very difficult question to answer, because there are many different possible answers to this question. Some people would say that a story is something that makes you feel emotions. Other people would say that a story is a kind of acceptable lie.

The fact is, stories are a natural part of the way human beings think. We understand our careers, lives, our culture's histories, our own families, science, love, and religion in terms of *stories* or *narratives*.

In simple terms, a story is what happens to a group of characters, but this tells us nothing. What's more important is what a story does. At the end of a good story, people feel satisfied, they feel as if something has happened – even if it was just lights on a screen or words in a book.

This is because a story *does* something, or in fact it does several things. For one thing, a **story “arcs”**.

rising tension

climax

denouement

beginning

conclusion

This is the traditional shape that people say a story follows: it “arcs” as tension builds, until it reaches a climax, and then tension is lessened and the story reaches a conclusion. Of course, not all stories follow this pattern. Some stories never really conclude. Other stories end at the climax.

Along the course of this arc, **a story usually lets us see a character change**. For a story to be interesting, every character should have shortcomings or weaknesses. As a story proceeds, characters make decisions, and those decisions affect the character. Usually, rising tension happens because a problem from the beginning of the story gets worse and worse; at the climax of the story, the character has to face or deal with a major weakness or failure.