

Genre Focus Lesson

I. Objectives

- To read to enjoy drama
- To visualize the setting and action in a drama
- To identify and understand the features of a drama: dialogue, stage directions, and cast of characters
- To identify and understand conflict in a drama
- To respond and connect to a drama
- To perform a scene from a drama

II. Motivating Options

Visualizing Point out to students that a drama is meant to be staged as well as read. Its audience includes viewers along with readers. To help students understand the impact of a drama, they should try to visualize the sets and action, using the stage directions and dialogue as a guide. Encourage them to read the opening stage directions of the play and then close their eyes and visualize the way the set might look onstage or filmed. Urge them to pause periodically in their reading and visualize what is happening. In this way, they can become viewers as well as readers.

III. Teaching Strategies

Point out to students that most dramas are divided into acts and scenes and contain the following features and elements: *features of drama*, *elements of drama*, *vocabulary*, and *author's craft*.

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A. Analyzing

1. **Features of Drama** In a drama, there is little description. Characters and action are revealed through the following features.

a. **Dialogue** Explain that the dialogue among characters gives students information about both the characters' personalities and the action of the play. Encourage them to imagine the characters' voices speaking as they read the dialogue. Ask students to think of lines of dialogue from a film that exemplify a character, such as the Terminator's "I'll be back!" or Scarlett O'Hara's "After all, tomorrow is another day." Discuss with them what these lines reveal about the characters.

b. **Stage Directions** The set, props, lighting, and sound effects of a drama work together to create atmosphere. Because stage directions are usually not very detailed, directors might interpret them in different ways, leading to productions of the same drama with unique atmospheres. Have students work in pairs to write a detailed description of a set based on stage directions. They can compare their descriptions, noting the differences in detail and atmosphere.

c. **Cast of Characters** The cast of characters will often include details about the characters – their appearances and their relationships to each other. In a play with many characters, students may benefit from creating a family-and-friends tree that shows how the characters are linked to one another. Have students make a time line to chart the passage of time and changes of setting from act to act in a long drama or scene to scene in a shorter drama.

2. **Elements of Drama** The elements of drama are similar to the elements of a short story. However, they must be revealed through stage directions and dialogue.

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- **Characters** are described in the cast of characters and in stage directions. Their personality traits are revealed in their dialogue.
 - **Setting** is described in stage directions. Often the setting will include props that are essential to the plot.
 - **Theme** is revealed through the actions and dialogue of the characters. Stage directions can also hint at the theme of a drama by describing a setting or props that reflect the theme.
 - **Plot** is also revealed through the actions and dialogue of the characters. A dramatic plot will usually center on one or more conflicts, either external or internal. Explain that both kinds of conflict can reveal character traits. Characters' reactions to external conflicts give clues to their physical and emotional traits. The ideas and feelings that fuel internal conflicts suggest the issues that characters find important.
3. **Vocabulary** As students read, have them keep a log of any specialized terms they find. In a screenplay, they can list and define camera terms. In a stage play, they can identify stage directions such as *stage left* and *right*, *upstage* and *downstage*. Students can share their logs with partners and work together on defining any unfamiliar terms.
4. **Author's Craft** Explain to students that the author of a drama must be able to reveal character, plot, and theme using only stage directions and dialogue. The detail in stage directions and the word choice in dialogue are, therefore, very important. As they read, students should notice how the author uses these features to move the plot forward and to reveal character and theme.

B. Responding

1. **Literature Groups** After reading the drama, students can meet in groups to discuss their responses to and opinions of the work. Encourage them to find lines of dialogue that struck them as

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especially powerful or important to the drama. (For more suggestions on using Literature Groups, see *Literature Groups Sourcebook: Strategies and Activities*.)

2. **Performing** Students can work in groups to perform a short scene from the drama. Have groups choose a director who can supervise the actors and set designer. Groups can rehearse their scenes and, when they are ready, perform them for the class. If you have access to a video camera, you can record the performances for later viewing.

IV. For Blackline Masters, click [HERE](#)