

ELEMENTS OF A PLAY

BEGINNING/MIDDLE/END—Think of the beginning and end as “pictures” of the world of the play and the middle as the “action.” The beginning is the way things are before the play starts. The end is the way things are when the play is over and characters have changed. In the middle, characters try different strategies to solve problems, which causes the change.

CAUSE & EFFECT—Anything a character does causes something to happen (an effect) which causes the next thing to happen which causes the next thing, just like a row of dominoes falling.

CHARACTER ARC—This is the way one or more characters are changed at the end because of what happened in the middle of the play.

CHARACTER STRATEGIES—A strategy is the way the character tries to get what she/he/it wants or needs. Because a strategy doesn’t always work or may cause a new obstacle, the character often has to try more than one strategy before resolving the dramatic conflict. It is important that each strategy is connected to the character’s “want” or “need” and could be a way to get past the obstacle.

CHARACTER VOICE—This is how each individual character sounds. This doesn’t just mean things like accents, but the words each character chooses. Adults use different words than teenagers or younger children. The character voice should illustrate the character’s traits. Someone who is nervous will choose different words than someone who is angry when they say the same thing.

DRAMATIC CONFLICT—One or more characters in a play want or need something whether it is an object, a feeling or a changed condition. Dramatic conflict occurs when something or conditions keep him/her/it from getting what he/she/it wants or needs.

FORWARD MOVEMENT—This keeps the audience interested in what comes next and/or makes them care about what happens to the characters. Think of it as what makes someone move forward to the edge of his/her seat.

LOGICAL BEHAVIOR—Each character must act in a way that you would expect him/her/it to and is logical based on what we know about the character. For example, a pig would only fly if it had wings or was magical, and a bully would not turn nice unless something caused him/her/it to change.

OBSTACLES—These are the things or conditions that keep a character from getting what he/she/it wants. Obstacles help cause dramatic conflict.

THEATRICALITY—Theatricality is very noticeable or exaggerated things that catch the audience’s attention. Theatricality is often added by using humor or suspense. It can also be added with lights, sound, costumes or props. A good playwright must be careful not to use too much so the audience misses the story of the play.