

Catastrophe—The action at the end of a [tragedy](#) that initiates the [denouement](#) or falling action of a play.

Catharsis—The purging of the feelings of pity and fear that, according to Aristotle, occur in the audience of tragic drama. The audience experiences catharsis at the end of the play, following the catastrophe.

Dialogue—The conversation of characters in a literary work. In fiction, dialogue is typically enclosed within quotation marks. In plays, characters' speech is preceded by their names.

Dramatis personae—Latin for the characters or persons in a play.

Exposition—The first stage of a fictional or dramatic plot, in which necessary background information is provided.

Pathos—A quality of a play's action that stimulates the audience to feel pity for a character. Pathos is always an aspect of tragedy, and may be present in comedy as well.

Props—Articles or objects that appear on stage during a play.

Recognition—The point at which a character understands his or her situation as it really is.

Stage direction—A playwright's descriptive or interpretive comments that provide readers (and actors) with information about the dialogue, setting, and action of a play. Modern playwrights, including Ibsen, Shaw, Miller, and Williams tend to include substantial stage directions, while earlier playwrights typically used them more sparsely, implicitly, or not at all.

Staging—The spectacle a play presents in performance, including the position of actors on stage, the scenic background, the props and costumes, and the lighting and sound effects.

Unities, or Unified Action—The idea that a play should be limited to a specific time, place, and story line. The events of the plot should occur within a twenty-four hour period, should occur within a give geographic locale, and should tell a single story. Aristotle argued that Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* was the perfect play for embodying the unities.