

## **HELP! I'M ANALYZING A PLAY!**

Below are some questions and exercises to help you begin analyzing a dramatic work. Your analysis should NOT contain comments on every question and exercise below. Conceivably, you should select a few items as the basis of the ideas which will lead to a detailed and interesting analysis of the dramatic work.

Dramatic works may combine literary aspects of both prose fiction and poetry. You should also refer to one of the available handouts on analyzing prose fiction and/or poetry which will contain many exercises and questions that are applicable to your analysis of a dramatic work.

Remember, however, that drama, unlike prose, always employs the objective, or dramatic, point of view. The following questions are supplemental to those covering poetry and prose and are suited to the special nature of dramatic works.

1. Does the play employ realistic or non-realistic conventions? On a scale ranging from a literal interpretation of reality to a surrealistic representation of reality, where is the play situated?
2. Once you've established the play's conventions, determine if there are any departures from those conventions. If there are departures, what is their dramatic effect? Are they meaningful?
3. Is the play a tragedy or comedy, a melodrama or a farce? Does it mingle aspects of these types of drama? Is it important for the audience to know the type of drama? Why or why not?
4. If the play is a comedy, is it primarily satiric or romantic?
5. Identify the protagonist(s) and antagonist(s). Are there any foil characters?
6. What dramatic functions are served by the various minor characters? Do they shed light on the actions or motives of the major characters? Do they advance the plot by eliciting actions by others? Do they embody ideas or feelings that illuminate the major characters or the movement of the plot?
7. How is dramatic suspense created? Contrast the amount of information possessed by the audience as the play proceeds with the knowledge that various individual characters have. What is the effect of that contrast?
8. What themes does the play present? To what extent do the themes of the play have an effect on the dramatic experience?
9. Does the power or intensity of the themes increase or decrease the pleasure of the theatrical experience? Does the play seem either too scholarly or too trite in its presentation of important themes.

10. How do the various physical effects (sets, lights, costuming, makeup, gestures, stage movements, musical effects, song, dance, etc.) reinforce the themes, meanings, and emotional effects? How does the playwright indicate these physical effects (directly, through stage and set directions or indirectly, through dialogue between characters)? Why did the playwright choose this method of indicating the physical effects?
11. What amount of time is covered in the play's action? How much of the action is presented as a report rather than dramatized on stage? Is there any significance behind the selection of events to be dramatized and those to be reported? Does that significance relate to the play's themes?
12. How often does the play employ narration as a means of exposition? Have a purpose beyond its usual function of communicating information about prior events? What effects on the audience do the methods of exposition have?