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Modernism is a period in literary history that started around the early 1900s and continued until the early 1940s. Modernist writers in general rebelled against clear-cut storytelling and formulaic verse from the 19th century. Instead, many of them told fragmented stories that reflected the fragmented state of society during and after World War I.

Many Modernists wrote in free verse, and they included many countries and cultures in their poems. Some wrote using numerous points of view or even used a “stream-of-consciousness” style. These writing styles further demonstrate the way the scattered state of society affected the work of writers at that time.

Emily Dickinson and Walt Whitman are thought to be the mother and father of the movement because they had the most direct influence on early Modernists. Sometime after their deaths, the Imagist poets began to gain importance. The University of Toledo’s Canaday Center has a rich collection of poetry and critical work from that era.

Imagist poets generally wrote shorter poems, and they chose their words carefully so that their work would be rich and direct. The movement started in London, where a group of poets met and discussed changes that were happening in poetry. Ezra Pound soon met these individuals, and he eventually introduced them to H.D. and Richard Aldington in 1911. In 1912, Pound submitted their work to Poetry magazine. After H.D.’s name, he signed the word "Imagiste" and that was when Imagism was publicly launched. Two months later, Poetry published an essay that discusses three points that the London group agreed upon.

Many people have written about what constitutes drama. One of the first and most influential was Aristotle, who concluded that there were 6 elements to drama: plot, character, thought, diction, spectacle, and song.

Since then many people have had their say. What about symbols and metaphors? Or mood and atmosphere? Are tension and suspense important? Are these key elements of drama?

When you see an amazing show at the theatre, you may leave thinking “What made that so great? Why did that play move me or make me nervous?” A play, film or TV show can only become great when all the key elements of drama work together.

In this blog we’ll explore some of the key elements of drama and what makes them so important to the way we tell stories.

**Plot**

The plot is about the order of events and the progression of the play. Without a plot, it is difficult to create a compelling drama. To a large extent, the success of a dramatic play depends on how the events of the play unfold. Plot is essential to drama because it takes the audience on a journey. We become immersed and want to know the outcome.

A plot can have many shapes. It is often represented as a curve in a graph, as the plot builds up to a climax and then returns to some new state of calm and stability. Plot is not just about one thing happening after another. In a good play, each action or event happens for a reason. A plot can serve a theme and will influence the growth or decline of the characters.

Aristotle identified plot and character as the two most important elements of drama. And still today you’d be hard-pressed to find anyone who believes that plot is not a key element of drama.

### Character

If Plot = What, then Character = Who. The protagonists, the antagonists, and the supporting cast are essential to drama. They are the elements of plays, TV shows and films that audiences can connect to.

They make decisions, influence the plot and inhabit the fictional universe that has been created by the writers, directors and crew. By merely looking at the list of characters in Romeo and Juliet you will be able to see how the relationships between characters influence the plot, the tension and the atmosphere in stories and how they form a key element of drama.

### Tension/Suspense

The director Alfred Hitchcock once said, “There is no terror in the bang, only in the anticipation of it.” You can hold an audience’s attention if they are anticipating something scary, or significant or dramatic. This is tension.

Will Romeo and Juliet get together and live happily ever after? Although the relationship may seem doomed from the beginning, Shakespeare creates tension in the way their story unfolds. You want the audience to be asking, “What will happen next?” And this is best achieved through tension and suspense. If the audience is not interested in what happens next then it is difficult to create true drama.

### Language

Stories can be elevated through language. A play can have a simple plot and uncomplicated characters but can become compelling and beautiful through the use of language. With language you can hide clues, inspire humour and create subtext.

Characters express themselves with language, action is propelled with words and tension can be built through conversations. Language is also a key element of drama because it can connect with people in unique ways.

### Spectacle/Atmosphere

Aristotle’s fifth element of drama was Spectacle, which is about the setting and what the audience sees. Drama needs a visual element. Spectacle and atmosphere can bring new meaning to the language and characters.

Atmosphere and spectacle can make a drama memorable. Often when you go to see a play or watch a film you will remember how it made you feel.

Throughout the years the plot, character and language of Shakespeare’s play might remain the same but theatre companies will experiment with staging and visuals to create a fresh and exciting spectacle or atmosphere.

### What Makes Great Drama?

Drama is created when all these key elements come together. In some plays, TV shows, or films, they might focus more on one element than the other. But both character-driven and plot-driven stories require creative and competent people to make them work.

Plot, character, tension, language, and spectacle are evident in all of the best plays, TV shows, and films. These elements form the basis of any great drama, and it is interesting to see how different artists use them to tell a story.

Meta-description: What makes a great dramatic play, film, or TV show? What is the special ingredient? In this blog learn about the key elements of drama.

**Arms and the Man**, a [romantic](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/romantic) [comedy](https://www.britannica.com/art/comedy) in three acts by [George Bernard Shaw](https://www.britannica.com/biography/George-Bernard-Shaw), produced in 1894 and published in 1898. The play is set in the Petkoff household in Bulgaria and satirizes romantic ideas concerning war and heroism. A battle-weary officer, a Swiss mercenary fighting for the Serbian army, takes refuge in Raina Petroff’s bed chamber, where she agrees to hide him from the authorities. In response to his matter-of-fact account of the war, in which he debunks her fiancé Sergius’ heroism, Raina at first ridicules the intruder’s cowardliness but ultimately appreciates his honesty. Sometime later, after the war is over, the officer, Captain Bluntschli, returns. By the end of the play, Sergius has promised himself to the maidservant Louka, whose fiancé, the manservant Nicola, willingly [forgoes](https://www.britannica.com/dictionary/forgoes) his claim to her, and Raina has become engaged to Bluntschli, who has just inherited a number of Swiss hotels. The play’s title was taken from the first line of [Virgil’s](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Virgil) epic poem the [*Aeneid*](https://www.britannica.com/topic/Aeneid). Shaw shows how members of higher social classes in Bulgarian society looked down on those from lower social classes. This distinction between the top and lower classes is also reflected in the characters of Major Petkoff, Catherine, and Raina. Because Bluntschli was born into the middle class, he is not regarded as a gentleman in polite society. When Raina and her parents find out about the hotels that he has received from his father, however, they readily agree to his proposal for Raina and accept it without hesitation. After that, people think of him as wealthy and in a gentlemanly manner.

The play examines the causes of war, the tactics used during battle, and the negotiations that take place after hostilities have ended. In point of fact, the title of the play is a direct quote from Virgil’s Aeneid, which is a Roman epic that extols the virtues of warfare. By employing irony in his use of this quote, Shaw was drawing attention to the fact that war should not be seen as romantic.

Arms and the Man can be described as a modern play, even though it was first produced in 1894 (and followed the Naturalistic characteristics Shaw used in writing), by looking at the themes focused upon in the play.

One theme highlighted in the play is the romanticism of love. regardless of what era you live in, romantic love is always prevalent. Many people have been charged with falling for the wrong person. This idea has traversed time.

Another theme that could be recognized as a modern theme is class discrimination. As forward-thinking as one society believes it to be, class discrimination is still prevalent. It seems that people have always, and will always, look down on those they deem below them.

Finally, the theme of idealism versus [realism](https://www.enotes.com/topics/literary-terms/complete-index/realism) has been a topic in the minds of even the greatest people for centuries. Literary and artistic movements have developed around these ideals and still bring about great conversations.