

SMART™ Lesson

Analyzing Dramatic Structure

Dramatic structure is the framework of a play or drama, including its beginning, middle, and end. Understanding dramatic structure is important for analyzing how a play is developed and for writing your own plays.

The Three Acts

Most plays are divided into three acts:

- **Act 1:** The beginning of the play, where the characters and setting are introduced and the conflict is established.
- **Act 2:** The middle of the play, where the conflict intensifies and complications arise. This is often the longest and most complex section of the play.
- **Act 3:** The end of the play, where the conflict is resolved and loose ends are tied up. This is sometimes called the denouement.

The Five-Act Structure

Some plays, particularly those written in the Elizabethan era, are divided into five acts:

- **Act 1:** The introduction, where the characters and setting are introduced and the conflict is established. This also includes the exposition, or background information needed to understand the story.
- **Act 2:** The rising action, where the conflict intensifies and complications arise.
- **Act 3:** The climax, where the conflict reaches its highest point and the outcome is uncertain.
- **Act 4:** The falling action, where the conflict begins to resolve and the consequences of the climax are played out.
- **Act 5:** The conclusion, where the conflict is fully resolved and loose ends are tied up.

Questions

1. What is the purpose of the three acts in a play?
2. How many acts are there in a play written in the Elizabethan era?
3. What is the climax of a play?