Drama Terms to Know

**Tragedy -** A Shakespearean tragedy **tells the story of a seemingly heroic figure whose major character flaw causes the story to end with his tragic downfall.**

**Revenge Tragedy (*Hamlet*) –** the protagonist has a great need to revenge some great wrong done, generally the member of a close family. Based on the great Greek playwright Seneca, Shakespeare “turns the tragedy on its head” no confident avenging hero, a prince who understands honor and tradition, but is unable to follow through with revenge.

*Some say Shakespeare penned his unexpressed emotions about his young son’s death (Hamnet) and fear of losing his father into his work.*

**Tragic Hero –** a character who, either by choice or circumstance, is caught up in a sequence of events that inevitably results in disaster; the fall is caused in part by some error or frailty in the protagonist and not by a vice or depravity.

**Tragic flaw** - a flaw in character that brings about the downfall of the hero of a tragedy

**Pathetic Fallacy -** Pathetic fallacy occurs when a writer attributes human emotions to things that aren't human, such as objects, weather, or animals. It is often used to make the environment reflect the inner experience of a narrator or other characters. It can also mean that what is wrong in man’s world is reflected in the natural world (storms, earthquakes, plague).

**“Great Chain of Being”** - Elizabethans believed that God set out an order for everything in the universe. This was known as the Great Chain of Being. On Earth, God created a social order for everybody and chose where you belonged. In other words, the king or queen was in charge because God put them there and they were only answerable to God (the Divine Right of Kings). This meant that disobeying the monarch was a sin, which was handy for keeping people in their place! It also led to the idea that if the wrong person was monarch everything would go wrong for a country, including whether the crops would be good, or if animals behaved as they should. The Elizabethans were very superstitious.

**Anachronism** - the incorporation of an event, scene, or person who does not correspond with the time period portrayed in the work

**Aside** - words spoken by a character in a play that are only intended for the audience to hear, not the other characters on the stage

**Comic relief**- a humorous scene, incident, or speech in the course of a serious fiction or drama

**Dramatic Structure**

**Act 1: The Exposition**

Here, the audience learns the setting (Time/Place), characters are developed, and a conflict is introduced.

**Act 2: Rising Action**

The action of this act leads the audience to the climax. It is common for complications to arise, or for the protagonist to encounter obstacles.

**Act 3: The Climax**

This is the turning point of the play. The climax is characterized by the

highest amount of suspense.

**Act 4: Falling Action**

The opposite of Rising Action, in the Falling Action the story is coming to an end, and any unknown details or plot twists are revealed and wrapped up.

**Act 5: Denouement or Resolution**

This is the final outcome of the drama. Here the authors tone about his or her subject matter is revealed, and sometimes a moral or lesson is learned.

**Monologue** - a short speech delivered by a character in a play, with other characters

present on stage, in order to express his or her true thoughts and feelings.

**Soliloquy –** The act of talking to oneself alone on stage in order to reveal a character’s thoughts and feelings to the audience.

**Additional Literary Terms to know for reading comprehension:**

dramatic irony mood

situational irony foreshadow

verbal irony paraphrase

personification symbolism

metaphor figurative language

simile tone