Glossary of Terms Used in the Theatre

*Acting*: areas See *center stage, downstage, stage left, stage right, and upstage.*

*Actor*: A person, male or female, who performs a role in a play or an entertainment.

*Actor’s position*: The orientation of the actor to the audience (e.g., full back, full front, right profile, left profile).

*Antagonist*: A person, a situation, or the protagonist’s own inner conflict in opposition to his or her goals.

*Articulation*: The clear and precise pronunciation of words.

*Body positions*: See *actor’s position.*

*Catharsis*: The purification or purgation of the emotions (as pity and fear) caused in a tragedy.

*Center stage*: The center of the acting area.

*Character*: The personality or part an actor re-creates.

*Characterization*: The development and portrayal of a personality through thought, action, dialogue, costuming, and makeup.

*Climax*: The point of highest dramatic tension or a major turning point in the action.

*Cold reading*: A reading of a script done by actors who have not previously reviewed the play.

*Collaboration*: The act of working together in a joint intellectual effort.

*Commedia dell’arte*: A professional form of theatrical improvisation, developed in Italy in the 1500s, featuring stock characters and standardized plots.

*Complication*: See *rising action.*

*Conflict*: The opposition of persons or forces giving rise to dramatic action in a play.

*Context*: The interrelated conditions in which a play exists or occurs.

*Conventions of theatre*: See *theatrical conventions.*

*Costume*: Any clothing worn by an actor on stage during a performance.

*Creative drama*: An improvisational, process-centered form of theatre in which participants are guided by a leader to imagine, enact, and reflect on human experiences.

*Crisis*: A decisive point in the plot of a play on which the outcome of the remaining actions depends.

*Critique*: Opinions and comments based on predetermined criteria that may be used for self-evaluation or the evaluation of the actors or the production itself. 199

*Denouement*: The final resolution of the conflict in a plot.

*Design*: The creative process of developing and executing aesthetic or functional designs in a production, such as costumes, lighting, sets, and makeup.

*Dialogue*: The conversation between actors on stage.

*Directing*: The art and technique of bringing the elements of theatre together to make a play.

*Downstage*: The stage area toward the audience.

*Dramatic play*: Children’s creation of scenes when they play “pretend.”

*Dramatic structure*: The special literary style in which plays are written.

*Dramaturg*: A person who provides specific in-depth knowledge and literary resources to a director, producer, theatre company, or even the audience.

*Dress rehearsals*: The final few rehearsals just prior to opening night in which the show is run with full technical elements. Full costumes and makeup are worn.

*Electronic media*: Means of communication characterized by the use of technology (e.g., radio, television, and the Internet).

*Elizabethan theatre*: The theatre of England during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I and often extended to the close of the theatres in 164

*Ensemble*: A group of theatrical artists working together to create a theatrical production.

*Epic theatre*: Theatrical movement of the early 1920s and 1930 characterized by the use of such artificial devices as cartoons, posters, and film sequences distancing the audience from theatrical illusion and allowing focus on the play’s message.

*Exposition*: Detailed information revealing the facts of a plot.

*Farce*: A comedy with exaggerated characterizations, abundant physical or visual humor, and, often, an improbable plot.

*Form*: The overall structure or shape of a work that frequently follows an established design. Forms may refer to a literary type (e.g., narrative form, short story form, dramatic form) or to patterns of meter, line, and rhymes (e.g., stanza form, verse form).

*Formal theatre*: Theatre that focuses on public performance in front of an audience and in which the final production is most important.

*Genre*: Literally, “kind” or “type.” In literary and dramatic studies, genre refers to the main types of literary form, principally tragedy and comedy. The term can also refer to forms that are more specific to a given historical era, such as the revenge tragedy, or to more specific subgenres of tragedy and comedy, such as the comedy of manners.

*Gesture*: An expressive movement of the body or limbs.

*Greek theatre*: Theatrical events in honor of the god Dionysus that occurred in Ancient Greece and included play competitions and a chorus of masked actors.

*Improvisation*: A spontaneous style of theatre in which scenes are created without advance rehearsing or scripting.

*Informal theatre*: A theatrical performance that focuses on small presentations, such as one taking place in a classroom setting. Usually, it is not intended for public view.

*Kabuki*: One of the traditional forms of Japanese theatre, originating in the 1600s and combining stylized acting, costumes, makeup, and musical accompaniment.

*Level*: The height of an actor’s head actor as determined by his or her body position (e.g., sitting, lying, standing, or elevated by an artificial means).

*Makeup*: Cosmetics and sometimes hairstyles that an actor wears on stage to emphasize facial features, historical periods, characterizations, and so forth.

*Masks*: Coverings worn over the face or part of the face of an actor to emphasize or neutralize facial characteristics.

*Melodrama*: A dramatic form popular in the 1800s and characterized by an emphasis on plot and physical action (versus characterization), cliff-hanging events, heart-tugging emotional appeals, the celebration of virtue, and a strongly moralistic tone.

*Mime*: An ancient art form based on pantomime in which conventionalized gestures are used to express ideas rather than represent actions; also, a performer of mime.

*Minstrel show*: Musical theatre that usually consisted of performances of traditional African American music and dance provided by white actors in blackface and charac-terized by exploitive racial sterotypes.

*Monologue*: A long speech by a single character.

*Musical theatre*: A type of entertainment containing music, songs, and, usually, dance.

*Noh*: One of the traditional forms of Japanese theatre in which masked male actors use highly stylized dance and poetry to tell stories.

*Objective*: A character’s goal or intention.

*Pacing*: The tempo of an entire theatrical performance.

*Pageant*: Any elaborate street presentation or a series of tableaux across a stage.

*Pantomime*: Acting without words through facial expression, gesture, and movement.

*Pitch*: The highness or lowness of the voice.

*Play*: The stage representation of an action or a story; a dramatic composition.

*Playwright*: A person who writes plays.

*Production values*: The critical elements of a production, such as acting, direction, lighting, costuming, sets, and makeup.

*Projection*: The placement and delivery of volume, clarity, and distinctness of voice for communicating to an audience.

*Props (properties)*: Items carried on stage by an actor; small items on the set used by the actors.

*Proscenium*: The enlarged hole cut through a wall to allow the audience to view the stage. It is also called the proscenium arch. The archway is in a sense the frame for the action on the stage.

*Protagonist*: The main character of a play and the character with whom the audience identi-fies most strongly.

*Puppetry*: Almost anything brought to life by human hands to create a performance. Types of puppets include rod, hand, and marionette.

*Reader’s theatre*: A performance created by actors reading script rather working from memory.

*Rehearsal*: Practice sessions in which the actors and technicians prepare for public perfor-mance through repetition.

*Rising action*: The middle part of a plot consisting of complications and discoveries that create conflict.

*Run-through*: A rehearsal moving from start to finish without stopping for corrections or notes.

*Script*: The written text of a play.

*Sense memory*: Memories of sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and textures. It is used to help define a character in a certain situation.

*Stage*: The area where actors perform.

*Stage crew*: The backstage technical crew responsible for running the show. In small theatre companies the same persons build the set and handle the load-in. Then, during performances, they change the scenery and handle the curtain.

performance. The stage manager is responsible for the running of each performance.

*Stage left*: The left side of the stage from the perspective of an actor facing the audience.

*Stage right*: The right side of the stage from the perspective of an actor facing the audience.

*Stock characters*: Established characters, such as young lovers, neighborhood busybodies, sneaky villains, and overprotective fathers, who are immediately recognizable by an audience.

*Style*: The distinctive and unique manner in which a writer arranges words to achieve particular effects. Style essentially combines the idea to be expressed with the individuality of the author. These arrangements include individual word choices as well as such matters as the length and structure of sentences, tone, and use of irony.

*Subtext*: Information that is implied by a character but not stated by a character in dialogue, including actions and thoughts.

*Tableau*: A silent and motionless depiction of a scene created by actors, often from a picture. The plural is *tableaux.*

*Text*: Printed words, including dialogue and the stage directions for a script.

*Theatre*: The imitation or representation of life performed for other people; the performance of dramatic literature; drama; the milieu of actors, technicians, and playwrights; the place where dramatic performances take place

*Theatre of the absurd*: Theatrical movement beginning in the 1950s in which playwrights created works representing the universe as unknowable and humankind’s existence as meaningless.

*Theatrical conventions*: The established techniques, practices, and devices unique to theatrical productions.

*Theatrical experiences*: Events, activities, and productions associated with theatre, film/video, and electronic media.

*Theatrical games*: Noncompetitive games designed to develop acting skills and popularized by Viola Spolin.

*Upstage*: Used as a noun, the stage area away from the audience; used as a verb, to steal the focus of a scene.

*Vocal projection*: See *projection.*

*Vocal quality*: The characteristics of a voice, such as shrill, nasal, raspy, breathy, booming, and so forth.

*Volume*: The degree of loudness or intensity of a voice.

*COMMON FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT WORDS*!

1. Exposition . The mood and conditions existing at the beginning of the story. The setting is identified. The main characters with their positions, circumstances and relationships to one another are established.

2. Inciting Incident. An exciting force or initial event that jolts the hero out of his everyday routine, and prompts your hero to “go into motion” and take action. It is the event that starts the conflict/plot.

3. Rising Action . The series of events, conflicts (clashes of opposing forces), obstacles, and discoveries, in the story, which progressively intensify and lead up to the climax.

4. Climax.The turning point of the story. A crucial event takes place and from this point forward, the protagonist moves toward his inevitable end. The event may be either an action or a mental decision that the protagonist makes

5. Falling Action. The events occurring from the time of the climax to the end of the story. The main character may encounter more conflicts in this part of the story, but the end is inevitable.

6. Resolution.The tying up of loose ends and all of the threads in the story. The conclusion. The hero character either emerges triumphant or is defeated at this point.

7. Apron. The flat extension of the stage floor that projects from the proscenium arch toward the audience.

8. Batten A wooden dowel or metal pipe attached to the onstage lines from a rope-set or counterweight system, to which scenery is attached.

9. Cyclorama (Cyc) A large backdrop meant to resemble the sky.

10. Drop.A flat piece of fabric, generally painted, that forms part of the scenery.

11. Electric. A batten specifically used for lighting instruments.

12. Flies. Area above the stage where scenery is hung out of view.

13. Grand Drape. The curtain that covers the opening of the proscenium arch.

14. Grid . Framework or beams above the stage that supports riggings for flying scenery.

15. Legs .Narrow, vertical stage drapes used for masking backstage areas and actors.

16. Proscenium Arch. The architectural wall that separates the backstage area from the audience.

17. Scrim. A drop that can be transparent or opaque depending on how it is lit.

18. Teasers. A short, horizontal drapes used for masking the flies and lighting.

19. Traveler. Any drapery that moves or opens horizontally.

20. Wings. Space on the stage that is not visible to the audience.

CFA 21. Producer A. Chooses the play, obtains theatre space, handles the finances of the production, supervises the business and house managers, and oversees publicity and advertising.

2. Director B. Interprets the play and develops an overall artistic vision. Casts actors, plans blocking, directs rehearsals, and blends performances and technical aspects into a unified production.

3. Stage Manager C. Arranges for auditions; posts audition, callback, and casting notices; schedules acting and technical rehearsals; prepares the prompt book; and “calls” the show during performances by alerting crew members to upcoming cues and giving them the “go” signal. Beginning with opening night, the stage manager has complete responsibility for everything that happens both on and off the stage.

4. Actors D. Play the characters in the script by analyzing them and fitting them into the director’s overall concept for the play

5. Designers E. Work with the director and or/technical director to develop plans for set design, lighting, sound, costumes, makeup, and props.

6. Crew F. Work with the designers to take the production from the planning stage to reality by building, decorating, and running the sets, props, lights, sound, costumes and makeup.

7. Set G. A representation consisting of the scenery and other properties used to identify the location of a dramatic production.

8. Props H. Anything the actor picks up with his hands and moves around the stage.

9. Costumes I. A style of dress, including garments, accessories, makeup and hairstyle, especially as characteristic of a particular country, period, or people.

10. Lighting J. Instruments used to light the stage, actors, costumes, props, etc., and to help establish time, place, and mood of the dramatic production.

11. Sound K. Most commonly involves the manipulation of previously composed audio, such as previously recorded music and sound effects. In some instances it may also involve the composition or manipulation of audio to create a desired effect or mood

12. Blocking A. The specific staging of a play’s movements, usually given by the director.

13. CrossA blocking move across the stage to another position.

14. Cue A signal, (vocal or physical) to which an actor must respond. The line another actor speaks just before your character’s line is a cue line.

15. Diction The articulation of speech and its clear pronunciation, as presented by the actor. An actor must speak clearly to be understood by the audience.

16. Motivation The reason behind objectives; why your character does what they do.

17. Objective The basic goals, wants, and intentions of a character.

18. Obstacles Forces of opposition that prevents a character from achieving their objective.

19. Project The ability to increase one’s voice or actions so as to be heard/understood clearly by the audience.

20. Tactics Different strategies a character uses in pursuing his/her intention or objective in the scene.