What is a play?

A series of incidents organized to accomplish a purpose
Reading A Play

• The playscript is a blueprint.
• Assume that what is written IS what the author wished to say.
• Reader must be sensitive to nuances in the playscript.
Dramatic Action is both what the characters do and why the characters do it.

- Builds through three steps
  - **Purpose**: awareness of desire or goal
  - **Passion**: strength of desire or suffering making characters act to fulfill goals
  - **Perception**: the understanding that eventually comes from the struggle

- Because of the range of human behavior & motivation, NO play can present the totality.
A Dramatic Action Must Be

• Complete and self-contained
• Deliberately shaped (for purpose/goal)
• Able to engage and maintain interest
• Internally consistent
METHODS OF ORGANIZING DRAMATIC ACTION

- **Cause-to-Effect**: [most commonly used]
- **Character**: all events focus on one person (might be a biography)
- **Thought**: scenes linked through a central theme or set of ideas
THE PARTS OF DRAMA

• Plot
• Character
• Thought
• Diction
• Music
• Spectacle
PLOT = Overall Structure of Play

Like an essay, there is a
Beginning, a Middle and an End.

The Beginning establishes
• The place
• The occasion
• The characters
• The mood
• The theme
• The internal logic (rules of the game)
The Beginning provides the previous information in an *exposition*. In addition, the Beginning may include an *inciting incident*.
The Middle is normally composed of a series of *complications* [anything which changes the direction of the action].

The series of complications leads to the **Climax**, often accompanied by a **Crisis** [discovery or event that determines the outcome of the action].
The End will include the *resolution* or *denouement* [day nu mah’]. It ties loose strands and restores balance.
Character & Characterization

• **Character** is the primary material for creation of plots. **Characterization** delineates one person from another

• Levels of characterization
  – Physical/biological
  – Societal
  – Psychological
  – moral
The playwright emphasizes one or more level of characterization, depending upon what the character does or how she/he functions in the play.
The character is revealed through
• Descriptions in stage directions or NON dialogue material
• What the character says
• What others say about the character
• What the character does
THOUGHT
Includes the themes, arguments, and overall meaning of the action.
The ways of projecting thought are

- Chorus
- Soliloquies
- Asides

In these, the audience is directly addressed and provided with information

- Allegory – the entire piece suggests something else
- Symbolism suggests a concept or set of relationships
DICTION

• It is the language of the characters

• May serve to
  – Impart information
  – Characterize
  – Direct attention to important plot elements
  – Reveal themes or ideas
  – Establishes tone/mood and internal logic
  – Established tempo or rhythm
Diction in a play is judged by appropriateness to

- Characters
- Situation
- Internal logic
- Type of play
MUSIC

• **May be incidental** to the play, background, **or**

• **Integral** as in operas or musicals

• Helps to
  – Establish moods
  – Characterize
  – Suggest ideas or presage events
  – Lend variety
  – Simply give pleasure
SPECTACLE

• It encompasses all visual elements of the production: movement & spatial relations, lighting, set, costumes, and props.
• May be little or a lot; suggestive or definite
• Evaluated on appropriateness and distinctiveness
FORMS OF DRAMA

- Tragedy
- Comedy
- Tragicomedy
- Farce
- Melodrama
- History
STYLE IN DRAMA

• Results from a distinctive mode of expression or method of presentation
• Results from 3 influences
  – Grounded in what is believed to be truthful & valuable
  – Manner in which playwright manipulates the means of expression
  – Manner in which play is presented in theatre.