

Hello Students,

I'm Dr. M Shanthi from DMC College, Mapusa.

Welcome. Today we are going to learn about the definition of one act play and its important components.

We will be learning about John Millington's Synge, the Irish playwright.

The learning outcome for this module is to differentiate between a full length play and a one act play. Describe the meaning of the one act play and analyze the salient features of one act play.

Before I go to the play, I would like to ask you all how many of you have gone and seen a play or a drama in a theater or at least watched on TV?

Normally, what are the basic features you require for a drama? You need a story or a plot. Maybe the main story or the sub story that is known as the main plot and subplot. Next you have characters which are the very important elements in a drama. If you take characters, there are major characters and minor characters. The protagonist or the hero is very important for a play.

Then you need a conflict, or a problem where the hero or the heroine face the problem and then how he resolves the problem in the climax. The next important element in a play is dialogue. So any drama or a play you need dialogue which is a very basic feature which one can look for. After the dialogue, the setting of the stage is very important. Then comes lights, music, director and the producer. With the combination of plot, characters, dialogue, setting, lights, music, director, producer, a play could be performed on the stage.

In today's lecture we're going to see the definition of one act Play. One act play is meant to be performed or enacted with a single act, which is short in nature. All the actions take place within one act without any intermission. There is no interval in between and it would focus on a single incident and would create a single effect. It also treats the problem of everyday life. If you take the dramatists, they give more importance to the stage direction in order to minimize the action. The setting should always be simple and the story must be conveyed within the given time. Maybe one night or normally from 15 minutes to one hour. These days we could find 10 minutes plays and even the dramatists in the contemporary world, write one page plays too. The characters are very limited in number and may be 3 to 6 characters. The main character or the protagonist is portrayed with only one or two important characteristic features.

The dramatic question or a conflict or a problem is highlighted where the hero or the heroine has to face so that he or she would lead the action and the dialogue should be simple and effective.

The dramatists should take care of each and every word in a very effective manner either it can be of comedy, tragedy, history, mystery, satire, musical, and the list would go on.

If you take one act play, the action always starts without any introduction of characters. The action will start directly with a problem or conflict then it will reach a climax. You all must be knowing

What is the meaning of climax? In movies, you know the meaning of the word 'climax'. In the climax or the turning point, where the hero has to face a villain or the critical situation and then finally he resolves the problem. Then we could find the conclusion of the play.

The dramatists don't digress from the unity of place, action and time in a one act play. What is the meaning of unity of place, action and time? For Example, if there is a scene in a flat, the action will take place only in that flat or at the most, outside the flat. They Don't go to the next street or some other place and they stick to that flat itself. That is known as unity of place. The action should take place within 24 hours. That is known as unity of time. The combination of episodes which are enacted with a particular theme is known as unity of action, and if you take a short story to a novel, in the same way one act play is to the full length play. I would like to explain that if you take the difference between a full length play and a one act play, in a full length play the dramatists like William Shakespeare, Marlowe and all other dramatists had full freedom to describe a detailed picture of the characters in the first introductory act. In full length play you have five acts, and in each act you have three to four scenes or sometimes even upto seven scenes. All the characters are introduced, their nature and the relationship with each other that is explained in act one which we can call it as 'exposition.'

Then what happens? There's a conflict. There is some problem with the situation or with the hero, and that would create a problematic situation to the protagonist. The dramatic question will create some anxiety to the audience. And the rising action is shown in act two. The problems faced by the hero or the heroine gets intensified. Then you have a turning point that is known as climax and it is shown in act 3. In act 4 one can find falling action. The problems are resolved and at the end in act five that is known as denouement or the conclusion. Whether it is a tragic end or comic end depends on the kind of a play ie a Tragedy or a Comedy. But if you take one act play, the action starts with the conflict, with the rising action and then you find the climax and then the resolution.

These are all the differences one could find between a full length play and one act play.

If you take one act play, the dramatists should pay more attention to the interesting characters and for the nail biting climax as you watch in movies. You come to the edge of your seat to watch a movie. In the same way the dramatists pay attention to the nail biting actions and the protagonist or the main character should induce some interest in the audience. Suppose if he's dull and boring, then the play will not have that much attention for the audience, and also the settings should be clear in order to understand the action. It should go smoothly and there should be a dramatic theme which should attract the attention of the audience, and that theme should make the audience ponder upon when they go back home. Some messages they have to take home. That is the quality of a great play.

Some of the examples which I have shown on the slide are very important plays. I have mentioned here and you all should either download it or buy the book and read. Then you will understand what is the real definition of a one act play. For example

Samuel Beckett's "Krapps Last Tape"

Anton Chekhov's "Marriage Proposal".

“The Bald Soprano” and “A Memory of two Mondays” by Arthur Miller,  
Tennessee Williams “Cairo, Shanghai, Bombay”.  
Harold Pinter’s “The Dumb Waiter”.

Please remember, don't miss Anton Chekhov's "Marriage proposal". It is really nice and my favorite play too.

The Second part of this module is where I'm going to talk about John Millington Synge. You may wonder why I take this dramatist's name in particular. Because Of your syllabus. You have his play “Riders to the Sea” and John Millington Synge was an Irish playwright and he had played a very major role in Irish literary renaissance. And he was one of the co-founder of Abbey Theatre along with the famous Irish poet W.B. Yeats and Lady Gregory who was the social activist in Celtic Revival of Ireland.

Initially he was writing only critical essays and when he met W.B. Yeats in Paris, he advised Synge to go to the Aran Island in Ireland. So that he would get first hand information from the fishermen folk where he could be with them and could write about them in a realistic manner. So he followed the advice of Yeats and had gone and stayed in Aran Island and he saw the real life situation. His stay inspired him to write two plays “In the shadow of the Glen” and “Riders to the sea.” When he traveled to the Irish West Coast which has propelled him to write one more play, “The Playboy of the Western World.” He completed “Riders to the Sea” in the year 1902 and he brought it to the stage on 25th February, 1904 and the play without any subplot and with only the main plot attracted many audiences. It brought fame and name to the dramatist.

With just 4 characters on the stage, he could bring the tragic effect that Shakespeare had brought in his tragedy “King Lear.”

Today, we saw what is one act play? What all the salient features of an one act play and the differences between a full length play and one act play. We also saw about John Milington Synge.

The references I have given would be helpful to know more about the one act plays.

I hope you all enjoyed my lecture. Thank you.