

Studying drama

- As with any other type of literature, contextualize the passage you have to study if you have read the entire work.
- Bear in mind that the text is (supposedly) not meant to be read for the sake of reading it. The “end product” is a theatrical performance, not a book. Therefore:
- Try to visualize the scene. Try to imagine what the audience see and hear, and also what they don't see or hear. Are any props used? On what or whom is the audience's attention focused?
- Pay special attention to stage directions. Imagine the scene performed: actors speak their lines, but there is also stage business (what actors do besides speaking their lines). A stage direction may take very little time to read and yet correspond to protracted stage business (for example, “they fight”).
- How many actors are present on the stage? Is the stage busy or empty? What characters are on stage? What characters are off stage? When do the actors enter? When do they exit? What characters are spoken of? Are they present on the stage or not?
- Who sees / hears / knows what? Who doesn't?
- How much does each character speak?
- Who controls (or appears to control) the action?
- Do the characters speak in verse or prose? What is the effect? Does it highlight the social rank of the characters? their personality (noble / common, low)? their tone or attitude (formal / casual, colloquial, spontaneous)? the tone of the scene (formal, ritualistic / naturalistic)?
- Pay attention to the relationship between:
 - what is said and what takes place: does the action mirror the dialogue? Does it contradict it? With what effects?
 - Look for signs of dramatic irony (when there is a contradiction between words and acts) or tragic irony (when a character says something that has more relevance than he realizes at the time).

Additional vocabulary:

theatrical

drama: *le théâtre, la littérature dramatique*

dramatic: *théâtral, spectaculaire*

director: *metteur en scène*

scenery, setting: *décor*

line: *réplique*

a play-within-a-play

dumb show: a short pantomime within a play