Elements of Drama

**Dialogue**, the verbal exchanges between characters in a play, typically has three major functions: to advance the plot, to establish setting (time and place of the action), and to reveal characters’ thoughts, responses and emotional states – its most important and consistent function.

**Plot**, **character**, and **theme**, in terms of drama, are generally defined the same as they are for fiction. See your Elements of Fiction handout.

**Stage directions** are a playwright’s written instructions about how the actors are to move and behave in a play. They explain in which direction characters should move, what facial expressions they should assume, how they should speak a line, etc.

**Staging** is a play’s visual detail. This includes such things as the positions of actors on-stage (sometimes referred to as **blocking**), their nonverbal gestures and movements (also called **stage business**), the scenic background, the props and costumes, lighting, and sound effects.

**NOTE:** Although plays can certainly be read and enjoyed as literature, always remember that drama is a staged art. Plays are written to be performed by actors before an audience.