

Theatre

Basic Vocabulary

1. **act** The major sections of a play.
2. **actor** The artist portraying a role for an audience.
3. **ad-lib** To make up words or dialogue on the spot.
4. **antagonist** A person, a situation, or the protagonist's own inner conflict in opposition to his or her goals.
5. **apron** Front part or area of the stage extending past the main act curtain, also called lip.
6. **arena** Type of performance space with audience surrounding all sides of the stage.
7. **articulation** The clear and precise pronunciation of words.
8. **aside** For an actor to speak directly to the audience (not meant to be heard by other characters).
9. **audience** The group that reacts and responds to a theatrical performance.
10. **audition** An opportunity through which a performer is able to demonstrate talent.
11. **backdrop** Painted cloth or set wall built to serve as a background for the setting on stage.
12. **backstage** The area of the stage that is out of sight of the audience.
13. **black box** Type of performance space that is small, created out of a room, painted all black.
14. **blocking** Actors' movement on stage.
15. **box set** A type of setting that is built on the stage to look like the interior of a house or room, having three walls and no ceiling.
16. **build** Rising intensity or climbing action that develops within a scene or entire play.
17. **call** The time one must be at the theatre or ready to go on stage.
18. **callback** A second, more specific audition where a director looks closer at given actors.
19. **cast** The ensemble of actors who portray the roles in a play.
20. **casting call** A pre-production process for selecting a certain type of actor, dancer, singer, or extra for a particular role or part in a script, screenplay, or teleplay.
21. **catharsis** For an audience to have an emotional reaction while watching a performance

where they purge themselves of their pity and fears.

22. **center stage** The center area of the stage.
23. **character** The personality or part an actor recreates.
24. **characterization** The process of creating a character whose words and actions are determined by the elements of the play.
25. **choreography** *from the Greek words "χορεία" (circular dance, see choreia) and "γραφή" (writing); the art or practice of designing sequences of movements of physical bodies (or their depictions) in which motion, form, or both are specified. Choreography may also refer to the design itself. A choreographer is one who creates choreographies by practicing the art of choreography, a process known as choreographing.*
26. **climax (crisis)** The high point of action, conflict, or dramatic tension within a scene or a play. The decisive point in the plot of a play on which the outcome of the remaining actions depends.
27. **cold reading** A first look at a script, seeking an actor's interpretation of the text, without rehearsing first; used at an audition.
28. **collaboration** The act of working together in a joint intellectual/artistic effort.
29. **commedia dell'arte** A professional form of theatrical improvisation, developed in Italy in the 1500s, featuring stock characters and standardized plots.
30. **comedy** A light and amusing play that typically has a happy ending.
31. **conflict** The action when two opposing forces meet.
32. **context** The interrelated conditions in which a play exists or occurs.
33. **costume** Any clothing worn by an actor on stage during a performance.
34. **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.
35. **cross** To move from one point of the stage to another. Symbolized by an X in blocking notation.
36. **cue** The signal an actor or technician receives or uses to begin an action, a line or a movement.
37. **denouement** The final resolution of the conflict in a plot.
38. **design** The creative process of developing and executing aesthetic or functional designs in a production, such as costumes, lighting, sets, and makeup.

39. **dialogue** The conversation between actors on stage.
40. **diction** The actor's ability to be understood.
41. **director** The person who oversees the entire process of staging a production.
42. **downstage** The area of the stage closest to the audience.
43. **dramatic irony** Happens when the audience knows more information about the plot and situations in a play than certain characters do.
44. **dramatic mediums** Telling stories through stage, film, television, radio or technology.
45. **dramatic structure** The special literary style in which plays are written.
46. **dramaturg** A person who provides specific in-depth knowledge and literary resources to a director, producer, theatre company, or even the audience.
47. **dress rehearsal** The final rehearsal(s) of a play before it opens to the public; utilizing all costumes, props, lighting, sound, and set changes.
48. **Elizabethan theatre** The theatre of England during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I and often extended to the close of the theatres in 1640.
49. **ensemble** A group of theatrical artists working together to create a theatrical production.
50. **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.
51. **farce** A comedy with exaggerated characterizations, abundant physical or visual humor, and, often, an improbable plot.
52. **exposition** The background information of a story, usually told at the beginning of a play through narration or dialogue.
53. **flat** A constructed piece of scenery, usually made of wood and/or canvas, used to create a set wall or backdrop for a stage setting.
54. **floor plan** A drawn picture of a set, as seen from a bird's eye view (from above), using geometric shapes to represent set pieces and levels.
55. **fly system** A system of rigging and ropes that is used to raise and lower scenery within on stage, operated by hand or mechanically from backstage.
56. **follow spot** A concentrated source of light that illuminates a performer on stage, and stays with them as they move; most often coming from a spotlight instrument.
57. **fourth wall** An imaginary wall between the actors and the audience.

58. **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.
59. **gesture** An expressive movement of the body or limbs.
60. **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.
61. **house** The area in a theatre/auditorium where the audience sits.
62. **improvisation** The spontaneous movement and speech creating a specific character in a particular situation. A spontaneous style of theatre in which scenes are created without advance rehearsing or scripting.
63. **intention** What the character wants from the other character(s) in a scene.
64. **interpretation** Choices the actor, director and designer make together to clarify the role or play.
65. **Kabuki** One of the traditional forms of Japanese theatre, originating in the 1600s and combining stylized acting, costumes, makeup, and musical accompaniment.
66. **level** The height of an actor's head as determined by his or her body position (e.g., sitting, lying, standing, or elevated by an artificial means).
67. **makeup** Cosmetics and sometimes hairstyles that an actor wears on stage to emphasize facial features, historical periods, characterizations, and so forth.
68. **masks** Coverings worn over the face or part of the face of an actor to emphasize or neutralize facial characteristics.
69. **masking** Curtains, drapes, or set walls that are used to block the audience's sight from the backstage. 2. Used in stage combat to block the audience's sight from certain moves.
70. **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. A style of overacting that focuses on contrived action rather than realistic characterization or situations; dramatized for effect.
71. **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.
72. **minstrel show** Musical theatre that usually consisted of performances of traditional African-American music and dance provided by white actors in blackface and characterized by exploitive racial stereotypes.

73. **monologue** A long speech by a single character.
74. **motivation** A character's reason for doing or saying things in a play.
75. **musical theatre** A type of entertainment containing music, songs, and, usually, dance.
76. **Noh** One of the traditional forms of Japanese theatre in which masked male actors use highly stylized dance and poetry to tell stories.
77. **objective** A character's goal or intention.
78. **pacing** The tempo of an entire theatrical performance.
79. **pageant** Any elaborate street presentation or a series of tableaux across a stage.
80. **pantomime** Performing without words, expressing meaning through physical actions/gestures.
81. **performance** A live event shared between theatre artists and an audience.
82. **pit** The area, usually below the front part of the stage, where the orchestra is set up to play the music for a live performance.
83. **pitch** The highness or lowness of the voice.
84. **play** The stage representation of an action or a story; a dramatic composition. A piece of work written in dialogue form usually with a beginning, middle and end, broken into one to three acts.
85. **playwright** A person who writes plays.
86. **plot** The sequence of events in a play, generally including rising action, a climax and a resolution.
87. **presentational** A style of performance where the characters or performers make aware of the audience's presence, often breaking the fourth wall.
88. **production values** The critical elements of a production, such as acting, direction, lighting, costuming, sets, and makeup.
89. **projection** The placement and delivery of volume, clarity, and distinctness of voice for communicating to an audience.
90. **properties (props)** Physical items an actor interacts with on stage.
 a. ***stage props:** large, stay on the set.
 b. ***hand props:** small, used by many actors.
 c. ***personal props:** used only by one actor, and stays with them.
91. **proscenium** The most common type of theatre space, known for its framed arch

(proscenium arch) that outlines the stage opening, having the audience facing one side directly in front.

92. **protagonist** The main character of a play and the character with whom the audience identifies most strongly.
93. **puppetry** Almost anything brought to life by human hands to create a performance. Types of puppets include rod, hand, and marionette.
94. **raked** (A type of stage that) slopes downward towards the audience, built at gradual angle.
95. **reader's theatre** A performance created by actors reading script rather working from memory.
96. **rehearsal** Practice sessions in which the actors and technicians prepare for public performance through repetition.
97. **rising action** The middle part of a plot consisting of complications and discoveries that create conflict.
98. **role** A part or character that an actor interprets in a performance.
99. **run-through** A rehearsal moving from start to finish without stopping for corrections or notes.
100. **scene** The basic structural element of a play.
101. **script** The written text of a play.
102. **sense memory** Memories of sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and textures. It is used to help define a character in a certain situation.
103. **set** Physical environment in which the actors perform.
104. **sides** Selections taken from a script used for an actor to read a scene aloud (usually used at an audition for a cold reading).
105. **sight lines** The audience's view of a performance space.
106. **spike** To mark the stage floor, usually with colored tape, where set pieces will rest.
107. **stage** The acting area.
108. **stage business** Small actions performed by an actor which may enhance character or develop plot.
109. **stage combat** A style of acted movement that is planned out, or choreographed, to look like real fighting between characters within a performance.
110. **stage crew** The group of people working on set construction, props, lighting, sound, costumes, and make-up.

111. **stage left** The area of the stage to the actor's left as the actor faces the audience.
112. **stage right** The area of the stage to the actor's right as the actor faces the audience.
113. **stage manager** The person in charge of all elements of a play during the run of a performance. Responsible for all backstage duties and jobs. Calls a show for cues and transitions. Often acts as "second in command" and assistant to the director.
114. **stock characters** Established characters, such as young lovers, neighborhood busybodies, sneaky villains, and overprotective fathers, who are immediately recognizable by an audience.
115. **strike** To take down a set or remove scenery or props from the stage; happens immediately at the end of a production run before the next show is brought in.
116. **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.
117. **subtext** Information that is implied by a character but not stated by a character in dialogue, including actions and thoughts The true meaning behind a spoken or scripted line, as interpreted by an actor.
118. **tableau** A silent and motionless depiction of a scene created by actors, a frozen moment. Created by posing still bodies. The plural is tableaux.
119. **technical theatre** Designers and artists who collaborate to create and produce the visual and aural elements of a play.
120. **text** The printed words, including dialogue and the stage directions for a script.
121. **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.
122. **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.
123. **theatrical conventions** The established techniques, practices, and devices unique to theatrical productions.
124. **theatrical experiences** Events, activities, and productions associated with theatre, film/ video, and electronic media.
125. **theatrical games** Noncompetitive games designed to develop acting skills and

popularized by Viola Spolin.

126. **theme** The underlying meaning of a play or literary work.
127. **thrust** A type of performance space where the audience surrounds three sides, and raises high above a very open stage; usually there is no main act curtain.
128. **tragedy** A form of a play or theatre where the main character suffers a reversal or downfall.
129. **traveler** A type of curtain or masking (black) that hides the audience's view of the backstage.
130. **understudy** A performer who studies the part of another role, so that they might perform it in the absence of the actor who was originally cast.
131. **upstage** The area of the stage farthest from the audience; used as a verb, to steal the focus of a scene.
132. **vocal quality** The characteristics of a voice, such as shrill, nasal, raspy, breathy, booming, and so forth.
133. **volume** The degree of loudness or intensity of a voice. The actor's ability to be heard.
134. **wings** The offstage areas directly to the right and left of the performance space.