Act: A major division in a play. An act can be sub-divided into scenes. (See scene). Greek plays were not divided into acts. The five act structure was originally introduced in Roman times and became the convention in Shakespeare’s period.

Antagonist: A character or force against which another character struggles.

Aside: Words spoken by an actor directly to the audience, but not "heard" by the other characters on stage during a play. Example: In Shakespeare's Othello, Iago voices his inner thoughts a number of times as "asides" for the audience

Catharsis: The purging of the feelings of pity and fear. According to Aristotle the audience should experiences catharsis at the end of a tragedy.

Character: An imaginary person that inhabits a literary work. Dramatic characters may be major or minor, static (unchanging) or dynamic (capable of change).

Comedy: A dramatic work in which the central motif is the triumph over adverse circumstance, resulting in a successful or happy conclusion.

Complication: An intensification of the conflict in a play

Deus Ex Machina: When an external source resolves the entanglements of a play by supernatural intervention. The Latin phrase means, literally, "a god from the machine." The phrase refers to the use of artificial means to resolve the plot of a play.

Dramatic Irony: A device in which a character holds a position or has an expectation reversed or fulfilled in a way that the character did not expect but that the audience or readers have anticipated because their knowledge of events or individuals is more complete than the character’s. **(We know something a character doesn’t and it creates suspense)**

Dynamic Character: Undergoes an important change in the course of the play- not changes in circumstances, but changes in some sense within the character in question -- changes in insight or understanding or changes in commitment, or values.

Foreshadowing: Anton Chekhov best explained the term in a letter in 1889: "One must not put a loaded rifle on the stage if no one is thinking of firing it." Chekhov's gun, or foreshadowing is a literary technique that introduces an apparently irrelevant element is introduced early in the story; its significance becomes clear later in the play

Fourth Wall: The imaginary wall that separates the spectator/audience from the action taking place on stage.

Hamartia: Fatal character flaw leading to one’s downfall. Hubris is a form of hamartia.

Hubris: The Greek term hubris is difficult to translate directly into English. This negative term implies both arrogant, excessive self-pride or self-confidence, and a lack of some important perception or insight due to pride in one's abilities. This overwhelming pride inevitably leads to a downfall.

Protagonist: The main character of a literary work.

Round Characters: A round character is depicted with such psychological depth and detail that he or she seems like a "real" person.

Scene: A traditional segment in a play. Scenes are used to indicate (1) a change in time (2) a change in location, (3) provides a jump from one subplot to another, (4) introduces new characters (5) rearrange the actors on the stage. Traditionally plays are composed of acts, broken down into scenes.

Scenery: The physical representation of the play's setting (location and time period). It also emphasizes the aesthetic concept or atmosphere of the play.

Soliloquy A speech meant to be heard by the audience but not by other characters on the stage (as opposed to a monologue which addresses someone who does not respond). In a soliloquy only the audience can hear the private thoughts of the characters. Example: Hamlet's famous "To be or not to be" speech.

Stage Direction: A playwright's descriptive or interpretive comments that provide readers (as well as actors and directors) with information about the dialogue, setting, and action of a play.

Static Character: A literary or dramatic character who undergoes little or no inner change; a character who does not grow or develop.

Suspension of Disbelief: Basically the term means that you accept something as real or representing the real when it obviously is not real. In drama this is a crucial.

Stock Character: A recognizable character type found in many plays. Comedies have traditionally relied on such stock characters as the miserly father, the beautiful but naïve girl, the trickster servant.

Tragedy A type of drama in which the characters experience reversal of fortune, usually for the worse. In tragedy, suffering awaits many of the characters, especially the hero.

Tragic flaw: A weakness or limitation of character, resulting in the fall of the tragic hero.

Tragic hero: A privileged, exalted character of high repute, who, by virtue of a tragic flaw and/or fate, suffers a fall from a higher station in life into suffering.