




How to respond to a play




Use this guide sheet to help you develop your own personal response to any play.



Understanding

- Context
 - When was the play written? 
 - Where is it set?
 - What do you know about society at the time it was written?
 - Who were the intended audience? What were they like? How would they have reacted to the play? Is this different to how a modern audience would react?
 - Who is the playwright? What do you know about them? Why did they write this play?
- What is the play about?
 - Where is it set? Time, place, era.
 - What kind of setting or staging is utilised?
 - What happens?
 - What is the main plot? Is there a subplot?
 - How does the play begin and end?
 - What are the **themes**?
 - How does the action progress?
- What is the genre?
 - Is this a tragedy, comedy, romance? How do you know?
 - To what extent is this genre adhered to?
 - Is there a subgenre?
- Characters
 - Who are the characters? What are their roles?
 - How do they act / speak?
 - What do they add to the play?
 - How do they change or develop? Why?
 - How do they interact with others?
 - What do they represent? 
 - How do they link to the themes?
- What methods are used by the playwright?
 - Symbolism
 - Dramatic devices
 - Language
 - Imagery
 - Circular structure
 - What is the effect of each?
- What is the **message**?
 - What are the '**big ideas**' that are presented?
 - What does the playwright want you to understand?
 - Is their message still relevant today?
 - Why did they write the play?
 - What are their concerns/ideas? 
 - Is there a moral/religious/philosophical lesson?
 - Is this a universal message? A personal message? A societal message?
 - Why does the playwright want to leave you with this message?
 - Are they highlighting, critiquing, emphasising, revealing etc.

What are 'big ideas'?

These are the bigger issues that are being presented in the play. These can be *social, political, environmental, moral, existential or religious*. These are often ideas that go beyond what is merely written on the page e.g. a play about a family may actually be about wider societal issues. Try and think about what is being suggested in the play and see if you can spot any *wider issues* that the playwright may be alluding to. 

How to respond to a play: methods



Analysing: consider the methods used and analyse their effect. The methods are like the writer's toolbox.

You will need to be able to identify the methods used by the writer and comment on their effect. You should not merely technique spot, but should instead consider why these methods have been used, how they reinforce the message and what effect they have on the audience.

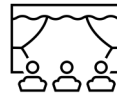
Language

- o What kinds of words have been used?
- o Try and identify word classes. What are the connotations of these words? Why have they been used? What do they suggest about the characters/action/relationships? How do these words enhance a technique or vice versa?
- o Has imagery been used? Why? What does it reveal? How does it enhance the meaning?



Dramatic Devices

- o Identify the different dramatic devices used.
- o Why have they been used? What is the effect?
- o How do they reinforce the message/meaning?
- o How do they help to create a tone/mood?
- o How can you interpret meaning?
- o What do these devices reveal about character/action/events/setting/ relationships?
- o How do the devices reflect the themes?



Structure and Form

- o What can you say about the structure of the play?
- o How do events develop and progress?
- o How are characters introduced? When? Why at this point? How do they develop throughout the play?
- o When do characters enter and exit? Why?
- o How do characters interact with and speak to each other?
- o Does the tone change or is it consistent?
- o How is the stage utilised? What are characters doing? How? Why?
- o Does the setting change? Why?
- o Is there a shift in the direction of the action? At what point?
- o How does the play begin and end?
- o How does it look on the page? What is the effect?
- o Where are the key events? How are they linked?
- o Where is the climax? How does the writer prepare the audience for this?
- o Is anything repeated? When? How? Why? What does this represent? How does this move the action forward and link events or characters?



Remember to consider the effect on the audience. How is this achieved? Why?



Dramatic Devices & Form

Long pauses and silences	Stage directions	Sound and music	Props
Entrances and exits	Monologue	The introduction of characters	Foreshadowing
Interruptions	Soliloquy	Lighting	Dialogue vs stage directions
Length of sentences and speech	Beginning and ending of acts and scenes	Time	Asides
Dramatic irony	Symbols	Chorus	Dialogue

Using 'what, how, why' to develop your response



What – this indicates when you are providing a personal response (What do you see? What is presented? What do you learn?)

How – this often refers to method and techniques (How is this shown?)

Why – this often refers to writer's intention or message (Why has this been used? Why are you being shown this? Why is it presented in this way?)

What

- What do you see?
- What do you think?
- What is your impression?
- What is your view?
- What do you learn?
- What do you understand?
- What is being presented?
- What is the writer showing you?
- What can you say about character/action/themes/relationships/events?



How

- How do you know this?
- How is it shown to you?
- How is it presented?
- How are you affected?



Why

- Why does the writer do this?
- Why does the writer present it in this way?
- Why does the writer want you to feel this way?
- Why has this word / technique been used?



Developing your analysis: guiding questions



Points – Development and analysis	Development by linking – take ideas further
<p>What kind of mood/tone/atmosphere is created? How? Why?</p> <p>What do you learn about the characters/action/relationships/themes? How are these presented? Why?</p> <p>What is the intended effect of...? How is this achieved?</p> <p>What technique/dramatic device has been used?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why has it been used? • What is the effect? • How does it reinforce the message? • How does it reinforce your point? • How does it reinforce or reflect the themes? • Can you <u>double up</u> on the techniques used? • What is the effect? • Why was it chosen? <p>What kind of language has been used? Diction/word choice/imagery?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the connotations? • How does it affect the audience? • Why has it been used? Why this particular word? • Where is it? Why? • How does it reinforce the message/playwright intention? • How does it reinforce your point? <p>How is the audience supposed to feel/react? How do you know?</p> <p>What ideas are expressed/presented? How? Why?</p>	<p>Link to context as a way of developing interpretation of meaning: What do you know about the time period? What do you know about the playwright? Why was the play written? Issues that the playwright is commenting on.</p> <p>Link to the genre: What is the genre? What do you know about the features of this genre? To what extent does the play adhere to the features of the genre? Why?</p> <p>Link to playwright's intention: What is their message? How does your example show this? What do they want you to understand? How do you know? What do they want you to do? How do you know?</p> <p>Key phrases: This suggests This implies This reinforces This reveals This shows</p> <p>The writer is: Critiquing Highlighting Subverting Presenting Emphasising</p>