

“The Play’s The Thing.....”



**Podcast One:
What Is a Play?**

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Podcast One Agenda--What Is a Play

- Welcome/Start-Up's
- The Podcast Series
- The Handout
- Preview of Topics
- Who am I? (Your host, Andrew Black, Playwright)
- How Is Theater Unique as an Art Form? (And implications for playwrights)
- What Are some Defining Characteristics of the Well-Made Play? (And what types of narrative that are likely to benefit most from this podcast series?)
- Your Assignments



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How Is Theater Unique as an Art Form?

Key characteristics that distinguish theater from other art forms:

1. A play unfolds in real time in front of a live audience. The performer and the audience breathe the same air and exchange energy.
2. There is a feedback loop between the audience and the actor. The art product changes based on audience response.
3. The audience sees something happening that it knows will never happen again in exactly the same way.
4. Anything can happen in live theater; the bugs have not been worked out.
5. Theater is a collaborative art that requires the input and coordination of artists from a wide variety of different disciplines.



Food for thought. Think back to an experience you have had in the theater—

1. Have you noticed the impact it has on you when actors demonstrate emotion while in the same room with you? If not, go see a play in a small theater and notice the way the actors’ emotions affect you.

2. Can you recall a time when the reaction of the audience had an impact on the performance of a play? What was it? If not, go see a play and observe how small audience reactions (laughter, silence) impact the performance and the actors.

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How Is Theater Unique as an Art Form? (Continued)

Food for thought. Think back to an experience you have had in the theater—

3. Have you ever had the experience of watching something in a theater that that you knew was totally unique to that performance—something that would never happen again in exactly the same way? (Plays which include audience interaction of some kind often fall into this category). What effect did this have on you?



4. Can you recall a time when you saw a play and something did not seem to go as it was supposed to? (A prop is missing on stage, an actor misses a line). What impact did this experience have on you?

5. Have you noticed the collaborative nature of the theater during a performance? (actors with actors, actors with crew, tech personnel) How does this effect your experience of the play?

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What Is a Play?

There are key defining characteristics of a well-made play. The principles in these podcasts will apply best to that type of play. In art, there are rarely firmly drawn lines. So, the principles apply to most types of narrative. The distinctions made in this podcast are best defined as a continuum with three broad categories: “Definitely Is” a play, “Could Be” a play, “Is Probably Not” a play.

Definitely Is	Could Be	Is Probably Not
Text-Based: A play has a script and is based primarily on written words or language.	Text-Based with music (Musical)	Other Form-Based (Opera, Ballet, Dance, Circus, Music Concert/Cabaret)
A unified story with a beginning, middle and end. The story is revealed primarily through dialogue and character actions.	Short plays held together by a frame or common theme	A Collection of Things (Review, Variety Show, Vaudeville), Magic Show, Light Show, Skits
Theatrical Reality/Fictional/Illustrative/ Metaphoric	Based on or Inspired by True Events/Artistic Storytelling	Actual Reality/Docu-Theatre, Found Object Theater, Memoir/Fact-Based Storytelling
Written to be performed live in front of an audience	Taken from other sources and re-written to be performed live in front of an audience/Readers’ theater	Taken from another source and performed live in front of an audience with no changes/Poetry or Fiction readings Movie scripts
A variety of lengths	Full-length, one act or ten-minute	A one-pager (probably)

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What Is a Play? (Continued)

Food for thought. Think back to some of your favorite theatrical experiences—

1. Using the table above, see if you can determine which of the experiences fully meet the criteria of “definitely is” a play. List those below. Can you think of other performative or theatrical experiences which, though satisfying and enjoyable, may not have, strictly speaking, “definitely” been a play? List those below.

2. For the play that you are writing or thinking about writing, does it meet the criteria for “Definitely Is”? Where does it fall into the “may be” a play? Are there any adjustments that might need to be made to the way you think about your work? What are they?

