Drama Terms: 15 Brief Definitions

1. **Anagnorisis/recognition**: point in the play during which the tragic hero experiences a kind of self-understanding; the discovery or recognition that leads to the peripeteia or reversa

2. **Antagonis**t: the character who opposes the protagonist.

3. **Catharsis**: a purgation of emotions. According to Aristotle, the end of tragedy is the purgation of emotions through pity and terror.

4. **Dramatic irony**: the words or acts of a character may carry a meaning unperceived by the character but understood by the audience. The irony resides in the contrast between the meaning intended by the speaker and the different significance seen by others.

5. **Foil**: any character in a play who through contrast underscores the distinctive characteristics of another, particularly the protagonist.

6. **Freytag's pyramid:**

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|   | 2. **Complication**: the part of a plot in which the entanglement cause by the conflict of opposing forces is developed. |   | 4. **Falling action** or resolution: exhibits the failing fortunes of the hero   |   |
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| 1. **Exposition**: introductory material that gives the background of the play |   |   |   | 5. **Denouement**: the unraveling of the plot of the play |

7. **Hamartia**: tragic flaw

8. **Hubris**: overweening pride or insolence that results in the misfortune of the protagonist of a tragedy. Hubris leads the protagonist to break a moral law, attempt vainly to transcend normal limitations, or ignore a divine warning with calamitous results.

9. **Peripeteia/reversal**: reversal of fortune for the protagonist--from failure to success or success to failure.

10. **Proscenium or proscenium stag**e: an arch that frames a box set and holds the curtain, thus creating the invisible fourth wall through which the audience sees the action of the play.

11. **Protagonist:** the chief character in a work

12. **Stock character**: conventional character types whom the audience recognizes immediately. Examples: the country bumpkin, the shrewish wife, the braggart soldier

13. **Thrust  or apron stage**: A stage that projects into the auditorium area, thus increasing the space for action; a characteristic feature of Elizabethan theaters and many recent ones.

14. **Tragic hero**: According to Aristotle, the protagonist or hero of a tragedy must be brought from happiness to misery and should be a person who is better than ordinary people--a king, for example. In "Tragedy and the Common Man," Arthur Miller argues that the ordinary man can also be a tragic hero.

15. **Unity of time, place, and action** ("the unities"): limiting the time, place, and action of a play to a single spot and a single action over the period of 24 hours.