

Melodrama – Knowledge Organiser

Melodrama

Melodrama is a style of drama in which is characterised by its sensationalism. The characters are stereotypical and their reactions are exaggerated and highly emotional. The storylines extremely eventful, often with 'life and death' situations, intending to entertain and shock the audience. Good triumphs over evil in melodrama, with the baddies getting their come-uppance.

Stock characters

Stock characters are a form of stereotype, which we expect to see in a particular style of drama. Their appearance, behaviour and speech is predictable. In melodrama, we would expect to see, for example, the Maiden, the Hero and the Villain, and we would be able to identify them easily from their actions and appearance.

Language

The word choices made by the playwright/actor. Word choices can say a lot about a character, including social class, educational background, emotional state, relationships with others, nationality and profession.

Structure

The structure of a play is the 'shape' of the action. Typically in melodrama, we begin with **exposition** (who's who and what's going on), build **tension** towards the **climax**, draw the plot together through the **denouement** and end with **resolution**.

Costume design

With the characters being stereotypical, costume design in melodrama would usually reinforce these stereotypes. Colour might be used symbolically (red for danger, black for a villain, white for purity etc) and accessories might be added for dramatic effect, e.g. a cloak to swish menacingly.

Set & lighting

The set in a melodrama should create an atmosphere. There may be shadowy corners in which a villain could lurk. You may need several doorways for dramatic entrances/exits and thrilling chase sequences. Levels could also suggest status, such as high platforms for the powerful characters. The lighting could help create shadowy corners, or sudden flashes could add dramatic effect to surprise entrances. Colour could be used symbolically such as red for danger and white for purity.

