CH. 1 WHAT IS THEATRE?

HOW WE DEFINE THEATRE CAN BE MORE COMPLICATED THAN YOU PROBABLY THINK!
THE BASE WORD “THEATRE” COMES FROM THE GREEK WORD “THEATRON”

• THAT TRANSLATES LITERALLY AS SEEING PLACE

• BUT- IT IMPLIES MORE THAN THAT:
   • IT IMPLIES THAT THEATRE IS A VISUAL ART
   • IT IMPLIES THAT THEATRE IS WHERE YOU GO TO “SEE” SOMETHING
   • IT IMPLIES THAT THEATRE INVOLVES ACTIVE VIEWING OF AN EVENT
THINK OF WAYS YOU’VE HEARD THE WORD “THEATRE” USED?

• THEATER OF WAR
  • SPARE ME YOUR THEATRICS

• MOVIE THEATER

• KABUKI THEATRE

• HOME THEATER

• THEATRICALITY

• THEATRE ARTS

TO NAME JUST A FEW...
SO THEATRE CAN MEAN MANY DIFFERENT THINGS BUT- WAIT- WHAT ABOUT HOW YOU SPELL IT?

- THERE IS, IN FACT, DEBATE ABOUT THE SPELLING OF THEATRE WITH EITHER AN “ER” OR “RE” ENDING

- LOTS OF TIME AND LANGUAGES HAVE ALTERED THE SPELLING OF THE WORD

- FOR NOW- IT IS SAFE TO THINK OF IT THIS WAY:
  - THEATER- REFERS TO THE BUILDING OR SPACE
  - THEATRE- REFERS TO THE ART FORM ITSELF

- REALLY THIS IS NO GIANT DEAL BUT SIMPLY A FUN EXCURSION IN SPELLING (IF THERE IS SUCH A THING)
ANOTHER RELATED WORD: DRAMA

- DRAMA COMES TO US FROM THE GREEK WORD “DRAN” MEANING “TO DO”

- IT IMPLIES ACTION- ACTIVITY- SOMETHING ACCOMPLISHED
THESE TERMS (THEATRE AND DRAMA) ARE NOT INTERCHANGEABLE!!!

• SOMETIMES YOU’LL HEAR PEOPLE USE THEM AS THOUGH THEY MEAN THE SAME THING- THEY DO NOT!

• THINK OF HOW YOU HAVE HEARD “DRAMA” USED…
  • HE IS BEING DRAMATIC
  • THERE IS TOO MUCH DRAMA AROUND HERE
  • DON’T BE A DRAMA QUEEN
  • SAVE THE DRAMA FOR YOUR MAMA

© JW Morissette. All Rights Reserved.
Clearly- Drama is different from Theatre

- Theatre is the art form. It is the viewing of an event. It can also mean the building where the event is held.

- Drama is what is done in the theatre. It is the actual action of the story.

- And to complicate things even more: Drama doesn’t always have to be serious. Today’s use of the word tends to lend a serious tone to the word but it simply means- the action of something that is done!
FOUR WAYS TO USE THE TERM THEATRE:

• THEATER AS A “PLACE”

• THEATRE AS A “COMPANY OR TROUPE”

• THEATRE AS A “JOB OR OCCUPATION”

• A MORE GENERAL: THEATRE AS AN “ART”
THEATER AS “PLACE”:

• THE PHYSICAL BUILDING

• AN EXTANT 4TH CENTURY BC GREEK THEATRE HOLDS AS MANY AS 17,000 SPECTATORS

• THAT IS SIMILAR TO OUR OWN STATE FARM CENTER WHICH SEATS 15,500- (SURE, PRIMARILY USED FOR BASKETBALL BALL BUT IT HOUSES TOURING THEATRE SHOWS TOO!)
THEATRE AS “COMPANY OR TROUPE”

- THEATRE ARTISTS OR PRACTITIONERS- THE PEOPLE PART (WHICH WOULD ALSO INCLUDE THE “LIVE” ASPECT DISCUSSED IN THE INTRO)
THEATRE AS “JOB OR OCCUPATION”

• YES- CONTRARY TO POPULAR BELIEF THEATRE CAN BE YOUR JOB, THE WORK YOU DO WITH YOUR LIFE, AND YOU CAN ACTUALLY BE PAID!

• A SHORT LIST OF “JOBS” IN THEATRE- JUST TO GET US STARTED(WE’LL HEAR MORE ABOUT ALL OF THESE THIS SEMESTER):

  Producers  Crews  Playwrights
  Directors  Stage Managers  Critics
  Designers  Actors  Box Office Staff
  Builders  House Manager  Agents

© JW Morrissette. All Rights Reserved.
COCKTAIL PARTY PHRASES

• EVER BEEN TO COCKTAIL PARTY? EVER BEEN TO A FORMAL PARTY WHERE SMALL TALK IS EXPECTED? EVER FIND YOURSELF WONDERING WHAT TO SAY? LOOKING FOR INTERESTING THINGS TO CHIT-CHAT ABOUT ON A JOB INTERVIEW WHEN EVERYONE HAS HAD ENOUGH SHOP TALK? WANT TO AMAZE PEOPLE WITH HOW WELL ROUNDED YOU ARE?

• USE OUR HANDY COCKTAIL PARTY PHRASES- IMPORTANT GEMS THAT CAN BE REAL CONVERSATION STARTERS!
Cocktail Party Phrase #1

• This is important while we’re looking at the people who make up the world of theatre-

“theatre is a collaborative art form”
• THEATRE IS COLLABORATIVE - EVERYONE WORKS TOGETHER TO CREATE A SINGLE PROJECT. MULTIPLE ARTISTS (ACTORS, PLAYWRIGHTS, DESIGNERS, DIRECTORS, DRAMATURGS… ETC.) COME TOGETHER AROUND A SINGLE PROJECT.

• THEATRE RELIES ON THIS COLLABORATION OF MANY, MANY PEOPLE IN ORDER FOR IT TO BE CREATED.

• THIS IS UNIQUE IN MOST ART FORMS - WHILE THERE CERTAINLY ARE ARTS THAT REQUIRE MORE THAN ONE ARTIST VERY FEW ARTS COMPARE WITH THE NEEDED COLLABORATION OF THE THEATRE!

© JW Morrissette. All Rights Reserved.
THEATRE AS “ART”

• YOUR TEXT ATTEMPTS TO DEFINE “ART” AS “… A SUPREME PURSUIT OF HUMANITY, UNIQUELY INTEGRATING OUR EMOTIONS WITH OUR INTELLECTS AND OUR AESTHETICS WITH OUR REVELATIONS.”

• WHILE THAT IS TRUE IT IS ALSO IMPORTANT TO RECOGNIZE THAT THE INDIVIDUAL HAS THE POWER TO DEFINE “ART” FOR THEMSELVES. YOU, PERSONALLY, CAN DEFINE “ART” TO YOUR OWN SPECIFICATIONS- BUT- THAT DOES NOT NEGATE WHAT SOMEONE ELSE DEFINES TO BE “ART.” THERE IS PLENTY OF ROOM FOR MULTIPLE DEFINITIONS.
Perhaps the most basic definition of theatre is:

- A space (and idea to fill that space)
- A performer (or performers)
- An audience

If you remove any of these from the equation you might have something interesting but you don’t have theatre!

- Notice that part of the definition is an audience. That is an integral part of theatre and we’ll be coming back to that!
ONE MORE IDEA OF WHAT IS THEATRE:

THE PARATHEATRICAL
PARATHEATRICAL:

• AN EVENT SHARING SIMILARITIES TO OUR DEFINITION OF THEATRE BUT NOT EXPRESSLY MEANT TO BE THEATRE IN THE FORMAL SENSE. (ACCORDING TO DR. PETER DAVIS HERE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS.)

• PARATHEATRICALS ARE ALL AROUND US ALL THE TIME BUT AREN’T MEANT TO BE FORMAL THEATRE IN THE “ART” SENSE.

• THINK OF IT THIS WAY:

© JW Morrissette. All Rights Reserved.
THESE ACTIVITIES HAVE “THEATRICAL” ELEMENTS:

• A WEDDING (THERE ARE EVEN COSTUMES…)
• A POLITICAL RALLY (THERE ARE USUALLY AUDIENCES…)
• A SPORTING EVENT (THERE IS EVEN AN INTERMISSION…)
• A CONCERT (THERE CAN BE SPECIAL EFFECTS…)
• WATCHING PEOPLE WALK THROUGH THE MALL (THE ULTIMATE FREE THEATRE…)

• WHAT OTHERS CAN YOU THINK OF?

© JW Morrissette. All Rights Reserved.
THESE PARATHEATRICALS PROVE SOMETHING:

• THEATRE ELEMENTS ARE AROUND US ALL THE TIME

• WE USE ELEMENTS OF THEATRE IN OUR EVERYDAY LIVES (HAVE YOU EVER DRESSED IN A PARTICULAR WAY TO HAVE A PARTICULAR IMPACT? THAT IS THEATRE…)

• WE HAVE ALL TRIED ACTING IN SOME FORM (HAVE YOU EVER TRIED TO GET AN EXTENSION ON AN ASSIGNMENT- YOU’VE PROBABLY ACTED A LITTLE…)

• THEATRE IS PART OF OUR LIVES- IF WE LOOK FOR IT.
HOW DO WE VALUE THEATRE AS INDIVIDUALS AND AS A SOCIETY?

• AS WE CONTINUE TO EXPLORE THIS QUESTION WE HAVE LEARNED SOME ADDITIONAL INFORMATION IN THIS CHAPTER:
  • THEATRE CAN MEAN MANY DIFFERENT THINGS
  • THEATRE IS AROUND US ALL THE TIME IN SOME FORM
  • EVEN WITHOUT KNOWING IT WE MAY HAVE USED ELEMENTS OF THEATRE IN OUR DAILY LIVES
  • IF IT HAS MULTIPLE MEANINGS, IS AROUND US ALL THE TIME AND PLAYS A ROLE (THERE’S ANOTHER THEATRE PHRASE BY THE WAY) IN OUR DAILY LIVES:
    • WE MUST HAVE SOME VALUE FOR THE THEATRE!!!