

Tragedy

Wherever, there is tragedy, there is sadness. A baby dies, a person's life is ruined, disaster strikes a village, a drunk driver spirals out of control and hits an innocent pedestrian, a young man gets caught up in a gangster's blood feud. Tragedy is and has always been grim and serious, but how people have understood tragedy has changed over the ages.

Ancient Greek tragedy: The ancient Greeks believed that the universe had a way of balancing itself, so that anyone who got too powerful or lucky was cut down to size by the goddess Nemesis, who would make sure that no one got too proud or arrogant. So tragic, disastrous events often happened to the rich and mighty, like kings or heroes.

Aristotle was a Greek philosopher. He had very precise rules for tragedy. He said that a tragedy always had the following ingredients:

- A powerful man (a king or hero) who was proud. He is not totally good, nor totally bad, but a normal combination of both.
- This man had a fatal weakness in his character, called the **fatal flaw**, which he couldn't see (or he couldn't quite see how it would destroy him). This flaw caused him to make some **fatal mistake** which brought about his **fall** into ruin.
- This man's fall makes us feel **pity**, because usually his ruin was worse than he deserved, but it also makes us feel **fear** because we recognize that we could easily be like him, make a similar mistake and suffer a similar fall.

Medieval Tragedy: In the Middle Ages, people had the sense that fortune was like a wheel that kept turning. Sometimes you get lucky, sometimes you get a big dose of bad luck: the wheel never stops turning. It doesn't really matter who you are or what you've done. If you're at the top you're going down; if you are at the bottom the good news is that you are going up. Medieval tragedies are, therefore, simply the stories of wealthy, powerful, successful people who, whether they deserve it or not, fall into ruin and poverty and misery by an unpredictable turn of "the wheel of fortune". They get thrown from the top to the bottom.

Senecan tragedy or "Revenge tragedy": This tragedy is concerned mainly with the deadly fact that honour, duty, ties and bounds mean that we often feel the need to avenge those who have died, so that if there is a killing, there will be a revenge killing, then another, then another, then another.....the blood doesn't stop. The need or "duty" to get revenge on those who have done wrong to you creates an almost unstoppable chain of violence.

Modern tragedy: Modern tragedy is mainly concerned with the fact that at times it seems that the universe is a cold, uncaring place. No one or nothing seems to care about you or watch over you. In the sense of modern tragedy, it's all space and gas and stars: there is no meaning and no safety. So terrible things happen to good people, and innocents suffer

and die, and there is no reason for it and no help: it's just that way. Example: The Titanic sinks and everyone dies. Why? No reason. It just happened. Tragic.

Your group's tragic story:

Type of tragedy:

Story:

Characteristics of Sophoclean Tragedy

1. It is based on events that already took place, and with which the audience is familiar.
2. The protagonist is a person of noble stature.
3. The protagonist has a weakness and, because of it, becomes isolated and suffers a downfall.
4. Because the protagonist's fall is not entirely his or her own fault, the audience may end up pitying him/her.
5. The fallen protagonist gains self-knowledge.
6. The drama usually unfolds in one place in a short period of time, usually about a day.