

Theatrical Styles

Classical Antiquity				
Style	Popularized	Origin	Description, Characteristics	Prominent Playwrights
Folk forms	Prior to 6 th century BCE	Global	Varies from nation to nation. Traditional and folk forms of theatre related to relationships with the Earth. Sometimes associated with religious/spiritual ritual and ceremony.	
Classical Theatre	6 th century BCE	Greece	Greek theatre originated as an expression of Dionysian worship. Development of the genres of tragedy and comedy. The plays dealt with illustrious figures and significant events, based on legends or remote history, conveying a religious, moral, or political meaning. The cosmos was depicted in the drama, represented on a vertical set: seat of the gods above, place of exile and punishment below, a flat circle of the Earth in the middle, a chorus in the circular orchestra. The function of the chorus was to generalize the particular events by critically observing and interpreting the action of the play. It provided, as it were, the social background. Masks were used to represent character types.	Thespis, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Aristophanes, Menander, Agathon
	240 BCE	Roman	The genres of mime and pantomime were popularized by Romans in the 2 nd century BCE. Seneca divided Greek plays into five acts, exaggerated the melodramatic and violent aspects, emphasized rhetoric, and focused on the conflict between passion and reason which helped to shape Elizabethan drama and French Neoclassical tragedy.	Andronicus, Gnaeus Naevius, Quintus Ennius, Plautus, Terence, Seneca
Medieval Theatre	400-1450 CE	Europe	Originated as an expression of the Christian religion and became abstract representations of biblical themes. Folk play survived as symbolic ritual dramas of the seasons, or as the mimetic elements in dances held at village feasts. The popular entertainers - mimes, acrobats, dancers, jugglers, wrestlers, minstrels, and storytellers - preserved vital skills and eventually began working in courts. The written texts that they developed for performance were literate and often sharply satirical.	Hrosvitha, Hildegard of Bingen, Adam de la Halle

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Baroque Period

Defined as complicated, exaggerated, and ornate, Baroque style often created motion, friction, and intensity by associating aspects of contrast. During the Baroque age, the theatre reflected the growing complexity of ideas, comedic and dramatic elements, plots, and characters. View of the world as a stage where an ordered world is threatened by outside forces. Questions about representation of human beings based on *Poetics* by Aristotle – should human beings be represented as better than they are (tragedy), worse than they are (comedy) or exactly as they are.

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Neoclassicism/ Renaissance	Early 15 th century	Italy	Attempted to recapture the power and prestige of the Roman empire and to revive art, science, and scholarship which was believed to have flourished at that time. Governed by the belief that art should express the ideal virtues in life and could improve the viewer by imparting a moralizing message. Characterized by harmony, clarity, restraint, universality, and idealism, and a hierarchical universe.	Ludovico Ariosto, Ruzzante, Claudio Monteverdi, Jean-Baptiste Lully
	Early 17 th century	Europe	National unity and a desire to create a strong national culture drove the renaissance in theatres across Europe. Preoccupation with the general and representative. Exploration of harmony and conflict, illusion and reality.	Pierre Corneille, Jean Racine, Moliere, Joost van den Vondel, Philippe Quinault
Spanish Golden Age	Early 16 th century	Spain	Comedia nueva consisted of three-act plays in varied verse, mixing high and low, tragedy and comedy, and utilized plots from history, myth and legend, the Bible, popular ballads, and Italian novella.	Lope de Vega, Miguel de Cervantes, Pedro Calderon de la Barca
Elizabethan Theatre	16 th century	England	Theatre in touch with all segments of society. Lack of scenery placed the emphasis firmly on the actor interpreting the playwright's words. Belief that art mirrored nature.	William Shakespeare, Christopher Marlowe, Ben Jonson
Jacobean Theatre	Early 17 th century		Plays were both dramas and comedies and reflected the social and political unrest of the day as well as belief in witchcraft and ghosts.	John Webster, Thomas Middleton, John Ford
Restoration Theatre	Late 17 th century		Characterized by its witty dialogue, comedic situations, and exploration of themes such as love, marriage, and social dynamics.	Aphra Behn, Sir George Etherege, John Dryden

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Humanism				
Free will, human motivation, and embracing individual growth are key concepts of humanist philosophical orientations.				
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Enlightenment	Early 18 th century	France Italy America	Reason is the primary source of authority and legitimacy, and advocated such ideals as liberty, progress, tolerance, fraternity, constitutional government, and separation of church and state. Jean-Jacques Rousseau wrote, 'the general effect of the theatre is to strengthen the national character to augment the national inclinations, and to give a new energy to all the passions'.	Diderot, Voltaire, George Lillo, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Vittorio Alfieri. Richard Steele, Oliver Goldsmith, Richard Brinsley Sheridan, Marivaux, Carlo Goldoni. Carlo Gozzi, John Rich, Royall Tyler
Romanticism / Gothic / Shinpa	Early to mid- 19 th century	Europe Japan	Characterized by emphasis on emotion and individualism and glorification of the past and nature. Emphasized intense emotion as an authentic source of aesthetic experience. Placed importance on experiences of sympathy, awe, wonder, and terror, in part by naturalizing such emotions as responses to the "beautiful" and the "sublime". In the theatre, formalized rules were cast aside to allow for individualistic and passionate expression. The emphasis on detail led toward naturalism on the one hand and a drama of the subjective imagination on the other. Character development became secondary to lively action.	von Goethe, von Schiller, Pixérécourt, Raimund, Planché, Richard Wagner, Victor Hugo, Dumas, George Sand, Alfred de Vigny, Almeida Garrett, Alexandre Herculano, Kyōka Izumi, Kōyō Ozaki, Roka Tokutomi, Matsutarō Kawaguchi
Realism / Shingeki	19 th century Early 20 th century	Europe – Russia America Japan	An effort to satisfy all the theatrical conventions necessary to the production, but to do so in a way that seems to be "normal" life. Portraying characters on stage that imitate real life, with realistic settings and staging. Narratives typically are psychologically driven, and include day-to-day, ordinary scenarios. Narrative action moves forward in time, and supernatural presences (gods, ghosts, fantastic phenomena) do not occur. In Japan, the 'new theatre' movement imitated realism popular in Europe. In the 1920s-40s new theatre productions replaced the practice of translating existing plays.	Tolstoy, Chekov. Ibsen, Stanislavski, Oscar Wilde, William Vaughn Moody, Charles Rann Kennedy, Rachel Crothers, Eugene O'Neill, Arthur Miller, Jacinto Benavente. Kaoru Osanai, Kunio Kishida, Ai Nagai, Yōji Sakate

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Modernism				
The elements of Modernism include a desire to break from tradition, emphasis on individuality, and disillusionment. The characteristics of modernism can be categorized into Experimentation, Symbolism, Absurdity and Formalism (excessive adherence to prescribed forms/styles).				
Style	Popularized	Origin	Description, Characteristics	Prominent Playwrights
Naturalism	Late 19 th , early 20 th century	Europe – France & Germany	Portraying life on stage with close attention to detail, based on observation of real life. Cause and effect are central to the script's structure, with the subjects focused on conflicts of "nature vs. nurture", the natural order of things, survival, notions of evolution. The production style is one of everyday reality. Theatre that attempts to create an illusion of reality through a range of dramatic and theatrical strategies.	Émile Zola, Gerhart Hauptmann, August Strindberg, Chekov, Henry-François Becque, George Bernard Shaw, Romain Rolland, Jacinto Benavente, Rabindranath Tagore
Symbolism	Late 19 th century	Europe – France & Belgium	Seeking to represent absolute truths symbolically through language (dialogue) and metaphorical images, mainly as a reaction against naturalism and realism in favour of spirituality, imagination, and dreams. Lugné-Poe "sought to create a unified nonrealistic theatre of poetry and dreams through atmospheric staging and stylized acting".	Auguste Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, Maeterlinck, Eugénio de Castro, Lugné-Poe, Alfred Jarry, Tennessee Williams
Futurism	Early to mid- 20 th century	Italy	Celebrated industrialisation and technologies of the time. Fought against classical forms of theatre and celebrated the youthful, spontaneous, and satirical. Desire to surprise and excite the audience. Wanted to blur the line between art and life in order to reach below the surface to reality.	Bruno Corra, Emilio Settimelli, Enrico Cavacchioli
Expressionism	Early 20 th century 1920s	Northern Europe America	Presents the world from a subjective perspective, distorting it for emotional effect to evoke moods or ideas. Truth comes from the individual. Staging is particularly important: outward appearance can be distorted and unrealistic to portray an external truth or internal emotional conflict; directors blocked to create 2D movement and made use of heavy lighting effects to create stark contrast. Expressionist plays often dramatise the spiritual awakening and sufferings of their protagonists, the struggle against bourgeois values and established authority.	Ernst Toller, Georg Kaiser, Reinhard Sorge, Walter Hasenclever, Hans Henny Jahnn, Arnolt Bronnen, Bertolt Brecht, Eugene O'Neill, Sophie Treadwell, Elmer Rice, Tennessee Williams, Arthur Miller
Dadaism	1915, 1920s	America, Europe	Rejected logic, reason, & aestheticism of modern capitalist society, favouring nonsense, irrationality, & anti-bourgeois protest. Expressed discontent toward violence, war, & nationalism through performance art.	Tristan Tzara

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Surrealism	1917-1940 1950s	Europe America Africa – Nigeria Asia – Japan	Artists depicted unnerving, illogical scenes and developed techniques to allow the unconscious mind to express itself. Its aim was, according to leader André Breton, to "resolve the previously contradictory conditions of dream and reality into an absolute reality, a super-reality", or <i>surreality</i> . "Total theatre" also developed in Nigeria in the 1950s. It utilised non-Naturalistic techniques, surrealist physical imagery, and exercised a flexible use of language.	Paul Eluard, André Breton, Guillaume Apollinaire, Roger Vitrac, Antonin Artaud, Federico Garcia Lorca, Gertrude Stein, Louis Aragon, Kōbō Abe, Kyōka Izumi
Epic Theatre/ Dialectical Theatre	Early to mid- 20 th century	Europe – Germany Italy Africa - Nigeria	Epic theatre forces audience members to constantly return to rational observation, rather than emotional immersion. Sudden bursts of song, elements of absurdity and breaches of the fourth wall are all prime examples of how this rational observation is constantly revitalized; this idea is known as <i>Verfremdungseffekt</i> (alienation effect). Often used for Political Theatre.	Bertolt Brecht, Erwin Piscator, Luigi Pirandello, Paul Claudel, Hubert Ogunde, Dario Fo
Angura	1960s & 1970s	Japan	Literally an abbreviation of “underground”, <i>Angura</i> reacted against the formal realism of <i>shingeki</i> to create wild, anarchic productions in theatres, tents and outdoors.	Shimizu Kunio, Shūji Terayama, Jūrō Kara, Kōbō Abe, Minoru Betsuyaku, Shōgo Ōta, Ren Saitō, Shimako Murai, Shūji Terayama, Rio Kishida
Theatre of Cruelty	1926-1935	France	A style that employs sensory overwhelm through the excessive use of light and sound to link the unconscious minds of performers and audience. Appropriating conventions from Balinese dance troupes, emotions, feelings, and the metaphysical were expressed physically, creating a mythological, archetypal, allegorical vision, closely related to the world of dreams and based on the notion of ‘primitivism’.	Antonin Artaud, Roger Vitrac

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Postmodern / Avant Garde Theatre

The characteristics of postmodernity include Idealism, Cultural determinism, Irony, Temporal distortion, Intertextuality, Fragmentation, Power reductionism, Paranoia, Pastiche, Hyperreality, and Social Constructivism. Postmodern theatre explores the fallibility of definite truth, the dominance of written text, and experimental theatrical perceptions and representations. Most postmodern productions are centered on encouraging the audience to reach their own individual understanding, challenging and disregarding accepted norms of seeing and representing the world, raising questions rather than supplying answers, and creating its own self-conscious atmosphere sometimes referred to as metatheatre.

Style	Popularized	Origin	Description, Characteristics	Prominent Playwrights
Theatre of the Absurd	Late 1950s	Europe	The plays focus largely on ideas of existentialism and express what happens when human existence lacks meaning or purpose and communication breaks down. The structure of the plays is typically a round shape, with the finishing point the same as the starting point. Logical construction and argument give way to irrational and illogical speech and to the ultimate conclusion—silence.	Samuel Beckett, Eugène Ionesco, Arthur Adamov, Fernando Arrabal, Camus, Sartre, Luigi Pirandello, Bahram Beyzai, Akbar Radi, Ali Nassirian, Bijan Mofid
Theatre of the Oppressed	1950s-1970s	Brazil Europe	Influenced by Pedagogy of the Oppressed by Paulo Friere, Boal's techniques use theatre as means of promoting social and political change. In the Theatre of the Oppressed, the audience becomes "spect-actors" who explore, show, analyse and transform the reality in which they are living. The major branches include: Image Theatre, Forum Theatre, Invisible Theatre, Newspaper Theatre, Rainbow of Desire, and Legislative Theatre.	Augusto Boal, Panagiotis Assimakopoulos
Postmodern Theatre	1960s	Europe America	The postdramatic theatre is characterized by: simultaneous use of multiple art or media forms; mixing existing theatrical forms and genres; broken, paradoxical and imagistic narratives; movement away from linearity to multiplicity (to inter-related webs of stories); fragmented characters (whose fragments stem from a central idea, theme, or traditional character); and meaning-making as a shared experience, rather than something derived from the text. Metatheatrical devices may include: breaking the 'fourth wall' (direct address to the audience or expression of an awareness of the presence of the audience); acknowledging the actors playing the characters, references to acting, theatre, dramatic writing, spectatorship and the metaphor "all the world's a stage"; an element whose meaning depends on the difference between the represented time and place of the drama (the fictional world) and the time and place of its theatrical presentation (the reality of the theatre event); plays-within-plays; etc.	Tom Stoppard, Caryl Churchill, Griselda Gambaro, Heiner Müller, Dimitris Lyacos, Robert Wilson, Robert Lepage, Reza Abdoh

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Minimalism	1960s	Europe America	Informed by Japanese culture and aesthetics, a minimalist theatrical stage design might involve only the essential components of the scene.	Samuel Beckett, Jon Fosse, Dimitris Lyacos, Cormac McCarthy
Poor theatre	1960s	Europe - Poland	Focus is placed solely upon actors, their characterisation and the underlying human relationships by stripping back staging design elements.	Jerzy Grotowski
Site-specific Theatre / Shigaigeki	1970s & 80s	America Australia Japan	<p>A piece of performance which has been designed to work only in a particular non-theatre space. The space may have been adapted to fit into the themes or style of the production. A site-sensitive (or space-sensitive) piece, on the other hand, will not adapt the space, but work with it's style and history to create a piece of performance. Site-specific theatre seeks to use the properties of a unique site's landscape, rather than a typical theatre stage, to add depth to a theatrical production. Sites are selected based on their ability to amplify storytelling and form a more vivid backdrop for the actors in a theatrical production. Variations include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Found space theatre, in which a pre-existing production is placed in an environment similar to the one in which the play is set • Promenade theatre, in which audience members stand and walk about rather than sit, watching the action happening among them and even following the performers around the performance space. <p>“City theatre”, a type of site-specific outdoor semi-street theatre practised in Japan.</p>	Shoji Kokami, Tenjō Sajiki Environmental and Site-Specific Theatre

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Contemporary Theatre				
Style	Popularized	Origin	Description, Characteristics	Prominent Playwrights
Contemporary Colloquial Theatre	1990s	Japan	A theatre style with dialogue based on vernacular Japanese. It contrasted with the more stylised forms of <i>shōgekijō</i> until then.	Oriza Hirata, Toshiki Okada
Postcolonial Theatre / Revolutionary Theatre / Black Revolutionary Theatre	1990s	Africa – Ghana Nigeria Egypt America	<p>Postcolonial theatre addresses the consequences of the decolonization of a country, especially questions relating to the political and cultural independence of formerly subjugated people. Deals with the question of the “subaltern” finding their voice, and issues of identity, race and nationhood. Explores indigenous stories of a place and people before the arrival of Western culture to reclaim cultural memory. Some playwrights emphasize the quest for their own racial and cultural identity as a way to assert their humanity.</p> <p>Revolutionary theatre supports abrupt, rapid, and drastic change, usually replacing the status quo. Theatre used to encourage revolutionary thought and to incite strong political action.</p> <p>Black Revolutionary Theatre attempted to encourage African-Americans to work outside of White institutions and White cultural formats to write from their own experiences.</p>	<p>August Wilson, Tomson Highway, David Henry Hwang, Caridad Svich, Sistren Theatre Collective, Yvette Nolan, Camyar Chai, Marcus Youssef, Ama Ata Aidoo, Kobina Sekyi, Efua Sutherland, Wole Soyinka, Alfred Farag, Hussein Nuri, Amiri Baraka</p> <p>Perfoming Back</p>
Afrofuturism	1990s	African diaspora	<p>“At its core, afrofuturism uses the black experience to create work that is otherworldly, cosmic and surreal. For me, it’s about creative freedom. Using political pain and channelling it. Taking the experience of being ‘othered’ and subverting it into something otherworldly. It’s about using the knowledge of our ancestors to battle the erasure that we experience on a daily basis,” says Keisha Thompson. Expresses notions of Black identity, agency and freedom.</p>	Rachael Young, Keisha Thompson, Vanessa Kisuule, H. "Herukhuti" Sharif Williams, Mojisola Adebayo, Porsha Olayiwola, Marshall "Gripp" Gillson

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