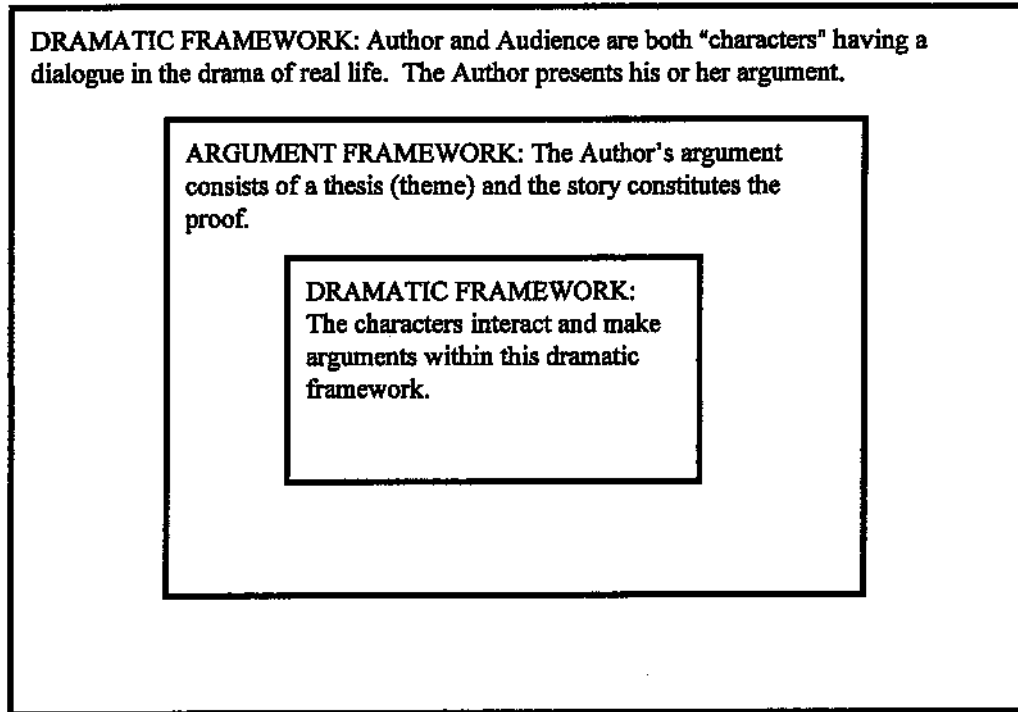


Elements of a Drama/Narrative

I. Master Frame Model

As we read any text carefully we see that the author is trying to persuade us; all texts are truly arguments. At the same time, all texts are staged within a social context, so they are also dramas. We recognize a text as fiction when we see characters making arguments within the double frame model. The master-frame model gives us a way to visualize this concept:



Definition: *Fiction* makes apparent the frames built into nonfictional discourse by making the dramatic frame around argument obvious. In doing so, it adds an additional frame to the text (the inside frame).

II. Elements of a Drama/Narrative

The first critic to analyze plays was the Greek philosopher Aristotle. In *Poetics*, he discussed the elements of drama in terms of two elements: plot and character. The elements of drama can be outlined as follows:

<u>PLOT</u>	<u>CHARACTERS</u>
Time	Tones
Place	Point of View
Occasion	Motives
History	Crucial Decisions
Interaction	
Conflict	

These two basic elements are still present in drama/narrative today. Understanding how each of these elements works can help us better comprehend and evaluate the texts we read.

1. **Plot**--Plot answers the question, "What is happening in a story?" It explains the situational circumstances and the problems and consequences that occur. Fiction is about change and movement. "A story is a story because it tells about a process of change" (Scholes 120) Examining more specific elements of plot will help us understand plot better.
 - a. **Time**--When the story takes place
 - b. **Place**--Where the story takes place
 - c. **Occasion**--Why the events are occurring
 - d. **History**--What occurs between the characters before the story begins
 - e. **Interaction**--How the characters communicate with one another
 - f. **Conflict**--What problems become evident in the text
2. **Character**--Characters answers the question, "Who is the story about?" Characters are the moving forces of a text. They can be static or dynamic, but either way they create change.
 - a. **Tones**--The attitudes of the speaker/character
 - b. **Point of View**--The perspective of each character
 - c. **Motives**--The psychological features which stimulate characters' actions
 - d. **Crucial Decisions**--The possible solutions to the problems in the text

Example

"The Moth and the Star" by James Thurber

A young and impressionable moth once set his heart on a certain star. He told his mother about this and she counseled him to set his heart on a bridge lamp instead. "Stars aren't the thing to hang around," she said; "lamps are the thing to hang around." "You get somewhere that way," said the moth's father. "You don't get anywhere chasing stars." But the moth would not heed the words of either parent. Every evening at dusk when the star came out he would start flying toward it and every morning at dawn he would crawl back home worn out with his vain endeavor. One day his father said to him, "You haven't burned a wing in months, boy, and it looks to me as if you were never going to. All your brothers have been badly burned flying around street lamps and all your sisters have been terribly singed flying around house lamps. Come on, now, get out of here and get yourself scorched! A big strapping moth like you without a mark on him!"

The moth left his father's house, but he would not fly around street lamps and he would not fly around house lamps. He went right on trying to reach the star, which was four and one-third light years, or twenty-five trillion miles, away. The moth thought it was just caught in the top branches of an elm. He never did reach the star, but he went right on trying, night after night, and when he was a very, very old moth he began to think that he really had reached the star and he went around saying so. This gave him a deep and lasting pleasure, and he lived to a great old age. His parents and his brothers and his sisters had all been burned to death when they were quite young.

Moral: Who flies afar from the sphere of our sorrow is here today and here tomorrow.

We will examine Thurber's fable according to plot and character.

PLOT

The plot of the fable is relatively simple.

Time--The story takes place during the young moth's lifetime. It begins when he is young and impressionable and ends when he is a great old age.

Place--The exact location of the story is not specified, but we know that it is a place where moth's reside. Part of the story occurs in the moth's father's house.

Occasion--The events occur because the moth has a great desire to chase a star. The moth has no lamp burns because he spends his time chasing a star; therefore, his parents must confront him.

History--Most likely, moths have been receiving lamp burns for years. Father moth indicates that these burns act as a mark of bravery when he says: "A big strapping moth like you without a mark on him!"

Interaction--The mother and the father communicate with the young moth by confronting him about his vain endeavor. The moth "would not heed the words of either parent." The brothers and sisters of the moth interact with him by setting an example of following the rules.

Conflict--The main problem of the text is the young moth's desire to chase a certain star, instead of following the path of other moths. The parents of the moth believe that the way to "get somewhere" is by hanging around lamps and getting burns.

CHARACTER

The characters of the fable are the young moth, his mother, his father, his brothers and his sisters. We see the actions of the young moth and his parents; we only hear about the actions of the siblings.

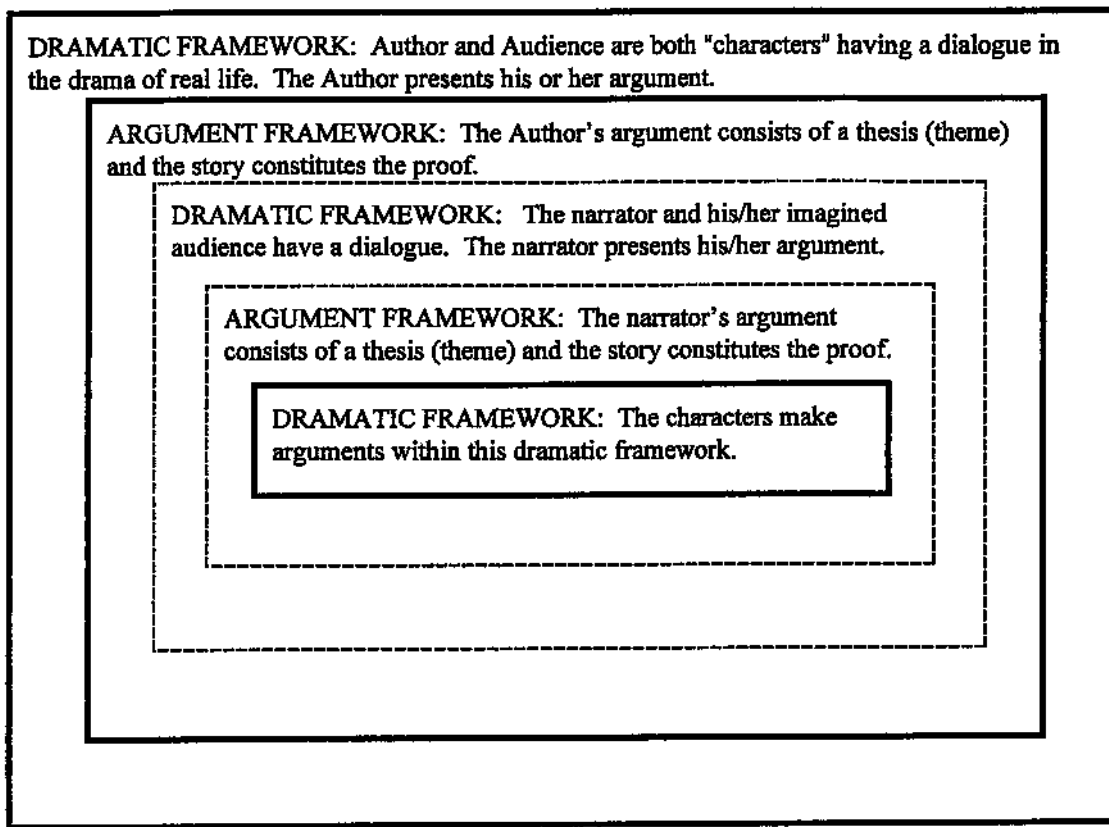
Tones--The attitude of the mother moth is one of superficial disapproval, while the father moth's tone is impatient and condescending. We do not hear the young moth speak, but his actions reveal an attitude of defiance and persistence.

Points of view--The perspective of the moth's family is one of following tradition. They believe that they should hang around lamps and get burnt, like all moths do. The young moth holds a perspective of following what his heart desires. He is not affected by the influence of his family.

Motives--The parents are psychologically influenced by tradition. The young moth is driven by his heart's desire to chase a certain star.

Crucial Decisions--The family of the moth chooses to follow in the tradition of other moths, which means being burned and dying at a young age. The young moth chooses to defy tradition and chase his star, which enables him to live to a great old age.

When analyzing the elements of a drama/narrative, we must consider NARRATIVE VOICE. In Thurber's fable, the author has not separated himself from the narrator. When the author chooses to separate himself from the narrator, usually using a 1st person narrator, we see two additional frames in the text. Our master frame model must be adjusted:



To illustrate how an author uses a 1st person narrator, we can look at an excerpt from Edgar Lee Masters's *Spoon River Anthology*. Masters allows the residents of Spoon River to speak from the grave using the form of epitaphs.

CHASE HENRY

In life I was the town drunkard;
When I died the priest denied me burial
In holy ground.
The which redounded to my good fortune.
For the Protestants bought this lot,
And buried my body here,
Close to the grave of the banker Nicholas,
And of his wife Priscilla.
Take note, ye prudent and pious souls,
Of the cross-currents in life
Which bring honor to the dead, who lived in shame. (10)

In this selection, the narrator becomes a character in the text. The argument is made not only by the author, but also through the tone and point of view of Chase Henry; thus, we can see the reason for the two additional frames.

PRACTICE

Analyze the following short story according to plot and character.

"In the Animal's Court" by Mark Twain

THE RABBIT. The testimony showed, (1), that the Rabbit, having declined to volunteer, was enlisted by compulsion, and (2) deserted in the face of the enemy on the eve of battle. Being asked if he had anything to say for himself before sentence of death should be passed upon him for violating the military law forbidding cowardice and desertion, he said he had not desired to violate that law, but had been obliged to obey a higher law which took precedence of it and set it aside. Being asked what law that was, he answered, "the law of God, which denies courage to the rabbit."

Verdict of the Court. To be disgraced in the presence of the army; stripped of his uniform; marched to the scaffold, bearing a placard marked "Coward," and hanged.

II

THE LION. The testimony showed that the Lion, by his splendid courage and matchless strength and endurance, saved the battle.

Verdict of the Court. To be given dukedom, his statue to be set up, his name to be writ in letters of gold at the top of the roll in the Temple of Fame.

III

THE FOX. The testimony showed that he had broken the divine law, "Thou shalt not steal." Being asked for his defence, he pleaded that he had been obliged to obey the divine law, "The Fox shall steal."

Verdict of the Court. Imprisonment for life.

IV

THE HORSE. The evidence showed that he had spent many days and nights, unwatched, in the paddock with the poultry, yet had triumphed over temptation.

Verdict of the Court. Let his name be honored; let his deed be praised throughout the land by public proclamation.

V

THE WOLF. The evidence showed that he had transgressed the law "Thou shalt not kill.," In arrest of judgement, he pleaded the law of his nature.

Verdict of the Court. Death.

VI

THE SHEEP. The evidence showed that he had manifold temptations to commit murder and 'massacre, yet had not yielded.

Verdict of the Court. Let his virtue be remembered forever.

VII

THE MACHINE. *The Court.* Prisoner, it is charged and proven that you are poorly contrived and badly constructed. What have you to say to this?

Answer. I did not contrive myself, I did not construct myself.

The Court. It is charged and proven that you have moved when you should not have moved; that you have turned out of your course when you should have gone straight; that you have moved swiftly through crowds when the law and the public weal forbade speed like that; that you leave a stench behind you wherever you go, and you persist in this, although you know it is improper and that other machines refrain from doing it. What have you to say to these things?

Answer. I am a machine. I am slave to the law of my make, I have to obey it, under all conditions. I do nothing, of myself. My forces are set in motion by outside influences, I never set them in motion myself.

The Court. You are discharged. Your plea is sufficient. You are a pretty poor thing, with some good qualities and some bad ones; but to attach personal merit to conduct emanating from the one set, and personal demerit to conduct emanating from the other set would be unfair and unjust. To a machine, that is—to a machine.

PLOT

1. **Time**--When does the story take place?
2. **Place**--Where does the story take place?
3. **Occasion**--Why are the events occurring?
4. **History**--What has occurred between the characters before the story begins?
5. **Interaction**--How do the characters communicate with one another?
6. **Conflict**--What problems become evident in the text?

CHARACTER

1. **Tones**--What are the attitudes of the speaker/character?
2. **Points of view**--What is the perspective of each character?
3. **Motives**--What are the psychological features which stimulate the characters' actions?
4. **Crucial Decisions**--What are the possible solutions to the problems in the text?

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