

## Modern Theater

Realism remained the major form of drama during the twentieth century. David Belasco, an important director and producer at the beginning of the century, used extreme realism on stage. Once, instead of building scenery, he moved a real room on stage.

New trends in stage scenery and lighting began to appear. Adolphe Appia and Gordon Craig moved away from flat, painted scenery into three-dimensional designs. They also worked to create mood and atmosphere rather than just a realistic location for the action.

Eugene O'Neill became the first American playwright to have an international reputation. During the 1920s and '30s he wrote many important plays including *Anna Christie*, *The Hairy Ape*, and *Long Day's Journey into Night*.

After World War II, a number of American playwrights emerged. Arthur Miller was a serious playwright who wrote *The Crucible* and *Death of a Salesman*. Many critics consider *Death of a Salesman* to be the greatest American play ever written. Tennessee Williams' plays were both realistic and poetic. Williams' most important plays were *The Glass Menagerie* and *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Lillian Hellman, whose plays included *The Little Foxes* and *The Children's Hour*, was the most influential female playwright of the era.

During the last half of the twentieth century a series of "anti-realistic" styles appeared, but they did not remain important. Some of the anti-realism attempts were symbolism, impressionism, and absurdism.

In the latter twentieth century, many regional theaters were established throughout the United States. The Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis, The Arena Stage in Washington, D.C., and The American Conservatory Theater in San Francisco all began production. Many governments in Europe established subsidized national theaters. The National Theater of Great Britain opened a new major theater complex just a short distance from the former location of Shakespeare's Globe Theater.

Many minority plays achieved production beginning in the 1960s. The largest minority group represented in theater was African-American. The first African-American playwright to achieve major success was Lorraine Hansberry, author of *A Raisin in the Sun*. Other minority theater groups included Hispanic- and Asian-American, feminist, poor, and environmental theater groups.

Recent experiments in theater include the expanded use of multimedia, happenings, and performance art. Happenings seek to break down barriers between the audience and the performers. They do not attempt to tell a story but encourage participation in the process. Performance art uses a variety of the arts. It asks the audience to get from the presentation whatever is meaningful to them.

Today's theater is a mix of styles. The theater is experiencing a period of growth. Audiences are increasing as more and more people enjoy the unique experience of witnessing live theater.



Minority theater began achieving success in the 1960s.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Questions for Consideration**

1. What was the major dramatic form during the twentieth century?

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2. What producer and director brought a real room onto the stage?

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3. What two designers moved toward three-dimensional scenery?

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4. Who was the first American playwright to achieve international fame?

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5. Who wrote *Death of a Salesman*?

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6. Who wrote *The Glass Menagerie*?

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7. Who was the first major female playwright after World War II?

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8. Where is The Guthrie Theater?

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9. Who was the first African-American playwright to achieve major success?

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10. What was the title of her most important play?

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11. What barriers do happenings attempt to break down?

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12. What is the audience expected to get from performance art?

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