

# What is tragic, what is comic? – A Comparison of Dramas



Name:

Date:



## Tragedy and Comedy

Tragedy or comedy - two central forms of drama that, at first glance, could hardly be more different. But what exactly does "**tragic**" mean? And what makes something "**comic**"? The lines aren't always clear, as both forms grapple with human conflicts, emotions and life situations in their own ways. While one can provoke thought or deeply affect us, the other invites laughter - yet often, there's more to both than meets the eye. A comparison helps us better understand the particular characteristics of each genre and more closely examine their impact on the audience.

 **Exercise:** Watch the video carefully and make bullet points for these questions:

- What makes this funny?
- What kind of humor is this?



## Youtube: (21) A Silent Slapstick Comedy (Senior Sketch)

To watch the youtube video just scan the QR code.

<https://youtu.be/g9rOVzySW4g?feature=shared>

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 **Brainstorming:** Create a mindmap, write down what you associate with 'comedy'.


 **Comedy**

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 **Exercise:** Read the following text carefully and then answer the questions about the text.

## Discovering Humor in "Scrawl" by Mark Shulman

"Scrawl" by Mark Shulman is a funny book about a boy named Tod Munn. Tod is not just any boy; he is known as a bully. But as we read, we find out that Tod is actually very smart. He hides his cleverness so he can keep his tough-guy image at school. The book is written like a diary, where Tod writes down his thoughts while he sits in detention. This diary format helps us see inside Tod's mind and learn about his life.

The story is funny because Tod has a unique way of describing things. Even when he talks about school, where he feels like an outsider, he uses humor to show how he sees the world. His funny descriptions make us laugh and help us understand his feelings. For example, Tod talks about glasses in a way that starts off sounding serious but ends up being humorous, showing his bully side.

"Scrawl" is a comedy because it uses humor to talk about serious topics. It shows how Tod feels trapped by his life but still manages to make readers smile. This mix of serious and funny moments is a key feature of a comedy. Comedies often use humor to talk about problems, helping us see things in a new way. In "Scrawl," we laugh at Tod's jokes but also think about his struggles.

Comedies usually have characters who find themselves in tricky situations. They use humor to deal with these problems, just like Tod does. Tod's story shows that even if life is tough, humor can make things feel better. This is why "Scrawl" is a comedy—it shows us how Tod uses laughter to cope with being misunderstood and feeling powerless.

Even though Tod feels alone, his funny thoughts help him connect with readers. We learn that humor can be a powerful tool. This makes "Scrawl" a special comedy that teaches us important lessons through laughter.

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 **Select the correct answer.**

**How does 'Scrawl' use humor to address serious topics?**

- ☐ By making serious topics seem less important
- ☐ By highlighting Tod's struggles through funny moments
- ☐ By focusing solely on jokes without any serious content
- ☐ By ignoring serious topics altogether

**What role does humor play in Tod Munn's character development in 'Scrawl'?**

- ☐ It shows Tod's inability to deal with his problems
- ☐ It helps Tod connect with readers and reveal his true self
- ☐ It makes Tod appear less intelligent
- ☐ It is used to make Tod's story less relatable

**Why is the diary format significant in the comedic aspect of 'Scrawl'?**

- ☐ It allows Tod to express his humor directly to readers
- ☐ It focuses only on Tod's serious thoughts
- ☐ It limits the visibility of Tod's humorous side
- ☐ It emphasizes Tod's inability to write creatively

**How does Tod Munn's humor help him cope with feeling misunderstood?**

- ☐ By making his situation appear more tragic
- ☐ By allowing him to laugh at his own struggles
- ☐ By alienating himself further from others
- ☐ By preventing him from forming connections

**What is the effect of Tod's humorous descriptions in 'Scrawl'?**

- ☐ They make the reader misunderstand Tod's struggles
- ☐ They entertain the reader while revealing Tod's perspective
- ☐ They detract from the seriousness of the story
- ☐ They focus solely on Tod's tough-guy persona

**Why is 'Scrawl' considered a comedy despite its serious themes?**

- ☐ It entirely avoids serious topics
- ☐ It uses humor to provide insight and relief from serious themes
- ☐ It focuses only on Tod's humorous interactions
- ☐ It presents serious themes in a more tragic light

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**🧑 Exercise Partnerwork:** Work with your classmate next to you. For each type of funny stuff listed below, come up with an example from a movie, a TV show, a joke, or just make up a short situation yourselves. Briefly explain what makes it funny:

## **Talking Funny (Verbal Comedy):**

- **Wordplay / Double Meanings:** This is when a word or phrase has two meanings, and both make sense in a funny way.
- **Example:** "I'm the **boss** here, the **cheese!**" (like a boss is in charge, and cheese is in charge of a pizza).
- **Exaggerating (Hyperboles):** Making something sound way bigger or more extreme than it really is.
- **Example:** "I'm so tired, I could fall asleep standing up and keep dreaming!" (No one is **that** tired, but it's funny).
- **Mix-ups with Words:** When someone uses the wrong word by mistake, and it sounds silly or causes confusion.
- **Example:** Someone means to say "pasta" but accidentally says "prostate."
- **Repeating Sentences or Words:** Saying the same thing over and over, which can get annoying but also be really funny.
- **Example:** "I told you so! I told you SO!"

## **Situation Funny (Situational Comedy):**

- **Mixing Up People or Things:** When characters think someone is someone else, or they confuse objects.
- **Talking Past Each Other:** When two people are talking but they don't understand each other because they're thinking about different things.
- **We Know More Than the Characters:** This is when you, the audience, know something important that the characters in the movie or show don't. This can make you laugh because you see what's about to happen.
- **Slapstick / Body Comedy:** Funny actions where people fall down, run into things, or do silly physical stuff.
- **Example:** Slipping on a banana peel, or running head-first into a wall.

## **Character Funny (Character Comedy):**

- **Exaggerating What Characters are Like:** When a character's main personality trait is made super big and over-the-top.
- **Example:** Someone who is **super** stingy, or someone who is **extremely** shy.
- **Opposites Attract (for laughs):** When two characters are totally different (like a really loud person and a very quiet person) and their differences make funny situations.

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**The function of comedy – laughter with meaning?**

 **Thought experiment in the learning group:** Imagine there were only tragedies. What would be different? Why do we need comedies?

 Take notes.

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 **Reading Exercise:** Read the following text carefully, then work on the Matching Task.

## Types of Plays: Tragedy and Comedy

A **play** (or drama) is one of the three main types of literature, along with stories (like novels) and poems. What makes a play special is that it's meant to be performed on a stage. The story usually unfolds through what the characters say to each other.

Inside plays, there are two main kinds: **tragedy** and **comedy**. They are very different in what they try to achieve, what they're about, how the characters are set up, how they sound, and how they make the audience feel.

### Tragedy

**Tragedy** is the older type of play and used to be thought of as more important. It started way back in ancient Greece and grew out of special ceremonies honoring a god named Dionysus.

#### What they're about:

- Tragedies deal with **serious, important problems** that often involve big life questions, right and wrong, or society.
- They focus on a **main character** (often called a "tragic hero") who is usually someone important, like a king, a noble, or a wise person.
- This main character gets into a **problem they can't solve** because of their own actions, a personal flaw, or outside forces (like fate or the gods).
- This problem always leads to a **terrible ending**, usually the main character's downfall, death, or complete failure.
- Big ideas in tragedies include **guilt, responsibility, fate, fairness, human mistakes, or hubris** (when someone thinks they're better than everyone else or even gods).

#### How they're built:

- Old tragedies often have **five parts** (like chapters):
  - **Beginning:** Introduces where and when it takes place, the main people, and the main problem.
  - **Building Up:** The problem gets bigger and more intense.
  - **Turning Point:** The moment where the hero's fate takes a major change, usually for the worse.
  - **Falling Action:** The results of that turning point become clear, and the hero's failure starts to show.
  - **Disaster:** The main problem ends with the hero's downfall.
- The language is often **fancy and dramatic**, and in older times, it was often written in poetry.
- Tragedies want to make the audience feel strong emotions like **"fear and pity."** This feeling is supposed to help them "cleanse their souls" (a process called **catharsis**), which was an idea from an old Greek thinker named Aristotle.

#### Examples of Tragedies:



- **Oedipus Rex** by Sophocles
- **Hamlet** or **Macbeth** by William Shakespeare
- **Faust, Part One** by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe
- **Intrigue and Love** by Friedrich Schiller

## Comedy

**Comedy** is a type of play that's meant to be entertaining and often makes fun of society. It also started in ancient Greece, but it wasn't seen as "high art" as much as tragedy at first. Over time, though, it became an important and respected type of play.

### What they're about:

- Comedies talk about **everyday problems** or social issues in a **light, funny way**.
- The story often involves **mistaken identities, misunderstandings, accidents, or tricks**.
- The characters are usually **regular people** from everyday life; they aren't heroes or important figures like in tragedies.
- Problems come from personal flaws, social rules, or everyday arguments between people.
- Unlike tragedies, comedies usually end happily: things get sorted out, couples get together, and social rules are made fun of or fixed.
- Comedies don't just entertain; they also often **criticize society's problems**, rules, or people in charge.

### How they're built:

- Comedies can also have five acts, but they often follow the structure less strictly.
- The language is usually **everyday, clever**, and full of **wordplay, irony, and sarcasm**.
- Characters are often **types of people** (like the stingy person, the joker, the trickster), which helps create funny situations.
- The goal of comedy is to make the audience **laugh**, but also to make them **think**.

### Examples of Comedies:

- **The Imaginary Invalid** by Molière
- **A Midsummer Night's Dream** by William Shakespeare
- **Minna von Barnhelm** by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing
- **The Physicists** by Friedrich Dürrenmatt (sometimes also seen as a dark comedy)

## Differences Between Tragedy and Comedy

The main differences between tragedy and comedy are how they handle problems and how they make the audience feel:


- **Tragedy** shows serious problems with a sad ending to make people feel deep emotions and think deeply about life.
- **Comedy** takes similar, or even simple, problems and deals with them in a funny way, leading to a happy solution. It makes the audience laugh and entertains them.

While tragedy shows people being controlled by a greater fate, comedy shows people with their everyday weaknesses - often in an exaggerated way, but this helps us recognize and criticize them.

### Tragedy

### Comedy

Characters are often types of people, aiming to make the audience laugh and think. · Deals with serious, important problems involving big life questions, right and wrong, or society. · Talks about everyday problems or social issues in a light, funny way. · Language is fancy and dramatic, often written in poetry. · Aims to evoke strong emotions like fear and pity for catharsis. · Problems stem from personal flaws or social rules, with happy endings. · Built with five parts: Beginning, Building Up, Turning Point, Falling Action, Disaster. · Focuses on a main character, often an important figure, facing an unsolvable problem leading to a terrible ending. · Language is everyday, clever, full of wordplay, irony, and sarcasm. · Involves mistaken identities, misunderstandings, accidents, or tricks among regular people.

 **Discussion Question for the class:** Which kind of 'improvement' do you prefer? Are you more likely to think deeply through laughter or through being deeply affected?

 **Write your answers here.**

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## Comedy vs. Tragedy - The Impact Debate

**Prepare a debate:** Divide into two groups: "Team Comedy" and "Team Tragedy." Each group gathers arguments for why their form of drama leaves a more impressive/lasting impact on the audience. Afterwards, each group presents its arguments. Register your arguments in the following table.

Arguments for Comedy	Argumente for Tragedy

 **Exercise:** Add the other group's arguments to your table.

**NOTE FOR TEACHER:** Concluding discussion in plenary: "Is there a 'winner'? Or do both forms fulfill their own, important function?" Emphasize that both forms of drama are valuable and effective in their own ways.