Playwriting Challenge #6: Dramatic Structure & Comedy

Dramatic tension or, keeping an audience hooked to the story of your play. Playwrights create tension by planting questions in the “mind” of the audience.

Your job as the playwright:
- set up the question and get the audience to really want to know the answer.
- Resist the urge to answer the question!
- increase the tension on either side, so the audience really wants to know what happens.
- Imagine it’s a see-saw, and you are trying to balance out this see-saw so it doesn’t tip one way and not the other.

For Example:
There’s a fox. He is approaching a chicken coop. The Fox is hungry.

There are chickens inside. They are a nervous bunch.

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**QUESTION:** Will the chickens open the door?
(element of danger: if the chickens answer the door the fox could eat them.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fox claims to be a cable repairman. He has a tool belt and looks legit.</th>
<th>Tactic 1</th>
<th>The chickens are suspicious. They don’t actually need their cable repaired. It’s working just fine.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fox asks if they’re sure their cable isn’t working, he’s all booked up until early next month.</td>
<td>Add ticking clock / deadline</td>
<td>Chickens go to check their TV... the cable isn’t working! And their favorite show comes on in a half an hour!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The fox cut the cable.</td>
<td>Dramatic Irony: something the audience knows, that the characters don’t know</td>
<td>The chickens never had cable to begin with.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**COMEDY:**
A joke is a set-up, and a punch line.

**Set Up:** What was the elephant doing on the freeway?

**Punchline:** About 5 mph

You are setting up expectations and then not meeting them or twisting them.

Let’s imagine that the fox finally gets into the chicken coop. What is something totally unexpected that he might find in there?

**For your playwriting challenge #6: Write two scenes.**

One with dramatic tension:
- Define the question you want your audience to wonder
- Increase the tension with tactics and a deadline
- Show and don’t tell

One with a comedy set up:
- Set up expectations and deliver something totally unexpected

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