

Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

Dr. Faustus

by Christopher Marlowe

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Dr. Faustus

Notes

Aristotelian Tragedy

In order to understand the character of Dr. Faustus and formulate intelligent conclusions about his function as a tragic hero in the play, students must have a working knowledge of Aristotle's concept of tragedy. In order for a work to be a tragedy, Aristotle believes several characteristics must be in place.

First, in Aristotle's *Poetics*, Aristotle asserts that plot of the tragedy must govern the whole drama. The drama must have a clear beginning, middle, and end, and all of the events in the drama need to be unified by their action. None of the events should be in any way random or unnecessary to the plot.

Second, the tragedy's main character must be a man who is like everyone else, someone with whom most people can relate. At the same time however, this same main character must be a person of high esteem. For example, in *Dr. Faustus*, Doctor Faustus is very intelligent, and is well known as a scholar. He has several degrees and is well versed in many different disciplines.

Finally, in an Aristotelian tragedy, the main character must possess a tragic flaw that brings about his downfall. The hero of the drama should have a change in fortune that is brought about by the actions in the plot. The audience should feel pity for the tragic hero as the hero understands the reason for his change in fortune.

Morality Play

The morality play was influential in the later half of the 15th century. The main theme of the morality play is religious, specifically dealing with the conflict of good and evil in man. Like the Aristotelian tragedy, the morality play's main character is a man who is like every man. The man suffers temptations and conflicts and makes moral decisions. In the morality play, other characters are introduced in order to remind the main character of his moral obligations. The focus of the plot in a morality play is the conflict within the main character's soul.

All references come from the Dover Thrift edition of *Dr. Faustus*, copyright 1994.

Dr. Faustus

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. discuss the classical roots of Aristotelian tragedy.
2. cite evidence from the play in order to support or refute the statement that Dr. Faustus is a tragic hero.
3. discuss the roles of the characters, such as Mephistophilis, as they affect the decisions of Dr. Faustus.
4. discuss the purpose of a morality play and how Doctor Faustus fits the criteria of a morality play.
5. discuss the author's writing style, including hyperbole, allusion, and irony.
6. explain the function of the Good Angel and Evil Angel in the play.
7. supply textual evidence to support or refute themes in the play.
8. understand the role of the comic scenes in the play.
9. define and cite an example of irony.
10. explain one role of the chorus.

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Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. What questions or concerns would the play have raised for an Elizabethan audience in terms of Dr. Faustus' obvious rejection of popular religious beliefs? How would an Elizabethan audience view the play?
2. What limits of power does Dr. Faustus discover in his quest for knowledge?
3. What is the objective of Dr. Faustus when he first begins his study of black magic? How are the objectives of Dr. Faustus achieved or changed throughout the play?
4. Discuss how the theme of "selling one's soul" is applicable today.
5. Support Dr. Faustus as a morality play or a tragedy. Could it be a combination of the two? How?
6. Explain the concept of Hell as illustrated in the play.
7. Account for the sins of Dr. Faustus. What are they? What manifestations do those sins take?
8. Discuss the role of religion in the play. What comment does Marlowe seem to be making about the Catholic faith, and how would this have been received in an Elizabethan audience?
9. Provide examples of the supernatural in the play. Why are they included?
10. Explain the purpose of the Clown and Robin in the play. How do they contrast Faustus?
11. Cite lines from the play that either support or refute the notion that Dr. Faustus is an Aristotelian tragic hero.
12. Cite examples in the play that support the thematic statement: Man faces a constant internal struggle as he tries to live a moral life.
13. Explain the use of practical jokes as they demonstrate Faustus' decline from a great scholar to a simple person who only finds delight at the expense of others.
14. Explain the symbol of blood as it is used in the play and cite specific examples of its use.
15. Explain the purpose of the chorus' last speech in the play.

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Prologue

Vocabulary

audacious – daring or bold

dalliance – amorous play

necromancy – conjuring of the spirits of the dead for purposes of magically revealing the future or influencing the course of events

vaunt – to make a vain display of one's own worth or attainments

1. Who introduces the story of Dr. Faustus?

2. Where was Faustus born?

3. Where did Faustus attend school?

18. Valdes believes they will be famous if they are resolute in their study. How does Faustus convince him that he is willing to proceed in the study of “black magic” and that he will not waiver?

19. Why do you think Valdes says to Faustus, “First I’ll instruct thee in the rudiments./And then wilt thou be perfecter than I”?

Scene X

Vocabulary

entreaty – an earnest request
execrable – detestable
injurious – abusive
mirth – gladness
paramour – lover
penance – an act performed to show sorrow or repentance for sin
pre-eminence – outstanding
requited – avenged

1. Of what does the Emperor question Faustus and what does the Emperor request?

2. What is Faustus' response?

3. What information does the Emperor wish to possess? Who does he specifically mention?
