William Shakespeare is one of the most popular writers of all time. Many of the plays written by Shakespeare are known as tragedies. Learn more about Shakespeare's writings, including their elements and structure, and test your knowledge with a quiz.

Introduction to Shakespeare

**William Shakespeare** is one of the most famous authors in English literature known for writing tragedies. Some consider Shakespeare's play *Hamlet* to be one of the best plays ever written. Some of the most popular tragedies written by William Shakespeare include *Romeo and Juliet*, *Macbeth,* and *King Lear.* All of these tragedies are widely studied and performed.

Elements of Shakespeare's Tragedies

Some of the most common elements in Shakespearean tragedies are:

* The **fatal flaw** - all of the heroes in Shakespeare's tragedies have a weakness in personality that eventually leads to their downfall.
* Fall of the nobleman - many of the men in Shakespeare's tragedies have extreme wealth and power, making their downfall more tragic.
* External pressure - Shakespeare's tragic heroes often fall victim to external pressure from others, such as evil spirits and manipulative characters who play a role in their downfall.
* Hero - The hero has opportunities for redemption but never takes advantage of these in time, which leads to death.

Shakespeare's tragedies usually share several features, including:

* Shakespeare's tragedies begin in an ordered society but end with chaos.
* Change is often reflected by changes in the environment, with storms or other happenings in the natural world.
* The audience often develops sympathy for the hero.
* The protagonist is usually a person of good character who is destroyed by his own ego or desire for self-advancement.

Two Types of Shakespeare's Tragedies

Shakespeare's tragedies were written throughout his career, starting with *Titus Andronicus* and *Romeo and Juliet*. Shakespeare's tragedies can be divided into two groups. Some of his tragedies focus on love, such as *Romeo and Juliet*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *Othello*. Each of these tragedies involve lovers who are torn apart for some reason. These tragedies involve characters who have no control over their fate and are separated by things beyond their control. They are informally known as the 'heart' tragedies.

Shakespeare's 'head' tragedies' bring to mind the Greek philosopher Aristotle's theories of dramatic tragedy. In a 'head' tragedy, the fatally flawed **protagonist**, or main character, is capable of free will but often has his positive traits overcome by ego. *Othello* and *Troilus and Cressida* are considered by some experts to be borderline heart/head tragedies, since they combine elements of love and drama.

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