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M.E.G.- 17

American Drama

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By: Kshyama Sagar Meher



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**Sample Preview
of the
Solved
Sample Question
Papers**

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QUESTION PAPER

June – 2023

(Solved)

AMERICAN DRAMA

M.E.G.-17

Time: 3 Hours]

[Maximum Marks: 100

Note: Answer any five questions. Each question carries equal marks.

Q. 1. Describe Expressionism in the light of the plays by O' Neill — 'The Emperor Jones', 'The Hairy Ape' and 'All God's Chillun Got Wings'.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-3, Page No. 20, 'Expressionism' and Chapter-23, Page No. 212, Q. No. 3.

Q. 2. What is a 'Musical'? Discuss the idea of social awareness in a Musical.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-4, Page No. 30, 'Musical Theatre and Its Kind' and Page No. 31, 'American Musical Theatre and Its Socio-Cultural Milieu'.

Q. 3. What is a Farce? Gather an outline regarding its development across time and culture.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-8, Page No. 68, Q. No. 1 and Page No. 69, Q. No. 2.

Q. 4. Do you think that 'Naturalism' was highly influenced by Darwin's natural selection and Freud's psychological theory? Justify your answer.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-10, Page No. 83, 'Naturalism' and Page No. 81, 'Characteristics'.

Q. 5. Discuss the emergence of Marxist Literary Criticism with reference to American drama.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-12, Page No. 104, 'Marxist Theory of Literature'.

Q. 6. Locate the idea of Absurd Theatre in its historical context.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-17, Page No. 149, 'Theatre of the Absurd'.

Q. 7. Discuss Modernism with reference to T.S. Eliot's 'A Family Reunion'.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-16, Page No. 138, 'Modernism in the Family Reunion'.

Q. 8. Attempt short notes on the following:

(a) Who is Afraid of Virginia Woolf?

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-19, Page No. 168, Q. No. 1.

(b) The Glass Menagerie

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-26, Page No. 241, 'The Glass Menagerie' as an Avant Garde Play: Key Concepts (Rejection of Realism of the Influence of Expressionism, Surrealism and Plastic Theatre)'.
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(c) Avant Garde Plays

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-26, Page No. 241, 'Introduction' and Page No. 247, Q. No. 6.



QUESTION PAPER

December – 2022

(Solved)

AMERICAN DRAMA

M.E.G.-17

Time: 3 Hours]

[Maximum Marks: 100

Note: Answer any five questions. Each question carries equal marks.

Q. 1. Discuss the salient features of American drama.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-1, Page No. 6, Q. No. 3 and Page No. 2, 'American Drama Comes of Age : Drama in the Twentieth Century'.

Q. 2. Discuss how Arthur Miller contributed to the growth of modern American drama.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-2, Page No. 13, 'Arthur Miller: Playwright of our Social Conscience' and Page No. 16, Q. No. 3.

Q. 3. Describe the journey of theatrical realism in American literature. Mention the textual references.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-2, Page No. 11, 'The Beginnings of Theatrical Realism' and Page No. 16, Q. No. 1.

Q. 4. Explain various forms (any four) of American drama.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-3, Page No. 19, 'Forms'.

Q. 5. 'Desire Under the Elms' is a naturalistic play by O'Neill that brought the theme of Greek tragedy in a rural New England setting. Discuss.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-24, Page No. 221, Other Important Question.

Q. 6. Analyze T. S. Eliot's contribution towards Poetic Drama.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-14, Page No. 120, 'Eliot's Contribution to Poetic Drama'.

Q. 7. Discuss the forerunners of Absurd Theatre in America.

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-18, Page No. 156-157, 'Forerunners of the Theatre of the Absurd: Comus and Satire' and 'Roots'.

Q. 8. Write short notes on the following:

(a) Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf ?

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-19, Page No. 168, Q. No. 1.

(b) The Family Reunion

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-15, Page No. 128, 'Introduction' and 'Detailed Critical Analysis of the Play'.

(c) A Raisin in the Sun

Ans. Ref.: See Chapter-11, Page No. 95, 'Plot of a Raisin in the Sun'.



Sample Preview of The Chapter

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AMERICAN DRAMA

BLOCK-1 : AMERICAN DRAMA: AN INTRODUCTION



The Beginning of American Drama

INTRODUCTION

Puritans contributed to the growth of American literature. In 1620, Puritans founded the first Puritan colony in Plymouth, renaming their recently discovered country New England. Early writers had trouble creating a tradition. The majority of the authors drew inspiration for their writing from British writers of the time. To create a distinctive corpus of writing that would be uniquely American, the first phase involved seeking personal identification. Invoking nationalist sentiments among the general populace was the second stage, which inspired individuals to wish to impose their rule over more untamed areas. Ironically, even though it wasn't the aim, this step was as British as it could possibly be in contrast to the first. Drama in America faced a number of other potential obstacles besides the absence of a rich literary tradition. American drama never quite attained the heights of its British counterparts because to Puritan opposition to and suspicion of the potential social function of theatre. "Generic Hegemony" is another reason why American drama is still on the back burner today. Drama has historically received less attention at American universities than prose or poetry, which has discouraged ambitious writers and students from taking this art form seriously. The majority of American drama is centred on these three titans of the genre: Tennessee Williams, Eugene O'Neill, and Arthur Miller.

CHAPTER AT A GLANCE

FROM TYLER TO BELASCO: THE EARLY AMERICA DRAMA

The Contrast by Royall Tyler (1787) is the first American comedy to be performed by trained actors. The tendency of Americans to adopt English habits is

made fun of in the play. William Dunlap, regarded as the father of American theatre, is credited with writing *Andre: A Tragedy in Five Acts*, the first American tragedy to be written about an American topic (1788). He created about 60 plays. Dunlap carried on the dramatic tradition by thoroughly translating Greek melodramas. He wrote 29 plays. His best-known works include *The Father* (1789), *The Stranger* (1798), *The Italian Father* (1799), and *History of the Rise and Progress of the Arts of Design in the United States*, a three-volume prose work that was first published in 1834.

Bronson Howard (1842-1908) made a significant contribution to the gradually rising popularity of writing about American society with plays like *Young Mrs. Winthrop* (1882), *One of Our Girls* (1885), *Wives* (1879), *The Banker's Daughter* (1878), which was first produced in 1873 as *Lillian's Last Love*. *Shenandoah* (1889) and *The Henrietta* (1887) were two of Bronson's earliest successes. Clyde Fitch (1865-1905) began his literary career with melodramas and history plays, but they did little to increase his popularity. *Nathan Hale* (1898), *The Climbers* (1901), *The Girl with the Green Eye* (1902), *The Woman in the Case* (1905), *The Truth* (1907), *The City* (1909), and *Girls* (1910) are some of Clyde's best-known pieces.

David Belasco (1853-1931), known as the Bishop of Broadway, produced 374 plays. Belasco, who was more of a theatrical technological experimenter than a dramatist, popularised the use of lensed spotlights. James O'Neill, the father of Eugene O'Neill, is recognised for his work with lesser-known playwrights and actors who later rose to fame. Belasco is credited with writing the plays *Hearts of Oak* (1879), *Men and Women* (1890), *The Girl of the Golden West* (1905), among others. He is known for his adaptation of

Madame Butterfly for the stage. Augustus Thomas (1857-1934) was one of the first authors to write about Native Americans. *Alabama*, which debuted in 1891, became his first theatrical success. The native subject is covered in the plays *Arizona* (1900), *In Mizzoura* (1893), *Colorado* (1900), and *Rio Grande* (1916). The outstanding work by Belasco is *Copperhead* (1916).

“AMERICAN DRAMA COMES OF AGE”: DRAMA IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Intriguing changes occur in American drama as the twentieth century gets under way. Melodrama, which dominated American drama in the 19th century, gave way to more modern psychological topics. O’Neill’s plays examined the status of the man in society, Miller’s plays examined family dynamics, Wilson’s works tackled racial concerns, and desire, sex, and death appeared frequently in 20th century theatre. The icing on the century-long cake of drama were stagecraft experiments, the introduction of unique forms and dramatic methods, and new performing techniques. Realisticism, which emerged in the mid- to late-19th century primarily as a response to romanticism, promoted the portrayal of men and manners in a language refined and elevated to such dramatic extremes that the veracity of the subject being portrayed seemed questionable. Realisticism became the dominant dramatic style of the 20th century.

William Vaughn Moody and Percy MacKaye authored some famous plays. Well-known works by Moody include *The Great Divide* (1907), *The Mystery of Hamlet King of Denmark* (1910), *Sappho and Phaon* (1907), *Jeanne D’Arcin* (1907), *The Scarecrow* (1908), *Anti-Matrimony* (1910), and *What We Will* (1910). Some of the most realistic American drama ever was created by Arthur Miller and Eugene O’Neill. O’Neill’s first published work was the play *Beyond the Horizon*, which made its Broadway debut in 1920 and went on to win the Pulitzer Prize for Drama the following year. The Nobel Prize recipient is the author of several notable plays. There are four Pulitzer Prize for Drama winners on the list: *Beyond the Horizon* (1920), *Long Day’s Journey into Night* (1957), *Strange Interlude* (1928), and *Anna Christie* (1922). His reputation as an expressionist has been aided by his works like *The Emperor Jones* (1920), *The Hairy Ape* (1922), and *All God’s Chillun Got Wings* (1924). In the post-war, industrialised era when individuals were looking for a place to fit in, O’Neill created the legendary character of Bob “Yank” Smith, a realistic representation of the struggling section of society known as the labour class.

Thornton Wilder (1897-1975) was one of Eugene O’Neill’s contemporaries who had the most impact. *Our Town* and *The Skin of Our Teeth*, two tragedies by Thornton, were awarded the Pulitzer Prize for theatre in 1938 and 1942, respectively. In 1927, Wilder’s second book, *The Bridge of San Luis Rey*, likewise won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction. Clifford Odets (1906-1963), a fellow heir to Eugene O’Neill, collaborated with Group Theatre to advance the principles of Method Acting, which were created by Russian actor and director Constantin Stanislavski.

Waiting for Lefty, Odets’ first play, depicts the story of taxi drivers planning a strike in 1935. There are small stories throughout the performance. Arthur Miller was greatly influenced by *Awake and Sing!* (1935), another play by Odet. Arthur Miller (1915-2005), one of the most controversial yet well-known playwrights in America, was born after the First World War. After O’Neill and Miller, Tennessee Williams (1911-1983), who wrote the famous dramas *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955) and *Streetcar Named Desire* (1947), was America’s third most well-known dramatist. *Summer and Smoke* (1948), *The Rose Tattoo* (1951), *Camino Real* (1953), *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955), *Orpheus Descending* (1957), *Garden District* (1958), and *Sweet Bird of Youth* (1959) are some of Williams well-known pieces. The 1948 Pulitzer Prize went to Williams. *The Pittsburgh Cycle*, a collection of ten plays, was written by American playwright August Wilson (1945-2005). Wilson has won a sizable number of honours and prizes. Wilson’s use of realism is characterised by the fact that he based his characters on people he knew in real life; David Bedford, Wilson’s stepfather, is said to have been the inspiration for Troy Maxson in *Fences* (1987). Many of Wilson’s plays are set in Pittsburgh, which is where he was born.

The strong foundation of American drama established in the first half of the 20th century was expanded upon by talented writers like Williams, Miller, Wilson, and others. It would be appropriate to refer to the 20th century as the Golden Age of Drama. Several playwrights carried on the European practice of experimenting with the theatre, despite the perception that realism and expressionism predominated American drama in the 20th century. Edward Albee is one of the absurdists in America, alongwith Samuel Beckett, Eugène Ionesco, Arthur Adamov, and Jean Genet. Edward Albee contributed to the Americanization of this tradition with plays like *The Zoo Story* (1958), *The Sandbox* (1959), *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1962), etc. Three of his plays—*A Delicate Balance*

THE BEGINNING OF AMERICAN DRAMA / 3

(1965), *Seascape* (1975), and *Three Tall Women* (1994)—were given the Pulitzer Prize for Drama.

CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN DRAMA

Much of the modern theatre in America is motivated by topics like AIDS, homosexuality, and other similar topics. One of America's most outspoken homosexual playwrights, Tony Kushner, brought delicate subjects to the stage like the AIDS crisis in New York in the 1980s. Kushner's contemporary David Mamet (born 1947), who started writing plays in 1970 with *Lakeboat*, drew inspiration from his own experiences as a cook on cargo ships. Critics paid more attention to Mamet's second play, *The Duck Variations* (1972). Nevertheless. The play is centred on a discussion between two elderly men on duck mating behaviour, although this just serves as a convenient excuse for other, more interesting talks to take place. His profanity-filled next piece, *Sexual Perversity in Chicago* (1974), is about the extramarital affairs of Deborah, Danny, Joan, and Bernie.

Glengarry Glen Ross, Mamet's drama that received the most favourable reviews, debuted in 1984. The lives of salesmen involved in the Chicago real estate industry are the subject of this drama. This play by Mamet garnered him the Pulitzer Prize in 1984. Mamet is an active author. His notable pieces include *The Shawl* (1985), *Speed-the-Plow* (1988), *Oleanna* (1988), *The Anarchist* (2012), *China Doll* (2015), *The Penitent* (2017), and *American Buffalo* (1975), among others. *Bitter Wheat* was his most recent play (2019). While Tony Kushner (born 1956), another renowned modern writer, discusses the moral decay in American culture, Mamet focuses on subjects like a person's sexual choice, the rights of the LGBT community. The 2003 wedding of Kushner and his husband Mark Harris made them the first same-sex couple to have their vows published in The New York Times Vows column. Kushner is the author of many plays, including the well-known *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes*, which earned the 1993 Pulitzer Prize and the prized Tony Award.

A Bright Room Called Day (1985), *Hydriotaphia* (1987), *Slavs! : Thinking About the Longstanding Problems of Virtue and Happiness* (1995), and *The Intelligent Homosexual's Guide to Capitalism and Socialism with a Key to the Scriptures* (2009) are some of his well-known publications. Kushner has penned screenplays for the motion picture industry. In 2012, his script for the movie *Lincoln* took home the prestigious Golden Globe Award for Best Screenplay.

Another well-known American dramatist is Katori Hall (born 1981). *The Mountaintop*, a 1968 novel, is a fictional tale of the evening before Martin Luther King Junior's assassination. *Hurt Village*, *Our Lady of Kibeho*, *Children of Killers*, *Hoodoo Love*, etc., are some of her best-known works. Another significant playwright is Amy Herzog, who in 2018 won the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award for Best Play for her play *Mary Jane*. Playwrights like Mamet, Kushner, Katori Hall, Amy Herzog, and others control the future of modern drama.

NATIVE AMERICAN DRAMA

Native writing has always been plagued by the illness known as mass culture ignorance. There hasn't been much interest in learning about native traditions, in part because they lack what is considered sophistication and in part because learning would be painful. Early writers had to encrypt their message or their culture since the social and political environment left little room for the preservation and depiction of Native Culture. The expression of the long-muted Native Voice only became viable after President Lyndon B. Johnson signed The Indian Civil Rights Act into law, guaranteeing Native American tribes many of the rights outlined in the Bill of Rights. According to William Penn Adair Rogers, the adored theatre and screen actor best known for playing *The Cherokee Kid*, American history is one of violence and upheaval: "Our performance against the Indians will be remembered throughout history. When our children and their offspring for ten more generations read about what we done to them, it will make us quite proud of ourselves."

Full-throated voices calling for attention to native peoples problems received their beginnings in the 1960s thanks to the Red Power Movement. A powerful example of how the federal government treated Native Americans was the 19-month-long occupation of Alcatraz in 1969 by 89 American Indians and their sympathisers. That set a precedent for Indian activism, resulted in the death of Richard Oakes, the group's leader, who was affectionately known as Indians of All Tribes (IOAT), and ended with little else, it did paint a picture of Natives Solidarity. They were brought together by this incident. One of the most well-known individuals in Native American drama is Rollie Lynn Riggs (August 31, 1899-June 30, 1954), who wrote 21 complete plays as-well-as several short stories, poetry, and a television script. His hit play *Green Glow The Lilacs* from the 1930s inspired the hit musical *Oklahoma!*. A record 2,212 performances of the musical

were seen on Broadway between 1943 and 1948. Another significant work to American theatre by Riggs is *The Cherokee Night* (1936). Since the publication of Phyllis Cole Braunlich's biography of Riggs, *Haunted by Home*, in 1988, there has been renewed discussion about whether *The Cherokee Night* is Rigg's solo piece that addresses native themes.

Rigg's plays *Russet Mantle*, *The Year of Pilár*, and *The Cream in the Well*, as-well-as his screenplays *Laughing Boy* and *The Plainsman* deal with Native American issues. Riggs tended not to alter his writings to suit the mainstream tastes of the Broadway culture. He was rarely worried about becoming well-known in the field. One of the first moves toward what is now known as the Native American theatre movement in the US and Canada was taken by Arthur Smith Junaluska when he founded the American Indian Drama Company in New York City. The Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA), a school, and the Native American Theatre Ensemble (NATE), a theatre company, were established in the years that followed. By enhancing the corpus with his plays like *Body Indian* in 1972, followed by *Coon Cons Coyote* and *Foghorn* (1973), Hanay Geiogamah (born 1945) played a significant role in influencing the future of Native theatre in America, starting with the founding of La MaMa Experimental Theatre Club, later renamed as NATE.

Another notable Cherokee-born author and playwright is Diane Glancy (born 1941). She has written plays like *The Woman Who Was a Red Deer Dressed for the Deer Dance* (1995), *War Cries: A Collection of Plays* (1997), *Cargo* (2006), and many others. She is the recipient of the Five Civilized Tribes Playwriting Prize. Her final piece was *The Words of My Roaring* (2006). Thomson Highway is a playwright, writer, and children's book author who was born in Canada in 1951 and is of Cree origin. He is renowned for his plays *The Rez Sisters* and *Dry Lips Oughta Move to Kapuskasing*, which won him the Dora Mavor Moore Award and the Floyd S. Chalmers Award. *The Rez Sisters* include dialogue from Cree and Ojibway movies. *The Kiss of the Fur Queen* by Thomson was a 1998 Books in Canada First Novel Award finalist. Daniel David Moses, a renowned author who writes about the complexity of queer identities, was born in Canada in 1952. Moses wrote plays such as *Delicate Bodies* (1980), *The White Line* (1988), *The Dreaming Beauty* (1990), etc., while living a gay lifestyle. Lisa Mayo, Gloria Miguel and Muriel Miguel, three sisters of Kuna

and Rappahannock ancestry, joined forces to form Spiderwoman Theater in 1975. One of the first female theatre groups to emerge from the feminist movement of the 1970s is called The Spiderwoman Theater, after the Spiderwoman deity from Hopi Mythology.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Q. 1. Had it not been for Puritanism, the American drama would have been different. Discuss.

Ans. It is a fact that because of Puritan aversion to and mistrust of the potential social function of theatre, American drama never quite reached the heights of its British equivalents. It is strange that a country that has yearned for an indigenous identity has failed to recognise, identify, and conserve its indigenous writings—this is especially true of drama. Numerous studies on the make-up of the syllabi of various American institutions reveal that theatre is either disregarded or, if it is, only the canonical, white writings make it into the curricula.

The majority of American drama is centred on these three titans of the genre: Tennessee Williams, Eugene O'Neill, and Arthur Miller. The list always remains very small and exclusive, despite the inclusion of a few more well-known dramatists like Edward Albee, August Wilson, David Mamet, Tony Kushner, T.S. Eliot, and a few more by a more thorough learner. There needs to be a major reevaluation of how American drama is approached.

Much of the Native American drama is still unrecognised and eventually lost in the sandstorms of history. That there was absolutely no drama in Norton Anthology of American Literature (1979) is surprising. If a student used this anthology as a source of information, they may believe that there was nothing produced in this genre in America.

American drama has a short and shallow history. Drama's origins seem recent in a nation that didn't enact its emancipation declaration until July 4, 1774. Numerous circumstances played a part in drama's faulty growth as a theatrical art form and as a literary genre, and those elements continue to this day. England struggled against the radicalism of the Puritans, a religious denomination that was frequently seen as an outgrowth of Anglicans, from 1649 until 1660.

Oliver Cromwell, the leader of the Puritans, controlled England for eleven years beginning in 1548/1549 when Charles I was slain. Depending on how individuals perceived it, several names have been given to this period in English history. Those who opposed