

Conventions of a Comedy play

1	The struggle of young lovers	The lovers of the play overcome hurdles to be together.
2	Mistaken identities and disguises	Twins are often mistaken for each other, and characters are hidden behind disguises.
3	Separation and reconciliation	Characters are often separated at the start of the play, but become reunited by the end.
4	Comical servants and fools	These characters often complete tasks incorrectly or mock the actions of others.
5	A blocking figure	A typically elderly figure (such as a parent) who prevents the young lovers from being together.
6	Idyllic settings	A magical realm, or a foreign country, where the action takes place.
7	Puns	A play on words.
8	Ends in marriage	The play ends happily, usually with the marriage of key characters.

Conventions of a History play

1	Succession	The moment that a new king or queen takes the throne.
2	The Tudor myth	The belief that the Tudors were chosen by God to rule England.
3	Social commentary	Although these plays explore moments of the past, they are also Shakespeare's way of commenting on what is happening in his society.

Conventions of a Tragedy play

1	Tragic arc	A 5-step structure which most tragedies follow.
2	Tragic hero	The hero of the text who has a fatal flaw in their character.
3	Hamartia	This is the flaw in the hero's character. For example, this may be their desire for power or revenge.
4	Internal conflict	A struggle that a character has with their emotions or the decisions they have to make.
5	Comic relief	A moment of humour in the play which provides a contrast to the tragic events.
6	Divine providence	The suggestion that God controls the actions of individuals.
7	Catharsis	The release of the audience's emotions through empathy with the characters.
8	Ends in death	The play ends in the death of several characters, especially the protagonist.

Context

1	Monarchs	Shakespeare wrote plays for two rulers (Queen Elizabeth I and King James I). His acting company was called the 'Lord Chamberlain's Men' until King James became the monarch. At this point, they became the 'King's Men'.
2	Censorship	Before Queen Elizabeth I died in 1603, the nation became concerned about who would succeed her to the throne; she had never married and had no children. In 1599, the 'Bishop's Ban' made it illegal to write about who would be the next monarch!

Key Vocabulary

1	Early modern	The time period in which Shakespeare was writing.
2	First Folio	In 1623, all of Shakespeare's plays were printed as one collection for the first time. This was called the 'First Folio'.
3	Soliloquy	The character speaks their thoughts alone or aloud regardless of any hearers.
4	Aside	Lines spoken by a character that are intended to be heard by the audience but not other characters.
5	Prologue	An opening to the text which may give background information on the characters or key events.
6	Epilogue	A conclusion to the text which comments on the events that have taken place.
7	Dramatic Irony	Some things are revealed to the audience before the characters, increasing tension.
8	Convention	A typical feature. For example, fools are a convention of Shakespeare's comedies.
9	Protagonist	The main character.
10	Monarch	The king or queen of a country.
11	Holinshed's Chronicles	In the early modern period, it was very common for writers to 'borrow' each other's stories. Shakespeare took much of his inspiration from this text.