The performance arts: reviews and critiques

VOCABULARY PRACTICE
ADVANCED | C1

Name: _____ Date: _____

1 Match each advanced term with its definition.

1 verisimilitude ____	**a** the appearance of being true or real within a fictional work
2 auteur ____	**b** a director whose personal vision strongly shapes a film's identity
3 pathos ____	**c** a quality that evokes pity or sadness in an audience
4 mise-en-scene ____	**d** the arrangement of scenery, actors and setting within a scene
5 subtext ____	**e** implied meaning beneath the literal dialogue or action
6 dramaturgy ____	**f** the theory and craft of dramatic composition
7 catharsis ____	**g** emotional release experienced by an audience through art
8 gravitas ____	**h** a serious, dignified quality that commands respect
9 hackneyed ____	**i** overused and lacking originality
10 zeitgeist ____	**j** the defining spirit or mood of a particular era

2 Choose the most precise term for each context.

1 A believable, true-to-life quality is verisimilitude / artifice.

2 A director whose vision defines a film is an auteur / a technician.

3 A quality evoking pity or sadness is pathos / indifference.

4 Implied meaning beneath dialogue is subtext / stage direction.

5 Emotional release through art is catharsis / suppression.

6 A serious, dignified quality is gravitas / frivolity.

7 An overused, unoriginal device is hackneyed / innovative.

8 The defining mood of an era is its zeitgeist / footnote.

3 Match the verbs with the noun phrases to form academic collocations.

1 evoke ____	**a** audience expectations

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2 subvert ____	**b** pathos
3 convey ____	**c** dramatic tension
4 imbue ____	**d** a performance with gravitas
5 command ____	**e** the audience's attention
6 elicit ____	**f** an emotional response
7 sustain ____	**g** subtext
8 undercut ____	**h** the intended effect

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4 Complete the analysis with terms from the box.

auteur | catharsis | dramaturgy | gravitas | hackneyed | mise-en-scene | pathos | subtext | verisimilitude | zeitgeist

Serious critique of performance often distinguishes between surface spectacle and deeper craft. A production's 1 _____ - the careful arrangement of setting, lighting and blocking - can communicate meaning as powerfully as dialogue itself, while unspoken 2 _____ often carries more weight than what characters explicitly say. Scholars trained in 3 _____ examine how structure and rhythm shape audience experience, arguing that a work achieving genuine 4 _____ can produce authentic emotional 5 _____ rather than superficial sentiment. Directors regarded as true 6 _____ are credited with a singular vision that resists imitation, in contrast to work dismissed as 7 _____, relying on tired convention. A performance delivered with genuine 8 _____ can lend weight even to a familiar story, while a production perfectly capturing its cultural 9 _____ may feel definitive of its era, achieving a level of 10 _____ that transcends mere technical competence.

5 Read the text and answer the questions briefly.

Criticism as interpretation

Serious performance criticism increasingly resists the idea that a review can offer a purely objective verdict, arguing instead that criticism is itself an act of interpretation shaped by the critic's own frameworks and expectations. A production's mise-en-scene, pacing and use of subtext can be read differently depending on the critical tradition a reviewer draws upon, meaning that two equally informed critics may reach substantially different conclusions about the same work without either being simply wrong. This does not render criticism arbitrary; rather, it demands that critics make their interpretive assumptions transparent, distinguishing observable craft, such as pacing or structure, from evaluative judgements that depend more heavily on personal or cultural perspective.

1 What idea does serious performance criticism increasingly resist? _____

2 What does criticism itself do, according to the text? _____

3 Why might two informed critics reach different conclusions about the same work? _____

4 Does this mean criticism is arbitrary? _____

5 What does this instead demand of critics? _____

6 What should critics distinguish, according to the text? _____

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6 **Replace the words in bold with a precise term or collocation.**

1 The scene had a strong sense of being true to life. _____

2 The film had a serious, dignified quality throughout. _____

3 The dialogue carried a lot of implied, unspoken meaning. _____

4 The plot device felt tired and overused. _____

OVER TO YOU

Write a 160-190 word critical review of a performance or production, distinguishing observable craft from evaluative, interpretive judgement.

[ ] Use at least twelve target expressions. [ ] Include four academic collocations. [ ] Maintain a precise, balanced register.

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ANSWER KEY

1 Advanced terms

1 a 2 b 3 c 4 d 5 e 6 f 7 g 8 h 9 i 10 j

2 Precise terms

1 verisimilitude 2 an auteur 3 pathos 4 subtext 5 catharsis 6 gravitas 7 hackneyed 8 zeitgeist

3 Academic collocations

1 b evoke pathos 2 a subvert audience expectations 3 g convey subtext 4 d imbue a performance with gravitas
5 e command the audience's attention 6 f elicit an emotional response 7 c sustain dramatic tension 8 h undercut the intended effect

4 Analysis

1 mise-en-scene 2 subtext 3 dramaturgy 4 verisimilitude 5 catharsis 6 auteurs
7 hackneyed 8 gravitas 9 zeitgeist 10 verisimilitude

5 Reading - suggested answers

1 That a review can offer a purely objective verdict.
2 It is itself an act of interpretation shaped by the critic's own frameworks and expectations.
3 Because they draw on different critical traditions.
4 No.
5 That critics make their interpretive assumptions transparent.
6 Observable craft from evaluative judgements dependent on personal or cultural perspective.

6 Precise terms and collocations

1 verisimilitude 2 gravitas 3 subtext 4 hackneyed

Over to you

Answers will vary. Look for conceptual precision, evidence-aware reasoning and balanced evaluation.