

Excerpt from *Poetics* by Aristotle Guiding Questions

1. According to paragraph two, what emotions must be provoked by an effective tragedy? Cite evidence to support your answer.

*Aristotle says that an effective tragedy “should.. imitate actions which excite pity and fear.”*

2. Explain what Aristotle means when he says in paragraph two “that the change of fortune presented must not be the spectacle of a virtuous man brought from prosperity to adversity: for this moves neither pity nor fear; it merely shocks us.”

*Aristotle means that to have a noble person suffer a terrible fate would only shock the reader, not provoke pity or fear.*

3. What is the meaning of “unmerited misfortune” as it is used in paragraph two? How, according to the text, does “unmerited misfortune” provoke pity and fear? Cite evidence to support your answer.

*“Unmerited misfortune” is some sort of fate or circumstance that a character unfairly experiences. Misfortune that is unmerited is unfair or undeserving. This provokes pity and fear in the reader because, according to Aristotle, we see this character as a “man like ourselves.”*

4. Use context clues to determine the meaning of “eminently” (paragraph 2). How does this specific word choice help you understand what type of character to whom Aristotle is referring?

*From the context, “eminently” could mean totally or completely. This word helps the reader understand that Aristotle is referring to a flawed character, one with whom the reader can sympathize but on whom we can also render judgment.*

5. According to paragraph two, what causes a character’s misfortune in an effective tragedy? What does Aristotle explicitly say should *not* cause the misfortune? Why does Aristotle make this distinction? Cite evidence to support your answer.

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*A character's misfortune should be caused by "some frailty or error," not by "vice or depravity." Aristotle makes this distinction because a character who is depraved would not be someone to whom the reader might be sympathetic and, therefore, would not provoke pity or fear.*