5 Acts – The Shakespearian Structure

Scholars noticed a pattern in Shakespeare’s writing and imposed what we call the “Five Act Structure” onto all of his plays. Most fit into it neatly. This is what each act is called and consists of:

* **Act I – Exposition** – Who are the characters? Where are we?
* **Act II – Conflict + Rising Action –** What’s the problem? How does it get worse? Is there mistaken identity (comedy ☺) or distrustful backstabbing (tragedy ☹)
* **Act III –Points of No Return/Climax** – Seriously, how did this problem get *even worse*? What decision did the main character make that he/she can NEVER GO BACK ON?!
* **Act IV – Falling Action –** What are the consequences of that PoNR? Who is the clear winner and/or loser in this story? Is there one more twist that sets someone on the top or bottom? Are people in love (comedy ☺), or are people dead (tragedy ☹)
* **Act V – Resolution/Denouement –** Tie up those loose ends! What’s the moral? Is the main character better for what he/she experienced (comedy ☺), or is he/she a broken shell(tragedy ☹)?

For those who are visual learners, here is the Five Act Structure placed on a **plot diagram**:

