



# The Characteristics of Greek Theater

GHS AH: Drama

# Greek Theater: Brief History

- Theater owes much to Greek drama, which originated some 27 centuries ago in 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE.
- Greeks were fascinated with the mystery of the art form.
- Thespis first had the idea to add a speaking actor to performances of choral song and dance. The term Thespian (or actor) derives from his name.



# Greek Theater: Brief History

- Greek plays were performed in outdoor theaters, usually in the center of town or on a hillside.
- From the 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE, we see the development of elaborate theater structures.
- Yet, the basic layout of the theater remained the same.

# Tragedy and Comedy

- Both flourished in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE, when they were performed, sometimes before 12,000 or more people at religious festivals in honor of **Dionysus**, the god of wine and the patron of the theater.
- Tragedy=dealt with stories from the past
- Comedy=dealt with contemporary figures and problems.

# Introduction to Greek Drama

- Video segment: **About Drama**

Complete the worksheet as you watch the video segment.

- *The masks of comedy and tragedy are emblems of theater today. . . and they originated in ancient Greece.*



What are the parts of a Greek theater?



# What is a Greek Chorus?

- The Greek Chorus was a group of poets, singers, and/or dancers that would comment on events in the play.
- 12 to 50 members would normally comprise the chorus.
- They would explain events not seen by the audience (ex. battles in a far away country)

# What is a Greek Chorus?

- The chorus would interact with the audience, and try to get them to take sides with the characters in the play.
- The chorus expressed to the audience what the main characters could not say, such as their hidden fears or secrets. The chorus often provided other characters with the insight they needed.



# What is a Greek Chorus?

- The **Greek chorus** usually communicated in song form, but sometimes spoke their lines in unison.
- The chorus worked together to explain the play because normally only 1 to 3 actors were on stage who were playing several parts each.

# What is the purpose of Greek Theater?

- The Greeks were interested in ethics, democracy and the art of thinking, so their plays explored these concepts.
- The purpose of a Greek drama/theater was:
  - “to pursue lofty moral themes, expand the intellect, and explore ethical issues.”*



# Greek Playwrights

- **Aeschylus**=525-456 BCE. Increased the number of actors from one to two, involved the chorus more into the action, and emphasized dialogue.
- **Sophocles**=496-406 BCE. Added a third actor, and centered the action into one, thus creating a more dramatic and powerful play.

# Greek Playwrights

- **Euripides**=485-406 BCE. He incorporated humor into his plays, thus breaking the rigid rules of tragedy and made it easier for new forms of drama to develop.
- **Aristophanes**=450-380 BCE. His plays are marked by wit, invention and skillful use of language as well as a satiric view of politics of the day.

# Reader's Theater

- What is it?
- It is a dramatic presentation in which 2 or more oral readers interpret a characterized script aiming to stimulate the audience's imagination about the literature being presented.

# Video Segment



- **Oedipus the King** or **Oedipus Rex** written by Sophocles in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE.
- Oedipus learns that King Laius has been murdered. In this scene, Oedipus argues with Teiresias. Oedipus fails to see that he, in fact, mistakenly killed the former king.



# Drama: Compare Greek to Modern

- Then: Relationship between actor and audience different. How?
- Now: *What do you think?*
- Then: Chorus is used to comment on the action in the play.
- Now: *What do you think?*

