

THEATER IN ANCIENT GREECE

Mark It on the Map

Have students turn to pages 4–5 and locate Greece on both maps. Ask if they have studied, know about, or have seen pictures of any of the sites labeled on the map. Have them use the map as a reference as they read the articles.

Vocabulary

dithyramb	choregoi
tragedy	oracle
comedy	

Introduction

Ask if any students know the name of an ancient Greek playwright or play. Have those who do give a brief description of each. Discuss what they think would be the differences between ancient and modern plays, such as lighting, sound, dress, etc.

Questions for Discussion

- ➔ What are satyr plays?
- ➔ What is the Great Dionysia? When, where, and why did it take place?
- ➔ What determined which playwright won first prize at the Great Dionysia? Who were the judges?
- ➔ Why did Greek actors use masks and standard costumes? Be specific with your answer.
- ➔ Who are the three masters of Greek tragedy? Name one play written by each.
- ➔ What role did the chorus play in Greek theater?
- ➔ Were women allowed to act in ancient Greek plays? If not, who played the women's roles?
- ➔ What is meant by black-figure style and red-figure style of Greek vases?
- ➔ What is the theme of Aristophanes' *The Frogs*?
- ➔ What role do the "frogs" play in Aristophanes' comedy?

Writing Workout

Students may complete one or more of the following activities:

- ➔ Read the quotation from Aeschylus on page 2. Write a letter to a friend or relative who is having problems and use Aeschylus' advice—with examples—as your advice.
- ➔ Make a list of what you consider to be the main differences between a performance in an ancient Greek theater and one in a modern theater.
- ➔ Pretend you are a Greek playwright and want your work performed at the next Great Dionysia. Make an outline of the steps you need to follow, including the actions you would have to take if your play were chosen.
- ➔ Choose the illustrations in this issue that you feel best capture the ancient Greek theater. Explain why.
- ➔ Choose one of the three excerpts from Greek tragedies found on pages 22–27. Explain what philosophical point the author was trying to make. What message or lesson was he attempting to teach his audience?
- ➔ Read the excerpt from Aristophanes' play *The Frogs* on pages 34–39. Make a list of the passages that would make a present-day audience laugh, and explain why.

Think About It

Students may complete one or more of the following activities:

- ➔ Why do you think plays were such an important part of Greek life?
- ➔ Which type of play do you prefer: tragedy or comedy? Give three reasons why.
- ➔ How do peace and war affect a nation's cultural life? What type of play writing does each encourage? Why?

- Today, historians use the detailed designs and drawings on surviving Greek vases as a window on daily life in ancient Greece. What present-day artwork or artifacts do you think future historians will study to learn about us?
- If you were the director of a production of an ancient Greek play, would you have the actors wear ancient Greek dress or modern-day dress? Why?
- Explain why Antigone became drama's "figure of resistance." Why is her story timeless?

Then and Now

The theater played a major role in ancient Greek civilization. What has replaced this form of entertainment in today's world? Explain your answer. (For students who say "nothing," have them think of reasons why "nothing" has.)

Debate

Divide the class into two teams to debate the following: Actors performing in plays written by ancient Greeks use contemporary English phrasing of the words, not direct translations of the ancient Greek. Give the teams time to prepare a 2-minute opening statement and a 5-minute argument. After both sides have given opening statements, give students time to prepare a 3-minute rebuttal. End with a class discussion of the subject.

Fun With Words

Students may complete one or both of the following activities:

- Read the history of each of the four words on pages 28–29. Choose the word you like best. Make a collage that includes three sentences that use this word and an illustration that visually describes the word's history.
- Write a skit to explain the meaning of the expression "Greeks bearing gifts."

Get Into Art

Students may complete one or both of the following activities:

- Divide the class into two groups. Assign one group the first four paragraphs of the article "Let the Play Begin" on pages 6–7. Assign the second group the last three paragraphs of the article. Have each group design a chronological table with illustrations and caption-type explanations of the development of the Greek play. Have each group present its "time line" to the class.
- Have students read "Backstage at the Theater" on pages 17–20. Ask them to choose the mask and role they like best and illustrate that character wearing a mask. Students could also create a character they would like to see in a Greek play, and draw a picture of the costume and mask that character would wear. Have the students write a caption to explain the significance of each facet of the character's costume.
- Read "The First Theaters" on pages 12–16 with the students. Then as a class make plans to create an illustrated book that will trace the development of the theater. Assign students or groups of students the various time periods in theater development, beginning with the early flat, circular space next to a hillside for spectators.

Play the Part

Make preparations with students to perform Aristophanes' play *The Frogs*, as found on pages 34–39. Assign parts, including that of the narrator. Divide the class into groups, with one actor in each group, and have each group design its actor's mask and costume, using the images on pages 34–42. Determine the props needed, and assign a prop to each group. Set a time for the play, make and send invitations, and then perform it.

Research Projects

Students may complete one or both of the following activities:

- Assign students to research which buildings, organizations, or programs in their town, city, or state are private and funded by philanthropists. Have the students present their findings to the class, along with a note about the ancient Greek philanthropist Herodes Atticus (page 43).
- Bring to class the arts and theater sections from several newspapers. Assign students to search the listings of events to see if any ancient Greek plays mentioned in this issue are being performed. Have them present their findings to the class. If possible, call a theater performing such a play and ask if someone (actor, stagehand, etc.) might come to speak to your class about the differences, difficulties, and rewards involved in performing an ancient Greek play.

Just for Fun

Students may complete one or both of the following activities:

- Follow the directions on page 32 to make your own vase.
- Play the video of Yanni performing in the Odeum at the foot of the Acropolis for the students.

Follow These Footsteps

Aeschylus

Aristophanes

Sophocles

Euripides