Greek Theatre and Tragedy: An Introduction to Antigone

English II Pre-AP
Lecture Outline

I. The Festival of Dionysus
II. The Theater of Dionysus
III. Structure of a Greek Theater
IV. Conventions of Greek Drama
V. Tragedy
VI. Sophocles and the Oedipus Myth
I. The Festival of Dionysus

- **Dionysus** - the god of fertility and wine; believed to liberate believers from personal trouble

- Festival of Dionysus
II. Theater of Dionysus
Important buildings of the Acropolis in antiquity included the (1) Parthenon, (2) Erechtheum, (3) Propylaia, (4) Temple of Athena Nike, (5) Odeion of Herodes Atticus, (6) Stoa of Eumenes, (7) Theater of Dionysos (smaller numbers are from an earlier printing of the illustration). Below, the Acropolis today.
A fully constructed Greek theater would have looked like this:
II. Theater of Dionysus

- Outdoor theater sacred to Dionysus
- Held 14,000 people
- Used annually for the dramatic competitions at the Festival of Dionysus
- Also used for court cases
III. Parts of a Greek Theater

- **Theatron**: Greek for *viewing place*; the audience space
III. Parts of a Greek Theater

**Orchestra**: Greek for *dancing place*; the whole circular performance space between the audience and stage
III. Parts of a Greek Theater

Prohedria: Greek for front seating; the seat of honor in front of or around the orchestra for priests and dignitaries
III. Parts of a Greek Theater

- **Parados**: Greek for *passageway*; a side entrance into the orchestra where the chorus made its grand entrance.
III. Parts of a Greek Theater

**Skene**: Greek for *tent*; the building behind the orchestra used for storage.

- **Skene (SKAY-nay)**: (Greek: tent) Building behind the orchestra; corresponds to the Roman scena or scaenae.
- **Logeion (LOH-gay-on)**: (Greek: a speaking place) Greek stage. Latin: pulpitum.
- **Proskenion (proh-SKAY-nee-on; proh-SKEE-nee-on)**: (Greek; Latin: proscaenium) Also called the okibas. Front wall of the stage; an acting area which projected in front of the skene (proskénion literally means “something set up before the skene”); in Classical Greek theatre, the ground-level portion immediately in front of the skene was used as an acting area; in Hellenistic period, the proskenion was a raised platform in front of the skene; the skene eventually included two levels, a lower level with a roof (the Hellenistic logeion or stage) and the second story skene with openings for entrances (thyromata).
IV. Conventions of Greek Drama

- Actors
  - Three actors - all male
- Chorus
IV. Conventions of Greek Drama

- Costuming
  - Masks
  - Cothurnus
  - Robes
- Scenery and Action
IV. Conventions of Greek Drama

- Plot is often drawn from traditional myths
- Plays are written in verse (not normal conversation)
- Conversations often interrupted by chorus
- **Prologue** - beginning of play; contains dialogue which informs audience of the play’s circumstances
- **Stasimon** - a fixed choral ode (first is delivered after Prologue and the remaining stasima are delivered between episodes)
V. Tragedy

- **Tragedy:**
  A narrative centering on a person of high estate (a king, queen, royal, or noble) who faces serious and important actions which end in sorrow or disaster
V. Tragedy

- Aristotle’s Unity of Time, Place, and Action
  - **Time**: One 24-hour period
  - **Place**: Play takes place within one physical space
  - **Action**: One basic story without subplots
- Action of the play arouses extreme pity and fear in the audience - pity for the protagonist and a sympathetic fear.
- **Catharsis**: the relief (purging of pity and fear) that the audience experiences, but the hero does not
V. Tragedy

- **Tragic Hero**
  - Suffers (and ultimately falls) because of a personal flaw (*hamartia*)
    - What do you think the most common flaw in tragedy is?
  - Experiences strong emotions and comes to a breaking point
  - Faces a horrible truth (catastrophe)
  - *Paripateia*: a move from happiness to misery; a reversal of fortune
V. Tragedy

- **The Fall**
  - Hero must fall from power and happiness
  - High estate
    - provides place to fall from
    - makes the fall all the more calamitous because it involves an entire nation or people
  - Many times, the hero brings about his own downfall due to his *hamartia*

- **Revelation**
  - The hero will realize that he is responsible for the tragic events (wisdom through suffering)
  - Disaster that befalls the protagonist should be inevitable, either decreed by fate or the clear outcome of his actions
  - Protagonist must assert his force and dignity as a man and not take his destruction meekly without protest
VI. Sophocles and the Oedipus Myth

- One of the three great tragedians of Athens (the other two being Aeschylus and Euripides).
- Considered the most successful playwright by Athenians - won the Dionysian festival multiple times.
- Wrote 120 tragedies; 7 survive.
- Best known for his *Oedipus* trilogy - *Oedipus Rex, Oedipus at Colonus,* and *Antigone*.
VI. Sophocles and the Oedipus Myth

- Oedipus Rex