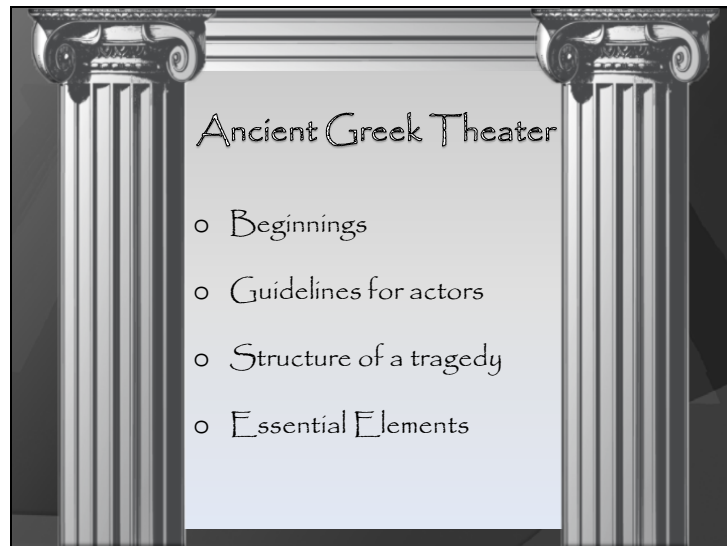


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Introduction



Entertainment is not something that you are lacking in today's technology-filled world. You receive entertainment through music and television on a daily basis. Ancient Greeks were not so lucky. They had to wait for entertainment, and it was always in the form of a live show. Have you ever been to the theater to see a play? This form of entertainment is still very popular today. In this presentation, you will learn about Greek theater, its beginnings, the guidelines for actors, the structure of Greek tragedies, and the essential elements found in all Greek tragedies.

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Beginning of Greek Theater

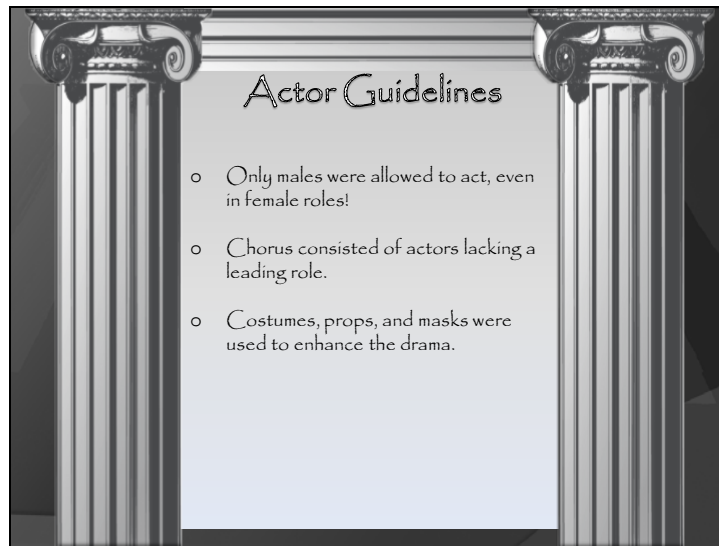


The Greek theater begins with a religious ritual, the celebration of the Greek god, Dionysus. Dionysus is the god of wine, hearth, and fertility. During the time of the festivals, which celebrated Dionysus, the Greeks danced and chanted to honor this god. These songs told stories, which were based on Dionysian legends and Greek legends where gods would interact with mankind. Because the government thought these celebrations were important, they would suspend daily activities and business so the citizens could attend, as well as participate. It appears that there were five Dionysian festivals staged at different times of the year. These festivals honoring Dionysus eventually evolved into Greek theater.

Festivals honoring Dionysus were held outside, so naturally the Greek theater, or amphitheater, was created outside. The most important and widely known of the festivals was the Great Dionysia. This festival, or Dionysia, became so popular that by the end of the fifth century it turned into an annual festival that lasted four days. The acting took place within Athens at the Theatre of Dionysus.

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Actor Guidelines



Actors had certain guidelines that they had to follow. In Greek theater, all actors were male. Women were not allowed to be a part of the performance. When they attended, they were to sit in the upper level of the theater in the audience. Actors who did not have a major role acted as part of the chorus. Before the introduction of the actor to the tragedy, the chorus that usually consisted of fifty members, was reduced to twelve or fifteen members. The actor who was the god, hero, or legendary figure wore a costume that made him look larger than life. This emphasized that he was more than just a mortal. Actors wore a **chiton** and **cothurni**. A **chiton** was a long robe which was dyed in symbolic colors. **Cothurni** were decorative platform shoes used to increase the actor's height. In Greek theater, costumes, props, and masks were all used to enhance the drama. The masks were used to aid the audience in identifying the character.

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Actors and Tragedians



You might be wondering where the actors for the theater come from? Today, actors gain experience through school drama and local acting societies before taking a big leap and auditioning for a major part. In Ancient Greece, citizens were required to attend the performances and at times expected to participate. If they were not actors or a part of the chorus, they had to respond to the events within the performance. This was a civic duty.

In 534 B.C., Athens held its first annual dramatic competition. At the time the ruler of Athens, Pisistratus changed the Dionysian Festivals and instituted drama competitions. Thespis won the first contest. Legend has it that he added an actor and interacted with the chorus. The word “thespian,” meaning actor, is derived from Thespis.

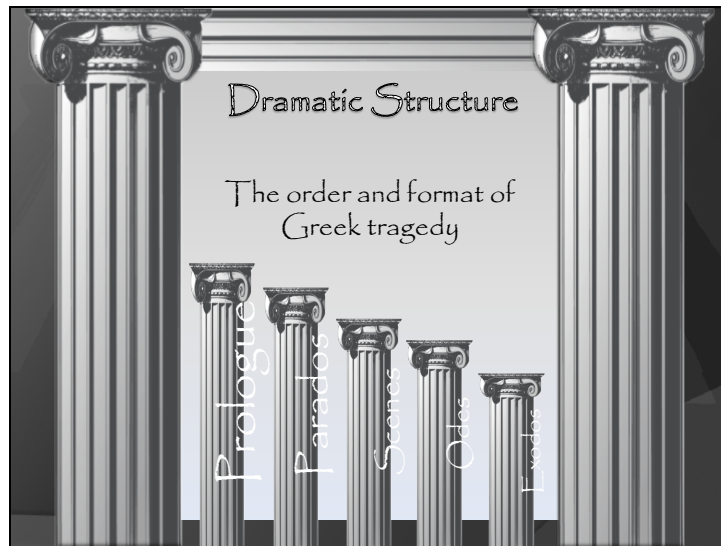
Aeschylus, the first playwright added a second actor to interact with the first. This allowed for conflict amongst the characters. He also introduced props and scenery and reduced the chorus from fifty to twelve.

Sophocles, another great tragedian, added a third actor to the plays. He won awards for twenty dramatic competitions. Sophocles also added an emphasis on drama between humans. This was different than the typical drama between human and gods. Sophocles’ plays were infused with irony.

Euripides, the third great tragedian, is given credit for adding a prologue to the play. Euripides’ plays were not about gods or royalty but they were about real people. This made him an extremely popular tragedian.

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Dramatic Structure



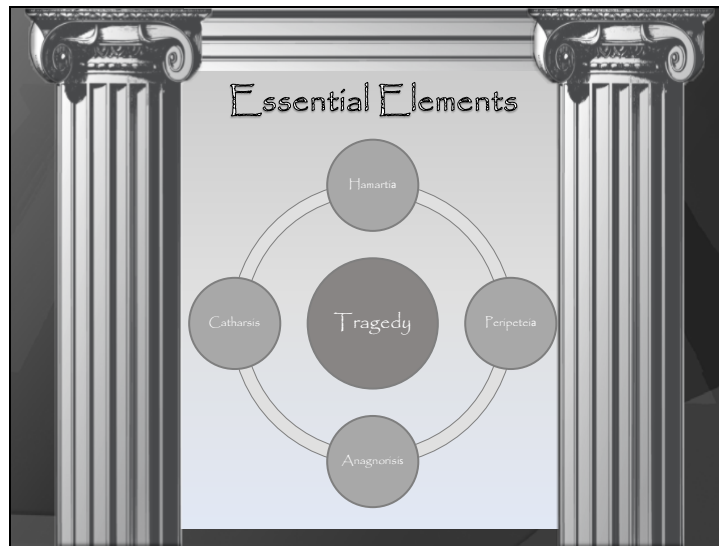
When you are watching a drama at home, how would you describe the structure of the show? Generally, today's dramatic structure begins with a complication or action. This central problem becomes evident and rises until it reaches a climax. At the climax, the complication is reversed and a resolution is produced. Finally, the show comes to a conclusion.

In Greek drama, the format was different. A tragedy began with a **prologue**. This was the opening story that set the scene, characters, setting, and background for the drama. After the prologue, an ode was sung by the chorus. This was called the **parados**. Once the **parados** was completed numerous **scenes**, or **episodes**, took place. This was the portion of the drama where the dialogue and events of the drama occurred. However, after each scene an **ode**, or **stasimon**, took place. These **odes (stasimons)** consisted of a choral passage in which the chorus used poetic and dignified language. The final part of the play took place when the chorus recited the last lines, this was the **exodos**.

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Essential Elements



Deciding what genre or program to watch at home has become quite a challenge. Selecting from categories such as drama, comedy, romantic comedy, action and adventure, horror, or sci-fi all depends on your mood. In Ancient Greek Theater, there were only three types of plays: tragedy, comedy, and satyr.

Oedipus Rex is a tragedy that shows the downfall of a tragic hero. The plot within a tragedy is divided into two parts, the complication and the denouement. The complication begins with the prologue and ends with the turning point within the tragedy. The denouement begins at the turning point and ends at the very end of the tragedy, exodus. Within a tragedy, there is a tragic hero. A tragic hero is the main character who comes from noble or lofty origins. In *Oedipus Rex*, the tragic hero is Oedipus, the King of Thebes. The tragic hero has a tragic flaw. A tragic flaw is a character trait or defect that causes the downfall of the tragic hero. Oedipus' tragic flaw is **hubris**. **Hubris** is extreme pride or arrogance.

All Greek tragedies have essential elements that define the work. In these works the hero must have a tragic flaw, or **hamartia**. There must also be a reversal within the tragedy. This is an action that produces the opposite of what is intended called the **peripeteia**. Eventually in the tragedy, the tragic hero will experience a moment of discovery. This **anagnorisis** leads to the **catharsis** at the end of the play. The **catharsis** is the moment when the audience releases stored up emotions held back through the tragedy.