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## **Oedipus the King and Introduction to Greek Theatre**

The Greek theatre history began with festivals honoring their gods. A god, Dionysus, was honored with a festival called by "City Dionysia". In Athens, during this festival, men used to perform songs to welcome Dionysus. Plays were only presented at City Dionysia festival.

Athens was the main center for these theatrical traditions. Athenians spread these festivals to its numerous allies in order to promote a common identity.

At the early Greek festivals, the actors, directors, and dramatists were all the same person. After some time, only three actors were allowed to perform in each play. Later few non-speaking roles were allowed to perform on-stage. Due to limited number of actors allowed on-stage, the chorus evolved into a very active part of Greek theatre. Music was often played during the chorus' delivery of its lines.

Tragedy, comedy, and satyr plays were the theatrical forms.

Tragedy and comedy were viewed as completely separate genres. Satyr plays dealt with the mythological subject in comic manner. Aristotle's Poetics sets out a thesis about the perfect structure for tragedy.

The Ancient Greeks took their entertainment very seriously and used drama as a way of investigating the world they lived in, and what it meant to be human.

### **Tragedy plays**

Thespis is considered to be the first Greek "actor" and originator of tragedy (which means "goat song", perhaps referring to goats sacrificed to Dionysus before performances, or to goat-skins worn by the performers.) However, his importance is disputed, and Thespis is sometimes listed as late as sixteenth in the chronological order of Greek tragedians.

Aristotle's Poetics contain the earliest known theory about the origins of Greek theatre. He says that tragedy evolved from dithyrambs, songs sung in praise of Dionysus at the Dionysia each year. The dithyrambs may have begun as frenzied improvisations but in the 600s BC, the poet Arion is credited with developing the dithyramb into a formalized narrative sung by a chorus.

Three well-known Greek tragedy playwrights of the fifth century are Sophocles, Euripides and Aeschylus.

Tragedy dealt with the big themes of love, loss, pride, the abuse of power and the fraught relationships between men and gods. Typically the main protagonist of a tragedy commits some terrible crime without realizing how foolish and arrogant he has been. Then, as he slowly realizes his error, the world crumbles around him. The three great playwrights of tragedy were Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides.

Aristotle argued that tragedy cleansed the heart through pity and terror, purging us of our petty concerns and worries by making us aware that there can be nobility in suffering. He called this experience '**catharsis**'.

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### **Comedy plays**

Comedy was also an important part of ancient Greek theatre. Comedy plays were derived from imitation; there are no traces of its origin. Aristophanes wrote most of the comedy plays. Out of these 11 plays survived - Lysistrata, a humorous tale about a strong woman who leads a female coalition to end war in Greece.

### **Greek Theatre**

Theatre buildings were called a theatron. The theaters were large, open-air structures constructed on the slopes of hills. They consisted of three main elements: the orchestra, the skene, and the audience.

**Orchestra:** A large circular or rectangular area at the center part of the theatre, where the play, dance, religious rites, acting used to take place.

**Skene:** A large rectangular building situated behind the orchestra, used as a backstage. Actors could change their costumes and masks. Earlier the skene was a tent or hut, later it became a permanent stone structure. These structures were sometimes painted to serve as backdrops.

Rising from the circle of the orchestra was the audience. The theatres were originally built on a very large scale to accommodate the large number of people on stage, as well as the large number of people in the audience, up to fourteen thousand.

### **Acting**

The cast of a Greek play in the Dionysia was comprised of amateurs, not professionals (all male).

Ancient Greek actors had to gesture grandly so that the entire audience could see and hear the story. However most Greek theatres were cleverly constructed to transmit even the smallest sound to any seat.

### **Costumes and Masks**

The actors were so far away from the audience that without the aid of exaggerated costumes and masks.

The masks were made of linen or cork, so none have survived. Tragic masks carried mournful or pained expressions, while comic masks were smiling or leering.

The shape of the mask amplified the actor's voice, making his words easier for the audience to hear.

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### **Introduction to Oedipus the King (Oedipus Rex)** There are a few names...

ABC's *Lost* has been a cult television classic for much of the first decade of the twenty-first century. The show's blogs, wikis, and fan pages perpetuate its phenomenal popularity even beyond the airing of its last episode. Why the critical acclaim and popular success? Much is due to the storyline, including dysfunctional families and apocalyptic prophecies, as well as to the show's philosophical subtext, which includes the conflict between free will and fate and the duality within all men.

Fans of *Lost* will appreciate its striking parallels to Sophocles's Oedipus Trilogy, the tragic tale of a man who believes he can escape his fate, only to find that his stubborn refusal to submit to his fate will have lasting impact on his home and family. The incestuous relationships, infanticides, fratricides, and suicides that follow are enough to compel and horrify the most demanding of contemporary audiences.

*Oedipus the King*, *Oedipus at Colonus*, and *Antigone* will serve to connect you to the classic themes of fate, family, and free will. Whether you read one or all of Sophocles's plays, they will come away with an awareness of the internal and external struggles linking the playwright's time to our own.

### ***List of Characters***

**OEDIPUS** king of Thebes

**CREON** brother of Jocasta

**TIRESIAS** a blind prophet

**JOCASTA** wife of Oedipus

**ANTIGONE** daughter of Oedipus

**ISMENE** daughter of Oedipus

**POLYNEICES** son of Oedipus

**ETEOCLES** son of Oedipus

**THESEUS** king of Athens

**HAEMON** son of Creon

**EURYDICE** wife of Creon



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3. Please know what a Greek Chorus is by giving a definition here:
4. Take a look at some other modern films with a chorus that comments on the action:
  - Hercules – The Gospel Truth  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RRq7ILawQB4>
  - Mighty Aphrodite <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z7MYyuxNhQo>
  - Pintel and Ragetti <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PE3K3Z13Uww>
5. Please read and highlight the important information in Aristotle's Ideas about Tragedy handout.
6. Answer the following question: If you could be told your future would you choose to hear it? Why or why not? (2)
7. There are a lot of parallels between "old" texts and modern entertainment. One great one in particular is between *Lost* and Oedipus. They both have the theme of fate versus free will. This is a great scene from *Lost*, but unfortunately it is a bad clip. Watch it anyway.  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IZyImj7Bhqo> (flashes before your eyes)  
Now please answer the questions:  
What is meant by Mrs. Hawking's statements: "You don't do it because you choose to, you do it because your supposed to." (2)

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And... "The universe has a way of correcting itself." (2)

And... What is Mrs. Hawkings role? A prophet? Desmond's self conscious? (2)

8. Please write true or false beside each statement and explain. (5)

It is a parent's job to It is a parent's job to care for his/her child more than for him/herself.

Children should be loyal to their parents no matter what the cost.

Siblings may be justified in harming each other with words or actions.

Children are fated to carry on their parents' legacies, be they bad or good.

Families forgive, period.