

GREEK DRAMA



PART 1: QUIZ

1. What was the Greek name for city states?

- ☐ Principal
- ☐ Poleis
- ☐ Peloponnesian

2. Who was given the least status in Ancient Greek times?

- ☐ Women
- ☐ Men
- ☐ Slaves
- ☐ Children

3. Between which two city states was the Peloponnesian War fought?

- ☐ Corinth and Athens
- ☐ Thebes and Sparta
- ☐ Athens and Sparta

4. Which of the following best describes the war strategy of Athens?

- ☐ To meet the Spartans head on and destroy them in a ground battle
- ☐ To remain inside the walls of their city and use their superior ships to win the war.
- ☐ To starve Sparta out of their city
- ☐ All of the above

5. Who was Pericles?

- ☐ The King of Sparta
- ☐ A famous warrior from Athens
- ☐ A Greek philosopher who was against all war
- ☐ A great general and leader of Athens

GLOSSARY

frieze a horizontal band of decoration (either painting or sculpture). Friezes are found on a wall near the ceiling

polytheistic/polytheism the belief in more than one god

Mount Olympus the highest mountain in Greece. Thought to be the home of the gods in Ancient Greek mythology





AN INTRODUCTION TO GREEK THEATRE



Watch online:

<https://bit.ly/3dim2YP>

Ancient Greek Plays

Ancient Greek plays were originally performed in Athens.

The texts of 30 tragedy plays and 12-14 comedy plays have survived over thousands of years. As well as the texts themselves, ancient sources such as inscriptions amphora (vase) decorations tell us what these plays contained and how audiences in Ancient Athens and beyond reacted to them.

Archaeological evidence shows us the layout of ancient theatres and allows us to piece together the stage, orchestra pit and seating areas.



Amphora depicting the battle of Achilles and Penthesileia
© British Museum



HOW DO WE KNOW ABOUT ANCIENT GREEK THEATRE?

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

GREEK THEATRE



The Plays

In Ancient Greece, there were three types of plays that were performed on stage. These were Tragedy, Comedy and Satyr. Tragic plays were often serious plays where the characters suffered great. Comedy and Satyr were plays designed to make the audience laugh.



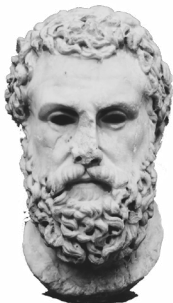
Festival of Dionysus Plays

As part of the Festival, each playwright submitted three tragedies and one 'Satyr' play - a comedy where members of the chorus would dress up as Satyrs. Each playwright had one day to showcase their plays.



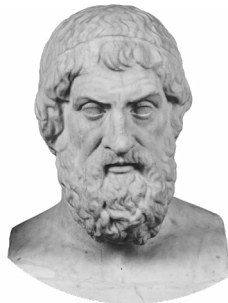
Famous Greek playwrights

There were 4 Greek playwrights who stood out and were celebrated in the 5th Century BCE by Ancient Greek citizens. They were:



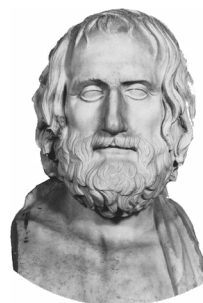
Aeschylus
(525-455 BCE)

Aeschylus won first prize at the Great Dionysia Festival. He was so well respected that many of his plays were re-staged after his death.



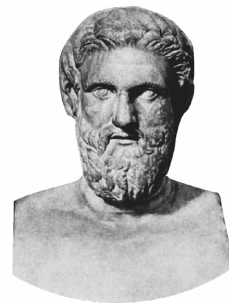
Sophocles
(496-406 BCE)

Sophocles wrote more than 100 tragedies, only 7 have survived to this day. He was also the first Greek playwright to use skenographia or scene painting to create a backdrop for his performances.



Euripides
(480-406 BCE)

Euripides wrote tragic plays with elements of comedy within them. He is thought to have invented the love-drama genre of play. Euripides spent a lot of time developing his character onstage and was the master of suspense and intrigue.



Aristophanes
(448-385 BCE)

Aristophanes was most famous for writing Greek comedies. He made fun of the Greek god as well as real people. His play The Clouds saw him make fun of the famous Greek philosopher Socrates. He won some prizes for his plays and even made up nonsense words as part of his scripts!



THE FESTIVAL OF DIONYSUS

THREE DAYS, THREE COMPETITORS,
ONLY ONE WINNER...

The City Dionysia, or Great Dionysia was a festival held annually in March.

People travelled from all over the Greek world to celebrate in Athens. The festival was dedicated to the Greek god Dionysus, who was well known in Greek mythology as a lover of parties and celebrations. Goats were sacrificed and men dressed up as woodland creatures known as 'Satyrs'.

The highlight of the festival was the procession where the statue of Dionysus was carried and put outside of the Theatre of Dionysus. Once the statue was in place, it was time for the stage performances to begin.

Three playwrights took to the stage to showcase their writing abilities. These Greek playwrights were sponsored by rich men. A jury was selected to vote for the winning playwright. The winner had their name inscribed on the wall of the Theatre. This was a huge honour.



Annual Event

The Festival was held in March each year.



Key Moment

The procession of a statue of Dionysus.



Awards

The winning playwright had their name inscribed on the wall of the theatre.



1. How often was the Festival of Dionysus held?

- ☐ Once a year
- ☐ Twice a year
- ☐ Once every four years.

2. What was the highlight of the festival each year? _____

3. What honour did the playwrights receive if their play won? _____

4. Sophocles was the first Greek playwright to _____

5. Which playwright's plays were re-staged after their death? _____

6. Who made fun of the Greek philosopher Socrates in their play 'The Clouds'? _____

7. Who wrote more than 100 tragedies? _____

8. Which genre of play did Euripides introduce? _____



THE THEATRES

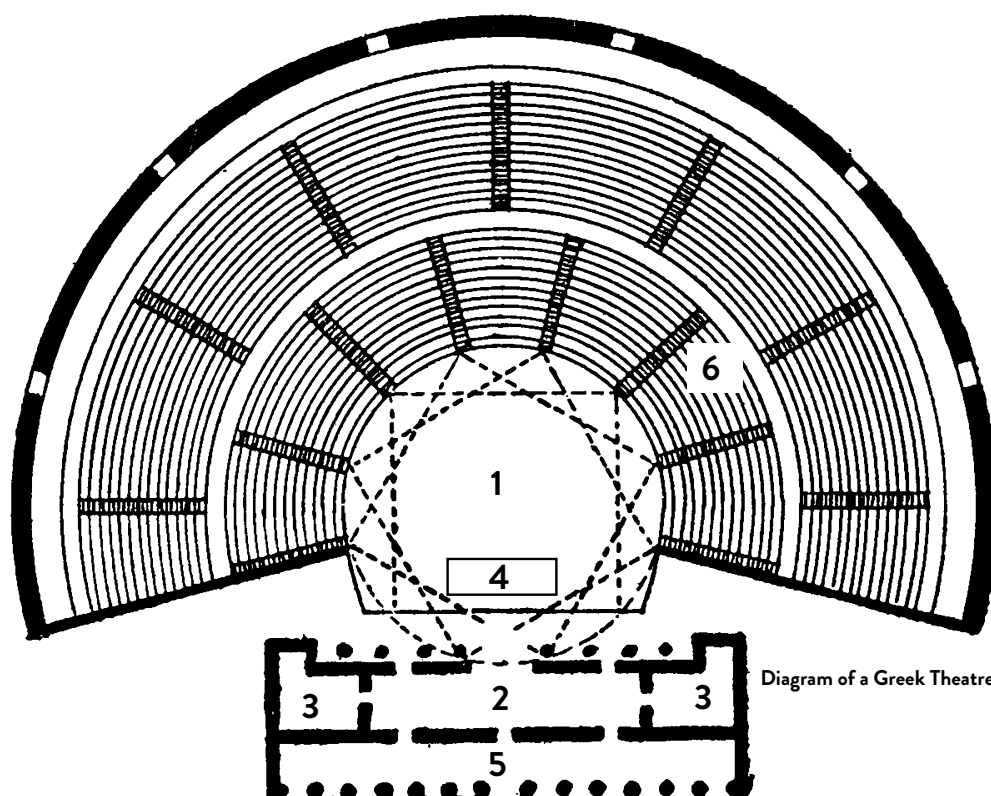


Diagram of a Greek Theatre

- 1 Orchestra
- 2 Stage
- 3 Paradoi
- 4 Altar
- 5 Skene
- 6 Seating



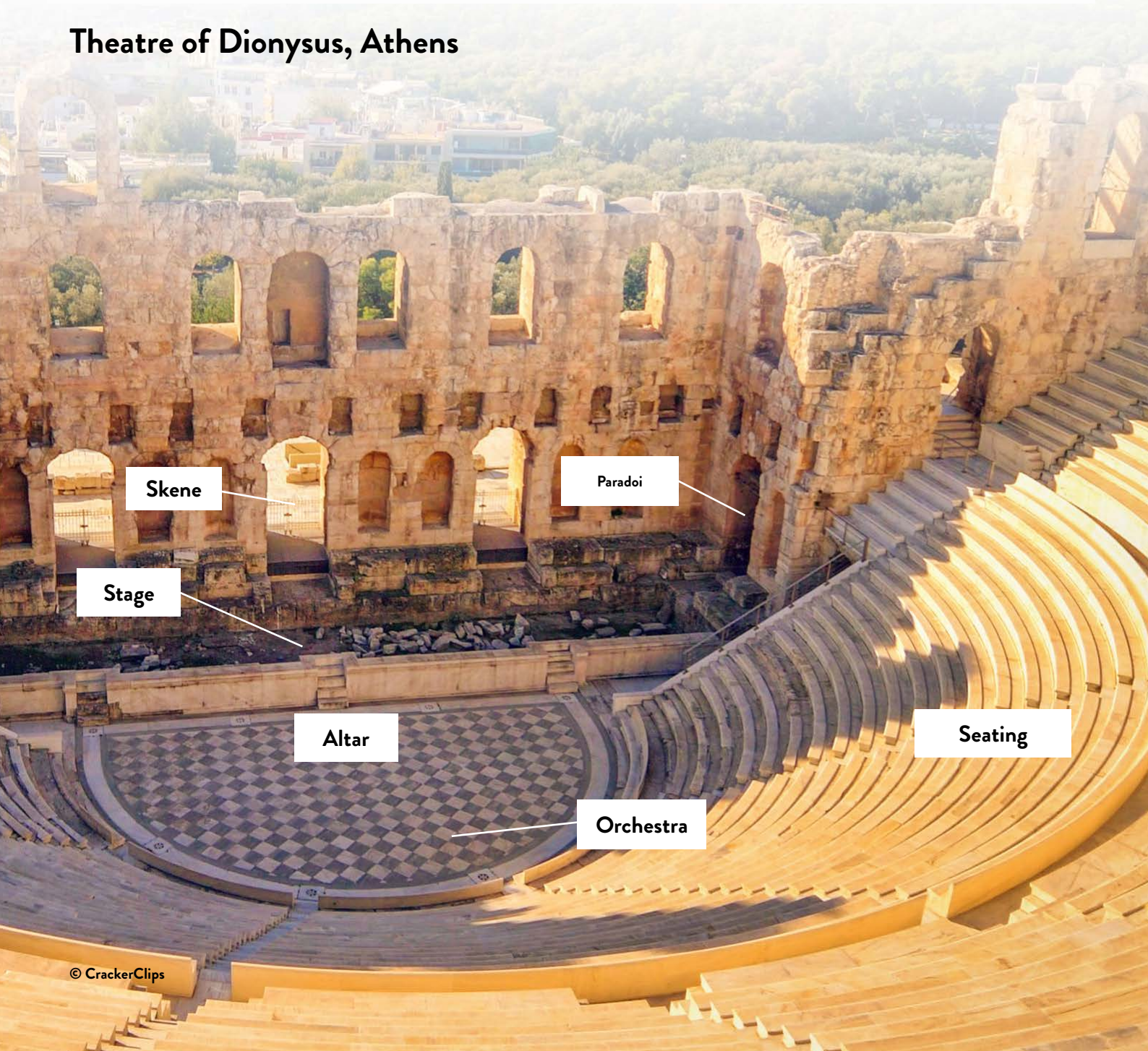
Greek theatres were open air and could seat up to fourteen thousand people. They were made up of three key areas: the orchestra, the skene and the semi-circular seating (koilon). The seats were laid out in tiers so that audience members could get a good view of the stage. The orchestra were placed in the circular space in front of the stage. In Ancient Greece, this space was reserved for dancing.

The stage was where the actors performed. Often, whole plays consisted of only three actors! This was why masks were so important as the actors could play more than one role.

The parodoi were entrances on either side of the stage that the actors used throughout performances. The altar, which celebrated the Greek god Dionysus, was situated in the circular area which also housed the orchestra. Actors would often dance around the altar during performances.

The skene was situated behind the stage and was used as a changing area. The sides of the skene which faced the audience were used for backdrops and were usually decorated as a Temple or a palace.

Theatre of Dionysus, Athens





1. How many audience members could fit inside a Greek theatre? _____
2. Where was the altar dedicated to Dionysus placed? _____
3. What were the paradoi? _____
4. Where did the actors get changed before and during performances? _____
5. Why were the seats in Greek theatres tiered? _____



Replica Thalia and Melpomene masks © Greek Mythos



THE ROLE OF MASKS IN ANCIENT GREEK THEATRE

Masks in Greek theatre

Masks were important parts of Ancient Greek theatre. The Tragedy mask or Melpomene, is named after the Muse of Tragedy and the Comedy mask is known as Thalia, after the Muse of Comedy.

What were masks made out of?

The masks needed to be fairly light, as the actors could be wearing them for hours at a time. They were often made from leather, wood and cork. Wigs were made from animal or human hair.

When were masks worn?

Masks were worn during plays and were useful ways of allowing one person to play more than one character. These masks were often highly decorated and they allowed audience members who were sitting further away in the theatre to see more of the action on stage.

The masks that were used in Greek Tragedy were often quite life-like and beautiful, whereas the masks used in Comedy and Satyrs were often very ugly and over-the-top.



- 1. Give two reasons why masks were worn _____

- 2. Why were masks in comic plays often ugly and over-the-top? _____



THE ROLE OF THE CHORUS IN ANCIENT GREEK THEATRE

The Chorus was made up of 12 young men who were trained in singing and dancing. One of their main roles was to entertain the audience through song and dance and by dressing in exciting, exotic costumes.

The other key function of the Chorus was to provide the viewpoints of the community on stage. They would often interact with the main actors in role as citizens when important decisions needed to be made. Many audience members enjoyed watching the Chorus because they could relate to them as citizens of Greece.



Greek Vase painting depicting the a Greek theatre chorus
© British Museum

- 1. What were the two key roles of the chorus in Ancient Greek plays?

