

Greek Drama



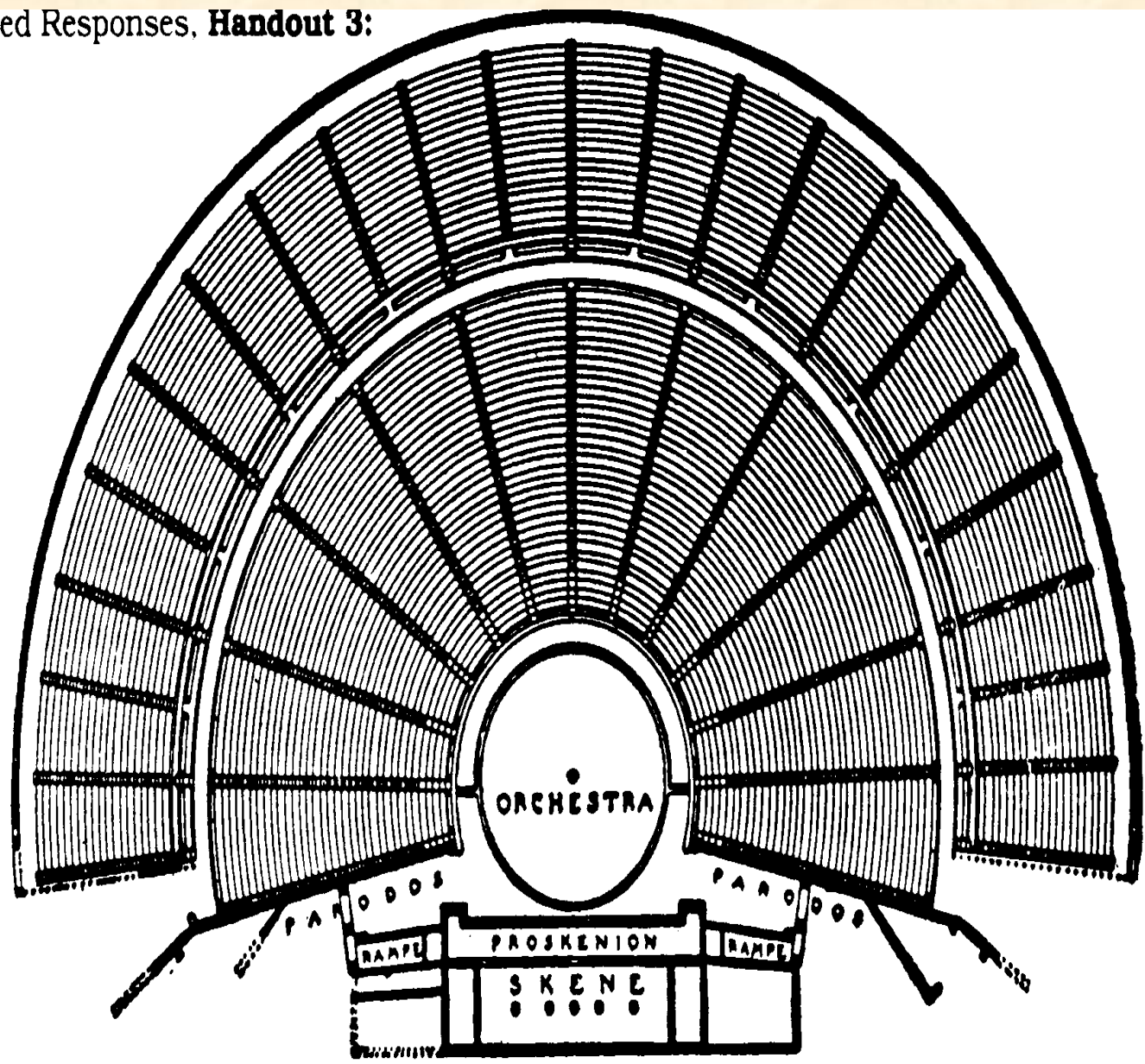
Greek Theater History

- Greek drama began with dances and songs performed in honor of Dionysus.
- Theatre as an art form evolved over hundreds of years, but records establish the sixth century B.C. as its official debut.
- Thespis → legendary first actor.
- Theatre flourished in fifth century B.C. when Athens became center of Greek culture and governmental power.
- Most important Greek activities were outdoors → great outdoor theatres.
- Three, week-long festivals were held each year which sponsored competitions for tragedy and comedy.

Setup of Greek Theatre

- Orchestra → area where chorus danced; at foot of semi-circular hillside where stone benches were built.
- Theatron → area where audience sat on benches.
- Parados → two broad aisles extending from the orchestra to each side of the theatron.
- Skene → rectangular building with 3 doors in front, providing a background for action of the play as well as an area into which actors could exit and change costumes and masks; violence in plays took place here, out of the view of the audience.
- Proskenion → last addition to Greek theater; a small platform in front of skene to give actor more visibility and separate them from the chorus.

Suggested Responses, **Handout 3:**



The Greek Actor

- Participating in Greek drama was considered a citizen's duty → They were expected to volunteer to perform in the chorus.
- Experienced performers became actors.
- Actors portraying gods, kings, or heroes → costume which adds size and distinction:
 - *Chiton: long, flowing robe, dyed in symbolic colors with padding underneath.
 - *Cothurni: high platformed shoes to add height.
- Actors used props to indicate their role (king → scepter, etc.)
- Actors wore masks which helped to identify specific characters, yet generalized features enough to make the actor seem like he could be any man.

Masks



- Called a *persona*.
- Served as a megaphone because of its large mouth opening.
- A symbol to distinguish role.
- Identified age, sex, mood, and rank.
- Made of bark, cork, leather, or linen.
- Tragic → beautiful; Comic → bizarre or grotesque.
- Allowed actors to change roles easily.

Tragic Mask



Comic Mask



Masks



Characteristics of the Greek Chorus

- Group of about 15 men.
- Sang lyric poetry and danced to music.
- Unpaid, usually citizens performing their “civic duty.”
- Trained, costumed in the dress of the people they represented, and wore light masks.

Functions of the Greek Chorus

- Link from audience to actors.
- Tension release.
- Reflects, ponders, asks questions.
- Sometimes advises main characters.
- Often acted as the conscience of the people.
- Establish mood and heighten dramatic moments.
- Establish pacing of play.
- Separate scenes.

Five Sections of Greek Tragedies

- The **Prologue** (Prologos) → Opening portion of the play, which sets the scene and contains the exposition.
- The **Parados** → Entrance song of the chorus. Named after the aisles where the chorus entered the theater.
- The **Episodes** (Scenes) → Contain the action of the drama; performed by the actors.
- The **Stasimons (Odes)** → A choral passage of the play which alternates with the episodes. The chorus sang and danced the odes accompanied by musical instruments. Odes consisted of strophes and antistrophes (similar to stanzas.)
- **Exodos** → The concluding section of the tragedy. The exodos ends with the chorus singing their final lines as they exit.

Dramatic Irony

- **Irony** is a contrast between what *appears* to be and what *actually* exists, between what is *expected* and what is *experienced*.
- **Dramatic irony** → The audience or reader is aware of critical information of which the characters are unaware. We watch it unfold with a sense of dread because we know what is coming!

Hubris

- People's destinies are decided by the Fates.
- Trying to change your destiny is a sin of pride → hubris.

Aristotle—“The Poetics”— Characteristics of the Tragic Hero

- **Character has a high social rank/noble birth.**
- **Character is pitted against forces beyond his/her control**
- **Decisions lead to a no-win situation**
- **Puts up a courageous struggle/downfall**
- **Realizes mistake and regrets it and gains self-awareness through defeat (often ends up dying).**



Themes

- The plays of Ancient Greece ask questions which are surprisingly still relevant to our lives today:
 - Should we follow the rule of law or our own moral code?
 - Do we have free will?
 - How should we respond to injustice?