GREEK THEATER
540 - 527 -- Festival of the Greater Dionysia

525 -- Aeschylus born; Increased the number of actors from one to two; reduced the role of the chorus; first with dialogue

c. 496 -- Sophocles born; wrote 123 tragedies; only 7 are known. He added a third actor. His most important play might be *Oedipus the King*.

485 -- Euripides born; Saw his city succumb to plaque, war, and internal division. His tragedies were filled with this realism and social comment; he used unorthodox characters and plots and his plays were known for their violent passions.

c. 450 -- Aristophanes born; the greatest comedian during the Golden Age. He wrote a play called *Clouds* that depicted the philosopher Socrates sitting in a basket suspended in air.
Greek Theater Structure

Orchestra *(Dancing Space)*
- Area where the Chorus would dance, sing, and interact with the audience. Made of earth in the early days but in the classical period they were paved. Dionysus in Athens was 60 feet.

Theatron *(Viewing Place)*
- Where the audience sat. Sometimes a hillside, sometimes a wooden bleachers; in the 4th century BC theaters were constructed of limestone.

Skene or Logeion *(Tent)*
- The stage which was decorated as needed. It measured about 25 by 10 feet.

Parodos *(Passageways)*
- General access for the audience and the areas where the chorus or actors made their entrances.
**Theatron** - seats for spectators
**Skene** or **Logeion** - stage for actors
**Orchestra** - dancing floor for chorus

**Thymele** - altar in the centre of the orchestra
**Parados** - gangway to altar and orchestra
Ancient Greek theaters were very large, open-air structures that took advantage of sloping hillsides for their terraced seating. Because of drama’s close connection with religion, theaters were often located in or near sanctuaries. The theater pictured here, for example, is set on the slopes of Mt. Parnassus above the famous temple of Apollo at Delphi (home of the Delphic oracle that figures so prominently in the myth of Oedipus and in everyday Greek life).
The Theater of Dionysus as seen from the Acropolis.
Under the rule of Lycurgus a set of 67 high-backed seats made of Pendelic marble were added to the Theater of Dionysus. They were reserved for dignitaries and judges - in fact, the seats had the names of their "owners" inscribed right in the marble. In the center is the best seat, an elaborately carved throne for the Priest of Dionysus Eleutherios. On the back are two satyrs supporting a bunch of grapes. The seat was in a direct line with the altar of the god in the center of the orchestra.
Theatre, Epidaurus, was built during the last quarter of the fourth century B.C. The harmony of its cavea, the way it 'sits' in the landscape with the semicircle hollowed out of the side of the hill, and the quality of its acoustics make the Epidaurus theatre one of the great architectural achievements of the fourth century. The circular orchestra provides the link with the stage buildings.
Greek plays were performed in an outdoor theater

Used masks

Almost always performed by a chorus and three actors, no matter how many speaking characters there were in the play.

The actors would go back stage after playing one character, switch masks and costumes, and reappear as another character.

Greek plays were performed as part of religious festivals in honor of the god Dionysus, and unless later revived, they were only performed once.
Imagine you are a tragic poet named Studentocles and you want to put on a tragedy in Athens at the festival of the greater Dionysian (the end of March). Here are the steps you would follow to put on your play.

1. Decide what plays you want to stage.
2. Submit your proposal to the archon eponymos.
3. Wait for the archon to select the choregos who will fund your play, and your star actor.
4. Finish writing the plays.
5. Write the music and attend to many other details.
6. Make sure the choregos attends to his duties.
7. Rehearse, rehearse, rewrite, rehearse, rehearse.
8. Wait for the process of selecting the judges to take place.
9. Attend the proagon.
10. The Festival of the Greater Dionysia arrives.
11. Attend the events which take place just before the plays are presented.
12. The plays are presented.
13. The judging takes place.
14. Go to the cast party, and begin thinking about next year.
Plays were funded by the polis, and always presented in competition with other plays.

Voted either the first, second, or third place.

Tragedies almost exclusively dealt with stories from the mythic past.

Comedies almost exclusively dealt with contemporary figures and problems.
The basic structure of a Greek tragedy is simple. After a prologue spoken by one or more characters, the chorus enters, singing and dancing. Scenes then alternate between spoken sections and sung sections. The basic parts of a Greek Tragedy are:

- **Prologue:** Spoken by one or two characters before the chorus appears. The prologue usually gives the mythological background necessary for understanding the events of the play.

- **Parodos:** This is the song sung by the chorus as it first enters the orchestra and dances.

- **First Episode:** This is the first of many "episodes", when the characters and chorus talk.

- **First Stasimon:** At the end of each episode, the other characters usually leave the stage and the chorus dances and sings a stasimon, or choral ode. The ode usually reflects on the things said and done in the episodes, and puts it into some kind of larger mythological framework.

- **Exodos:** At the end of play, the chorus exits singing a song which usually offers words of wisdom related to the actions and outcome of the play.
Although Tragedy dominated Greek theater, ancient Greeks enjoyed a good comedy.

Dramatic form that humorously portrays everyday themes and characteristics.

Great wit and irreverence.

Plots were usually fantastic but contained slapstick shenanigans and biting comments on the contemporary scene.

Originating in Dionysian fertility rites.

Greatest comedian of Athenian golden age: Aristophanes (c.445-383 B.C.) wrote "Clouds"
Greek Tragedies were dramas involving mythic characters whose pride leads them into suffering and death

*Oedipus the King (Sophocles)* - Most admired tragedy of the classical period

Purpose of tragedy was *catharsis*  
-- A cleansing

Few Greeks ever left the theater unaffected
The Art of Poetry
   Poet can: Narrate as an Observer
   Speak in First Person
   Use Characters as Third person

Categories
   Tragedy
   Comedy
   Epic Poetry

“Tragedy like poetry, produces its effect without action – it’s power is in the mere reading; enacting it onstage should give the exact same effect as reading a good epic loud.”

“The Tragedy is, in fact, superior, because it has all the epic elements as well as spectacle and music to provide an indulgent pleasure for the audience”
GREEK THEATER

"POETICS" BY ARISTOTLE

6 Parts that Define A Tragedy:
- Plot
- Character
- Diction (rhythmic language)
- Thought
- Spectacle
- Song

“In Tragedy we grieve over the fate of a man who must suffer for his flaw, perhaps touched by the possibility that we too might possess this flaw.”

4 Types of Tragedies:
- Complex -- depending entirely on reversal and recognition at the climax
- Pathetic -- Motivated by Passion
- Ethical -- Motivated by Moral Purpose
- Simple -- Without Reversal or Recognition
Greek Theater

Greek Playwrights

Aeschylus
- Reduced chorus and introduced 2\textsuperscript{nd} actor
  - Oresteia (King Agamemnon returns from Trojan war to be murdered by his wife who is murdered by her son)

Sophocles
- Introduced 3\textsuperscript{rd} actor and created more tightly, unified plot
  - Oedipus Trilogy (Oedipus Rex, Oedipus at Colossus, Antigone)

Euripides
- Realism and biting social comment

Aristophanes
- Clouds