

Example drama exercises using Antigone extracts

1. Creon and Haemon, using texts 1 and 2

The idea of this exercise is to encourage students to be aware of different interpretations of a scene, and to think about the different ways of staging it. It encourages them to think about traditional vs modern stagings, and about the requirements and challenges of each one.

- Split students in to pairs and give each pair one of the Creon/Haemon extracts
- Mix the texts up so that there is an even amount of extract 1 and 2 being looked at
- Give students five - ten minutes to put the scene on its feet, asking them to imagine that they are directing it for a show which is being performed next week
- During this time speak to each group and ask them to identify why they are staging it in their chosen way, giving them ideas if they are having trouble
- After ten minutes, as a class, watch students perform their pieces, pair by pair (or watch a few extracts instead if time doesn't allow)
- When all performances have finished, facilitate a class discussion about the performances, asking some or all of the following questions:
 - * How do the texts compare when performed?
 - * How does the language and vocabulary differ?
 - * Can you guess which scene was written most recently?
 - * Which text do you most identify with as an audience?
 - * Are they both easy to understand?
 - * Did you find them easy or difficult to direct, and why?
 - * How would you use lighting and set design to bring the scenes to life?
 - * How would the scene be different if you were performing it in an outside amphitheatre to thousands of people with no microphones? What would you do differently? How would your vocal and physical delivery change to adapt to this setting? What would the challenges of performing in an amphitheatre be? **Weather, sound, being seen, being heard, etc.** How do we get over those challenges in open air theatre today? **Microphones, big costumes, rain coats/ covers, big and physical performances, etc**

NB: You can adapt this exercise for work on the Greek chorus and for work on approaches to character, using the other texts available.

2. Stage your own festival of Dionysia! Using all of the texts

This exercise is a fun way of teaching students about the social and historical context of Greek theatre, by getting them involved in their own Greek festival, and thinking about the difference between the Dionysia and festivals today.

- Begin with a group discussion about what the festival of Dionysia was and about how it started:

The Dionysia (/daɪəˈnɪsiə/) was a large festival in ancient Athens in honour of the God Dionysus, the central events of which were the theatrical performances of dramatic tragedies such as Antigone and, from 487 BC, comedies such as Lysistrata. It was the second-most important

festival after the Panathenaia (like the Olympic Games). The Dionysia actually consisted of two related festivals, the Rural Dionysia and the City Dionysia, which took place in different parts of the year, in multiple towns.

The City Dionysia (Dionysia ta en Astei – Διονύσια τὰ ἐν Ἄστει), also known as the Great Dionysia, Dionysia ta Megala – Διονύσια τὰ Μεγάλα) was the urban part of the festival, possibly established in the 6th century BC. This festival was held probably in March or April, to celebrate the end of winter and the harvesting of the year's crops. According to tradition, the festival was established after Eleutherae, a town on the border between Attica and Boeotia, had chosen to become part of Attica. The Eleuthereans brought a statue of Dionysus to Athens, which was initially rejected by the Athenians. Dionysus then punished the Athenians with a plague affecting the male genitalia, which was cured when the Athenians accepted the cult of Dionysus. This was recalled each year on the first day of the festival by a procession of citizens carrying phalloi (a phallus), made of wood or bronze, aloft on poles. Sometimes various gifts and weapons showcasing the strength of Athens were brought along too. Competitions involved flute players and poets, and there was lots of dancing and drinking in the streets.

The Dionysia usually dedicated around five days to performance, with playwrights going head to head with each other to stage their plays in a competition to crown the best play, and judges watched from the front row. It has been suggested that audiences may have preferred to see well-known plays re-staged, rather than financially support new plays of questionable quality; or alternately, that revivals represented a nostalgia for the glory of Athens from before the devastation of the Peloponnesian War. Plays continued to be written and performed until the 2nd century BC, when new works of both comedy and tragedy seem to have been eliminated. After that point drama continued to be produced, but prizes were awarded to wealthy producers and famous actors rather than the long-dead playwrights whose work was being performed.

Another procession and celebration was held on the final day, when the judges chose the winners of the tragedy and comedy performances. The winning playwrights were awarded a wreath of ivy.

- Some useful discussion points could be:

- * What examples of similar festivals/events can you think of that exist today? **Edinburgh Fringe Festival, Glastonbury, The Voice, X Factor, etc.** How do you think these compare to the Dionysia? **Prize-winners receiving money and record deals, competitions, length of festivals, prizes being awarded to actors like the Oscars, etc**
- * Can you name some great Greek playwrights, some of who's work was performed at the festival? Aeschylus - **The Oresteia, The Persians.** Euripides - **Medea, The Bacchae.** Sophocles - **Antigone, Oedipus Rex.** Aristophanes - **Lysistrata, Frogs**
- * Who do you think came to watch the Dionysia? Rich people? Poor people? Or both? Prisoners? Were they meant for everyone? **Some sites say that women, slaves and children weren't allowed to attend, but this isn't confirmed. Children probably couldn't sit still for such a long time, and someone would need to be at home to look after the house, animals, etc**
- * The festivals encouraged people to travel to different places and to meet different people, like people do today at music festivals
- * Did male or female actors perform in the plays, or both? **The writers were all men, the actors and the chorus were all men, but many of the plays were about women.**
- * Did you know that comedy was thought of as "second best" for a long time, and that it was only brought in to the festival at a later stage. Is that true of entertainment today, do you think?

- Divide students in to small groups of three - five and give each group one of the seven extracts
- Mix the extracts up so that different extracts will be performed
- Give students five - ten minutes to put the extract on its feet, asking them to imagine that they are directing it for a large festival, for thousands of people

- NB: If the group is larger than the amount of characters in the extract, the other students can direct the piece and will form the “judging panel”
- During this time speak to each group and ask them to identify why they are staging it in their chosen way, giving them ideas if they are having trouble
- After ten minutes, as a class, watch the pieces, group by group
- When all performances have finished, the “judging panel” will award prizes (or points, like in Strictly, out of ten) to all groups under the following criteria:
 - * Best staging
 - * Best direction
 - * Best development of character

- NB: If all students are performing and there is no “judging panel” they can all mark each other’s work via a show of hands

- Ask judges to explain their marks (what was good, what worked well, etc) and keep a note of points
- The winning team get to host the next Dionysia and get to choose another Greek play to present in the future

Useful links:

- * <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dionysia>
- * <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Great-Dionysia>
- * <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=APzYzhFJ0Ao>
- * <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NxLtN4lsd28>