

Lysistrata

Aristophanes

About the play

The play takes place during the fruitless and long Peloponnesian war. Lysistrata holds a meeting with all of the women from across Greece and makes them swear on an oath that they will hold a sex strike until the war has ended. The women then seize the Acropolis in order to cut off the money supply for the war. A Magistrate arrives to see what is happening and the women humiliate him and dress him up. There are a variety of conflicts between the Men's chorus and the Women's chorus but eventually the men are struggling so much they decide to sign a peace treaty and have a party to celebrate.

Context

Set during the Peloponnesian War, Aristophanes wrote the play as a protest against political issues at the time as he feared for his beloved Athens. The play was first presented at the City Dionysia festival of 415 BCE. There is little conventional plot but a sequence of events and reactions. The structure of the play is very episodic and as such fits well with an epic theatre interpretation.

Drama had great significance to the Ancient Greeks and their drama festivals ran alongside their religious obeisance to the gods. Purpose built theatres were cut out of mountainsides called amphitheatres. Over time buildings were erected to create acting areas (Skene) for individual characters that emerged from the chorus. Costumes, masks and props were used to illustrate the characters for the audience.

Lysistrata – Athenian woman/protagonist. She is known as the first female hero of Greek comedy. Lysistrata is the least feminine of the women from either Athens or Sparta, and her masculinity helps her gain respect among the men.

Calonice - Calonice is Lysistrata's neighbour and like Lysistrata is a respectable middle-class housewife.

Magistrate – He represents Athens's masculine power structure and is the head of security and law in Athens. But is horrified by what he sees when he arrives at the Acropolis.

Myrrhine – An Athenian local who teases her husband later in the play in order to play her role in stopping the war.

Cinesias – Myrrhine's husband who tries to make her see sense and return home to look after their baby.

Lampito-She is representative of Spartan women. Lampito is a large, well-built woman who brings the Spartan women into Lysistrata's plan.

The Chorus of Women and Men- The Chorus of *Lysistrata* is split into two, the Chorus of Men and the Chorus of Women. The two choruses, both old and fragile, are incredibly comic elements of the text. As the members of the choruses have all reached and passed their prime, they are no use to Lysistrata in her project to stop the war.

Design

When approaching the text as a designer, here are some things to consider:

Concept: What is your concept? Production style? Chosen historical period? Research this and how it might influence your design ideas. Will the original production conditions influence your thinking?

Themes: How are they going to be expressed in your design ideas for the whole play and from scene to scene? How can your ideas help to communicate what you know about the characters and their relationship with others in the play?

Design skills include:

Set & props e.g. Stage space & shape, location, set construct, furniture and large props

Costume e.g. style, historical period, colour, texture of fabric and embellishments

Hair and Makeup e.g. style, colour, accessories, body makeup

Lighting e.g. type of lighting, position of lanterns, colour and intensity

Sound e.g. type of sound (music, sound effects or soundscape), intensity, length of cue and use of effects on the sound



Acting

When approaching the text as an actor, here are some things to consider:

Research the character throughout the play and before its action.

Acting style - This could be naturalistic, but versions of the play have used epic theatre & physical theatre techniques to emphasise the themes in the play.

Explore the relationships between characters in the "given circumstances" of the play and each scene. What are the motivations of the character to behave the way they do? Do they change? Why? What do they really mean when they engage in dialogue or are silent? Subtext.

How will you approach the nature of the Chorus? Are they both individual and separate characters?

How do they communicate this to an audience? Vocal

skills e.g. pitch, tone, rhythm, pausing, emphasis

Physical skills e.g. facial expression, posture, gesture, the use of physical levels, the speed of movement

Directing: [in the exam the element of **directing** will focus entirely on the relationship a director has with the actors.]

What type of acting style will be used? What are the conventions of this style and how might you use them in rehearsal with actors?

How might they move in the space? What do the proxemics between characters convey about their relationship? How could you, as a director, show the relationship between characters in the way they interact physically and vocally? How important is their entrance or exit from a scene and how could you get your actors to communicate this?

Some themes: The Brutality of War, Peace, Hope, Revenge, Role of woman in society, Politics, Power, Perseverance.