All drama originates from Ancient Greece where groups of people worshiped the god Dionysus by singing and dancing together. Soon, this religious ritual became formalized into what we know as drama. The Greek philosopher Aristotle was the first to categorize the parts of drama and tragedy, so we turn to his classification on what makes tragedy and drama.

Use these notes to review Greek history, theater, and tragedy. Test questions from the midterm and final will be drawn from these notes.

I. GREEK HISTORY

A. THE BATTLE OF MARATHON

1. IN THE YEAR 490 B.C., THE ATHENIANS DEFEATED AN OVERWHELMING FORCE OF PERSIANS AT THE BATTLE OF MARATHON

2. THE ATHENIANS LOST 192 MEN TO THE PERSIANS 6,400.

3. THE RESULT OF THIS INCREDIBLE UPSET WAS ONE OF THE LARGEST
FLOWERINGS OF CREATIVE ENERGIES THE WORLD HAS EVER SEEN.

4. A GREEK RUNNER RAN ABOUT 25 MILES TO CARRY THE NEWS TO ATHENS.

B. THE GOLDEN AGE OF GREECE

1. AFTER THIS EVENT, GREECE ENTERS A GOLDEN AGE DURING THE 5TH CENTURY B.C.
   a. GREEK LEADER PERICLES USES PUBLIC FUNDS TO REBUILD THE PARTS OF ATHENS DAMAGED IN THE PERSIAN WARS.

2. GREECE FORMS A DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT, WHERE EVERY MALE CITIZEN HAS THE RIGHT TO VOTE.

3. WOMEN AND SLAVES, HOWEVER, ARE NOT CONSIDERED CITIZENS AND HAVE NO PROPERTY RIGHTS. A WOMAN IS CONSIDERED THE PROPERTY OF HER HUSBAND.

II. GREEK DRAMA

A. RELIGIOUS WORSHIP

1. DRAMA BEGINS AS A FORM OF RELIGIOUS WORSHIP TO THE GREEK GOD DIONYSUS.

2. EARLIEST FORMS OF DRAMA INCLUDED RELIGIOUS CHANTS AND SONGS BE PERFORMED BY A GROUP OF INDIVIDUALS CALLED THE
**CHORUS.**

a. THE CHORUS WOULD WALK BACK AND FORTH ACROSS THE STAGE CHANTING RELIGIOUS HYMNS.

3. TRADITION STATES THAT **THESPIS**, A CHORAL LEADER, STEPPED OUT OF A CHORUS AND SPOKE TO THE CHORUS; THUS, HE IS KNOWN AS THE FIRST ACTOR.

**B. DIONYSUS**

1. DIONYSUS IS THE GOD OF WINE AND VEGETATION WHO SHOWED MORTALS HOW TO CULTIVATE GRAPEVINES AND MAKE WINE.

2. DIONYSUS WAS WORSHIPPED BY THE **MAENADS** OR **BACCHANTES**, WHO WERE A GROUP OF FEMALE DEVOTEES WHO LEFT THEIR HOMES TO ROAM THE WILDERNESS IN ECSTATIC DEVOTION TO DIONYSUS.

3. DIONYSUS WAS GOOD AND GENTLE TO THOSE WHO WORSHIPPED HIM, BUT HE BROUGHT ABOUT MADNESS AND DESTRUCTION UPON THOSE WHO SPURNED HIM OR THE ORGIASTIC RITUALS OF HIS CULT.

4. DIONYSUS WAS BELIEVED TO DIE EACH WINTER AND WAS REBORN IN THE SPRING.

a. THIS CYCLICAL REVIVAL, ACCOMPANIED BY THE SEASONAL RENEWAL OF THE FRUITS OF THE EARTH, EMBODIED THE PROMISE
C. DIONYSIAN FESTIVAL

1. YEARLY RIGHTS TO DIONYSUS EVOLVED INTO THE STRUCTURED FORM OF GREEK DRAMA.

2. THE GREATER DIONYSIA WAS HELD FOR FIVE DAYS DURING THE SPRING.

3. EACH WRITER WOULD PRESENT THREE TRAGEDIES AND A SATYR PLAY.
   a. A SATYR PLAY IS A FARCICAL, OFTEN BAWDY PARODY OF THE GODS AND THEIR MYTHS.

4. 15,000 PEOPLE WOULD SIT THROUGH THE PLAYS IN THE DIONYSIAN THEATER AND WOULD VOTE FOR THEIR FAVORITE PLAYS BY CASTING STONE BALLOTS.
   a. WINNERS WOULD RECEIVE THE LAUREL WREATH

III. GREEK THEATER

A. THEATERS WERE BUILT INTO NATURAL HILLSIDES

B. THE GREEK ACTORS WERE ALL MEN

1. THE ACTORS WORE LARGER THAN LIFE MASKS, WHICH INDICATED THE NATURE OF THE CHARACTER TO THE AUDIENCE.
a. IF A CHARACTER WAS HAPPY, THE MASK WOULD HAVE A SMILE, ETC.

2. EACH MASK ALSO CONTAINED A MEGAPHONE, SO THOSE FARTHEST AWAY IN THE AMPHITHEATER COULD HEAR THE ACTORS AND CHORUS SPEAK.

C. SOPHOCLES 496 B.C. - 406 B.C.

1. ONE OF THE THREE GREAT DRAMATIC DRAMATISTS OF ATHENS.

2. HE INTRODUCED A THIRD ACTOR TO THE STAGE.

3. SOPHOCLES HAD AN ARISTOCRATIC EDUCATION.

4. HE WAS CHOSEN TO LEAD THE CHORUS OF YOUTHS CELEBRATING THE NAVAL VICTORY AT SALAMIS IN 480 B.C.

5. HE WAS THE MOST SUCCESSFUL PLAYWRIGHT AT THE GREATER DIONYSIA, WINNING FIRST PRIZE AT LEAST 20 TIMES.

6. OF THE 100 PLAYS SOPHOCLES COMPOSED ONLY SEVEN SURVIVE AS COMPLETE PLAYS.

7. SOPHOCLES WAS VERY CONSERVATIVE, AND HIS PLAYS OFTEN DEAL WITH THE PAIN AND SUFFERING CAUSED WHEN AN INDIVIDUAL OBSTINATELY DEFIES DIVINE WILL OR AUTHORITY AND OBEYS HIS OWN INNER WILL -- EVEN IF HE RISKS LOSING HIS OWN LIFE.
Aristotle and Greek Drama

Aristotle's Definition of a tragic hero:

1. Comes from nobility
2. Tragic Flaw (caused by a simple mistake or a character flaw) maybe pride or *hubris*
3. Undergoes a Reversal of Fortune (fall from high to low)
4. Has a Downfall
5. Recognizes his mistakes (in a catharsis or purgation of pity and fear)

Play Structure:

1. Exposition
2. Rising Action
3. Climax
4. Falling Action
5. Denouement/Resolution

Aristotle's Six Elements of Drama

1. Plot (the incidents or story line)
2. Character (physical, social, psychological, moral--people represented in the play)
3. Thought/Theme (insights into humanity and life)
4. Music (all sound)
5. Spectacle (scenery and other visual elements)
6. Diction/language (the dialogue and poetry)
Tragedy

1. Tragedy is meant to reaffirm the fact that life is worth living, regardless of the suffering or pain that is part of human existence.

2. Tragedies are about people in conflict with the universe.
   a. tragedies are always about spiritual conflicts, never about every day events.

3. Tragic actions arise from a character's inner conflict.
   a. a tragic protagonist must have magnitude; his struggles are great because he is important to society.

4. The tragic protagonist must fall from high to low; they will have a noble soul.
   a. The audience must care about the tragic protagonist.

5. The tragic protagonist is a good man, but not perfect.
   a. He usually suffers from hubris (Pride) as shown through hamartia (character flaw or error in judgment).
   b. once the transgression is realized, the character enters the stage of anagnorisis (recognition) and will undergo a peripeteia (reversal of fortune or fall from high to low).

6. The protagonist's actions should arouse feelings of both pity and fear in the audience.
   a. Pity because the protagonist is better than we are, so we place ourselves into his position (empathy)
   b. Fear because we too do not know our future or fate.

7. By the end of the play, the audience should be purged of pity and fear, so they go through a catharsis.
   a. Catharsis = purgation of pity and fear

8. The tragic protagonist must ask the first and last of all questions: What does it mean to be?
   a. He must face the world alone, unaccommodated, and kick against his fate.
   b. He can never escape his fate, but he will insist upon accepting fate on his own terms.
Ancient Theater

Ancient theater started with the Greeks. The Greeks had three great writers of tragedy and two comic playwrights.

**Aeschylus** (525-456 B.C.) is often called the Father of Tragedy. His plays dealt with the interaction between gods and men, with emphasis on inevitability of suffering. His most famous play was *Agamemnon*; it was the first in a trilogy. It was followed by *The Libation Bearers*, and finally *The Furies*.

**Sophocles** (497-406 B.C.) was also a great writer of tragedies, who was also responsible for the addition of the third actor to the stage. He wrote over 100 plays; however, only seven have survived. These include *Electra* and the Oedipus trilogy which begins with *Oedipus Rex*, *Oedipus at Colonnus*, and finally *Antigone*.

**Euripides** (480?-405 B.C.) was the youngest, most modern and least popular of the three great writers of tragedy. His plays dealt with psychological motivation and social consciousness. He wrote plays such as *Medea*, and *The Trojan Women*.

**Aristophanes** (445-380 B.C.) Only eleven of his plays survive today and are examples of Old Comedy. He poked fun at public figures such as Socrates (*The Clouds*), and Euripides (*The Frogs*).

**Menander** (342-292 B.C.) was a writer of New Comedy. Only fragments of his plays have been found. He wrote comedies dealing with daily life and domestic situations.
Basic Theatre Terms

Act (noun) – The major division of a play.
Aside – A statement by an actor spoken half to him/herself and half to the audience.
Beat – A section of a scene where a shift of emotion or topic occurs.
Blocking – Coordination of an actor’s movements on stage.
Counter Cross – Matching an actor’s movement who crosses.
Cross – Walking from one side of the stage to the other.
Cue – A signal for something to happen.
Cue Line – A final line that signals an actor to begin the next line.
Curtain – A word signifying the beginning or the end of the play.
Fourth Wall – An imaginary wall between the audience and the actors in a play.
Monologue – A story or speech performed by one actor alone.
Motivation – A character’s reason for doing or saying things.
Objective – A character’s goal or intention.
Obstacle – Something that stands between the character and their objective.
Prop – Short for property. Anything an actor handles on stage.
Scene – The basic structural element of a play.
Stage Directions – Indications to the actor about various aspects of a play.
Subtext – Information that is implied, but not said by a character.
Basic Theatre Vocabulary

**Antagonist** - the character that provides the obstacles to the protagonist’s objective in a play

**Aside** - an observation or remark made by a character to the audience that is not being heard by other actors

**Blocking** - the pattern of movement actors follow while on stage

**Casting** - selecting which actors will play which roles/characters

**Characters** - the personalities or parts that actors become in a play; roles played by actors in a play; the third of Aristotle’s Six Elements of Drama

**Climax** - the point of highest dramatic tension or a major turning point in the action of the play

**Conflict** - the point in a play where action meets obstacle; the opposition of persons, forces, or ideas that gives rise to dramatic action in a play

**Costumes** - the clothing worn by the actors who play the characters

**Critique** - the art of evaluating or analyzing the play

**Denouement** - the solution to the conflict in a play; the wrapping up of events

**Development** - the phase in the action after the exposition has been presented and the plot has begun to build toward the climax.

**Dialogue** - the words spoken by the actors during a play.

**Diction** - 1) the word choices made by the playwright 2) the enunciation of the actors speaking the lines; the fourth of Aristotle’s Six Elements of Drama.

**Director** - individual who is in charge of all aspects of the production of a play; generally responsible for the final decisions in all areas of production

**Exposition** - information about what has happened before the action of the play begins; the set-up

**Foreshadowing** - clues given to the audience about upcoming events in the play

**Improvisation** - impromptu acting based on the following circumstances: who - the characters; what - the action; where - the place; and when - the time the action takes place

**Lazzi** - comic business or gag/joke

**Mime** - stylized pantomime; more exaggerated than pantomime often performed today in black clothing and white make-up.
**Monologue** - A work written to be spoken by just one person. This may be full length, as in a one-man or one-woman show.

**Pantomime** - a scene or play without words; the actors use only action and gesture to express their meaning.

**Playwright** - the individual who writes a play

**Plot** - what happens in a play; the order of events; the story as opposed to the theme; what happens rather than what it means; the first of Aristotle’s Six Elements of Drama

**Props** - objects used by characters on stage during a play. Hand Prop - an object small enough to be carried easily.

**Protagonist** - the principal character around which the action revolves

**Rehearsal** - preparing a play for performance

**Reversal** - a plot reversal when an action produces the opposite of what was desired or expected

**Role** - a part/character/person written by a playwright

**Script** - the play in written form

**Set** - the environment of the play; scenery and furniture

**Soliloquy** - A speech in which an actor, usually alone on stage, speaks his or her thoughts aloud.

**Spectacle** - the visual elements of the production of a play; the scenery, costumes props, makeup, lighting and special effects; the sixth of Aristotle’s Six Elements of Drama

**Stage** - the area where the actors perform the play

**Stage Left** - the left side of the stage as the actors look out toward the audience

**Stage Right** - the right side of the stage as the actors look out toward the audience

**Tension** - the state of anxiety induced in the audience by the threat of danger to a character in the play

**Theme** - what the play means as opposed to what happens (plot); the main idea or message within the play; the second of Aristotle’s Six Elements of Drama