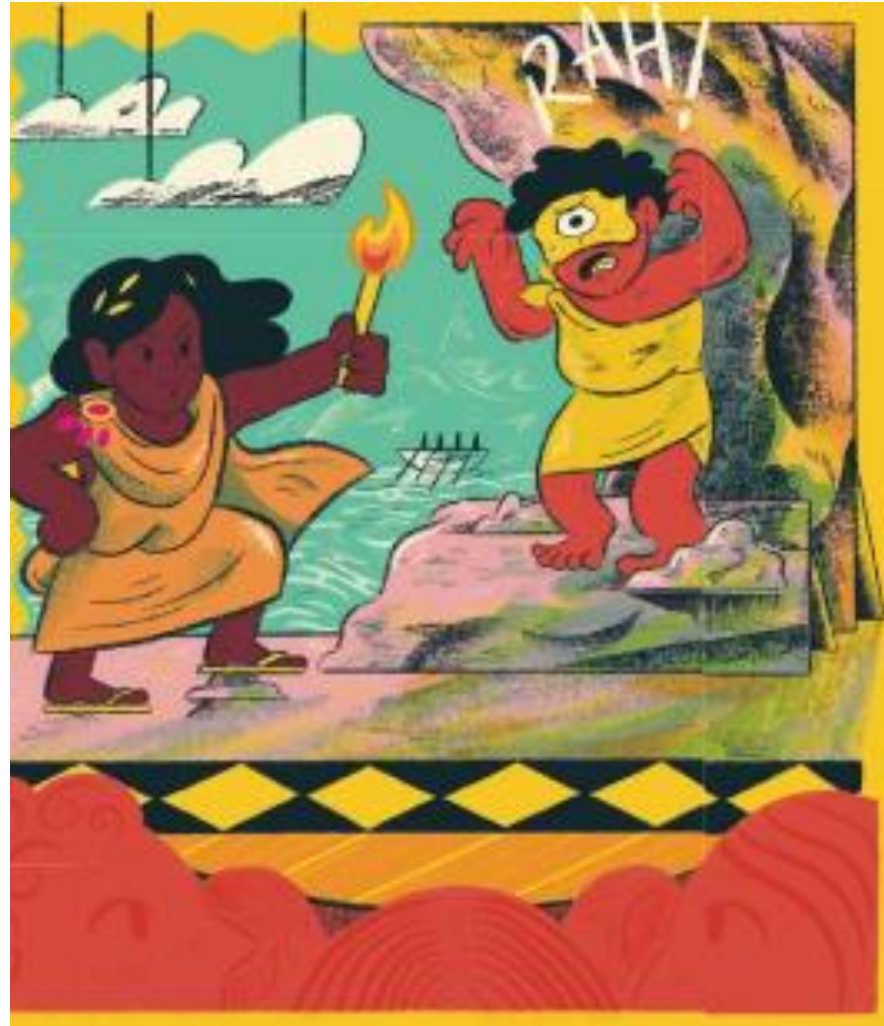




# TRAGEDY!



So, you want to live in infamy for the next 3,000 years, just like the great **Sophocles** or **Aeschylus**? The ancient Greeks loved watching plays and would compete in the Festival of Dionysus to entertain and move audiences, whilst critiquing kings and tyrants. Thousands of people gathered in Greek amphitheatres, which were semi-circular so that the people in the back row could hear the voices on stage (no electricity... so no microphones!). Famous playwrights like **Euripides** and **Sophocles** performed ancient Greek myths and stories of heroes fighting injustice or defeating an evil prophecy... you've heard of **Odysseus**, right? They were the rock stars of 450 BCE.

If you fancy creating your own epic story with tragic outcomes, comedic relief and shocking twists, follow our step-by-step guide to writing your own Greek tragedy. You'll be chilling in Elysium with millions of fans in no time.

### STEP 1: PICK A SOCIAL ISSUE YOU WANT TO EXPLORE IN YOUR PLAY

Greek plays had a strong moral message. They tried to teach the audience something. Whether it's the price of milk or the terrifying risks of climate change – pick an issue you're passionate about. Nothing says award-winning playwright better than a play written from the heart.

## STEP 2: CREATE SOME CHARACTERS

Every great story has a hero, a villain and somebody who needs rescuing. Why not challenge your audience's expectations and cast a female as your warrior? Or cast a brave hero who has a strong sense of justice and is deeply forgiving of his enemies.

## STEP 3: PLAN YOUR STORY

Is there going to be a war? Will the hero have an unrequited love, or is one of your characters going to chop up their enemy and bake them into a pie? Yes, the Greeks LOVED a bit of gore! There are lots of ways to plan your **story arcs** – try using a storyboard template (you can find these online) or mind-mapping the action. You could even write a list of plot points; whatever the method, find one that suits your inner writer and go crazy! General rule – no more than three lead characters should be on stage at any one time – except for the chorus.

## STEP 4: DEVELOP YOUR CHORUS

The chorus is central to moving the story forward. They are the citizens: people living in the city where the story takes place. They speak in unison, narrating the story, commenting on the action and giving their opinion about their leaders to represent ordinary people. The audiences loved the chorus because they could sympathise with it. (Note – remember their costumes should look similar, to make them look like working people in society.)

## STEP 5: WRITE YOUR SCRIPT

Possibly the hardest of all our steps... What kind of words do the characters use? How does their speech reflect their beliefs or personality? Remember, Sophocles, Shakespeare and all the legends in between had to redraft their scripts until they were happy. Be persistent. Keep writing. Keep redrafting.



## STEP 6: DESIGN YOUR PLAY VISUALLY

Choosing costumes, set and props is equally as important as the lines of dialogue and stage directions you've poured your heart into writing. Does the king wear a purple cloak? (Perhaps it'll have to be green as that's the colour of your parent's tablecloth, maybe NOT flowery like your nan's curtains...) The chorus wear masks. Have you made them? Can you design them? See our helpful photo guide to making your own Greek mask opposite.



See last slide

Get your family involved!

## STEP 7: DIRECT!

So, you've written your masterpiece, collected your costumes and imagined your set. Now is the time to get your actors together and bring it all to life. Staging is important – big, dramatic gestures and strong, booming voices will make your play iconically Greek – over exaggerate your body language and movements to make the performance highly dramatic.





# MAKE A CHORUS MASK

In a Greek play, members of the chorus often wear masks.

## YOU WILL NEED:

- A plastic mask (you can use this again and again)
- Scissors
- Petroleum jelly
- Gloves (important safety gear for any project that involves plaster of Paris)
- ModRoc
- Acrylic paint
- Sharp implement (a needle will do)
- Modelling clay
- Elastic

**1** Cut your mask below the nose and cover in petroleum jelly (this will stop the plaster sticking to the plastic).



**2** Wearing gloves for protection, dip strips of ModRoc in water, squeeze out and cover the front of the mask. Build layers to make facial



**3** Leave to dry for 48 hours.

**4** Paint mask and, when dry, peel away the plastic mask from the plaster duplicate. Using your needle and modelling clay, make a hole in each side and attach elastic.



Words: Rachel Leadley; Illustration: Robbie Cathro

## DISCLAIMER

Plaster of Paris can be dangerous if not used correctly. Always follow the instructions on the container and have a helpful adult present.

You may not have access to the things in the instructions but masks can be made from paper plates, card or just plain old paper and string. Previously, year 5 have made masks by using paper mache to cover a balloon. Use colour and be creative.



### STEP 1: DECIDE WHERE THE STAGE BEGINS AND THE AUDIENCE ENDS

There are lots of ways to stage a play. Do you want your audience to sit in a single block of seats facing the stage? That's called a **proscenium arch**. Maybe the stage could be like a catwalk, long and thin with audience members on either side. Or perhaps you could opt for a **promenade performance**, where audience members are dotted about and performers move around them? Your decision will be influenced by the space you are performing in, but also by the piece you want to perform. It's up to you.



### STEP 2: THINK ABOUT YOUR THEMES

What ideas are explored in your play? What colours, textures and images spring to mind when you think about it? Write all the answers down in a **mind map**, even if they sound a little strange. For example, if your play is about a conflict between a nature reserve and the city, your colours might be light spring green and dark smokey grey. Your textures might be gently ruffled like a meadow in the breeze (such a *romantic, ed*) vs. smooth, hard and jagged like glass. Collect colours and images and present them in a **mood board** – that's how we start every issue of AQUILA, by the way; with a collection of colours, textures and images. It's a great starting point for any creative project.





### STEP 3: ALL CHANGE

Situations change during the course of the play (that's kind of the point of any story) – think about simple ways to represent those changes on stage. Think about how objects can be used in more than one way. Can a row of chairs become a bridge? Could a hat become a bowl? Could a ladder become a mountain? Could a mop become a lion? These are all really interesting ways to add to your storytelling toolbox.

### STEP 4: SKETCH

Examining your mood board, sketch your design. You may not use the first sketch, or the second, or even the third. It doesn't have to be perfect. It just has to communicate your idea to the rest of your theatre troop.



### STEP 5: MAKE A MODEL

Professional set designers always make a **scale** model of their design to show exactly how it's all going to come together. This step might not be realistic if you're just playing about in your backyard, but if you're working on a school production or intending on building anything at all, it's definitely a good idea. If anything is wrong, it will probably show up at this stage.





## STEP 6: BUILD YOUR DESIGN

Alternatively, you could use this handy how-to-guide to build a super chic all-purpose theatre set. You can use these in whichever way you like, to play improvisation games, or even in your writing process (*it sounds very professional if you refer to your 'writing process' whenever possible, trust me I do it all the time, ed*).

**1** Cover your surfaces with newspaper or plastic sheeting, this activity can get messy.

**2** Collect as many cardboard boxes as you can. They need to be in good condition, not dented or broken. Differing sizes and shapes work better than uniform sizes.

**3** Tape up the open ends with black tape.

**4** Paint all the cardboard boxes with blackboard paint. We have chosen this paint because a little goes a long way and it has a nice matt finish. It's water-based and only needs one coat.

**5** Leave to dry.

**6** With white acrylic paint, paint different symbols and pictures onto the boxes.

## YOU WILL NEED:

- More than one person (optional, but it's quite a lot of work for one)
- Cardboard boxes
- Black tape
- Blackboard paint
- White acrylic paint

We've chosen things to represent the Greek gods of Olympus, but most of them can have more than one meaning. The eye can be an eye, but it can also represent CCTV, the evil eye, or the Cyclops. You can stack boxes up to create trees and pillars, bodies of water, or large animals. Actors can take them apart during the scene to rearrange the space, or construct the props they need.



## TAKE IT FURTHER:

Just how far can you take this make? We'd love to see your stage sets in action. Head to the readers' page at [aquila.co.uk/readers-page](http://aquila.co.uk/readers-page) and follow the link to send in your letters, or send them in the post to our usual address.