

GREEK THEATER

Brief History



How did theater as we know it come to be?

A brief overview

By Ms. Cantrell

The word tragedy comes from Greek *tragōidia* and comedy comes from Greek *kōmōidia*.

Tragedy has the protagonist battling an authority or force more powerful than themselves (such as Fate) with disastrous results.

Comedy is satirical or funny. It makes light of serious subject matter.

The festival Dionysia held in the March in Athens celebrated Dionysus and was started in around 508 BC- it was here that the tragedy, comedy, and satyr play emerged and spread throughout Ancient Greece. They would tragedy play competitions during this festival. Oral story telling was primary way for telling stories including religious stories and heroic myths. It was often through these plays that they would collectively celebrate their gods and

heroes. This oral tradition may contribute to historians not finding any scripts from that century- either they didn't write them down or none of the written copies have survived. From the historical records we do know about some of the competitors from that period: Thespis, Choerlius, Pratinas, and Phrynichus. Thespis was the first playwright and actor: his plays used one actor and a chorus. Aeschylus added the second actor, creating the opportunity for dramatic

dialogue. Sophocles added the third actor and wrote the most well known tragedy Oedipus Tyrannos (Oedipus Rex). The phrase *deus ex machina* means machine of the god- it refers to the gods resolving the conflict rather than the characters themselves. The actors would play multiple parts, wearing masks to represent the character they were playing.