INTRODUCTION TO GREEK TRAGEDY

The Theban Plays
FESTIVAL OF DIONYSIA

- Athenian festival celebrates Dionysus, who lifted a plague when the city accepted his cult.

- Procession with statue of the god and citizen carrying *phalloi*, drunken revelry, and dramatic performances over several days.

- Plays included song and dances, not just spoken word, and much of the feel of the play is lost when simply reading.

- Plays were performed outside, early in the day.

- Ancient theaters usually consisted of an open space at the bottom of a hill, with a simple painted wall, called a *skene* at the rear. Steps might lead to doors in the wall, actors to enter and exit. Over time, the hill was hollowed out to fit benches and the *skene* became a full stage.

- Each author presented 4 plays: 3 tragedies and a “satyr play,” which was usually a parody.
ACTORS

- Actors were men, as women were not allowed to perform.

- Actors were selected from a pool by city officials, after the plays had been chosen.

- There were only 3 actors per play, the *protagonist*, the *deuteragonist*, and the *tritagonist*. Although there may be more than 3 characters in a play, no more than that would ever appear on stage at a time.

- Actors used masks and costumes to portray characters of different gender, age and appearance.
THE CHORUS

- The Greek Chorus does not have a modern equivalent.
- Somewhere between an opera and musical comedy, the chorus sang and danced, providing a recap of the spoken lines during costume changes, as well as the entrance and exit of the play.
- Only the chorus leader, the coryphæus spoke to the actors on stage.
STRUCTURE

- To open the play, an actor gives an introductory monologue.

- Then the chorus chants an entrance song, called a *parados* as they enter the area from two sides. Its function was basically a call and response between the *coryphæus* and the characters on stage.

- Scenes of dialogue, called *episodes* would alternate with choral song and dance called *stasimon*, about four times, but sometimes one more or less.

- The final scene of dialogue is called the *exodos*, and may include a *kommos*, or song of grief, sung by an actor.