

DRAMA

The Greeks invented drama as an art form and built the first theaters in the West. Theatrical productions in Athens were both an expression of civic pride and a tribute to the gods. As part of their civic duty, wealthy citizens bore the cost of producing the plays. Actors used colorful costumes, masks, and sets to dramatize stories. The plays were about leadership, justice, and the duties owed to the gods. They often included a chorus that danced, sang, and recited poetry.

Tragedy and Comedy The Greeks wrote two kinds of drama—tragedy and comedy. A **tragedy** was a serious drama about common themes such as love, hate, war, or betrayal. These dramas featured a main character, or tragic hero. The hero usually was an important person and often gifted with extraordinary abilities. A tragic flaw usually caused the hero's downfall. Often this flaw was hubris, or excessive pride.

In ancient times, Greece had three notable dramatists who wrote tragedies. Aeschylus (EHS•kuh•luhs) wrote more than 80 plays. His most famous work is the trilogy—a three-play series—*Oresteia* (ohr•res•TEE•uh). It is based on the family of Agamemnon, the Mycenaean king who commanded the Greeks at Troy. The plays examine the idea of justice. Sophocles (SAHF•uh•kleez) wrote more than 100 plays, including the tragedies *Oedipus the King* and *Antigone*. Euripides (yoo•RIP•uh•DEEZ), author of the play *Medea*, often featured strong women in his works.

In contrast to Greek tragedies, a **comedy** contained scenes filled with slapstick situations and crude humor. Playwrights often made fun of politics and respected people and ideas of the time. Aristophanes (AR•ih•STAHF•uh•neeZ) wrote the first great comedies for the stage, including *The Birds* and *Lysistrata*. *Lysistrata* portrayed the women of Athens forcing their husbands to end the Peloponnesian War. The fact that Athenians could listen to criticism of themselves showed the freedom and openness of public discussion that existed in democratic Athens.

Source: "Golden Age of Athens," Susan Ramirez, et al., World History: Human Legacy, Holt (adapted)