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## GREEK THEATRE

Activities for Drama

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### TEACHER NOTES

*In this Drama-based lesson, learners will consider the key historical aspects of Greek theatre, its myths, traditions and conventions, and then create a series of presentations based on what they have learnt. The lesson is designed for Key Stage 3 learners, but can be adapted for Key Stage 4 & 5 as necessary. It is unlikely that you can include all of the elements of the lesson, but the activities are provided to help you choose the best opportunities for your particular group to engage with the style and theme of Greek theatre.*

*The content of these activities is inspired by Hercules but students do not have to have seen the production before they begin work on them. The notes are*

*written for teachers, but can easily be adapted as written instructions for students where appropriate.*

*Please refer to the **Hercules Live Production Guide for live theatre review** for specific details about the production, and additional images to support your teaching.*

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# GREEK THEATRE

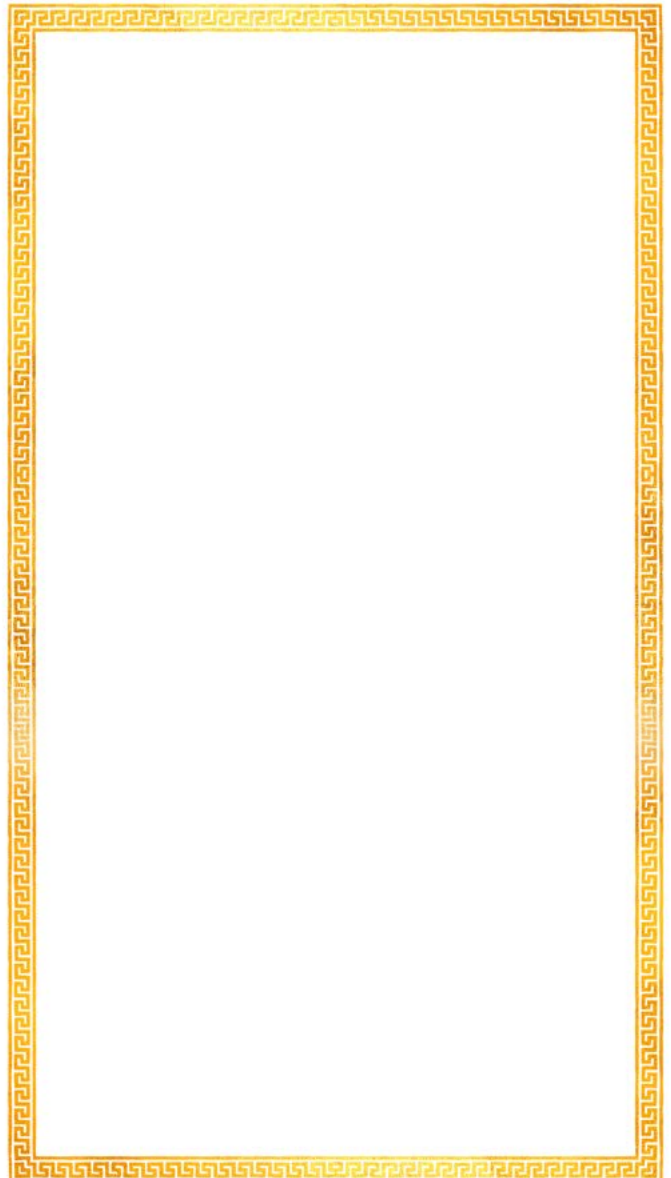
Drama

## 1. DEFINITIONS

- ✦ **THEATRON** The literal translation is 'the seeing place'. It refers to the seating where the audience would sit and watch the performance
- ✦ **AMPHITHEATRE** An open-air structure in which performances would take place. Circular or semi-circular in shape, the structure included tiered seating, often built into the side of a hill. The shape of the structure naturally amplified the voices of performers
- ✦ **PARADOS** The side entrances or passages through which actors entered and exited the stage
- ✦ **SKENE** A tent-like structure which served as a changing area but also formed part of a backdrop, (or 'scenery') against which to perform
- ✦ **ORCHESTRA** An area where the chorus would dance and sing
- ✦ **CHORUS** A group of performers who comment on the action. They can speak to the audience as well as the characters on stage, and can often help progress the narrative. They sing and speak in unison, and their costumes are similar/identical in order to identify them as a unified group
- ✦ **DIONYSUS** The Greek god of theatre, festivity and wine. Ancient Greek dramatists would write tragedies, comedies and satires which were performed as offerings at Festivals of Dionysus

## ACTIVITY

Explain the terms on the left. Then cover them up and ask students to match the definitions with the correct terms. If you need a visual reminder, you can provide students with the mixed-up definitions and terms.





# Disney HERCULES

## GREEK THEATRE

Drama

### 2. ANCIENT GREEK TOUR GUIDE



*A set projection of an ancient Greek temple in the style of an ancient Greek mosaic*

This task can form part of a research project on Greek drama, including online or book-based research to be able to respond to the prompts on the previous page.

Ask students to create a tour of the Festival of Dionysus. This could be a promenade piece of theatre, or a segment of a documentary on ancient Greek drama, depending on the interest and talents of your learners.

#### THE TOUR SHOULD INCLUDE

- ✦ An explanation of each part of the amphitheatre (this could involve some creative use of set, props and costumes if appropriate).
- ✦ Interviews with playwrights who have offered a play for the festival – particularly focusing on comedy or tragedy.
- ✦ Members of the audience talking about what they've seen.
- ✦ Members of the chorus talking about what and how they perform.
- ✦ An interview with an expert about Greek theatre.



### 3. CREATING A CHORUS



The Muses acting as a Greek chorus

The chorus is a fundamental element of Greek theatre. It requires the ability to synchronise with other members of the ensemble, break the fourth wall to talk to the audience, and use speech to comment on the action and influence the audience's responses to the action.

After their performances, ask the performers and audience to evaluate:

- ✦ Use of choral movement – unison and canon.
- ✦ Choral speech – clarity, synchronisation, and solo sections as well as choral speech.
- ✦ Use of space.
- ✦ Eye contact with the audience and a clear sense of breaking the fourth wall.

#### EXTENSION

This is a short section from *Hercules*. You may choose to extend this task to include a piece of text from a Greek play. Alternatively, you can ask students to create a short piece of choral speech telling an element of a Greek myth of their choice.

**Note:** S.R.O. Standing Room Only

In groups of 4-6, students should rehearse a choral reading of the following text from *Hercules*. It is from the moment in Act One where the Muses comment on Hercules' success in defeating the Hydra:

#### MUSES

BLESS MY SOUL  
HERC WAS ON A ROLL  
PERSON OF THE WEEK  
IN EVERY GREEK OPINION POLL  
WHAT A PRO!  
HERC COULD STOP A SHOW  
POINT HIM AT A MONSTER  
AND YOU'RE TALKING S.R.O  
HE WAS A NO ONE  
A ZERO, ZERO  
NOW HE'S A HONCHO  
HE'S A HERO!  
HERE WAS A KID WITH HIS ACT  
DOWN PAT  
FROM ZERO TO HERO  
IN NO TIME FLAT  
ZERO TO HERO!  
JUST LIKE THAT!

### 4. WELCOME TO MOUNT OLYMPUS: DESIGN FASHION SHOW



*The gods and goddesses of Mount Olympus*

In Greek mythology, Mount Olympus is home to the gods. In Hercules it is represented visually with the use of white and gold. It's a bright, light place to be, but it's not without its conflicts! In Hercules, the audience meets several different Greek gods and goddesses. These include:

- ✦ **ZEUS** King of the gods, ruler of the sky, god of thunder and lightning, as well as justice
- ✦ **HERA** Wife of Zeus, goddess of women, family and marriage
- ✦ **HADES** God of the dead, and of the Underworld (also called Hades). Brother to Zeus and Poseidon

The other gods who form the Olympians are:

- ✦ **APHRODITE** Goddess of love, beauty and pleasure
- ✦ **APOLLO** God of the sun, music and poetry
- ✦ **ARES** God of war, violence and courage
- ✦ **ARTEMIS** Goddess of wild animals and hunting
- ✦ **ATHENA** Goddess of wisdom and warfare
- ✦ **DEMETER** Goddess of agriculture and harvest
- ✦ **HEPHAESTUS** God of artisans, craftsman, sculpture and volcanoes
- ✦ **HERMES** Messenger and hard of the Gods, Patron God of merchants, thieves and travellers
- ✦ **POSEIDON** God of the sea, earthquakes and horses

The twelfth member of the Olympians is sometimes considered to be **DIONYSUS** (God of theatre and wine) However, he is considered interchangeable with **HESTIA**, goddess of the home and hearth: some lists of Olympians may favour Dionysus over Hestia, or vice versa.



### 4. WELCOME TO MOUNT OLYMPUS: DESIGN FASHION SHOW

Now that you know the different gods, and can see how the design team for *Hercules* has interpreted the costumes for Zeus, Hera and Hades, ask students to choose three other gods and design a costume for them. They should consider how the costumes for Zeus incorporate the motif of the thunderbolt for example, whilst Hera's costume communicates that she is a queen (in the use of the halo/tiara headgear) and her gown is very striking in its shape and colour. Her cape demonstrates her power and accentuates her movements, in particular.

During the research phase of *Hercules*, director Casey Nicholaw (director, choreographer) and costume designers Sky Switser and Gregg Barnes looked carefully at ancient Greek art. Many of the graphics and motifs in the design of the production are inspired by this research. You might like to allocate different research to different students who can then present their findings to inspire each other's works. You might also like to draw students' attention to this article from Vogue <https://www.vogue.com/article/dolce-and-gabbana-alta-moda-sicily-valley-of-the-temples> which details the Dolce & Gabbana fashion collection of 2019 which inspired some of the design work in *Hercules*.

Depending on the time and resources, you might like to:

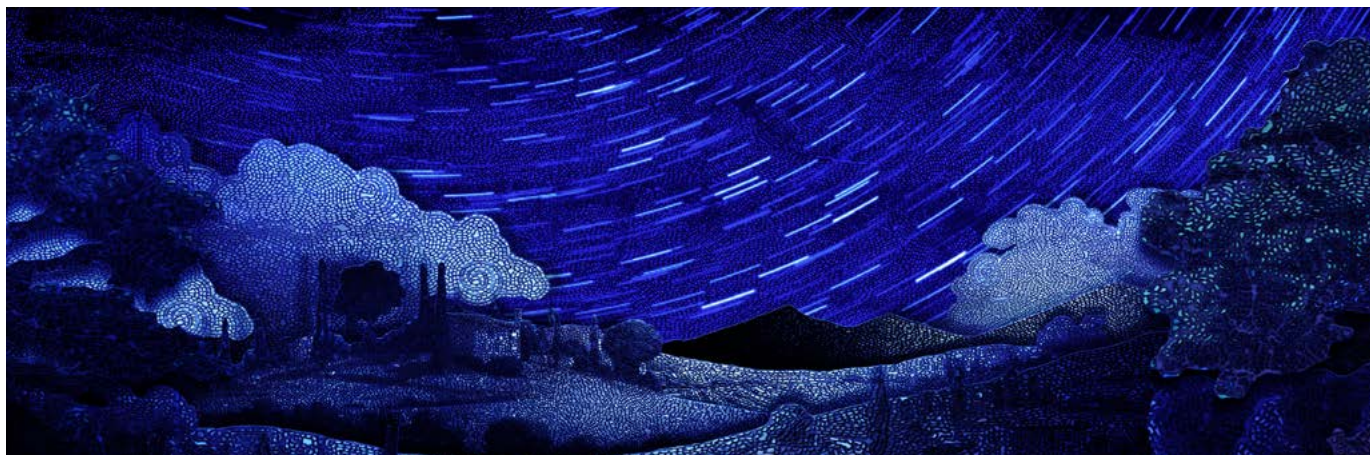
- ✦ Ask students to present their designs via a PowerPoint or on paper, labelling their drawings and annotating them to justify their decisions.
- ✦ Create collages using magazines, newspapers and other found material.
- ✦ Create a junk fashion show using newspaper, found fabrics, craft materials or recycled items to create the costumes on volunteer models (this could be done in teams, with each team taking one god or goddess to work on, instead of 3).



Zeus and Hera in full costume



### 5. DESIGNING VIDEO AND SET FOR A GREEK MYTH



The projections and video design by George Reeve are a fundamental part of the set for the production of *Hercules*. In this task, students will create the video or set design for a Greek myth of your, or their, choice.

As individuals or groups, students should obtain a cardboard box. Ideally it should be a large shoe box, or slightly bigger. Supervise them whilst they remove one LONG side of the box. They should also score slits in the two sides of the remaining long side, through which they will thread their backdrops and projections. (Alternatively they can simply create paper backdrops which fit on the 'cyclorama' of their box.

Once a myth has been chosen, work through the following stages of creating a video or projection design:

- ✦ 1 Summarise the story in 7 sentences. For example, 'Hercules meets Phil in a taverna'. For each sentence, add a brief description of the location where the action takes place. For example, 'a friendly, outdoor Greek taverna'.
- ✦ 2 Create a mind map of different images that could be projected on the cyclorama for each of the sentences. It does not need to be a naturalistic rendition of a specific place. For example, George Reeve used the mosaic motif to create a generic view of fields on Earth.
- ✦ 3 For each scene, choose one key image. For example, consider how the clouds were used to show the descent and ascent between Earth and Mount Olympus.
- ✦ 4 Draw those images on paper. Consider how the clouds were made to appear 3 dimensional by having layered clouds of different sizes and shapes. Explore how you might use this in your own paper design. Students should be very specific about colour. This could therefore utilise coloured felt tip pens for high colour saturation, watercolour or coloured pencils for lighter, paler scenes. (See the Live Production Review guide for more detail on how this variation in intensity was used in *Hercules*)

**Continued on page 8**



### 5. DESIGNING VIDEO AND SET FOR A GREEK MYTH

✦ 5 Add strong cardboard tabs to your images so that they can be slid in and out of the model box. Consider how those images can be moved up and down, as well as side to side if characters in the story are moving between worlds, for example.

✦ 6 Explore how the chosen images can help with the storytelling of a hero's journey. For example, Hercules' training involved running at speed which was suggested by the accelerated video footage of places that Hercules runs past. Students could loop a

long piece of paper and keep it moving to create a similar look in their own model box for their chosen Greek hero.

✦ 7 Once students have created their scenes (either independently in groups, depending on time and ability) ask them to share their work with another student or group. You might like to provide torches, covered with lighting filters where possible, so that students can see the impact of colour on their 'projections'.

