

MEDEA AND OTHER PLAYS

LIVING LITERATURE SERIES

EURIPIDES (P. Vellacott, Trans.)

A PERMA-BOUND PRODUCTION

TEACHER'S GUIDE

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SYNOPSIS

Medea

Jason, who led an expedition to Colchis to secure the Golden Fleece for his uncle Pelias, has fallen in love with Medea, daughter of King Aetes. She has tricked her father and killed her brother to aid Jason. Returned to Pelias's realm, Medea plotted to steal the throne, but failed. After arranging for the king's murder, she and Jason fled to Corinth.

At Creon's palace, a nurse mourns twisted love and the odium it creates. Jason, who has married Creon's daughter, has betrayed both wife and sons. The nurse suspects that Medea will think up an unspeakable retaliation. A nursery servant reports that Creon wants to oust Medea and her boys. The nurse dreads to see the family destroyed. Medea, pulsating with anger at Jason, hears the women of Corinth deplore the state of affairs.

Creon orders Medea and the children out of Corinth to save his kingdom from her evil. She denies that she is a sorceress; Creon doubts her words. She gains a single day's postponement and promises to leave by sunrise. When the king withdraws, she contemplates retaliation. The chorus supports her musings.

When Jason returns and mocks her, she calls him a villain. He retorts that she anticipates too great a reward for helping his expedition. He explains that he needed a royal bride to complete his alliance with Creon. Sneering at women for relying too heavily on marriage, he riles his edgy ex-wife, who condemns his evil heart. Jason accuses Medea of cursing Creon. Angrily, she curses his progeny as well. The chorus bemoans the overturning of love into bitterness. Aegeus welcomes Medea to take shelter in Athens, his realm, if she will give him an heir. She agrees to depart from Corinth and settle in Athens.

Alone with the Corinthian chorus, Medea ponders how to poison Jason's wife with a toxic robe and coronet and how to kill her own children. Against the chorus's warnings, Medea pursues vengeance and tricks Jason with fake maternal tears. He agrees to have Creon lift their exile and promises to find a place for them in his new home. Medea has her sons present the embroidered garment and coronet as gifts for Jason's bride.

When the boys return, their tutor reports that the family is no longer banned and that Jason's wife accepted the gifts. Medea regrets the evil that will follow. The tutor believes that she wants to protect her boys. When she is left with them, she teeters between kissing and killing them, then sends them indoors.

Medea discovers from a herald that Creon and Jason's wife are dead. She learns that Jason's bride rejected the boys, but received the robe and coronet they brought her. The garments caused a double source of fire to her body. Creon grasped her remains and suffered the same fate.

Against the advice of the Corinthian women, Medea sets stage two of her plot in motion. Inside the residence, she kills the wailing children with a sword. The chorus wonders at such mayhem and doubts that anyone can rival the slaying of their

own children. When Jason hears about the murders, he intends to slay his former wife.

A dragon-drawn chariot flies above the house bearing Medea. Jason rues his marriage to a cold-blooded killer. She predicts that Jason will die beneath his rotting ship *Argo*. He curses her. The chorus warns that the gods work out human lives with unforeseeable ends.

Hecabe

Far from Troy, Hecabe, once queen of Troy, is a war prize for Agamemnon, the Greek commander in chief. Before his tent in Thrace, the spirit of Polydorus, youngest son of Hecabe and King Priam, speaks his father's fear. He sent Polydorus to Polymestor, king of Thrace, to keep him safe. After the fall of Troy, Polymestor killed Polydorus, kept the payment, and tossed the young prince's remains into the sea.

The ghost remains three days near Hecabe while the Greeks delay their return. The ghost of Achilles, hovering over his own grave, demands that the victors sacrifice the princess Polyxena on the spot to assuage his spirit. Polydorus's ghost regrets that the death will cost Hecabe a beloved daughter on the day that his own corpse resurfaces. He blames a jealous god for his mother's plight.

Surrounded by other Trojan prisoners, Hecabe recounts her sufferings and a vision of the deaths of her daughter and son. Lacking the advice of her clairvoyant children, Helenus and Cassandra, the queen bears the doom of a dream in which a wolf grabbed a fawn from her lap. The female prisoners mourn the fact that Odysseus has persuaded Agamemnon to kill Polyxena to satisfy Achilles's spirit.

Hecabe relates the verdict to Polyxena, who is more disturbed at her mother's anguish than at her own death. When Odysseus comes for the girl, the queen reminds him that she rescued him when Helen saw through his disguise as a beggar when he spied on Troy. Hecabe states that Helen is more worthy of death than Polyxena. Odysseus replies that Greek women have suffered during the war and that her suffering is no greater than theirs.

Hecabe instructs Polyxena to humble herself before Odysseus, but the girl refuses to beg. The captives admire her strength and pride. Hecabe offers to take Polyxena's place because the queen deserves the penalty for bearing Paris, Helen's abductor. Odysseus refuses to negotiate.

Polyxena urges the queen to give in to Odysseus's demands. The girl departs with the queen's message to Priam and the valiant Hector in Hades and reminds Hecabe that she still has Polydorus. Hecabe collapses.

Talthybius, Agamemnon's herald, returns to bury the princess. Hecabe listens as he describes how Achilles's son offered Achilles the ritual wine and raised the sword blade. She retorted that she accepted death and pled to die unrestrained. Pulling her robe apart, she bared her breast and knelt to receive the fatal stroke.

Some Greeks raised a pyre and departed. Others complained that they offered no ceremonial garment or ornamentation for her remains. Talthybius's words comfort the queen.

MEDEA AND OTHER PLAYS

The aged maid returns ahead of bearers who carry Polydorus's body. The queen believes that this final loss will kill her. The maid realizes that the queen suspected that the prince was dead. The chorus debates with the queen the meaning of her vision of a black-winged figure. Agamemnon demands to know why the queen has not dressed the princess's remains. Seeing Polydorus, he halts. Hecabe identifies the corpse as the prince. Agamemnon commiserates with Hecabe.

The queen kneels to beg Agamemnon to avenge the prince by punishing Polymestor for murder and indecent treatment of the corpse. Agamemnon hesitates to accept the responsibility. Hecabe suggests joining with the captives to kill Polymestor and asks for safe conduct for the women. Agamemnon doubts that women are capable of killing a man. He allows her to summon Polymestor and his two children.

Polymestor arrives pretending sympathy for Priam and Hecabe. He lies to her that Polydorus and the king's pledge money are safe. She sends him to Athena's altar in Troy to locate more gold under a black rock and adds that she has concealed treasure in her tent under a pile of armor. When Polymestor and his children enter, the women sing of justice as sounds of violence emerge.

Polymestor, bleeding from blind eyes, flees the tent and debates with the chorus the justification for his wounds. Agamemnon stops him from slaying Hecabe. Polymestor rationalizes that Polydorus had to die to end future danger to Greece. He denounces the Greek women for hiding daggers to stab his children and brooches to puncture his eyes. He claims to have removed from Agamemnon a future of dreading Polydorus and his troops.

Hecabe denounces Polymestor as a barbarian. She claims that he lacked the courage to attack Priam's last son so long as Troy stood. She charges him with murdering a guest in his home and with concealing Priam's pledge money rather than share it with Agamemnon, who needed funds for his weary army. Agamemnon agrees that Polymestor deserves to die.

Degraded by the fallen queen, Polymestor bewails his children and blindness. He cites Dionysus, the Thracian prophet, who predicts that Hecabe will kill herself on the way to Greece by leaping from a mast. Her tomb, called the Dog's Grave, shall become a sailor's landmark. He also predicts that Cassandra will die.

Hecabe makes light of his prophecies, but he adds another prediction that Clytemnestra will kill both Agamemnon and Cassandra. Agamemnon orders Polymestor gagged and cast on a desert isle. He sends Hecabe to ready the corpses for burial. He welcomes a stout breeze that will return his ships to their homeland.

Electra

Following Electra's wedding, her husband, a Mycenaean peasant, introduces the play and explains why his mother-in-law Clytemnestra convinced her lover Aegisthus to murder her husband Agamemnon, leader of the Greek forces at Troy. During the assassination, Clytemnestra rescued her daughter. Aegisthus then plotted to wed Electra to a working-class man to deprive her children of noble birth. He intended the ploy to limit the number of claimants for the throne, which he has seized. Electra's husband decided to leave her a virgin.

Electra explains that she performs the harsh work of a peasant, a position that Aegisthus has forced on her. Accompanied by his friend Pylades, Orestes, Electra's twin, intends to propitiate Apollo's shrine to promise the god that he will avenge Agamemnon's death. As is the custom, Orestes killed a lamb as a blood sacrifice and left a lock of hair at the former king's tomb. Before reuniting with family, Orestes gathers information about

his sister.

Bolstered by country women from Argos, Electra hears about the celebration of the goddess Hera two days hence, but chooses to embrace suffering rather than dance with the celebrants. The leading peasant accuses Electra's aunt Helen, Clytemnestra's twin sister, of causing the devastating war with Troy. Electra shies away from the two men who observe her. Orestes conceals his kinship and declares that he comes in peace to deliver news of her twin.

Electra fills in details about her marriage. Without a brother to avenge their father, she regrets that Orestes left so long ago. The only citizen who could recognize the boy is an aged tutor of the king, who stole away with Orestes to a foster home. While Electra narrates family history, Orestes and the chorus listen eagerly. She declares that the royal palace bears the taint of blood crime and that their mother lives in luxury while her lover sneers at Orestes and throws stones at Agamemnon's grave.

Electra's husband accuses her of immodesty, but withdraws his complaint when he sees the two newcomers. When he invites Orestes to an overnight stay, Orestes accepts and credits him with courtesy. Taking her husband aside, Electra worries that they live in poverty. She asks her husband to invite Agamemnon's old servant to entertain two obviously noble guests.

Bearing provisions, the aged retainer weeps as he returns from the king's grave. He tells Electra that some mourner has slain a black ram, spread myrtle branches, and left hair, which resembles her own. She doubts that the evidence links her with the unknown mourner. The old man claims that the foot prints resemble hers.

The aged tutor recognizes Orestes by a scar on his forehead. Electra, convinced that her twin has returned, embraces him. The old man tells Orestes that no one will help him avenge the king's death. The servant proposes that Orestes confront Aegisthus at the pasture, where, without a bodyguard, he sacrifices a bull to the Nymphs.

Electra promises to do her part by murdering Clytemnestra. She sends the servant to report that she has given birth to a boy. In tense moments, the twins pray to Zeus and Hera. Electra hears Orestes scuffling with Aegisthus and learns that her brother triumphed. Immediately, the palace staff accept the servant's identification of the rightful heir to the throne.

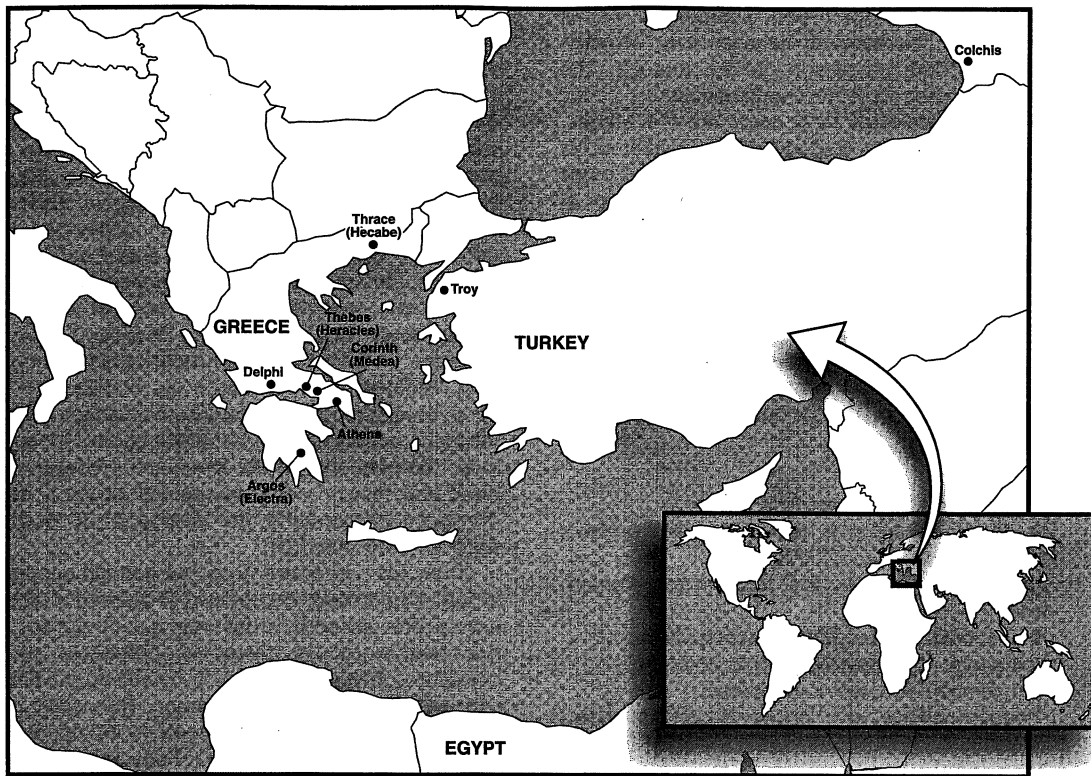
The chorus sings a hymn of triumph as servants display Aegisthus's remains. Electra awaits her own part in the double assassination. Orestes fears that he is unable to kill his mother. Arriving in a chair along with the women Agamemnon enslaved on his way home from Troy, Clytemnestra complains that the king's captured women belong to her. She admits plotting against the king.

Electra responds that her mother is conceited and that she won Aegisthus as a pawn to kill Agamemnon because he fought a war to reclaim Helen. Clytemnestra claims that she regrets that her son lives far from home and that Electra toils like a peasant under the badgering of Aegisthus. Electra asks how to perform the post-birth ritual. Clytemnestra offers her assistance.

Inside the hut, the chorus thrums with a vengeful hymn. Clytemnestra begs mercy, but the peasant singers condemn her for multiple wrongs. The twins return with blood on their hands and terror on their faces. Orestes recounts his mother's act of exposing her breast and reaching to his face as she faced imminent death.

The Dioscuri, Castor and Polydeuces, appear at the roof and accuse Apollo of causing mass slaughter. They advise the twins on earning forgiveness. They instruct Electra to marry Pylades

MEDEA AND OTHER PLAYS AND OTHER PLAYS



and Orestes to flee the kingdom to escape the mind-destroying Fates. At Athena's temple in Athens, he must undergo a trial at the Hill of Ares. If the hearers vote a tie, Orestes will shed blame.

The twin gods tell citizens to bury Aegisthus and that Menelaus and Helen will help bury Clytemnestra. They explain that a phantom Helen went to Troy while the real Helen stayed at Proteus's palace in Egypt. After the Fates free Orestes, he can settle on the River Alpheius in Arcady and live without further strife. Electra's peasant husband will earn a reward for treating her well.

The peasant singers asks why the twins had to suffer such a hard task. The gods reply that Apollo and the fates cursed the family. The twins weep as Orestes prepares once more to depart. The Dioscouri promise to aid those who are righteous and just and warns others of the penalty for wrongdoing.

Heracles

Amphitryon, Heracles's father, stands in his son's palace in Thebes before his daughter-in-law and sons at Zeus's altar. He explains why the hero left home to live in Argolis: Heracles ended Amphitryon's exile for slaying Electryon, Heracles's grandfather. By performing deeds commanded by Eurystheus, Heracles killed monsters. The 12th and last labor, stealing Cerberus, the three-headed dog, from Hades, precedes the first act.

Lycus, who has killed Creon and stolen the Theban rule, intends to murder Heracles's whole family to prevent them from seeking vengeance. Lycus has impoverished Amphitryon, who clings to Zeus's shrine and guards his grandchildren. Megara's worry over threats to husband and children. The old man soothes He predicts that Heracles will return soon. A chorus of old men expresses compassion.

Lycus worsens the situation by deriding claims that Heracles is a god's son and taunts Megara for depending on her hero husband. Lycus insults Heracles's memory; Amphitryon refutes

his claims that Heracles is dead. Amphitryon charges that Lycus is merely terrorizing the family, but doubts that he can quell Lycus. The chorus stands behind the old man.

Puffed up and strutting, Lycus summons servants to bring oak logs for a pyre. He flaunts his control over Thebes. The chorus leader yearns to overthrow the usurper. Megara thanks the chorus for its support, but warns them not to press Lycus too far. She readies her children for death. The chorus regrets that he is unable to defend her. Amphitryon asks to be the first slain. Megara requests that the children dress in robes before the execution. Lycus agrees to her request.

Amphitryon blames Zeus for abandoning Heracles's children. The chorus intones a hymn to the 12 labors of Heracles. Megara and the three little boys return to their fate. She bewails their doom and summons her husband's spirit to scare off Lycus. As Amphitryon prays again, Megara sees Heracles and relates Lycus's plan to kill them all. Heracles promises to tear down Lycus's palace, kill the usurper, and toss his corpse to the dogs.

Amphitryon warns that other enemies will flock to the scene. He urges his son to hurry and to guard his temper. Heracles agrees and narrates details of his sojourn in the underworld. Pulling his children to him, he enters the palace. The chorus sings a lament for the aged.

When Lycus demands that his victims appear, Amphitryon refuses to summon Megara lest he bear part of the guilt for her murder. Lycus goes inside to retrieve her and the children. Amphitryon follows him to see his reaction to Heracles. The chorus sings a jubilant air and praises Heracles. Iris, the god's handmaid, and the spirit of Madness appear from the sky. Iris warns that Heracles will suffer insanity if he slays his kin and predicts that he will kill his own children. Confusion arises in the house.

A herald reports that insanity seized Heracles after he killed Lycus. Heracles used his bow and club to kill his wife and chil-

MEDEA AND OTHER PLAYS

dren. Before he could kill Amphitryon, a phantom Pallas [Athene] hurled a boulder that knocked Heracles down. Amphitryon and the staff bound him to a pillar to halt his rampage. The old man lulls his son to sleep while the chorus despairs.

Heracles rouses and believes he is once more in Hades. Amphitryon returns him to sanity and reveals the extent of his insanity. Heracles can only wish himself dead. Theseus comes to his aid with an Athenian army and is stricken with terror at the butchery to the Theban royal family. Heracles expounds on his evil fate, but blames Hera rather than Amphitryon. The chorus agrees that she hated Zeus's offspring.

Theseus advises Heracles to return to Athens, Pallas's fortress, where Theseus will share the kingdom's rule. Heracles accepts the offer. Heracles anticipates that the people of Argos will reward him for the capture of Cerberus. Gladdened by Theseus's friendship, he bids his aged father farewell.

TIME LINE

B.C.

- ca. 1193 Greeks sack and destroy Troy.
- ca. 700 Greek drama begins as part of seasonal festivals honoring Dionysus.
- ca. 535 Thespis becomes the first actor in the Western world.
- 533 Athens holds the first dramatic competition.
- ca. 530 Pythagoras theorizes the Earth is a sphere.
- ca. 525 Pythagorean Theorem is developed.
- 525-460 Athenian political and military leader Themistocles lives.
- 520 The sundial is introduced into Greece.
- 508 Athens becomes a democracy.
- 500-429 Athenian political leader Pericles lives.
- 490 Greeks defeat Persian invasion at Marathon.
- 486 Athens holds the first comedy competition.
- ca. 484 Euripides is born.
- 484-420 Greek historian Herodotus lives.
- 480 Greeks defeat Persians at Salamis.
- 477 Work begins on the Parthenon.
- 468 Sophocles beats out Aeschylus for the top prize.
- ca. 468-467 Aeschylus writes *The Seven Against Thebes*.
- ca. 456 Aeschylus writes *Prometheus Unbound*.
- 449 Euripides becomes a playwright.
- 444 Euripides wins a first prize.
- 441 Sophocles writes *Antigone*.
- 438 *Alcestis* and *The Cyclops* are written.
- 435 Pericles builds the Theater of Dionysus at Athens.
- 431 Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta begins.
Medea is written.
- ca. 429 Sophocles writes *Oedipus Rex*.
- 425 *Hecabe* is written.
- 423 Aristophanes writes *The Clouds*.
- ca. 422 *Heracles* is written.
- 415 *The Trojan Women* is written.
- 414 Aristophanes writes *The Birds*.
- 413 *Electra* is written.
- ca. 406 Euripides dies.
- 405 Spartans destroy Athenian fleet.
- 404 Sparta captures Athens.

AUTHOR SKETCH

A difficult personality and the least successful of the Greek triad of tragedians—Sophocles, Euripides, and Aeschylus—Euripides left a large canon of extant tragedies and the only surviving satyr play, *The Cyclops*, one of some seven or eight he composed in his lengthy career. The son of Cleito (or Clito),

a produce vendor, and Mnesarchus (or Mnesarchides), a retailer from Phyla in Attica, Euripides was born around 484 B.C. on the island of Salamis.

Euripides's father learned from an oracle that his son would earn victory crowns. Euripides enjoyed the leisure to read and wander at will. He received training appropriate to his station, prepared for an athletic career, and was selected a torch-bearer and dancer for the rites of Apollo Zosterius. After satisfying military obligations at the age of 18, he studied art and philosophy under two sophists, Anaxagoras and Prodicus. With his first work, *Daughters of Pelias*, he became a playwright in 459 B.C.

Euripides won his initial first prize at age 43. To maintain concentration, he departed from Athenian fans to withdraw into a cavern on Salamis, collect manuscripts, and enjoy his solitude. Although he took part in an embassy to Syracuse and wrote an epitaph for Greeks killed in battle in Sicily, he took no delight in politics. At the end of his career, he had entered the Great Dionysia contest 22 times and produced 92 stand-alone plays, only four of which earned first prizes. A fifth in honor of *The Bacchae* accrued to his credit after his death around February or March 406 B.C.

In his last two years, Euripides left his homeland in disgust at failure to achieve the renown he deserved. Another explanation for the self-exile is his unpopularity for impiety, bookishness, and iconoclastic principles. In Macedon and Thessaly, he sojourned at King Archelaus's sparkling philhellenic court to visit with Timotheus and Agathon. During his stay, he wrote several plays, including *The Bacchae*. He appears to have died in Macedon and was interred at Pella. Mourners honored him in the port city of Piraeus with a cenotaph. The epitaph reads, "All Greece hath Euripides won."

CRITIC'S CORNER

For all his cantankerousness and lack of literary polish, Euripides wrote lasting, poetic stage works that retained their appeal beyond those of the era's elder star tragedians, Sophocles and Aeschylus. The most passionate and tragic of Greek playwrights, he rounded his characters' emotions with a full panoply of responses to suffering and madness. He challenged the prevailing nationalism of his day with depictions of fear, jealousy, and cowardice and applied psychological analysis to noble female characters, including Hecabe and Electra.

Beyond the usual themes for tragedy, *Medea*, Euripides's masterwork, overwhelmed audiences with the extent to which she carried vengeance. Her characterization comes closest to witchcraft of any being in Greek mythology. Nonetheless, Aristophanes enjoyed ridiculing Euripides by depicting him as a character in the comedies *Acharnians*, *Thesmophoriazusae*, and *Frogs*. The plays parody him as a misogynist, atheist, and elitist. Aristotle recognized weakness in his plots, yet called Euripides "the most tragic of poets."

EURIPIDES'S WORKS

- Alcestis* (438 B.C.)
- Alcmaeon in Corinth* (ca. 405 B.C.)
- Alcmaeon in Psophis* (ca. 438 B.C.)
- Alexander* (415 B.C.)
- Andromache* (ca. 427 B.C.)
- Andromeda* (412 B.C.)
- The Bacchae* (405 B.C.)
- Chrysipus* (ca. 412 B.C.)
- Cressae* (ca. 438 B.C.)
- The Cyclops* (438 B.C.)
- Daughters of Pelias* (455 B.C.)
- Dictys* (431 B.C.)
- Electra* (413 B.C.)

MEDEA AND OTHER PLAYS

Hecabe (425 B.C.)
Helena (412 B.C.)
The Heracleidae (ca. 428 B.C.)
Heracles (ca. 422 B.C.)
Hippolytus (428 B.C.)
Ion (417 B.C.)
Iphigenia in Aulis (405 B.C.)
Iphigenia in Tauris (ca. 413 B.C.)
Medea (431 B.C.)
Oenomaus (ca. 412 B.C.)
Orestes (408 B.C.)
Palamedes (415 B.C.)
Philoctetes (431 B.C.)
The Phoenician Women (410 B.C.)
Sisyphus (415 B.C.)
The Suppliants (421 B.C.)
Telephus (ca. 438 B.C.)
Theristae (431 B.C.)
The Trojan Women (415 B.C.)

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GENERAL OBJECTIVES

1. To experience and read aloud from a Greek tragedy
2. To identify and explain dramatic conventions, particularly prologue and chorus
3. To place drama in the canon of world literature

4. To envision the staging of contrasting scenes and moods
5. To enumerate varied images of fate
6. To isolate and explain examples of classic situations and attitudes
7. To set the play in its social, mythological, and geographical context
8. To comprehend vengeance and power as motivators
9. To evaluate constraints on women in classical times
10. To discuss the use of supernatural intervention

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

1. To determine why Hecabe faces the loss of a large royal family
2. To analyze Polymestor's deceit and punishment
3. To explain why Heracles suddenly goes mad and returns to sanity
4. To account for the use of a peasant's prologue to preface Electra
5. To discuss Medea's emotions as a mother and wronged woman
6. To analyze the importance of reward to Odysseus and Agamemnon
7. To enumerate poetic devices that play a major role in the dialogue
8. To note shifts in Orestes's resolve as he faces a difficult task
9. To list and explain circumstances that produce pity and fear in Hecabe
10. To account for the horrendous deaths of various characters

LITERARY TERMS AND APPLICATIONS

For a better understanding of Euripides's style, present the following terms and applications to the play:

foil a character whose presence in a literary work offsets or enhances the contrasting traits of another character, for example, Lycus and Heracles. The former is a thieving usurper who would not hesitate to murder Heracles's entire family and immolate them in an oak log fire to assure his control of the throne. Heracles, the famous warrior and performer of twelve superhuman labors, is a loving family man who happily returns to his wife and children to lay a trap to halt Lycus's fiendish plot.

irony an implied discrepancy between what is said or done and what is meant, as in Heracles's intended trap for Lycus and the turn of events that causes Heracles to go mad and murder the very family he tries to protect.

round character a realistic being who possesses a complex or multifaceted array of traits. The description fits Hecabe, who is the widowed queen sunk into despair after the defeat of her country and the deaths of her loved ones. In her negotiations and pleadings, she maintains dignity and nobility, yet displays her terror at the thought of Greeks murdering her surviving children. As an avenger, she exerts what strength remains to her in plotting with the Trojan captives to blind Polymestor and kill his children. She justifies her savagery as revenge for the murder of Polydorus and the execution of Polyxena.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SETTING

Euripides' plays are set in ancient Greece, where small kingdoms dotted the land before it became a unified nation. *Medea* opens at Jason's home in Corinth, one of Greece's major cities on the isthmus between upper Greece and the Peloponnesus. Medea, the enchantress from Colchis, had lived at the end of Pontus beyond the Caucasus Mountains at the southern tip of Russia. Returned with Jason and his crew aboard the Argo, she resides with him and their two sons at the palace in Corinth until

MEDEA AND OTHER PLAYS

he pairs with a royal bride. She receives an offer from Aegeus, a guest at Jason's wedding, to take her northeast to Athens to bear him an heir to the throne.

Hecabe takes place before the tent of Agamemnon at Thrace, kingdom of Polymestor. The peninsula lies north of the strait called Hellespont that separates Europe from Asia. Thrace is a peaceful land, in contrast with Phrygia's walled city of Troy, site of a ten-year battle between Greeks and Trojans after Prince Paris abducted Helen of Sparta. The play opens on Polydorus's description of a murky geography—the subterranean caves of the underworld, colony of Hades. Significant to the plot is the burial place of Achilles, whom the Greek burned outside Troy's walls and buried there alongside his friend Patroclus. At the play's end, the surviving Trojan women prepare to board ships to sail with the victors to Greece. Hecabe knows from prophecy that she will die a violent death and be buried in the Dog's Grave, called the "bitch's tomb," which will become a landmark to sailors.

Electra opens at a hut in Argos on the shore of the River Inachus near the eastern shores of the Peloponnesus, the lower portion of Greece. His home is set apart from the royal palace of the late king Agamemnon, commander in chief of a 1,000 ships that carried troops to Troy. The peasant comments that the king returned with war trophies to hang on the city's temple walls. Orestes, after a long sojourn at the home of Strophius in Phocis, an ancient territory in Central Greece, returns from exile to honor his father's grave. At the end of the conflict that kills Aegisthus and Clytemnestra, Orestes must depart once more, this time for Athens, where he will seek salvation from madness.

The last play, *Heracles*, opens at the altar to Zeus at the royal palace in Thebes, slightly north of the isthmus separating northern Greece from the Peloponnesus. The story brings to the stage the famed doer of mighty deeds, who reunites with his wife Megara and their children. Heracles is not fated to remain in the city that he loves. Cursed by madness that causes him to slaughter his family, he intends to bury wife and children and follow Theseus to his friend's kingdom in Athens.

CROSS-CURRICULAR SOURCES

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Algis Valiunas, "Learning from the Greeks," *Commentary*, August 1, 1998.

Novels

John Gardner, *Grendel*

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T. H. White, *Once and Future King*

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<academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/classics/oedipus.htm>

Richard Hooker, "Greek Drama," <www.wsu.edu:8080/~dee/GREECE/DRAMA.HTM>, 1999.

Plays

Maxwell Anderson, *Anne of the Thousand Days*

Jean Anouilh, *Andromache* and *Antigone*

Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*, *The Frogs*, and *The Birds*

James Goldman, *The Lion in Winter*

Henrik Ibsen, *A Doll's House* and *Hedda Gabler*

Edmond Rostand, *Cyrano de Bergerac*

William Shakespeare, *Othello* and *King Lear*

Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex* and *Antigone*

Poetry

George, Lord Byron, "The Destruction of Sennacherib"

Percy Bysshe Shelley, "Ozymandias"

Alfred, Lord Tennyson, "Ulysses"

Nonfiction

Lesley and Roy A. Adkins, *Handbook to Life in Ancient Greece*

Robert Bell, *Women in Classical Mythology*

Will Durant, *The Life of Greece*

Edith Hamilton, *The Greek Way*

Videos/DVDs

The Lion in Winter (1968)

Medea (1970)

The Odyssey (1996)

The Trojan Women (1971)

THEMES AND MOTIFS

A study of the central issues and situations in Euripides's tragedies should include these aspects:

Themes

- royalty
- adultery
- vengeance
- separation
- war
- loss
- greed
- audacity
- redemption
- courage
- resignation

Motifs

- coping with multiple challenges at the end of a war
- protecting a royal heritage
- assuaging a restless ghost
- assessing prophecies
- fighting weakness and old age

MEANING STUDY

Below are significant words, phrases, or sentences from the plays. Explain each in context. Play titles and page numbers pinpoint each entry so that you can re-read the passage in which it appears.

1. If only they had never gone! If the Argo's hull
Never had winged out through the grey-blue jaws of rock
And on toward Colchis! (*Medea*, p. 17)
(A common theme in Greek mythology and drama is the attempt to deny fate. The nurse wishes that Jason had never made the voyage to Colchis and thus had not met Medea, whom he married and brought to Corinth.)
2. Medea appears above the roof, sitting in a chariot drawn by dragons, with the bodies of the two children beside her. (*Medea*, p. 58)
(One explanation of this bizarre conclusion to Medea describes the car as the sun chariot of Helios, the sun god, who drove the mythic vehicle carrying sunlight across the heavens each day.)
3. My father, when Troy was ringed round with Hellene spears,

MEDEA AND OTHER PLAYS

Fearing the city's capture, smuggled me away
To Thrace, to the palace of his old friend Polymestor,
Who farms the fertile plain of this peninsula
And rules over a race of horsemen with his sword. (Hecabe, p. 63)
(Priam, realizing that the Greeks could capture Troy and slay all royal heirs, removed Polydorus from the city. Ironically, Polymestor turns out to be more deadly. Thus, Priam delivers his son to the killer who ends his line.)

4. They have resolved to sacrifice Polyxena
Your daughter at the high mound of Achilles' tomb,
They have appointed me to come and bring her there.
(Hecabe, p. 6y9)
(It suits the characterization of Odysseus, builder of the Trojan horse, to have him speak sentence on Polyxena without emotion. Known for his gift of logic, he considers it appropriate to slay the princess to assuage the spirit of Achilles, who died among Greek warriors mustered for the sake of Helen, a woman abducted by Polyxena's brother Paris.)
5. Is it Cassandra you have brought? (Hecabe, p. 83)
(Hecabe, staring at the draped corpse, fears that it is the body of Cassandra, her clairvoyant daughter whom Apollo, god of prophecy, doomed to foretell a truth that no one would believe.)
6. But wait—I see a slave-girl coming, carrying
A water-jar on her shorn head. (Electra, p. 108)
(The shearing of hair in ancient Greece was a sign of deep mourning and overwhelming shame. Electra bears the heavy humiliation of demotion from princess to bride of a peasant. Like lowly slaves to royalty, she carries water on her head in token of her submission to a peasant husband.)
7. My mother was Clytemnestra,
The detested daughter of Tyndareos. (Electra, p. 109)
(Clytemnestra was the twin of Helen, fathered by Zeus on Leda, queen of Sparta. After he came to Leda as a swan, she bore two swan eggs, one containing the twin girls and another containing Castor and Polydeuces or Pollux, who shared their mortal and immortal genes.)
8. Your father, child,
Brought all this on you by his wicked treachery
To one he should have loved. (Electra, p. 140)
(Agamemnon, who needed the gods' blessing on his attack on Troy, sacrificed his daughter, the princess Iphigenia. To gain custody of the girl, he lied to Clytemnestra that he had betrothed Iphigenia to Achilles, Greece's most splendid example of manhood and military skill. On the island of Aulis, Agamemnon slew the child as a blood offering to the gods to send a favorable wind to drive his ships toward Troy.)
9. Is there a man living who has not heard of me—
(Amphitryon of Argos, whose bed welcomed Zeus? (Hera-
cles, p. 153)
(The muscular, handsome Heracles was the son of Alcmene, granddaughter of Perseus and mother of the Heraclid dynasty. Amphitryon attaches no shame to the fact that Zeus chose Alcmene, Amphitryon's wife, to give birth to a powerful protector of gods and men.)
10. Hera desires (and I am with her)
To fasten on Heracles the guilt of kindred blood,
Making him kill his children. (Heracles, pp. 178-179)
(Iris, handmaiden of the gods, bears the message that Heracles must suffer the vengeance of Hera, queen of the gods. Hera spent much time harrassing Zeus' many bed

mates and their offspring.)

COMPREHENSION STUDY

Answer the following questions in your own words. There is not always a right answer. Your judgment is important. Be ready to defend your answers by referring to passages in the plays.

Plot

1. Explain why Orestes arrives in Argos.
*(After exile in Pylades's homeland, Orestes is now a grown man with an obligation to avenge the murder of his father. He must slay Aegisthus, his mother's lover, who killed the king and usurped a throne that rightfully belongs to Orestes. In his opening statement, Orestes states, "Now I have come, sent by Apollo's oracle, to Argive soil, to shed the blood of those who shed my father's blood." In secret, he mourned at Agamemnon's tomb and left gifts of a lock of dark brown hair, myrtle branches, and a sacrificed lamb.
Entering the city at dawn by the border rather than through city walls, Orestes, accompanied by Pylades, avoids the frontier guard and searches for his twin sister, Electra, who must help him carry out the double murder. By conferring with her, he intends to form a plan to execute their mother Clytemnestra for betraying their father. Pretending to know Orestes, the brother seeks information from his sister, who does not recognize him. After the old retainer convinces her that Orestes is really her twin, she exclaims, "I thought you'd never come. At last I hold you close." Rejoicing, the chorus sings, "Our deliverer stands before us, a beacon of hope for Argos.")*

Character

2. How does Polydorus reveal the hardships of his life?
*(Speaking the prologue to Hecabe, Polydorus, the last of Priam and Hecabe's sons to die, explains that he comes to earth from the underworld. When the Greeks besieged Troy, the old king had smuggled him out of the country to reside with Polymestor, Priam's old friend, on the peninsula of Thrace opposite the Troad. Along with a secret treasure of gold, the youngest of the Trojan princes was to remain in safety until the Trojan War ended. If the Greeks killed all of the royal family, he would survive to continue Priam's lineage.
Too young to fight, Polydorus had left home while Hector was still triumphing over Greek challengers. Happy in Thrace, the boy was optimistic until Troy fell to Agamemnon's forces and Priam was killed by Achilles's son Neoptolemus. Unsuspecting, the boy went to his own fate at the hand of Polymestor, who violated the code of the guest-friend by murdering him and seizing the gold. Polydorus's life ended ignominiously with the jettisoning of his remains into the sea, a vile act by a host and false friend to Troy's king.
Of his fate, Polydorus says, "Now I lie there stretched on the shingle, floating in the salty foam, by racing currents rolled endlessly to and fro, unwept, unburied." Because he has not received the traditional burial ritual, for three days, his spirit hovers near the head of Hecabe, his mother, Troy's former queen. Helpless to prevent more tragedy, Polydorus knows that the Greeks will stop at nothing to execute Polyxena, Hecabe's remaining daughter, to assuage the spirit of Achilles, which prevents Agamemnon from leading his men home to Greece. Polydorus begs the powers below to give him burial. He adds, "That done, I shall have all I wish.")*

MEDEA AND OTHER PLAYS

Conflict

3. Why does Amphitryon worry about his daughter-in-law and grandchildren?

(Before the Theban palace, Amphitryon, an anxious old man, fears for the safety of Megara and her children, fathered by his son Heracles. After seizing control of Thebes after Creon's death, Lycus "resolves to smother murder with more murder, and destroy Heracles' sons, for fear they should grow up to avenge their murdered family." Amphitryon realizes that Lycus will also kill him and Megara to expunge forever Heracles's lineage.

To save himself and his charges from execution, Amphitryon sits at the altar of Zeus the Saviour, built by Heracles as a war trophy, as their last hope of safety. Without food, drink, clothing, or a place to sleep, they face the sealed palace doors, a symbol of their doom. Amphitryon realizes that no Theban friend will come to their aid. To Megara's comments, he replies, "A fair wind may yet bring us safe to shore from all our fears. My son, your husband, may yet come. Be calm yourself, and dry your children's tear-filled eyes.")

Action

4. Describe how Aegisthus meets his death.

(After Electra dispatches her brother to "draw first blood" against Aegisthus, murderer of their father and usurper of the Argive throne, Orestes follows the old man who led him to safety and joins in a prayer to Zeus. The old man beseeches the god for succor: "Bring all who hate impure hearts and polluted hands." Electra calls on her father's spirit, which is outraged by Clytemnestra's treachery.

Attended by Pylades and the old man, Orestes departs while the chorus recounts how a curse fell on the family.

The sound of fighting suggests that Orestes has killed his enemy. Electra, who fears that her brother has failed, rushes to seize a sword to kill herself when the chorus intervenes and advises, "Wait at least until you know the worst is true." A messenger proclaims that Orestes's has killed Aegisthus. Electra, dazed at the news, asks, "Tell me again: the loathsome wretch who killed my father—is he dead?"

The messenger fills in the action of the confrontation. Beyond the peasant's cottage, where Aegisthus was cutting myrtle leaves for a garland for himself, he greeted Orestes and his companions. Orestes lied about his purpose. Aegisthus, who invited the men to be his guests at a banquet, led them into the palace. When Aegisthus offered the sacrificial blade for killing a bull at the altar of the nymphs, Orestes complied and revealed a missing lobe in the animal's liver. While Aegisthus removed choice parts, "Orestes rose on his toes, and struck him on the joint of the neck, shattering his spine.")

Character Development

5. Describe the change in Medea after Jason marries again.
(A silky-smooth hellion, Medea is capable of being loving wife and mother as well as plotter of dastardly blood crimes, including killing blood kin. The nurse, who delivers the prologue of the play, explains how her mistress fell in love with Jason when the Argo arrived at Colchis for the retrieval of the golden fleece. Inflamed with emotion, she plotted the murder of her own father by convincing his daughters to slay him.

Exiled in Corinth, Medea "earned the citizens' welcome; while to Jason she is all obedient—and in marriage that's the saving thing." When her husband proved false, Medea underwent a shift in outlook and behavior. According to the

nurse, "Scorned and shamed, she raves, invoking every vow and solemn pledge that Jason made her, and calls the gods as witnesses what thanks she has received for her fidelity."

Medea stops eating, collapses in anguish, weeps for hours, and refuses to rise from the ground. Deaf to the advice of friends, she wails for her father and Colchis, to which she can never return. Aware she has betrayed her father/king and homeland, she suffers Jason's spurning and insults. She even hates her sons. The nurse fears "some dreadful purpose is forming in her mind. She is a frightening woman; no one who makes an enemy of her will carry off an easy victory.")

Structure

6. Explain how Hecabe learns of the death of her one surviving son.

(As Polydorus predicts, a servant discovers his body where it floated up on the shore of Thrace. While Hecabe listens to the final moments of Polyxena's life and her courage in the face of Greek executioners, an old attendant returns from the shore with a draped body. Euripides has the servant uncover the body to reveal the familiar face. The playwright has the old queen divulge that she suspected that Polydorus was dead but that she didn't believe it.

Still curious about his death, Hecabe begins to interpret a dream of a black-winged figure that reported her son's death. She knows that Polymestor murdered the boy, a fact that startles the chorus and leads them to the assumption that Polydorus's host committed murder against his guest out of greed for Trojan gold. Euripides interweaves one grief with another by sending Agamemnon to demand the reason that Hecabe has not come to dress Polyxena's body for burial.

Euripides uses Hecabe's sad story to reveal the full and compassionate character of Agamemnon. Although he leads the Greek forces, he has pity for Hecabe and her "boundless suffering." The playwright gives the old woman a lengthy speech about human misery at the hands of the gods. As a result of her outpouring, Agamemnon takes her side, offers safe conduct to the Trojan women, and helps Hecabe punish Polymestor for his treachery. To the Trojan queen's credit, Euripides leaves the plotting and arrangements to her.)

Motivation

7. Explain how Heracles establishes his reputation.

(After Amphitryon hears from Lycus his intent to murder the robed children, the chorus presents a paean to Heracles. Extolling Apollo, god of music, they sing a "garland of song" about the famed twelve labors, beginning with purging of the lion from the grove of Zeus. Heracles next shot the savage Centaurs with arrows, killed the plundering stag with golden horns, and slew Cycnus, the guest-murderer. In the West, Heracles traveled to the garden of the Singing Maidens to kill the dragon that protected golden fruit. At Atlas's home, he held on his shoulders "the star-lit palaces of the gods."

The narration about Heracles's powers extends to the retrieval of the girdle of the Amazon, the killing of the many-headed Hydra, and slaying of three-headed Geryon. Crowning Heracles's journeys was the sail into Hades to steal Cerberus, the dog that guards the underworld. Now, as Heracles's children await execution, the chorus wishes that the great hero and doer of deeds would arrive in time to resurrect "the old splendid days.")

MEDEA AND OTHER PLAYS

Interpretation

8. Explain why Euripides is known for compassion.

(While writing about Greek myths, the stories that playwrights turn into stage tragedies and comedies, Euripides selects little dramas within the plots to highlight with realistic touches. He is particularly sympathetic toward Amphitryon, who is too old to protect his family from a villain. In the old man's defense, his daughter-in-law Megara says of him, "Aged Amphitryon, who long ago led Thebes to war against the Taphians, and destroyed their city, how dark and devils are the ways of gods to men.")

Into the chant of the chorus, Euripides speaks comfort to the elderly. The singers exhort, "Come, put your best foot forward, like a horse that drags the weight of a wheeled wagon up some steep rocky path." Their song speaks of the old man's feeble, uncertain footholds and his need to grip a companion by arm or cloak, both symptoms of advancing age and flagging strength. The song urges, "Each of you help his fellow whom he fought beside long ago.")

Comparative Literature

9. Where does Euripides insert ancient myths in his tragedies?

(To explain circumstances, Euripides refers to Greek myths that all playgoers of his day would recognize. Concerning Amphitryon's life in Thebes, the playwright mentions "the crop of Grown Men sprang full-grown out of the earth," a reference to the sowing of teeth that turned into armed soldiers. To account for Heracles's absence, Amphitryon mentions that his son has set out on his 12th and most dangerous labor—the abduction of Cerberus, the three-headed hell-hound, from Hades to earth. The description of the task shows the strength and daring of Heracles, one of mythology's strongest heroes, who is unafraid to challenge even death's kingdom.)

In *Electra*, the chorus refers to Clytemnestra as "sister of two famous brothers." The reference reminds playgoers that Clytemnestra, twin of Helen, was born to Leda at the same time as the twins Castor and Pollux. The chorus adds, "Frightening tales are useful: they promote reverence for the gods."

In *Hecabe*, the aged queen speaks a memorable speech about her losses from the Trojan War. She wishes to have the powers of "such art as Daedalus or a god might wield," a reference to the inventor who created the mechanical bull for Pasiphaë and made wings for himself and his son Icarus to use for flight from Crete. The image suggests her own wish to fly far from the doom that awaits her in Thrace.)

Language

10. Discuss aphorisms that Euripides words as insights into human tragedy.

(Euripides expresses intuitive commentary on human predicaments, such as the peasant husband's comment in *Electra* that "Rich bellies hold about the same amount as poor." In *Heracles*, Amphitryon optimistically exclaims to his daughter-in-law that "Death deferred may always mean death foiled." The chorus, taking the side of the elderly man, remarks, "A brave heart moves even a slow tongue to eloquence." In *Medea*, the title character, no shrinking heroine, mutters ominously, "We were born women—useless for honest purposes, but in all kinds of evil skilled practitioners." The chorus concurs that "men figure no less famous or infamous than women.")

In *Hecabe*, the title character speaks a stable, inherently

human point of view concerning evil and goodness. To *Odysseus* the aged queen remarks, "The strong ought not to use their strength to do what is not right." She expands on the statement with an overview of fate: "When they are fortunate they should not think Fortune will always favour them." Of the Greek predations against Trojans, including old King Priam at the altar of Troy's gods, she declares, "Killing is killing—there is no distinction made of slave and free man.")

HOW LANGUAGE WORKS

Euripides models clever composition by creating idiosyncratic statements from a variety of sentence types and rhetorical patterns.

1. To express *Electra*'s relief that *Orestes* has arrived and avenged their father's death, she speaks in apostrophe: "O holy light! O glorious chariot of the sun! O earth! O night, that till this moment filled my eyes! Now all is freedom."
2. *Megara*, desperate for her husband's return to stop *Lycus* from murdering the family, exults in exclamations and rhetorical question: "It's no dream! Does grief create such visions? It is *Heracles*!"
3. *Jason*, exasperated at his first wife's audacity, shouts questions punctuated with caesura: "Is *Medea* still in the house?—vile murderer!—or has she gone and escaped?"
4. *Agamemnon*, leader of the Greek forces, supports *Hecabe* at her lowest point with a lengthy comment on her suffering modified by concern for his own reputation: "I would like to satisfy both justice and the gods, and make this murderous friend of yours pay fitly for his crime, if we could find some way to carry out your wish without letting the army think I have connived at killing *Polymestor* for *Cassandra*'s love."
5. *Medea*, the ego-centric sorceress who appears above the roof in her chariot drawn by dragons, outlines her plans in a series of clauses beginning with a first person pronoun: "I will myself convey them to the temple . . . I will bury them with my own hand . . . I will ordain an annual feast and sacrifice . . . I myself will go to Athens."
6. Condemning women in a sweeping generalization, *Polymestor*, newly blinded by Trojan captive women, sums up the situation: "No monster like a woman breeds in land or sea and those who have most to do with women know it best."

ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

Art, Costume Design, and Music

1. Create a handbill that will catch the eye of prospective audiences of a current production of *Medea*, *Hecabe*, *Heracles*, or *Electra*. Use an illustration that intrigues the reader to see the play and learn how it ends. Emphasize action, emotion, and contrast in your drawing.
2. Propose scenes for a mural to illustrate interconnected plots. Begin with *Agamemnon*'s departure for the Trojan War, the sacrifice of *Iphigenia*, the division of spoils when Troy falls, his return with *Cassandra*, murder by *Aegisthus* and *Clytemnestra*, *Aegisthus*'s desecration of the former king's tomb, and avenging of the king's murder by his wandering son *Orestes*. Add the collusion of *Orestes* with *Electra* in the murder of their mother *Clytemnestra*.

Education

1. Compose an introduction to Greek drama for use in the classrooms of Plato or Aristotle. Explain why the addition of a third actor altered the interaction onstage and allowed more flexibility in dramatic scenes.
2. Suggest methods of preparing *Orestes* or *Electra* for a

MEDEA AND OTHER PLAYS

position as reigning monarch in Thebes. Include the study of geography, literature, foreign language, economics, and Greek history.

Geography

1. With a group, design a brochure, web site, frieze, or poster series detailing the distances between Thebes, Troy, Corinth, Athens, Argos, Delos, Delphi, and Thrace. Use estimated speeds of foot and sea travel to determine how long it took messengers and other pedestrians to reach their destinations over rocky terrain and open seas.
2. Compose a list of Greek plays and epics and their settings. Note whether the places are real or imaginary. Locate real settings on a map along with the literary titles. Place a star on Salamis, Euripides's birthplace.
3. Compose a guided tour of contrasting settings in the plays. Include commentary on the terrain, nearness to the sea, and architectural landmarks.

History and Social Studies

1. List difficulties for a messenger in ancient Greece.
2. Summarize capital crimes and methods of execution in the days of Euripides. List countries that presently outlaw the death penalty. Explain why many nations have abandoned such punishments as blinding or slaying whole families.
3. View murals, portraits, pottery, illuminations, bas reliefs, coins, mosaics, and other art forms typifying the lives of Greeks of the classical period. Comment on the interplay of people of different social, educational, and professional backgrounds at a variety of activities.
4. Explain why Polymestor dooms himself by violating the guest code of ancient Greece. Discuss the requirements of the code that both host and guest remain civil and respect each other's rights.

Language Arts

1. Apply the term "coming to knowledge" to the final scene of each tragedy. Explain the price paid by Heracles and his wife and children, Jason and his sons, Hecabe and her children, and the twins of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, all of whom were noble or royal families.
2. Using Heracles as an example, compose an extended definition of tragedy or tragic hero. Characterize the importance of a character flaw to catastrophes. Explain why Amphitryon stresses that Heracles must control himself.
3. Choose a series of lines from the plays to illustrate Euripides's skill with poetry, as with "A plain answer to all men's question—whether the gods still favour a just cause," or "Am I a meddler, then, to help a dead friend where he's most in need of help?"
4. Contrast the rhythm and impact of various styles of rhetoric, including ode, paeon, chant, dialogue, lament, debate, and speech. Determine how the chorus contrasts the actors' lines and why these poetic remarks are important moral messages in Greek drama.
5. Contrast several translations of a major speech in one of the plays, such as the laments on old age in Heracles and on the perils of war in *Hecabe*. Note how line length, rhythm, diction, and stress vary in the different versions.
6. Read *The Birds*, *The Frogs*, *Lysistrata*, or another of Aristophanes's comedies. Analyze how his subject matter, style, tone, and purpose differ from those of Euripides's tragedies. Suggest reasons for Aristophanes's ridicule of and admiration for Euripides.
7. With a small group, discuss the ancient philosophy of the golden mean, which the Romans stated as "Nothing in

excess." How does the stage tragedy of *Heracles* demonstrate the wisdom of the aphorism?

8. List and explain mythological, geographical, and historical allusions in the play.
9. Using Cassandra as a model, create an extended definition of seer. Explain how her knowledge of the past and future increased her value to Agamemnon. Account for the shift in meaning of a "cassandra" as the term is used today.
10. Write extended definitions of ode, strophe, envoi, myth, legend, antiphony, comedy, satire, dithyramb, prologue, and tragedy. Include examples of each genre from ancient and modern literature.
11. Compose a short scene in which Heracles arrives in Athens with Theseus and accepts the kindness and welcome of citizens who have heard about the deaths of Megara and her children. Summarize Heracles's confession of fault at the shrine of Aphrodite.
12. Write a newspaper review of the City Dionysia, the great drama festival of ancient Athens. Describe the arrangement of presentations as well as the prizes, such as that awarded to Euripides four times for the best tragedy and the posthumous award he earned for *The Bacchae*.
13. Write a letter in which you assume the identity of an ordinary Greek citizen of the fifth century, B.C. Express your feelings about a day you spent at the outdoor theatre. Describe the play you saw, its meaning, and the audience's response to it. Comment on the role of the chorus in differentiating between right and wrong behavior.

Math and Economics

1. Make a comparative chart of monies used in ancient Greece. Propose a two-sided coin to honor Agamemnon, Menelaus, Heracles, or Theseus. Suggest reasons why few women appear on coins from the period. Propose one coin with the twins Helen and Clytemnestra or Electra and Orestes on opposite sides.
2. Use historical data to determine the height, width, and depth of the Theater of Dionysus in Athens. Include figures on how many people could sit to view a play. Contrast these figures with those for other theaters throughout the ancient world, particularly in Epidaurus, Syracuse, Taormina, Rome, Arles, and Pompeii.

Music

1. Select music to delineate the contrast between hopeful scenes, murder, citizen uproar, regret, suffering, triumph, terror, boasting, and prophecy.
2. List recordings of music to substitute for the sounds of the sea in *Hecabe*, sword fighting in *Medea* and *Electra*, cowering at Zeus's shrine in *Heracles*, and funeral processions for Polydorus and Polyxena in *Hecabe*.
3. Give reasons why Euripides's plays adapt well to opera. Explain why singers vie for the roles of *Medea*, *Hecabe*, *Megara*, and *Lycus*.

Philosophy

1. Discuss the moral implications of *Electra*, *Medea*, *Heracles*, and *Hecabe*. Express what playgoers might learn from viewing the plays and thinking about human arrogance, violence, vengeance, injustice, theft, treachery, and fate.
2. Summarize the philosophy in ancient times that the losers of a war like *Hecabe*, *Cassandra*, *Polydorus*, and *Polyxena* must accept total loss, captivity, degradation, and death.
3. Comment on the boldness of Euripides's humanistic questions. Use as a model Talthybius's rhetorical question in

MEDEA AND OTHER PLAYS

Hecabe: "Is all our belief in gods a myth, a lie foolishly cherished, while blind hazard rules the world?"

Psychology

1. Propose personality types for the roles of Orestes, Electra, Creon, Polyxena, Lycus, Megara, Odysseus, Clytemnestra, Agamemnon, Heracles, and Hecabe. Explain why temperament and demeanor enhance the drama of a royal family in disastrous times. Propose body language to display innocence, determination, resignation, hatred, rebuke, and vengeance.
2. Define hero as it applies to Heracles and Orestes. Why do the two suffer despite their courage and good intentions?
3. Discuss the psychological problems faced by ambitious couples in royal marriages, particularly Jason and Medea and Clytemnestra and Agamemnon. Compose advice to Jason's new wife concerning his past history and relationship with his former wife and two sons. Discuss how these emotional drives place stress on Jason's second marriage.
4. Compose a lecture on emotional disturbance as characterized by Orestes and Electra.
5. Write an encyclopedia entry on insanity. Add details that explain why a hero like Heracles would hallucinate and misidentify his own wife and children. Discuss Amphitryon's soothing words during Heracles's swoon and Theseus' friendship as he and Heracles depart for Aphrodite's shrine in Athens.

Science and Health

1. List, define, and illustrate references to nature.
2. Explain in a theme how a hasty blinding with a sharp brooch pin could endanger Polymestor's life, especially from shock, brain damage, hemorrhage, and infection. Note the adaptation necessary to sudden loss of vision, particularly use of aural and tactile clues.

Speech and Drama

1. Make flash cards containing definitions of drama, character, setting, plot, theme, tone, mood, aside, induction, epilogue, soliloquy, monologue, climax, chorus or prologue, dilemma, conflict, literary foils, motivation, protagonist, antagonist, and denouement. Post them during discussions of the plays to clarify literary method.
2. Illustrate class differences in war heroes, royalty, messengers, tutors, peasants, and servant classes as well as wanderers, warriors, the elderly, mentally ill, and usurpers. Explain how stage roles dignify the lowly as well as nobles.
3. Explain how Greek drama grew out of the worship of Dionysus, the god of wine and fertility, and added masks, scenery, dance, and choral ode to speaking parts. Emphasize Euripides's contribution of realistic emotion to tragedy.
4. Make a list of dramatic scenes from the play that would require intense use of lighting, costume, makeup, music, props, and stunts.
5. Read or view a more modern drama. In an oral composition, compare modern methods of playwriting with those of Euripides.
6. Draw a floorplan of the theatre at Epidaurus. Label the seats of the priests, altar, theatron, orchestra, skene, proskene, eccyclema, and parados. Place actors for the final scene of *Hecabe*, *Electra*, *Heracles*, or *Medea*.
7. Sketch masks to be used by the actors at a high point of one of Euripides's plays, such as Medea's examination of her boys before she murders them.

ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT

1. Describe significant events connected with the plays, such

as the fall of Troy and the twelve labors of Heracles.

2. Make a list of scenes that express strong attitudes toward kinship, love, vengeance, loyalty, deception, peace, obedience, strength, women's sufferings, greed, insanity, war, and family. Indicate what you think is Euripides's personal philosophy on each subject.
3. Compose brief definitions of drama, tragedy, and hero/heroine as they apply to Euripides's plays. What changes in the stories would turn them into romance or comedy?
4. Summarize scenes that depict conflict.

ANSWER KEY

VOCABULARY TEST

- | | | | | |
|------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1. L | 6. T | 11. N | 16. F | 21. S |
| 2. D | 7. G | 12. C | 17. M | 22. E |
| 3. J | 8. B | 13. Q | 18. R | 23. P |
| 4. A | 9. Y | 14. H | 19. W | 24. I |
| 5. K | 10. U | 15. V | 20. O | 25. X |

COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Identification (20 points)

- | | |
|---------------|---------------|
| 1. Medea | 6. Amphitryon |
| 2. Polymestor | 7. Castor |
| 3. Orestes | 8. Priam |
| 4. Electra | 9. Medea |
| 5. Theseus | 10. Aegeus |

Part II: Short Answer (20 points)

- | | |
|---------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Creon | 6. Polydorus's body |
| 2. Orestes | 7. Achilles |
| 3. her sons' bodies | 8. Agamemnon |
| 4. 12 | 9. Aegisthus |
| 5. her breast | 10. Orestes |

Part III: True/False (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. F | 6. F |
| 2. F | 7. F |
| 3. T | 8. T |
| 4. T | 9. F |
| 5. T | 10. T |

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Answers will vary.

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Multiple Choice (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. B | 6. C |
| 2. B | 7. A |
| 3. D | 8. D |
| 4. C | 9. B |
| 5. A | 10. C |

Part II: Matching (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. F | 6. J |
| 2. A | 7. B |
| 3. D | 8. C |
| 4. I | 9. H |
| 5. E | 10. C |

Part III: Fill-in (20 points)

1. Helen, Troy
2. Orestes, Agamemnon
3. Heracles, Thebes
4. Lycus, Megara
5. women, robe

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Answers will vary.

MEDEA AND OTHER PLAYS

VOCABULARY TEST

Match the underlined words in each phrase at left with a synonym from the list at right. Place the letter of your response in the blank provided.

- | | |
|--|-------------------|
| _____ 1. am I but a <u>ranting</u> tongue | A. fullest extent |
| _____ 2. cub torn from its <u>dam</u> | B. the impious |
| _____ 3. impure hearts and <u>polluted</u> hands | C. dirtied |
| _____ 4. harden my heart to the <u>uttermost</u> | D. mother |
| _____ 5. best and noblest turns to <u>gall</u> | E. headband |
| _____ 6. no <u>remorse</u> would touch you | F. attack |
| _____ 7. my <u>reckoning</u> may well be wrong | G. assumption |
| _____ 8. bring help—not to <u>blasphemers</u> | H. retaliation |
| _____ 9. masters my <u>resolve</u> | I. session |
| _____ 10. their <u>lustral</u> water | J. sinful |
| _____ 11. of barbed <u>allusions</u> | K. bitterness |
| _____ 12. too much <u>defiled</u> | L. raving |
| _____ 13. do some <u>harrowing</u> | M. prediction |
| _____ 14. how to evade <u>reprisal</u> | N. references |
| _____ 15. some <u>malignant</u> power | O. demon |
| _____ 16. at the <u>onset</u> of aliens | P. lurking |
| _____ 17. sent by Apollo's <u>oracle</u> | Q. cultivating |
| _____ 18. round the stone <u>cornice</u> | R. projection |
| _____ 19. shall <u>revere</u> your memory | S. agitated |
| _____ 20. <u>fiend</u> , child-murderer | T. regret |
| _____ 21. for the <u>frenzied</u> prophetess | U. purifying |
| _____ 22. the golden <u>frontlet</u> | V. evil |
| _____ 23. a <u>stealthy</u> step | W. respect |
| _____ 24. in open <u>council</u> | X. satisfy |
| _____ 25. enemies shall never <u>glut</u> | Y. intent |

MEDEA AND OTHER PLAYS

COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Identification (20 points)

Identify the following characters. Select answers from the list below:

Aegeus
Aegisthus
Amphitryon

Castor
Clytemnestra
Electra

Lycus
Medea
Orestes

Polydorus
Polymestor
Priam

Pylades
Theseus
Zeus

- _____ 1. princess in Colchis
_____ 2. Thracian king
_____ 3. twin of Electra
_____ 4. married to a peasant
_____ 5. friend of Heracles
_____ 6. Megara's father-in-law
_____ 7. one of the Dioscori
_____ 8. king of Troy
_____ 9. killer of Creon
_____ 10. childless king

Part II: Short Answer (20 points)

Answer the following questions about the characters and discuss the significance of each.

1. Who dies from touching a daughter's corpse?
2. Who leaves a lock of dark brown hair at an altar?
3. What does Medea display in the chariot?
4. How many labors did Heracles undertake?
5. What does Clytemnestra display to win Orestes's sympathy?
6. What washes up on shore at Thrace?
7. What ghost demands Polyxena's sacrifice?
8. Who leads the Greeks at Troy?
9. Who throws stones at the king's grave?
10. Whom did the king's servant lead safely into exile?

MEDEA AND OTHER PLAYS

Part III: True/False (20 points)

Mark the following statements either **T** for true or **F** if any part is false.

- 1. Electra's brother has no hope of escaping a life of insanity.
- 2. Polymestor dies along with his children in Hecabe's tent.
- 3. Agamemnon sends Odysseus to pronounce judgement against Polyxena.
- 4. Hecabe requests jewelry from the captive Trojan women.
- 5. Heracles lays a trap for Lycus.
- 6. Amphitryon admits that he is unwilling to rescue his grandchildren.
- 7. Agamemnon's men demand that Polyxena and Hecabe die to pay for the slaughter of Achilles, their greatest warrior.
- 8. Medea attempts to win her husband's sympathy with sweet words.
- 9. Iris declares that all who commit murder must wander and suffer madness.
- 10. Orestes is uncertain that he has the courage to slay his mother.

Part III: Essay (40 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Compare two characters who care more about children than about their own safety.
2. List the losses inflicted on Trojans after the Greek triumph.
3. Compare Hecabe and Megara as negotiators.
4. Express Euripides's descriptions of women who face danger and death.
5. Describe how Orestes plans to avenge his father's murder.

MEDEA AND OTHER PLAYS

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Multiple Choice (20 points)

Choose a word or phrase from the list below to complete each of the following statements. Place the letter of your response in the blank at left.

- _____ 1. Amphitryon worries that Heracles
 - A. will never return to Thebes alive.
 - B. can't control his temper.
 - C. has no son to succeed him.
 - D. has taken a young wife.
- _____ 2. Hecabe maneuvers Polymestor by
 - A. making him feel guilty about killing Troy's last male heir.
 - B. divulging the hiding place of more gold.
 - C. threatening him with retaliation from Agamemnon's soldiers.
 - D. warning him of Achilles's ghost.
- _____ 3. Electra believes that
 - A. Pylades knows the whereabouts of Orestes.
 - B. Castor has forced her to remain a virgin.
 - C. Clytemnestra chose the peasant as her future husband to humiliate her.
 - D. the foot print belongs to her twin.
- _____ 4. When Heracles returns to consciousness,
 - A. Iris blames him for shooting arrows at his children.
 - B. he realizes he has been in the underworld.
 - C. he finds himself tied to a pillar and his father tending to him.
 - D. Megara reports that their children are dead.
- _____ 5. The tutor learns from eavesdropping on old men
 - A. that Creon intends to banish Medea and her sons.
 - B. the place where Jason has taken his new bride.
 - C. how the robe and coronet burned Creon.
 - D. why Jason married a second time.
- _____ 6. Medea agrees to
 - A. place the two corpses in the chariot as a gift to the gods.
 - B. end her spite against Jason.
 - C. go to Athens and bear children for Aegeus.
 - D. return to Colchis if Jason goes with her.
- _____ 7. Polyxena bares her body to the waist
 - A. before Achilles's son.
 - B. to lure Polymestor from Agamemnon's tent.
 - C. as proof of her innocence.
 - D. and tears her hair over her brother's corpse.
- _____ 8. The old man assures Electra that
 - A. she must hurry to kill Clytemnestra as well as Aegisthus.
 - B. the new king hurls stones at Agamemnon's tomb.
 - C. Pylades will make a more suitable husband than the peasant.
 - D. the stranger is her brother.
- _____ 9. Clytemnestra stops Aegisthus
 - A. before he kills Agamemnon's concubine.
 - B. from slaughtering Electra.
 - C. on his way to kill a lamb at the king's tomb.
 - D. from exiling Orestes a second time.
- _____ 10. Creon banishes
 - A. Heracles because he has not completed the tasks assigned by Eurystheus.
 - B. Jason along with his bride.
 - C. Medea because he fears her powers.
 - D. Orestes before madness descends on him.

MEDEA AND OTHER PLAYS

Part II: Matching (20 points)

Match the following actions with places and names from the list below. Place the letter of your response in the blank provided at left.

- | | |
|--|-------------------------|
| _____ 1. Jason traveled to Colchis. | A. dragon-drawn chariot |
| _____ 2. Medea appears with the corpses of her two boys. | B. Agamemnon's tomb |
| _____ 3. On the way home, the Greek army makes camp. | C. Athens |
| _____ 4. A warrior's ghost demands Polyxena's blood. | D. shores of Thrace |
| _____ 5. Polymestor believes that the Trojans buried gold. | E. Athene's temple |
| _____ 6. Women blind Polymestor. | F. Argo |
| _____ 7. Orestes killed a lamb and let the blood soak into the earth. | G. Argos |
| _____ 8. Aegeus needs an heir to the throne. | H. house of Tantalus |
| _____ 9. A curse dooms a lineage. | I. Achilles's tomb |
| _____ 10. Theseus promises to let Heracles live in peace and friendship. | J. Hecabe's tent |

Part III: Fill-in (20 points)

Fill in the following statements with names or details:

1. A peasant accuses Electra's aunt _____, Clytemnestra's twin sister, of causing the devastating war with _____.
2. The only citizen who could recognize _____ is an aged retainer of King _____, who accompanied the boy to a foster home.
3. Amphitryon, _____'s father, stands at his son's palace in _____ before Zeus's altar.
4. When _____ demands that his victims appear, Amphitryon refuses to summon _____.
5. Alone with the chorus of Corinthian _____, Medea ponders how to poison Jason's wife with a toxic _____ and coronet.

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Explain the series of tragedies that befall Agamemnon's family.
2. Compare Lycus and the peasant husband as minor characters.
3. Contrast the anger of Medea with Heracles's madness.
4. Describe Hecabe's losses at the beginning of the play.
5. Predict future hardships for Heracles, Medea, Orestes, and Polymestor.



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