

Syllabus

Aristophanes: The Complete Plays

Paul Roche (Translator)

The goals of the course are to acquaint the students with the extant plays of Aristophanes, their historical context, and their impact on the development of drama and modern literature. The plays were produced between 427 and 386 BCE, a span of time when Athens struggled with its fall from being the dominant Greek city state, with a large empire that funded such magnificent works as the Parthenon, to impoverishment following its defeat by Sparta in the Peloponnesian wars.

Course design: The class will meet in thirteen one-hour sessions. After an introductory session with a presentation on historical background by the instructor, we will go through the oldest extant Greek comedy, the satyr play written by the tragedian Euripides, and then the eleven extant plays of Aristophanes. A discussion leader along with an assistant will be appointed for each class session. The assistant for any given week will be the leader for the following week. Each session will consist of a brief introduction about the play by the leader, and then a 10-15 minute reading from the play by the leader and the assistant, on a section chosen by the leader. This will be followed by a group discussion on topics proposed by the instructor and by the session leader. Following the group discussion, the instructor will present images submitted by the students gleaned from the internet considered relevant to the play or its historical background.

Student assignments:

Students will in turn serve as discussion leaders or assistants. Note that depending on enrollment students may have multiple assignments as leaders or assistants.

Student discussion leaders will:

- Submit two additional discussion questions on the play a week in advance.

- Present a brief introduction to the play.

- Chose and present with their assistant a 10-15 minute reading from the play.

- Lead the discussion on the play.

Student discussion assistants will:

- Prepare in advance discussion questions for the following session when they will be discussion leaders.

- Prepare for in-class reading of the play segment chosen by the leader.

All students will:

- Read the assigned plays in advance.

- Submit brief comments in writing to the instructor on the discussion questions for each week. Students will also be expected to participate during the in-class discussions, but submission of written comments will guarantee credit for participation.

Find two images each week from the internet that are relevant to the play or its historical background and submit them to the instructor by 5:00 P.M on the day before class so that they can be assembled for presentation and discussion in class. Please try to submit images of reasonably high resolution so that they will look good in a PowerPoint presentation, and be prepared to explain why you chose them.

Grading

- 50% Participation as discussion leaders and assistants
- 25% Participation in discussions and submission of written comments
- 25% Image submission and discussion

Sessions and plays

August 25. Introduction and historical background

Papke

September 1. The Cyclops

Leader: Papke

Assistant: to be assigned

Discussion questions:

1. Odysseus and his men have no trouble accepting the presence of Silenus and his satyr sons on the island. Do you think this reflects a general attitude of the contemporary Greeks to accept the idea that supernatural creatures live among them?
2. Does the presence of the satyrs affect the telling or outcome of the story?
3. To what degree do the satyrs actually add to the element of comedy?
4. What do you think becomes of Silenus and the wine skin?
5. Is the play an endorsement or indictment of drinking?

September 8. Acharnians

Leader: to be assigned

Assistant: to be assigned

Discussion questions:

1. Who are the Acharnians and what do they represent?
2. What is the significance of the Megarian character?

September 15. Knights

Leader: to be assigned

Assistant: to be assigned

Discussion questions:

1. What are the roles of allegory in this play?
2. How effective do you imagine this play was for changing the political trajectory of Athens?

September 22. Clouds

Leader: to be assigned

Assistant: to be assigned

Discussion questions:

1. Was the portrayal of Socrates honest or fair? Was it intended to be?
2. What is the allegorical significance of the cloud chorus?

September 29. Wasps

Leader: to be assigned

Assistant: to be assigned

Discussion questions:

1. Does the paying citizens to be jurors compromise the legal system?
2. What is the allegorical significance of the wasp chorus?

October 6. Peace

Leader: to be assigned

Assistant: to be assigned

Discussion questions:

1. What is the role of the dung beetle?
2. Who are the people of Athens who oppose the peace?

October 13. Birds**Leader:** to be assigned**Assistant:** to be assignedDiscussion questions:

1. What does this play say about the playwright's opinions regarding the divine nature of the gods and the mortal nature of man?
2. What might humans really see as admirable about the lives of birds?

October 20. Lysistrata**Leader:** to be assigned**Assistant:** to be assignedDiscussion questions:

1. What is the significance of the nature of the oath taken by the women? {The Oath, with two parts?}
2. In what ways are the women strong, and in what ways weak? How do they compare to the men?

October 27. Thesmophoriazousae**Leader:** to be assigned**Assistant:** to be assignedDiscussion questions:

1. Is Aristophanes praising women or mocking them?
2. What was the true offense of Mnesilochus in his attempt to intercede for Euripides?

November 3. Frogs**Leader:** to be assigned**Assistant:** to be assignedDiscussion questions:

1. Why does Dionysus go in disguise as Heracles?
2. Who do you think should have won the contest?

November 10. Ecclesiazusae

Leader: to be assigned

Assistant: to be assigned

Discussion questions:

1. Once again, Aristophanes seems to make the case that women are smarter than men. Do you think he is sincere?
2. What are the flaws in the utopian state designed by the women?

November 17. Plutus

Leader: to be assigned

Assistant: to be assigned

Discussion questions:

1. What is the metaphor regarding the state of the god Plutus?
2. Is this an indictment of the Olympians?

December 1. Review and general discussion

Leader: Papke

Discussion question:

1. In what ways has Aristophanes influenced art literature and politics to this day.