

Theatre History



THEATRE TERMS



- **Dionysius-** the Greek god of wine and fertility.
- **Amphitheatre-** a round or oval building, typically unroofed, with a central space for the presentation of dramatic or sporting events.
- **Chorus-** a company of actors who comment (by speaking or singing in unison) on the action in a classical Greek play
- **Scaenae frons-** elaborately decorated background of a Roman theatre stage. This area usually has several entrances to the stage including a grand central entrance.
- **Roman Colosseum-** the Colosseum or Coliseum (also known as the Flavian Amphitheatre) is an elliptical amphitheatre in the centre of the city of Rome, Italy.
- **Cycle plays-** several stories performed, one right after the other.

THEATRE TERMS



- **Morality plays-** attempted to teach a moral lesson to the audience through the use of allegorical characters.
- **Mansions-** several small, temporary, hut-like houses, each one decorated differently to represent a different location.
- **Patronage-** system of providing financial support in which merchants sponsor artists to create works of art, such as plays, for the enjoyment of their family and friends.
- **Verisimilitude-** the appearance of being true or real.
- **Shutters-** a painted drop or a large set of wings which met in the middle of the stage and could be slid away to reveal another backdrop.

THEATRE TERMS



- **Globe Theatre-** a theater on the south bank of the Thames in London, 1599–1613: many of Shakespeare's plays were first produced here.
- **Iambic pentameter-** a commonly used metrical line in traditional verse and verse drama.
- **Noh Theatre-** a stylized and graceful form of Japanese theatre that had elements of opera, pantomime, and stylized dance.
- **Kabuki-** Japanese theatre form that developed in the early and mid-seventeenth century and is still being performed today.
- **Sanskrit drama-** all end happily; focus is on the actor, who uses movement and a set style of hand gestures to communicate meaning.
- **Rasa-** mood in Indian Sanskrit.
- **Beijing Opera-** acting is dancelike, with each movement set to a steady rhythm established by the leader of the on-stage orchestra who plays a drum.

Lesson Objectives



THE STUDENT WILL :

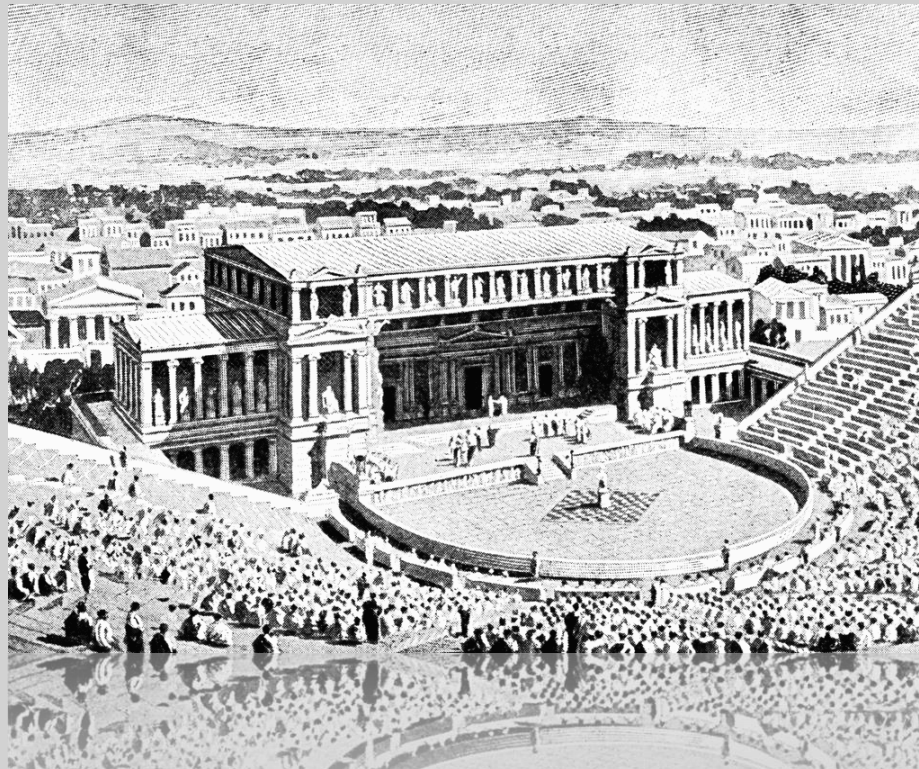
- **IDENTIFY AND APPRECIATE THE MAJOR TIME PERIODS IN THEATRE HISTORY.**
- **IDENTIFY MAJOR PLAYS AND PLAYWRIGHTS IN HISTORY.**
- **IDENTIFY AND EXPLAIN THE DESIGN, PERFORMANCE, AND MAJOR HISTORICAL INFORMATION FOR ONE SPECIFIC THEATRICAL TIME PERIOD.**
- **APPLY HISTORICAL KNOWLEDGE TO A PERFORMANCE.**

A Few Periods of Theatre History:



- Ancient Greek Theatre
- ROMAN THEATRE
- *Medieval Theatre (Theatre of the Middle Ages)*
- Italian Renaissance Theatre
- Elizabethan Theatre
- *Eastern Theatre Traditions (Japan, China, India)*

ANCIENT GREEK THEATRE



ANCIENT GREEK THEATRE



YOU CAN GO TO A PLAY

ALMOST ANYTIME YOU CHOOSE.

HUNDREDS OF PLAYS ARE PERFORMED ALMOST EVERY NIGHT OF THE WEEK ALL ACROSS THE UNITED STATES. YOUR OPPORTUNITIES TO SEE A PLAY WOULD HAVE BEEN VERY LIMITED, HOWEVER, HAD YOU LIVED IN GREECE AROUND 400 TO 500 B.C.

ANCIENT GREEK THEATRE



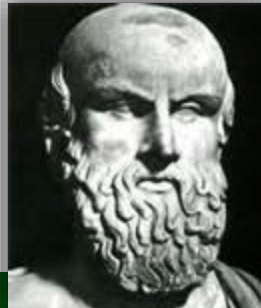
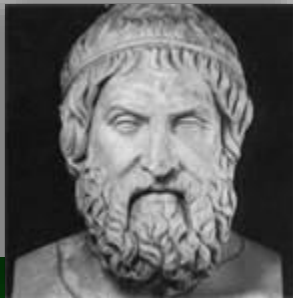
- In ancient Greece, plays were performed only a few times a year at religious festivals honoring **Dionysius**, the Greek God of wine and fertility.
- The festivals were held to honor **Dionysius** in the hope that he would bless the Greeks with many children, rich land, and abundant crops.



ANCIENT GREEK THEATRE

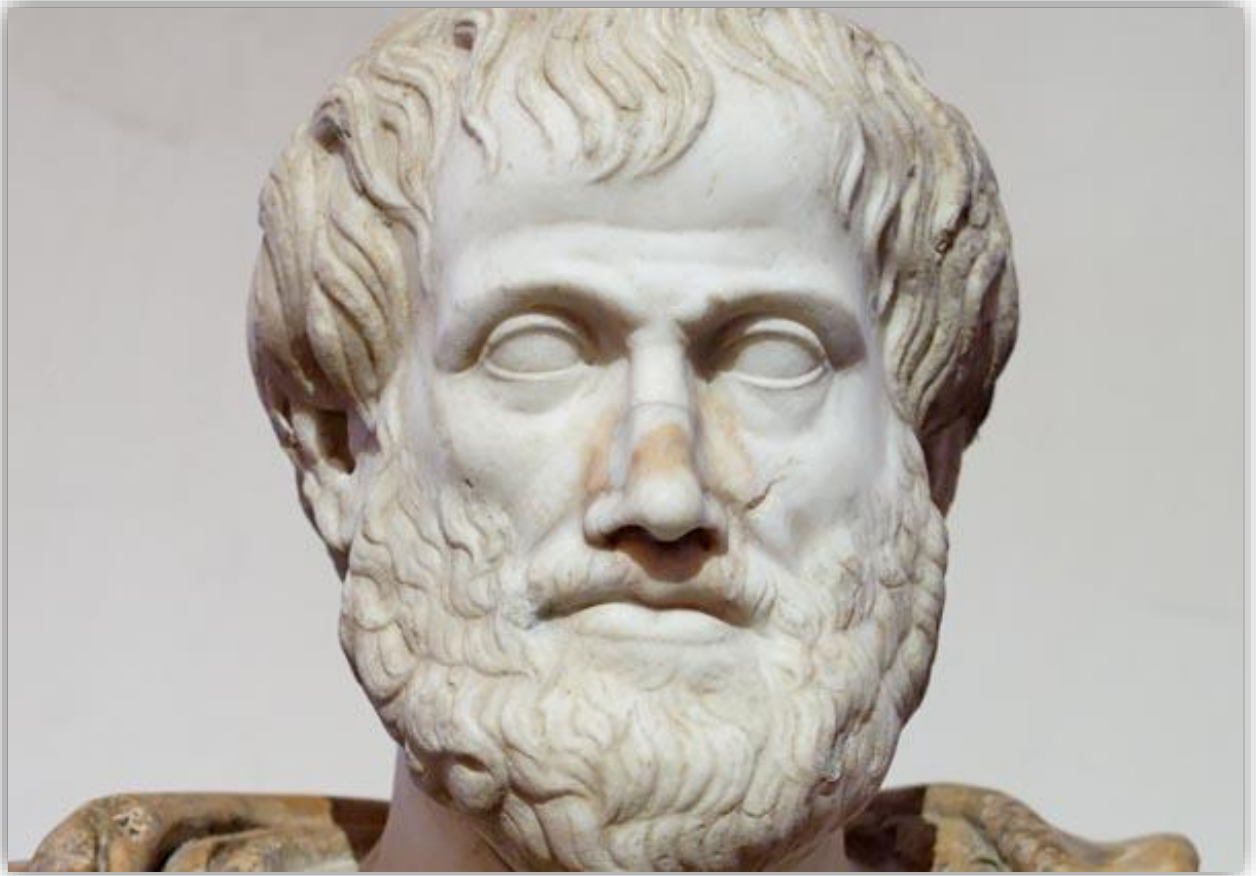
- An important part of the festival was the dramatic contest.
- At first there were contests for drama only, but later contests for comedy were added.
- The first such contest is thought to have taken place in 534 B.C.
- The winner was **Thespis**, from whom we derive the word *thespian* (which is still used today to refer to an actor).

- Other famous winners of the contests were **Sophocles**, **Aeschylus**, and **Euripides** for *tragedies* (dramas in which the main character suffers a disastrous end), **Aristophanes** and **Menander** for *comedies* (light, humorous dramas w/ a happy ending).
- Of the hundreds of plays written by these famous Greek playwrights, only forty-some remain today.
- Among these plays, *Oedipus the King* by Sophocles is considered one of the finest dramas, and *Lysistrata* by Aristophanes is perhaps the best-known Greek comedy.





The great Greek philosopher and teacher, Aristotle, wrote *The Poetics*. In this book he discussed the theater of his time. Aristotle discussed important topics of the theater including plot (what happens), theme (the idea or message), character, music, diction (speech), and spectacle (what was seen).



ARISTOTLE

Aristotle became the first literary critic.



GREEK MYTHOLOGY

Greek mythology is the legends and stories behind the Greek gods.

The earliest Greek dramas, especially those by Aeschylus (525-456 BC), drew their plots and characters from these myths.



ATHENS, GREECE

ATHENS WAS THE CENTER OF GREEK THEATRE. THE MOST IMPORTANT FESTIVAL OF THE YEAR WAS THE GREAT, OR CITY, DIONYSIA WHICH WAS HELD IN LATE MARCH TO THE BEGINNING OF APRIL IN THE THEATRE OF DIONYSIUS.



THEATRE OF DIONYSIUS

This open air theatre was built much like today's large football or baseball stadiums. Since each play was performed only once, the theatres had to be large enough to hold thousands of people. Historians believed that as many as 14,000 to 17,000 people might have attended each production.



—So that all the audience could see, the theatre was built into a hillside. The performance took place on the ground level, a circular floor call the *orchestra*, and the audience extended all the way to the top of the hill.



Since there was no electricity for lighting, sound, or special effects, the plays began early in the morning and lasted until the sun began to set. Imagine the excitement in the air as people prepared to spend an entire day at the theatre.

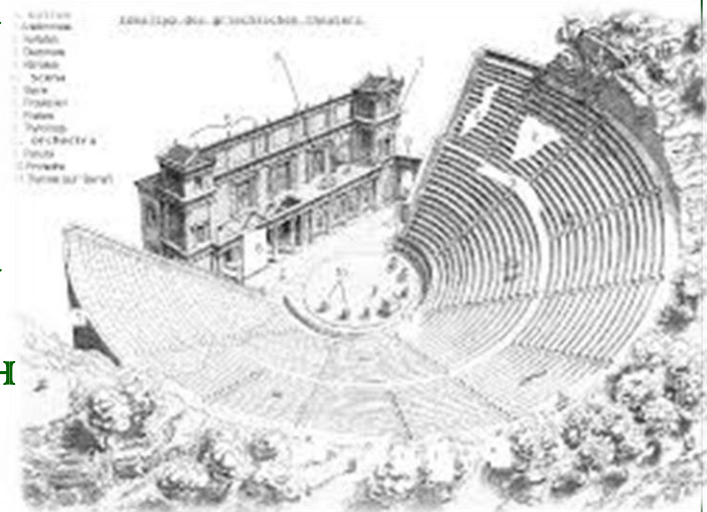


THEATRE OF DIONYSIUS

GREEK Amphitheatre



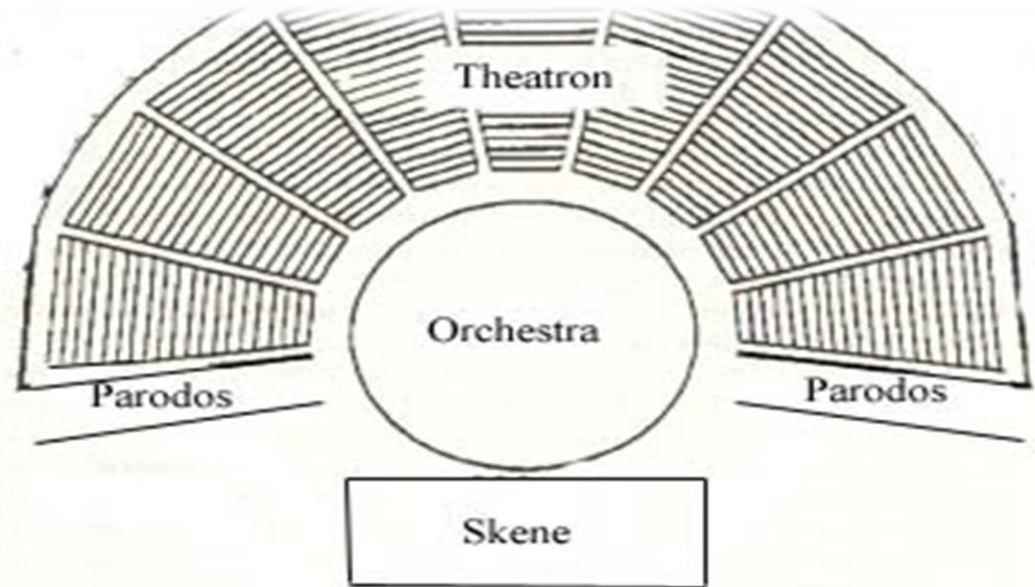
GREEK TRAGEDIES AND COMEDIES WERE ALWAYS PERFORMED IN OUTDOOR THEATERS. EARLY GREEK THEATERS WERE PROBABLY LITTLE MORE THAN OPEN AREAS IN CITY CENTERS OR NEXT TO HILLSIDES WHERE THE AUDIENCE, STANDING OR SITTING, COULD WATCH AND LISTEN TO THE CHORUS SINGING ABOUT THE EXPLOITS OF A GOD OR HERO. FROM THE LATE 6TH CENTURY BC TO THE 4TH AND 3RD CENTURIES BC THERE WAS A GRADUAL EVOLUTION TOWARDS MORE ELABORATE THEATER STRUCTURES, BUT THE BASIC LAYOUT OF THE GREEK THEATER REMAINED THE SAME.





Orchestra: The orchestra ("dancing space") was normally circular. It was a level space where the chorus would dance, sing, and interact with the actors who were on the stage near the skene. In the center of the orchestra there was often a thymele, or altar. The orchestra of the theater of Dionysus in Athens was about 60 feet in diameter.

Theatron: The theatron ("viewing-place") is where the spectators sat. The theatron was usually part of hillside overlooking the orchestra, and often wrapped around a large portion of the orchestra. Spectators in the fifth century BC probably sat on cushions or boards, but by the fourth century the theatron of many Greek theaters had marble seats.




Skene: The skene ("tent") was the building directly behind the stage. During the 5th century, the stage of the theater of Dionysus in Athens was probably raised only two or three steps above the level of the orchestra, and was perhaps 25 feet wide and 10 feet deep. The skene was directly in back of the stage, and was usually decorated as a palace, temple, or other building, depending on the needs of the play. It had at least one set of doors, and actors could make entrances and exits through them. There was also access to the roof of the skene from behind, so that actors playing gods and other characters could appear on the roof, if needed.

Parodos: The parodos ("passageways") are the paths by which the chorus and some actors (such as those representing messengers or people returning from abroad) made their entrances and exits. The audience also used them to enter and exit the theater before and after the performance.

GREEK MASKS

Many of the Greek actors wore lightweight masks. These masks made it easier for the actors to change characters quickly. Since the first Greek actors were all men, the masks made their portrayal of female roles more believable.





Much of the action of the Greek play was song and dance by a group of young men and boys. This group was called the *chorus*. Thespis is credited by most historians as being the first playwright, and perhaps the first person, to have stepped out from the chorus to recite the first solo lines, and thereby become the first actor.



GREEK CHORUS

ROMAN THEATRE



BY 146 B.C.,
ROME HAD
CONQUERED
GREECE, AND IN
THE YEARS
THAT
FOLLOWED,
ROME WOULD
GRADUALLY
ABSORB THE
ENTIRE GREEK
WORLD.

ROMAN THEATRE



- BECAUSE THEIR EMPIRE WAS SO VAST AND THEIR WEALTH WAS SO GREAT, MANY ROMAN CITIZENS HAD A GREAT DEAL OF FREE TIME.
- THEY DIDN'T HAVE TO SPEND MANY HOURS EACH DAY GROWING, GATHERING OR EARNING MONEY TO PAY FOR THEIR FOOD.
- AS A RESULT, THEY WERE A SOCIETY THAT LOVED MANY FORMS OF ENTERTAINMENT.



ROMAN THEATRE



- GREEK-STYLE THEATRE WAS ONLY ONE OF MANY FORMS OF ENTERTAINMENT THAT THE ROMANS REGULARLY PRODUCED.
- THE ROMANS ENJOYED SHORT COMEDIES (SIMILAR TO OUR “SITCOMS”), ATHLETIC EVENTS, MUSIC AND DANCE, TRAINED ANIMAL SHOWS, CHARIOT RACES, AND CIRCUS PERFORMERS SUCH AS JUGGLERS AND TUMBLERS.
- OF THE DIFFERENT FULL-LENGTH PLAYS PRODUCED BY THE ROMANS, THE COMEDIES WERE MUCH MORE POPULAR THAN THE TRAGEDIES.

ROMAN THEATRE

- THE TITLES OF MANY ROMAN PLAYS WERE RECORDED IN GOVERNMENT AND FESTIVAL RECORDS, BUT FEW OF THAT LARGE NUMBER SURVIVE.

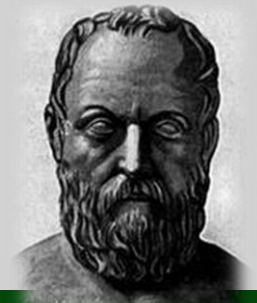
- OF THE KNOWN TRAGEDIES, ALL BUT ONE IS BY A PLAYWRIGHT NAMED **SENECA** (5 B.C.–65 B.C.).

- NINE OF HIS PLAYS SURVIVE.



- OF THESE, THE BEST KNOWN ARE *THE TROJAN WOMEN*, *MEDEA*, *OEDIPUS*, AND *AGAMEMNON*, ALL OF WHICH ARE BASED ON GREEK PLAYS.

- THE COMEDY SCRIPTS THAT HAVE SURVIVED ARE EITHER BY **TITUS PLAUTUS** (254 B.C.–184 B.C.) OR PUBLIUS TERENTIUS AFER, WHO IS KNOWN TO US TODAY AS **TERENCE** (190 B.C.–159 B.C.).



ROMAN THEATRE



- MOST OF THE SURVIVING ROMAN PLAYS ARE BASED UPON PLOTS OF GREEK PLAYS.
- THIS PRACTICE OF BORROWING THE MAIN IDEAS AND CHARACTERS FROM PLAYS WRITTEN IN EARLIER PERIODS IS A PRACTICE WHICH WE SEE REPEATED BY MANY FAMOUS PLAYWRIGHTS THROUGHOUT HISTORY.
- FOR EXAMPLE, THE ROMAN *MENAECHMI* WAS SHAKESPEARE'S SOURCE FOR THE *COMEDY OF ERRORS*, ONE OF HIS MOST POPULAR SCRIPTS TODAY.

ROMAN THEATRE



- BUT THE ROMAN WRITERS DID MORE THAN COPY THE GREEK'S IDEAS.
- THEY MADE SOME IMPORTANT CHANGES IN DRAMATIC FORM.
- THEY ELIMINATED THE CHORUS AND ADDED MUSIC TO UNDERScore THE DIALOGUE, RATHER LIKE A MOVIE SOUNDTRACK DOES TODAY.
- UNLIKE THE GREEKS, WHO RESTRICTED THE NUMBER OF ACTORS IN EACH PLAY, THE ROMANS DID NOT LIMIT THEIR WRITERS TO ANY SET NUMBER OF PERFORMERS.



THE STAGE SETTING FOR ROMAN COMEDY WAS ALWAYS THE SAME CITY STREET, REGARDLESS OF THE PLAY BEING PRODUCED. THE BACKDROP (A PERMANENT STONE STRUCTURE KNOWN AS A SCAENAE FRONS) ALWAYS REPRESENTED THE FRONT OF SEVERAL HOUSES, IN WHICH THERE WERE DOORWAYS. THESE DOORWAYS REPRESENTED THE HOUSEHOLDS OF THE MAIN CHARACTERS OF THE PLAY AND SERVED AS ENTRANCES AND EXITS. FOR TRAGEDY, THIS SAME STRUCTURE WOULD REPRESENT A PALACE OR TEMPLE.



THEIR STRONG SENSE OF DESIGN IS REFLECTED IN THEIR THEATRE BUILDINGS, WHICH WERE UNIFIED, FREE-STANDING STRUCTURES SEVERAL STORIES IN HEIGHT. THESE BUILDINGS WERE UNLIKE THE GREEK THEATRE BUILDINGS, WHICH WERE BUILT ON HILLSIDES TO UTILIZE THE NATURAL SLOPE OF THE GROUND FOR BETTER AUDIENCE VISIBILITY.



ROMAN COLOSSEUM

Theatre of the Middle Ages



*The theatre created in the middle ages
(also known as the Medieval Period)
stretched from approximately 500-1500 A. D.*

Theatre of the Middle Ages



- *The theatrical performances staged during this period were quite different from the theatrical performances staged in Rome.*
- *In the absence of a powerful monarch or government to stabilize trade and daily life, the church took over many of the functions of leadership.*
- *Because the church was so powerful, and because so few people could read the scriptures for themselves, theatre became a way to communicate religious messages to the general public in a clear and powerful way.*



Theatre of the Middle Ages

- Most plays performed in the Middle Ages told stories from the Bible.

- Often several stories were performed, one right after the other in what became known as a *cycle* of plays.

- An example of such a cycle is the Wakefield cycle staged in Wakefield, England, which consisted of thirty-two plays.

- The thirteenth play in this cycle, *The Second Shepherd's Play*, is considered one of the best English cycle plays.

- The cycle plays were often referred to as *mystery plays*, because they focused on the mysterious nature of God's power.

- These plays dramatized biblical events spanning the period from the creation in the book of Genesis to the last judgment in the book of Revelation.

- For example, *The Mystery of Adam* tells the stories of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel, and the prophets who foreshadow the coming of Christ.

Theatre of the Middle Ages



- Although the plays of this period focused on man's proper response to God, as the period passed, the church began to modify the content of the plays.
- These newer plays, known as *morality plays*, attempted to teach a moral lesson to the audience through the use of allegorical (symbolic) characters.
- For example, a character in a morality play may have represented all of mankind, or a particular vice or virtue such as greed, anger, or mercy.

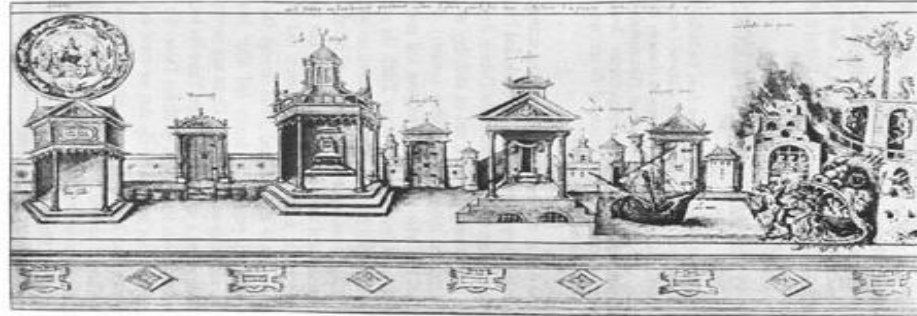
- The main character, often called *Everyman* or *Mankind*, was typically tempted by evil but returned to side of good in the end.



From 15th Century Manuscript

Theatre of the Middle Ages

The plays were presented very differently from the way the Romans had staged their plays.



A 1547 Valenciennes set design showing Heaven (left), a Hell Mouth (right), and various places there between.

Staged in the church itself or in the churchyard around the church building, or in the street, the setting customarily was comprised of a series of several small, temporary, hut-like houses, each one decorated differently to represent a different location. These were called *mansions*. All of these mansions were visible to the audience at once. Each of the mansions faced a common, shared playing space in front of the row of mansions called the *platea*. This space served as the central acting area for all of the locations. The audience would accept the space was changing based upon from what mansion the actors entered.

Theatre of the Middle Ages



*Although they were of minor importance compared to the religious and morality plays, two other forms of theatre--farce and interlude--were popular in the Middle Ages. **Farce** was a form of coincidence that originated in the 1200s, emphasizing some of society's more ridiculous behaviors. The **interludes** were comic plays that served as short breaks between different parts of a celebration.*

Italian Renaissance



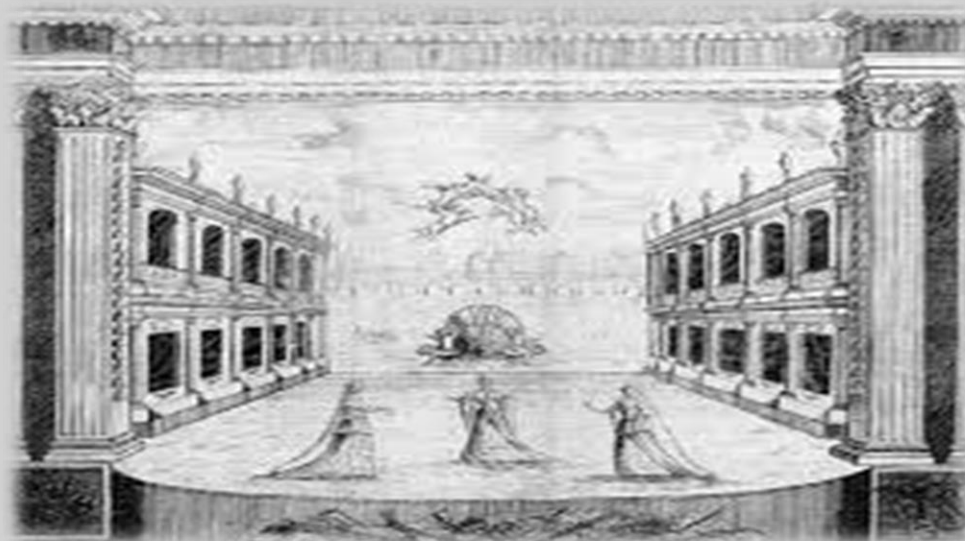
In the years stretching from the late 1300s through the early 1600s, the cultural center of Europe was Italy.



This period of cultural advancement and activity is known as the Renaissance.

Italian Renaissance

- The Renaissance was a time for great advancement not only in the theatre but in all of the arts.
- It is during this period that theatre was transformed from its Medieval form to a type of theatre much closer to our modern style.





Much of the new theatre activity resulted from the merchants sponsoring artists to create works of art, such as plays, for the enjoyment of their family and friends. This system of providing financial support was known as **patronage**.

Italian Renaissance



Italian Renaissance



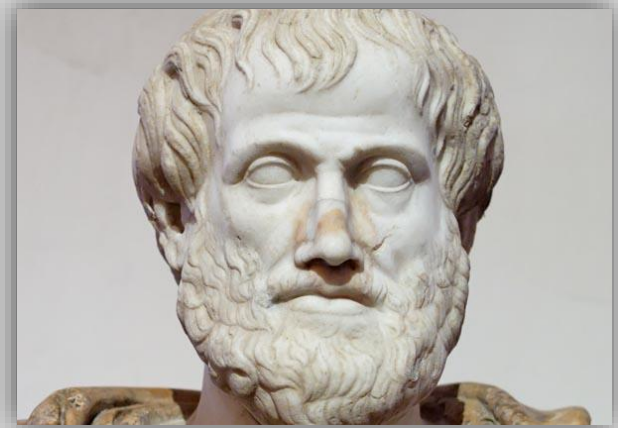
- The subject matter of the arts changed from the religious topics, which had been dominant in the Middle Ages, to more earthly matters, and is focused upon human rather than divine activity. This new Way of looking at the world was known as **humanism**.

Italian Renaissance

Neoclassical Ideas

- The new Renaissance rules of writing drama, known as the Neoclassical Ideals, were very important because they dominated opinions about the best ways to write plays for over two hundred years. The Neoclassical theories were based upon the then recently rediscovered writings of the Greek and Roman playwrights and the writings of the Greek philosopher **Aristotle**.

- The Renaissance writers thought they had found the rules about the proper way to write and create theater, so they created plays that copied the stories and themes of the Greek and Roman plays.



Italian Renaissance

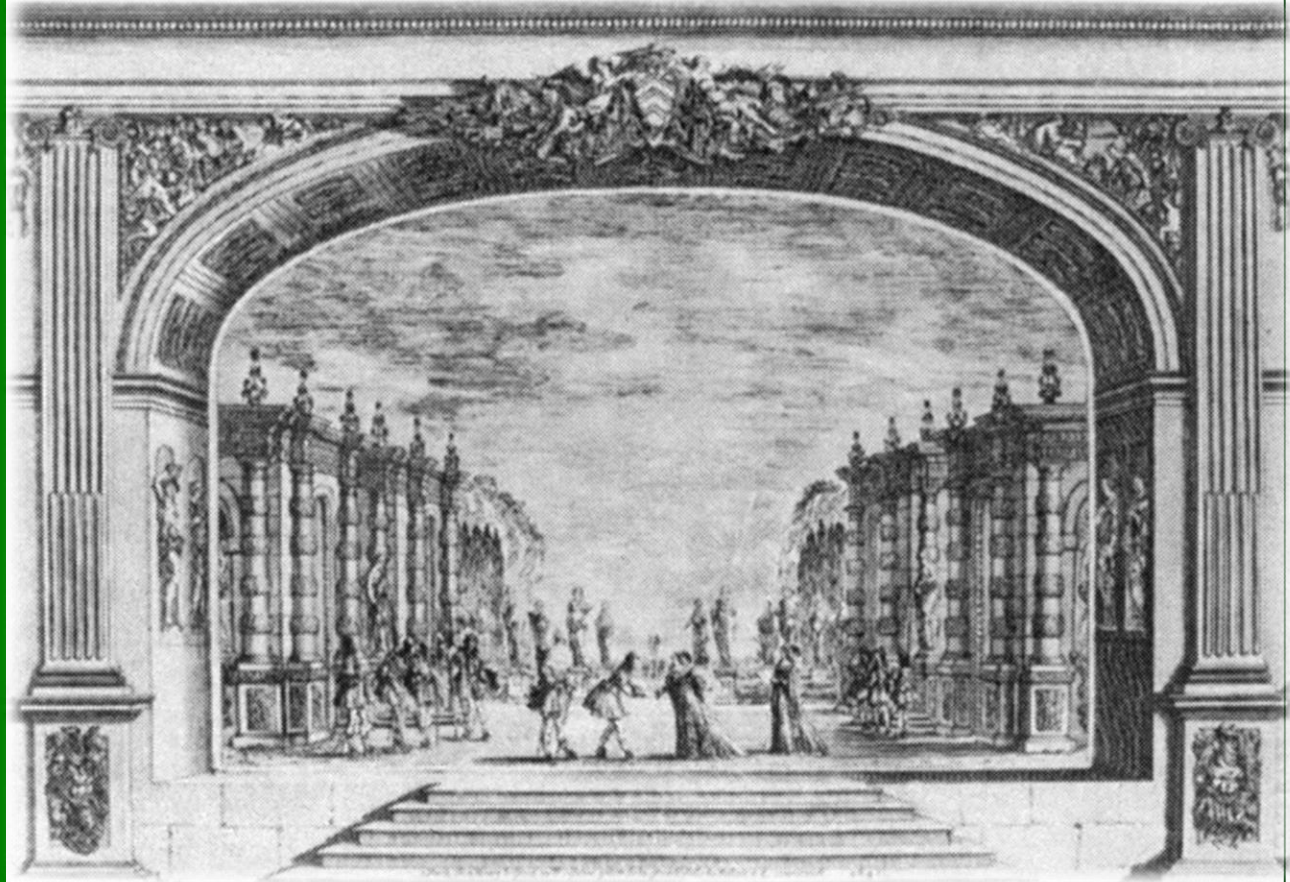


Neoclassical Ideas

- The Neoclassical Ideals were concerned with what is called **verisimilitude**, which means “being true to life.”
Verisimilitude is what the Renaissance playwrights mistakenly believed that Aristotle was dictating. Therefore, the Renaissance philosophy demanded that all characters and situations be recognizable and verifiable from real life.
- To make sure that this rule of verisimilitude was followed, all plays had to have a unity of time (requiring that the action of the play not cover more than twenty-four hours), unity of place (requiring that the action all take place in one locale), and unity of action (requiring that the plot have only one story line, with no subplots).

Some of the most important people in theatre history in this period were architects, who changed forever the way theatre buildings would be built. In the early 1600s, architects first began to design proscenium arches, or picture-frame openings around the stage space.

Italian Renaissance





The oldest surviving theatre from this period is located in Vicenza, Italy, and named the Teatro Olimpico. It was completed in the year 1585 and could hold up to 3,000 people. Although it had no proscenium arch, the stage had a permanent facade (fake building front built on stage to represent a large building).



Like the Roman scene houses in the earlier period, the Olimpico's facade had a series of doorways built into a massive, ornate wall that could be used to represent the households of various families in the plays. These doorways were different from their Roman counterparts in that they had long hallways or alleyways built into them. These alleyways ran at sharp angles away from the audience, giving the illusion of deep interior spaces within the homes of the play's characters.

The facade gave way to the use of painted scenery, which could be shifted to reveal new settings behind it. Soon, painted flats (painted canvases representing three-dimensional walls) were replacing fixed, architectural stage houses as the basic unit of scenery.



This change is what made building proscenium arches popular. The arch gave audience members the sense that they were looking at a walking, talking, moving, transforming, singing painting when they went to the theatre.

Italian Renaissance



- In the Middle Ages, the style had been to use mansions to represent heaven, hell, Earth, and other specific settings—all visible to the audience at the same time.
- In the Renaissance it was much more popular to reveal only one setting at a time.
- This made it necessary to hide from view all the flats except the one being used at a given time.
- The proscenium arch was the solution.
- While serving as a huge picture frame, it also hid the extra flats and the system of ropes, pulleys, and tracking needed to move the flats.
- As the period progressed, the audience began to want more and more changes of setting, which led to the building of permanent proscenium arches.



The first theatre to have a proscenium stage was the **Teatro Farnese**, in Parma, Italy, completed in 1618. For the Farnese scenery, painters used perspective techniques to create a painted series of wings or flats, which were placed one behind the other on both sides of the stage, so that they could be slid away to reveal the next set. These flats usually appeared to be houses along a city street. The setting was closed off at the back of the stage with a painted drop or a large set of wings called **shutters**, which met in the middle of the stage and could be slid away to reveal another backdrop.



The use of these multiple settings required that newer theatre buildings have more backstage space to store scenery and equipment. This meant that Renaissance stages became larger and larger, and deeper and deeper, to house all the scenery and to provide the visual depth that had become so popular in visual arts.

Italian Renaissance



- Although the Italians were very concerned with perspective, they did not find it necessary to create new scenery for each play.
- Instead they reused three standard styles of settings, one for tragedies (showing the street of a wealthy neighborhood), another for a comedy (showing a common street lined with lower-class homes), and a third setting for pastoral plays (showing trees, hillsides, and simple country cottages).
- The practice was to reuse these basic settings over and over, depending upon the style and genre of the play being produced.

Italian Renaissance

The first comedy written in Italian

- *La Cassaria*

by Ludovico Ariosto.

La Cassaria is a comedy that combines classical form with a more contemporary sense of earthy humor.



The first important tragedy

- *Sofonisba*

by Giangiorgio Trissino.



Elizabethan Theatre





In England,
the Renaissance is
known as
The Elizabethan Age.
This period was named
after the powerful
English ruler, who
ruled Great Britain for
forty-five years, from
1558 to 1603.



Elizabeth's reign began a period of English history during which language and literature flourished. At the heart of the English Renaissance was the love of language and the art of theatre.

Several developments during Elizabeth's reign helped the theatre to thrive. As one example, acting changed from an amateur to a professional status. The citizens who had performed the medieval religious plays and the plays in the homes of nobility were replaced by companies of professional actors who played regularly around London and throughout the country.



This development gave playwrights a more stable and experienced group of performers for whom to write more detailed and complicated plays.

Elizabethan Theatre

- Along with this rise in the profession of acting came the building of permanent theatres, public buildings where all classes of people could attend performances.
- These permanent buildings began to replace the temporary stages that had been set up in the town squares or in cathedral yards.
- The new theatre buildings created spaces dedicated specifically to the presentation of theatrical events.



Because of the church's earlier policy, which looked at all theatre that was not religious in nature as an evil activity, the city of London did not permit theatre buildings to be erected inside the city limits. Therefore, the permanent theatres so popular during the Elizabethan period were located outside the city, across the Thames River, and audience members had to leave the city to see a play.



The audience knew that a play was going to be presented at one of the theatres across the river by seeing a flag fly from high atop the theatre, which was the signal that there would be a performance that day.

Of these theatre spaces, the most famous was the **Globe Theatre**, which was the location for the presentation of Shakespeare's plays.

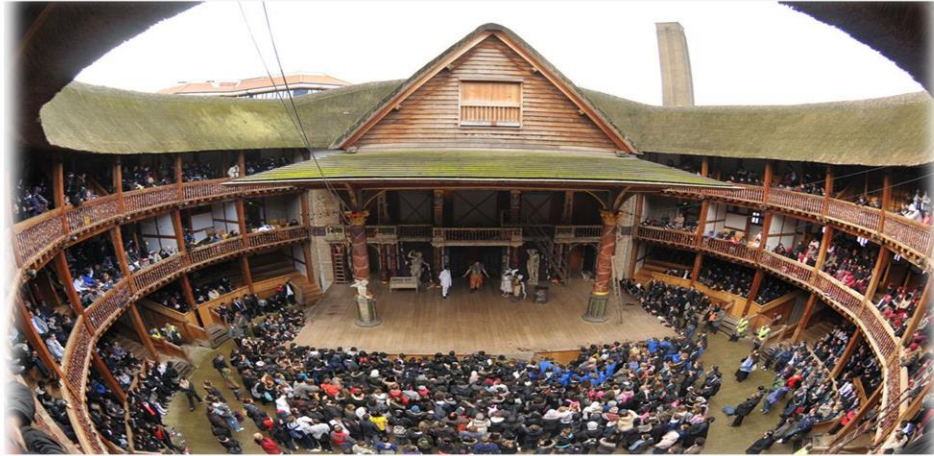


Most Elizabethan theatres were circular or octagonal structures of about three stories, with an open roof. We know that the Globe was such a building.

• The raised platform stage was surrounded by the audience on three sides, and was closer to a contemporary thrust stage than to a proscenium arch stage, which was so popular at this same period in time in Italy.

• Behind the platform stage was a stage house, known as a **living house**, which served as a backdrop for the action. This structure served as backstage space for changing and storing costumes and props and the few scenic pieces used in the productions.

• At the back of the platform was an area called the **inner stage**, a roofed area that could be separated from the front of the platform to suggest an interior setting.



• Above this, on the roof of the inner stage, was a second playing space, a sort of balcony where some of the scenes might be played. This was, no doubt, where Shakespeare's famous balcony scene in *Romeo and Juliet* would have been played.

There was a third level of platforming above this balcony stage space, which was called the musicians' gallery, where a small group of musicians might be stationed to provide music during the play. There was usually a roof coming out from the top of the stage house to protect the various layers of playing space from direct sunlight or rain.

Elizabethan Theatre

- The form of the English plays written in this period was different from the plays being written in Italy and on the European continent.

- The English did not follow the new neoclassical ideal.

- Instead, the English dramas of the period were structured in a series of brief scenes, which frequently changed location from place to place.

- These quick shifts in action required that the Elizabethans adopt a much freer use of stage space.

- They didn't use the perspective painting and wings used by the Italians.

- Instead, the Elizabethan stage was an open platform with little or no scenery placed on it.

- This platform was a neutral playing area, which could become many different locations in the same play.

- When one group of characters left the stage and another group entered, the audience knew that the scene was changing.

- An actor might carry on a single piece of furniture to location of the next scene.

- A throne, for example, might indicate a palace setting; a table and a few props might indicate a dining hall.

- At other times, a character might signal the next location by announcing it in the early lines of the scene.

- This type of signal to the audience is called **spoken decor**.

- Language was important in Elizabethan plays in all respects, even scenery!

Elizabethan Theatre

Iambic Pentameter

- Another noted feature of Elizabethan drama was the use of poetry.
- Christopher Marlowe (1564-1593) was one of the first playwrights to utilize a special type of dramatic poetry called **iambic pentameter**, which is written to contain five beats or stress points per line.
- Words in iambic pentameter have two syllables to each beat and when spoken, stress is placed upon the second beat.
- This makes the language almost musical in nature.

Shakespeare

- By far the most important playwright during this period was **William Shakespeare**.



Eastern Theatre Traditions



JAPAN



INDIA



CHINA

Eastern Theatre Traditions

JAPAN



IN THE EARLY 1400S, THE JAPANESE WERE PERFORMING A VERY STYLIZED AND GRACEFUL FORM OF THEATRE CALLED **NOH THEATRE**. NOH HAS ELEMENTS OF OPERA, PANTOMIME, AND STYLIZED DANCE.

Eastern Theatre Traditions

JAPAN

- The first Noh performances were shared with the general public by **Zeami**, a fifty-year old actor/ playwright who was one of the most outstanding Noh performers to have ever lived and who wrote over 100 Noh plays.



- In the dramas, the main character is always played by a man who wears a beautiful, carved, hand-painted mask.
- He performs to the constant accompaniment of several on-stage musicians.
- Most Noh plays are spiritual in nature, having a ghost, demon, or obsessed human whose soul cannot find rest as the main character.



Eastern Theatre Traditions

JAPAN

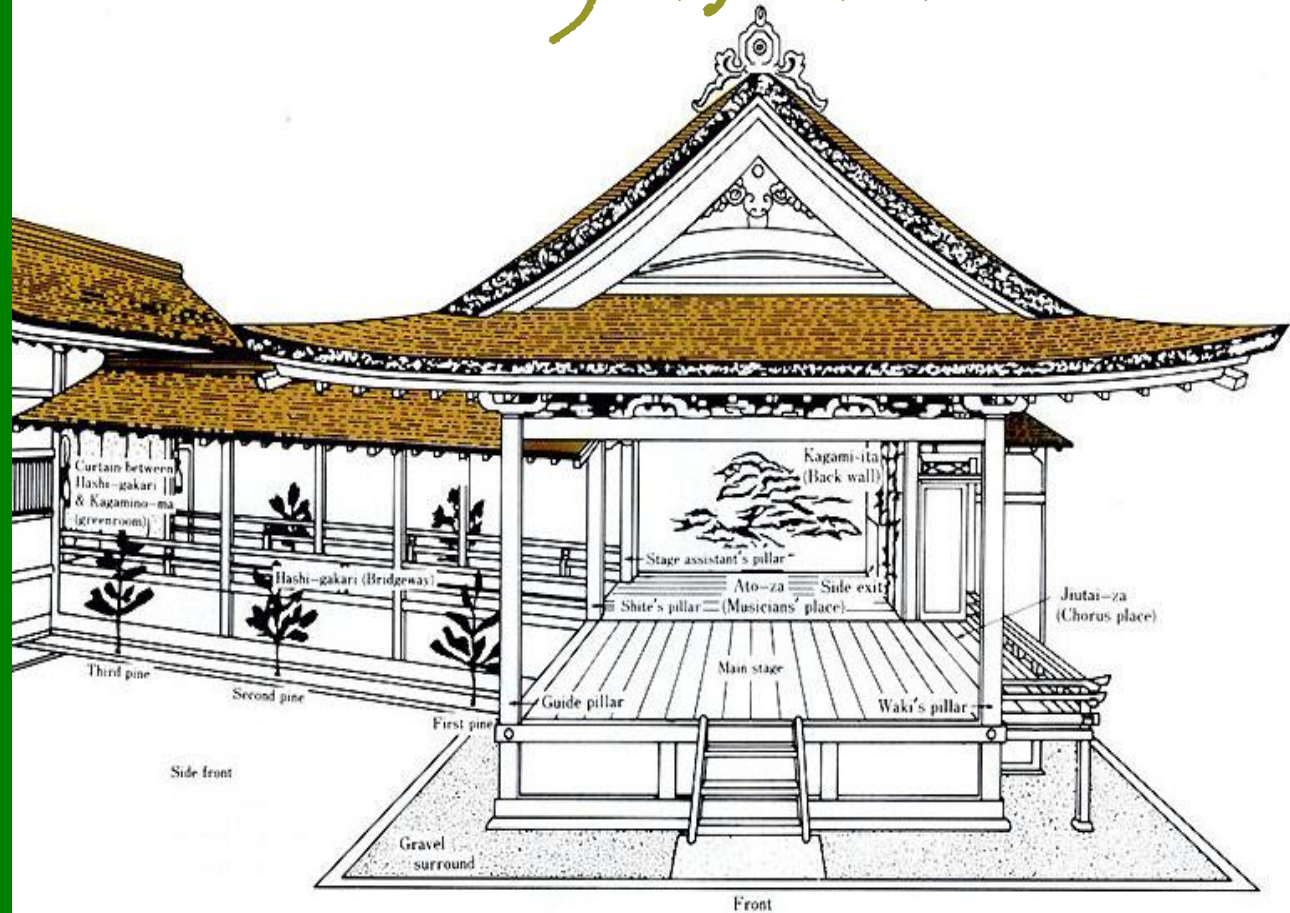
- Actors in Noh troupes train for their profession for many years.
- From the time they are very young children they train to become one of the three main roles in Noh.
- These are the *shite*, or main character; the *waki*, or narrator; and the *tsure*, or accompanying role.



Eastern Theatre Traditions

JAPAN

The actors perform on a raised platform stage of polished wood. This stage is connected to the actor's dressing rooms by a long wooden walkway with the audience viewing from three sides.



Eastern Theatre Traditions

JAPAN

- *Kabuki*, another Japanese theatre form, developed in the early and mid-seventeenth century and is still being performed today.
- The Kabuki plays were based upon the plays written earlier in that country for their very popular puppet theatres called *Bunraku*, and from the Noh plays.
- Most of these were based upon history or folklore, especially ghost stories.



Eastern Theatre Traditions

JAPAN

- Like the Noh actors, the Kabuki actors train from childhood in singing, dancing, acting, and acrobatics.
- Many of these actors inherited a character type from their fathers who were famous actors before them.



The *Onnagata* were male actors who specialized in playing the female roles. These actors were famous for their ability to imitate the essence of feminine personality through the use of stylized poses and gestures.



Eastern Theatre Traditions
JAPAN



A major difference between Noh actors and Kabuki actors is that Noh actors always wear masks, while Kabuki actors create their characters' facial features with highly stylized make-up.

Eastern Theatre Traditions JAPAN



桃太郎



亀清



男多助



哈神

Eastern Theatre Traditions

JAPAN

- The Kabuki stage is rather like our common American proscenium stage of today.
- The audience views the playing space from only one side, watching the action through a proscenium (picture frame) opening.
- The Kabuki stage, however, is rather long and has a much lower proscenium opening than most of our theatres today.
- A unique Kabuki staging feature is the presence of a *hanamichi*, which means “flower way.”
- A *hanamichi* is a walkway that connects the stage with the back of the auditorium.
- This walkway is used for many characters’ entrances and exits as well as for the performance of short scenes.
- The configuration of the acting space remains the same, but the plays, unlike Noh, are usually staged with elaborate sets and props.





Eastern Theatre Traditions

JAPAN

Kabuki, like Noh, is usually accompanied by an orchestra that plays music to enhance the dialogue. Unlike Noh, however, the Kabuki musicians are sometimes hidden from the audience's view.



Eastern Theatre Traditions

INDIA



THE INDIAN PEOPLE HAVE A MUCH OLDER THEATRICAL TRADITION IN THEIR *SANSKRIT DRAMA*, WHICH DATES FROM APPROXIMATELY 100 A.D. ABOUT TWENTY-FIVE OF THESE PLAYS REMAIN. THESE ARE ALL BASED UPON STORIES FOUND IN THE *MAHABHARATA* OR THE *RAMAYANA*, TWO GREAT EPIC WRITINGS, WHICH ARE COMPOUNDS OF MYTH, HISTORY, AND LEGEND.

Eastern Theatre Traditions

INDIA

These dramas, which all end happily, are different from Western plays in that instead of being based upon the action and reactions of characters or the examination of thematic issues, the central goal of Sanskrit drama is the creation of an appropriate *rasa*, or mood. This places the focus in Sanskrit drama squarely on the actor, who uses movement and a set style of hand gestures to communicate meaning, rather like sign language functions today. In keeping with this style of communication, there is very little scenery in Sanskrit presentations.





One of the most famous Sanskrit plays, *The Little Clay Cart*, is a social play that features a set of young lovers who struggle to be together. This is common in Sanskrit dramas, as good and evil in these plays are clearly defined and good always eventually wins.

Eastern Theatre Traditions INDIA



Eastern Theatre Traditions CHINA



IN CHINA, THERE ARE VERY FEW RECORDS OF THEATRICAL ACTIVITY UNTIL ABOUT 1500 B.C. WITH NO GREAT DRAMATIC LITERATURE CREATED UNTIL THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY A.D.

Eastern Theatre Traditions

CHINA

Because of the nation's vast size, many regional forms of theatre developed around the country. Early plays were drawn from all sorts of subject matter, ranging from current events to histories and legends, containing characters from all walks of life. Thematically, the plays usually upheld the idea of loyalty to family, friends, and country, and showed that justice eventually was served.



Eastern Theatre Traditions

CHINA

In 1790, on the Emperor Ch'ien-lung's eighteenth birthday, performers from all over the country were brought to Beijing to perform in a huge celebration. Many of these performers remained in the city and established a new form of theatre, which focused upon the performer and acting style rather than text. This new, highly stylized performance mode was called the *Beijing Opera* and remains the dominant style of theatre in China.



Eastern Theatre Traditions

CHINA

These performers believed that a text or play is merely an outline for a performance. Acting is dance-like in Beijing Opera, with each movement set to a steady rhythm established by the leader of the on-stage orchestra who plays a drum. Each line of dialogue is accompanied by a movement or gesture intended to enhance or explain its exact meaning to the audience. Costumes are ornate and utilize color symbolically to indicate many facts about the character's class, status, occupation, and temperament.



Eastern Theatre Traditions

CHINA

The traditional Chinese stage is modeled on the shape of the covered porches of the temples where the earliest of the dramas were performed. They are simple platforms with an ornate roof supported by four lacquered columns. Many of these early stages were located in teahouses and the audience watched the performances while seated at small tables located in front of the stage. On the stage is little more than a carpet, sometimes a table and a few chairs. Openings in the curtain that hangs at the rear of the stage provide the only entrances and exits.



Theatre History Project Assignments



Educate the class on your time period of theatre history and transport us to that period by doing **EACH** of the following:

- Building a Model / Collage of what a theatre looked like for your time period.
- Performing a selection from a play from your time period (2 minutes).
- Having an element of period costuming. This can be large pictures or an actual costume.
- Present the Playwrights and Plays popular during the time through a Visual Aid.
- Prepare a quiz for the class on the info you give in the presentation.

Project Grading



This project is divided into 5 major components:

- **Theatre Model – 20%**
- **Play Performance – 20%**
- **Period Costuming Presentation – 20%**
- **Playwrights/ Play Visual Aid- 20%**
- **Quiz – 20%**

Getting Started – Day One Goals



- **Choose and break into groups of 4.**
- **Discuss which time period interests your group.**
- **Turn in your top 2 choices to Panfil. I will reassign groups if multiple groups pick the same time period.**
- **We will go to the library tomorrow. Be prepared to start researching then. STAY ON TASK!**