

'The Frogs'

A comedy by Aristophanes

(Simplified Version)

Check the students know what the difference between a comedy and a tragedy is...

Characters:

Dionysus, god of wine

Heracles, Greek hero, handsome, strong, brave (and brother of Dionysus)

Charon, ferryman of the dead

Pluto, the King of Hades

Persephone, the beautiful Queen of Hades

A maid

A chorus of frogs

- Set in Athens. It is a bad time for Greek plays. Tragedies just aren't tragic enough, comedies just aren't funny enough. The audiences are crying at the bad jokes in the comedies and laughing at the bad acting in the tragedies. The god of wine and entertainment, Dionysus, has had enough. He wants to fix things and make plays good again. So he has a little think (scratch beard), and, because he is the god of wine, a little drink (drink wine), and then he comes up with a CUNNING PLAN...
- What was his cunning plan? Any ideas?
- Dionysus decides... to go to Hades (land of the dead). Why? Because all the good writers of plays are dead, and he wants to go and find a good writer, bring them back and get them to write some really good plays.
- Can anyone think of a good way to go to the land of the dead? (Apart from actually dying!) Does anyone know another Greek story where someone went to Hades and came back alive?
- Heracles (Dionysus's brother) had already been to the land of the dead. He went there to steal Cerberus, the three-headed guard dog of Hades. He's a big strong hero (make big strong hero muscles). He knows all about it. You have to find Charon (big scary ferryman) and he will row you across the lake and drop you off at the other side.

- So Dionysus and Heracles go to the boat and find Charon and ask him to take them across. Now, it's a loooooong way to Hades, and the two brothers start to get bored (yawn)
- Suddenly, they hear a noise. "What is that noise?" asks Dionysus. "Oh it's just the frogs" says Charon (enter frog chorus)
- These aren't just any frogs. They think they're funny. And they like to sing about it. A lot.
- Anyone know any frog jokes?
- *Why did the frog walk across the road?* He didn't, he jumped!
- *Why are frogs so happy?* They eat whatever bugs them!
- *What kind of shoes do frogs wear?* Open toad!
- *How does a frog feel when he has a broken leg?* Unhappy!
- What does a Greek frog say?
- Not 'ribbit' but "brek-kek-kek-koax-koax" (get students to chorus this) And they also burp quite a lot, if anyone wants to do that too.

- *Oh we are the musical Frogs!
 We live in the marshes and bogs!
 Sweet, sweet is the hymn
 That we sing, as we swim
 Brek-kek-kek-kek, koax, koax*

*And our voices are known
 For their beautiful tone
 When on festival days
 We sing to the praise
 Of the genial god-
 And we don't think it odd
 When the worshiping throng*

To the sound of our song

Rolls home through the marshes and bogs

Koax-koax

Rolls home through the marshes and bogs

- Just to add to the confusion, Dionysus and Heracles decide to play a trick on the King and Queen of the underworld by swapping clothes. When they get to the shore the king and queen, Pluto and Persephone, come to greet them. Now, can you remember what Heracles did last time he was in the underworld? He stole Cerberus, the three headed dog. Are Pluto and Persephone happy about this? No they aren't! As soon as they see Dionysus, who they think is Heracles (because they swapped clothes), they send him to be whipped as a punishment! Go on Dionysus, off to be whipped!
- Poor Dionysus comes back with a very sore behind, and not surprisingly wants to swap clothes so he won't get any more punishments that are supposed to be for Heracles. So they swap clothes again.
- But right at that moment one of Persephone's maids recognises Heracles and invites him to an amazing party she is having – a big feast with lots of dancing. So off they go! Poor Dionysus, missing out on all the fun! But he has an important job to do – do you remember why he came to the underworld in the first place? To find a good writer!
- There are two really good writers in Hades. One called Aeschylus (*esk-a-lus*), who had died many many years ago, and one called Euripides, who died less than a year ago. As soon as they hear that one of them is going to come back from the dead they start to fight: "I'm the best writer!" , "No, I'M the best writer!"
- What's the best way to find out who writes the best plays? A poetry competition, of course! (give poems below to Aeschylus and Euripides, and get them to read them). Best poet wins. Frogs get to vote. (In the actual story, Aeschylus wins, the moral of the play is that the old ways are the best ways). Frogs escort the winner off the stage. Everyone take a bow.

Aeschylus

POEM 1

The cow is of the bovine ilk;
One end is moo, the other, milk.

POEM 2

Behold the hippopotamus!
We laugh at how he looks to us
And yet in moments dark and grim
I wonder how we look to him!

-----cut here-----

Euripides

POEM 1

God in his wisdom made the fly
And then forgot to tell us why.

POEM 2

The song of Canaries
Never varies,
And when they're moulting
They're pretty revolting