THE ELEMENTS OF GREEK DRAMA
DIFFERENT DRAMATIC TYPES

- Tragedy: downfall of a hero/heroine by fate and the will of the gods. Typically they are trying to obtain some goal and in the process find a flaw within themselves, which leads to their ultimate downfall.
- Satyr: short spoof of a myth (like a parody).
- Comedy: satire of public affairs and people (pokes fun at real life).
BEGINNINGS

- Greek drama took a prominent place in Greek culture in 550 BCE in Athens, Greece.
- The Greek festival Dionysia performed plays to honor the Greek god Dionysus.
- Dionysus was the god of grapes, wine, and wine making.
- Tragedies were only performed once.
- All actors were men.
This was the “The Golden Age” of Greek Drama.

During Dionysia, there was a competition between three playwrights who would submit three tragedies and one satyr.
HELLENISTIC PERIOD

- After the Peloponnesian War, theatre in Athens began to decline.
- Old tragedies resurfaced.
- New Comedy was a new type of play that focused on comic episodes about ordinary citizens’ lives.
Ancient Greek plays are more like modern operas.

A chorus is typically composed of 12-15 young men who would sing and dance. They were usually preparing to enter military service. One serves as the charogos, or leader of the chorus.

In the beginning there was only one actor. By the Classical period there were three actors. However this did not mean that there were only three characters.
COSTUMES

❖ Most important part of the costume was the mask.
• They were usually made of leather, wood, or cloth and paste.
• Had open mouths so that the actor could be heard clearly.
• Wigs were attached to the masks.
Typical Structure of a Tragedy
1. **Prologue:** A monologue or dialogue preceding the entry of the chorus, which presents the tragedy's topic.

2. **Parodos (Entrance Ode):** The entry chant of the chorus, often in an anapestic (short-short-long) marching rhythm (four feet per line). Generally, they remain on stage throughout the remainder of the play. Although they wear masks, their dancing is expressive, as conveyed by the hands, arms and body.
Typically the parodos and other choral odes involve the following parts, repeated in order several times:

- **Strophê (Turn):** A stanza in which the chorus moves in one direction (toward the altar).
- **Antistrophê (Counter-Turn):** The following stanza, in which it moves in the opposite direction. The antistrophe is in the same meter as the strophe.
- **Epode (After-Song):** The epode is in a different, but related, meter to the strophe and antistrophe, and is chanted by the chorus standing still. The epode is often omitted, so there may be a series of strophe-antistrophe pairs without intervening epodes.
3. **Scenes:** There are several *scenes* (typically 3-5) in which one or two actors interact with the chorus. They are, at least in part, sung or chanted. Each scene is terminated by a *peaen*.

4. **Paean:** A choral ode giving praise to Dionysos

5. **Exodus (Exit Ode):** The exit song of the chorus after the last episode.
STAGE & THEATRE

- Theatron: the seating for the audience.
- Orchestra: the stage.
- Stoa: a colonnade that served as the backstage area.
- Skene: came off the stoa and looked like house fronts. Women were usually stationed here.
WHAT IS A TRAGEDY?

- A tragedy is a drama which, according to Aristotle, depicts the downfall of a basically good person through some fatal error or misjudgment, producing suffering and insight on the part of the protagonist and arousing pity and fear on the part of the audience.
THREE PRINCIPLES OF A GREEK TRAGEDY
1. “A true tragedy should evoke pity and fear on the part of the audience.”

- Pity and fear are the natural human responses to spectacles of pain and suffering – especially to the sort of pain and suffering that can strike anyone at any time. The effect is that we feel relief in the end through catharsis (purging/cleansing of emotions).

- To achieve **catharsis** is the purpose of a tragedy.
2. “The tragic hero [protagonist] must be essentially admirable and good.”

The fall of a scoundrel or villain evokes applause rather than pity. Audiences cheer when the bad guy goes down. On the other hand, the downfall of an essentially good person disturbs us and stirs our compassion. As a rule, the nobler and more truly admirable a person is, the greater will be our anxiety or grief at his or her downfall.
3. “In a true tragedy, the hero's demise must come as a result of some personal error or decision.”

- According to Aristotle, there is no such thing as an innocent victim of tragedy, nor can a genuinely tragic downfall ever be purely a matter of blind accident or bad luck.

- Instead, authentic tragedy must always be the product of some fatal flaw and/or mistake (*harmatia*), for the tragic hero must always bear at least some responsibility for his own doom.
TRAGEDY MUST HAVE SIX PARTS

1. **Plot** - The most important element!
2. **Characters** - The Tragic Hero
3. **Thought** - Theme
4. **Diction** - The use of literary devices such as metaphors.
5. **Song** - The Chorus.
6. **Spectacle** - Special effects (least important)
1. PLOT

- According to Aristotle, plot refers not to the story itself, but to the “arrangement of incidents,” or structure and presentation of the play.

- Moreover, each incident must be part of a tightly constructed cause-and-effect chain of actions.

- Plot is the most important component!
SIMPLE VS. COMPLEX PLOTS

- Plot can be **simple** or **complex**.

- **Simple plots** have only a “change of fortune” (catastrophe). The catastrophe marks the protagonist’s failure and usually occurs at the end of the drama.

- **Complex plots** have both “plot reversal” (peripeteia) and “tragic recognition or insight” (anagnorisis) connected with the catastrophe.
- **Peripeteia** ("plot reversal"): a pivotal or crucial action on the part of the protagonist that changes his situation from seemingly secure to vulnerable.

- **Anagnorisis** ("tragic recognition or insight"): according to Aristotle, a moment of clairvoyant insight or understanding in the mind of the tragic hero as he suddenly comprehends the web of fate that he has entangled himself in.
THE ROLE OF FATE

- Fate: the supposed force, principle, or power that predetermines events.

- The Greeks believed that everything happened for a reason, and that the path they led in life was prescribed for them by the gods: **there was no escaping their fate.**
2. CHARACTERS

- **The Tragic Hero** - The protagonist should be renowned and prosperous, so his change of fortune can be from good to bad.

- The tragic hero's powerful wish to achieve some goal inevitably encounters limits, usually those of human frailty (flaws in reason, *hubris*, society), the gods (through oracles, prophets, fate), or nature.
Hubris ("violent transgression"): overweening pride or insolence that results in a misfortune of the protagonist of the tragedy.

Hubris leads the protagonist to break a moral law; he will attempt vainly to transcend normal limitations or ignore divine warning with calamitous results; placing one's self equal to the gods.

Nemesis ("retribution"): the inevitable punishment or cosmic payback for acts of hubris.
Aristotle says that the tragic hero should have a flaw and/or make some mistake (harmatia).

The hero need not die at the end, but he/she must undergo a change in fortune (catastrophe).

In addition, the tragic hero may achieve some revelation or recognition (anagnorisis) about human fate, destiny, and the will of the gods.
3. THOUGHT

- Thought is third in importance, and is found “where something is proved to be or not to be, or a general maxim [truth, principle, or rule of conduct] is enunciated.”

- Thought can also reveal the theme (main idea/message) of a play.
Diction is fourth, and is “the expression of the meaning in words” which are proper and appropriate to the plot, characters, and end of the tragedy.

- **Metaphor**: a figure of speech in which an implied comparison is made between two unlike things that actually have something important in common.

- **For example**: Life is a journey; The eyes are windows to the soul.
5. SONG

- Song, or melody, is fifth, and is the **musical element of the chorus**.

- Aristotle argues that the Chorus should be fully integrated into the play like an actor; choral odes should not be “mere interludes,” but should contribute to the unity of the plot.
Spectacle is last, for it is least connected with literature: spectacular effects depend more on the art of the stage machinist than on that of the poet/author.

Aristotle argues that superior poets rely on the inner structure of the play rather than spectacle to arouse pity and fear.