

TSSMTM
Creating VCE Success

ENGLISH TEXT SUMMARY NOTES
“King Oedipus”

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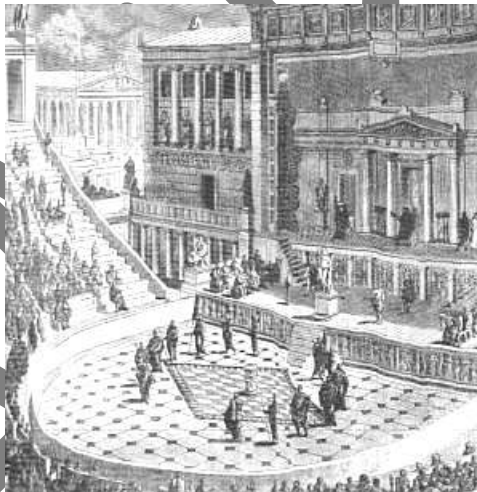
AREA 1:

READING & THE STUDY OF TEXTS: KING OEDIPUS

Chapter 1

HOW PLAYS WERE PERFORMED

Going to the theatre in Ancient Greece was a somewhat different experience to that of the twenty-first century theatre goer today. In ancient times, Greek tragedies were performed three times per year as part of religious pageants or festivals which honoured the God Dionysius and usually took place in Spring time. People from all walks of life attended these performances as there was something for everyone in the plots and there were all sorts of seating at prices everyone could afford. The theatres were open air affairs and almost every “seat” had a good vantage point.



The theatre of Dionysius

Everyday issues were depicted and more often than not the mighty were humbled as their weaknesses were played out before the audience. The typical tragic hero received a just if not severe punishment which underlined the culture of the day. Heroes usually had a fatal flaw which they could not overcome and which caused them to behave in a manner that would have been unacceptable to the audience, hence their approval of the punishment dished out would be overwhelming. These tragic heroes were nevertheless sympathetic characters, in as much as they could not help themselves because of their imperfect personality traits. They were put into unfortunate situations where they were helpless to do anything but the wrong thing, usually unwittingly and left to try and make the best of what had occurred. Needless to say, justice was seen to be done in the end.

The annual drama competitions in Athens took most of the day, and were spread out over several days. Plays were performed in the daytime and up to 10,000 people watched performances. Actors probably wore little or no makeup. Instead they carried masks with exaggerated facial expressions. They also wore *cothorni* (singular: *cothornos*), or buskins, which were leather boots laced up to the knees. There was little or no scenery. Initially, most of the action took place in the *orchestra*. Later on, as the importance shifted from the chorus to the characters, the action moved to the stage.



**Greek actors in a detail from a vase.
Note the masks and cothorni**