



 Prestwick House

Activity Pack

MEDEA

BY EURIPIDES



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Written by Katie Michell

Name: _____

Date: _____

Pre-Reading

Author Background

Objective: Obtaining information about the author and other Greek playwrights

Activity

The origins of theater can be traced to ancient Greece, where Aeschylus, believed to be the first Greek playwright, wrote plays to be performed in honor and worship of Dionysus, the Greek god of wine. Along with Aeschylus, several other Greek dramatists greatly influenced, and continue to influence, Greek culture and the world of theater.

For this assignment, you will work in a small group to research one of the Greek playwrights listed here. Record the information you find on the chart provided. Then create a poster highlighting the major facts about your playwright. Include text and pictures, use color, and be sure your poster can be read from a distance.

- Aeschylus, b. 524 BC
- Sophocles, b. 496 BC
- Euripides, b. 484 BC
- Aristophanes, b. 450 BC

Name: _____

Date: _____

During Reading**Making Predictions**

Objective: Using examples of foreshadowing to make predictions

Activity

Foreshadowing is a term that refers to hints in a work of literature about what might happen later. Sometimes the foreshadowing is obvious; sometimes the reader does not know an event was foreshadowed until after it happens. In *Medea*, there is a great deal of foreshadowing early in the play.

This activity has two parts. First, read the lines included on the chart that follows on the next page and make a prediction about the play's later events—what do you think those lines hint at? After reading the play, you will go back to this chart to complete the final column by recording what actually happened. You'll get to see how accurate your predictions were.

Name: _____

Date: _____

During Reading: Lines 471 – 878**Making Masks**

Objective: Making masks in the tradition of Greek theater

Activity

A major convention of Greek theater was that actors wore masks with attached wigs and somewhat elaborate costumes. In addition to the chorus, there were only three actors—all men—who had to play all the roles in the play. In terms of *Medea*, this means that three men played a total of seven characters; other actors played the roles of the chorus members, often numbering between twelve and fifteen.

For this activity, you will work in a small group to create masks for each of the characters you've encountered to this point in the play. Remember that each mask should have an attached wig. Be sure to let each mask reflect some characteristic of the character, like Medea's anger, for example. Additionally, you will draw on drawing paper, using colored pencils or markers, what you believe would be a suitable costume for each character. Be prepared to present your work to your classmates.

Make one mask and draw the costume for each of these characters:

- Medea
- Jason
- Nurse
- Tutor
- Aegeus
- Creon

Name: _____

Date: _____

During Reading**Character Analysis**

Objectives: Using adjectives to describe Medea
Recognizing characteristics of Medea revealed in the text

Activity

Throughout the play, Medea shows many sides of herself. While her anger and vengefulness dominate the play, she can also be pitiable at times. Several times, she demonstrates pride in herself and devotion to others. On a few occasions, she behaves reasonably; sometimes she is fickle and deceptive.

Read each of the passages below. Some are spoken by Medea and some by other characters. Determine what feature of Medea's personality the passage describes, and choose an adjective from the list on the next page to write in the box next to the passage in the chart below. You may put more than one adjective in a box if you wish; just be sure you can back up your opinions with examples from the play. The first one is done for you.

Name: _____

Date: _____

During Reading**Verse Analysis**

Objective: Understanding and interpreting dramatic fiction through contextual clues

Activity

A number of lines from lines 879 – 1459 are given below, accompanied by a question directed toward comprehending and interpreting the passage. Use the verse to answer each question in the space provided. A chart has been provided for you on the next page. The first one has been done for you as an example.

Name: _____

Date: _____

During Reading**Adopting the Author's Style**

Objective: Using Euripides's style to rewrite a scene

Activity

The play seems to barrel like a freight train toward its horrific conclusion, Medea's murder of her own children. The spectators must watch, trapped, as the brutal act unfolds before their eyes. However, what if the poisoned dress and crown had not killed the princess and Creon? Might Medea have decided against killing her children?

Rewrite lines 1145 – 1279, from where the Messenger arrives to tell Medea of the princess's and Creon's deaths, to the end of Medea's outlining her plan to kill her sons. In your new version, have the Messenger deliver news Medea does not expect—that her poison plan has failed, both her intended victims survive, and the princess appreciates the gifts.

Name: _____

Date: _____

During Reading

Creating a Newscast

Objectives: Synthesizing information from the text
Writing a script

Activity

The conventions of Greek theater required that violent acts occur offstage. This is the case in *Medea*, when Medea kills her children:

Child (*from within the house*): Oh, no!

Chorus: Do you hear the cry? Do you hear the child? Oh, poor thing, O unlucky woman!

First Child: What do I do? Where can I escape Mother's hands?

Second Child: I don't know, dearest brother; we're done for!

Chorus: Should I go into the house? I think I should stop the murder for the children.

First Child: Yes, by the gods, stop it! The time is critical!

Second Child: We are almost in the clutches of her sword!

This exchange sheds light on the murder that is happening inside the house, offstage. You know from words like "sword" and "mother's hands" that Medea kills her children with a sword. What else can you glean from this section of the play?

For this activity, work in a small group to create a newscast of the event. Imagine that your news team is live at Medea's home after the murder of the children. What details will you want to report? Reread this section of the play to determine what happened; use your imagination to fill in any gaps.

Each member of your group must have a speaking role in the newscast. Therefore, you would have to have reporters in different locations (for example, one in the news studio, one in a helicopter, one at the site of the murder, etc.). Once you have determined how many roles your group needs and which group members will fill them, write the script of the newscast. Obviously, some acts and quotes will need to be made up.

Name: _____

Date: _____

During Reading

Group Research

Objectives: Researching different religious traditions about death
 Presenting research findings

Activity

Any Greek tragedy will contain at least one death, usually more. Medea kills four people: her two children, Creon, and Creon's daughter. Other than a few lines at the end of the play, the reader gets no information about death rituals in ancient Greece. Medea says about her children:

“I myself will bury them with this very hand. I will take them to the temple of Hera on the mountain, so that none of my enemies can dig up the tomb and insult them; and I enjoin upon this land of Sisyphus a solemn festival and rites for all time in expiation of this impious murder.” (1412 – 1418)

From this passage we can infer that the dead are buried, perhaps in a tomb or some sort of structure, and a festival or some kind of ritual takes place. In this activity you will take a closer look at the funeral traditions of ancient Greece and other cultures.

In small groups, choose one religion from the list below. Using the Internet or resources in your school library, find out what Greeks and other cultural groups do to prepare the body before burial, what the funerals of different cultures are like, and what each culture believes about the afterlife. Record your findings in the chart provided on the next page.

Choose from these religions:

- Ancient Greek
- Buddhism
- Hinduism
- Islam
- Judaism

Name: _____

Date: _____

After Reading

Casting Call

Objective: Analyzing characters in order to make the play into a film

Activity

Hollywood has not produced a major motion picture version of *Medea*; the only film versions in existence are either foreign or made-for-television. While it's a short play, it would make a fascinating film, and it could easily be modernized to reflect today's society.

Imagine you are making an updated version of the film. Which actors and actors would you cast for these parts and why? Follow these steps to complete this assignment:

1. Make a list of which actor will play each part. Characters to cast:
 - Medea
 - Jason
 - Creon
 - Aegeus
 - Nurse
 - Tutor
 - Messenger
 - the Chorus
 - the children
2. Use the Internet or magazines to find pictures of each actor or actor.
3. Compile a small cast book to showcase each actor. You may place only one or two actors on one page. Under each actor's picture, write his name and tell which character in the play he will portray. Then write a short explanation of your choice: Why would this actor be good in this role? Have you seen him in other films? Is he an Oscar winner? Provide a detailed explanation.
4. At the end of you explanation, include a quotation from the character in the play that is indicative of his personality.