**A Greek Play**

**NOTES AND SCRIPT**

Greek tragedians based many of their plays on the myths and legends of Greece. Therefore performing a Greek play in class can allow children to learn about the nature of Greek myths as well as the Greek theatre. Involving all of a class in such a production, whether as actors, the chorus, musicians or a Greek audience is an ideal way of inspiring enthusiasm for the subject.

Obviously the play does not have to be a tragedy: the 12 labours of Herakles also provide scope for dramatic interpretations. These could form the basis of improvisation sessions where a particular episode from a myth is acted out. On the other hand, if time allows, a more ambitious production, perhaps with some form of script, might be attempted.

It is important to keep the historical nature of such an event in mind; after all the chief purpose of such an exercise is to promote an understanding of the Greek theatre (see background notes on Greek drama) Children should be encouraged to try and behave, as far as possible, like Greeks watching or performing a play. The quality of research and preparation has a profound effect on its value as an historical exercise. Pupils could make masks from card or paper mache.

**The Legend of Perseus and the Gorgon**

The story of Perseus and the Gorgon is one myth which can easily be adapted as a play. Several of the story’s elements, such as the wicked stepfather and the slaying of the monstrous Gorgon, have similarities with fairytales, which children might be familiar with. Others such as the divine intervention of Athena and Hermes are particularly Greek. The following script provides some idea of how this story could be performed.

**CAST**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Perseus** | A hero | **King Polydectes** | Perseus’ stepfather |
| **Athena** | A goddess | **Hermes** | Messenger of the gods |
| **Gorgon** | A monster with snakes for hair | **The Gorgon’s 2 sisters** |  |
| **Chorus** | King Polydectes’ courtiers |  |  |

**SCENE 1**

The palace of Polydectes. He is seated on his throne surrounded by his courtiers. Perseus is also present.

PROLOGUE

**Chorus:** This is the story of Perseus; a brave and handsome hero. Throughout his life he performed many great deeds. The most famous was the slaying of Medusa the Gorgon, who was hated by gods and men.

Perseus lived on the island of Seriphos, which was ruled by his stepfather, King Polydectes. He was a cruel man, who often made fun of Perseus.

**Polydectes:** You’re a lazy good-for-nothing Perseus. When are you going to do something with your life?

**Chorus/courtiers:** You eat the king’s food. Sleep in the palace. Never lift a finger to help anyone. You’re a coward.

**Perseus:** (angrily) I’ll show you what I can do! I will go and kill Medusa the Gorgon and return with her head.

**Chorus/courtiers:** (shocked) That is impossible! You’re mad.

**Polydectes:** No man can kill Medusa. Everyone knows that if you look upon her face you will turn to stone.

**Perseus:** We shall see. Farewell.

EXIT PERSEUS/ EXIT KING POLYDECTES

**SCENE 2**

Perseus’ journey to the land of the Gorgons. Perseus is on stage.

**Chorus:** Perseus crossed the sea to a strange land. Here he asked where the Gorgon lived.

**Perseus:** Do you know where the Gorgon lives?

**Chorus:** No, I have no idea.

**Perseus:** What am I to do? No one knows where I can find the Gorgon.

**Chorus:** Perseus grew very tired and rested in a forest, suddenly he saw a bright light in the distance.

ENTER ATHENA AND HERMES. PERSEUS SHIELDS HIS EYES IN SHOCK.

**Chorus:** Perseus knew that these beautiful folk were the goddess Athena and Hermes, the winged messenger of the gods.

**Athena:** We have been watching you Perseus. You have the heart of a hero and the gods will help you. I will give you my shield. You must use it when killing the Gorgon: by looking at her reflection in this shield you will not be turned to stone. I will also give you my cloak which makes anyone who wears it invisible.

**Hermes:** I will give you my sword to kill the Gorgon and also my winged shoes to help you travel faster. You must now fly across the sea towards the land of the dead. Nearby is the island where Medusa and her sisters live.

EXIT ATHENA AND HERMES. EXIT PERSEUS.

**SCENE 3**

The Gorgons’ island. Medusa and her two sisters are asleep.

**Chorus:** Perseus travelled far until he came to the island of the Gorgons. There he found Medusa and her sisters asleep on the ground. He wrapped Athena’s cloak around him so that he was invisible. Then, looking at the Gorgon’s reflection in his shield, he flew down and cut her head off with Hermes’ sword (PERSEUS REMOVES MEDUSA’S MASK).

He wrapped the head in his cloak and flew away.

THE GORGON’S SISTERS AWAKE AND SHRIEK HORRIBLY AT THE DEPARTING PERSEUS.

**SCENE 4**

The palace of Polydectes. He is seated on his throne surrounded by his courtiers.

**Chorus:** Perseus, helped by the winged shoes of Hermes, soon returned to Seriphos. Upon his arrival he went straight to the palace of Polydectes.

**Polydectes:** (sarcastically) So you have returned. Have you brought the Gorgon’s head?

**Perseus:** You shall soon see what I have brought for you!

**Chorus:** Perseus took the head from Athena’s cloak and showed it to the king, who immediately turned to stone.

ALL THE COURTIERS CHEERED AND CROWNED PERSEUS AS THEIR KING.

**THE END**

As the Chorus has a large speaking part it is perhaps best to divide it amongst several people. Perseus can mime the actions which the chorus narrates. It is also a good idea to have musical interludes between each scene so that the actors can get ready for the next one.