

PLAYS AND PLAYERS

The Western idea of drama is deeply rooted in ancient Greece. In Europe, the very first plays probably developed from songs and dances, performed as part of a Greek religious festival held for Dionysus, the god of wine.

THE DIONYSIA

In Athens, the early religious festival grew into a much larger dramatic festival, the Dionysia, held for five days each spring. Processions and sacrifices were followed by drama competitions. Everyone was allowed to stop work so that they could attend. Aspiring writers submitted their plays to the archon, who chose which ones would be performed.



INTERNET LINK

For a link to a website where you can go on a trip to watch plays in ancient Greece, go to www.usborne-quicklinks.com



This is a chorus member dressed as a bird.

THE EARLY PLAYS

The early festivals consisted of a group of men, known as the chorus, dancing and singing. Later, an actor was brought in to exchange dialogue with the leader of the chorus. As more actors were introduced, the role of the chorus dwindled, and the dialogue between the actors became the most important part of the play. In this way the modern idea of a play was born.



Comedies, like the one shown here which comes from a Greek pot, contained a lot of clowning around and rude jokes.

TRAGEDIES AND COMEDIES

Greek plays soon evolved into two distinct types: tragedies and comedies. Tragedies were usually about heroes of Greek myths and dealt with moral choices, passions and conflict, and often had unhappy endings. Comedies were about ordinary people, and often mocked leading politicians and personalities of the day.

THE STAGE

In Athens, the first plays were performed in the agora - but, as the festival grew bigger, a huge open-air auditorium was built near the Acropolis. This idea was soon copied all over Greece, and some venues could hold over 18,000 spectators.

This picture shows a play being performed in a large open-air auditorium.

Some of the men dress as women.

A crane is used so some actors can appear to fly.

