

ANCIENT GREECE

Discussion 3 : Comparing modern theatres and those of ancient Greece

Objectives : To know that theatre has been passed down to us from the ancient Greeks; to know about the role of theatre in the way of life of ancient Greeks.

Materials: Festival and Games chapter – Explore section; pictures of modern theatres, including views of the inside.

Class set-up: Whole class and paired work

Vocabulary: theatre, auditorium, orchestra, chorus, playwright, Dionysos

Discussion:

Read the introduction page of the Explore to the class, then get the children to work through the Explore in pairs. They might want to make a few notes about what they find, ready for the class discussion. Bring the class together and ask:

- What are the main features of a theatre building in ancient Greece?
(The main things to pull out are the sloping seating area, or auditorium, the orchestra in the centre and the stage buildings).
- In what ways does the Greek theatre look similar to a modern theatre?
(You may want to show some pictures of a modern theatre at this point, to allow children to spot the similarities)
- In what ways does the Greek theatre look different to our theatres?
(Draw attention to the lack of a stage and the large orchestra, compared to a modern 'orchestra pit').

- Why do you think the Greeks built outdoor theatres?
- What is the 'chorus' in Greek theatre?
- In Greek theatre, the chorus had an important role in the plays. What evidence is there for their importance in the actual theatre building?
(Draw attention to the large orchestra, where the chorus sang and danced).
- Do modern plays use a chorus?
(You may want to refer to the chorus in an opera, but the main point is that in a spoken play, we don't usually have a chorus).
- What differences are there between ancient Greek actors and actors today?
(e.g. they were all male; the class could also discuss the use of masks and costume, which whilst used today, were always worn in Greek theatre).
- What evidence is there in the theatre building that Greek plays were shown in competition?
- What evidence is there in the building that the plays were performed as part of a religious festival?

Finish by telling children that theatre has been passed down to us from the ancient Greeks, and although there are differences between modern and ancient theatres, the similarities are still visible to us.

Background information:

You may find the following Background Information sheets found on www.ancientgreece.co.uk useful for this activity:

The Theatre