

Aristophanes Study Guide

Know the following terms:

Cleon

Agon

Lenaea

Dionysia

Theater of *Dionysus*

Choregoi

Parabsasis

Pnyx

Megara

Probouloi

Introduction & General Questions

- What do we know about the relationship between Aristophanes and Socrates?
- Describe the political background, especially in regards to the relationship between Athens and Sparta, surrounding the production of Aristophanes plays.
- Approximately when did Aristophanes write his plays, and at what times of year were they performed?
- How did the Peloponnesian War transform the position of Athens in the Greek world?
- What is the evidence supporting the idea that Old Comedy had a “right-wing agenda?” (p. xix)
- What is the evidence supporting the idea that Aristophanes had a pro-Spartan bias? What evidence from the plays seems to contradict this idea?
- How did Old Comedy “make people into better citizens?” (pp. xxi-xxii)
- What evidence in the plays indicates that this was a male-dominated and even misogynistic society?
- Describe the activities and significance of the chorus in the plays.

The Acharnians

- Who were the Acharnians?
- What does *Dikaipolis* mean, and how does this name enhance the comedic elements of the play?
- What does the opening scene at the assembly suggest about the nature of Athenian democracy?
- How does the play suggest that Athenian democracy was corrupt?
- How are the various peace proposals (5 year, 10 year, etc...) by the Spartans depicted in this play?
- What makes Aristophanes’s jokes hard to understand/appreciate?
- How does *Dikaipolis* explain the outbreak of the war?
- How are the Megarians depicted in the play?
- How do Lamachus’s and Dikaipolis’s lines indicate Aristophanes politics on pp. 56-8?
- What transformation occurs in the nature of the chorus in the Acharnians?

The Clouds

- In what sense does *the Clouds* take a traditionalist point of view?
- Why was the Clouds “an unusually dark comedy”, and what evidence in play suggests that it was not well received when it was first performed? (p. 68)
- What factors make Strepsiades cranky in the opening scene?
- What motivate Strepsiades into enrolling his son in the Thinkery?
- Why do the students in the Thinkery appear sickly?
- What is the character Socrates attitude toward the gods?
- How is the moon related to Strepsiades’s problems?
- Explain the characteristics and points of view of the characters Right and Wrong.
- Why does Strepsiades burn the Thinkery

Lysistrata

- How do the women respond to Lysistrata’s initial proposal?
- What is the symbolism associated with the male and female choruses at the acropolis?
- What explanation does Lysistrata give for occupying the acropolis?
- What are the two main points of the wool metaphor? (pp. 163-4)
- Who are the principal members of the chorus in this play?
- Why do the Spartans ultimately sew for peace?
- How does the play portray the character of Reconciliation? Why is this portrayal effective?