

Intro to Aristotle

Who the heck is this guy and why is he so important?

Aristotle was...

A philosopher in Ancient Greece.

He was particularly concerned with dramatic and
Literary theory.

He was taught by Plato and went on to tutor
Alexander the Great.

He formed many theories around psychology, politics
and ethics.



Publications

Aristotle wrote many manuscripts outlining his theories. The most relevant to our course is *Poetics*.

Poetics articulates Aristotle's thoughts on what makes the perfect tragedy. In short he states that,

“A tragedy is the imitation of an action that is serious and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself; in appropriate and pleasurable language;...in a dramatic rather than narrative form; with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish a catharsis of these emotions.”

What did that even mean?

- The play needs to deal with ONE issue. That issue needs to be very serious and have a certain “importance”.

Lost phone? Not that serious or show stopping.

The unbalancing of the natural order resulting in the death of an entire royal family? Reasonably important and significant.

- The language of the play should be sophisticated and nice to listen to. This includes the use of a chorus, the use of rhyme, rhythm and verse/prose.

- The story cannot just be narrated or told. Aristotle believed in the significance of action. Therefore, the story must be dramatized or acted out.
- The events that occur in the play should make the audience afraid and feel sorry for characters. This is why when studying a lot of these older plays, we must consider the intended audiences reaction and not just our own.
- By the end of the play, after all of the tense moments, the scary moments and the times when the audience has felt sorry for a character, everyone should experience a release of these feelings. Think of it as a purging of the intended emotions.

A Word From the Experts...

Greek Theatre- National Theatre Channel (UK)

So what does this actually look like in a story?

Oedipus The King

This play was written by Sophocles in Ancient Greece. Aristotle LOVES this play and refers to it frequently when explaining the perfect tragedy. You could, essentially, say that the play is the perfect example of a tragedy.

The Main Points

- A baby (Oedipus) is sent away from its parents due to a horrible prophecy.
- Oedipus gets wind of a prophecy that states he will kill his father and marry his mother so he leaves his adopted family, not knowing they aren't his biological parents.
- After meeting and killing a man on the road, Oedipus outsmarts a Sphinx that is holding Thebes hostage and is rewarded with a kingship and a wife.
- Things in Thebes begin to crumble so Oedipus speaks to a wise blind man who warns him that he has fulfilled a terrible prophecy (killing the father and marrying the mother).
- After some time, a messenger arrives to tell Oedipus the truth about his family, resulting in his wife committing suicide and the play ending with Oedipus clawing his eyes out.