



SHAKESPEARE
THEATRE COMPANY
EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Ion

by Euripides
a new version by David Lan
directed by Ethan McSweeney



FIRST FOLIO:

TEACHER CURRICULUM GUIDE

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The First Folio Teacher Curriculum Guide for Ion was developed by the Shakespeare Theatre Company Education Department, with articles compiled and written by Abby Jackson and Michelle Jackson. Layout and editing by Caroline Alexander.

Next Steps

If you would like more information on how you can participate in other Shakespeare Theatre Company programs, please call the Education Hotline at 202.547.5688 or visit our website at ShakespeareTheatre.org.

Welcome to the
Shakespeare Theatre Company's
production of

Ion

by Euripides

This season, the Shakespeare Theatre Company presents seven plays by William Shakespeare and other classic playwrights. Consistent with STC's central mission to be the leading force in producing and preserving the highest quality classic theatre, the Education Department challenges learners of all ages to explore the ideas, emotions and principles contained in classic texts and to discover the connection between classic theatre and our modern perceptions. We hope that this First Folio Teacher Curriculum Guide will prove useful as you prepare to bring your students to the theatre!

For the 2008-09 season, the Education Department will publish First Folio Teacher Curriculum Guides for our productions of *Romeo and Juliet*, *Twelfth Night* and *Ion*. First Folio Guides provide information and activities to help students form a personal connection to the play before attending the production. First Folio Guides contain material about the playwrights, their world and their works. Also included are approaches to exploring the plays and productions in the classroom before and after the performance.

First Folio Guides are designed as a resource both for teachers and students. We encourage you to photocopy articles you find helpful and distribute them to your students as supplemental reading.

Enjoy the show!

Synopsis of ION

The messenger god Hermes identifies the scene as Apollo's oracle at Delphi and tells the story of Creusa, the daughter of the king of Athens, who was raped in a cave by the god Apollo. Hiding her pregnancy from her family, Creusa returned to the cave to give birth to a boy. She abandoned him there, but Apollo sent Hermes to take the child to Delphi. There the priestess of Apollo brought him up, and the boy has become a temple servant, quite unaware of his parentage. Meanwhile Creusa has married Xuthus, a foreigner who aided Athens in war. They have had no children, so they come to Delphi to ask the oracle whether they will ever become parents.

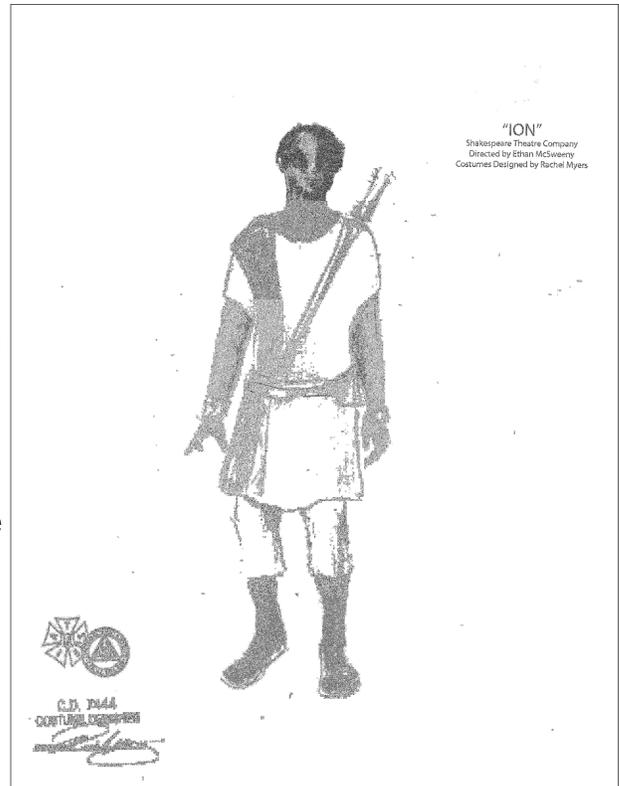
A young man enters to do his morning tasks at the temple and to answer questions from a chorus of Creusa's maidservants. Creusa now enters, and the young man is surprised that she is weeping. As they exchange their personal histories, both are struck by the similarities in their experiences. Creusa tells him of a friend who bore and abandoned Apollo's child and says that she wants to ask the oracle what happened to that baby. Xuthus enters to consult the oracle about their childlessness, and Creusa leaves.

When Xuthus emerges, he tries to embrace the young man, since the oracle has said the first person he sees is his child. Xuthus gives him the name Ion and insists he must come to Athens. As they leave he warns the chorus to reveal nothing to Creusa.

Creusa enters with an old family servant, and the chorus quickly tells her what has happened. The old servant, enraged at the thought of a non-Athenian bringing his illegitimate child into the Athenian royal family, suggests killing the boy. Creusa agrees and supplies poison.

Another servant enters and describes how the plot to poison Ion failed when a bird drank the poison instead. The old servant confessed that Creusa was behind the attempted murder, and a court has condemned her to death. Creusa takes refuge at Apollo's altar; when Ion pursues her, she urges him to kill her right there. Suddenly Pythia, the priestess who raised Ion, enters, bringing with her the basket in which she found him. Creusa recognizes the basket as the one in which she left her baby; she tells Ion she is his mother, and they have a joyful, tearful reunion.

Ion wants to tell Xuthus what has happened, but Creusa tells him Apollo, not Xuthus, is his father. Ion wonders how the sacred oracle could have told a lie. Suddenly the goddess Athena appears, reassuring Ion that Apollo is his father and ordering Creusa to take Ion to Athens. She foretells that he will rule the city, and his sons will colonize the eastern lands, which will be called Ionia. Meanwhile Creusa and Xuthus will have two sons who will also found great states. Athena cautions Ion and Creusa not to tell Xuthus that the boy is not his son.



A rendering of Ion's costume by designer Rachel Myer.

An Interview with Director Ethan McSweeney

Shakespeare Theatre Company Literary Associate Akiva Fox discusses the upcoming production of *Ion* with director Ethan McSweeney. Below is an excerpt from the interview. For the full text, visit ShakespeareTheatre.org.

AKIVA FOX: When you directed *The Persians* [a Greek play by Aeschylus] for the Shakespeare Theatre Company in 2006, you talked a lot about how you hated the way Greek drama was usually produced. So here you are, with this very unusual and atypical Greek drama in *Ion* and I was wondering if you could start out by talking about what makes it unusual, and what you like about it.

ETHAN McSWEENEY: When Michael [Kahn, Shakespeare Theatre Company Artistic Director] put the play in front of me, I had a look at it and I thought, “Oh dear, I can’t possibly do this. I’ve just done *The Persians* three years ago and I was very proud of that production. Maybe that was all the ideas I had about Greek drama.” And now I have fallen completely in love with this play. It’s an interesting counterpoint to *The Persians*, which is one of the oldest, Greekest of Greek dramas. This one is by Euripides and it is a virtually unknown Greek play. Why this is, I have no idea, except for the fact that I think it breaks a lot of the traditional models. This is a Greek comedy-drama, and it is by turns funny, touching, dramatic, and it’s a Greek play with a happy ending, which alone makes it really exceptional within the pantheon of Greek plays. I think Euripides was really busting the form; there’s a reason why he’s the father of modern drama.

AF: I know one of your concerns in working on *The Persians* was the use of the chorus. You found some clever ways out of the usual choral speaking—you gave them identities and you broke up the language between them. How are you interested in using them in this play?

EM: In this production, the chorus is going to be a bunch of pushy contemporary American tourists, visiting Delphi. It was an inescapable conclusion from their first entrance for me, and I think that what I’m figuring out for myself about Greek drama is that the chorus is supposed to be the onstage surrogate for the audience. They’re there to ask the questions that we have, they’re there to represent us in the story, and so I thought, “what if we make them us on a trip to Delphi?” You know, people from the modern world. And then I thought, “is it possible that Ion, in his ancient world, could coexist with this modern chorus?” I thought it was, because at a lot of historical and religious centers, you have either practitioners of a religion dressed up in their traditional garb, or you have historical re-enactors, like there are at every historical site in Europe. I thought maybe these things could legitimately coexist within the same visual field, and that might be interesting. So that’s how we’re going to treat the chorus in this play. And as I said, there is going to be a very theatrical component to the production. The setting is imagined right now as a version of the temple ruins inspired by Delphi, and into it I expect we’ll bring some live music, some puppetry, some aerial effects, and this contemporary American chorus.

“This is a Greek comedy-drama, and it is by turns funny, touching, dramatic, and it’s a Greek play with a happy ending, which alone makes it really exceptional within the pantheon of Greek plays.”

AF: Do you think audiences watch plays they don’t know differently than they watch something they’ve seen a thousand times?

EM: They certainly can get on the edge of their seats. *Ion* will be, by STC standards, brief (it’s a single act, not two or three). It is large in scope and in scale; these Greek plays were much like contemporary musicals, in that they were filled with all sorts of different things going on, not like a single-set living room play. So I think that the key is trying to embrace all the different theatrical genres that occur within a Greek play, and the possibilities that are latent within it.

NEXT STEPS

1. According to McSweeney, how is *Ion* different from other Greek plays?
2. As you read through the interview, did you notice any words that were unfamiliar to you? Create a glossary of vocabulary words found in McSweeney’s interview. Use a dictionary to look up words you don’t know. Some words to start with: genre, theatricality, practitioners, latent.

Family Life in *Ion*: Love, Loss and Reconciliation

What does it mean to be a parent? Do men and women have different responsibilities toward their children? *Ion* raises these questions as it weaves together the tale of family loss and reconciliation: a young boy searching for his identity, a mother grieving her lost child, a man desperate for a son to carry his name and an interfering god who has seemingly abandoned responsibility.

If we look closely, we notice four characters in the play that could be considered *Ion*'s parents: Creusa, Apollo, Pythia, and Xuthus. While Apollo fathers *Ion* and Creusa gives birth to him, the Pythia rescues and cares for him and Xuthus is ultimately given charge over him at the end of the play. As a result, it is difficult to delineate the line between parent and guardian, and between mother and father.

This confusion is further complicated by the concept of infertility or "barrenness," meaning the inability to have children, brought out in the play and its importance in Greek culture. In the Greek family, children, especially sons, were prized as the continuation of the blood line and were considered the property of the father. It was the male head of the household, rather than the mother, who would ultimately decide whether the parents would raise the baby or not. In other words, a family's childlessness weighed heavily on the shoulders of the man as it determined his family's present social status and future existence. Xuthus desires a son not merely for sentimental reasons but also to improve his status as a man and a citizen of Athens, particularly because he is already looked down upon for being a foreigner.

If the inability to have a child and thus produce an heir was troubling to men, it was even more degrading for women. In Greek society, the entire goal of a woman's life was to have children. In fact, in Greek wedding ceremonies, it was stated that the woman was given to her husband "for the production of legitimate children." If a woman was found to be unable to have children, she could be divorced by her husband and publicly ridiculed. Understanding Greek marriage customs helps to explain Creusa's acute distress when she arrives at Delphi. Not only was she raped and abandoned by a god, but she had to give up her only child in order to avoid public disgrace, only to later endure more shame for her inability to have children as a wife.

"My father's a foreigner. My mother? A mystery.
You say no one will hold that against me.
Can that be true?"

Ion

NEXT STEPS

1. In small groups, discuss the roles of women and men in ancient Greek culture. How are they different from and/or similar to gender roles in present-day American culture? Decide on two key differences and similarities between the gender roles of these two cultures and share your ideas with the class.
2. Imagine that Xuthus, Creusa, Pythia and Apollo have been brought to court to battle over the custody of *Ion*. As the lawyer for **one** of these four characters, write a paragraph as your "closing statement" in the court case, persuading the judge that your client is *Ion*'s true guardian and should thus gain custody.
3. Using internet and print sources, research to find myths about other women in Creusa's family lineage, such as Procne, Philomela, Porcris and Orithya. Write a two page essay that compares and contrasts the story of Creusa to that of one of her female relatives. Within your essay, draw connections between these two characters and the role of women in ancient Greek family life.

Intro to GREEK MYTHOLOGY and DRAMA

THE MYTHS

Myths are at the core of human storytelling. Combining religion, science and creativity, myths reveal the **worldview** of a particular group of people. Myths served a variety of purposes in Greek culture: to explain the origins of the world and of humanity, to rationalize natural **phenomena**, and to serve as **supernatural** metaphors for human existence. If we look closely, we see that the same stories recur in different cultures and at different times in history, suggesting that the themes and structures of **mythology** are universally appealing. From classical works like *The Iliad* and *Ion* to contemporary stories like *The Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter*, we learn different things about humanity, about our desire to relate and about our enduring ability to communicate the story of our world in a way that is relevant to our culture.

THE GODS

The ancient Greeks had specific ways of creating and expressing their mythology. The Greek mythological world, for example, included **gods**, **demigods**, **mortals** and **supernatural creatures**. Greek mythology began with the character of Chaos, an entity out of which the primal forces were formed: the earth mother, the divine love, the underworld and the shadow world. It was through these forces that **Zeus**, the most powerful divine figure, came into being. Zeus oversaw a loosely knit family of gods and goddesses who resided on **Mount Olympus**, including those featured in *Ion*: **Apollo**, **Athene** and **Hermes**. Through their interactions and affairs with human beings, these **deities** gave birth to the demigods like *Ion* who were half-mortal and half-god.

Although we might think of gods today as faultless and entirely separate from humanity, the Greeks imagined them differently. As Edith Hamilton says in her landmark book *Mythology*, first published in 1942, the “Greeks made the gods in their own image.” Greek gods are thus portrayed as jealous and loving, humorous and lonely, distressed and passionate—in other words, as essentially human. Despite their human qualities, however, the Greek gods also appear as all-powerful, all-knowing creatures who are able to puppeteer the lives of humans and control the natural forces. This **juxtaposition** between the human personalities and supernatural powers of the Greek gods allowed the Greeks to both relate to and revere their gods, and it provided a wealth of interesting stories and complex relationships to weave into Greek drama and poetry.

THE DRAMA

Greek theatre began around 530 BCE in the city of Athens, and the earliest plays were performed at the **Festival of Dionysus** (also known as the Great Dionysia). This yearly five-day festival paid homage to Dionysus, the god of wine and harvest, and showcased the talents of rising poets and musicians through a series of theatre competitions. The **tragedy** competition, which consisted of a cycle of three plays that usually lasted an entire day, was at the center of the festival. At the end of the festival, the judges would determine the winner and lavish him with wreaths of ivy and a goat, which the winner would then sacrifice to Dionysus. The word “tragedy” actually comes from the Greek words for “goat song.”

Greek tragedies were traditionally structured to alternate between actors performing spoken text and choral responses that involved singing and dancing. This call-and-response style was first developed by a playwright named **Thespis** in 534 BCE., which is why actors today are sometimes referred to as “thespians.” The chorus in Greek drama ranges in size from four to 30 people and plays two main roles: to represent the thoughts and opinions of characters in the play and to maintain the long-standing tradition of group song and dance in Greek culture. In addition to the chorus, the Greeks used a variety of other devices to help tell their stories, including the “machina,” or machine, which was a crane used to fly in actors—usually playing divine characters. The expression **deus ex machina** means “god from the machine,” and refers to the endings of Greek plays in which deities came in and fixed the problems that humans could not, as Athene does in *Ion*.

THEN AND NOW

As we watch Greek drama today, we experience the power of the play itself and continue a longstanding theatrical and cultural tradition. Greek plays like *Ion* reveal the worldview and way of life for Greeks in the fourth and fifth centuries BCE. while at the same time pondering questions and themes that continue to perplex and engage humanity.

NEXT STEPS

1. Create a list of the **bolded** words in the article and define them.
2. How do contemporary views of religion differ from those of the ancient Greeks? Are there any similarities?

People and Places in *Ion*

DELPHI
 Seen as the center of the earth and a pilgrimage point for many who came seeking Apollo's oracle to find truthful answers to difficult questions.

ATHENS
 A major city in Greece (the patron city of Apollo and Athene).

KEY

- - - - - Place
- Mythical Creature
- · - · - Parent/Child
- Lover/Spouse

GODS AND MORTALS

ZEUS
 The supreme ruler of the gods and the Lord of the Sky.

ERECHTHEUS
 Creusa's father and the King of Athens.

HERMES
 The god of Commerce and Zeus' messenger, Hermes serves as narrator in *Ion*.

ATHENE
 The goddess of War, of the City and of Wisdom.

APOLLO
 The god of Light and Truth and Ion's father. He seduced Creusa.

CREUSA
 The daughter of the King of Athens, Creusa is Ion's mother. She abandoned Ion on the Long Rocks shortly after his birth.

XUTHUS
 Creusa's husband, Xuthus is a foreigner who won her hand when he fought for Athens. Apollo names him the father of Ion.

THE PYTHIA
 The priestess of Delphi chosen to care for Ion and ordered by Apollo to conceal the truth about Ion's parentage.

ION
 A demigod, the son of Apollo and Creusa, who guards and purifies the Oracle of Delphi.

THE GORGON
 A monster whose gaze turned men to stone.

Classroom Connections

Before the performance...

About the playwright

Who was Euripides and why was his work important to Greek drama and theatre as a whole?

Ask students to research the life and works of Euripides using at least three print sources and two internet sources. Have each student compose a one-page biography (including a list of works cited) and create an audiovisual presentation about Euripides to present for the rest of the class; students can also work in small groups, with each student researching a specific aspect of Euripides' life.

Consider having students include these elements in the project:

- Timeline of major Greek dramatists, including Euripides
- Information about the life of Euripides
 - Where and when was he born?
 - Who were his parents and did he have children?
 - What would life have been like for him (research ancient Greek life, including school, family, work, etc)?
- What works other than *Ion* did Euripides compose?
- Why do we consider his work important in theatre today?

Encourage students to get creative with their presentations! Possible ideas include a poster, Power Point, representational sound or video clips or even a performance.

After the performance...

Page to Stage: Designing *Ion*

This activity offers students insight into and practical application of the creative process that stage designers use when establishing the world of a play. Theatrical designers work use costumes, scenic elements (sets and props), lights and sound to create the cohesive world of the production in collaboration with the director's vision.

Have students read the play and the article on Greek Drama (p. 5) and discuss what design elements would have been available to actors during this time. Divide students into design teams of five, with each student assuming the role of sets, costumes, lights, props and sound designer. As a design team, they must decide on and research the following:

- **Setting/Era:** Discuss what specific time and place we can set *Ion* to make it most relevant for contemporary audiences.
- **Design Concept:** This can be a phrase, a one sentence description or an outline.

After deciding on a design concept, each student will design for their element:

How will you use set, costumes, lights, props and sound/music to help tell the story?

Each student should provide:

- A **creative representation** of their design (poster, CD, collage, fabric swatches).
- A **design statement** in support of their concepts, including the historical research and textual references from the play that support their decisions.

Have the design teams present their concept to their classmates. After your students see the production, reflect on the design and how it supports their understanding of the play. Compare and contrast the Shakespeare Theatre Company's production design with the students' own vision for the play. What did they think of the designers' choices? How did the designers approach to the play create a world, establish character relationships and ultimately illuminate the story of *Ion*?

Resource List and Standards of Learning

ION

Books on Greek Drama, Culture and Mythology:

- Bullfinch, Thomas. *Greek and Roman Mythology*. Dover Publications, 2000.
- Csapo, Eric and William J. Slater. *The Context of Ancient Drama*. University of Michigan Press, 1994.
- Hamilton, Edith. *Mythology*. Back Bay Books, 1998 (original edition 1942).
- Swift, Laura. *Euripides: Ion*. Duckworth Companions to Greek and Roman Tragedy. Duckworth, 2008.
- Winkler, John J. and Froma I. Zeitlin, ed. *Nothing to Do with Dionysus?: Athenian Drama in its Social Context*. Princeton University Press, 1990.
- Zimmerman, John Edward. *The Dictionary of Classical Mythology*. Bantam, 1983.

Helpful Websites:

- Theoi Greek Mythology: Exploring Mythology in Classical Literature and Art.
- theoi.com
- Encyclopedia Mythica: Mythology, Folklore and Religion.
- pantheon.org

STANDARDS OF LEARNING

The activities and question sequences found in the Folio supports grade 9-12 standards of learning in English and theatre for the District of Columbia, Maryland and Virginia. Primary content areas addressed include but are not limited to:

- | | | |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| - Classical Literature | - Vocabulary and content development | - Stagecraft |
| - Argument and persuasive writing | - Research | - Performance |
| - Questioning and Listening | - Inference | - Analysis and Evaluation |

Specific examples include:

Curriculum Connection: About the Playwright

DC—content strand drama HSP 3.4: Identify key figures, work and trends in world theatrical history from various cultures and time periods.

VA—content strand 9.6: The student will develop narrative, expository and informational writings to inform, explain, analyze or entertain.

MD—content strand 7.9.1.2: Prepare and deliver speeches and oral presentations using a variety of strategies.

Page to Stage: Designing Ion

DC—content strands:

HSP 3.1: Use the vocabulary of theatre, such as style, genre, design, and theme to describe theatrical experiences.

HSP 3.2: Compare a traditional interpretation of a play with a nontraditional interpretation and defend the merits of each.

VA—content strand 9.2: The student will make planned oral presentations.

MD—content strand 7.9.1.2: Prepare and deliver speeches and oral presentations using a variety of strategies.

Theatre Etiquette: A Guide for Students

Above all, it is important to remember that the actors on stage can see and hear you at the same time you can see and hear them. Be respectful of the actors and your fellow audience members by being attentive and observing the general guidelines below.

The phrase “**theatre etiquette**” refers to the special rules of behavior that are called for when attending a theatre performance. With that in mind, here are some important things to do *before* you go inside the theatre:

- ◆ Turn off your cell phone and any other electronic devices (iPods, games, etc.), or better yet, leave them in coat check. It is very distracting, not to mention embarrassing, when a cell phone goes off during a performance. The light from cell phones and other electronic devices is also a big distraction, so please no text messaging.
- ◆ Spit out your gum.
- ◆ Leave all food and drinks in the coat check. NO food or drinks are allowed inside the theatre.
- ◆ Visit the restroom before the performance begins. Unless it is an emergency, plan to stay seated during the performance.

React to what’s happening on stage!

Please feel free to have honest reactions to what is happening onstage. You can laugh, applaud and enjoy the performance.

However, please don’t talk during the performance; it is extremely distracting to other audience members and the actors. Save discussions for intermission and after the performance.

Thoughts about the importance of being an audience member from Shakespeare Theatre Company Artistic Director Michael Kahn

“When you go to the theatre, you are engaging with other living, breathing human beings, having an immediate human response. In the theatre you sense that all of this may never happen again in this particular way.

As a member of the audience, you are actually part of how that’s developing—you have a hand in it ... You are part of a community where you are asked to be compassionate, perhaps to laugh with or grieve as well as to understand people, lives and cultures different from your own.”