

STUDY GUIDE FOR LYSISTRATA

Information:

Sommerstein's Introduction is very helpful and informative. You should read at least the first 31 pages of it.

Points To Consider When You Are Reading the Play:

Lysistrata, like all of Aristophanes's comedies contains a good deal of fantasy. The war with Sparta that is referred to in the play was very real, however. It had been going on for many years when the play was written, and it continued for many years after it was produced. Another "realistic" aspect of the play is its portrayal of various features of daily life in late 5th century B.C. Athens. What do we learn about the daily lives of people in Athenian households from reading Lysistrata? In particular, what do we learn about what it might have been like to be a woman in post-Periclean Athens?

There are two key parts to Lysistrata's master (mistress?) plan: 1) the sex strike; 2) the occupation of the Acropolis. Why is it dramatically important that her plan should involve both of these parts rather than just one or the other of them?

In Lysistrata both the male and the female characters frequently say very negative things about women. To what extent does Aristophanes seem to confirm the negative stereotypes of women that his contemporaries probably accepted without question? To what extent does he seem to suggest that women are, in fact, quite different (and better) than conventional wisdom would have had his audience believe?

Aristophanes's comedies normally had only one Chorus. Lysistrata is unique in having two -- the Male Senior Citizen Chorus and the Female Senior Citizen Chorus. Why is it appropriate that this play should have these two Choruses?

What reason(s) do you think Aristophanes might have had for making the Male Chorus not only old, but extremely decrepit? What is the significance of the props they carry: the pots (pitchers) containing embers that may or may not still be burning; the logs; the tapers (that is, candles of sorts)?

The two Choruses spend most of their time in the play battling each other. Which of the two wins the battles between them? Initially? Finally?

What kind of person is Lysistrata? What leadership qualities does she display?

Lysistrata's first battle is the battle to convince the other women to join in the sex strike? Which of the women is, the first to agree to try Lysistrata's strategy for ending the war? Why is it significant that it should be she?

Lysistrata behaves in a friendly manner to the "enemy" women. Does she show herself to be unduly trusting and gullible with them?

With whom does she fight her next big battle? Who wins it?

What do you think of the "wool argument" Lysistrata presents to the Magistrate? Is her approach to Athens's problems simply "wooly-minded", or does what she says make real sense?

What important purposes -- apart from providing entertainment -- does the scene between Myrrhine and Cinesias serve?

In what precisely does the comedy in the scene between Myrrhine and Cinesias consist? What elements of it, that is, do we find funny and why?

What important parallels does Aristophanes want his audiences to see between: **a)** the condition of the Athens of his day and the condition of the Chorus of Old Men; **b)** the battles between the two Choruses and the wars between the states; **c)** the conflicts between the young women and the young men and those between the two Choruses; **d)** the condition of the young men and women after the sex strike has been going on for some time and the condition of the states after several debilitating years of the war?

Why has Aristophanes "personified" Reconciliation as "an extremely beautiful and totally unclothed girl"?