Lysistrata and Other Plays by Aristophanes

Writing at the time of political and social crisis in Athens, Aristophanes was an eloquent yet bawdy challenger to the demagogue and the sophist. In Lysistrata a band of women tap into the awesome power of sex in order to end a war. Also included are the plays The Acharnians and The Clouds.

Why you'll like it: Classical comedies, critical, though-provoking.

About the Author: Aristophanes, 448 B.C. - 385 B.C. Aristophanes is considered to be one of the greatest comedic writers ever to have taken to the stage. He was born in Athens, Greece, in the town of Cydathenaeum. Aristophanes is believed to have been well educated, which would explain his propensity towards words. Aristophanes was first a satirist, he was well known for attacking anything from politics to poets, mainly the war between Sparta and Athens and the poet Euripides. "The Acharnians" was his first play, written in 425, B.C.. This was the first of his plays in reaction to the war, as well as the play "Peace." But perhaps Aristophanes most famous play, Lysistrata, made his true feelings of the war known. Aristophanes died three years after the war ended, in 385, B.C. (Bowker Author Biography)

Questions for Discussion

1. Imagine you are Lysistrata before the beginning of the play. Aside from the sex strike, what are your other options for bringing about change in the city? If you still choose the sex strike, why do you think this will be the most effective option?

2. How realistic is the plot of Lysistrata? Would Lysistrata's strategy for ending the war work today or in recent wars? Discuss the 1960s-1970s slogan, from the Vietnam era, "Make Love, Not War."

3. Why do you think Aristophanes chose to have two choruses? Why older men and women? How does this choice add to the comedy?

4. Do you think Lysistrata succeeds in delivering a political message, or is it too bawdy to be taken seriously? Why

5. Aristophanic comedy is often described as a realistic genre; and yet the plays contain large elements of fantasy. How does this work in Lysistrata? The Acharnians? The Clouds?

6. How are analogies and metaphors used throughout the play to further plot, character and theme?

7. In what various ways does Aristophanes use food for comic effect in The Acharnians?

8. In The Acharnians, Aristophanes' main goal is to expose those who cheat and defraud the Athenian people. To what extent do you agree?

9. What happens in the assembly in The Acharnians?
10. What constituency does Dicaeoplois claim to represent? Is he able to voice his concerns effectively? Why or why not?

11. Why don’t the Clouds tell Strepsiades that he’s doing the wrong thing in the first place?

12. Is Strepsiades an inherently bad or flawed guy? Or is he just misguided? Does the fact that he’s helping his son redeem him at all?

13. What is your take on the way Socrates is portrayed? Is he evil? Some people think the Clouds contributed to Socrates’ bad reputation and eventual execution – is the portrayal that damning? If so, how?

14. What role does Pheidippides play in the production – is he just comic relief? Someone to despise more than Strepsiades? Doe he have any redeeming qualities?

(Questions provided by shmoop.com and the publisher)