

Inquiry 100 Greeks at War Aristophanes/Euripides Essay

Medium Length Essay (circa 5 pages)

Below are several suggested topics, but it would be ideal if you are able to focus this essay on the theme you are pursuing in your final essay.

1. In her essay, “The Idea of Women in Peacekeeping,” Mary-Jane Fox writes that “Aristophanes himself seems to be proposing that, in contrast to the hard and fast boundary between public and private, from private considerations the public good can emerge – indeed, even from the private considerations of second-rate citizens, women.” (Mary-Jane Fox, *The Idea of Peacekeeping: Lysistrata and Antigone*, International Peacekeeping, Summer, 2001 (8.2) 9-22.) Investigate the ways the women in *Lysistrata* challenge the conventional public-private dichotomy in order to bring the war to an end.

2. Investigate the ways the women in *Lysistrata* use derision and temptation to deflate male egos and thereby bring the war to an end. Does war really depend on a heroic mindset, so that appropriately humiliated male will cease and desist from fighting? It certainly seems that a heroic self-image perpetuates fighting in Homer’s *Iliad*, but didn’t war go on in the absence of heroic grandeur in Thucydides? What message does Aristophanes communicate on this topic?

3. Simone Weil famously defines force as “that x that turns anybody associated with it into a *thing*” (Weil 3). What does one see if one reads *Lysistrata* in terms of this idea of force? While Weil clearly has in mind violence or threat of violence, the women in *Lysistrata* use a variety of means to alter the behavior of the men (including prominently refusal of sex, mockery, and transgression of social norms). Does this play show that Weil needed a broader notion of force or should we say instead that the play shows that there are ways other than force to influence others?

4. Rachel Bepaloff describes Helen as the passive victim of her own beauty, but Aristophanes’ women discover that their beauty and allure empowers them. Investigate these two very different perspectives on the implications of “sex-appeal.”

5. A simplistic contrast might associate war with activity and peace with passivity, but Aristophanes paints a picture of war as the mindless continuation of a monotonous pattern of behavior while peacemaking requires activity, originality, imagination, resolve, courage and aggressive implementation. Accordingly, many of the traits that mark heroes appear in *Lysistrata* and her fellow peacemakers. Does Aristophanes show that there can be heroic peacemaking as well as war-fighting?

6. Our readings to this point have focused on either lead up to war or conduct of war. “Trojan Women” depicts the aftermath of war from the victims point of view. What does that focus reveal?

7. "Lysistrata" and "Trojan Women" both look at war from the vantage point of women. What the two plays reveal is clearly rather different, but are there significant points of contact between the two plays?

8. "Trojan Women" is a relentless confrontation with the awful consequences of war. What does it say and show about human suffering in the context of war?

9. What theological ideas lie behind "Trojan Women?" The play seems ambiguous: Poseidon deserts losers, Athena turns on arrogant winners, and Hecuba raises questions about how much the gods care about human concerns. She also debunks appeals to the gods as explanations for human misdeeds (as in the case of Helen). Can you discern the shape of Euripides' ideas about the gods from this play?