



Orestes' Choice -

a larp about love and fury in Mythic Greece

<https://tinyurl.com/oresteschoice>

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Players: 4+ (at 8-ish players, consider splitting into 2 groups)

Time: At least 3h, of which 2h is active larp time.

Trigger warnings: Greek tragedy-typical: violence, sexism, murders, human sacrifice, deaths of children.

Expect: angsting over love and ethics, morally gray characters who all believe they are acting out of love, all the drama, opt-in to murderous ending, lots of truly horrific (canon-compliant) backstory, railroaded scenes, switch characters each scene, dramatic improv-heavy, loosely scripted short scenes, partly fated play with room for player agency, many long names sorry.

Pitch: The Odyssey, The Iliad, and many other ancient stories, center around the Curse of the House of Atreus - a bloody, tragic, triumphant, romantic, horrific, generation-spanning soap opera about gods and humans.

We enter the narrative near its end, when Orestes and his lover Pylades hide in a ruin outside Mycenae. At sunrise they plan to break into Mycenae to kill Orestes' mother and step-father, to avenge a murdered father Orestes has never met. Between scenes where the two young warriors wrestle with the morality of this, we play out memories and backstory. No character is player-specific, and is instead represented by a specific prop.

Props/characters may be accepted, offered, and refused at any point. Between each scene we go out of game to briefly decide on the next scene. There will be a few mandatory scenes, and then a bunch of scene suggestions. Players can also come up with their own scenes. In the final scene, all players play Orestes and they must decide what to do. Kill one person? Two? Leave their father unavenged and suffer the curse of the gods?

Larp style note: This larp is not a morality puzzle. There are no perfect solutions and no character is pure. Find the emotional truth of the character you inhabit at the moment and follow it.

The ancient Greek tragedies were often about hard choices in very restricted settings. When nothing you do matters in the end to avert tragedy, the only thing that matters is what you do and how you do it. The players cannot change the scene endings, but they can choose how they come about and they can choose to highlight different motivations for characters.

They choose which scenes to play and which to let lie. Similarly, they have to choose who plays what character, when. Agency with restrictions, and as we know, restrictions increase creativity.

Note to facilitators:

- You can participate as a full player in this larp.
- Unless your players have studied up on the lore or the larp, you may have to go through this entire document, or this [slide deck](#), with them beforehand. Consider breaking up the lore dumps with theatrical warm-up exercises like "yes, let's do it".
- You will have to figure out 1 prop for each character beforehand.

As facilitator you also must make a few choices before running the game and after what epilogue to play:

- You will be giving players **information about which scenes they may choose to play**. You can print a copy of the entire scene appendix for each player, or to just print out 4 copies for the active players for that scene. Or you can print out only 1 copy for yourself and read/summarize each scene for your players.
- In each scene there is a **set first line and a set last line**. How do you want to give these lines to the relevant players? If they have the entire scene appendix, they can read their lines there. Or you can choose to only print out the "first and last line" appendix and cut this up into slips of paper that you give the players with the first and last lines. Or you can verbally tell the players their lines.
- When the players have played the mandatory end scene T, you have to decide if you want to **let the players read the Four Voices** retelling the aftermath **or** if you want to read **The Canon Ending** and explanation for the players. See the Epilogue for more.

Background

In our version of Mythic Greece, the following is true. In addition, anything established during play is true, superseding canon.

House Atreus

The ancient founder of the House of Atreus used treachery, murder and enforced cannibalism to gain power; as punishment, the gods cursed his descendants to again and again live through similar sufferings. Each generation born to the House of Atreus has hoped that the curse has ended, but each generation has been tragically proven wrong. So far.

"But there is a cure in the house, and not outside it, no, not from others but from them[...]"
(Aeschylus, 5th c BCE, "Oresteia")

"If a man's wedded wife should murder him, and the son, in his turn, killed his mother, and after that the son paid for the murder, with his death, where would these disasters end?"
(Euripides, 5th c BCE, "Orestes")

Matricide and Patricide

Killing one's mother or father is one of the ultimate sins: no civilized household would house you, and the powerful ancient Furies (terrifying winged monsters) pursue said killers and torment them forever. Killing a spouse is also an ultimate sin. Men are generally seen as more important than women, so some argue that a daughter killing her father or a wife killing her husband is slightly worse than the obverse (people are split 50/50 on this). Willingly failing to avenge a murdered family member in general is extremely bad.

Gender and Sexuality

Patriarchy reigns supreme in Mythic Greece, though there are many fierce women who try to break the mold. Men loving men is fine, but they should also marry and father sons. Men behaving like women is bad and weak.

Important places

Mycenae - the city that Agamemnon ruled, now ruled by Clytemnestra, his wife, and Aegisthus, her new husband. Outside the city we find Agamemnon's, and his daughter Iphigenia's, tombs.

Oracle of Delphi - Apollo's oracle lives in the temple city of Delphi.

Phocis - A city once allied with the dead Agamemnon, where his son Orestes grew up after Clytemnestra and Aegisthus killed Agamemnon. Prince Pylades' home.

Troy - After Clytemnestra's sister Helen was kidnapped to Troy, Agamemnon led a Greek army to besiege the city. The city eventually fell after 10 years.



Img: Famous Lion Gate of BCE. Constructed in 1250BC.

Ancient greek names are hard

Try to learn them, but consider using family terms or titles: mother, father, sister, prince, my friend, beloved... And when you speak of someone, remind everyone who they are "Your father Agamemnon", "My sister Electra" etc.

Safety, veils and vetos

Players may demand that certain topics (e.g. deaths of children) not be discussed graphically or in detail - this is called a veil. Players may also completely veto topics (e.g. rape) being brought up at all. If a veto against one of the larp's stated trigger warnings is brought up, e.g. murder, the group should stop playing this larp and do something else.

Discuss veils and vetos before gameplay begins, and inform the players that they may at any time stop play to discuss veils and vetos.

Larpers are more important than any larp: they may leave at any time. Players should be encouraged but not pressured to play in scenes. Please select some safety words and gestures, e.g. "red" or a physical double tap for everyone to stop play and check in, "yellow" for slow down/lower intensity, and "green" for "everything is fine". Suggested touching restrictions are that (at least) business casual touches (touch anywhere on arms up to shoulders) are ok. Decide within your group what is accepted.

Props

Each character should have a prop that always represents them, ideally something that gives players things to do in scenes. Characters have suggested props listed, but any prop is fine. Try putting the props somewhere dignified - let fetching them and putting them back have a sense of ritual.

Orestes' prop: Orestes' prop should be weapon of some kind. A blunt theater knife or a foam dagger would be ideal - maybe add something that can work as a whet stone or a piece of leather for honing/polishing the blade.

Example of other good props for other characters (and stuff you can do with them):

- Scarf around neck (drape, bind, warm someone, clean someone)
 - Scarf around waist (be a belt, bind, warm someone, clean someone)
 - knife and whetstone (threaten, play with, hone)
 - pen and paper (write and read letters)
 - Eyeliner (makeup, mark someone)
 - hats, crowns (wear, put on someone else)
 - staff/cane (to lean on, hit people with)
 - 2 cups (toast, pour wine at an altar or at someone's grave, give someone water)
 - comb/brush. (Groom yourself or others, hit people)
 - book (read aloud, read silent, point to as a source of authority)
 - candle (light, douse, be spooky, be intimate)
 - mirror (see yourself, make others see themselves, spy, make yourself look prettier)
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- You will also need (number of players-2) scarves for the Chorus members to drape over their hair.
 - An out of game "prop" is one copy of the Scene Appendix printed out for each player. Or, if that is hard, at least 2 copies of the Scene Appendix.

Timeline

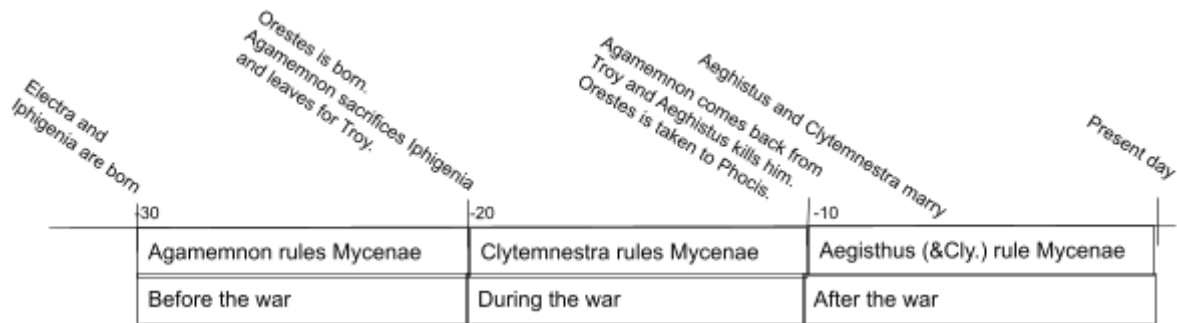
Character ages are rounded up or down to their nearest decade.

~ 3 decades ago. Electra and Iphigenia, daughters both, are born to Agamemnon, King of Mycenae and his Queen, Clytemnestra..

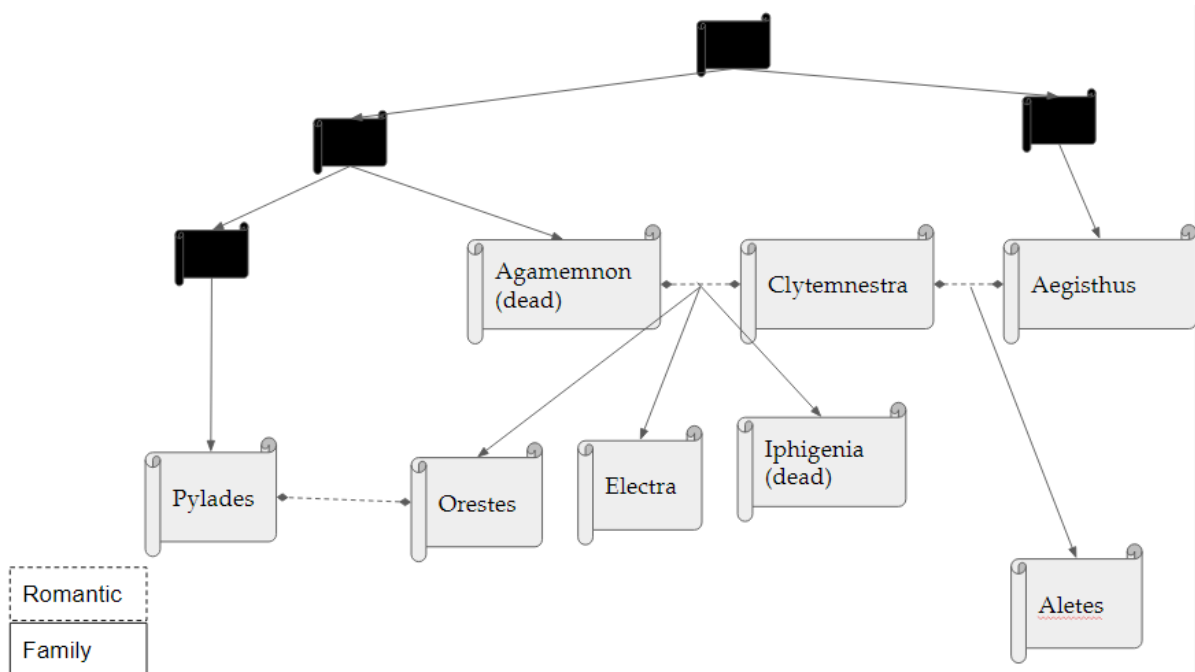
~ 2 decades ago. Orestes, a son, is born to Agamemnon and Clytemnestra. Clytemnestra's sister Helen is kidnapped to Troy; Agamemnon gathers an alliance to attack Troy. Agamemnon sacrifices his and Clytemnestra's daughter Iphigenia to the gods to get wind for the fleet's sails.

~ 1 decade ago. Troy falls. Agamemnon returns to Mycenae. Clytemnestra asks Aegisthus, her lover, to kill Agamemnon. Agamemnon is killed. Orestes, now 10 years old, is secreted away to Phocis by a nurse loyal to Agamemnon.. Phocis refuses to return Orestes to his mother.

0: Clytemnestra and Aegisthus rule Mycenae, and have a young son, Aletes. Electra lives with them. Orestes and his lover Pylades, planning to kill Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, return in secret to Mycenae from Phocis, after a stop-over at the Oracle of Delphi.



Characters



(Source)

Character ages are rounded up or down to their nearest decade. They all act out of (different kinds) of (possibly deranged) love.

Orestes, prince of Mycenae, in voluntary exile in Phocis (~ 20 years old¹) has just become a man and is ready to set out in the world. He never knew his father Agamemnon, but knows it is his duty to avenge him. He used to love his mother Clytemnestra, but hasn't seen her in 10 years. He remembers his Aegisthus as a kind man, but has been told many times how his mother was unfaithful with him, and how Aegisthus killed Agamemnon on his mother's orders.

Has been told that his father sacrificed his older sister Iphigenia before he was born. After Agamemnon's murder, a nurse smuggled Orestes out of Mycenae to family in Phocis, where he grew up with his cousin Prince Pylades. He and Pylades are now lovers.

¹ "In the context of ancient Greece, twenty-year-old men were thought of as more like irresponsible teenagers, not real adults. People didn't think someone was really "a man" until age 40 or so. Twenty is more like "old enough to join the army," which for Orestes equates to "old enough to travel around and kill my enemies." (p.c. Anna Everett Beek, PhD)

Extremely recently, Orestes and Pylades went to the Oracle of Delphi, searching for guidance in life, and Apollo, through his Oracle, told them that Orestes must kill Aegisthus and Clytemnestra or be punished by Apollo. But the Furies, and all of society, hate people who kill their parents.

Quote: “[Apollo said that] if I failed to kill my father’s killers [...] it would be a life of torment that would never end.” (Aeschylus, 5th c BCE, “Oresteia”)

Suggested Prop: theater/dull knife and whetstone/polishing cloth.

Pylades, Prince of Phocis (~20). Orestes’ cousin, great friend, and lover. Kind and sensible one moment, full of youthful zeal the next. Wants to support Orestes and wants him to be happy. Tries to figure out if supporting Orestes here means encouraging or discouraging him to go through with the murders. Enthusiastically willing to help in some righteous murders if necessary.

Quote: “For how shall I prove my friendship, if not by helping you in sore distress?” (Euripides, 5th c BCE, “Orestes”)

Suggested Prop: 2 cups and something to drink from them.

Electra, princess of Mycenae (~30), Orestes’ sister. Clytemnestra and Agamemnon’s child,



sister to Iphigenia (who Agamemnon sacrificed). Now thirty and unwed, Electra has lived through 3 distinct life phases: her first decade before the siege of Troy (living happily with mother, father and sister in Mycenae), her second decade during the siege (father away being war hero, mother ruling Mycenae, “uncle” Aegisthus visiting more and more, little brother Orestes growing up), and her third decade after the siege (her father dead, his murderer married to her mother, her household joined by a new young half-brother Aletes). She is destined to be married off to a man of Aegisthus’ choosing.

Electra by chance met her brother Orestes by Agamemnon’s grave yesterday. She hadn’t seen him in 10 years, and urged him to kill Aegisthus

and Clytemnestra.

Electra has always been profusely ardent in her love for her father, possibly as a “fawn” defense mechanism after he sacrificed her sister Iphigenia.

Quote: “I know that some people will say [Agamemnon] never loved his children, that he couldn’t have, given what he did. But I remember the feel of his arms around me and the steady beat of his heart against my ear, and I know there will never be a safer place in this world for me than that.” (Saint, 2022, “Electra”)

Suggested Prop: a handheld mirror or a comb/brush

Image: 18th.c. Elektra with sword, From Voltaire’s Orestes. [BM:1871-0812-3880](#)



Clytemnestra, Queen of Mycenae (~50), mother of Iphigenia, Electra, and Orestes. She was furious with her husband Agamemnon after he sacrificed Iphigenia to Artemis. For the decade he was away, she was sole ruler of Mycenae and brought up her surviving children Electra and Orestes. She took Aegisthus as a lover, and asked him to kill Agamemnon when he came back. Now Queen of Mycenae and wife of King Aegisthus, mother to young Aletes.

Image: 17th c. French playing card. Clytemnestra. [BM 1871-0513-524](#)

Quote: "You patronize me like some little woman, with no mind to call her own. I speak with heart devoid of fear, to those with wit to understand, and you can praise me or condemn me as you like, it's all the same to me." (Aeschylus, 5th c BCE, "Oresteia")

Suggested Prop: scarf

Aegisthus, King of Mycenae (~40), Clytemnestra's husband and Agamemnon's cousin. Aegisthus killed Agamemnon on Clytemnestra's orders, but would have been happy to do it for other reasons: Agamemnon's father did some truly horrible things (including tricking him into eating his own children) to Aegisthus' father.

Quote: (Zeus to Aegisthus) "The painful secret of gods and kings is that men are free. They are free, Aegisthus. You know it, but they do not." (Sartre, 1943, The Flies)

Suggested Prop: book.

Img: 15th.c. Aegisthus. [BM:1889-0527-60](#)

Agamemnon, former King of Mycenae (Dead.) Father to Orestes, Electra, and Iphigenia the last of whom he sacrificed to the gods for wind so his fleet could sail to Troy). Former king of Mycenae. War leader of the Greek Army that conquered Troy. His wife Clytemnestra asked her lover Aegisthus to kill him.

Quote: "Death is a softer thing by far than tyranny." (Aeschylus, 5th c BCE, "Agamemnon")

Suggested Prop: helmet/crown/hat.

Img: 2500 BC. Agamemnon's Death Mask. [National Archaeological Museum, Athens.](#)



Suggestion for finding love in Agamemnon's actions: He has love for his cause (retrieving Helen) and his loyal soldiers who have put their lives in his hands - they need the wind or the whole campaign is doomed.

Apollo, the god of justice, sun, and beauty. He orders Orestes to kill his father's murderers. Apollo thinks a woman is worth less than a man and therefore a father's life is more important than a mother's.

Quote: "Know thyself" (Inscribed on the temple of Apollo at Delphi).

Suggested Prop: one or many gold jewelry chain(s), the more blingy the better.

Suggestion for finding love in Apollo's actions: The love of justice, the same justice for all mortals, no exceptions.

How to Play the Larp

You will play (at least) 12 scenes in this game. Some scenes (the prologue scenes and the present day scenes) are mandatory. The players will choose other scenes (flashback scenes). Between the scenes, larping stops and the facilitator either informs the players of the next (mandatory) scene, or offers the players a choice between two scenes (flashback scenes). See "order of scenes" below for details. See Facilitator Notes for details on printing scripts and helpful tools.

Playing a Scene

Scenes should be roughly 1-10 minutes long.

1. Before each scene, read the scene description out loud. Each scene has a set start line and a set end line.
2. Help players choose who plays which character. Let players pick up their props. Have people read through their start and end lines in the scene.
3. Establish with participants what the surroundings look like: tables, walls, thrones etc. Decide time of day.
4. Remind everyone who the characters are and their relationships, and when in the timeline the scene takes place (before/during/after the Trojan war, or in the "present" day when Pylades and Orestes are preparing for the murders.)
5. The non-active players will play The Chorus. While the active players prepare for the scene, the Chorus players briefly (20-30 seconds) check in about where they want to stand or sit in the scene space. They should remain together.
6. When players are ready, they put away their text materials and the scene is started by someone saying the set first line.

Optional technique! Scene replays. It's possible to replay a scene, to explore what happens with another perspective, another emotional aspect, or just other players.

The Chorus

Ancient Greek plays always have a Chorus that comment on the action - they are both part of the scene and not. A Greek chorus is not heard directly by the players, but still often praises or berates the characters. The Chorus also speaks to the audience, explaining, narrating, complaining. A chorus can definitely have an agenda. In our larp, all non-playing players are the chorus. The chorus can speak at any time, but should time their interruptions carefully. Chorus lines should be very short and are used to enhance the drama. The players should try not to interrupt each other and give room to speak to both active players and the Chorus. Active players may choose to let their characters be influenced by the prompts or not. But the Chorus also speaks to itself - it is both audience and narrator at the same time.

How? One member of the chorus says something, and then the rest echoes that sentiment (once). Example:

- A random Chorus member: "Remember your treacherous Mother!"
- All Chorus members: "Remember your treacherous Mother!"

Our chorus always starts with the word "Remember".

- "Remember <name/title>"
 - "Remember your father", "Remember Iphigenia"
- "Remember <adjective> <name/title>."
 - "Remember loving Clytemnestra", or "Remember your treacherous Mother".
 - loving, treacherous, dead, poor, happy, stern, murderous, kind, etc.
- "Remember your destiny", "Remember the curse", "Remember Apollo's orders"

Chorus members also have a prop! They should wear scarves draped over the top of their hair.

Optional technique! The Bell. Instead of the chorus chanting, the facilitator or one member of the chorus might sparingly use a hand bell to make a soft sound that is a reminder of fate. It works as a meta technique that reminds the characters in the scene, especially the one speaking, that they cannot avoid their fate, whatever it might be.

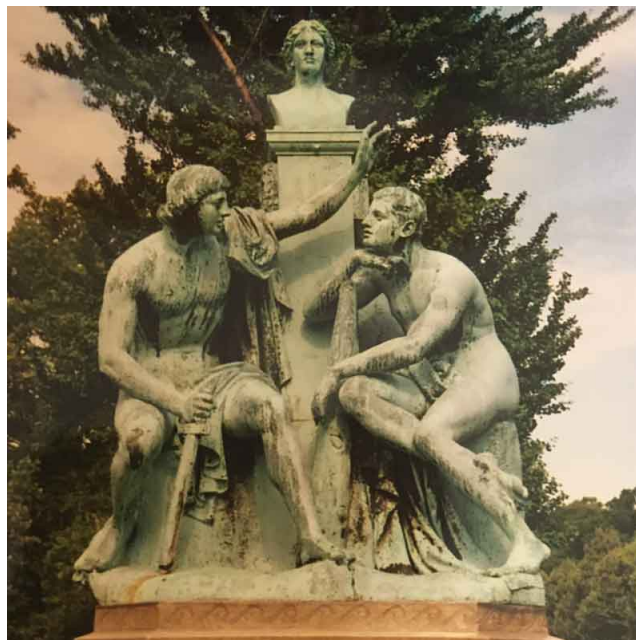
Order of scenes

Scenes should be played in this order:

- The 3 mandatory **prologue** scenes
- **Flashback** scene, make players choose:
 - Clytemnestra tells Electra and Agamemnon that she is pregnant. (D), or
 - Clytemnestra meets Aegisthus for the first time (E)
- **Flashback** scene, make players choose:
 - Young Orestes asks Electra about his father. Clytemnestra joins the argument (F), or
 - Young Orestes and Electra play with Aegisthus (G)
- **Present** day scene, Scene P - Orestes and Pylades discuss how to do the murders
- **Flashback** scene, make players choose:
 - Young Orestes wants to join Aegisthus on a dangerous hunt (H), or
 - The last time his Mother and Sister see Orestes (I)
- **Flashback** scenes, make players choose:
 - Electra is told that her Father has been killed (J), or
 - Nurse tells Orestes his Father has been killed and they leave Mycenae (K)

(If there is time, iterate: use optional present day scenes Q and/or R and pick some flashback scenes.)

- **Present** day scene, scene S - Orestes wakes from a nightmare, dawn is near.
- **Flashback** scene, make players choose:
 - Pylades and Orestes meet as children (L), or
 - The Mycenae court discusses Electra's marriage prospects (M)
- **Flashback** scene, make players choose:
 - Teenage Pylades and Orestes fantasize about their future (N), or
 - Aegisthus and Clytemnestra play with their five year old son (O)
- Mandatory **end** scene T - Daybreak. Orestes has to decide what to do.



Img: 1884. Orestes & Pylades fountain in Philadelphia.

Appendix I: Scenes

Mandatory prologue scenes:

(all players should be strongly encouraged to be in at least one of the prologue scenes)

Just before the beginning of the Trojan War (~20 years ago)



Scene A. Clytemnestra begs Agamemnon not to sacrifice their daughter Iphigenia. Electra watches.

Clytemnestra begs Agamemnon not to sacrifice Iphigenia to the gods to break the lack of wind that prevents the entire fleet from sailing to Troy. He refuses. Electra (~10) is there, terrified and silent. (You can also add Iphigenia, ~12. The girls communicate wordlessly.)

Clytemnestra: My lord, my husband, my love,
I beg you, do not do this.

Agamemnon: This will be done.

Img: 19th.c.AD. Agamemnon, Clytemnestra, Iphigenia(?), Electra (?). From Racine's play Iphigenie. [BM:2011-7059-58](#)

Present day

Scene B. Orestes, Pylades and Apollo at the Oracle of Delphi (~2 weeks ago)

Orestes and Pylades go to the Oracle of Delphi where Apollo appears to answer their prayers for guidance. Apollo tells Orestes that he must kill Clytemnestra and Aegisthus to avenge Agamemnon, or else Apollo will make Orestes suffer terrible plagues. Apollo issues divine orders, and does not engage in much dialogue.

Orestes: Pylades, I fear the answers I might get from the god.

Pylades: I will always support you.

Img: 17th.c. Orestes and Pylades. Engraving. [BM:1839-0309-10](#)



Scene C. Orestes, Pylades and Electra meet at the tomb (yesterday)

Electra meets her brother Orestes, and her cousin Pylades, for the first time, when they visit Agamemnon's tomb. She tells them about life at court with Clytemnestra and Aegisthus and urges Orestes to kill them.



Electra: You look just like my dead father Agamemnon. Are you my brother?

Pylades: Orestes, we must hide and plan.

Image: 4th.c.BC. Urn, Pylades and Orestes meet Electra. [BM:1949-0926-1](#)

Scene ideas to choose from

Between 30 to 20 years ago (before the Siege of Troy)

Scene D. Clytemnestra tells Electra (~10) and Agamemnon the news that she is pregnant.

They pray to the gods that it will be a son this time. (You may add Iphigenia, ~12)

Clytemnestra: I have a surprise for you all. Can you guess?

.....

Agamemnon: We will have a feast!

Between 20 to 10 years ago (while Agamemnon is away at war)

Scene E. Clytemnestra meets her future husband Aegisthus for the first time

Aegisthus and Clytemnestra meet when he visits Mycenae to, he says, get to know his only remaining family and see his cousin Agamemnon's children.

Aegisthus: The fabled Queen of Mycenae.

.....

Clytemnestra: Come again tomorrow, dear Aegisthus.

Img: 1882. Collier. Clytemnestra. [Guildhall:577](#)

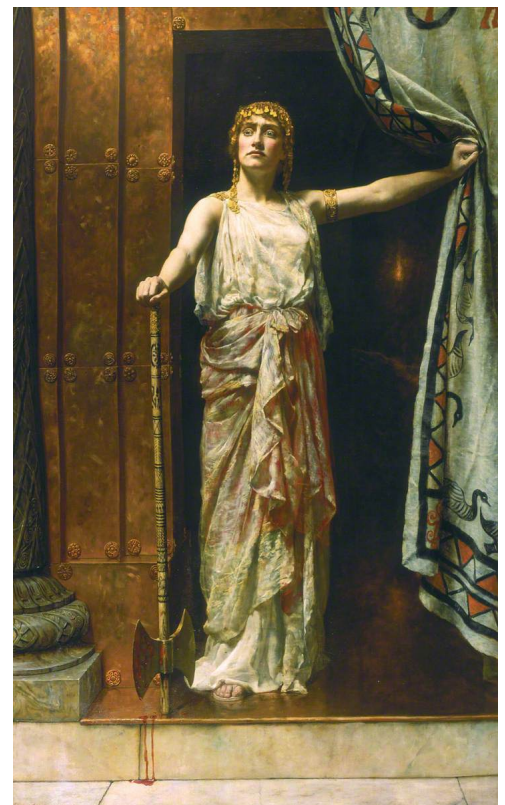
Scene F Young Orestes asks his sister Electra and mother Clytemnestra about his father

Orestes asks Electra to tell him about their father, King Agamemnon, who has been away at war Orestes' entire life. Later, Clytemnestra overhears and offers her own opinions.

Orestes: Electra, what was our father like?

.....

Clytemnestra: Memories are warped mirrors. But I see clearly.



Scene G. Young Orestes, 8, and Electra play with Aegisthus

Orestes, 8 years old, and Electra, 18, are teased from their argument by Aegisthus' offer to teach them how to sharpen (kitchen and hunting) knives.

Electra: I know you took my comb, Orestes!

.....

Orestes: Thank you, uncle Aegisthus.

Scene H. Young Orestes, 8, has an argument with Aegisthus about whether he can join him for a dangerous boar hunt.

Aegisthus says he is too young and it is too dangerous. Orestes is furious.

Orestes: You're not my father!

.....

Aegisthus: Sleep now, prince.

Scene I. The last time Clytemnestra and Electra see Orestes

Clytemnestra says good morning to her children; they are both eager to eat breakfast and get going with their day.

Clytemnestra: You will both sit down and eat something.

Orestes: I love you, Mother.

Optional technique! Parallel scenes. Scenes J and K can be played in parallel if you have 5 players. One scene starts, and pauses whenever a player in that scene decides to pause it, by clapping their hands 3 times. The next scene takes over for a while, until a player there decides to pause it. Proceed until both last lines have been said.



Agamemnon. [Louvre:INV5185](#)

Scene J. Aegisthus and Clytemnestra tell Electra that her father has been executed.

Electra, ~20, is excited to meet her legendary war hero Father for the first time in 10 years. Instead Aegisthus and Clytemnestra come to tell her that Aegisthus has executed Agamemnon for the murder of Electra's long-dead sister Iphigenia. They also worry because they can't find Orestes. And they tell her that they will marry.

Electra: Mother, Father's ship has been in the harbor for an hour! When will I get to see him?

Aegisthus: Clytemnestra, we will retire.

Ing: 1817. Guérin. *Aegisthus, Clytemnestra,*

Scene K. Orestes' nurse tells him of his father's murder, and spirits him away from Mycenae, towards Phocis.

Orestes, (~10), is secreted out of Troy, by his nurse, who tells him Aegisthus has murdered King Agamemnon on Clytemnestra's orders. The nurse thinks they might next murder Orestes.

Nurse: My prince, quick, come with me.

Nurse: I will have you safe with allies in Phocis by morning.

Img: 15th.c. woodcut, Agamemnon's murder. [Wikipedia](#).



Between 10 years ago and present

Scene L. Pylades (~10) and Orestes (~10) meet for the first time.

Pylades: Hi. I'm Pylades. Mother said you'll be sleeping in my room. Why are you here?

Orestes: When I grow up, I am going to be a warrior.

Scene M. Clytemnestra and Aegisthus discuss Electra's (~30) marriage prospects

They ask Electra for her opinion. Electra's brother Orestes was kidnapped to Phocis, which is ruled by Agamemnon's old allies, and both Clytemnestra and Aegisthus suspect the royal family of Phocis is bringing Orestes up to hate his mother. Clytemnestra thinks that maybe a marriage between Electra and Prince Pylades of Phocis (~20 years old) could perhaps mend old wounds? Aegisthus is not keen on Electra marrying - he is worried that the curse on the House of Atreus has not ended, and if Electra has a son, he might grow up wanting to avenge his grandfather.

Clytemnestra: My dear husband, Electra must marry soon if she is to bear children.

Electra: I will leave you now.



Scene N. Pylades and Orestes fantasize about their future

Pylades and Orestes, pleasantly drunk, chit-chat about a future of adventure, a year before Apollo's command to kill Clytemnestra & Aegisthus.

Pylades: Orestes, if you could go anywhere, where would you like us to go?

.....

Orestes: We have a glorious destiny, Pylades.

Img: 1st.c. AD. Orestes & Pylades. [Prado:E000028](#)

Scene O. Aegisthus is play-fighting with his young son Aletes (~5) and Clytemnestra joins in.

You may also add Electra (~30).

Aegisthus: No, my son, you have to hold the knife like this.

.....

Clytemnestra: Aletes, mother and father love you very much.

Present day scenes:

Scene P. Orestes and Pylades discuss how to go about the murders.

Orestes sharpens a dagger and discusses with Pylades where and how they should kill them. Stomach wounds cause the most suffering, heart wounds can be tricky to execute but lead to quick deaths, neck wounds are easiest but bleed a lot. Also: attacking from the front or stabbing them in the back?

Pylades: So, how do we kill them?

Orestes: Before I walk out that door, my mind must be made up about the details.

Img: 18th.c.AD, ring. Orestes & Pylades (?). [BM:1799-0521-83-a](#)



Scene Q. (optional, consider if there is extra time). Pylades asks Orestes what is to be done with his half brother, the little boy Aletes.

Pylades: What about your half brother, young Aletes. What if he is in the queen's chambers?

Orestes: I will do what I have to do.

Scene R. (optional, consider if there is extra time). Pylades asks Orestes if he ever wants children of his own.

Pylades: Would you ever want children of your own?

Orestes: The future feels so far away, I am trapped in this present moment.

Scene S. Orestes has a nightmare during a short nap, and Pylades wakes him up.



In this scene the Chorus is active as furies (scary monsters that torment parent killers) and can move around the stage until Orestes wakes up, at which point they become the stationary Chorus again.

The furies torment Orestes with threats, accusing him of being a horrible person who plans to kill his loving mother. Pylades eventually wakes Orestes up (and Furies disappear) and asks Orestes about his nightmare. Pylades then asks Orestes if

there are any alternatives. Maybe another god to protect them from Apollo's wrath? Can they travel far away? Can they maim rather than kill? All options seem impossible.

The furies (in chorus): Treacherous Orestes! Disloyal son!

Pylades: Orestes, wake up. You are having a nightmare.

Orestes: I am so grateful for you, Pylades.

Img: 1862. Bouguereau. Orestes & Furies. [CMA:71.623](#)

Mandatory end scene



Scene T (Last Orestes scene!).

Players line up. The facilitator tells them that the facilitator will play Pylades and will ask each of them, in turn: "Orestes, dawn is here. What are we going to do?"

Give the players 30 seconds to think about their answer, then proceed with the scene. Let each scene last 10-30 seconds.

Img: 1st.c.AD, Pompeii fresco. Orestes & Pylades.

Epilogue scene

To end the game you can either choose to let the players read the #1 Four Voices, about what happened after Orestes deed (Electra, Apollo, The Furies and Athena) or you as facilitator can read #2 What Canon Says Happened.

Epilogue #1 is good if many players had murder in mind as their final decision. It is a reading of our shortened and paraphrased version of Aeschylus' final play in the trilogy: "Eumenides" (The Furies) where Orestes is put on trial.

Epilogue #2 is good if many players' final decisions were far from canon (where Orestes, assisted by Pylades and Electra, kills his mother and stepfather). It is a summary of what happens to the characters in canon.

Epilogue 1: Four Voices - Players Read aloud

The facilitator should allow the players to read an epilogue summing up what happens to Orestes after he makes his choice . If this is done, the facilitator should then wrap the game with the Final words and the debriefing.

Electra:

Orestes was a man changed that day.

He was born into misfortune, given an impossible choice,

Heed blood and honor, and shed still more blood. Or flee from his fate, and forever be in Apollo's wrath, with no birthright.

I encouraged him, I pleaded and instigated. I helped with the murder, too, doing as much as any woman could, and Pylades assisted us as well.

Afterwards poor Orestes grew so ill. Haunted, he fled the city to find a safe place, fearing the people's judgment. Infected with a savage wasting sickness, he collapsed shortly after. And now he is bedridden and lies there, driven into fits of madness by his mother's blood. Nightmares haunting him dusk to dawn. He is hardly himself anymore.

In short moments of clarity he regains his senses. He then speaks to me, blaming himself for causing distress to everyone around him. For bringing both me and Pylades into this damned cause, that we also would have blood on our hands.

He asks himself what Agamemnon would have thought of his deed. Thinking he would appeal to Orestes to stay his sword, rather than bring down the women who brought him into this world. No act, no matter how filled with wrath or pain, will bring his father into the light of the living, ever again.

Orestes cannot go on living in this pain.

Furies:

Let no man be beyond the laws of the gods! Orestes has shed his mother's kindred blood.

Shall he continue to live in peace after this heinous deed?

Shall he in Mycenae dwell, where his sire dwelt? Shall he stand before the city's shrines?

Shall he lead his clansmen as a bloodstained king? Tainting the throne further with the curse of Atreus?

We, Alecto, Megaera and Tisiphone, we ancient spirits of the underworld, seek out those who have made wrong of wrongs. Oathbreakers, murders and those who betray. If the gods or men's justice will not reach you, we will.

Orestes has betrayed his bloodline, the very essence from whence he came. Shall not the murder of a mother count as much as the murder of a father? No sinister deeds of Orestes, will ever make amends for what Clytemnestra have done.

We will track every step, we will lurk in every shadow. We will poison every thought, will spread doubt on all conviction, haunt you to your end of days.

If we are denied our eternal right, we will poison and blight the land instead.

Apollo

Orestes was repentant. So let's not be too hasty with his judgment.

Orestes' conscience weighs heavily upon him. How could he bring justice to his father, to his society and family? He was made an orphan by his mother. Through treachery Clytemnestra killed Agamemnon and took his throne. Murdered in his own home, defenseless in his bath. No end for our commander in the war with Troy.

Where were the Furies then I ask? Where were their vengeance and fury?

Was not Clytemnestra's deed, just as heinous as what they claim of Orestes'?

I saw that Orestes had no choice, but to bring right this blood-guilt in Mycenae.

He committed matricide, that is clear. But he acted so as a suppliant of mine.

Should he be sick and haunted to the end of his days?

Should he be slain or stoned without means to defend himself?

I, Apollo, god of Sun and knowledge, demand true justice for Orestes. Arbitrary retribution should have no place among civilized men. I call upon Athena to bring her wisdom and judgment. I will provide safe passage for him to Athens. There he can be properly judged.

In this river of blood and hate lasting generations, Orestes might be the last. The blood should stop here. Else we let the curse of Atreus continue in perpetuity.

Athena

This matter was too momentous, whatever claims mortals had to judge it rightly. Even I, Athena the eternal Right, am forbidden from passing judgment on issues of blood-guilt and the wrath that swiftly follow. Too long have these crimes stained society, too long have the sentiment 'blood for blood' continued.

Orestes came to the city of my name. I understood Apollo had led him here. I took him in uncondemned. The Furies followed, wanting to exact their vengeance, their view of justice. If they failed, they promised their anger's poison would infect the land, creating a festering sore of eternal ill, making lands once fertile barren.

In this difficult situation with sorrow on either hand. As Fate had imposed this matter on me, I chose judges who would establish a lasting law to govern cases of blood-guilt, confirmed by an oath. The City was to call forth witnesses and proof, using strong words for justice fortified by oaths. To judge, I had selected the twelve most trustworthy individuals from Athens to examine the case carefully and solemnly pledged their oath to deliver a fair judgment. The Furies and Apollo himself bore witness to the deeds done.

The trial ended with a vote that was evenly split. Six elders wanted to acquit Orestes, and six wanted him condemned. I did not find a majority against him. Orestes had killed, and his deeds were now atoned for. He was pardoned and had to be freed. The Curse of house Atreus has now ended. The Furies were agitated and angered. I tried to appease them and refrain them from cursing the land with eternal blight.

"Calm the dark inward surge of your bitter anger, for your honor instead will be elevated, alongside me, forever in this land. Be revered as guardians of hearth and justice instead of vengeance."

Through these kind words I contain their wrath, pledging holy sanctuary deep within Athens for them. And from now on men must, in matters of men, decide justice for themselves.

Epilogue 2: What Canon Says Happened

Read this aloud, passing the text around so everyone reads some.

What happened in canon? Well, there are many stories.

In Euripides' "Orestes", Electra tells us one story of what happened:

"Still, he obeyed the god and killed her. I helped with the murder, too, doing as much as any woman could, and Pylades assisted us as well. After that poor Orestes grew so ill. Infected with a savage wasting sickness, he's collapsed in bed and lies there, driven into fits of madness by his mother's blood." (Euripides, 5th c BCE, "Orestes")

And later Orestes does wonder if his father would have wanted him to carry out the murder:

*"Sister, why wrap your head in your dress and cry?
I'm ashamed to make you share my suffering,
to bring distress to an unmarried girl
with this sickness of mine. Don't pine away
because of my misfortunes. Yes, it's true
you agreed to do it, but I'm the one
who shed our mother's blood.*

*I blame Apollo,
who set me up to carry out the act,
which was profane. His words encouraged me,
but not his actions.*

*And I think my father,
if I'd looked him in the eye and asked him
if I should kill my mother, would've made
many appeals to me, reaching for my chin,
not to shove my sword into the neck
of the woman who'd given birth to me,
since this act would not return him to the light of the living,
and I'd be wretched, suffering ills like these.* (Euripides, 5th c BCE, "Orestes")

Gods and men debate whether Orestes did the right thing. Tyndareus, Orestes grandfather and Clytemnestra's father, thinks the murder of Clytemnestra was wrong:

*"He was right to think that she was wicked,
but he's made himself more evil killing her.
I'll ask you this question, Menelaus.
If a man's wedded wife should murder him
and the son, in his turn, killed his mother,
and after that the son paid for the murder
with his death, **where would these disasters end?**"* (Euripides, 5th c BCE, "Orestes")

Apollo argues that Agamemnon had to be avenged:

*"Yea, for it stands not with a common death,
That [Agamemnon] should die, a chieftain and a king
[...] Die, and by female hands."* (Aeschylus, 5th c BCE, "Oresteia")

Orestes is put on trial (the first ever trial!) by twelve elders of Athens. In Aeschylus' famous version, half them judge that his actions were wrong, and half judge that his actions were right. Athena acquitted Orestes since there was no majority vote against him. Orestes gets

washed free from sin, and the curse of the house of Atreus is broken: coming generations will have it easier.

In many happier stories, best friends and lovers Pylades and Orestes go on to have adventures together. They marry women as well. In some stories, Pylades marries Electra.

In some stories, Orestes and Pylades, in the course of their adventures, find Iphigenia alive, having been spirited away by Artemis rather than sacrificed.

Final words:

Read aloud: Over the centuries, there have been many authors that were inspired by The Oresteia, such as Shakespear, Gaiman, Philip K. Dick and Sartre. And there have been many reimagined versions of the story of Orestes from new angles. Now we have added to that canon with what we have created here today. Let's leave this experience with this quote from Euripides' 2500 year old play "Orestes":

"There is advantage in the wisdom gained from pain."

Ask participants: what is something you take with you from this experience?

References

Aeschylus Aeschylus and E. D. A Morshead. 5th c BCE / 2007. The Oresteia: Agamemnon the Libation Bearers, Eumenides (The Kindly ones). Available at <http://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks07/0700021h.html>

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Saint Jennifer and Navarro Díaz Natalia. 2022. Electra. Ediciones Urano.

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Image on first page: Midjourney composition given prompt: *"warrior Orestes and his lover prince Pylades praying before a giant statue of the god Apollo, inside a Greek temple, incense in the air, atmosphere is tense and holy, in the style of line drawing"*

Appendix II: Handout Lines - single page

Scene A. Clytemnestra begs Agamemnon not to sacrifice their daughter Iphigenia. Electra watches.

Clytemnestra: My lord, my husband, my love, I beg you, do not do this.

Agamemnon: This will be done.

Scene B. Orestes, Pylades and Apollo at the Oracle of Delphi (~2 weeks ago)

Orestes: Pylades, I fear the answers I might get from the god.

Pylades: I will always support you.

Scene C. Orestes, Pylades and Electra meet at the tomb (yesterday)

Electra: You look just like my dead father Agamemnon. Are you my brother?

Pylades: Orestes, we must hide and plan.

Scene D. Clytemnestra tells Electra (~10) and Agamemnon the news that she is pregnant.

Clytemnestra: I have a surprise for you all. Can you guess?

.....

Agamemnon: We will have a feast!

Scene E. Clytemnestra meets her future husband Aegisthus for the first time

Aegisthus: The fabled Queen of Mycenae.

.....

Clytemnestra: Come again tomorrow, dear Aegisthus.

Scene F Young Orestes asks his sister Electra and mother Clytemnestra about his father

Orestes: Electra, what was our father like?

.....

Clytemnestra: Memories are warped mirrors. But I see clearly.

Scene G. Young Orestes, 8, and Electra play with Aegisthus

Electra: I know you took my comb, Orestes!

.....

Orestes: Thank you, uncle Aegisthus.

Scene H. Young Orestes, 8, has an argument with Aegisthus about whether he can join him for a dangerous boar hunt.

Orestes: You're not my father!

.....

Aegisthus: Sleep now, prince.

Scene I. The last time Clytemnestra and Electra see Orestes

Clytemnestra: You will both sit down and eat something.

Orestes: I love you, Mother.

Scene J. Aegisthus and Clytemnestra tell Electra that her father has been executed.

Electra: Mother, Father's ship has been in the harbor for an hour! When will I get to see him?

Aegisthus: Clytemnestra, we will retire.

Scene K. Orestes' nurse tells him of his father's murder, and spirits him away from Mycenae, towards Phocis.

Nurse: My prince, quick, come with me.

Nurse: I will have you safe with allies in Phocis by morning.

Between 10 years ago and present

Scene L. Pylades (~10) and Orestes (~10) meet for the first time.

Pylades: Hi. I'm Pylades. Mother said you'll be sleeping in my room. Why are you here?

Orestes: When I grow up, I am going to be a warrior.

Scene M. Clytemnestra and Aegisthus discuss Electra's (~30) marriage prospects

Clytemnestra: My dear husband, Electra must marry soon if she is to bear children.

Electra: I will leave you now.

Scene N. Pylades and Orestes fantasize about their future

Pylades: Orestes, if you could go anywhere, where would you like us to go?

.....

Orestes: We have a glorious destiny, Pylades.

Scene O. Aegisthus is play-fighting with his young son Aletes (~5) and Clytemnestra joins in.

You may also add Electra (~30).

Aegisthus: No, my son, you have to hold the knife like this.

.....

Clytemnestra: Aletes, mother and father love you very much.

Scene P. Orestes and Pylades discuss how to go about the murders.

Pylades: So, how do we kill them?

Orestes: Before I walk out that door, my mind must be made up about the details.

Scene Q. (optional, consider if there is extra time). Pylades asks Orestes what is to be done with his half brother, the little boy Aletes.

Pylades: What about your half brother, young Aletes. What if he is in the queen's chambers?

Orestes: I will do what I have to do.

Scene R. (optional, consider if there is extra time). Pylades asks Orestes if he ever wants children of his own.

Pylades: Would you ever want children of your own?

Orestes: The future feels so far away, I am trapped in this present moment.

Scene S. Orestes has a nightmare during a short nap, and Pylades wakes him up.

The furies (in chorus): Treacherous Orestes! Disloyal son!

Pylades: Orestes, wake up. You are having a nightmare.

Orestes: I am so grateful for you, Pylades.