

# A Noise Within Study Guide

# Phaedra



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# About this Study Guide



Thank you for your commitment to sharing great literature with your students. It is a commitment that A Noise Within has shared with you since its founding in 1991, with the staging of its first play, William Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.



Classical works are an important part of our collective culture and history, and unless students are given the opportunity to read historical texts and to experience them live, as they were meant to be experienced, many will think of those written treasures as outdated words in a textbook anthology. With the goal of increasing student's lifelong understanding and enjoyment of classic works and theatre going, A Noise Within is honored to partner with you in the effort to preserve our literary heritage.

This study guide has been prepared as a prelude to A Noise Within's production of *Phaedra*. Please use it as a reference or as a teaching aid as you prepare your students to enter the classical world.

If your high school students are attending A Noise Within's performance of *Phaedra* and are participating in the post-performance discussion, they are fulfilling the following of California's Theatre Standards, as set forth by the State Board of Education:

- Theatre Standards grades 9 – 12
- Artistic Perception – 1.1 and 1.2
- Creative Expression – 2.1
- Historical and Cultural Context – 3.2 and 3.3
- Aesthetic Valuing – 4.1 and 4.2

All of the information and activities outlined in this guide were designed to meet the 9th and 10th grade English language arts standards set forth by the state of California. Together, the activities fulfill the content standards as follows:

- English Language Arts
- Reading – 1.1, 1.3, 3.1, 3.2, 3.4, 3.5, 3.11 and 3.12
- Writing – 1.1, 1.4, 1.9 and 2.2
- Listening and Speaking – 1.1 and 1.11

Although these activities are designed specifically with the 9th and 10th grade standards in mind, they can be adapted to serve students in other grades as well.

# About the Play *People and Places in Phaedra*



## Characters

### Theseus

King of Athens. As a young man, he slew the Minotaur with the help of Ariadne, a Cretan princess. His love affair with Antiope, an Amazon warrior princess, resulted in a son, Hippolytus.

### Phaedra

Daughter of King Minos of Crete and Pasiphæe, sister of Ariadne, wife of Theseus.

### Hippolytus

Beautiful son of Theseus and Antiope.

### Aricia

A character invented by Racine, but who had mythological roots. Before Theseus could inherit the crown of Athens, he had to fight Aegeus' brother, Pallas, and all his children. These cousins would have inherited the throne of Athens, since Theseus grew up not knowing Aegeus was his father. Aricia is the only daughter and last remaining child of Pallas. Through her father, she is a rival for the throne of Athens, which is why Theseus has forbidden her to marry or have children.

### Theramenes

Tutor of Hippolytus.

### Oenone

Phaedra's nurse and confidante.

### Ismene

Aricia's confidante.

### Panope

Lady in waiting to Phaedra.

## Places mentioned in Racine's *Phaedra*

### Aegean Sea

The sea surrounding Greece

### Athens

The most beautiful and cultured city in ancient Greece. Theseus' reign began the first great period of Athenian democracy.

### Crete

The island home of Phaedra and her family. Before Theseus' reign, it was the most powerful kingdom in the Aegean Sea.

### Elis

A city near the site of the ancient Olympic games. Elis lies on the northwestern Peloponnese.

### Troezen

Childhood home of Theseus and part of the Athenian empire. Hippolytus has also grown up there. While Theseus was on his adventures, he moved his family from Athens to Troezen for their own protection.

# About the Play *Racine's Phaedra*



## Act I

Theseus, King of Athens, has disappeared during one of his expeditions and has been missing for nearly six months. Hippolytus tells his tutor, Theramenes, of his intention to search for his father. But this is not the real reason that he wishes to leave Troezen, where the court has been in residence. His father has forbidden him to marry, and he wishes to escape the charms of Aricia, with whom he is in love.

Oenone, Phaedra's nurse, announces her mistress, but Hippolytus, wishing to avoid a scene, leaves. The queen's behavior betrays her forbidden love for her step-son, Hippolytus. She wants to die, but the unexpected announcement of Theseus' death gives her renewed hope: with the death of her husband she has not sinned and is free to remarry. She immediately gives up her plan of suicide in order to arrange an alliance with Hippolytus against Aricia, to preserve her own son's right to the throne of Athens.

## Act II

Ismene, Aricia's confidante, announces Theseus' death to the girl and reveals her suspicion of Hippolytus' romantic feelings for Aricia. Aricia has fallen in love with Hippolytus. Hippolytus arrives, and they share their feelings with each other.

Phaedra enters with the intention of pleading for her son, but instead reveals her secret love. Devastated by Hippolytus' rejection, she takes a sword and tries to kill herself. As she rushes out, Theramenes comes in with news that Theseus may yet be alive. Hippolytus decides to investigate.

## Act III

In spite of her confession, Phaedra's hopes have been revived, and she begs Oenone to plead her case with Hippolytus. When she hears the news of Theseus' return, she again threatens suicide. Oenone comes up with a plan to save her mistress.

## Act IV

Oenone has accused Hippolytus of attempting to seduce Phaedra. Theseus is completely deceived. When Hippolytus appears, Theseus wonders at his innocent appearance and greets him with accusation, culminating in a prayer to Neptune. Hippolytus defends himself, but is rejected by Theseus. Meanwhile, Phaedra goes to Theseus to plead for Hippolytus, but becomes hysterical with jealousy when Theseus reveals to her that Hippolytus is in love with Aricia. Finally, she repents and rejects Oenone, the instigator of her treachery.

## Act V

Hippolytus decides to flee, refusing to clear his name, but he arranges to meet Aricia so that they may marry. Immediately after his departure, Theseus appears. Aricia stands up to him and defends Hippolytus' innocence. The king is taken aback. He calls for Oenone and is told that she has committed suicide. Theseus now believes in his son's innocence, but it is too late. Theramenes comes in with the news that Hippolytus has died. Phaedra arrives and clears Hippolytus, then dies of the effects of the poison she has taken earlier. Theseus vows to honor his son's name and to treat Aricia as his daughter.

# About the Play Mythological Background



## Phaedra, Theseus and Hippolytus—A Grecian Soap Opera

The Greeks believed that the gods had authority over the fortune of humans and that in order for salvation to occur, the gods had to be recognized or worshipped. The Greeks recognized the 12 the major gods: Zeus, Hera, Poseidon, Apollo, Artemis, Aphrodite, Ares, Hephaestus, Athena, Hermes, Dionysus and Demeter. In the mythological story of Phaedra, Theseus and Hippolytus, Aphrodite, the goddess of love, plays a large part in determining their fate.

The story of Phaedra, Theseus and Hippolytus stood as a warning to mortals of the mighty powers of Aphrodite. Phaedra was the daughter of King Minos of Crete and Pasiphae, and the younger sister of Ariadne. Pasiphae also bore the Minotaur as a result of a pairing with a bull sent to her by her lover Poseidon, god of the sea. King Minos kept the half-bull and half-human boy in a maze under his palace. In the time of King Minos, Greece was a subject of Crete, and every nine years seven young Athenian boys and seven Athenian girls were offered as food for the Minotaur. This was Minos' revenge, as his only son died had while carrying out a dangerous task on behalf of the Athenian King Aegeus. If this "payment" was not made, Minos would send his troops to destroy Athens.

Theseus was the son of Princess Aethra of Troezen, who was secretly married to King Aegeus of Athens. Theseus was an adventurous youth and decided to go to Crete to end the

terror of the Minotaur. With the help of Minos' daughter Ariadne, he was successful in his quest. Ariadne fell in love with him and fled with him as far as Naxos, where he abandoned her.

Theseus had made an agreement with his father, the King of Athens, that if he was successful in his quest to kill the Minotaur, he would sail back to Athens on a ship with white sails. In his excitement at returning home, Theseus forgot to change the color of his sails from black to white. When his father saw the black sails in the distance, he threw himself from the cliff into the sea in grief. The sea is called the Aegean Sea in his honor. Theseus, upon his arrival, became King of Athens. Theseus went on to defeat the Amazonians and married their queen, Antiope. She bore him a son, Hippolytus. Hippolytus was known for his beauty and perfect purity. He was devoted to Artemis, the virgin sister of Apollo and goddess of hunting.

Upon the death of Antiope, Theseus married Phaedra who bore him two sons: Acamas and Demophon. The couple settled on the island of Cyprus, which was the birthplace of Aphrodite, the goddess of love. An earlier affair with Poseidon had left Aphrodite embittered toward the sea god, and she never liked Theseus. She also resented Hippolytus because he worshipped another god. Using Phaedra as a pawn, Aphrodite plotted her revenge.

Phaedra was considerably younger than Theseus and saw in Hippolytus a young man closer to her age with all the attributes of his father. Aphrodite cast a spell on Phaedra, who became obsessed with Hippolytus and attempted to seduce him. Hippolytus rejected her advances. In order to get revenge, Phaedra told Theseus that his son made advances on her virtue and that he should be punished.

There are various versions of the story with differing ends for Hippolytus. In Euripedes' play *Hippolytus*, written in 428 BC, Hippolytus is killed by a bull sent by Poseidon at the request of Theseus. Virgil has Hippolytus saved from the bull by Artemis and taken to safety. In another version, Hippolytus is put to death, but Theseus finds out the truth and reconciles with his son before he dies. In yet another version, Dionysus punishes Hippolytus by sending a wild bull which terrifies the horses, pulling Hippolytus from his chariot dragging him to his death. In each of the versions, Phaedra commits suicide out of remorse for what she has done.

Hippolytus was restored to life and lived in a holy forest where he was worshipped under the name of Virbius. He became a hero and his cult was associated with Aphrodite with whom he shared a shrine on the Acropolis. The site of his death was a place of pilgrimage for young girls about to be married.

# About the Author



## Jean Racine

(Dec 22, 1639 – Apr 21, 1699)

JEAN BAPTISTE RACINE was born in La Ferté-Milon, a small town near Soissons, France. He was raised by his grandparents, who were members of a reform movement within the Roman Catholic Church known as Jansenism. The central beliefs of the Jansenist sect were the denial of free will, predestination and the need for divine grace for salvation. Although Racine received a classical education, he was greatly influenced by the beliefs of this sect. Many of his works combine the Greek idea of fate with the Jansenist belief in human frailty.

In 1658, Racine went to Paris to study philosophy at the Collège de Harcourtin. While there, he befriended Molière and the poet Boileau and abandoned his spiritual interests for the delights and ambitions of the secular world. Like many of his contemporaries, he followed the custom of dedicating poems to potential patrons. His marriage ode for Louis XIV and Marie-Thérèse of Spain, *La Nymphé de la Seine*, written in 1660, gained him his initial notoriety.

His first play, *Amasie*, was written in 1660, and the next year he wrote *Les Amours d'Ovide* (*The Loves of Ovid*) for the famous Hôtel de Bourgogne. Both plays have been lost, but these early attempts at playwriting exposed Racine to the theatre for the first time.

His career as a playwright was the cause of a rift with his family. Not only was he working as a poet and playwright, but through his career choice he associated with theatre people, which was against Jansenist doctrine. In 1660, he wrote to a friend, "I keep getting every day letter after letter, or to put it better, excommunication after excommunication, on

account of my unlucky sonnet." (referring to a poem on Mazarin that had since been lost). In 1661, his uncle invited him to take up an ecclesiastical post in Uzes. While there he wrote *La Thébaïde* (*The Thebans*). Although he did not really aspire to a career in the church, he did experience many things that appeared in his later works as a dramatist. The rift between Racine and his family continued to widen during his time in Uzes. He wrote to a cousin, "It is quite enough to be playing the hypocrite here, without playing it in Paris, too, by correspondence; for I call it hypocrisy to be writing letters when you can talk about nothing but devotion and do nothing else, then recommend yourself to people's prayers. It's not that I don't need them badly. But I wish people would say them for me, without my being obliged to ask them so often to say them. If God grants that I become a prior, I'll say as many prayers for others as they have said for me." Soon after this letter, Racine left for Paris, giving up any attempt at a life in the church.

In Paris, Racine devoted his time to writing plays and to meeting powerful people. By 1663, he had written two more sonnets to the King: *Ode Sur la Convalescence du Roi* (*Ode on the King's Convalescence*) and *La Renommée aux Muses* (*The Goddess Fame Speaks to the Muses*).

In 1664, *La Thébaïde* was performed by Molière's company at the Comédie Française, followed by *Alexandre le Grand* (*Alexander the Great*) in December of 1665. Racine gave permission for a rival company, Hôtel de Bourgogne, to perform *Alexander* in the same month, on the grounds that he was not satisfied with the original production and the

Hôtel de Bourgogne had a higher reputation for staging tragedy. Following this betrayal, Molière never spoke to Racine again. Racine's subsequent plays: *Andromache* (1667), *Les Plaideurs* (1668), *Bérénice* (1670), *Bajazed* (1672), *Mithridate* (1673) and *Phèdre* (1677) were performed by the Hôtel de Bourgogne.

During this production of *Andromache* in 1667, Racine began a relationship with the Marquise du Parc, who was his mistress until her death a year later. Racine's next affair, with the famous actress la Champmeslé, continued until his break with the theatre. La Champmeslé originated the roles of Bérénice, Roxane, Monime, Iphigénie and Phèdre.

Following *Phèdre*, Racine decided to change his life. He ended his affair with la Champmeslé, cut all ties with the commercial theatre, ended relationships with his theatrical friends and reconciled with the Jansenists at

Port Royal. He married Catherine de Romanet, a pious young woman who had never been exposed to the theatre, and became the father of two sons and five daughters, most of whom went into the church.

Racine was appointed royal historiographer and accompanied the king on his military campaigns.

His final plays, *Esther* (1689) and *Athalie* (1691), were commissioned by Louis XIV's wife. These were biblical tragedies written for the students of a girl's school, not the passionate works of earlier years.

Racine died on April 21, 1699 from cancer of the liver and was buried at Port Royal. In contrast to his earlier life, Racine died a pious and reverent man. His remains were eventually moved to Saint-Etienne-du-Mont in Paris.

## Jean Racine Timeline

### WORLD EVENTS RACINE'S LIFE

1638 Birth of Louis, Dauphin of France	1658 Racine in Paris	1665 <i>Alexander the Great</i> written	Racine marries Catherine de Romanet	1687 On campaign with King
1639 English Civil war Birth of Racine	1660 Monarchy brought back to England <i>Amasie</i> written	1666 Great Fire of London	Named Royal Historiographer	1689 <i>Esther</i> written
1643 Louis XIV proclaimed King Racine's mother dies	1661 <i>Les Amours d'Ovide</i> written Racine considers career in the church	1667 <i>Andromache</i> written	1678 Son, Jean Baptiste born Accompanies King on Siege of Ypres	1691 <i>Athalie</i> written On campaign with King
1649 Charles I of England beheaded England becomes a commonwealth Grandfather dies Racine sent to College de Beauvais	1663 Royal sonnets	1668 <i>Les Plaideurs</i> written	1682 La Salle explores Mississippi river and claims Louisiana for France	1692 Salem Witch Trials in Massachusetts Son Louis born On campaign with King
1655 Racine goes to school in Port Royal	1664 British troops capture New Amsterdam and rename it New York <i>La Thébäide</i> performed by Moliere's company	1669 <i>Britannicus</i> written	Peter the Great becomes joint ruler of Russia	1693 On campaign with King
		1670 <i>Bérénice</i> written	1683 On campaign with King	1699 Racine dies
		1672 <i>Bajazed</i> written		
		1673 <i>Mithridate</i> written		
		1677 <i>Phèdre</i> written		

# Performance Practice



## Theatrical Performance in 17th Century France

During the reign of Louis XIV, between 1643 and 1715, the arts thrived. The king was a patron of many writers, artists and musicians, including Molière, Racine and Lully. By supporting such artists, Louis ensured his security as absolute monarch. The arts were primarily used as a part of the propaganda machine.

In 17th century Paris, theatrical performances were given both in public theatres and at court. During the 54-year reign of Louis XIV, 1,200 tragedies were performed at court. French theatre in the 17th century was dominated by Pierre Corneille, Molière and Jean Racine. Actually, theatrical repertoire at the French court consisted primarily of the works of those playwrights, right up until the French Revolution in 1789.

Unlike England, France did not have a restriction on women performing on stage, but the career of acting for either sex was considered immoral by the Catholic church. Actors were excommunicated from the church and even refused last rites on their deaths. In order to get around this, however, actors had fantastic stage names that typically described their roles or characters.

By the end of the century, the public's enthusiasm for tragedy had lessened. Theatrical tragedy paled in comparison to the economic problems of the time, and comedic plays now included moral messages.

### French Public Theatres

The early theatres in Paris were often existing structures, like tennis courts, as their rectangular shape and open floor with side

galleries made them ideal for conversion into permanent or temporary theatres. Stages were narrow, and there were little or no areas for scenery changes. In the early part of the 17th century, performances took place twice a week starting at 2 or 3pm. The presentation often consisted of several works: a comic prologue, then a tragedy, then a farce, and then a song to end it. Nobles sat on the side of the stage. Because there were no such things as house lights, the audience was always aware of each other, and spectators could be noisy during performances. The place directly in front of the stage, called the parterre, did not have seats and was reserved for men only. These were the cheapest seats. Elegant people watched from the galleries. Prior to 1630, honest women did not attend the theatre.

### The Hôtel de Bourgogne

The first public theatre in Paris was the Hôtel de Bourgogne. Built by the members of la Confrérie de la Passion in 1548 as a place to stage religious dramas, it was located in the historical market center of the city. The long, narrow (40' x 96') structure (with a 33' deep platform stage) occupied the second floor of what had been the town house of the Duke of Burgundy. Unfortunately, just a few years after it was completed, the king passed a law forbidding the public performance of religious drama. As recompense, the Confrérie were granted a monopoly over the public performance of other types of drama in the city. As a result, all theatrical companies wishing to give performances in Paris had to rent the Hôtel de Bourgogne. The Confrérie retained their monopoly until the Théâtre du Marais opened in 1634.

### Palais Cardinal

The Palais Cardinal was built by Cardinal Richelieu (1585-1642) as his Parisian home. Located in the heart of Paris, just a short distance from the Louvre, the Palais Cardinal was under construction throughout the height of Richelieu's career. Its large theatre, completed just before his death, was the best-equipped performance space in the city. It was the first proscenium theatre in Paris. Richelieu left his palace and its theatre to the royal family upon his death, and it was renamed Palais Royal. It changed hands and was refurbished several times, but it remained a pre-eminent performance site for more than 100 years. Molière's plays were performed here between 1661 and 1673. After 1673, the theatre became the site of the Paris Opéra under the management of Molière's nemesis, Jean-Baptiste Lully.

### Théâtre du Marais

The Théâtre du Marais, located in the fashionable Marais district, was permanently converted from a tennis court into a theatre in 1634. The building burned down in 1644, and its successful resident troupe financed an extensive remodeling. The new theatre was larger in capacity and more elegant than its closest rival, the Hôtel de Bourgogne.

### Hôtel du Guénégaud

The Hôtel du Guénégaud was also a converted tennis court. After Molière's death in 1673, Lully succeeded in getting the remaining actors of his troupe evicted from the Palais Royal theatre, and Molière's troupe moved to the Hôtel du Guénégaud. Not much is known about the interior design of this theatre, but it was originally intended as a space for opera. It was the first major theatre space on the left bank of the Seine, and it flourished between 1673 and 1680. It was the first site of the Comédie Française. In 1689, Louis XIV united the Hôtel de Bourgogne and the Hotel Guénégaud into one official troupe.

### Théâtre Français

This theatre was built to house the Comédie Française in 1689, replacing the Hôtel du Guénégaud. Once again, the building was a converted tennis court, yet remodeled to house a horseshoe-shaped auditorium. This continued to be the site of the performances of the Comédie Française for the rest of the seventeenth and for much of the eighteenth centuries.

### The "Rules" of French Theatre

Most scripted plays in the 17th Century were written in verse. Notable exceptions were some of the comedies of Molière. The meter used was a 12 syllable line (the Alexandrine) with a pause after the sixth syllable. Lines were put into rhymed couplets. Couplets alternated between "feminine" (ending in a mute 'e') and masculine (ending in a vowel other than a mute 'e' or in a consonant or nasal) rhymes.

During the reign of Louis XIII, a scheme to organize cultural patronage and uniformity was founded—the Académie Française. This group of 40 learned men was formed in 1637 and patterned after the Italian academies. The mission of the Académie Française was to "fix the French language, give it rules and make it pure and comprehensible by all." The Academie established five rules for neoclassical, dramatic structure.

- Anything that happens on stage must be able to happen in real life
- Every drama must preach a moral lesson by showing that good will be rewarded and that evil will be punished
- There can be no mixing of dramatic styles—a play is either a comedy or tragedy, but not a tragicomedy
- A play must observe the three unities\*
- A drama must be divided into five acts

Soliloquies were not allowed in neoclassical, French drama, because they were not considered to be realistic.

A tragedy had to draw its characters from the nobility. The plot must deal with affairs of state (i.e. who will be the next king) and the ending must be tragic (people die). The dialogue must be poetic.

### \*The Unities

Aristotle, in his work *Poetics*, outlined the format for a tragedy. Both the French and the Italians took their theatrical formats from this.

The Unity of Action – A play should have one main action that it follows, with no or few subplots.

The Unity of Place – A play should cover a single, physical space. The stage should not represent more than one place.

The Unity of Time – A play should represent an action that takes approximately the same amount of time as the play.

### Scenery and Lighting

The theatre at the Palais Royal was lit by six, grand chandeliers and by rows of candles at the front of the stage. Scenery was lit from the sides by candles. In a painting in the collection at the Comédie Française, Molière the actor plays on a stage lit by six chandeliers, each with twelve candles, and thirty-four candles at the front of the stage.

Large chandeliers, similar to those onstage were hung in the auditorium. In addition to lighting the auditorium, these chandeliers enhanced the lighting of the downstage area. A row of footlights was placed at the edge of the stage, adding more light to the faces of the actors.

Inventory lists of the day provide us with detailed information about the types and quantity of candles used in theatres, informing us that more candles were used in the auditorium than on the stage itself.



# Famous Phaedras



Phaedra is a coveted role for many actresses. Throughout history, many notable women have played this role to great acclaim.

## La Champmeslé (1641-1698)

Marie Desmares was born in Rouen and began her career with a provincial theatre troupe. Her beauty and voice endeared her to audiences. She was a young widow when she met the actor Charles Chevillet, known as Monsieur de Champmeslé. La Champmeslé became famous for her harmonious voice and musical declamation. Reciting dramatic verse was governed by strict rules, and she excelled at her art. By 1668, both she and her husband were members of the Comédiens du Roi, and performed at the Théâtre du Marais. In 1670, they joined the Hôtel de Bourgogne, where she took on the great roles of Racine, who became her lover. She originated the title roles of Bérénice (1670), Iphigénie (1674), Phèdre (1677) and Monime in *Mithradate* (1673). She left the Hôtel for the amalgamated Molière-Marais company, which formed the core of what was to become the Comédie Française, where she performed until her death.

## Adrienne Lecouvreur (1692-1730)

Adrienne Couvreur was born in the little village of Damery, near Rheims. A natural elocutionist, by the age of ten she had begun to learn and recite poems. When she was thirteen, her father moved them to Paris, where she was placed in a humble school in a humble part of the city. Under her influence (very mature for one so young), a number of children and young people formed themselves into a theatrical company purely for the love of acting. A local grocer let them have an empty store-room for their performances, and it was here that Adri-

enne first acted in a tragedy by Corneille. She had never been inside of any theatre, nor had she any training in the rudiments of theatre, yet she delivered her lines like a professional.

At first, only the neighborhood knew about these amateur performances, but one day a noble lady, Mme. de Gue, attended and was fascinated by the young Adrienne. Mme. de Gue offered the use of the courtyard of her own house as a theatre for the young group, and soon Adrienne became famous with the nobility, as well as with actors from the Comédie Française. She excited so much jealousy among the actors of the Comédie Française that they evoked the law against her. Theatres required a royal license, and Adrienne's company did not have one. Legal proceedings began, and the company went into the precincts of the temple, where legal warrants could not be served. Eventually, this group of actors broke up. Adrienne, now fifteen, would have been happy to perform at one of the Paris' theatres, but they were closed to her through jealousy. She went into the provinces, where she was a leading lady in several companies for about a decade.

For all of her professional success, she led a very unhappy life. She had two children, but never married, although she was the recipient of many proposals. Finally, in 1717, at the age of twenty-five she became a member of the Comédie Française and an instant celebrity.

She began a nine-year affair with Maurice, Comte de Saxe (the son of the future king of Poland). A rival for Maurice's affections, the Duchesse de Bouillon, resolved to humiliate Adrienne and to do it in the theatre. During a gala performance of Racine's *Phaedra*, the duchesse sent a large number of her servants to hiss and jeer and to try to break off the play. The duchesse sat in on the performance



in order to watch her rival and gloat over her discomfort. When the performance began, Adrienne knew that a plot was afoot. She moved to the front of the stage and faced her enemy saying:

“I am not of those women void of shame,  
when savoring in crime the joys of peace,  
Harden their faces till they cannot blush!”

The whole house rose to their feet in support of Adrienne. The duchesse hurried from the theatre.

Not long after this incident, Adrienne was acting in one of Voltaire's plays when she suddenly collapsed in pain. Four days later, she died of apparent poisoning (poisoning was common, especially if one wanted to eliminate a rival). Maurice was with her at her death, as was a Jesuit priest who declined to administer last rites unless she repented of her theatrical career. She refused, since she believed that to be the greatest actress of her time was not a sin. Her life and death was the subject of a play by Eugène Scribe, and an opera by Francesco Cilea.

### **Sarah Bernhardt** (1844 – 1923)

Renowned for her silvery voice, commanding presence, wide emotional range and unconventional behavior on and off stage, the “divine Sarah” was the greatest French actress of the 19th century and one of the best-known figures in stage history. Henriette Rosine Bernhardt entered the Conservatoire de Paris at the age of sixteen. In 1862, she made her debut at the Comédie Française. She had her first success in 1869 at the Théâtre de l’Odeon in

François Coppee's *La Passant*. Back at the Comédie Française in 1872 she was a triumph in Racine's *Phèdre* (a role she performed frequently up until 1914). In addition to other notable roles, she performed the title role in *Hamlet* in 1899 and *La Dame aux Camélias* by Dumas fils. After forming her own traveling theatre company, she became internationally famous. At the age of 70, she had her leg amputated, but refused to abandon the stage, playing parts she could act while seated. 600,000 paid their respect to her upon her death in 1923. Her funeral cortege consisted of five hearses, decked with white camellias.

### **Maria Casares** (1922 – 1996)

Born in Spain, Maria Casares' family moved to Paris in 1936 at the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. She enrolled at the Paris Conservatoire and soon became a leading lady at the Comédie Française.

Following on her stage success, she began to receive film offers and had a thriving film career in the 1940s and early 1950s. During the 50s and 60s, she concentrated on her stage career. Her performance as Jeanne d'Arc at the Comédie Française in 1952 won her great acclaim. By the mid 1950s she had switched to the Théâtre National Populaire, where her performances of *Phaedra* and *Medea* made her a national treasure. These productions formed the base of the company's tour to London and New York.

She continued to act on stage and in films until 1995.

# Discussion Questions



## Questions for before the performance

- 1) How do we know from the beginning that Phaedra is unhappy?
- 2) How does the structure of Racine's play fulfill the "rules" of French tragedy?
- 3) This play was written by Racine in 1677 for French audiences, from a Greek play by Euripides based on mythological characters. How are the themes in the play (obsession, betrayal and honor) relevant to today's audiences?
- 4) What role do the gods play in what happens to the characters in Racine's *Phaedra*?
- 5) What is your definition of 'honor', and why is it important in our lives?

## Questions for after the performance

- 1) How did the production of *Phaedra* at A Noise Within differ from what you expected? How was it the same?
- 2) Were you able to interpret any scenes or lines differently because of how the actors represented the characters? How?
- 3) How did you feel about the character of Phaedra during the play?
- 4) How did you feel about Hippolytus throughout the play?
- 5) What was the high point of the play?
- 6) After seeing the performance, has your definition of 'honor' changed?

# Classroom Exercises

## Translating a text

How does a translator go about working on a text? This exercise starts with Racine's original French text and shows how different translators have adapted it. Have your students try to adapt their version using the examples here. In this scene from Act II, Scene ii, Hippolytus is declaring his love to Aricia:

Racine:

Moi, vous hair, Madame?  
Avec quelques couleurs qu'on ait peint  
Ma tierte,  
Croit-on que dans ses flancs un  
monstre  
M'ait porte ?  
Quelles sauvages mœurs, quelle haine  
Endurcie  
Pourrait, en voyant, n'être point  
Adoucie ?  
Ai-je pu résister au charme décevant.

RICHARD WILBUR'S TRANSLATION:

Hate you, Princess? No, not I.  
I'm counted rough and proud, but  
don't assume  
That I'm the issue of some monster's  
womb.  
What hate-filled heart, what brute  
however wild  
Could look upon your face and not  
grow mild?  
Could I withstand your sweet,  
beguiling spell?

WILLIAM PACKARD'S TRANSLATION  
(1966):

Madam, could I hate you?  
No matter what they say or how they  
Paint my pride,  
Do they suppose some beast once  
Carried me inside?  
What mind that is unkind, what heart  
That may be hard,

In viewing you, would not grow soft  
In its regard?  
Could any man resist the charm of  
What you are?

A.S. KLINE'S TRANSLATION (2003)

I hate you, Madame, how so?  
Despite those colours in which they  
paint my pride,  
Can they think a monster brought be  
to the light?

What savage manners, what hardened  
hatred  
Would not, on seeing you, be wholly  
softened?  
Could I have resisted the seductive  
charm?

YOUR TRANSLATION:

RULES FOR WRITING IN THE STYLE  
OF RACINE

### Meter

The meter used was a 12 syllable line (the alexandrine) with a pause after the sixth syllable.

Lines were put into rhymed couplets. Couplets alternated between "feminine" (ending in a mute 'e') and masculine (ending in a vowel other than a mute 'e' or in a consonant or nasal) rhymes.

### Rules for dramatic structure

- Anything that happens on stage must be able to happen in real life,
- Every drama must preach a moral lesson by showing that good will be rewarded and that evil will be punished
- There can be no mixing of dramatic styles—a play is either a comedy or tragedy, but not a tragicomedy
- A play must observe the three unities of action, place and time (see below)
- A drama must be divided into five acts
- Soliloquies are not allowed
- Characters must be from the nobility
- Plot has to deal with affairs of state
- Ending must be tragic

### The Unities

- The Unity of Action – A play should have one main action that it follows, with no or few subplots.
- The Unity of Place – A play should cover a single, physical space. The stage should not represent more than one place.
- The Unity of Time – A play should represent an action that takes approximately the same amount of time as the play.

Exercise: Have students write a piece using the above rules.

## Dancing at the Court of Louis XIV

Louis XIV loved to dance. Indeed, many of the plays and operas written during his reign contain dances. At court, dances such as the allemande, bourée, courante, gavotte, gigue, minuet and sarabande were extremely popular. Every man and woman of breeding knew how to dance well. Dancing masters were employed by the wealthy to teach their children who would learn all the important dances at a very young age.

Much of what we know of French court dances emanates from a book written in 1588 by Thoinot Arbeau, in which he outlines the steps of various French social dances as well as gives clues about dance styles. This treatise, *Orchésographie*, contains illustrations as well as rules on etiquette and behaviour. Another book, written in 1700 by Raoul-Auger Feuillet, *Choregraphie; ou l'art de decrier la danse* illustrated floor patterns used in popular dances.

The Pavane was a dance that originated in the late 16th century. The *pavane*, or Peacock Dance was used as a processional to open a ball. The dance got its name from the movement of the ladies' trains spread out like the tail of a peacock. This social dance gave ladies and gentlemen the opportunity to show off their finest ball clothes and jewels as they processed around the ballroom.

Observations from the period suggest that men wore their cape and sword and women walked with a grave air with their eyes lowered in a demure fashion. The movement of the pavane is very slow; it was essential that steps were executed in a graceful and dignified manner. While the dancers were serious, the pavane was the opening of an evening of merriment, and so there was underlying excitement and anticipation.

### Directions for the Pavane

At the head of the room is "The Presence" or the king and queen. Partner your students up at the opposite end of the room and have them process in using a pavane. Couples are arranged according to status with those of the highest rank at the head of the line. At the beginning of the dance, ladies and gentlemen bow or curtsy to each other—this is known as *révérence*. When they reach The Presence, men should bow and ladies should curtsy to The Presence.

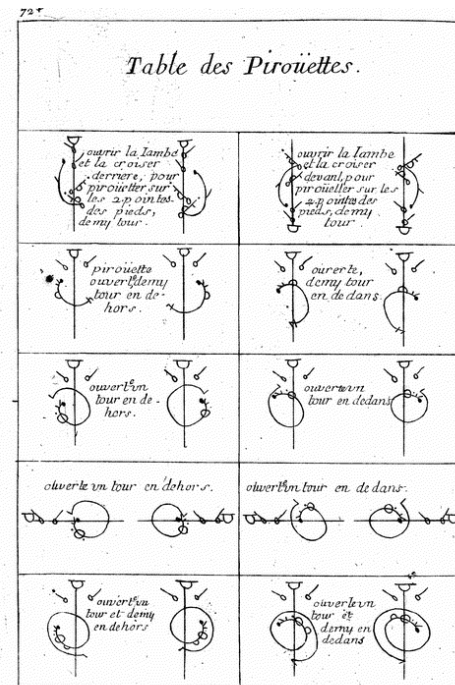
The pavane is danced in duple meter with two steps: simples (single steps) and doubles (double steps). Arms should be gently rounded, shoulders set back. The gentleman should hold the lady's left hand at waist level.

### SIMPLE STEP:

1st bar (2 counts) One step forward with the left foot for the first bar.

2nd bar (2 counts) Bring the right foot up beside the left. Do not put weight on the right foot.

3rd & 4th bars (four counts) perform a simple step beginning with the right foot.



A page from Feuillet's book, *Choregraphie; ou l'art de decrier la danse*



### DOUBLE STEP

- 1st bar (2 counts) Step forward with left foot.
- 2nd bar (2 counts) Step forward with the right foot.
- 3rd bar (2 counts) Step forward with the left foot.
- 4th bar (2 counts) Place right foot beside the left with the heels together.

The sequence of the dance consists of two simples and one double forward and two simples and one double backward. When dancers find themselves at the end of the room and don't want to move backward, they should do a *conversion*.

To do a conversion, dancers turn and face the opposite direction when dancing the double. The gentleman moves backward with tiny steps while the lady moves around the gentleman until they face the opposite direction from where they started. The conversion made it easier for the lady to see where she was going as the dresses that they wore were voluminous and had trains. Arbeau states, "If she were to meet with some hindrance while moving backwards she might fall, a mishap for which you (the gentleman) would receive the blame and suffer a rapid decline in her good graces."

### Music for Pavanes

Pavanes were played on musical instruments known as hautbois (a double reed instrument which evolved into what we know today as the oboe) and sackbuts (eventually evolved into the trombone).

### Musical Suggestions:

- *Pavane pour le Roi* by Eustache de Caurroy
- *Pavane to the Earl of Salisbury* by William Byrd
- *Pavane in D* by John Dowland

We do not dance the pavane today; however, vestiges of it can be found when we process in graduation or marriage ceremonies.

## Phaedra in Literature and Music

The story of Phaedra has been the subject of several great works:

- Euripedes, *Hippolytus*, a Greek play
- Seneca, *Phaedra*, a Latin play
- Jean Racine, *Phaedra* (1677), a French play
- Robinson Jeffers, *Cawdor* (1928), an English poem
- *Phaedra* (1962), movie starring Melina Mercouri and Anthony Perkins
- Benjamin Britten, *Phaedra* (1976), an opera in English
- Per Olav Enquist, *Till Fedra* (1980), a Swedish play
- Sarah Kane, *Phaedra's Love* (1996), an English play
- Matthew Maguire, *Phaedra* (1995), an English play

# About Theatre Arts



## Being an Audience Member

Today, movies and television take audiences away from what was once the number one form of entertainment: going to the theatre. But attending a live performance is still one of the most thrilling and active forms of spending time. In a theatre, observers are catapulted into the action, especially at an intimate venue like *A Noise Within*, whose thrust stage reaches out into the audience and whose actors can see, hear, and feel the response of the crowd. Although in the past playhouses could sometimes be rowdy, today participating in the performance by giving respect and attention to the actors is the most appropriate behavior at a theatrical performance. Shouting out or even whispering can be heard throughout the auditorium, as can rustling paper or ringing phones.

After *A Noise Within*'s performance of *Phaedra*, you will have the opportunity to discuss the play's content and style with the performing artists and directors. You may wish to remind students to observe the performance carefully or to compile questions ahead of time so they are prepared to participate in the discussion.

## Theatre Vocabulary

These terms will be included in pre- and post-performance discussions at *A Noise Within*.

**blocking:** The instructions a director gives his actors that tell them how and where to move in relation to each other or to the set in a particular scene.

**character:** The personality or part portrayed by an actor on stage.

**conflict:** The opposition of people or forces which causes the play's rising action.

**dramatic irony:** A dramatic technique used by a writer in which a character is unaware of something the audience knows.

**genre:** Literally, "kind" or "type." In literary terms, genre refers to the main types of literary form, principally comedy and tragedy. It can also refer to forms that are more specific to a given historical era, such as the revenge tragedy, or to more specific sub-genres of tragedy and comedy such as the comedy of manners, farce or social drama.

**motivation:** The situation or mood which initiates an action. Actors often look for their "motivation" when they try to dissect how a character thinks or acts.

**props:** Items carried on stage by an actor to represent objects mentioned in or implied by the script. Sometimes the props are actual, sometimes they are manufactured in the theatre shop.

**proscenium stage:** There is usually a front curtain on a proscenium stage. The audience views the play from the front through a "frame" called the proscenium arch. In this scenario, all audience members have the same view of the actors.

**set:** The physical world created on stage in which the action of the play takes place.

**setting:** The environment in which a play takes place. It may include the historical period as well as the physical space.

**stage areas:** The stage is divided into areas to help the director to note where action will take place. Upstage is the area furthest from the audience. Downstage is the area closest to the audience. Center stage defines the middle of the playing space. Stage left is the actor's left as he faces the audience. Stage right is the actor's right as he faces the audience.

**theme:** The overarching message or main idea of a literary or dramatic work. A recurring idea in a play or story.

**thrust stage:** A stage that juts out into the audience seating area so that patrons are seated on three sides. In this scenario, audience members see the play from varying viewpoints. *A Noise Within* features a thrust stage.

## Theatre Lore

### *Why do actors say “break a leg”?*

Perhaps the saying comes—in a complicated way—from the use of “leg.” In theatre, a “leg” is a part of the mechanics that open and close the curtain. To break a leg is to earn so many curtain calls that opening and closing the curtain over and over during final applause causes the curtain mechanics to break.

At the outset of theatre tradition, players acted outdoors, where there were no stages or curtains. Applause came in the form of foot stomping, which could indicate another origin of this phrase.

### *Why is it bad luck to say “Macbeth” inside the theatre?*

There are many origins for this superstition. Old actors believe the witches’ song in *Macbeth* to possess the uncanny power of casting evil spells. The reasons for this fear usually bring tales of accidents and ill-fortunes that have plagued productions of the play throughout the world.

An alternative is that the superstition began in the days of stock companies, which would struggle to remain in business. Frequently, near the end of a season, a company would realize it was not going to break even, and, in an attempt to boost ticket sales, would announce the production of a crowd favorite: *Macbeth*. If times were particularly bad, the play would frequently be a portent of the company’s demise.

### *What is a ghost light?*

There is a superstition that if an emptied theater is ever left completely dark, a ghost will take up residence. In other versions of the same superstition the ghosts of past performances return to the stage to live out their glory moments. To prevent this, a single light called a ghost light is left burning at center stage after the audience and all of the actors and musicians have gone.

Now, those in the world of theatre know that a “dark” theatre is one without a play. There is nothing sadder to a dramatic artist than an empty house and a playless stage. Therefore, a light is left burning center stage so that the theatre is never “dark;” it is simply awaiting the next production.

### *What is a raked stage? Where do the terms upstage and downstage originate?*

Historically, stages were built on inclines, with the backs of the stages slightly higher than the fronts. The incline was called a rake and helped those in the back of the audience see the action onstage. Eventually, theatres started placing seats on inclines instead of stages, but the terminology stuck. Downstage is the front of the stage, closest to the audience, and upstage is the back of the stage. Some theatres, like A Noise Within, still participate in the tradition of using raked stages.

### *Why are actors called thespians?*

In the sixth century B.C., a Greek chorus performer named Thespis was the first person in history to step away from the chorus and speak by himself, exchanging dialogue with the group and impersonating a character instead of simply reciting a story as the chorus had done before then.

# About A Noise Within



A Noise Within's mission is to produce the great works of world drama in rotating repertory, with a company of professional, classically-trained actors. *A Noise Within* educates the public through comprehensive outreach efforts and conservatory training programs that foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of history's greatest plays and playwrights.

As the only company in southern California working in the repertory tradition (rotating productions using a resident ensemble of professional, trained artists), *A Noise Within* is dedicated solely to producing classical literature from authors such as Shakespeare, Molière, Ibsen, Shaw, and Euripedes.

The company was formed in 1991 by founders Geoff Elliott and Julia Rodriguez-Elliott, both of whom were classically trained at the acclaimed American Conservatory Theatre in San Francisco. They envisioned *A Noise Within* after recognizing a lack of professional, classical productions and education in Southern California and sought out and assembled their own company of actors to meet the need. All of *A Noise Within's* resident artists have been classically

trained, and many hold Master of Fine Arts degrees from some of the nation's most respected institutions, such as Juilliard, Yale, and the American Conservatory Theatre. In its fourteen-year history, *A Noise Within* has garnered over 500 awards and commendations, including the Los Angeles Drama Critics' Circle's revered Polly Warfield Award for Excellence and the coveted Margaret Hartford Award for Sustained Excellence.

In 2004, *A Noise Within* accepted an invitation to collaborate with the Los Angeles Philharmonic for a tandem performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the Hollywood Bowl.

More than 25,000 individuals attend productions at *A Noise Within*, annually, and between performances at the theatre and touring productions, the company draws 13,000 student participants to its arts education programs every year. Students benefit from in-school workshops, conservatory training, and an internship program, as well as subsidized tickets to matinee and evening performances, discussions with artists, and state standards-compliant study guides.

## A Noise Within Study Guide

Written by Dawn Kellogg  
Edited by Autumn Hilden  
Production Photography by Craig Schwartz  
Graphic Design by Christopher Komuro

**A Noise Within**  
California's Classical Theatre Company

Geoff Elliott & Julia Rodriguez Elliott, Artistic Directors  
Administrative Office: 234 S. Brand Blvd., Glendale, CA 91204  
Administration: Tel (818) 240-0910 / FAX (818) 240-0826  
Website: [www.anoisewithin.org](http://www.anoisewithin.org)  
Box Office: (818) 240-0910 ext.1

## Resources for teachers

The following is a list of resources used in the creation of this guide. They may prove helpful as you prepare your students to encounter the complexities of *Phaedra*.

### AVAILABLE ONLINE

Holt, Ardern. How to dance the revived ancient dances from *An American Ballroom Companion*.

Kiger, Jennifer. *The Enigma of a Legend: Jean Racine*

Williford, Christa. *Playhouses of 17th Century Paris*

### FURTHER SUGGESTED READING

*The Concise Oxford Companion to the Theatre*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1993.

Mansel, Philip. *Dressed to Rule – Royal & Court Costume from Louis XIV to Elizabeth II*. Yale University Press, 2005.

Tollini, F. P. *Scene Design at the Court of Louis XIV: the work of the Vigarani Family and Jean Berain*. Edwin Miller Press, 2003.