

# **24 EXCITING PLAYS FOR ANCIENT HISTORY CLASSES**

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# To the Teacher

These 24 plays were written to involve students in the “drama” of ancient history. They are not meant to replicate the dialogue of historical persons. Rather, these plays, set in various historical epochs, reflect what characters from ancient history *might* have said. While some of the plays may seem more mythological than factually historical, they are based on literature of the period and do reflect the concerns and attitudes of the time. As the teacher you can choose whether or not to use certain plays, or to use them to prompt a discussion of the difference between history and myth. While the plays may be produced for an audience, they are designed primarily for reading. Each reading should take between 10 and 15 minutes. The following suggestions may help you incorporate these plays into your ancient-history curriculum.

1. Use the plays during the middle or end of the unit.
2. Run off one complete copy of the appropriate play for each student in your class, plus 10 (for future reserves). If possible, make two-sided copies to save paper. Alternatively, copy different plays on different-colored paper, so you can quickly tell if all your students are reading the right pages.
3. Assign roles as homework to a selected group. Tell this group that you expect their best possible oral reading. (Otherwise the reading can be dull.)
4. Have the nonparticipants silently read along, and assign them the task of writing down two new things they learned from the work. Also, remind them that their time to read will come.
5. If the play is to be produced, have students research period costumes and scenery. You and your students may decide as a group what works best concerning character entrances, exits, and positioning.
6. Have students write their own historical plays! Emphasize the need for comprehensive research and the necessity of choosing characters and scenes that elicit substantive dialogue.

# Problems of Early Peoples

## *Characters*

**SAGESSE**, a wise man  
**LORO**, his parrot  
**SKICK and DUG**,  
Sagesse's aides

**FANE and ORMILIG**,  
wanderers

## *Scene I: Under a large tree, somewhere in the Eastern Hemisphere, a long, long time ago.*

- SAGESSE:** Loro, look. Two visitors approach. Call Skick and Dug.
- LORO:** (*whistles*) Skick! Dug! We've got company. Real strange ones. Get your Polaroids ready.
- SKICK:** You called, oh Wise One?
- SAGESSE:** Yes. Please make our visitors feel welcome.
- DUG:** I don't think they can speak.
- LORO:** They're nothing but savages. Look how they pull their scraggly hair.
- SKICK:** What painful facial expressions they make.
- DUG:** What can this behavior mean?
- SAGESSE:** Chronic depression from miserable life-styles.
- LORO:** Send them both to psychiatrists.



- SKICK:** How absurd! Who could understand them?
- SAGESSE:** Good point, Skick. What they need is language.
- LORO:** And some strong deodorant and mouthwash!
- DUG:** Shut up, feather-head!
- SAGESSE:** Skick, Dug, accompany these two to my vacation condo. Return when they have learned language.
- SKICK:** Written, too?
- SAGESSE:** Of course. They'll need to take notes.

***Scene II: A few months later.***

- LORO:** (*whistles*) The hairy ones are back. Hope they both had good long baths.
- DUG:** Wise One, allow me to introduce Fane and Ormilig.
- SAGESSE:** Welcome. Now, what have you learned about them?
- DUG:** You were right. Both of them were very depressed. They left their people to find a better life.
- SAGESSE:** Be specific. What problems did they have?
- SKICK:** We've taught them much, and now they can speak for themselves.
- FANE:** Oh, Wise One, our lives were so hard.
- ORMILIG:** And *boring*!
- SAGESSE:** Tell us more.
- FANE:** The same food, raw and stringy meat, day after day after day . . . .



- ORMILIG:** And no safe and comfortable places to rest.
- LORO:** No problem. There's a Taco Bell next to a Motel 6 just beyond the sunset.
- SKICK:** Loro, ever heard of parrot soup?
- SAGESSE:** That's enough. We're here to solve problems, not create them. Now, think . . . . What could these people use?
- DUG:** A . . . a . . . . Fire!
- SKICK:** Makes the meat taste better, and keeps you warm. Plus, it scares away dangerous animals.
- SAGESSE:** Anything else? Wild game isn't always available.
- DUG:** A . . . a . . . . Berries! And other wild plants.
- SAGESSE:** Yes, but what can you do when you've picked them bare?
- SKICK:** Farming! Agriculture! We'll teach Fane and Ormilig all about planting and harvesting grain.
- DUG:** Of course . . . . And how to grind it into flour for making bread.
- LORO:** Yeah, and how to deep-fry it for doughnuts.
- FANE:** Sounds great. But there's more to life than eating.
- ORMILIG:** Right. We're tired of wearing these animal skins. They're hard to fit.
- FANE:** Yeah. And they're too stiff and hard.
- LORO:** Give them a Land's End catalog. They have some very stylish jackets.



- SKICK:** How about a parrot-feather suit?
- SAGESSE:** We can help in this matter, too. Dug can teach you all about sheep and their wool.
- DUG:** Certainly. But first I have to show them how to make sharp tools to shear off the wool. You get some copper and tin. Then you heat them together to make bronze . . . .
- LORO:** Going to the nearest hardware store would be much easier.
- SKICK:** And that's only a few thousand years away!
- SAGESSE:** How about planting cotton? After all, it "breathes." Skick, you can teach them.
- SKICK:** I suppose, but I hate all those seeds—takes forever to comb them out.
- LORO:** Call my friend Eli. It's long distance, but I know he can solve your seed problem.
- ORMILIG:** We need help moving things . . . large, heavy things . . . and lots of little things at one time. A person's only got two hands, and my feet and back sure get tired.
- SAGESSE:** Dug, you're the mechanical one.
- DUG:** Very simple. We make a cart and hook it to a strong, tame animal like a horse or ox. But first we have to make some wheels.
- LORO:** Be sure to make them round this time.
- DUG:** Loro, I'm going to make your neck one of the spokes if you don't knock off the wisecracks.
- SAGESSE:** These projects should keep you all very busy for some time.



- FANE:** Very true, and we're grateful for all your help. But as I previously stated, there's more to life than—
- SAGESSE:** The basic necessities of food, shelter, and clothing. Skick, you're the artistic one . . . .
- SKICK:** Thank you. Fane, Ormilig, I'll teach you how to express and communicate your deepest thoughts and feelings, how to entertain yourself and others.
- ORMILIG:** That would be great. Our only diversion is throwing rocks and sticks at each other. And they can hurt.
- LORO:** You need hockey helmets. How about baseball? Tennis, anyone?
- SKICK:** I'll teach you painting, music, dance, drama . . . .
- SAGESSE:** In time . . . . I think you're both ready to return to your people. Skick and Dug will accompany you and teach you these things where you live.
- FANE:** We would like that, but they cannot come with us. Our people would do them great harm.
- SAGESSE:** Why? Have they no laws? No peaceful order?
- ORMILIG:** None. It's every person for himself or herself. The strongest rule. Only those who submit survive.
- FANE:** That's another reason why we left.
- SAGESSE:** You and your people need justice and protection. That's what laws and government are for.
- LORO:** But watch out for politicians.
- ORMILIG:** What's that bird talking about?





- SAGESSE:** Oh, something that always seems to be put in civilization's bag. Upon further reflection, I think you need to spend a little more time here.
- LORO:** Yeah, so you can learn how to cope with marriage problems by watching *Divorce Court*.
- DUG:** Loro! That's enough! No potato chips for a week!



# Alexander the Great: Dream to the Winds

## *Characters*

**OLYMPIAS**, Alexander's  
mother

**ALEXANDER**

**LEONIDAS**, a tutor

**PHILIP**, Alexander's father

**ANTER**, a horse trainer

**ARISTOTLE**, a teacher

**HEPHAESTION**,

**CRATERUS**, and

**PTOLEMY**, officers and  
friends of Alexander

**PARMENION** and

**NEARCHUS**, officers

**PERSIAN MESSENGER**

**BINAS** and **MATTON**,  
foot soldiers

## *Scene I: Royal court, Pella, Macedonia, 349 B.C.*

**OLYMPIAS:** Alexander, now that you are seven, and no longer a child, it's time for you to systematically prepare for your destiny.

**ALEXANDER:** Yes, Mother.

**OLYMPIAS:** My uncle, Leonidas, will be your tutor. He is ready to begin.

*(Exit OLYMPIAS, enter LEONIDAS.)*

**LEONIDAS:** Alexander, what do you think I'll try to teach you?

**ALEXANDER:** How to become a great warrior and king like my father.

**LEONIDAS:** Hmmm. How do the artisans make your father's spears so hard?

**ALEXANDER:** By putting them into a very hot fire.

**LEONIDAS:** Yes. And that's how you will become strong and able.



**ALEXANDER:** Will you try to put me into a fire?

**LEONIDAS:** In a way . . . through the flames of discipline: lean diet, hard exercise, sleep on the ground, and marches in the middle of the night.

**ALEXANDER:** Why that way?

**LEONIDAS:** Alexander, a man cannot lead unless he first commands his own body and spirit. No more can you live the soft, flabby, and lazy life.

***Scene II: Royal court, Pella,  
Macedonia, a year later.***

**PHILIP:** Alexander, is that you singing?

**ALEXANDER:** Yes, my father.

**PHILIP:** Shame! Shame for a warrior's son to sing so sweetly, like a girl.

**OLYMPIAS:** How cruel of you!

**PHILIP:** Shut up, Olympias. I know what makes a king.

**OLYMPIAS:** Ha! You know only treachery and lust, the meat and marrow of your reign. The gods have written for Alexander a different script.

*(Exit PHILIP.)*

**ALEXANDER:** Mother, what are you talking about?

**OLYMPIAS:** Your father is a strong warrior, as you shall one day be. But always remember that you come from the seed of Achilles.

**ALEXANDER:** Yes, Mother.



**OLYMPIAS:** Your father is sometimes a careless and insensitive fool . . . .  
Know that your destiny is to soar far above all mortals like  
him . . . upon the wings of your will and spirit.

***Scene III: Royal stables, 343 B.C.***

**ANTER:** Sire, it's no use. The steed will not be broken. All my men  
have failed.

**PHILIP:** What a pity . . . such a noble and spirited horse to roam only  
in the shadows of glory. Send Bucephalus back.

**ALEXANDER:** Father, wait! Let me try!

**PHILIP:** Nonsense! You're too frail, and only thirteen . . . Alexander!  
Stop!

**ANTER:** I can't believe my eyes! How did the boy do it?

**PHILIP:** Well done, my son! Bucephalus is yours. Ride him to glory!

**ANTER:** Alexander, how did you calm him?

**ALEXANDER:** I observed that Bucephalus bolted only when he saw his own  
shadow. I simply faced him to the sun, mounted, and kept his  
head up.

***Scene IV: Royal court, Pella,  
Macedonia, 342 B.C.***

**PHILIP:** Alexander, meet your new tutor, Aristotle. His father was  
court physician to my father.

*(Exit PHILIP, enter ARISTOTLE.)*

**ALEXANDER:** You are Greek?

**ARISTOTLE:** Yes . . . from Athens.

**ALEXANDER:** My father admires Greek culture, but distrusts your  
politics.



- ARISTOTLE:** Oh . . . Alexander, what is your life's goal?
- ALEXANDER:** My destiny—to rule the world.
- ARISTOTLE:** For what purpose?
- ALEXANDER:** To gain immortal glory.
- ARISTOTLE:** And what is that glory? Is it to see your royal banner flying above the Persians' palace?
- ALEXANDER:** Yes, yes.
- ARISTOTLE:** And above every mud and straw hut whose inhabitants live desperate lives, like helpless, driven beasts?
- ALEXANDER:** You Greeks are clever. Where are you leading me?
- ARISTOTLE:** To understand true glory.
- ALEXANDER:** Go on . . . .
- ARISTOTLE:** After the sword of victory, bring to the conquered people the light of Greek civilization: her literature, philosophy, science, and art.
- ALEXANDER:** Yes! I will not only conquer, but create—create a new world. Now you must begin to fill my cup with your knowledge.
- ARISTOTLE:** Even ideas concerning *how* to conquer?
- ALEXANDER:** That won't be necessary. I've learned well from my father.
- ARISTOTLE:** I'm sure you have . . . but a man should never stop learning, even in warfare. Some battles require the brawn of a bear, some the engineering of a beaver, some the speed of a deer—and all battles require the cunning of a fox.
- ALEXANDER:** Why do you use animals in your counsel?



- ARISTOTLE:** Because nature is our greatest teacher. Observe, Alexander. Always observe. Then use logic to give meaning to your experiences. The mind is a person's greatest power. Foolish people only react. The great-souled person first dreams, then creates and shapes events to fulfill these dreams.
- ALEXANDER:** I wish to be such a man, a great leader.
- ARISTOTLE:** Then you must shape the wills and spirits of your followers.
- ALEXANDER:** Why? Isn't giving orders enough?
- ARISTOTLE:** No. You must lead by your own brave example. You must own and share every soldier's danger, discomfort, and deprivation. If you do, your troops will follow any plan, to any place.
- ALEXANDER:** I understand . . . I only hope my father leaves me something to conquer.

***Scene V: Gordium, Asia Minor, 333 B.C.***

- HEPHAESTION:** We're approaching the legendary Gordian Knot. No mortal man has yet mastered its strength or complexity. Alexander, will you give it a go?
- CRATERUS:** All you have to do is untie it to release the wagon.
- PTOLEMY:** I think Alexander will do it his own way.
- (ALEXANDER cuts the knot with one stroke of his sword.)*
- HEPHAESTION:** Behold! The Gordian Knot is no more!

***Scene VI: Port of Tyre (Lebanon)  
332 B.C.***

- PARMENION:** Oh, King, the Tyrians have murdered our emissaries and thrown their bodies into the sea.



- ALEXANDER:** What treachery!
- PARMENION:** The humane way you treated the captured Persian royal household at Issus makes no mark with these barbarians.
- NEARCHUS:** The fort must be secured. Otherwise the Persian fleet will use it as a base to destroy our communications.
- ALEXANDER:** But if we take it, the Persian fleet will have no port for supplies.
- NEARCHUS:** And ultimately be forced to surrender.
- PARMENION:** But the cost! A half mile of water separates us. The fort's walls are over one hundred feet high! We need more fire-power. Our ships will be like sitting ducks.
- ALEXANDER:** Bring Aristobulus, the engineer, at once.
- NEARCHUS:** Tell us your thoughts, my King.
- ALEXANDER:** Consider the patient beaver . . . We will build a causeway out to their island fort. Nearchus, gather every ship in Phoenicia. By land and sea we'll lay siege to Tyre.

***Scene VII: Alexander's headquarters,  
Tyre, seven months later.***

- NEARCHUS:** Alexander, the walls are crumbling! Our catapults and battering rams have succeeded!
- PARMENION:** And our forces have landed.
- (PERSIAN MESSENGER arrives and gives ALEXANDER a message.)*
- ALEXANDER:** *(reading)* Very interesting. Darius wants a peace treaty. He knows Tyre will soon be ours.
- NEARCHUS:** What are the Persian's terms?



- ALEXANDER:** He offers us ten thousand talents in gold, his daughter in marriage, and all territory west of the Euphrates . . . .
- NEARCHUS:** That's one third of the whole Persian Empire!
- PARMENION:** If I were king, I'd accept.
- ALEXANDER:** And if I were Parmenion, so would I. No negotiations! After Tyre, on to Egypt. Then east, past the ends of all Persia!

***Scene VIII: Alexander's camp,  
Beas River, India, 326 B.C.***

- PTOLEMY:** The troops are growing increasingly restless.
- CRATERUS:** The recent hard fighting against King Porus and his elephants has unnerved many.
- HEPHAESTION:** The death of Cleitus by Alexander's own hand has alienated many of the Macedonian troops.
- CRATERUS:** Why did he do it? Cleitus saved Alexander's very life at Granicus.
- PTOLEMY:** It was the bitter fruit of a drunken rage. Cleitus had no business speaking as he did.
- CRATERUS:** What? Telling the king he was becoming too Persian? That too many former enemies were appointed officers and governors? Has he forgotten his roots?
- HEPHAESTION:** Have you forgotten his dream? Alexander wanted to unite all peoples into a great civilization.
- CRATERUS:** The men are tired of dreams. They're sick of the constant rain, bad food, and snakes. They're weary from marching across scorching deserts and frozen mountain passes.
- HEPHAESTION:** But hasn't Alexander shared all this, too?
- CRATERUS:** Yes, as always. But we, and especially Alexander, must face facts. The men will go no further. They miss their families.





**PTOLEMY:** You are right, and he must be told. Alexander's own troops will give him his only defeat.

***Scene IX: Public square, Babylon,  
323 B.C.***

**MATTON:** Binas, old comrade in arms. Sit with me for a while.

**BINAS:** Yes. Let us grieve Alexander's death together.

**MATTON:** You were with him from the beginning. How will you remember him? How he conquered the whole world?

**BINAS:** No. His empire will break apart before long. I'll recall how he outfoxed old Darius at Gaugamela.

**MATTON:** And finished off the Persian empire.

**BINAS:** Remember how he made us all get a good night's rest while Darius made his men stand watch the whole night and grow weary?

**MATTON:** And how we crushed their chariots the next day!

**BINAS:** Yes. Instead of attacking head on, Alexander had us wait, and then part to let the Persians race through.

**MATTON:** While they fumbled with their chariots to turn around, we gave them our heavy metal.

**BINAS:** And what will you remember about him?

**MATTON:** The time in India when he went out on a very dangerous mission. He took an arrow to his lung. I'll never forget how he fought to survive.

**BINAS:** He was a fighter, all right, and he always suffered right along with us.



**MATTON:** That's it! He was always part of us. He even knew my name.

**BINAS:** Mine, too! He was always talking with the foot soldiers.

**MATTON:** Yes . . . but what I'll most remember is when we were finally coming home. We were in the desert and the heat was unbearable. There wasn't any water left. I found a small puddle, only enough to fill my helmet, and brought it to Alexander. Remember what he did as we all watched?

**BINAS:** Yes. He threw the water to the winds, and we all cheered.

