

“I admit to being a woman but don’t sell my contribution short on that account. It’s better than the present panic. And my word is as good as my bond, because I hold stock in Athens— stock I paid for in sons”- Koryphaos of Women

In 411 BC Aristophanes wrote *Lysistrata* during the height of the Peloponnesian War between Athens and Sparta. A war that began over the expansion of the Athenian Empire evolved into a battle between democracy and oligarchy. One may ask, when the stakes are so high and the world seems to be hanging by a thin thread, how do you cope and attempt to make sense of things? Aristophanes’ answer: turn to comedy.

The women of Ancient Greece find themselves tired of the ongoing war and attempt to take action towards diplomacy. They rally together, take control of the Acropolis, and vow to abstain from sex. And thus, a battle between men and women is ignited.

Through witty dialogue, physical comedy, and phallic jokes, Aristophanes makes commentary on the harsh toll of war on the home-front and what it means to be a patriot in a time of war. What best reflects these themes are the allusions to Greek Mythology. It was through the exploration of these references in the rehearsal room that the themes came to life for the actors, and created a deep appreciation for the comedic wit Aristophanes crafted through these allusions.

For example, to demonstrate the complexity of war *Lysistrata* uses a reference to the *Iliad* saying, “and of course, he’d quote Homer: Ye menne must husband ye warre.” She goes on to say, “we rewrite Homer: Ye WOMEN must WIFE ye ware.” It is through this allusion that we see the high stakes of war at home: the disruption of the family that Homer explores in his epic poem. Through this reference, *Lysistrata* argues that women should be included in talks of politics and diplomacy because these decisions impact the home. The women are tired of the agony of waiting at home not knowing if their husband or sons will come back from war victorious or if they’ll be thrust into mourning.

Admittedly, we may not understand all of the allusions in the play; however, they reflect the way comedy has been used throughout history to offer incisive social commentary. This is as true today as it was in Ancient Greece. Comedy is a powerful tool that allows humankind to try to make sense of the insensible, and to come together for the hope of a better tomorrow.

[Click here for a breakdown of the allusions in *Lysistrata*!](#)