

## Not Another Teen Movie

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**Course:** History 102 (Honors)

**Instructor:** Dr. Craig Saucier

**Assignment:** Book Review

What incorporates nudity, sexual references, bawdy jokes, and the male versus female conundrum? No, this is not another teen movie. The correct answer is *Lysistrata*, a comedic Greek play written by Aristophanes in 411 B.C. Aristophanes was an Athenian comedic playwright who lived during the thirty years of the Peloponnesian War. *Lysistrata* was written twenty years after the start of the war, when the Athenians, as well as Aristophanes, had grown weary of it. As such, the recurring theme of *Lysistrata* is the Peloponnesian war was futile and more emphasis should be placed on peace. In order to convey his exasperation over the continuity of the war through a safe medium, Aristophanes chose to write his play in the form of a satire.

The main character of the play, Lysistrata, is an Athenian female who is distraught about the Peloponnesian War because the men are away fighting, while the women are left lonely at home. She devises a plan and invites all of the women from Athens, as well as from Sparta, to hear her proposition. She persuades the women that if they abstain from having sex with their husbands until a peace treaty is signed, then want of sex ultimately will cause the men to bend to the women's wills. Lysistrata also convinces some of the older female Athenians to overtake the treasury so the men will be cut off from funds for the war. In response, the men try to burn the city down, but the women quickly douse the men with water and effectively extinguish the flames. About a week into her plan, when Lysistrata becomes aware that some women are attempting to sneak off to be with their husbands in secret, she again must persuade them her

plan will work if only they wait a bit longer. Lysistrata's friend Kalonike then sees her husband approaching with an erection; she is instructed by Lysistrata to arouse him as much as possible, but not to go to bed with him. After Kalonike completes her task, a magistrate from Athens meets with a herald of Sparta; they subsequently notice that each is displaying an erection. To end their suffering, they decide a peace treaty is necessary, but neither side can come to an agreement. The women then invite the men to a party, where they become inebriated, which only increases the men's desires. Finally, both sides sign the peace treaty so they can return home with their wives.

As the foregoing summary reveals, Lysistrata is an independent and free-thinking woman who clearly reflects the idea that women should be treated equally to men. Because she is the main character in the play, she solely drives the plot line. Without her, the plan to abstain and promote peace talks between the men never would have formed, the women never would have thought to overtake the treasury, and, eventually, the women would have given in to temptation and returned to their men before peace could be accomplished.

Lysistrata, as a character, and the play, as a whole, display strong undertones of women's rights' activism. This play is something that everyone can relate to, especially females who have ever felt overlooked or unimportant. Lysistrata presents a hilarious solution to a serious problem, and her ingenuity and wit are proof that women, even in ancient times, could be just as capable and intelligent as men. The play is a worthy read for the everyday reader, who merely is in search of a little comic relief, as well as for the historic intellectual, who wants insight into the Peloponnesian War. For either audience, Aristophanes presents far more than "just another teen movie" in his *Lysistrata*.

**Dr. Saucier's Comments:** *I am pleased but not at all surprised by the selection of Christine's Lysistrata essay for inclusion in The Pick. In her two semesters, as an Honors student in my western civilization courses, Christine's writing has consistently made my job easier. Her writing is technically bold, clean, and clear. More important, to me at any rate, Christine often moves beyond insightful to poetic. She sees beyond the words themselves, not just the historical drama unfolding but its relevance to our contemporary times, which is, of course, the essence of historical literature.*