

Birds Essay

*This essay uses *Birds* to write about Athens.*

The assignment: Write a 3- to 4-page essay that uses three moments from *Birds* to take a position on the culture, beliefs, and social expectations of classical Athens.

What you need to do

● Get ready.

Review the requirements. Review the Requirements for All Papers. This page has important guidance and videos on formatting your document, structuring your essay, and using evidence.

A resource you may find helpful is the Elephant Pamphlet, which gives step-by-step guidance on preparing for and writing a position paper.

● Choose your topic from one of the three prompts below.

Option A *The use of fantasy.* *Birds* uses the fantastic scenario of creating Cloudcuckooland and meeting messengers and legendary figures to comment on real issues of concern to Aristophanes.

How does this compare to other ancient Greek works that use elements of fantasy or the idea of utopia to discuss matters of contemporary concern?

Option B *Aristophanes's agenda.* The surviving plays of Aristophanes range over a long and turbulent period of Athenian history. Do Aristophanes's opinions and technique change over time?

Discuss the consistency of Aristophanes's approach to writing, and the evolution of his overall philosophy across this most troubled period. What themes and ideas are present in both plays? Is his approach, methodology, or agenda consistent? If not, how does it change?

Option C *Gods and mortals.* *Birds* uses both gods and animals as a contrast to humans.

How do other plays contrast mortal humans with the gods? In what ways do the similarities or differences in *Birds* provide insight into what Aristophanes was trying to say?

● Choose a second work to compare with *Birds*.

Option A For the “Use of fantasy” option, choose another work from ancient Greece that uses elements of fantasy to compare to *Birds*.

Popular options include:

- *Oedipus at Colonus* by Sophocles, in which Oedipus seeks the sanctuary of a mystical sacred grove that helps him transform himself;
- *Cyclops* by Euripides, featuring the Cyclops from Homer’s *Odyssey* and a chorus of satyrs;
- *Assemblywomen* by Aristophanes, which involves the women taking to create an ideal Athens; and
- *Republic* by Plato, which outlines an ideal city-state according to Plato’s philosophy. (Use an outline like this one to focus on a few key sections that might be useful examples.)
- There are other possibilities as well.

Option B For the “Aristophanes’s agenda” option, choose another play by Aristophanes to compare with *Birds*.

Popular options include:

- *Frogs*, mounted in 405 BCE, in which Dionysus, bored with contemporary Athenian plays, travels to Hades to bring back a dead playwright;
- *Clouds*, mounted in 423, in which a farmer seeks to learn false speech to rid himself of debts; and
- *Wealth*, mounted in 388, involving the god of wealth and his inability to tell good men from bad.
- Any of the 11 surviving plays is fair game. Full texts in English are also available here or here.

Option C For the “Gods and mortals” option, choose another work from ancient Greece that depicts the gods to compare to *Birds*.

Popular options include:

- *Eumenides* by Aeschylus, which involves the Furies harassing Orestes for killing his mother, and Athena and Apollo testifying on his behalf in an Athenian court;
- *Bacchae* by Euripides, which has Dionysus punishing Thebes for ignoring his honors by driving the women into a frenzy; and
- *Hippolytus* by Euripides, which has Aphrodite plotting against Theseus’s illegitimate son Hippolytus, a follower of Artemis.
- There are other possibilities as well.

● Find three moments from *Birds* that are strong examples of your topic.

Option A For the “Use of fantasy” option, find three incidents from *Birds* that demonstrate Aristophanes’s use of fantasy and his reasons for doing so.

Compare each of these moments with a similar (or contrasting) moment in the other play.

Option B For the “Aristophanes’s agenda” option, find three incidents from *Birds* that reflect either Aristophanes’s opinions or how he makes the play reflect them.

Compare each of these moments with a similar (or contrasting) moment in the other comedy.

Option C For the “Gods and mortals” option, find three incidents from *Birds* that depict the gods and illustrate Aristophanes’s intent in doing so.

Compare each of these moments with a similar (or contrasting) moment in the other play.

● **Write a 3- to 4-page essay in which you take a position on Athenian culture.**

You'll need an Introduction State what you believe *Birds* shows us about the culture, beliefs, and social expectations of fifth-century Athens in a way that answers the question in the prompt you chose. (This is your thesis statement.)

... **a Body** ... Describe and discuss, one by one, each of the three moments you found from *Birds* and compare with a similar moment from your second work. For each section, discuss what the evidence tells us about classical Athens.

... **and a Conclusion**. Tie your examples and assertions together and show how they support your overall thesis.

● **Finalize your essay.**

Citations are important. Make sure your evidence is cited and that you include a bibliography. For how to do citations and bibliographies, see the Research and Citation Center. You will be marked down drastically if your paper is not properly cited.

Optional draft. You may email me an optional draft two weeks before the final due date. It should include most of your paper (at least two-thirds of the final content, with sections to be written described in square brackets). I'll give feedback, but not a grade, to help you refine your final paper.

Double-check the requirements. Make sure your essay meets the Requirements for All Papers for formatting, structure, and evidence, as well as the specifications given above for what's expected for this assignment. [See the Essay Musts page.]

Once you're sure your essay meets the requirements, upload it as DOCX or PDF to Brightspace.