

SOCRATES FOR ESL TEACHERS & STUDENTS

Scene 1

Accuser and Meletus

Two Athenian citizens, the older accuser and Meletus, talk about Socrates. They fear that his teachings are corrupting the youth and that his influence teaches them to go against their parents and society.

for the teachers: During the war between Sparta and Athens, from 431 B.C. to 404 B.C. which ended in Athens' defeat, Socrates remained in Athens, unharmed. Two of his students, Critias and Alcibiades, fought on the side of Sparta and murdered thousands of Athenians from the middle class and poor. The democrats fled Athens and organized. They retook the city the following year and in 403B.C. an amnesty was declared. Crimes committed against the state before that year could not be prosecuted.

Scene 2

Socrates, Crito

Socrates and his dear friend Crito meet in front of the courthouse. Crito has not yet heard about the indictment. Socrates explains to him that he is going to court because the Athenians are charging him with corrupting the youth.

Scene 3

Socrates, Accuser, Crito, Meletus

Socrates addresses the Assembly in his defense. The word 'apology' in Greek means 'defense'. Socrates defends himself against the prejudice of the Athenians. He explains that he spends his life examining and conversing with people.

for the teachers: the charge: "Socrates is guilty of engaging in inquiries into things beneath the earth and in the heavens, of making weaker arguments appear the stronger and of teaching others these same things." This charge is not true in any way. It was a charge against the sophists in general, and Protagoras in particular. Socrates was interested only in matters of the soul and had no interest in what was called natural philosophy. The people fear that Socrates will continue to influence the young men. They cannot mention Critias and Alcibiades because of the amnesty. Socrates defends himself against the long-standing prejudice.

Scene 4

Socrates, Meletus

Socrates defends himself against Meletus. The charge: Socrates corrupts the youth by teaching them not to believe in the gods of the state. Socrates easily defends himself by proving that he believes in the gods.

for the teachers: little is known about Meletus, the younger accuser. He was chosen by Anytus to prosecute Socrates because of his religious fervor. Anytus was a well-known democrat who had fled Athens and returned to restore democracy to the state.

Scene 5

Socrates, Accuser, Crito, Meletus

Socrates continues to defend himself against the prejudice and resentment of the Athenians. Here, he explains the mission of his life- to search for wisdom and excellence, and to examine himself and others.

for the teachers: Socrates spent the war years in Athens without taking sides. He did not use his powerful voice to help the democrats or to defeat his two students who became tyrants. Part of the resentment is that Socrates stood by and did nothing. Since Socrates could not be charged for past actions, the fear that he would continue to advise rich young men who might rise up again against Athens is reiterated here.

Scene 6

the vote on Socrates' guilt or innocence.

Socrates, Accuser, Meletus, Crito, Assembly

for the teachers: The Assembly was the central power of the state and served as a law court, hearing all cases. It consisted of all the free-born male citizens over the age of 18. Socrates was tried by 501 of his peers. Private individuals brought actions on behalf of the state. There were no lawyers.

Scene 7

Penalty phase

Socrates, Meletus, Accuser, Crito

Meletus proposes the death penalty.

Socrates enrages the Assembly by proposing a penalty of free meals in the state hall of honor. After all, he has never wronged a man voluntarily and will not wrong himself. He then proposes and rejects: imprisonment, a fine, exile. At the end, Socrates proposes a fine of one mina. Crito proposes 30 minae.

for the teachers: a mina was worth approximately one pound of silver and was equivalent to 100 days of wages for a skilled artisan. 30 minae, therefore, was equivalent to about eight and a half years' wages.

Scene 8

the penalty vote

Meletus, Accuser, Assembly, Socrates, Crito

Socrates talks about the meaning of death. He leaves the Assembly with the lesson that death is not the greatest evil for a human being. Being a wicked person is much worse than death. He urges the people to correct his sons as he himself had corrected them.

Scene 9

the jail scene and the Law

Jailer, Socrates, Crito