

EXTRACT 1: THE MAHABHARATA

These notes are intended to help you understand the context of the drama.

The Mahabharata is an epic Hindu poem from ancient India, originally written in Sanskrit. It was adapted for the stage by Jean-Claude Carrière and Peter Brook in the 1980s and later for television in a production lasting over five hours.

The poem is a historical account of the lengthy, deadly struggle for power between two groups of cousins. The first group was the Pandavas, sons of King Pandu. The second group was the Kauravas, sons of the blind king Dhritarashtra. These relationships are set out in the table below.

Interwoven into this conflict are tales of many characters, some dead, some alive, some human, some gods. The drama includes tensions, hatred, betrayals, magical births, deaths and a constant sense of destruction. These are presented in a highly stylised form of theatre.

This extract is from the opening scene, 'The Beginnings'.

CHARACTERS

KAURAVAS – sons of the blind king DHRITARASHTRA	PANDAVAS – sons of King PANDU and Queen KUNTI
GANDHARI, wife of DHRITARASHTRA	YUDHISHTHIRA , ARJUNA, BHIMA,
DURYODHANA, eldest son	NAKULA, son of PANDU and MADRI
DUHSASANA, second son	SAHADEVA, son of PANDU and MADRI

VYASA, the poet/author of *The Mahabharata*

BOY

GANESHA, elephant-headed Hindu god

KING SANTANU (played by VYASA), grandfather of DHRITARASHTRA and PANDU

GANGA, goddess of the river

BHISHMA, son of GANGA and SANTANU

KING OF THE FISHERMEN, father of SATYAVATI

SATYAVATI, mother of VYASA

AMBA, AMBIKA, AMBALIKA, sisters and princesses

KING SALVA, fiancé to AMBA

KING PANDU, warrior king, son of AMBALIKA and VYASA, father of the PANDAVAS

QUEEN KUNTI, a wife of KING PANDU

QUEEN MADRI, another wife of KING PANDU

KING DHRITARASHTRA, blind son of AMBIKA and VYASA

GAZELLE

SERVANT

THE BEGINNINGS

A boy of about twelve enters.

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[SATYAVATI *leaves.*]

EXTRACT 2: THE LARK

These notes are intended to help you understand the context of the drama.

The extract is taken from *The Lark* by Jean Anouilh (1910–87), translated into English by Christopher Fry. This version was first performed in London in 1955.

The play explores the story of Joan of Arc, heroine of medieval France, the peasant girl who claimed she heard the voices of God and the saints. She believed God had chosen her to lead France to victory over the occupying English forces.

She was tried for witchcraft and heresy and burned at the stake in 1431, aged 19. However, in Anouilh's treatment the burning is not the end, as the play finishes with a lark singing in the open sky. This symbolises joy and hope rather than defeat and death.

The play is in two Parts and the extract is taken from the opening of Part One.

CHARACTERS

WARWICK, an English Earl

CAUCHON, the Bishop of Beauvais

JOAN

FATHER

MOTHER

PROMOTER, a Church official

INQUISITOR

LADVENU, a monk

PART ONE

A simple, neutral setting.

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JOAN straightens herself up, still in tears, while her MOTHER goes back to the CROWD.

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