

OEDIPUS THE KING

LIVING LITERATURE SERIES

SOPHOCLES

A PERMA-BOUND PRODUCTION

TEACHER'S GUIDE

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SYNOPSIS

"Therefore we must call no man happy while he waits to see his last day, not until he has passed the border of life and death without suffering pain." These concluding lines from the first tragedy of Sophocles's classic Theban Trilogy capture the philosophy of fifth century Greece. *Oedipus the King*, the first play of a triad that includes *Oedipus at Colonus* and *Antigone*, narrates the struggle of Oedipus, king of Thebes, against a mysterious plague which kills his subjects and robs their harvests. The priest of Zeus calls on the king for a solution. The answer which Oedipus's brother-in-law Creon brings from the oracle of Apollo—"to drive out the thing that defiles this land, which we . . . have fed and cherished"—is a puzzle.

As Oedipus seeks to root out the person who taints the city with blood-guilt, he begins to investigate the death of Laius, the former king, whom Oedipus declares he has never met. The chorus urges Oedipus to question Tiresias, the blind prophet, but Tiresias delays in answering the king's summons. When the prophet arrives in Thebes, Oedipus is annoyed at his tardiness, antagonizing the old man into delivering a blatant accusation—that the king himself is the guilty man, a man who sees but is blind to the truth of his two crimes, incest, and murder.

When Oedipus and Creon squabble over pointless accusations of envy and jealousy, Jocasta urges both men to control their evil tempers. She reveals to them an oracle that caused her first husband to fear the destiny of a son who would murder him at a crossroads. Fastening their infant's ankles together, Jocasta took her doomed child to be abandoned on a hillside so the kingdom might not suffer the fate that was prophesied. Oedipus's eyes gradually open to his crime as details fall into place—the crossing of the roads from Delphi and Daulia in Phocis, the tall white-haired man, and the time of the killing.

Oedipus reviews his own heritage: the son of Polybus of Doria and Merope of Corinth, he left home after hearing Apollo's oracle at Delphi predict incest and murder as his destiny. As Oedipus and Jocasta await the corroborating testimony of a herdsman who witnessed Laius's murder, they receive the unexpected news of Polybus's death. The messenger eagerly soothes Oedipus's troubled mind with information which ironically assures the king's downfall—Polybus adopted Oedipus, an abandoned child, after a shepherd found him. The shepherd who nurtured the foundling comes forward to complete the tragic tale. Thus, Oedipus knows the entire story of his past.

The conclusion takes place offstage, where Jocasta hangs herself. Oedipus, now in possession of the truth, removes the golden pins from his wife/mother's dress and blinds himself. He begs Creon for a speedy death to end his

troubles or else exile from the disgrace of his catastrophic crimes. Oedipus does not worry about the safety of his grown sons, but he requests that Creon provide a home for Ismene and Antigone, Oedipus's small daughters. The tragic hero resigns himself to his fate.

TIME LINE OF GREEK DRAMA

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|--------------|---|
| ca. 535 B.C. | Thespis becomes the first actor in the Western world. |
| 499 | Aeschylus produces his first play. |
| 484 | Aeschylus wins his first top prize. |
| 471 | Aeschylus wins a second top prize. |
| 472 | Aeschylus, <i>The Persians</i> . |
| 468 | Sophocles beats out Aeschylus for the top prize. |
| ca. 468-467 | Aeschylus, <i>The Seven Against Thebes</i> . |
| 463 | Aeschylus, <i>The Suppliants</i> |
| 458 | Aeschylus's <i>Oresteia</i> earns a top prize. |
| ca. 456 | Aeschylus, <i>Prometheus Unbound</i> |
| ca. 451 | Sophocles, <i>Ajax</i> |
| 441 | Sophocles, <i>Antigone</i> |
| 438 | Euripides, <i>The Cyclops</i> and <i>Alcestis</i> |
| 435 | Pericles builds the Theater of Dionysus at Athens. |
| 431 | Euripides, <i>Medea</i> |
| ca. 428 | Euripides, <i>The Heracleidae</i> and <i>Hippolytus</i> |
| ca. 427 | Euripides, <i>Andromache</i> |
| 425 | Aristophanes, <i>The Acharnians</i> |
| | Euripides, <i>Hecuba</i> |
| 424 | Aristophanes, <i>The Knights</i> |
| 423 | Aristophanes, <i>The Clouds</i> |
| 422 | Euripides, <i>Heracles</i> |
| | Aristophanes, <i>The Wasps</i> |
| 421 | Euripides, <i>The Suppliants</i> |
| | Aristophanes, <i>Peace</i> |
| 417 | Euripides, <i>Ion</i> |
| 415 | Euripides, <i>The Trojan Women</i> |
| 414 | Aristophanes, <i>The Birds</i> |
| 413 | Euripides, <i>Electra</i> and <i>Iphigenia in Tauris</i> |
| 412 | Euripides, <i>Helena</i> |
| 411 | Aristophanes, <i>Lysistrata</i> and <i>Thesmophoriazousae</i> |
| ca. 410 | Euripides, <i>The Phoenician Women</i> |
| ca. 409 | Sophocles, <i>Oedipus Rex</i> , <i>The Trachinian Women</i> , <i>Electra</i> , and <i>Philoctetes</i> |
| 408 | Euripides, <i>Orestes</i> |
| 405 | Aristophanes, <i>The Frogs</i> |
| | Euripides, <i>The Bacchae</i> and <i>Iphigenia in Aulis</i> |
| ca. 401 | Sophocles, <i>Oedipus at Colonus</i> |
| 393 | Aristophanes, <i>The Ecclesiazusae</i> |
| 388 | Aristophanes, <i>Plutus</i> |
| 360 | Lycurgus adds 17,000 seats to the Theater of Dionysus. |
| 316 | Menander, <i>Dyskolos</i> |

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Second in importance of the three great Athenian tragedians, Sophocles (496?-406 B.C.) won his audiences through literary craftsmanship and creative genius. The son of a successful armorer and native of Colonus, on the outskirts of Athens, Sophocles possessed winning qualities—looks, good cheer, athletic prowess, musical talent, popularity, poise, and culture. At 28 he defeated the dramatist Aeschylus for the first prize in tragedy, and from that day on never took a prize lower than second place.

In addition to his literary acumen, Sophocles excelled as a military leader, achieving the rank of general. He served under Pericles in the Samian War (440-439 B.C.) and represented his country on foreign embassies. During a period of rough-and-tumble politics, Sophocles remained conservative and refused to air his country's dirty linen in print. Instead, he stuck to classic themes. His nickname—the Attic Bee—epitomizes his talent, for it was the vigor of his work and the honey from his words that earned him a place among the greatest classical authors.

CRITIC'S CORNER

Although never as forceful or as poetic as Aeschylus, Sophocles won a place among the great tragedians for graceful, mellifluous lyrics and a wise, sensible approach to the human condition. His chief desire was to reveal the moral dilemmas of humanity in the grasp of fate. The shaping of human destiny was to him a product of the individual's character and the whims of chance. Despite a lack of religious themes, his work espouses a belief in an earthly punishment for the sin of excessive pride.

The most notable of Sophocles's innovations—the addition of the third actor and the increase of the chorus from twelve to fifteen—produced a significant development in drama and afforded a new flexibility not found in older, more conservative stylists. Also, he was the first to write plays to suit talents of individual actors. Out of more than 100 plays, his seven extant works are *Antigone* (442-441 B.C.), *Philoctetes* (409), *Oedipus at Colonus* (401), *Ajax* (ca. 451), *Oedipus the King* (ca. 409), *Electra* (ca. 409), and *The Trachinian Women* (ca. 409).

GENERAL OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the structure of Greek drama
2. To recognize the elements of tragedy
3. To fit the plot of the play into the Theban trilogy
4. To isolate the theme of pride and its results in the lives of the characters
5. To review the many references to mythological characters and events
6. To discuss the tone of the chorus's speeches
7. To locate and analyze examples of irony in the play
8. To discuss the theme of family
9. To analyze reactions to Apollo's oracles
10. To determine the role of the supernatural in the events

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

1. To analyze Jocasta's sufferings
2. To assess the nature of Oedipus's struggle with opposing forces in his life
3. To determine the significance of Oedipus's sufferings in terms of their influence on his children and subjects

4. To evaluate Creon's role
5. To follow the sequence of events in the tragic destruction of Oedipus's family, beginning with Oedipus's great-grandparents and ending with Antigone
6. To analyze the form and function of choric odes
7. To discuss the importance of lower class people in the plot
8. To recount how Laius died
9. To explain the riddle of the sphinx
10. To determine how messengers serve a king of ancient Greece

THE IMPORTANCE OF SETTING

The milieu of *Oedipus the King* is difficult to re-create for modern audiences. In the era Sophocles is depicting, Greece was not a nation, but a collection of small, disconnected kingdoms. The relationships of neighboring royalty were significant to people who lived largely isolated from each other. Long journeys were necessary, but perilous. Trips to Delphi were important to people who wanted to know the future. The distance from Oedipus's home north over the Isthmus of Corinth to Thebes covered rocky terrain and out-of-the-way spots where danger lurked. On the day of the murder, Oedipus's reaction to Laius was not uncommon in a time when people had to be prepared for danger while traversing an unknown land. Another factor in the killing, identity, would have been obscured by the fact that royalty was not so different from ordinary people as it has been in more recent times.

The action of the play itself, like most Greek drama, is more psychological than physical. The characters stay at the court of Thebes while determining how to solve the murder of Laius and rid the area of suffering. Playgoers must imagine the setting in which the infant Oedipus was pierced with a thong and left to die. Likewise, during the denouement, Jocasta's suicide and Oedipus's blinding take place out of the audience's sight to preserve the decorum of the stage. Thus, there is little movement about the setting as the characters act out serious tragedy.

LITERARY TERMS AND APPLICATIONS

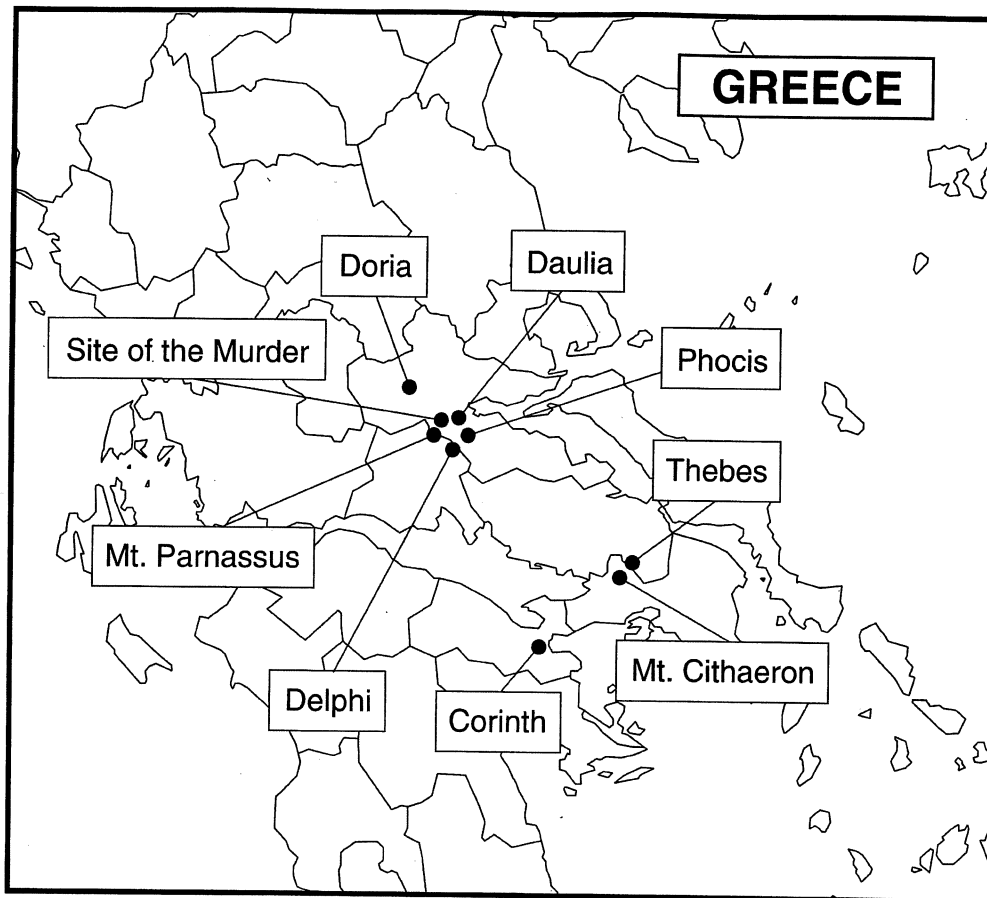
For a better understanding of Sophocles's style, present the following terms and applications to the play:

character name a method of displaying or revealing character traits, attributes, or attitudes through the choice of symbolic names, which may contain a descriptive term, for example, "Swollen Foot," the translation of Oedipus's name to indicate the fearful situation of the exposed baby whose ankles had been pierced and tied together. Other translatable names in the play include Jocasta (Shining Moon), Creon (ruler), Tiresias (he who delights in sights), Ismene (knowledgeable), Antigone (in the mother's place), and Laius (cattleman).

irony an implied discrepancy between what is said or done and what is meant, as in Oedipus's hunt for a killer and his discovery that the killer is himself. Also ironic is his belief that he has escaped prophecy and eluded killing his father by leaving the two people he has always assumed were his natural parents. A physical irony is his demand to see the truth and his deliberate blinding when he finally knows the details of Laius's death.

tragedy a serious drama in which the main character, usually a prominent, noble, or royal person, falls or dies as a result of some human failing, which the Greeks called by the

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archery term *hamartia*, a missing of the mark. In the case of Sophocles's *Oedipus the King*, human failing applies to the central character's wicked display of temper, his arrogance in thinking he can escape fate, and the resulting murder of Laius over a trivial matter. The overtones of Oedipus's downfall affect the entire family, particularly his suicidal wife and the two motherless girls.

CROSS-CURRICULAR SOURCES

For more information about life and literature in literary genre, ancient Greece, *Oedipus the King*, Sophocles, Greek theater, mythology, and maps of the ancient world, consult these sources:

Gary Cary and Mary Ellen Snodgrass, *A Multicultural Dictionary of Literary Terms*

Robert Flaceliere, *A Literary History of Greece*

Michael Grant, *Myths of the Greeks and Romans*

Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths*

Gilbert Highet, *The Classical Tradition*

Mary Lefkowitz and Maureen B. Fant, *Women's Life in Greece & Rome*

Albin Lesky, *A History of Greek Literature*

National Geographic, *Greece & Rome*

Mary Ellen Snodgrass, *Greek Classics and Voyages in Classical Mythology*

Also, consult these websites;

"Greek Mythology Link," <http://donet.swipnet.se/~w-58907/GGGM-F/Bibliography.html>, 1997.

"A Historical Chronology of Ancient Greece,"

<http://www.cis.vt.edu/ClassicalStudies/Chronology.html>.

"Hotlist of Ancient Greece," <http://www.kn.pacbell.com/wired/fil/pages/listancientgr.html>.

"Map of Ancient Greece,"

<http://library.advanced.org/10805/greekmap.html>.

"Oedipus the King," <http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/classics/oedipus.htm>.

THEMES AND MOTIFS

A study of the central issues and situations in Sophocles's *Oedipus the King* should include these aspects:

Themes

- grave suffering
- prophecy
- puzzles
- anger
- search
- family
- suicide
- recompense
- exile

Motifs

- civic peace disrupted by a plague
- respect for a royal family
- the use of supernatural powers to solve a crime
- a family tragedy that has no solution
- self-imposed punishment

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MEANING STUDY

Below are words, phrases, sentences or thought units that have particular meaning in the story. Explain the meaning each has in this play. Page numbers are given so that you can note the context from which the item is taken.

1. The rest of the Thebans, carrying boughs like us, are sitting in the market place, at the two temples of Athena, and at the prophetic fire of Apollo near the river Ismenus. (p. 2)
(Like all suppliants, both royal and humble, the Thebans sit before the temples of Athena, goddess of war and wisdom, as well as at the sacred flame of Apollo, the god of prophecy, light, and healing. Apparently, they are so eager for relief from the plague that they leave no stone unturned in their search for divine intervention. The choice of wisdom and prophecy foreshadow Oedipus's coming to knowledge about his personal faults, which he refutes when Tiresias explains them.)
2. You came to us once and liberated our city, you freed us from the tribute which we paid that cruel singer, the Sphinx. (p. 3)
(The Sphinx of Thebes, a monster made up of the body of a lion and the head and trunk of a woman, strangled passers-by who could not answer the following riddle: "What walks on four legs in the morning, two legs at noon, and three legs in the evening?" Oedipus supplied the answer: man, who crawls, then walks, and finally leans on a cane. His reward was the throne of Thebes and marriage with Queen Jocasta.)
3. I guess that his news is joyful. For on his head is a crown of laurel in bloom. (p. 5)
(The Laurus nobilis or bay was used in ancient times as a means of communing with Apollo. Priestesses chewed leaves, slept in the temple on them, or inhaled the smoke of burning branches in order to predict the future. Laurel also crowned winners and heroes, priests and athletes. Heralds carried branches of laurel to symbolize that they brought important news.)
4. Apollo, king and protector! I pray for the arrows from your golden bow—let them be ranged on my side to help me. And with them the flaming torches of Artemis, with which she speeds along the Eastern mountains. (p. 13)
(In their prayer to Apollo, the chorus calls on the aid of Artemis or Diana, the moon goddess and sister to Apollo. In addition to fostering wild things, Artemis was an earth mother, source of life and fertility. By calling on both the sun and moon deities, suppliants could cover all bases.)
5. I shall shrink from nothing in my search to find the murderer of Laius, of the royal line of Thebes, stretching back through Labdacus, Polydorus and Cadmus, to ancient Agenor. (p. 16)
(In his formal vow to cure the city of Thebes of its plague, Oedipus makes a strong promise—to carry his search back through what turns out to be his own ancestors. His line stretches from Laius, his real father, through Labdacus, Polydorus, and Cadmus, Oedipus's great-great-great grandfather. The line continues from there back to Agenor, Cadmus's father, and on to Poseidon, Epaphus, and ultimately to Zeus and Io.)
6. You cannot see, but you understand the city's distress, the disease from which it is suffering. You, my lord, are

our shield against it, our savior, the only one we have. (p. 19)

(At the end of his rope, Oedipus admits that he must fall back on Tiresias's skill in prophecy in order to learn the real reason for the plague in Thebes. Tiresias, knowing full well the name of Laius's killer, begs off the task of telling the truth and exposing Oedipus. Taunted and harassed, the old seer notes, "What is to come will come, even if I shroud it in silence." Only when Oedipus accuses Tiresias of taking part in the attack on Laius does the old seer rise to anger and accuse Oedipus.)

7. I shall go no more in reverence to Delphi,
The holy center of the earth,
Nor to any temple in the world,
Unless these prophecies come true,
For all men to point at in wonder. (p. 61)
(After Zeus sent out eagles from the ends of the world toward the center, Delphi, a city-state located on Mt. Parnassus, was revealed as the center of the earth. Zeus's marker, the omphalos, umbilicus, or navel, an oval stone, still resides in the museum at Delphi. It attests to a tradition of worship that existed among Greek tribes long before the foundations of civilization.)
8. Oedipus outranged all others
And won complete prosperity and happiness.
He destroyed the Sphinx, that maiden
With curved claws and riddling songs,
And rose up like a towered wall against death—
Oedipus, savior of our city. (p. 90)
(The Sphinx, a female monster, lived atop Mount Phicium and preyed on Theban males after Laius's death. After Oedipus solved the riddle of the Sphinx, the monster flew into the walls of the citadel, deliberately committing suicide because of her public humiliation. A later explanation of the phenomenon is that the Sphinx was a bandit or else one of Laius's illegitimate children who knew some long-hidden state secret.)
9. He ripped out the golden pins with which her clothes were fastened, raised them high above his head, and spared the pupils of his eyes. (p. 93)
(Greek women wore loosely draped linen or woolen garments. To give their clothing shape, they bound the waistline and pinned the shoulder seam with elaborate brooches. Often, the shape and design of the brooch symbolized the lady's family line.)
10. O Cithaeron, why did you receive me? Why did you not take and kill me on the spot, so that I should never reveal my origin to mankind? (p. 99)
(In his anguish, Oedipus cries out to the mountain range on which he was exposed in infancy. The mountains, sacred to Zeus, were named for Cithaeron, an ancient king of the city of Plataea.)

COMPREHENSION STUDY

Answer the following questions in your own words. There is not always a right answer. Your judgment is important. Be ready to defend your answers with lines from the play.

Questions 1-5 Literal Level

1. What reasons does Oedipus give for blinding himself?
(According to the attendant, who reports Oedipus's self-mutilation, Oedipus loosened the rope that killed Jocasta and then ripped out the golden pins on her dress. After

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spearing his eyes with the pins, he cried: "Be dark forever now—eyes that saw those you should never have seen, and failed to recognize those you longed to see." Filled with anguish, Oedipus continued striking his eyes and bloodying his face. Upon his arrival on stage, Oedipus explains to the chorus that Apollo caused his suffering, but that he alone chose to put out his eyes. As he justifies his actions, "What use had I for eyes? Nothing I could see would bring me joy.")

2. How does the witness of Laius's murder react to Oedipus's rise to power?

(The servant who escaped the death scene returned home and realized the horror of Jocasta's unwitting marriage to her own son, Oedipus, who believed himself to be the son of Polybus and Merope. To spare himself, the servant begged Jocasta to send him far from Thebes, where he could live the uncomplicated life of a shepherd. In thanks for his loyalty to Laius, Jocasta allowed the slave to have his wish.)

3. How does Oedipus respond to the plague in Thebes?

(The priest complains to Oedipus that Thebans are at their wits end over the plague that torments Thebes. They bemoan the "blight on the crops of the land, on the ranging herds of cattle, on the still-born labor of our women. The fever-god swoops down on us, hateful plague, he hounds the city and empties the houses of Thebes."

In reply to their travail, Oedipus takes pity on his people and calls them "my children." He empathizes with their suffering. As their king, he weeps for their affliction and takes immediate action. He sends Creon, Jocasta's brother, to Delphi to learn from the oracle how to go about ending the plague. Oedipus promises that whatever the god Apollo demands, he will perform.)

4. Why do Creon and Oedipus quarrel?

(Upon Creon's return from Delphi, he brings good news from the oracle. Pompously, Oedipus spurns Creon's interpretation and asks for Apollo's exact words: The squabbling begins inauspiciously as Creon explains the circumstances of Laius's death. Oedipus has grown fond of the role of savior. Strutting with self-importance before the populace, he demands more and more information from Creon and implies that Thebans were remiss in investigating their former king's death.

After Oedipus consults with Tiresias, Oedipus becomes grasping. He jumps to the conclusion that Creon has plotted with Tiresias to seize power in Thebes. He says, "He sets this intriguing magician on me, a lying quack, keen sighted for what he can make, but blind in prophecy." Oedipus curses Tiresias and drives him away.

Creon returns to the stage. Angered at the slight on his reputation, he has reason to chafe at having been labeled a traitor by the upstart king. The chorus leader defends Oedipus, rationalizing that he lost control momentarily. At Oedipus's return, the quarrel escalates. He asks, "Don't you see that your plan is foolish—to hunt for a crown without numbers or friends behind you?" Creon accuses Oedipus of being out of his mind. He concludes, "Given time you will realize all this without fail: time alone reveals the just man—the unjust you can recognize in one short day.")

5. How do Jocasta and the chorus end the quarrel between the king and Creon?

(The quarrel rages on with the chorus leader attempting to stop the senseless claims of the two leaders. Jocasta, who is older and wiser than Oedipus, returns "in the nick of time" and shames the two noblemen for quarreling while the Theban peasants are suffering from a plague. Like a bossy mother, she orders the two men into the house.

Creon, insistent upon his hurts, explains that Oedipus plans either to banish or kill him. Jocasta, realizing the extent of their quarrel, urges her husband "in God's name" to respect Creon's oath. The chorus chimes in and urges Oedipus to stop the destructive bickering. Creon makes a salient observation at this point: that Oedipus suffers from a "sulky temper" as well as a "ferocious anger," two qualities that precipitate his tragic fall. Jocasta insists on getting to the bottom of the quarrel. In her pursuit of the truth, she tells the story of how Laius was killed. The scenes take shape in Oedipus's head as he hears the details and begins to recognize his part in the crime. Realizing the similarity between Laius and the man Oedipus killed at Phocis, the king forgets his claim against Creon, pictures himself as the evil culprit at the crossroads, and cries out, "O God! I think I have just called down on myself a dreadful curse—not knowing what I did.")

Questions 6-8 Interpretive Level

6. How does Oedipus underscore the irony of his guilt in the opening scene?

(The king's references to clear vision and to his own sickness are tragic foreshadowings of his solution to Thebes's anguish. At the end of his discussion with Creon, Oedipus vows: "I will begin afresh. I will bring it all to light." He justifies his course of action by adding "I shall rid us of this pollution, not for the sake of a distant relative, but for my own sake. For whoever killed Laius might decide to raise his hand against me. So, acting on behalf of Laius, I benefit myself, too."

The irony intensifies as Oedipus clothes himself in importance. Posturing before the citizens, he promises, "I shall leave nothing undone. With God's help we shall prove fortunate—or fall," thus predicting his self-destruction. The proclamation that Oedipus makes is riddled with self-accusation. He orders any witness to speak "even against himself, and so escape the indictment, for he will suffer no unpleasant consequence except exile; he can leave Thebes unharmed." In these words, Oedipus sums up his eventual departure from his kingdom.

To intensify his words, Oedipus raves on, digging deeper the hole into which he will fall. He predicts that the guilty man will be friendless, "forbidden communion in prayers or offerings to the gods, or in holy water." Like an outlaw, he will be expelled from homes "as if he were himself the source of infection which Apollo's oracle has just made known to me." At the peak of his frenzy, Oedipus intones a curse, "an evil death-in-life in misery." He even curses himself if the perpetrator lives in the palace.)

7. How does Apollo figure in Oedipus's crime?

(Apollo plays a key role in Theban affairs. It is the god of healing and prophecy to whom Laius is traveling on the

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day he is killed. It is Apollo whom Oedipus seeks as he journeys toward a revelation of his true parentage. By coincidence, the two men meet at Phocis where the road from Delphi adjoins the road from Daulia.

When god forces the issue in Thebes and sends a plague, Oedipus again dispatches a messenger to Apollo to know the reason. Creon's words, like the typical message from the oracle, are unclear. Through Oedipus's blind search for the truth, the god's words become abundantly clear. Oedipus, guilty of the sin of pride, condemns himself with his own self-ennobling words. Having seen the light of Apollo, the sun god, Oedipus denies himself light forever. Ironically, Creon turns once more to the god for a suitable punishment for so vile a criminal as Oedipus.)

8. How are outsiders important to the catastrophes that threaten both royal houses of Thebes and Corinth? (Some of the most important information in the story comes from people below Oedipus's rank. At the court of Polybus in Corinth, the young prince learned from a nameless drunk at this father's table that Polybus was not his real father. Oedipus, eager to know more, set out for Delphi to ask the god's assistance in determining his fate.

Once established in power in Thebes, Oedipus enjoyed a peaceful life until plague strikes his people. In response to Apollo's words, Oedipus tracks down bits of information. Some of his past he learns indirectly from Jocasta, his wife/mother. Yet, the crucial data comes from the messenger from Corinth and the old shepherd who found the exposed boy baby and freed its bound ankles. Too soon free of an evil destiny, Oedipus rejoices that Polybus has died without suffering at his own son's hands. Then he learns that he was never a threat to Polybus, since Oedipus was the abandoned son of King Laius.)

Questions 9 and 10

9. Why does the story of Oedipus suit the Greek preference for the themes of pride and destiny? (Sophocles clearly delineates the characters' pride while laying the groundwork for an unavoidable cataclysm. Oedipus is the classic example of a man who seals his own fate by haughty, extravagant actions. If Oedipus had not murdered Laius in a fit of rage over a trivial incident and if he had not quarreled with his kinsman Creon, he might have saved himself the loss of family and power. On the other hand, since the events were foreordained by the gods as revealed by Apollo, Oedipus could not avoid his sin. So the dichotomy of human will and divine will expresses the age-old questions: Is Oedipus truly to blame, or is he merely a pawn in the hands of the gods?)
10. How do oracles provoke illogical actions in men? (In Oedipus the King, the characters repeatedly ask Apollo's help, but they never resign themselves to the answers the oracle gives. When Laius knows that his son will kill him, when Oedipus learns his own fate, neither man is capable of accepting the voice of the god as final authority over his action. In both cases, the characters seek to avoid the fate which god has prescribed for them and meet their destiny in their headlong rush toward false safety. The pathos of Greek drama is that

there is no way for humans to escape the bad ends that lie in wait for them and which ruin the lives of innocent people around them, particularly the witness to the killing and Oedipus's wife and daughters.)

Questions 11-13 Creative Level

11. Lead a discussion in which you debate the nature of Oedipus's tragedy. Summarize your thoughts in an essay which either condemns or justifies Oedipus's actions.
12. Make a list of details from the play that link it directly to ancient Greece, such as the use of laurel and olive branches in worship, cremation of Thebans who die from the plague, consultation with oracles to answer personal questions, and Jocasta's golden pins that fasten her dress.
13. Determine your own choice if you could know your fate. How would knowledge of destiny alter your character and behavior?

ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

Drama and Speech

1. Using *Oedipus the King* as an example, compose an extended definition of tragedy or tragic hero.
2. Propose personality types for the roles of Oedipus, Creon, Tiresias, and Jocasta. Explain why temperament and demeanor enhance the drama of a royal family trying to solve an old but troubling crime. Propose body language to display innocence, determination, and vengeance.
3. Apply the term "coming to knowledge" to the final scene. Explain the price paid by Oedipus and his wife and children, who were once the royal family of Thebes. Determine why Oedipus's punishment benefits Creon.
4. With a small group, discuss the ancient philosophy of the golden mean, which the Romans stated as "Nothing in excess." How does this play demonstrate the wisdom of the aphorism?

Math

1. Compute the distance from Thebes to Corinth and Delphi. Use estimated speeds of foot travel to determine how long it took messengers and other pedestrians to reach their destinations of rocky terrain.
2. Use historical data to determine the height, width, and depth of the Theater of Dionysus in Athens. Include figures on how many people could sit to view a play. Contrast these figures to those for other theaters throughout the ancient world, particularly in Epidaurus, Syracuse, Taormina, Rome, and Pompeii.

Economics and Social Studies

1. Make a comparative chart of monies used in ancient Greece. Propose a two-sided coin to honor Oedipus and Laius, his predecessor.
2. Compose a list of Greek plays and epics and their settings, as with *Oedipus the King* in Thebes, Homer's *The Iliad* in Troy, and *The Odyssey*, which travels about the Mediterranean world. Note whether the places are real or imaginary, particularly the entrance to the underworld. Locate real settings on a map along with the literary titles. Place a star on Sophocles's birthplace.
3. Lead a panel discussion of the significance of the term "king" in Oedipus's time. Determine why Tiresias possesses a form of power greater than royalty.

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Psychology and Religion

1. Discuss the psychological problems faced by couples in a royal marriage. Compose advice to Jocasta concerning Oedipus's past history and his intention to solve the riddle of the sphinx. Discuss how these emotional drives place stress on their marriage.
2. Using Tiresias as a model, create an extended definition of **seer**. Explain how his knowledge of the past and future increases his value as an adviser to royalty.
3. Determine the evolving relationship between Creon and his two young nieces, Ismene and Antigone. Read a summary of *Antigone* to learn how this relationship develops into additional suffering and tragedy.
4. Explain how drama grew out of the worship of Dionysus, the god of wine and fertility.
5. Discuss the moral implications of a play like *Oedipus*. Express what playgoers might learn from viewing the play and thinking about human arrogance, violence, and fate.

Cinema

1. Make a list of dramatic scenes from the play that would require intense use of lighting, costume, makeup, music, props, and stunts, particularly the hanging scene, departure from Thebes, flashbacks of the murder at the crossroads, the arrival of the messenger, and Oedipus's blinding.
2. Name current movie stars who could play the noble, doomed Oedipus, his wife and daughters, Tiresias, and Creon.

Science and Health

1. Explain how a hasty blinding with a sharp object could endanger Oedipus's life. Note the adaptation necessary to sudden loss of vision, particularly use of aural and tactile clues.
2. Give an oral report on the genetic weaknesses of daughters born to Oedipus and his mother Jocasta.
3. List difficulties for a messenger in ancient Greece, particularly fatigue, sunburn, thirst, and the danger of falling or being waylaid by highwaymen.
4. Summarize the general and specific meanings of "plague" over time. Explain the common fear of contagion.

Language Arts

1. Choose a series of lines from the play to illustrate the playwright's skill with poetry, such as "Since I am so full of dreadful expectation, I shall hold nothing back from you."
2. List and explain mythological, literary, historical, and geographical allusions in the play, for example, Delphi, Cadmus and Dionysus.
3. Contrast the rhythm and impact of various styles of rhetoric, including epic poetry, chant, dialogue, soliloquy, and song. Determine how the chorus contrasts the actors' lines and why these poetic remarks are important to Greek drama.
4. Contrast several translations of a major speech in one of the plays, such as the final lines about human happiness. Note how rhythm, diction, and stress vary in the different versions.

Composition

1. Write a history of Tiresias's experiences. Discuss how he lost his vision and why loss of vision becomes a theme in *Oedipus the King*.
2. Read or view a more modern tragedy, for example, Edmond Rostand's *Cyrano de Bergerac*, Henrik Ibsen's *A Man of the People*, Tennessee Williams's *The Glass Menagerie*, or Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*. In an oral composition, compare modern methods of playwrighting with those of Sophocles.

Art and Music

1. Use desktop publishing or other artistic forms to create a handbill that will catch the eye of prospective audiences of a current reproduction of *Oedipus the King*. Use an illustration that intrigues the reader to see the play and learn how it ends. Emphasize action, emotion, and contrast in your drawing.
2. Select instrumental, choral, or solo vocal music to delineate the contrast between hopeful scenes, murder, suicide, city uproar, regret, suffering, and prophecy.
3. Propose scenes for a mural to illustrate the play's evolving plot. Begin with the search for a cure to the plague and end with the blinded former king taking leave of his daughters and wandering away from Thebes.

STUDENT INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES

1. Compose a short scene in which Oedipus returns from visiting the oracle at Delphi and bids farewell to Polybus and Merope. Try to maintain the dignified verse style of Sophocles.
2. Sketch masks to be used by the actors of Sophocles's play. Emphasize the emotional response of each character in the facial expressions.
3. Draw a floorplan of the theatre at Epidaurus. Label the seats of the priests, altar, theatron, orchestra, skene, proskene, and parados. Place actors for the final scene of *Oedipus the King*.
4. Arrange an interview with Tiresias. Have someone assume the role of the blind prophet; have another person be a reporter. Discuss with Tiresias how he feels about his part in the tragedy of Oedipus's family.
5. Draw a map of Greece. Using an atlas of the ancient world, mark the most important places mentioned in Sophocles's plays, such as Delphi, Colonus, Thebes, Athens, Mount Parnassus, Mount Cithaeron, Daulia, Corinth, the Aegean Sea, and the Peloponnesus.
6. Write a newspaper review of the City Dionysia, the great drama festival of ancient Athens. Describe the arrangement of presentations as well as the prizes.
7. Write extended definitions of myth, comedy, satire, and tragedy. Include examples of each genre from ancient and modern literature.
8. Read *The Birds* or another of Aristophanes's comedies. Analyze how his style, tone, and purpose differ from those of Sophocles.
9. Write a letter in which you assume the identity of an ordinary Greek citizen of the fifth century, B. C. Express your feelings about a day you spent at the outdoor theatre. Describe the play you saw, its meaning, and the audience's response to it.
10. Make a list of all mythological allusions and references in

OEDIPUS THE KING

Oedipus the King. Explain how each fits the passage in which it appears, particularly references to Apollo the healer and the wise Athena.

TEACHER'S NOTES

ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT

1. List in chronological order significant events in Jocasta's life, particularly her widowhood, suicide, marriage to Oedipus, and distress over the plague and the Sphinx's cruelties.
2. Make a list of scenes from the play which express strong attitudes toward loyalty, honesty, friendship, self-esteem, loss, valiance, love, pride, responsibility, deception, fear, and reward. Indicate what you think is Sophocles's personal philosophy on each subject.
3. Compose brief definitions of truth as they apply to Ismene and Antigone, Creon, Laius, Apollo, Tiresius, Oedipus, the shepherd, the messenger, and Polybus.
4. List scenes that depict conflict, particularly the murder at the crossroads, Jocasta's suicide, Oedipus's departure from his two daughters, discussions of guilt, Oedipus's sincere intent to find Laius's killer, and accusations against Tiresius.

OTHER WORKS BY SOPHOCLES

Ajax (ca. 451)
Antigone (442-441 B. C.)
Electra (ca. 409)
Oedipus at Colonus (401 B. C.)
Philoctetes (409 B. C.)
The Trachinian Women (ca. 409)

RELATED READING

Jean Anouilh, *Andromache*
Jean Cocteau *The Infernal Machine*
Euripides, *The Trojan Women*
Gustave Flaubert, "The Legend of St. Julian Hospitator"
Henrik Ibsen, *Hedda Gabler* and *A Doll's House*
Edmond Rostand, *Cyrano de Bergerac*
William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* and *Othello*

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OEDIPUS THE KING

VOCABULARY TEST

Complete each of the following sentences with words from the list below. You will have answers left over when you finish.

astray	cherished	fatherland	incense	oracle	supplication
banished	defile	furrows	incestuous	overbearing	tufts
begot	divinity	goad	involuntary	prophetic	urgency
border	equate	helm	laments	reproach	vigor
calamitous	expel	immigrant	laurel	solicitude	vile

1. Apollo sent me away with my question unanswered but he foretold a dreadful, _____ future for me—to lie with my mother and beget children my eyes would not bear the sight of—and to be the killer of the father that gave me life.
2. When the old man saw me coming past the wheels he aimed at my head with a two-pronged _____, and hit me.
3. No foreigner or citizen may take me into his house, no one can talk to me—everyone must _____ me from his home.
4. With these hands that killed him I _____ the dead man's marriage bed.
5. How can I deny that I am _____, utterly unclean?
6. I must be banished from Thebes, and then I may not even see my own parents or set foot on my own _____—or else I am doomed to marry my own mother and kill my father Polybus, who brought me up and gave me life.
7. I am the victim of some harsh _____; what other explanation can there be?
8. The man who goes his way _____ in word and deed, who fears no justice, honors no temples of the gods—may an evil destiny seize him and punish his ill-starred pride.
9. Yet I pray to God to spare that _____ which benefits the state.
10. Lords of Thebes, it occurred to me to come to the temples of the gods bearing in my hands these branches and offerings of _____.
11. I come in _____ with these emblems of prayer.
12. But I was led _____ by fear.
13. How could the _____ which your father plowed bear *you* in silence for so long?
14. Time, which sees all things, has found you out; it sits in judgment on the unnatural marriage which was both begetter and _____.
15. You made an _____ breed of father, brother, son—bride, wife, mother—all the most shameful things known to man.
16. I have sent Creon, my brother-in-law, to the _____ oracle of Apollo, to find out by what action or speech, if any, I may rescue Thebes.
17. There is a multitude of other horrors which you do not even suspect, and they will _____ you to yourself and to your own children.
18. He is apparently an _____ of foreign birth, but he will be revealed as a native-born Theban.
19. Therefore we must call no man happy while he waits to see his last day, not until he has passed the _____ of life and death without suffering pain.
20. Without telling my parents, I set off on a journey to the _____ of Apollo, at Delphi.

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COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Identification (30 points)

Briefly describe the characters listed below.

1. Jocasta
2. Oedipus
3. Laius
4. Creon
5. Polybus
6. Tiresias
7. messenger
8. chorus
9. Merope
10. Sphinx

Part II: Matching (20 points)

Complete each quotation with a phrase from the answers below.

- _____ 1. Without knowing it, you are the enemy of your own flesh and blood,
_____ 2. You see straight now but
_____ 3. I answered the riddle with my own intelligence—
_____ 4. King though you are, you must treat me as your equal in one respect—
_____ 5. There is a multitude of other horrors which you do not even suspect, and
_____ 6. He is apparently an immigrant of foreign birth, but
_____ 7. Blind instead of seeing, beggar instead of rich,
_____ 8. And if you find that I am wrong,
_____ 9. He turns his back on the prophecies delivered at the world's center, but
_____ 10. It is true that

- A. the birds had nothing to teach me.
- B. he will be revealed as a native-born Theban.
- C. the dead below and the living here above.
- D. the murderer and marriage-partner of his father.
- E. one man may be wiser than another.
- F. they will equate you to yourself and to your own children.
- G. let me not live out the rest of my days with such a reputation.
- H. he will make his way to foreign soil, feeling his way with a stick.
 - I. I cannot see forward or back.
 - J. then you will see darkness.
- K. he was the joy of Thebes.
- L. the right to reply.
- M. to be called a traitor in the city, by all of you, by my friends.
- N. then say I have no skill in prophecy.
- O. they, alive forever, hover round him.

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Part III: Settings (20 points)

Match the locations below with the actions that occur at each. Some answers will be used more than once and some not at all.

- | | | | | |
|-----------|------------|-----------|--------------------|--------------------|
| A. Delos | C. Daulia | E. Phocis | G. Mount Cithaeron | I. Mount Parnassus |
| B. Athens | D. Corinth | F. Delphi | H. Doria | J. Thebes |

- _____ 1. Merope's home.
- _____ 2. where Oedipus goes to learn about his real parents.
- _____ 3. where the old shepherd removed the bindings from the baby's ankles.
- _____ 4. center of the world.
- _____ 5. place where Laius is attacked by Oedipus.
- _____ 6. city that suffers from a plague.
- _____ 7. site of the infant Oedipus's abandonment.
- _____ 8. birthplace of Polybus.
- _____ 9. place where Jocasta commits suicide.
- _____ 10. city whose old king has recently died.

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Compare ways in which both Oedipus and Creon exhibit their pride.
2. Defend Oedipus's decision to pursue the truth.
3. Describe the chorus's relationship to Theban royalty.
4. Project the kind of life Ismene and Antigone can expect with Creon.

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COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Multiple Choice (20 points)

Choose an answer to complete each statement below. Place the letter of your answer in the blank provided at left.

- _____ 1. A messenger from Corinth announces that
A. Oedipus has inherited Polybus's throne. B. the infant was placed in the care of a shepherd.
C. Laius's death took place at a crossroads. D. Creon has returned from visiting the oracle at Delphi.
- _____ 2. After Jocasta hangs herself, Oedipus
A. fears he has offended the gods. B. prophesies that he will leave Thebes.
C. pulls her down from the noose. D. reveals his sins to all Thebes.
- _____ 3. Jocasta begs Oedipus to ask no more questions
A. because she fears he will anger the leaders of Thebes.
B. that might make her appear disobedient of god's will.
C. about the baby boy Laius left to die on the hillside.
D. because she fears for her husband's happiness.
- _____ 4. Oedipus declares that his crime
A. did not occur as the messenger describes it. B. makes him unworthy of the elders' trust.
C. will destroy him and his children as well. D. is the fault of Apollo.
- _____ 5. Oedipus begins to suspect himself of Laius's murder
A. after Creon describes the way in which Laius died.
B. when Tiresias explains how the infant was abandoned.
C. when Jocasta describes Laius's white hair and tall frame.
D. when disease first afflicts the crops and citizens of Thebes.
- _____ 6. Oedipus angers Tiresias by
A. denying his prophecies. B. accusing him of taking part in the plot to kill Laius.
C. ridiculing his age and blindness. D. bragging that he can cure the plague.
- _____ 7. Oedipus blinds himself because
A. he can no longer look on Jocasta. B. he cannot bear to see his children or the citizens of Thebes.
C. the gods require a sacrifice to atone for his sins. D. he prefers blindness and exile to death.
- _____ 8. Creon wants Oedipus to enter the palace
A. to hide his shame from the public. B. to protect him from vengeful Thebans.
C. so that Oedipus can remove Jocasta's body for burial.
D. to examine evidence that he is really Laius's son.
- _____ 9. Creon wants to return to the oracle for more information
A. rather than to kill Oedipus. B. about the shepherd that saved the baby boy.
C. about why the plague struck Thebes. D. concerning Labdacus's son.
- _____ 10. Oedipus worries that
A. Creon will kill Oedipus's two young daughters. B. his two girls will remain unmarried and childless.
C. his sons will have to flee from Thebes. D. Creon will not bury his sister.

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Part II: Completion (30 points)

Complete each of these quotations.

1. I charge you now to carry out the articles of the _____ you made.
2. I am a man of _____, but take courage and touch me.
3. Therefore we must call no man happy while he waits to see his last _____ . . .
4. I have sent Creon, my brother-in-law, to the prophetic oracle of Apollo, to find out by what action or speech, if any, I may rescue _____.
5. The damage done to me by such a report is no simple thing—it is the worst there is—to be called a _____ in the city, by all of you, by my friends.
6. The land is plague-stricken and you pursue private _____.
7. Without telling my parents, I set off on a journey to the oracle of Apollo, at _____.
8. The _____ is the child of violent pride, pride that vainly stuffs itself with food unseasonable, unfit, climbs to the highest rim and then plunges sheer down into defeat where its feet are of no use.
9. I come in supplication with these _____ of prayer.
10. The people of _____ will make Oedipus their king, so I heard there.
11. And here I am in _____—I did not put hand to sword.
12. I found you in the shady valleys of _____.
13. You had your _____ pinned together, and I freed you.
14. Fail to solve the mystery of my _____? Never!
15. I shall not call your _____ again—ever!

Part III: True/False (20 points)

Mark the following statements either **T** if true or **F** if any part is false.

- _____ 1. Oedipus and Jocasta quarrel over her right to Laius's throne.
- _____ 2. Oedipus vows that he will not give up the search for the truth about his birth.
- _____ 3. Oedipus suspects that the shepherd is his real father.
- _____ 4. The shepherd recalls herding flocks with the man who is now a messenger.
- _____ 5. Oedipus calls on the guards to twist the shepherd's arms behind his back and threatens to kill the shepherd if he does not answer.
- _____ 6. It was Laius who gave the baby boy to the shepherd out of fear of the prophecy.
- _____ 7. Oedipus returns to the stage to announce that Jocasta has hanged herself.
- _____ 8. Oedipus claims that Apollo did not urge him to blind himself.
- _____ 9. Oedipus's sons take their father's hands and lead him away from Thebes.
- _____ 10. The men of Thebes take pity on Oedipus, even though he is guilty of terrible sins.

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Describe how Oedipus reacts to the unfolding truth about his parentage.
2. Compare Creon and Tiresias in their relationships with King Oedipus.
3. Analyze the importance of coincidence to the play.
4. Summarize Laius's faults.

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ANSWER KEY

VOCABULARY TEST

- | | |
|----------------|------------------|
| 1. calamitous | 11. supplication |
| 2. goad | 12. astray |
| 3. expel | 13. furrows |
| 4. defile | 14. begot |
| 5. vile | 15. incestuous |
| 6. fatherland | 16. prophetic |
| 7. divinity | 17. equate |
| 8. overbearing | 18. immigrant |
| 9. vigor | 19. border |
| 10. incense | 20. oracle |

COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Identification (30 points)

Answers will vary.

Part II: Matching (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. D | 6. B |
| 2. J | 7. H |
| 3. A | 8. N |
| 4. L | 9. O |
| 5. F | 10. E |

Part III: Settings (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. D | 6. J |
| 2. F | 7. G |
| 3. G | 8. H |
| 4. F | 9. J |
| 5. E | 10. D |

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Multiple Choice (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. A | 6. B |
| 2. C | 7. B |
| 3. D | 8. A |
| 4. D | 9. A |
| 5. C | 10. B |

Part II: Completion (30 points)

- | | | |
|-----------------|-------------|---------------------|
| 1. proclamation | 6. quarrels | 11. Thebes |
| 2. sorrow | 7. Delphi | 12. Mount Cithaeron |
| 3. day | 8. despot | 13. ankles |
| 4. Thebes | 9. emblems | 14. birth |
| 5. traitor | 10. Corinth | 15. name |

Part III: True/False (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. F | 6. F |
| 2. T | 7. F |
| 3. F | 8. T |
| 4. T | 9. F |
| 5. T | 10. T |

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.

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TEACHER'S NOTES



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