

THE THEBAN PLAYS

SOPHOCLES

Teacher's Guide

Written By Mary Ellen Snodgrass

LIVING
LITERATURE
SERIES

A PERMA-BOUND Production

This guide was prepared using the Penguin 1974 edition, ©1947. Other editions may vary. Note: Oedipus the King is translated as King Oedipus in this version.

SYNOPSIS

KING OEDIPUS

King Oedipus is the first tragedy of a triad that Sophocles wrote over a period of four decades. Along with *Oedipus at Colonus* and *Antigone*, the play narrates the struggle of Oedipus, king of Thebes, against a mysterious pestilence which kills his subjects and robs their harvests. The priest of Zeus calls on the king for a solution. The puzzling answer which Oedipus's brother-in-law Creon brings from the oracle of Apollo speaks of expelling defilement from the land by driving out a cherished person.

As Oedipus seeks to root out the one 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 Teiresias, the blind prophet, but Teiresias delays in answering the king's summons. When the prophet arrives in Thebes, Oedipus is annoyed at his tardiness. The testy king antagonizes the aged seer 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 boy to be abandoned on a hillside so the kingdom might not suffer the fate that the oracle foresaw. 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. He is the son of Polybus of Doria and Meropé of Corinth. After hearing Apollo's oracle at Delphi predict incest and murder as his destiny, Oedipus left home to protect his beloved parents. 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 that inadvertently assures the king's downfall, Polybus and Meropé 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 birth and upbringing.

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 spears the pupils of his eyes. 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, the kingdom's small princesses. The tragic hero, devoid of all hope and grieving for his daughters, resigns himself to his fate.

OEDIPUS AT COLONUS

In early April at Colonus, a mile northwest of the Acropolis, Oedipus, old and feeble, wanders the countryside. It has been two decades since he blinded himself. He leans on his daughter Antigone as he enters the sanctuary of the Eumenides, the place where, according to Apollo, the old man will die. A stranger courteously asks him to leave holy turf. Oedipus insists that he will never go. He begs an audience with Theseus, the famed king of Athens. The stranger departs to tell citizens that Oedipus has arrived.

Embittered, Oedipus prays to the furies and asks their compassion. He seeks a place to rest from his wandering, a place to die. The chorus sizes up the intruder and guarantees his safety in the sacred grove. Oedipus reveals to them that he is a pariah, the son of Laius. The chorus recoils and commands him to vacate the grove. Antigone intervenes; the chorus is courteous, but insistent that the old man must go. Seeking justice, Oedipus summarizes the tragedy of his life. The chorus refers him to the authorities.

Ismene, Oedipus's younger daughter, gallops up to report news of her two brothers: Eteocles has seized power and banished Polynices. According to the most recent oracle, the Thebans will embrace Oedipus in his last days. His grave will bless others. Ismene alerts Oedipus to expect Creon, who wants to facilitate the oracle to bring fortune to Thebes. Oedipus regrets that his sons carry on the doomed struggle for the throne he willingly abdicated.

The chorus pities the old man and explains how to pour holy libations and how to pray to propitiate the Eumenides. To spare her father the effort, Ismene carries out the ritual. The chorus continues probing Oedipus's wretched life. He sighs and recounts the ill fortune that led him to murder Laius and marry Jocasta, Laius's wife. The royal couple were Oedipus's birth parents. Without suspecting the enormity of his crime, he sired four children by incest. He assures his listeners that he sinned without knowing of his relationship to Laius and Jocasta.

THE THEBAN PLAYS

The noble Theseus, accompanied by troops, arrives and ponders Oedipus. Having wandered far and faced danger, exile, and mortality, Theseus can comfort the old man. Oedipus thanks him for his compassion and vows to bless Athens, but declines to explain how he can make such a magnanimous promise. For himself, Oedipus requests burial. He explains to Theseus how Polynices has affected the state. Theseus confers citizenship on Oedipus and extends an invitation to the Athenian palace. Oedipus declines.

Theseus offers to shield Oedipus from Creon. The chorus intones a paean to Colonus. When Creon enters, he reassures the nervous citizens and urges his nephew/brother-in-law to return to Thebes to assuage his former subjects. On behalf of Antigone, the unbetrothed daughter who lives like a street urchin, Creon stresses that Oedipus should end his wanderings. Oedipus accuses Creon of deception and warns him that Apollo's prophecy is unshakeable.

Creon retorts that he has taken Ismene into custody and will do likewise to Antigone. The chorus is outraged at his high-handedness. Creon threatens to attack Athens if he comes to harm in its precincts. Theseus stirs citizen outrage and scolds Creon for disgracing his city. Creon makes excuses and displaces blame onto the sinful Oedipus. The blind wanderer justifies his actions as the work of fate. Theseus arrests Creon. The chorus raises a victory song.

Theseus restores the two daughters to Oedipus and reports that a stranger from Argos who prays before Poseidon's altar claims to be Oedipus's kin. The old man deduces that the newcomer is Polynices. Antigone begs her father to forego judgment and receive his rebellious son. The chorus sympathizes with the elderly man's dilemma.

Polynices regrets the squalor that degraded Oedipus and his daughters. Polynices summarizes his own tragic position and declares he will lead Argos's soldiers against Thebes to reclaim the throne. Oedipus declares him a reprobate and predicts that his cabal will fail. After the ruined king curses his son, Antigone advises Polynices to abandon the grand plot to retrieve Thebes. Polynices departs predicting that his family will never see him again.

Anticipating an addition to Oedipus's multiple sufferings, the chorus waits. Oedipus quivers at the sound of thunder, the preface to his death. Quickened by the presence of god, he summons his daughters and Theseus. The chorus prays for the old man as death approaches.

A messenger reports that the daughters purified their father with holy water. At the second peal of thunder, he consoled them. God's voice encouraged the old man to accept the end. He left his girls in Theseus's care and disappeared. Antigone longs for the comfort of home. She and Ismene implore Theseus to reveal their father's burial site, but Theseus is bound by an oath of secrecy. Antigone concerns herself with Polynices's threat of war on Thebes.

ANTIGONE

The forthright daughter of Oedipus, the self-blinded king of Thebes, and of Jocasta, who hanged herself when she learned of her sin of incest, Antigone is a proud princess. She values godliness over the pratings of her uncle Creon. The shallow brother of Jocasta, he seized Oedipus's throne. Creon refuses burial to his nephew Polynices, whom the boy's brother Eteocles killed when seven enemy kings attacked Thebes in an act of anarchy. Before the citizens of Thebes, Creon charges that Polynices intended to burn the city and temples and to kill and enslave its citizens.

When a tremulous guard reports that someone has disobeyed the royal edict by performing burial purification over Polynices's remains, Creon threatens the sentries with public flogging if they don't name the culprit. The king declares that a law-breaker is an outlaw and a stateless person. The guard returns with Antigone, Creon's niece. He confronts her; she admits guilt. He arraigns her for a capital crime. She replies that God established laws of burial.

Ismene, the older sister, confesses complicity with Antigone and urges Creon to relax the stringent law against performing funeral rites for Polynices. Even though Antigone is betrothed to Creon's son Haemon, the king stubbornly refuses any concessions to members of the family. Haemon intercedes for Antigone, but Creon vows that he will keep his relatives in check as an example to other rebellious citizens. Haemon angrily rushes away, vowing never to see his father again.

Creon is unmoved and ghoulishly describes how Antigone will be buried alive in a stone cave. Antigone considers herself friendless in the face of execution for breaking an unjust law. After threatening any who refuse his commands, Creon encounters Teiresias, the blind prophet, who reports a terrible omen of screaming, clawing birds picking Polynices's corpse. He implores the king to free Antigone before it is too late, but Creon sneers at the prophecy. Teiresias angrily departs from the king's rudeness.

After the leading citizen adds his voice to the growing cry for clemency, Creon relents and hurries to bury Polynices and set Antigone free. A messenger reports how Haemon rushed to his love, who hanged herself in the cave with a linen noose. Unable to endure the loss, Haemon menaced his father with a sword, and then drove it into his own body. Without a word, his mother Eurydice departs and, bewailing the death of Megareus, her first son, plunges a dagger into her body at the altar. A chastened Creon ends the drama in shock that his pride has doomed both family and rule. A wreck of his former self, he asks to be led away.

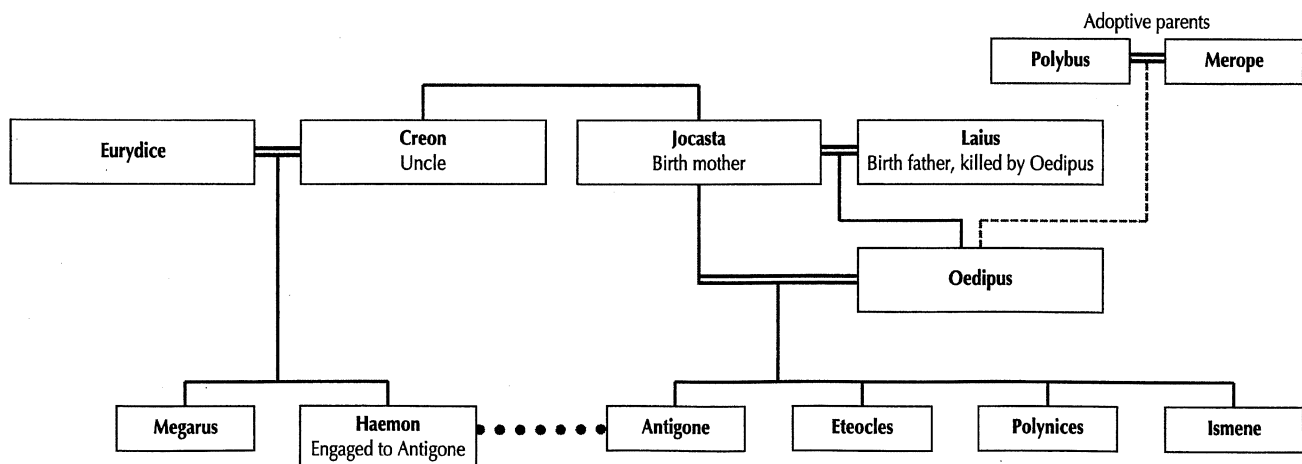
THE THEBAN PLAYS

PLOT TIMELINE

- In Oedipus's infancy:** His mother abandons him to spare Laius, her husband, from being murdered.
- Three days later:** A shepherd rescues the boy.
- In boyhood:** Oedipus grows up as foster son of Polybus of Doria and Merope of Corinth.
- In youth:** Oedipus leaves his home with Polybus & Merope to avoid an oracle predicting patricide and incest in his future.
- In adulthood:** He murders an unidentified man at the crossing of the roads from Delphi and Daulia in Phocis.
- Later:** He marries the widowed queen of Thebes and sires two sons and two daughters.
- During Oedipus's reign:** When Apollo's oracle indicates that defilement from a valued person is causing a plague, Oedipus investigates.
- Later:** Teiresias the prophet declares Oedipus guilty of murder and incest.
- Immediately:** Jocasta hangs herself; Oedipus blinds himself and leaves his kingdom to wander with Antigone as his guide.
- 20 years later:** In early April, Antigone leads Oedipus to Colonus to die at a sacred grove.
- Immediately:** Ismene reports that Eteocles has seized power and banished his brother Polynices.
- Later:** Theseus gives Oedipus Athenian citizenship and safe harbor from Creon's retribution.
- Immediately:** Creon arrests Ismene. He stresses that Oedipus should end his wanderings by returning to Thebes. Theseus arrests Creon and restores the two daughters to Oedipus.

- Meanwhile:** Polynices poses as a stranger from Argos praying before Poseidon's altar and claims to be Oedipus's kin.
- Immediately:** Polynices declares he will lead Argos's soldiers against Thebes to reclaim the throne. Oedipus predicts that Polynices will fail and curses him.
- Before Oedipus's death:** At the sound of thunder, Oedipus leaves his girls in Theseus's care and disappears.
- Following his death:** Before a civil war over the Theban throne, Megareus commits suicide to assure a victory for Thebes.
- During the war:** Eteocles and Polynices kill each other in combat. The Argive army withdraws from Thebes.
- After the battle:** Creon accords a state funeral to Eteocles, but leaves the remains of the traitor Polynices to rot unblest.
- Immediately after:** Antigone and Ismene, sisters of the two, discuss their sacred duty.
- Afternoon:** A sandstorm closes the guards' eyes when Antigone performs rites over Polynices.
- Later:** A guard divulges that someone buried the corpse.
- Immediately:** Creon has Antigone arrested and condemns her to death.
- Meanwhile:** Teiresias appears to denounce Creon for planning to execute a Theban princess.
- Shortly:** Creon rescinds his execution order, but finds Antigone has hung herself.
- Immediately:** Haemon tries to retaliate, then kills himself with a sword.
- Meanwhile:** Eurydice retreats to the palace and stabs herself.
- Afterward:** Creon regrets his losses and asks to be led away.

THEBAN TRILOGY GENEALOGY



THE THEBAN PLAYS

TIMELINE OF GREEK DRAMA

- ca. 700 B. C. Greek drama begins as part of seasonal festivals honoring Dionysus, the god of wine and fertility.
- ca. 535 Thespis of Athens becomes the first actor in the Western world.
- 533 The state holds the first dramatic competition.
- 499 Aeschylus produces his first play.
- 486 The state holds the first comedy competition.
- 484 Aeschylus wins his first top prize.
- 471 Aeschylus wins a second top prize.
- 472 Aeschylus, *The Persians*.
- 468 Aeschylus loses to Sophocles.
- ca. 468-467 Aeschylus, *The Seven Against Thebes*.
- 463 Aeschylus, *The Suppliants*.
- 458 Aeschylus's *Oresteia* earns a top prize.
- ca. 456 Aeschylus, *Prometheus Unbound*.
- ca. 447 Sophocles, *Ajax*.
- 441 Sophocles, *Antigone*.
- 438 Euripides, *The Cyclops*.
- 438 Euripides, *Alcesteis*.
- 435 Pericles builds the Theater of Dionysus at Athens.
- 431 Euripides, *Medea*.
- ca. 428 Euripides, *The Heracleidae*.
- 428 Euripides, *Hippolytus*.
- ca. 427 Euripides, *Andromache*.
- 425 Euripides, *Hecuba*.
- 425 Aristophanes, *The Acharnians*.
- 424 Aristophanes, *The Knights*.
- 423 Aristophanes, *The Clouds*.
- 422 Aristophanes, *The Wasps*.
- ca. 422 Euripides, *Heracles*.
- 421 Aristophanes, *Peace*.
- 421 Euripides, *The Suppliants*.
- 417 Euripides, *Ion*.
- 415 Euripides, *The Trojan Women*.
- 414 Aristophanes, *The Birds*.
- 413 Euripides, *Electra*.
- ca. 413 Euripides, *Iphigenia In Tauris*.
- 412 Euripides, *Helena*.
- 411 Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*.
- 411 Aristophanes, *Thesmophoriazusae*.
- ca. 410 Euripides, *The Phoenician Women*.
- ca. 409 Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex*.
- ca. 409 Sophocles, *The Trachinian Women*.
- ca. 409 Sophocles, *Electra*.
- 409 Sophocles, *Philoctetes*.
- 408 Euripides, *Orestes*.

- 405 Aristophanes, *The Frogs*.
- 405 Euripides, *The Bacchae*.
- 405 Euripides, *Iphigenia In Aulis*.
- ca. 401 Sophocles, *Oedipus At Colonus*.
- 393 Aristophanes, *The Ecclesiazusae*.
- 388 Aristophanes, *Plutus*.
- 360 Lycurgus adds 17,000 seats to the Theater of Dionysus in Athens.
- 316 Menander, *Dyskolos*.

AUTHOR SKETCH

Second in importance of the three great Athenian tragedians, Sophocles won his audiences through craftsmanship and creative genius. Born around 496 B. C. in Greece's golden age, he was the handsome, poised son of Sophilus, a successful armorer and native of Colonus, a suburb of Athens. Possessed of winning qualities, the optimistic, athletically gifted, and sociable playwright earned respect for his appearances on the stage.

Sophocles was well read in Homer and Greek myth. He studied music under Lamprus and, at age 16, led the chorus in celebration of Greek victory at Salamis. He fathered four sons, the playwright Iophon, Meneclides, Stephanos, and Leosthenes, by his first wife, Nicostrata; Theoris, his second wife, bore a fifth son, Ariston, father of Sophocles's grandson and namesake. At age 28, the playwright defeated 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 appears to have remained active most of his 90 years. He earned the rank of general the same year he wrote *Antigone*, the third of the Theban Trilogy. He served under his friend Pericles in the Samnian War from 440 to 439 B. C. and later under Nicias. Returned to civilian life, Sophocles was elected imperial treasurer, served as Aesclepius's priest at healing rituals, and represented the state on foreign embassies. His nickname, the Attic Bee, captures the nature of his talent, for it was the honey from his words that earned him a place among the greatest classical authors.

CRITICS' CORNER

"None can be called happy until that day when he carries/His happiness down to the grave in peace." These concluding words from the first tragedy of Sophocles's classic Theban Trilogy epitomize the philosophy of fifth-century Greece. Although never as forceful or poetic as Aeschylus, Sophocles won fame and honor for his graceful, mellifluous lyrics and wise, sensible analysis of human failings. His chief desire was to reveal moral dilemma and the workings of fate. The shaping of destiny was to him a product of the individual's character and the whims of chance. Despite the lack of religious themes and divinities in his plays, his belief in an earthly punishment for the sin of excessive pride undergirds his outlook. For his classic humanism, Edith Hamilton called him the "quintessence of the Greek."

THE THEBAN PLAYS

The most notable of Sophocles's innovations was the addition of a third actor to Greek drama and the increase of the chorus from twelve to fifteen. He produced significant change in theater by pioneering scene painting and realistic tragic masks, abandoning the literary convention of a controlling theme for a tetralogy, and introducing the heroic maiden and the ingenuous young male. His innovations offered 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 some 125 plays attached to his name, only seven survive, all from his most mature work. From citations and critiques, literary historians acknowledge that he also wrote *Ajax* (ca. 447 B. C.), *Epigoni*, *Electra* (409 B. C.), *Philoctetes* (409 B. C.), *Trachinian Women* (409 B. C.), *Eriphyle*, *Mysians*, *Aleadai*, *Odysseus*, *The Deaf Satyrs*, and *The Capture Of Troy*.

From classical Greek, Sophocles's triad has gone through frequent translation into modern European languages, in particular, Robert Fitzgerald's version of *Oedipus At Colonus* in 1941 and David Grene's translation of *Oedipus The King* in 1942. The most successful include an Italian version of *Antigone* by Luigi Alamanni in 1533, a French version by Jean-Antoine de Baif in 1573, and another resetting by German playwright Friedrich Hölderlin in the late eighteenth century. English lyric poet Thomas Watson published an English translation in 1581.

Antigone suited the tenor of the 1940s, when the German playwright Bertold Brecht and the French playwright Jean Anouilh both used the tragic princess Antigone/Antigon as a model of resistance to the fascism that caused World War II. Paris audiences interpreted Antigone, the tragic heroine, as a symbol of the French Resistance, brave patriots who subverted Nazi occupation with dangerous guerrilla tactics. In 1962, Greek actress Irene Papas gave a stunning performance as Antigone in a Greek film, currently available with English subtitles.

OTHER WORKS STILL IN EXISTENCE BY THE AUTHOR

Ajax, ca. 447 B. C.
Antigone, 442-441 B. C.
The Trachinian Women, ca. 409 B. C.
Oedipus The King, ca. 429 B. C.
Electra, ca. 409 B. C.
Philoctetes, 409 B. C.
Oedipus At Colonus, 401 B. C.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Beer, Josh. *Sophocles and the Tragedy of Athenian Democracy*. Oxford: Praeger, 2004.
Bernardete, Seth. *Sacred Transgressions: A Reading of Sophocles' Antigone*. South Bend, Ind.: Augustine Press, 1999.
Bloom, Harold. *Sophocles*. New York: Chelsea House, 2003.
Butler, Judith P. *Antigone's Claim*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2000.
Dalton, Dennis G. *Law and Rule in Sophocles's Antigone* (audiocassette). Prospect, Ill.: The Teaching Company, 1996.
Easterling, P. E., ed. *Cambridge Companion to Greek Tragedy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Edmunds, Lowell, and Robert W. Wallace, eds. *Poet, Public and Performance in Ancient Greece*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1997.
Frank, Bernhard. "Sophocles's *Antigone*," *Explicator* 56, no. 4 (summer 1998): 170-171.
Girard, René. *Oedipus Unbound: Selected Writings on Rivalry and Desire*. Palo Alto, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2004.
Hirai, Masako. *Sisters in Literature: Female Sexuality in Antigone, Middlemarch, Howard's End, and Women in Love*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998.
Kamerbeek, J. C. *The Plays of Sophocles: Commentaries 3: The Antigone*. New York: Brill Academic Publishers, 1997.
Lyons, Donald. "The Sphinx of Athens," *New Criterion* 13, no. 7 (March 1995): 68-73.
Nardo, Don. *Readings On Antigone*. San Diego, Calif.: Greenhaven Press, 1999.
Scott, William C. *Musical Design in Sophocles' Theater*. Venice, Fla.: Dartmouth Publications, 1996.
Segal, Charles. *Sophocles's Tragic World*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996.
Thompson, Harold, and Dale Grote, "Antigone," <http://www.pantheon.org/articles/a/antigone.html>, 1999.
Tyrrell, William Blake, and Larry J. Bennett. *Recapturing Sophocles's Antigone*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998.
Van Nortwick, Thomas. *Oedipus: The Meaning of a Masculine Life*. Norman: University of Oklahoma, 1998.
Wise, Jennifer. *Dionysius Writes: The Invention of Theater in Ancient Greece*. Ithaca, N. Y.: Cornell, 1998.
Wolf, Matt. "An Ancient Drama Whose Wisdom Is Always Modern," *New York Times* (27 October 2002): 2.6.

GENERAL OBJECTIVES

1. To experience and read aloud from a Greek tragedy
2. To identify and explain dramatic conventions, particularly character flaw, literary foil, conflict, situational irony, and decorum
3. To envision discreet staging of multiple deaths
4. To enumerate varied images and allusions to Greek mythology
5. To evaluate constraints on queens and princesses in a patriarchal society and to discuss Sophocles's concept of woman's place in the family and in a royal dynasty
6. To enumerate poetic devices that play a major role in the dialogue
7. To explain circumstances that heighten horror
8. To examine the structure of the Greek trilogy
9. To analyze examples of irony
10. To characterize the moral purpose of classical drama
11. To isolate the theme of pride and its influence on motivation
12. To analyze types of family dysfunction
13. To determine the role of the supernatural

THE THEBAN PLAYS

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

1. To place *King Oedipus*, *Oedipus at Colonus*, and *Antigone* in the canon of Greek tragedies
2. To explain the roles of sentry, guide, soldiers, stranger, shepherd, and messenger
3. To discuss the importance of royalty to the plots
4. To account for Haemon's suicide after he attacks his father with a sword
5. To determine why Ismene and Antigone lack guidance
6. To analyze the anarchy that costs Eteocles and Polynices their lives and to explain why Creon chooses to dishonor his nephew's body
7. To contrast Creon's relationships with nieces, son, wife, guard, prophet, Theseus, Polynices, future daughter-in-law, and citizens
8. To predict the effect of events on the Theban dynasty
9. To discuss the tone of the chorus's speeches
10. To summarize reactions to Apollo's oracles
11. To characterize Jocasta's and Eurydice's sufferings
12. To assess the nature of Oedipus's struggle with opposing forces

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), Haemon (skillful), Creon (ruler), Teiresias (he who delights in sights), Ismene (knowledgeable), Antigone (in the mother's place), and Laius (cattleman).

dilemma a plot that depicts human characters in dire predicaments which they must resolve by making some sacrifice. Oedipus decides to save his adoptive parents by leaving home; Antigone must choose between breaking the law of Thebes or obeying a divine injunction to honor her brother's corpse. Creon must choose whether to bend his edict against the burial or to enforce a law that will set the tone of social order. For selfish reasons, he chooses to quell anarchy, the political situation that caused Eteocles to kill Polynices.

foil a character whose presence in a literary work offsets or enhances the contrasting traits of another character, for example, Teiresias and Creon or Creon and Theseus. The foil serves as an opposite or as a standard by which another character is measured, a situation found in *Antigone*. Unlike Eteocles and Polynices, Antigone must play the role of the dutiful sister, which she debates with Ismene. Unlike Creon, Antigone knows the cost of law-breaking, which she has observed from the death of her mother and from the self-blinding of her father for committing incest. Surrounded by foils, she truly stands alone.

hamartia the missing of the mark, a Greek archery term that applies to the weakness or character flaw in the prominent, noble, or royal protagonist of a tragedy. Because of King Creon's stodgy insistence on retribution to the disobedient, he robs himself of family and of respect from his son and subjects.

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 and the source of the pestilence.

tragedy a serious drama in which the main character, usually a prominent, noble, or royal person, loses status or dies as a result of some human failing. In the case of Sophocles's *King Oedipus*, 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, their bickering sons, and their two motherless girls.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SETTING

The milieu of *King Oedipus* is difficult to recreate 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 at the crossroads, 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 were not so different from ordinary people as they have been depicted in more recent centuries.

The action of the trilogy 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 how to rid the area of disease and crop failure. Playgoers must imagine the setting in which the infant Oedipus lay pierced with a thong through his ankles and where he was abandoned to die. Likewise, during the first play's 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 tragedy.

The rule of decorum and the emphasis on royal characters limit settings in the remaining two plays. In *Oedipus at Colonus*, Sophocles deliberately conceals the supernatural events surrounding Oedipus's death and burial and forces Theseus to keep it all secret. By revealing Creon threatening the aged wanderers and, in *Antigone*, at his royal

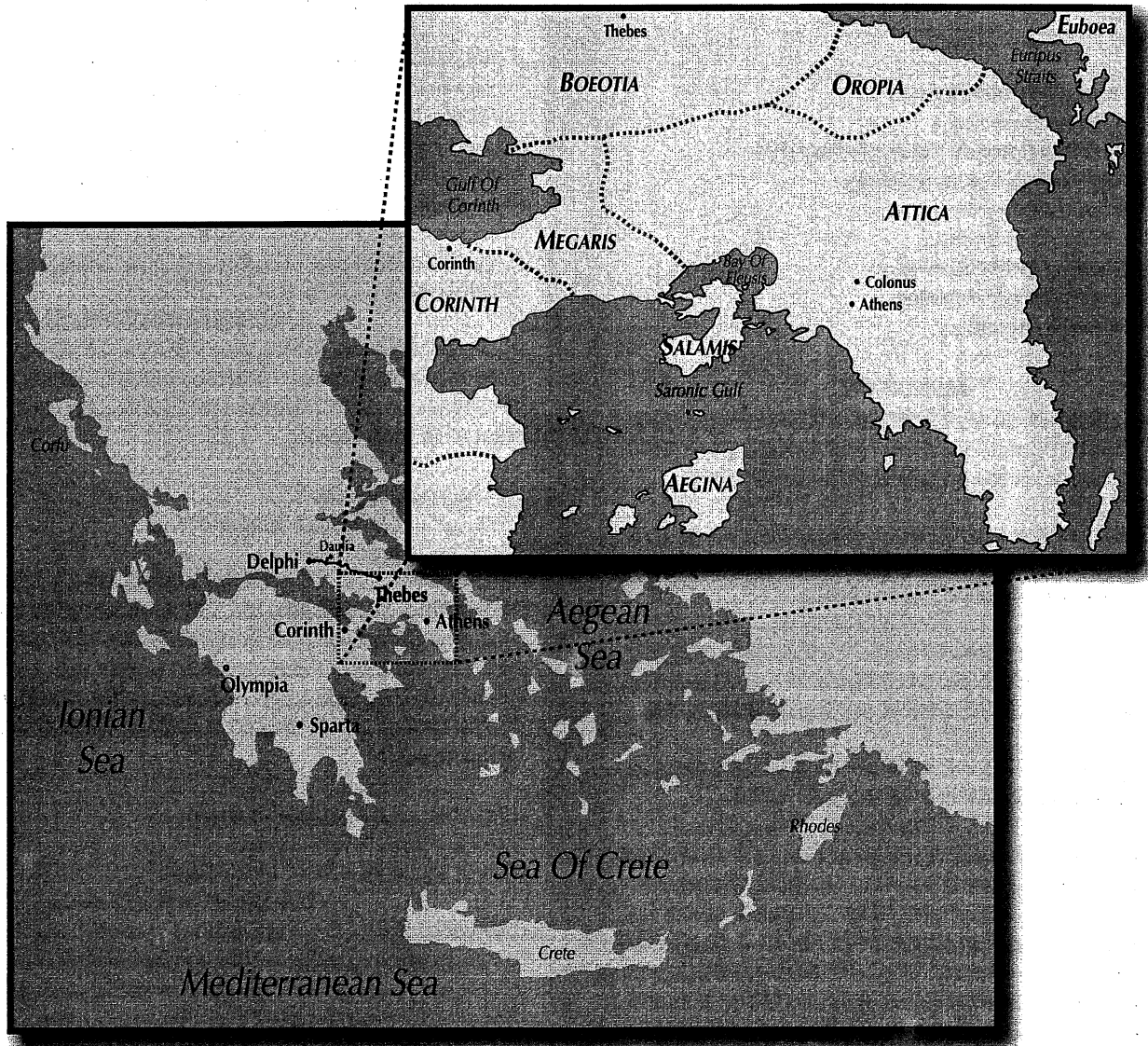
THE THEBAN PLAYS

palace interacting with two motherless nieces, Antigone and Ismene, the playwright emphasizes the callousness of a king who ignores how others feel. The arrival of the sentry and his hesitance to explain how the law was broken derive more meaning from the intimidating trappings of a kingly palace, a place where guards and messengers must use caution in word and deed.

Sophocles makes words describe the offstage events. Polynices summarizes in few words how he allies with Argos by a royal marriage and how he collects armies to march against Thebes. The sentry's testimony characterizes the setting in the field, where a sandstorm overwhelms the guards, who cluster on a hill away from the smell of the rotting corpse. Their dismay on finding the corpse buried suggests that they fear reporting lawbreaking to Creon.

When Antigone returns from her traditional task of anointing her brother's mangled remains, she leaves the bleak environment, stench of carrion, whirlwind, and stony-faced guards and returns to a stony king, her uncle. His pomposity, exacerbated by annoyance at her, grow out of a lordly setting that reminds him of his rule over Thebes. To hang onto power, he must prevent further anarchy, starting with Antigone herself.

As the scene shifts to a description of the rocky cave where Antigone hangs herself and where Haemon chooses suicide over living without his beloved, the brief appearance of Eurydice softens the royal setting with a mother's perspective. For good reason, she chooses to kill herself by the altar, as though offering herself as propitiation to gods angry at Creon's arrogance. As Creon realizes his loss of wife, sons, and future daughter-in-law, the setting becomes a prison of inflexible law from which he asks to be led.



THE THEBAN PLAYS

THEMES AND MOTIFS

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

THEMES

- suffering
- prophecy
- puzzles
- family
- fate
- contention
- arrogance
- patriarchy
- dilemma
- audacity
- disobedience
- loss
- regret

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
- civil war and its aftermath
- performing ancient family ritual
- a pattern of family disintegration
- discounting of prophecy

MEANING STUDY

Below are significant words, phrases, or sentences from the play. Explain each in context. Play name and page numbers pinpoint each entry so that you can re-read the passage in which it appears.

1. In front of the King's Palace, upon the steps and around the altars which stand in the forecourt, are grouped numerous citizens of Thebes, sitting in attitudes of supplication.

(*King Oedipus*, scene, p. 25)

(*The posture of the suppliant recurs in ancient literature, designating the social distance between ruler and subjects or between human and god. Only by shedding pride do suppliants expect mercy or aid.*)

2. The Sphinx with her riddles forced us to turn our attention from insoluble mysteries to more immediate matters.

(*King Oedipus*, Creon, p. 29)

(*The Sphinx of Thebes, a monster which bore the body of a lion and the head and torso of a woman, strangled passersby 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 correctly answered "man." The riddle refers to stages of life in which humankind crawls, walks, and leans on a cane. Oedipus's reward was the throne of Thebes and marriage to the widowed Queen Jocasta.*)

3. In accordance with the word of the Pythian oracle.
Thus shall I have done my duty to the god.

(*King Oedipus*, *Oedipus*, p. 32)

(*The Pythia was the title of the high priestess of Apollo's oracle at Delphi. She attained great stature as a solace for sick and troubled suppliants who visited her shrine in hopes of finding solutions to their earthly complaints. She served as the god's mouth-piece and deliverer of answers to questions and prayers.*)

4. There she bewailed
The twice confounded issue of her wifhood—
Husband begotten of husband, child of child.

(*King Oedipus*, attendant, p. 60)

(*Jocasta bewails the status of her two sons and two daughters, the offspring of her son/husband Oedipus, who is both the children's father and their brother. Like Oedipus, Jocasta learns the truth of family relationships when it is too late to prevent the sin of incest.*)

5. He is coming! King Theseus, Aegeus' son, comes here.

(*Oedipus at Colonus*, Chorus, p. 88)

(*When his son Theseus returned from a successful battle against the Minotaur in the labyrinth at Crete, forgetting to remove his black sail, a prearranged signal that the expedition was a failure, Aegeus, the king of Athens, believing him to be dead, drowned himself. The body of water in which Aegeus died was named in his honor the Aegean Sea.*)

6. The kindly intention of such a man must be respected . . .
[for] the boon he will bring to us.

(*Oedipus at Colonus*, Theseus, p. 91).

(*In contrast to Creon, Theseus is a godly man. He welcomes Oedipus because Theseus understands a heavenly blessing will be conferred on Athens if Oedipus ends his days in the city in peace and is buried there.*)

7. . . .; golden crocus gleams
Along Cephissus' slow meandering streams,
Whose fountains never fail;

(*Oedipus at Colonus*, Chorus, p. 92)

(*Saffron, from ancient times, has been a valuable and useful dyestuff and spice taken from the dried stigmata of the crocus plant. The costly yellow powder was an additive to medicine and incense. Thus, Colonus is a well-favored place already and does not need another blessing, but it would be helpful in keeping that status.*)

8. Grant to our friend a passing with no pain,
No grief, to the dark Stygian home
Of those who dwell in the far invisible land.

(*Oedipus at Colonus*, Chorus, p. 119)

(*Oedipus prepares for death, which the chorus mentions metaphorically as a passage over the Styx, one of the four rivers that encircle Hades or "the underworld" where the souls of the dead inhabit various regions such as Elysium or Tartarus. The souls of the dead pay Charon, the boatman, for passage across*

THE THEBAN PLAYS

the river. Satisfying the toll are coins placed in the mouths or on the eyes of corpses. "Slygian" has also come to refer to a dark, dismal atmosphere.)

9. There's a party of malcontents

In the city, rebels against my word and law,
Shakers of heads in secret, impatient of rule.

(*Antigone*, Creon, p. 134)

(Shortly after a threat to his power by the Seven against Thebes, Creon reveals his uncertainty of rule. He fears that he will lose the throne of Thebes. Disturbing his serenity are mutterers who encourage local distrust of the king.)

10. The daughter of Tantalus, a Phrygian maid, Was doomed to a piteous death on the rock Of Sipylus, which embraced and imprisoned her, Merciless as the ivy.

(*Antigone*, *Antigone*, p. 148)

(This passage refers to Niobe, Queen of Thebes and daughter of Tantalus, a woman who was changed into stone and who wept for her murdered children. Her tears became a cataract that poured over the rock face.)

11. She makes her offering three times to the dead.

(*Antigone*, Sentry, p. 138)

(A ritual pouring of wine or oil upon the ground near a grave as a sacrifice to a god so that the soul of the deceased will be allowed into the Underworld.)

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 by referring to passages in the dramas.

LITERAL LEVEL

PLOT

1. When is the wrongdoer physically obscured?

(The sentries guarding Polynices's corpse watch to assure that only dogs and carrion birds disturb the remains. The guards withdraw to a nearby hill to escape the stench of decaying flesh. When Creon's law against burial rites is broken, a whirlwind temporarily impairs the guards' view of the intruder. When the dust settles, they hear the bitter cry of Polynices's sister Antigone and see her pouring the three ceremonial libations over his remains.)

THEME

2. What ritual must Oedipus observe after he trespasses in the sacred grove of the Eumenides?

(To expiate his violation of a sacred precinct, Oedipus follows a series of holy acts. He first must fetch the ceremonial cup in clean hands. Then he must wreath the double handles of the ceremonial bowls in fleece from a freshly shorn ewe-lamb. After pouring out three offerings of water mixed with honey while he faces east, he must lay 27 olive branches on the ground. He must whisper his prayer and withdraw without looking back.)

SYMBOLISM

3. What omen urges Teiresias to action in the third drama?

(Teiresias watches for heavenly omens in nature. He is sitting in the augur's chair when a flock of birds begins screaming and whirling overhead. The prophet kindles a sacrifice, but Hephaestus, the god of fire, sends no flame. A strange sweat flows down the thigh of the sacrificial animal. The gallbladder bursts and grease oozes down, leaving the thigh-bones bare.)

CONFLICT

4. Why does Oedipus blind himself?

(According to the attendant, who reports Oedipus's self-mutilation, the king charges his own body with sacrilege. He blames his eyes "that should see no longer his shame, his guilt, no longer see those they should never have seen, nor see, unseeing, those he had longed to see, henceforth seeing nothing but night." To carry out his intent, he darkens his gaze forever.)

CHARACTER

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

(The servant who escapes the death scene at the crossroads returns to the Theban palace and begs Queen Jocasta to send him far from the kingdom. He wants to live the uncomplicated life of a shepherd. In thanks for his loyalty to Laius, Jocasta allows the slave to have his wish.)

INTERPRETATIVE LEVEL

MOTIVATION

6. How does Creon's pride cause the deaths of Haemon and Eurydice?

(When Creon refuses to lighten Antigone's sentence, he incurs the anger of her fiancé, Prince Haemon. The boy, astonished at his father's callous edict to leave Polynices's body to the dogs and carrion birds, pleads for clemency for Antigone. Creon's stony-hearted refusal forever separates father from son and jeopardizes Creon's dynasty.

The situation worsens after Antigone's suicide. When Haemon finds his love hanging from a noose in the cave, he strikes out at Creon with a sword and then stabs himself in frustration and despair. Eurydice, who has already suffered the loss of her son Megareus through suicide, is unable to face a second death. Her desolation leads to a her own suicide with the sword. Creon's stubborn adherence to his own command leads to his isolation and fatal separation from the family members he loved.)

CHARACTER RESPONSES

7. Why does Theseus rebuke Creon?

(Theseus, a more level-headed, genteel ruler than the king of Thebes, has learned from his experience with exile and threats to his life. He is astounded that Creon would come to Athens to kidnap Oedipus's daughters. Creon insults Athenians and their king by committing a crime in their territory as though Athens were a "city of slaves, or city of emptiness, and I a thing beneath your

THE THEBAN PLAYS

notice!" Creon attempts to justify his actions by demeaning Oedipus. Creon claims, "I felt certain they would never receive a polluted parricide, a party to an incestuous union—mother and son.")

INTERPRETATION

8. How does Oedipus underscore the irony of his guilt in the opening scene of the first play?

(The king's references to clear vision and to his own sickness are tragic foreshadowings of his solution to Thebes's anguish from the plague and from extensive crop failure. At the end of his discussion with Creon, Oedipus vows to "start afresh; and bring everything into the light." He justifies his course of action by adding, "My own cause too—not merely from a fellow-creature will I clear this taint, but from myself." His posturing unfortunately predicts his eventual downfall for murder and incest.)

ANALYTICAL LEVEL

COMPARATIVE LITERATURE

9. Why does the trilogy feature the theme of pride?

(Greek drama centered on the sin of arrogance. Both Oedipus and Creon exemplify humans who seal their own fate by their haughty, self-ennobling actions. If Oedipus had not murdered Laius in a fit of rage over a trivial incident at the crossroads, if Creon had not clung to his right of rule in opposition to obvious mitigating circumstances, both men might have saved themselves the loss of family and power. Sophocles denounces the characters' pride and egotism as reckless and self-destructive as well as counter-productive to Thebes and its citizens.)

SUBTEXT

10. How do oracles provoke illogical human actions?

(Ambiguous information leads to self-fulfillment of prophecies in the Theban trilogy as Laius and Oedipus meet their destiny in a headlong rush toward false security. The characters repeatedly ask Apollo's help, but they never resign themselves to the oracle's prophecies. When Laius realizes 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 fail to avoid the fate that Apollo has prescribed for them.)

CREATIVE LEVEL

11. How is Antigone's choice to bury her brother based on her history, family, upbringing, and/or character?

(Answers will vary.)

HOW LANGUAGE WORKS

Sophocles elevates drama through the reactions of characters to fate. For example:

1. Upon realizing his multiple sins of murder and incest, Oedipus blames his rescuer:

Cursed be the benefactor
That loosed my feet and gave me life
For death; a poor exchange.
Death would have been a boon to me and all of mine.

2. Upon Theseus's encounter with Oedipus, the Athenian king speaks openly of his own bouts with evil destiny:

Speak freely.
There is no circumstance that you can tell
So lamentable that I should shut my ears to it.
I do not forget my own upbringing in exile,
Like yours, and how many times I battled, alone,
With dangers to my life, in foreign lands.

3. Eurydice, a grieving mother, learns of crisis in the kingdom. Confidently, she states,

When I caught your talk of some near calamity
I was sick with fear and reeled in the arms of my women.
But tell me what is the matter; what have you heard?
I am not unacquainted with grief, and I can bear it.

4. As the truth of Oedipus's sins register with his mother/wife, Jocasta warns of further investigation:

No! In God's name—if you want to live, this
Must not go on. Have I not suffered enough?

She adds,

O lost and damned!
This is my last and only word to you
For ever!

5. In Antigone's attempt to stave off war between her brothers, she asks Polynices,

How many of your men
Will follow when they hear what is foretold?

6. In her final speech, Antigone calls on the gods with a justification for her crime:

Time stays no longer.
Last daughter of your royal house
Go I, his prisoner, because I honoured
Those things to which honour truly belongs.

THE THEBAN PLAYS

ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

LAW

Compose wills for Haemon, Oedipus, Eteocles, Antigone, Eurydice, Jocasta, Laius, Megareus, and Polynices. Suggest how they would have left their worldly goods to express changes of heart toward family and loyalty to the realm. Compose a similar will for Creon exhibiting his character growth after multiple losses.

RELIGION

1. Explain how Greek drama grew out of the worship of Dionysus, the god of wine and fertility, and how theatrical companies added masks, scenery, dance, costumes, and choral ode to speaking parts.
2. Using Teiresias 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. Compare his role to that of the Hebrew priest Nathan, adviser to King David.

LITERATURE

1. Using *King Oedipus* as an example, compose an extended definition of tragedy, hamartia, or tragic hero. Characterize the significance of a character flaw to catastrophes.
2. List and explain mythological, literary, historical, and geographical allusions in the three plays. For example, refer to comments about nymphs, Cephisus, Cronus, Persephone, Poseidon, Aegeus, Ares, Aphrodite, Tartarus, Hephaestus, Delphi, Cithaeron, the Sphinx, Labdacus, Polydorus, Hades, the furies, Eumenides, Pythia, Cadmus, Agenor, Zeus, Athena, Artemis, Dionysus, the Delphic oracle, and Apollo.
3. Contrast several translations of a major speech in one of the plays, such as the final lines about human happiness, Oedipus's promise to rid Thebes of taint, or Haemon's denunciation of his father's rule. Note how line length, rhythm, diction, and stress vary in the different versions.
4. 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*, August Wilson's *Fences*, Archibald MacLeish's *J. B.*, or Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*. In an oral composition, compare modern methods of playwriting with those of Sophocles.
5. Read *The Birds*, *Lysistrata*, or another of Aristophanes' comedies. Analyze how his subject matter, style, tone, and purpose differ from those of Sophocles. Determine whether the sin of pride recurs as a controlling theme in comedy.
6. Lead a debate on the value of interlinking plots in the triad. Explain how the mounting tragedies in one family impact Ismene, the remaining Theban princess. What effect do multiple tragedies have on Creon, the ruler who survives his family's losses?

GEOGRAPHY

1. Create a bulletin board contrasting settings described or mentioned in the text. Include Corinth, Athens, Colonus, Phocis, Dirce, Arcadia, Aetolia, Daulia, Pelops, Delphi, Doria, Cithaeron, Cephisus, Sipylus, Sardis, Ismenus, Argos, Eleusis, Delos, Attica, Thebes, Thrace, Lycea, Cyllene, Parnassus, Helicon, Ister, Phasis, Bosphorus, Polar, Peloponnesus, Edonia, Phrygia, Etna, and Thessalia. Trace Oedipus's life from birth to Jocasta and Laius through his adoption by Polybus and Meropé, kingship in Thebes, wanderings to Colonus, and a secret death and burial.
2. Compose a list of classic plays and epics and their settings, as with Sophocles's *Oedipus the King* in Thebes, Homer's *The Iliad* in Troy, and Homer's *The Odyssey*, which travels about the Mediterranean world before concluding at Pylos. Note whether the places are real or imaginary, particularly the entrance to the underworld. Locate real settings in a classical atlas along with the literary titles. Place a star on Sophocles's birthplace.

PSYCHOLOGY AND ETHICS

1. Propose personality types for the roles of Oedipus, Creon, Teiresias, Ismene, Haemon, 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.
2. Apply the term "coming to knowledge" to the final scene of each tragedy. Explain the price paid by Oedipus and his mother/wife and siblings/children, who were once the royal family of Thebes. Determine why Oedipus's punishment benefits Creon, yet leads to Creon's downfall.
3. 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.
4. Determine the evolving relationship between Creon and his two young nieces, Ismene and Antigone, and his nephew, Eteocles and Polynices. Summarize how this strained kinship develops into additional suffering and tragedy.
5. Lead a discussion of suicide. Explain why Jocasta, Eurydice, Antigone, Megareus, and Haemon choose to end their lives at crucial points in the action. Contrast their deaths with those of Polynices, Eteocles, Laius, Polybus, and Oedipus.
6. Compose a lecture on emotional disturbance as characterized by the Eumenides. List home diagnosis, complications, and treatment for severe traumas like those that Ismene and Creon suffer.

THE THEBAN PLAYS

MATH AND COMPUTERS

1. With a group, list and explain these terms: parricide, adversity, consummation, emissary, tutelage, importunate, votaries, overture, suppliant, herald, edict, beseech, incontinently, durance, expiation, acolyte, heinous, grotto, sacred precinct, infirmity, Phoebus, mother-wit, transgression, impugn, soothsayer, surmise, contrive, exeunt, Healer of Delphos, blight, revelry, proclamation, seer, lamentations, supplication, enchantress, sepulchre, foreknowledge, Pythian, bay leaves, pilgrimage, exile, and Sphinx.
2. With a group, design a brochure, website, frieze, or poster series detailing the distances from Thebes to Corinth, Colonus, Athens, and Delphi. Use estimated speeds of foot travel to determine how long it took messengers, guards, and other pedestrians to reach their destinations over rocky terrain.
3. Use historical data to determine the height, width, and depth of the Theater of Dionysus in Athens. Include figures on how large an audience could view a play. Contrast these figures with those for other ancient theaters throughout the ancient world, particularly in Epidaurus, Syracuse, Taormina, Rome, Arles, and Pompeii.

RESEARCH

1. Outline the life of Teiresias. Explain why he suffered misery and why he is a worthy choice of adviser to kings.
2. With a classroom demonstration, explain how and why Greek drama grew out of the worship of Dionysus, the god of wine and fertility. Include details about the creation of masks and how the term "persona" derived from the megaphone within the mask.
3. Write an encyclopedia entry on suicide. Add details that explain why a disillusioned spouse or parent would end life rather than survive tragedy in the family. Contrast suicide from despair with Megareus's ritual suicide.

JOURNALISM

1. Arrange an interview with Teiresias or Theseus. Have someone assume the role of the blind prophet or the Athenian king; have another person be a reporter. Discuss with Teiresias how he feels about his part in the tragedy of Oedipus's family or ask Theseus why he pities Oedipus.
2. 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.

ECONOMICS AND FINANCE

1. Make a comparative chart of monies used in ancient Greece. Propose a two-sided coin to honor Oedipus and Laius, Apollo and Pythia, Antigone and Polynices, or Theseus and Creon. Suggest reasons why few mortal women appear on coins from the period.

SOCIAL STUDIES

1. Using desktop publishing or other media, illustrate class differences of royalty, messengers, prophet, sentries, ladies-in-waiting, priest, boy, onlookers, and servant classes as well as wanderers, warriors, and shepherds. How do stage roles dignify nobles?
2. Lead a panel discussion of the significance of the term "king" in the time of Laius, Oedipus, Creon, Polybus, and Theseus. Determine why the priest, Pythia, and Teiresias possess a form of power greater than royalty.
3. View murals, portraits, pottery, illuminations, bas reliefs, coins, and other art forms typifying the lives of Greeks of the classical period. Comment on the interplay of people of different social, educational, and professional backgrounds at a variety of activities, including dining, traveling by land or sea, walking with children, welcoming royal guests, celebrating, protecting the king and his family, guarding, delivering messages, and arming for battle.

SCIENCE AND HEALTH

1. Explain in a theme 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, kinesthetic, olfactory, and tactile clues.
2. Give an oral report on the genetic weaknesses of daughters and sons born to Oedipus and his mother/wife Jocasta. Include additional possibilities of abnormality from Jocasta's marriage to Laius, her distant cousin.
3. List difficulties for a messenger in ancient Greece, particularly fatigue, sunburn, thirst, and the danger of falling, being waylaid by highwaymen, or angering royalty by delivering unfavorable or disturbing news as such as anarchy, the threat of war, pestilence, ruined crops, or the arrival of an adversary or a pariah like Oedipus.

LANGUAGE

1. Summarize the general and specific meanings of "plague" over time, including the seven plagues of Egypt in Moses' time. Explain the pervasive fear of contagion as a punishment hurled down from heaven by an angry deity.
2. Choose a series of lines from the plays to illustrate Sophocles's skill with poetry, as with "We cannot believe, we cannot deny; all's dark," "Now is the time to show/Whether or not you are worthy of your high blood," "Kingdoms are won by men and moneybags," and "I come to offer you/A gift—my tortured body—a sorry sight."
3. Explain Creon's last speech. Why does he consider himself weak and foolish? Why does the chorus consider such humbling essential to a person who lives unwisely up to old age? Explain in what way Creon is at last wise.

THE THEBAN PLAYS

ART, COSTUME DESIGN, AND MUSIC

1. Use desktop publishing, plaster of paris, masks, puppets, batik, fabric banners, shadow portraits, or other artistic forms to create a gallery of characters in the play. Pair contrasting figures such as Jocasta and Antigone, Polynices and Megareus, Teiresias and Creon, or Ismene and Theseus.
2. List dramatic scenes from the play that would require intense use of lighting, costume, makeup, music, props, and stunts, particularly the hanging scenes, Antigone's disobedience during a whirlwind, the sound of thunder before Oedipus's death, Theseus's welcome of Oedipus to Athens, Oedipus's departure from Thebes, the gathering of seven armies, flashbacks of the murder at the crossroads, the arrival of messengers, Polynices's war on Thebes, Eurydice's grief for Megareus, and Oedipus's blinding.
3. 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*, *Oedipus At Colonus*, or *Antigone*. Use an illustration that intrigues the reader to see the play and learn how it ends, such as tragic masks or costumes draped in classic style. Emphasize action, emotion, and contrast in your drawing.
4. Select instrumental, choral, or solo vocal music to delineate the contrast between hopeful scenes, murder, suicide, city uproar, regret, suffering, triumph for Thebes, loss of a child, anarchy, widespread disease and crop loss, mystic death, and prophecy.
5. Propose scenes for a mural to illustrate the triad's interconnected plots. Begin with the search for a cure to the pestilence and end with Creon's loss of wife, sons, and future daughter-in-law.
6. On paper plates or cardboard, sketch masks to be used by the actors at a high point of one of Sophocles's plays. Emphasize emotional response of each character in the facial expressions, such as Oedipus's realization who killed Laius or Eurydice's reaction to Haemon's suicide.

DRAMA AND SPEECH

1. With a small group, discuss the ancient philosophy of the golden mean, which the Romans stated as "Nothing in excess." How does this triad of dramas demonstrate the wisdom of the aphorism? In what respect is Creon excessive?
2. Compose an extended definition of drama in which you explain the following aspects: character, setting; plot, theme, tone, mood, aside, strophe, epilogue, soliloquy, monologue, climax, chorus, dilemma, conflict, literary foils, motivation, tragedy, rising action, and denouement.
3. Contrast the rhythm and impact of various styles of rhetoric, including ode, paean, chant, dialogue, lament, and speech. Determine how the chorus contrasts the actors' lines and why these poetic remarks are important moral messages in Greek drama.

4. Draw a floor plan of the theatre at Epidaurus. Label the seats of the priests, altar, theatron, orchestra, skene, proskene, and parados. Place actors on stage for the final scene of Oedipus the King, Oedipus at Colonus, or Antigone.

COMPOSITION

1. Compose a short scene in which Oedipus returns from visiting the oracle at Delphi and bids farewell to Polybus and Meropé or write a scene in which Creon and Ismene console each other after the deaths of the rest of their family. Try to maintain the dignified verse style of Sophocles.
2. Propose a guided tour of contrasting settings in the play, particularly Oedipus's secret burial scene, Antigone's immurement in the cave, Polynices's burial on the dusty plain, the crossroads where Laius died, the shepherd's discovery of an abandoned infant, Creon's palace, Polynices at Poseidon's altar, or the sacred grove at Colonus.
3. 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 response to it. Comment on the role of the chorus in differentiating between right and wrong behavior. Summarize examples of human folly.

EDUCATION

1. Compose an introduction to classical Greek drama for use in the classroom. Write extended definitions of ode, strophe, envoi, myth, comedy, satire, dithyramb, and tragedy. Include examples of each genre from ancient and modern literature. Explain how Sophocles's tragic method impacts modern dramatic scenes.

CROSS-CURRICULAR SOURCES

For more information about the Theban plays, Sophocles, Greek drama and mythology, and other subjects and issues deriving from the novel, consult these sources:

PRINT MEDIA

ARTICLES

Lyons, Donald. "The Sphinx of Athens," *New Criterion* 13, no. 7 (March 1995): 68-73.

Wolf, Matt. "An Ancient Drama Whose Wisdom Is Always Modern," *New York Times* (27 October 2002): 2.6.

BOOKS

The King Must Die

The Last Of The Wine

CASEBOOK

Oedipus: A Folklore Casebook, Lowell Edmunds

ESSAY

Henry David Thoreau, "Civil Disobedience"

THE THEBAN PLAYS

PLAYS

An Enemy Of The People

Fences

J. B.

The Lion In Winter

Medea

The Night Thoreau Spent In Jail

FRENCH VERSION

Antigon, Jean Anouilh

LARGE PRINT

Antigone, Ulverscroft

POETRY

"The Destruction Of Sennacherib," George Gordon, Lord Byron

"Ozymandias," Percy Bysshe Shelley

"Ulysses," Alfred, Lord Tennyson

REFERENCE

The Aching Hearth: Family Violence In Life And Literature,
Sarah Munson Deats and Laretta Tallent Lenker

The Greek Way, Edith Hamilton

A History Of Greek Literature, Albin Lesky

A History Of The Ancient World, Chester G. Starr

The Life Of Greece, Will Durant

Women Of Classical Mythology, Robert Bell

AUDIO MEDIA

Audiocassettes

(ABRIDGED)

Antigone, Pacemaker Classics

(UNABRIDGED)

Antigone, Harper Caedmon

Oedipus Rex, Harper Caedmon

Audio CD

King Oedipus, Audite

Audio Download

Oedipus The King, Naxos Audio Books

Oedipus The King And The Nature Of Greek Tragedy,
Arnold L. Weinstein (lecture)

VISUAL MEDIA

DVD

Antigone: Rites of Passion, 2001, starring Bertram Ross

Videocassettes/Films

Art In Ancient Greece, Filmic Archives

Bacchus, The God Of Wine, Filmic Archives

Henry V

Homer's Mythology: Tracing A Tradition, *The Writing Company*

The Lion In Winter

Medea, Filmic Archives

The Odyssey

Phaedra

Subtitled Videos

Antigone, 1962, starring Irene Papas

Oedipus, 1967, directed by Pier Paolo Pasolini

Video Discussion

Antigone, Thomas Klise

Maps

"Map of Ancient Greece,"

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

Voyages In Classical Mythology, Mary Ellen Snodgrass

Posters

"Greek Mythology," The Writing Company

"Introducing Mythology," The Writing Company

OTHER MEDIA

CD-ROM

DIScovering Authors, Gale Group

Favorite Greek Myths, The Writing Company

Internet

"The Ancient Greek Theatre Page,"

<http://anarchon.tripod.com/index/GREEKTH.html>.

"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>.

"Oedipus the King,"

<http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/classics/oedipus.htm>.

Multimedia Kit

Archetypes In Life, Literature, And Myth, The Writing Company

Mythology, Filmic Archives

THE THEBAN PLAYS

RELATED READING

Maxwell Anderson, *Anne Of The Thousand Days*
Jean Anouilh, *Andromache* or *Antigon*
Aristophanes, *Lysistrata* and *The Birds*
Euripides, *The Trojan Women* and *Medea*
John Gardner, *Grendel*
James Goldman, *The Lion In Winter*
Henrik Ibsen, *Hedda Gabler* or *A Doll's House*
Mary Renault, *The King Must Die* and *The Last Of The Wine*
Edmond Rostand, *Cyrano de Bergerac*
William Shakespeare, *Othello*, *Macbeth*, and *King Lear*
Mary Stewart, *The Crystal Cave* and *The Hollow Hills*
Mark Twain, *A Connecticut Yankee In King Arthur's Court*
T. H. White, *Once And Future King*
August Wilson, *Fences*

ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT

1. List in chronological order and describe significant events connected with the two troubled families. Mention the murder at the crossroads, Teiresias' predictions, Jocasta's suicide, Oedipus's blindness, Megareus's self-sacrifice, civil war, Polynices's death in combat, Creon's losses, Polybus and Meropé's adoption of a son, the queen's death by hanging, Antigone's condemnation to death, Haemon's loss of a fiancée, Theseus's kindness to the exile, the shepherd's rearing of a son, and Eurydice's suicide.
2. List events from the play that express strong attitudes toward kinship, love, vengeance, obedience, piety, law, women, anarchy, parenthood, and loss. Indicate what you think is Sophocles's personal philosophy on each subject.
3. Compose brief definitions of drama, tragedy, and decorum as they apply to *King Oedipus*, *Oedipus At Colonus*, and *Antigone*. What changes in the triad would end multiple sufferings?
4. Summarize scenes that depict familial conflict, particularly Ismene's disapproval of Antigone's decision, Oedipus's anger at Polynices, Eteocles' killing of his brother, Jocasta's fear that Oedipus will discover too much, Creon's denunciation of Haemon's fiancée, Haemon's disillusion with his father, Antigone's challenge of her uncle's law, Jocasta's despair at her unintentional incest, and Megareus's decision to sacrifice himself.

THE THEBAN PLAYS

VOCABULARY

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

beseech	grotto	intolerable	rank	subtlety
blight	incontinent	inviolable	sacrilege	transgress
expiation	infallible	maul	sanctuary	vagabonds
fraudulent	iniquity	prophetic	specious	

1. If my _____ eye fails not, tomorrow's moon makes known to all the earth the secret of our master's birth.
2. His _____ meeteth all chance, all danger conquereth.
3. I am his father, but I tell you, sir, his very voice would be _____.
4. Must Creon, so long my friend, my most trusted friend, stalk me by stealth, and study to dispossess me of the power this city has given me—freely given—not of my asking—setting this schemer on me, this pedlar of _____ magical tricks, with eyes wide open for profit, but blind in prophecy?
5. I knew the infallible wisdom of the Hill of Acres does not allow asylum to such _____.
6. To _____ or twist the law to one's own pleasure, presume to order where one should obey, is sinful, and I will have none of it.
7. But I hear whispers spoken in the dark; on every side I hear voices of pity for this poor girl, doomed to the cruellest death, and most unjust, that ever woman suffered for an honourable action—burying a brother who was killed in battle, rather than leave him naked for dogs to _____ and carrion birds to peck at.
8. The usual central exit from the stage presents the appearance of a rocky path leading by irregular steps to a thickly-wooded _____.
9. So the tormented sufferer was not to find rest before he _____ had denounced the feigned repentance of these deceivers and silence their _____ overtures with his last curses.
10. In their despair her citizens cried to their king for yet more proofs of his _____ resource, and to their gods, chief among them Apollo, for light and healing in their wretchedness.

B. For each of the five unused words from Part A, compose an original sentence using them correctly.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

THE THEBAN PLAYS OF SOPOCLES

COMPREHENSION TEST A

PART I: SHORT ANSWER (30 POINTS)

Identify the following characters and explain the significance of the events listed.

- _____ 1. regrets Megareus's death.
- _____ 2. clutches the corpse of Antigone.
- _____ 3. forbids the burial of a traitor.
- _____ 4. hangs herself while wearing gold brooches.
- _____ 5. accuses Haemon of supporting Antigone's rebellion.
- _____ 6. calls on a god to rid Thebes of its disease.
- _____ 7. tries to take part of the blame for Antigone's crime.
- _____ 8. calls for tools and speed to save Antigone.
- _____ 9. welcomes an exile to Athens.
- _____ 10. kills a brother.
- _____ 11. recognizes the stranger at Poseidon's altar.
- _____ 12. faces Oedipus at the crossroads.
- _____ 13. locates an abandoned child.
- _____ 14. blames Oedipus for making his daughter a spinster.
- _____ 15. welcomes thunder.

PART II: TRUE/FALSE (20 POINTS)

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

- ___ 1. Teiresias responds to the omen of screaming birds.
- ___ 2. Creon comes to Colonus to force Oedipus back to Thebes.
- ___ 3. Creon promises stoning to anyone who breaks the law.
- ___ 4. Ismene gallops to Colonus to warn her father of Creon's law.
- ___ 5. A messenger reports the death of Polybus at Corinth.
- ___ 6. Eurydice is not in favor of Haemon's engagement to a rebel.
- ___ 7. Haemon offers to accompany Antigone to the execution site.
- ___ 8. Teiresias tells Oedipus how to answer the riddle of the Sphinx.
- ___ 9. Oedipus violates a sacred sanctuary.
- ___ 10. Jocasta regrets that her daughters will wander with a blind father.

THE THEBAN PLAYS

PART III: QUOTATION IDENTIFICATION (20 POINTS)

Name the character who speaks each of these lines.

- _____ 1. Therefore, good sirs, since you moved me from my seat, you must—by all the gods—protect me now.
- _____ 2. Stranger, see what you've brought upon yourself! By birth and race you ought to know much better.
- _____ 3. There is no way to tell the character and mettle of a man until you've seen him govern.
- _____ 4. He never gave you life, no more than I.
- _____ 5. You insult us; you insult your very race and native land.
- _____ 6. There ain't no mark of pick or mattock, ground's all 'ard, unbroken.
- _____ 7. No marriage I could make would ever match the good of your abiding counsel.
- _____ 8. I'm just not made to war against the state.
- _____ 9. Her poor remains still in the house, bury them—what tomb you wish.
- _____ 10. As eldest son I claimed my sovereign birthright to your throne.

PART IV: ESSAY (30 POINTS)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Account for multiple deaths in the household of Laius, Oedipus, and Creon.
2. Defend Antigone's decision to break Creon's law.
3. Compare Creon, Oedipus, Jocasta, and Eurydice in their responses to bad news.
4. Express the play's attitude toward prophecy.
5. Describe the circumstances that precede Oedipus's arrival at the sacred sanctuary.

THE THEBAN PLAYS

COMPREHENSION TEST B

PART I: MULTIPLE CHOICE (30 POINTS)

Choose the answer that best completes each statement below. Place the letter of your response in the blank at left.

- _____ 1. After Antigone confesses,
A. Creon chooses to ignore Ismene's role in the crime.
B. Creon charges Ismene with being an accomplice.
C. the guard claims he did not see the girl at the burial site.
D. Haemon pleads for her dismissal.
- _____ 2. A messenger announces that
A. Jocasta committed suicide in front of the king.
B. a whirlwind has hidden the corpse in dust.
C. Polybus is dead.
D. Creon killed Polynices and Eteocles in battle.
- _____ 3. Creon doubts the guard's words and blames him for
A. taking a bribe.
B. siding with Antigone.
C. covering the corpse with dust.
D. disobeying the decree.
- _____ 4. Ismene reveals
A. danger to Thebes.
B. doubts that the stranger is her brother.
C. sympathy for Jocasta and Oedipus.
D. Theseus's reason for welcoming Oedipus to Colonus.
- _____ 5. Antigone explains to her sister that
A. Antigone can never marry as long as her father lives.
B. no one can defy the gods without punishment.
C. Creon forbids Polynices a decent burial.
D. their uncle has threatened to stone Oedipus if he returns to Thebes.
- _____ 6. The token that indicates Oedipus's death is
A. the oracle at Delphi.
B. bird sounds.
C. lack of fire on the sacrifices.
D. thunder.
- _____ 7. Teiresias predicts that
A. no one will locate Oedipus's grave.
B. Megareus must die.
C. Ismene and Antigone will wander with their blind father.
D. the Furies will repay Creon for his acts.
- _____ 8. Creon declares that
A. Teiresias is lying about the Eumenides.
B. women must be forced to obey.
C. Theseus has no right welcoming the exile to Colonus.
D. the chorus is overstating the case for Polynices's burial.
- _____ 9. Creon brags to Thebans that
A. he has killed the seven who warred on the city.
B. he will allow no one to be an exception before the law.
C. Haemon is a loyal son and heir to the throne.
D. he has ousted the man who brought pestilence to Thebes.
- _____ 10. Teiresias boldly predicts
A. that Antigone will wander with Oedipus.
B. Jocasta's suicide.
C. that evil will befall Creon.
D. the oracle that will save Thebes from suffering.
- _____ 11. Before his death, Haemon
A. accuses his father of making a mistake.
B. tries to stop Antigone from confessing her disobedience.
C. bids farewell to Eurydice.
D. apologizes to his father for disrespect.
- _____ 12. In the tomb, Creon sees
A. how Eurydice killed herself.
B. Haemon embracing Antigone's body.
C. the guard cremating the corpse.
D. Ismene begging Antigone to change her mind.
- _____ 13. Before Eurydice dies,
A. she begs Creon to pardon his nieces.
B. Creon orders her to say no more about Megareus.
C. her slave women report that she accuses Creon of being a weak king.
D. she blames Creon for two deaths.
- _____ 14. The chorus reminds the audience that
A. human law comes before oracles and prophecies.
B. Teiresias deserves respect and obedience.
C. Creon must stop rebellion in Thebes to protect its citizens.
D. arrogance is a sin.
- _____ 15. Creon declares that there is no more evil institution than
A. fortunetelling.
B. his own family.
C. anarchy.
D. royalty.

THE THEBAN PLAYS

PART II: MATCHING (20 POINTS)

Match by placing letter of quotation ending in blank provided before quotation beginning.

- | | |
|--|--|
| ___ 1. I am the one who puts | A. when all the kingly sway can be enjoyed without? |
| ___ 2. I dunno who darned done it neither | B. and I make do with less. |
| ___ 3. Who would chose uneasy dreams to don a crown | C. if she can flout authority and walk away unscathed. |
| ___ 4. I come with a gift: | D. this fearless Argos in the field against the state of Thebes. |
| ___ 5. Such a pregnant rush of light | E. in accents that will bring him little joy. |
| ___ 6. Creon is burying one | F. never comes without some meaning. |
| ___ 7. Oh, she's the man, not I | G. distress to bring it on a friend. |
| ___ 8. Home at last, | H. that place you must not tell to any living being. |
| ___ 9. And I myself unhelped shall walk before you there | I. where Polynices lay abandoned still—all mauled by dogs. |
| ___ 10. Well, there was a murder, yes, | J. so it in't fair to make me take the rap. |
| | K. but done by brigands in another land. |
| | L. to find myself called traitor; traitor to my town, to you, and to my friends. |
| | M. this my battered body. |
| | N. not wed, no broken spell. |
| | O. to desecrate the other. |

PART III: FILL-IN (20 POINTS)

Fill-in the word that completes each statement below. Place your responses in the blanks provided.

1. The _____ explains to Creon that he lost the toss and had to bring bad news.
2. _____ grieves over the death of an older son, Megareus.
3. Antigone hangs herself with a noose of _____.
4. A stranger arrives at Poseidon's _____.
5. Teiresias explains that the din of _____ warned him of coming evil.
6. Oedipus angers Teiresias, the blind _____.
7. Polynices seizes the _____ of Thebes.
8. Jocasta is certain that _____ was murdered by brigands.
9. A messenger terrifies Oedipus with news of the death of _____.
10. Oedipus's name indicates his _____.

PART III: ESSAY (30 POINTS)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Explain how Ismene and Antigone suffer for their parents' wrongs.
2. Compare the shepherd, Haemon, and Eurydice as minor characters.
3. Contrast Oedipus as king, exile, pariah, and guest of Theseus.
4. Describe the royal households of Thebes.
5. Predict future quarrels between Creon and his subjects.

THE THEBAN PLAYS

TEACHER'S NOTES

THE THEBAN PLAYS

TEACHER'S NOTES

THE THEBAN PLAYS

ANSWER KEY

VOCABULARY

- | | |
|----------------|----------------|
| 1. prophetic | 6. transgress |
| 2. subtlety | 7. maul |
| 3. intolerable | 8. grotto |
| 4. fraudulent | 9. specious |
| 5. vagabonds | 10. infallible |

COMPREHENSION TEST A

PART I: SHORT ANSWER (30 POINTS)

Explanations will vary.

- | | | |
|-------------|---------------|--------------|
| 1. Eurydice | 6. chorus | 11. Oedipus |
| 2. Haemon | 7. Ismene | 12. Laius |
| 3. Creon | 8. Creon | 13. shepherd |
| 4. Jocasta | 9. Theseus | 14. Creon |
| 5. Creon | 10. Polynices | 15. Oedipus |

PART II: TRUE/FALSE (20 POINTS)

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

PART III: QUOTATION IDENTIFICATION (20 POINTS)

- | | |
|--------------|---------------|
| 1. Oedipus | 6. sentry |
| 2. chorus | 7. Haemon |
| 3. Creon | 8. Ismene |
| 4. messenger | 9. Oedipus |
| 5. Theseus | 10. Polynices |

PART IV. ESSAY (30 POINTS)

Answers will vary.

COMPREHENSION TEST B

PART I: MULTIPLE CHOICE (30 POINTS)

- | | | |
|------|-------|-------|
| 1. B | 6. C | 11. A |
| 2. A | 7. D | 12. B |
| 3. A | 8. B | 13. D |
| 4. D | 9. B | 14. D |
| 5. C | 10. C | 15. C |

PART II: MATCHING (20 POINTS)

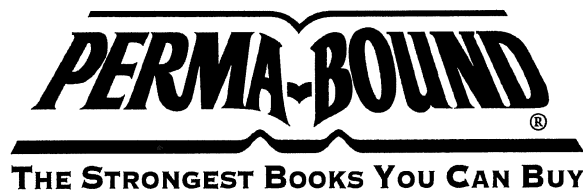
- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. D | 6. O |
| 2. J | 7. C |
| 3. A | 8. N |
| 4. M | 9. H |
| 5. F | 10. K |

PART III: FILL-IN (20 POINTS)

- | | |
|-------------|------------------|
| 1. sentry | 6. seer |
| 2. Eurydice | 7. throne |
| 3. linen | 8. Laius |
| 4. altar | 9. Polybus |
| 5. birds | 10. swollen foot |

PART IV: ESSAY (30 POINTS)

Answers will vary.



PERMA-BOUND ❖ 617 EAST VANDALIA ROAD ❖ JACKSONVILLE, ILLINOIS 62650
TOLL FREE 1-800-637-6581 ❖ FAX 1-800-551-1169 ❖ E-MAIL: books@perma-bound.com

PERMA-BOUND CANADA ❖ BOX 868, STATION MAIN ❖ PETERBOROUGH, ONTARIO K9J 7A2
TOLL FREE 1-800-461-1999 ❖ FAX 1-888-250-3811 ❖ E-MAIL: perma-bound.ca@sympatico.ca

VISIT OUR WEB SITE: <http://www.perma-bound.com>