

ANTIGONE

I. BACKGROUND OF GREEK TRAGEDY

A. ORIGINS

1. Tragedies performed in Athens at the 3 festivals of Dionysius
2. Each performance (tetralogy) had 3 plays and a satyr-play
 - a. included dancing and dialogue between leader & chorus--at first, more satire
 - b. then became more serious--philosophical, religious, moral
3. free admission; people were expected to come--civic and religious obligation

B. PLOTS--from Greek mythology and heroic legends

C. THEATRE AND EQUIPMENT

1. orchestra--where chorus sang and danced (after marching through the right or left entrance--the parados)
2. theatron---where audience sang
3. actors wore masks to emphasize the dominant traits they impersonated: all were male who knew how to sing since many lines were lyrics chanted
4. chorus-----acted like the ideal spectator usually. Typically, the chorus marched into the orchestra and chanted the parados

D. STRUCTURE OF PLAY

1. prologue: opening scene, background of play and conflict provided by single actor or dialogue of 2
2. parados: entrance of chorus, usually chanting a lyric relating to the play
3. episode: act or scene that develops plot; chorus sometimes played minor role
4. stasimon: the choral ode, sung at end of episode
5. exodus: final action after the last stasimon

E. ARISTOTLE'S TRAGEDY

1. "TRAGEDY is an imitation of action & life, happiness & misery"; plot is the most important element, character is second.
 - a. Its length is such that it can be clearly understood 'without difficulty'; should have a single central theme
 - b. protagonist is character experiencing most change
 - c. its AIM is to arouse pity and fear for protagonist
2. PROTAGONIST is tragic hero whose error in judgment leads to downfall or subjects that person to retribution. Often, however, fate lays with cosmic moral order and role of chance in his/her affairs

F. MYTHOLOGICAL BACKGROUND: "The Oedipus Myth"

G. CHARACTERS:

ANTIGONE: Oedipus' younger daughter
CREON, king of Thebes
HAEMON, Creon's son
SENTRY
CHORUS of THEBAN ELDERS

ISMENE, Oedipus' eldest daughter
EURYDICE, Creon's wife
TIRESIAS, blind prophet
MESSENGER

STUDY GUIDE: "ANTIGONE"

NOTES: Prologue

**In ancient Greece, funeral rites were the privilege and duty of women.

**Antigone and Ismene are the last of Oedipus' family; thus, Antigone takes it personally when Ismene refuses to help

**The status of women in ancient Greece looked something like this: they married at age 13 or 14, often to men twice their age; wealthy women were secluded in homes with no legal or property rights. If a husband died, a family member (sometimes dictated in the will) would try to find her another husband. A husband was considered "his wife's guardian."

1. What was Creon's edict? What does Antigone intend? Why? What are Ismene's feelings about Antigone's intended actions?

2. What attitudes about women (of the time) do Antigone and Ismene reflect?

3. In terms of the tone and content, how does the Parados differ from the prologue?

The prologue is the dialogue between Antigone and Ismene. It has a bitter and determined, but mournful/sad tone. The Parados has a joyful tone, rejoicing the end of the battle and the victory of Thebes. In a flashback, it informs reader of the events preceding it.

4. Explain these literary techniques: a) metaphor of Polyneices (Parados); b) verbal irony of Antigone (about line 677; c) Ismene's tone (lines 69-72).

5. What is the play's essential conflict?

TEACHER NOTES:

**Creon views the state's laws as the HIGHEST.

**Creon believes his decision re: Polynices is BEST for the state, the common good

**Conflict: Antigone belief in religious law as being superior to that of the state; Creon's belief that state law supersedes all. Polynices has attempted to destroy the state; hence, to defile his body would be to make an example of him for others who might try a similar action.

SCENE 1, ODE 1:

NOTES:

**Greek tragedies were based on old myths and legends the people already knew; some parts were changed to suit the author's purpose.

**Greek Tragedy's purpose was not entertainment, but moral instruction. Even slaves, women & prisoners were released to attend these plays.

**The Chorus would chant and they moved back and forth across the stage

**No violence was ever shown on stage

**Greek hero: part god, part human--trying to do good, but hindered by flaws in human

judgment OR overwhelming forces of society

6. Characterize Creon from this scene.

7. Why won't Creon give Polyneices a proper burial? How does the Chorus feel about this?

8. What is the Sentry's news? Why is he reluctant to tell Creon? What is Creon's reaction? What is the Sentry's reaction to Creon's reaction?

9. Ode 1 provides insight into human nature and a commentary on the nature of law. Explain. According to the Chorus, is anyone right in terms of the two opposing views taken by Antigone and Creon?

BOOK PASSAGE-BASED QUESTIONS

With your group members, analyze Creon's speech and present to the class. Use the SOAPSTone strategy. Write an essay in which you use text-based evidence to characterize Creon at this point in the play.

How does the beginning of Creon's speech differ from the end?

How does the chorus feel about Creon's decision? How do you know?

SCENE 2, ODE 2: page 707

NOTES:

**The Chorus, made up of Theban elders, will articulate the opinion of the general public.

Sometimes they are mistaken, ambivalent, and wise.

**Chorus can provide for audience the playwright's ideas, explain the significance of certain actions, provide background when needed, set mood, emphasize the play's theme.

**Once in a while, Chorus functions as a character.

BOOK PASSAGE-BASED QUESTIONS

1. How has the character of the Sentry changed as the scene opens? Read his speech from lines 35 to 49 and discuss the effectiveness of the narrative point of view in this passage

2. How does Antigone defend herself? Why does she welcome Death?

3. Lines 80 and 86 show Creon making accusations. Explain.

4. Sophocles uses figures of speech in describing the Sentry's discovery of Antigone's guilt. Explain these two.

5. In lines 75-76, the Choragos says, "Like father, like daughter: both headstrong, deaf to reason." Is this true regarding Antigone or Creon? Why?
6. Does the public (represented by the Chorus) support Creon? Clarify.
7. Summarize the conflict between Antigone and Creon as they discuss the right to bury Polyneices.
8. Two different images are presented in the Choragos and in Creon as they discuss Ismene's character. Explain.
9. Ismene has changed her mind about Antigone's actions in this scene. How and why? How does Antigone react to this?
10. Why do you think Creon proposes the harsh treatment of putting Antigone to death?
11. According to Ode 2, what lies over the house of Oedipus? To whom and how does the "mortal arrogance"--refer?

BOOK PASSAGE-BASED QUESTIONS

SCENE 3, ODE 3:

Notes and Comprehension Guide

- **Note several examples of irony in character development in this scene
- **The Greek concept of justice: Greeks believed that all justice must be tempered with compassion, mercy, love.
- **In scene 1, Creon claimed to represent the State; in this scene, Creon refuses to recognize the public's plea that Antigone has not committed a crime. He moves more and more toward a tyranny. In ancient Athens, people despised tyrants, mainly because their history painfully reminded them of their rule.
- **Haemon's love for Antigone's family centers on conflicting realities: Creon's 'fortune' and "continuing wisdom." He therefore wants no anger from the gods.
- **Ode 3 on the 'power of love' is considered one of the greatest, most moving portrayals of love--note the imagery and metaphorical language.

21. Explain these figurative language words/phrases:

- a) Choragos: "Unless time has rusted my wits"
- b) Haemon: "Reason is God's crowning gift to man"

- c) Creon: "...you are right/Not to lose your head over this woman"
- d) Creon: "You consider it right for a man of my years and experience/To go to school to a boy"
- e) Creon: "The State is the King"
- f) Haemon: "Yes, if the State is a desert."
- g) Chorus: Love is a "waster of rich men." (Strophe, Ode 3))
- h) Chorus: Love is a "keeper/Of warm lights and all-night vigil/In the soft face of a girl." (Strophe, Ode 3)

22. What are Creon's justifications to Haemon for his decision to execute Antigone? How does Haemon try to change his father's mind?

23. Line 29 represents verbal irony re: Antigone's character ["family ties"]. Explain.

24. Read lines 73-85 again. Haemon addresses Creon's inflexibility of judgment. Summarize. What metaphors does he use? Explain.

25. According to Haemon, what is the city's attitude toward Creon? What image does Creon use to explain his power? How does Haemon counter? What does he mean?

26. According to Haemon , why is he arguing so vehemently with his father? According to Creon, why is Haemon's judgment so ridiculous?

27. How does Creon plan to absolve himself and the state re: Antigone and Ismene? What attitude of Creon's does this reveal?

28. According to the Chorus in Ode 3, what is Haemon's motivation for his actions? What is the Chorus' cautious response to this?

SCENE 4, ODE 4

NOTES

**The references to the many gods are from literature, history, mythology, religion, politics, sports, science, or culture. ALLUSIONS draw comparisons.

**Note the character change in Antigone: she is suffering, quiet, sad, resigned to her fate, sensitive to criticism, looking for and needing words of praise and love. (Previously, she was strong-willed, resistant to and confident in responding to criticism, determined,

almost arrogant).

29. Research these allusions [check these on the Internet; you could look in Greek mythology or theater]:

a) "...Death/Summons me down to **ACHERON**, that cold shore."

b) "**TANTALOS**' wretched daughter..."

c) "...her [**NIOME'S**] tears are never done."

d) "Where **PERSEPHONE** welcomes the thin ghosts underground."

e) "...the **nine/IMPLACABLE SISTERS** that love the sound of the flute." [Ode 4]

f) "...grinning **ARES**..." [Ode 4, Strophe 2]

30. What does Antigone mean in lines 15-20? [story of Niobe]

31. Antigone anticipates dying. Why is she looking forward to it? What curse does she place on her uncle Creon?

32. Lines 25-32 . Is Antigone pitying herself, or is she responding to the Chorus laughing at her?

33. Line 41 refers to the curse of the Oedipus myth--that all of Oedipus' descendants will pay for his sin of incest (though it was unintentional). What is the Chorus' response in lines 45-48? [Chorus]

34. What does Antigone ask the gods to remember in her last lines? What might be her motives?

35. The Ode talks about 3 Greek mythological characters--Danae, Lycurgos, and Cleopatra. What is the similar fate Antigone shares with them? Is the Ode hailing Antigone? Clarify.

SCENE 5, PAEAN, EXODUS:

NOTES:

**One of Sophocles' main themes is the significance of SUFFERING – which people suffer in many ways, and from that suffering, grow spiritually. Note this with Antigone and Creon as the remainder of the play unfolds.

**In this final scene, Antigone does not have an active part; however, the resolution of the plot and her conflict develop the theme and conflict.

**Note the importance and reverence given to prophets, namely Teiresias. Their word is unquestioned: belief in the power of the gods overshadows any man-made law, an idea to which Creon eventually relents.

**Eurydice, Creon's wife, places a curse on him before her death.

**Creon's demeanor changes radically by the play's end. He prays for his own death so that his suffering might end.

**Consider who is the tragic hero, Antigone or Creon? It is debatable.

36. Teiresias, the prophet, points out to Creon his mistakes. What are they?

37. Of what does Creon accuse Teiresias? What does Teiresias prophesy?

38. What is the irony of Teiresias' blindness?

39. The play deals with PRIDE. Define this word. Find two passages in this scene that address the nature and consequences of pride.

40. In the Paean, why is the Chorus pleading with Dionysius to come "with clement feet?" [What is the Chorus asking the gods to heal?

41. In the Exodus, the Messenger's speech begins with line 32 and goes to line 76. We see Creon rushing to bury Polyneices before going to free Antigone. What does this decision reflect about Creon?

42. At the end of the play, Eurydice blames Creon for the tragic events, and Creon willingly accepts, saying, "I alone am guilty." Explain how any of these people might be responsible: Creon, Haemon, Antigone, Ismene, Teiresias, the Greek gods.

THE PLAY AS A WHOLE

43. Describe the major conflict in *Antigone*. Is it a good/evil conflict, or a conflict of two goods? What is the author Sophocles' stance?

44. Do you feel sympathy for Creon in the Exodus, or did he get what he deserved?

45. What is the role of the Chorus and the Choragos in the play? How do they influence the play's action?

46. What is the play's theme? Find 3 passages that support your opinion.

47. What character traits keep Antigone and Creon from resolving their differences?

48. Know the meanings of these extended metaphors:

- "wild eagle" [Parados, lines 8-13]
- "wave cresting" and "anger of heaven" [Ode 2]
- "trees that bend..." [Scene 3, lines 80-86]