

READING GUIDE

Antigone by Sophocles

You will keep a chart of the songs of the chorus and relate them to the action of the play.

	Summary of the Song	Function of the Song
Parados	Polyneices attacked Thebes but was defeated.	Gives background for Creon's order not to bury Polyneices.
Ode 1		
Ode 2		
Ode 3		
Ode 4		

Prologue

Conflict. Note the seriousness of the conflict that is introduced in lines 52-58. What is Antigone going to do, and what may happen to her as a result?

Character. Up to lines 84, what have you learned about Antigone the protagonist of the play? How would you contrast her with her sister, Ismene?

Parados

Reading Classical Drama. Stop at line 44 in the Parodos. And summarize the background information that the chorus gives in its song. How does the chorus view Polyneices?

Scene 1

Motifs in Drama. A motif is an element or concept expressed by the characters throughout a play that helps develop the plot and theme. Although this is only the first scene of *Antigone*, the idea, or motif, of treachery versus loyalty has appeared several times. How do you think this motif might affect the plot?

Character. (ll. 8-30) This speech introduces Creon, who acts as Antigone's **antagonist**. According to him, what deserves the highest loyalty?

Analyze Creon's speech as a persuasive argument. What is his position on the burial of Polyneices? What reasons does he use to support his claim? Is his argument logical? Does he deal with the "counterargument"?

Conflict. (ll. 58-76) The sentry finds himself in the dangerous situation of telling the king bad news. How do you feel toward the sentry at this point? Why?

Why is the sentry afraid of telling Creon that somebody put dust on Polyneices' body?

What does the audience learn about Creon from this interaction with the sentry?

Classical Drama. Stop at line 78. Who do you think buried the body? Note the **dramatic irony** arising from Creon's assumption that the person who buried the body was a man.

Character. Notice how the sentry (lines 79-101), a **minor character**, relates to Creon. What does his attitude tell you about Creon?

Dramatic Irony. At this point in the play, Creon doesn't know that Antigone has buried her brother out of loyalty to the family and principle. In lines 111-120, what does he think is the reason for the refusal to obey his decree?

Character. What do you think of Creon so far? What seem to be his virtues? His flaws?

Ode 1

Reading Classical Drama. In your chart, summarize the message that this choral ode conveys about human beings. How would you relate the ode to the previous scene?

Metaphor. Look at how Sophocles uses metaphor and simile in the ode. Find at least 5 examples and cite the lines.

Scene 2

Classical Drama. How does the sentry's speech (ll 23-49) create sympathy for Antigone?

Classical Drama. Reread lines 35-42, and paraphrase the metaphor that compares Antigone to a mother bird whose chicks have been stolen. What emotion does this comparison reveal in Antigone. Find lines that show Antigone was not afraid and that the sentry felt some regret about turning her in.

Character. Reread lines 57-72. What does Antigone believe is the supreme law? What is her attitude toward death?

Conflict. How does Creon's perception of Antigone as a threat to his manhood heighten the conflict between them?

Motifs in Drama. How has the motif of treachery versus loyalty affected the characters and events? Who is motivated by loyalty and who by treachery at this point in the play?

Theme. Reread lines 99-102. What is Antigone suggesting about the rule of kings and its effects on citizens?

Conflict. Reread lines 110-114. Which statement sums up Creon's outlook and loyalty? Which statement sums up Antigone's position?

Classical Drama. Greek tragedy explores humans' relationship to the gods. How does Antigone's thinking about the gods differ from Creon's thinking?

Character. What does Antigone's treatment of her sister reveal about her character?

Conflict. Ismene reveals that Antigone is engaged to Creon's son Haemon. What new issues could arise from the conflict between Antigone and Creon?

Ode 2

Reading Classical Dram. Judging from this choral ode, how do the gods feel toward the family of Oedipus? Be sure to put this on your song chart.

Explain the last three lines of the ode. Whom do you think these lines apply to?

Scene 3

Theme. Reread lines 11-19. What is Creon's view of family relationships?

Theme. Reread lines 35-44. What are Creon's views about government and his role as king?

Conflict. How does Creon's perception of women contribute to his conflict with Antigone?

Theme. Reread lines 55-60. How do Haemon's views of government differ from Creon's?

Theme. Interpret Haemon's reply in line 108.

Dramatic Irony. Look at lines 119-121. What might Haemon mean? What does Creon think he means?

Character. What do you think about Creon's decision to bury a person alive when he has refused to bury a person who is dead?

Ode 3

In your chart, summarize the message about love expressed in this ode. How does the ode relate to the exchange between Haemon and Creon?

Scene 4

Theme: In lines 11-14 and 33-36, how does the chorus view Antigone's punishment for her act of conscience and loyalty?

Personification. Reread lines 28-30. What is Antigone personifying?

Classical Drama. Reread lines 45-48. To what does the chorus attribute Antigone's tragic downfall?

Classical Drama. How do you judge the way Antigone accepts her death? Does she show qualities of a tragic hero?

Character. How would you describe Creon's rage? Antigone says that Creon's voice is "like the voice of death" (line 73). Do you think her description is a good characterization of Creon's words and actions?

Theme. What is Antigone's highest loyalty?

Ode 4

Reading Classical Drama: What insights into Antigone's situation do you get from the myths that this ode alludes to? Summarize your thoughts in your chart.

Analyze the evolving viewpoint of the chorus and choragus. How has their attitude toward Antigone changed since the beginning of the play? How do they view her act of conscience now?

Scene 5

Classical Drama. Reread lines 18-32. What do they suggest about how the gods view Creon's refusal to allow Polyneices to be buried?

Summary. Summarize the status of all the important characters at the beginning of this scene.

Theme. In lines 70-83, Creon has accused Teiresias of selling out. To what does Teiresias say one should pay his loyalty?

Character. What does Creon's exchange with Teiresias reveal about Creon's view of himself and others?

Character. Why does Creon change his mind?

Irony. Discuss the significance of the confrontation between a blind prophet who sees the truth and the "seeing" king who is deaf to reason and blind to the truth. How does this confrontation support the play's themes. What message is Sophocles suggesting about the nature of Truth?

Paeon

Reading Classical Drama. What mood is created by this paeon to the god Dionysus?

Exodos

Character. How does the messenger in the Exodos introduce his terrible news?

Character. Creon's queen has only 7 lines, yet her presence is strongly felt in this scene. Account for her significance. Does Eurydice's power come from her words? Or does it derive from the information that Creon transmitted about his views on women?

Classical Drama. Summarize the tragic catastrophe that events have led to.

Character. In lines 86-92, what does Creon suggest was the effect of his unbending loyalty to the laws of the state?

Classical Drama. Reread lines 86-98. How does Creon view his actions?

Classical Drama. Creon assumes responsibility for the terrible events that have occurred. To what extent is he a tragic hero?

Allegory. An allegory is a story that functions on two levels: a literal and a symbolic level. Allegories often teach a moral lesson through their symbolic meaning. *Antigone* can be read as an allegory about obedience, or as the choragus says, "submission to the gods."