

Antigone

Mythical Background

1. What is the legend of Oedipus?
2. How did Oedipus find out the truth about himself?
3. What was Oedipus' fate after he left Thebes, and how did it intertwine with that of his sons?
4. What became of Polyneices' challenge to the throne of Thebes?

"Prologue" and "Parados"

1. What information does Antigone give to Ismene at the beginning of this scene?
2. What does Antigone plan to do? Why?
3. Why does Antigone, employing an oxymoron³, say that she will "do holy things criminally" when she refers to her proposed deed? What conflict of values is represented in this phrase? (An oxymoron is a rhetorical figure of speech, which joins two contradictory terms for paradoxical effect, as in "a wise fool". The word itself is a combination of two Greek words meaning `sharp-dull'.)
4. How does Ismene respond to Antigone's request for help? What does Ismene's response say about her character?
5. What is Ismene's view of the relationship between men and women?
6. How does Antigone react to Ismene's reluctance to help her?
7. What major theme does Sophocles introduce in the opening scene of his play?
8. What does Ismene's line at the end of her scene with Antigone reveal about Ismene's true feelings?
9. What expositional purpose does the "parados," or entrance of the chorus, serve in the play?
10. Which side in the war does the Chorus favor and why?
11. What irony hangs over this opening choral ode?

"Scene 1" and "Ode 1"

1. Who has Creon assembled at the beginning of the scene?
2. What is Creon's attitude toward the chorus during the scene in which he delivers his edict?
3. What human institution does Creon believe to be most important in life?
4. Compare Creon's beliefs with those of Antigone. On what specific points does Creon contradict Antigone?
5. What is the Chorus's initial attitude toward Creon's decree?
6. How does this scene in which Creon delivers his edict serve to introduce him as a tragic hero?
7. What ironies underlie the scene in which Creon makes his edict?
8. What is the character of the sentry? What purpose does he serve in his first appearance before Creon?
9. How does the sentry act when he comes before Creon? What does this suggest about Creon's personality or reputation?
10. What is Creon's reaction to the Guard's news?
11. What is the purpose of "Ode 1"?
12. Make a list of man's civilized skills as enumerated by the Chorus.
13. According to the Chorus is there any limitation to man's mastery of nature?
14. Where do the chorus' sympathies seem to be in this ode?

"Scene 2" and "Ode 2"

1. What is the attitude of the Chorus and the Guard with regard to the capture of Antigone?
2. How does Antigone defend her defiance of the edict?
3. How does Antigone view the relationship between laws made by man and those created by the gods?
4. What role does Antigone's womanhood play in Creon's sentence?
5. What is Antigone's attitude with regard to her deed? with regard to Ismene's attempt to share responsibility for the deed?
6. What does Antigone say about the true feelings of the chorus? Is she correct?
7. In "Ode 2," what does the chorus say about Antigone's fate?
8. Why has this family suffered so much and made such disastrous mistakes?

“Scene 3” and “Ode 3”

1. What does Creon say is the greatest evil that society faces? (Hint: Lines 33-44)
2. According to Haemon, what is the reaction of the common people to Creon's decree of death for Antigone?
3. What advice does Haemon give to Creon?
4. What is the point that Haemon is attempting to make to Creon by the analogies of the tree and the ship?
5. What criticisms does Haemon make of Creon?
6. What threat does Haemon make?
7. Why does Creon change Antigone's punishment from public stoning to burial alive in a cave?
8. What elements of foreshadowing are present in this scene?
9. How does Haemon's tone toward Creon change from the beginning to end of “Scene 3”?
10. In “Ode 3,” what view does the chorus express?
11. Since choral odes generally comment upon the action of the previous episode, explain what connection this song has with the preceding scene.

“Scene 4” and “Ode 4”

1. According to the Chorus, what is Antigone's downfall? How is she actually quite similar to Creon?
2. What new side of Antigone's character do we see in the lines which begin the fourth episode?
3. In lines 37 – 44, what feelings does Antigone express about her father?
4. Antigone compares herself to Niobe (Tantalus's daughter) who because of her grief turned to stone. What does Antigone say that she and Niobe have in common? What difference and similarity between the two does the Chorus see?
5. How does Creon continue to underrate Antigone's courage and determination?
6. How does Creon try to assuage his conscience and abdicate his guilt in Antigone's death?
7. How do Antigone's convictions seem to be wavering? What is the Chorus's response?
8. What is happening at the end of “Scene 4”?
9. The fourth ode presents three mythical examples which comment upon Antigone's situation. What do the first two mythic personages, Danae and Lycurgus, have in common with Antigone?
10. What is the overall purpose of the choral ode which follows Antigone's final exit?

“Scene 5”

1. Explain the ironic symbolism of Tiresias' blindness.
2. What omens have caused Tiresias to approach Creon? What does he say the omens mean?
3. What is Creon's initial reaction to Teiresias's report?
4. How is this reaction characteristic of Creon?
5. What logic does Tiresias offer for Creon to relent?
6. What course of action does the Chorus recommend to Creon?
7. What is Creon's reaction to this recommendation?
8. What does Teiresias predict for Creon? What crime has Creon committed to deserve this?
9. What dilemma does the Chorus acknowledge for Creon?
10. Paraphrase lines 92-108. How can these lines be seen as a turning point?
11. Compare Creon's initial reception of Tiresias to the treatment he gives the prophet at the end of their scene together.

“Paeon”

1. What is a Paeon?
2. What is the subject and dramatic purpose of this final ode in the play?
3. Why does the Chorus choose to pray to Dionysus at this critical moment rather than to any other god?

“Exodus”

1. Who are the Amphion and Cadmus the Messenger mentions?
2. What two people does the Messenger say have died? How have they died?
3. Why must the Messenger narrate the suicide instead of Sophocles' portraying it before the audience?
4. Why do you think that Creon goes to bury Polyneices first rather than to Antigone's cave, as he said he was going to do in the previous scene?
5. By the time Creon returns, who else has died? How and why?
6. Whose body is brought onstage in the play's final scene? What significance does this have?
7. What is the significance of Creon's speech as he enters carrying Haemon's body?
8. Who was Megareos?
9. What did Eurydice's do with her last breath?
10. Judging by the final speeches of the play, what is Creon's tragic flaw?
11. Does Sophocles agree with Creon's assessment: “on my head fate climbs up with its overwhelming load”? Why or why not?
12. What moral lesson does the Chorus see in the fate of Creon at the close of the play?

Fate and Destiny:

1. What role do fate and free will play in Sophocles' world view?
2. To what degree is Antigone doomed by her fate?
3. What role do fate and free will play in Creon's destiny?
4. How does Creon's confrontation with Tiresias affect his fate?
5. How is Thebes itself affected by the power of fate?

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