

Oedipus Rex

- by Sophocles

Sophocles

- 496 - 406 B. C.
- a playwright who lived a long, comfortable, happy life
- grew up in a wealthy family in ATHENS, GREECE

Sophocles

- his dramatic work portrayed misery and tragedy
- he also became a distinguished public official

Sophocles

- produced 123 plays (only seven survive today)
- the age of Sophocles in Greece was a time when anything seemed possible through human effort and reason

Sophocles

- toward the end of Sophocles' life, Athens waged a war against Sparta, their bitter rivals
- there also was a great plague in 430 B. C.

Sophocles

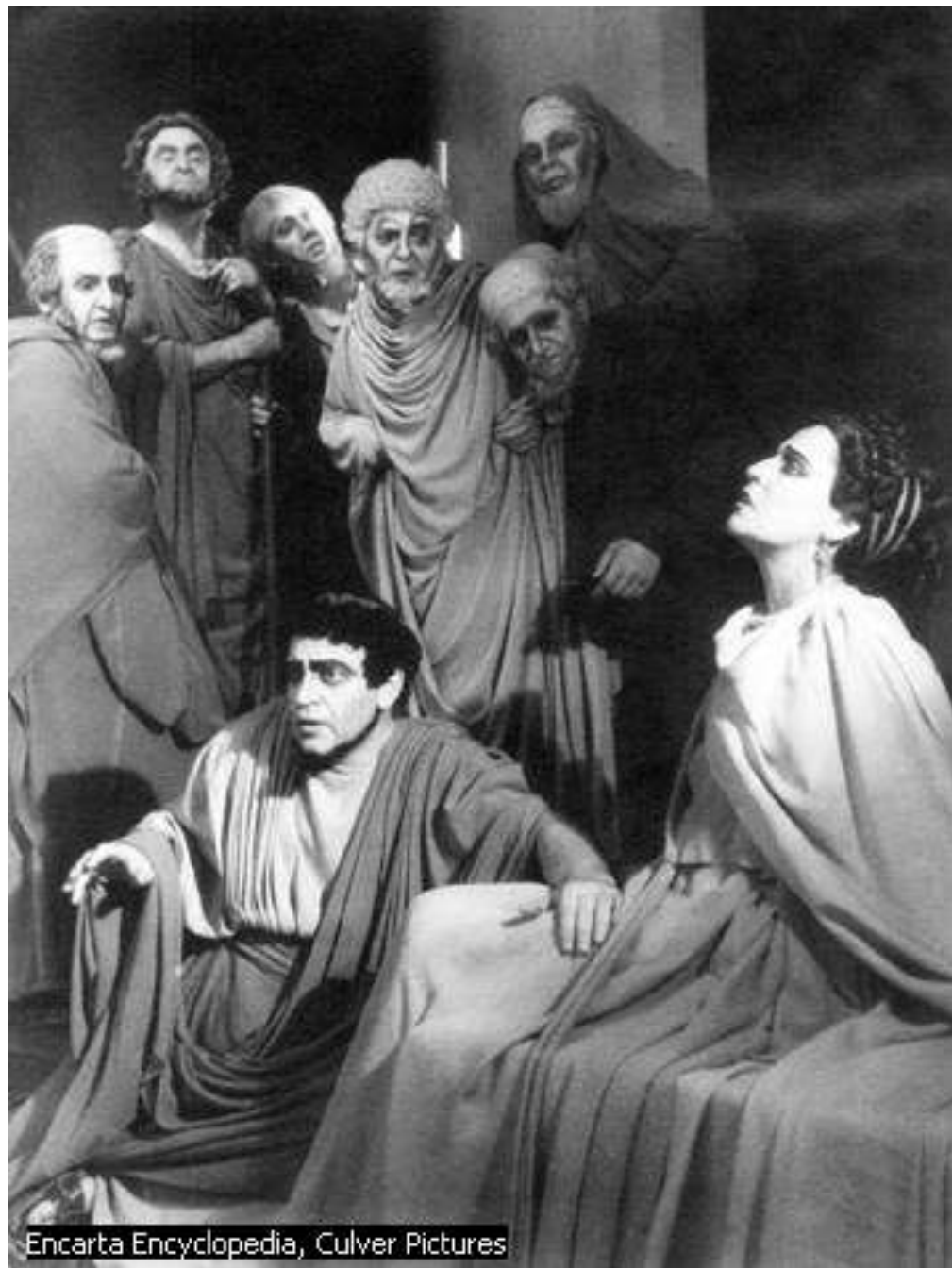
Sophocles' surviving
plays (written
after 440 B.C.)
are deeply
troubling

Sophocles

These plays depict characters caught up in unsolvable dilemmas that test their faith in divine and human justice

OEDIPUS REX

- INTRODUCTION



Encarta Encyclopedia, Culver Pictures



Encarta Encyclopedia, REUTERS

OEDIPUS REX

- one of the world's greatest tragedies



OEDIPUS REX

- a **TRAGEDY** is a serious drama featuring a main character who strives to achieve something and is ultimately defeated!

OEDIPUS REX

- The main character's downfall is *often* due to an inborn character flaw or weakness - the tragic flaw.

OEDIPUS REX - Background



- During the early years of the Peloponnesian War, when Oedipus Rex was produced, Athens suffered from political instability and devastating plague.

OEDIPUS REX - Background



- Sophocles opens his play with a situation that the people of Athens could identify with: a plague with no end in sight!



Ancient Athens – 5th Century B. C.



OEDIPUS REX-Prologue

- The city of Thebes is ravaged by plague
- Citizens beg King Oedipus for help

OEDIPUS REX-Prologue

- Oedipus sends his brother-in-law, Creon, to the oracle of Apollo at Delphi.

OEDIPUS REX-Prologue

- Creon returns and announces that the plague will end when the Thebans punish the murderer of their previous king, Laius.

OEDIPUS REX-Prologue

- Oedipus tries to take the role of savior and vows to do everything in his power to apprehend the murderer and save his people

OEDIPUS REX-Prologue

- Oedipus does not realize that his vow will relentlessly lead him to an encounter with himself, his past, and his darkest secrets!!!

- MAIN
CHARACTERS

Teiresias

- blind prophet and servant of Apollo
- reveals the reasons for the devastation and plague in Thebes

Teiresias

- one of the most powerful characters in the play
- tells Oedipus he will become blind and poor

Jocasta

- the wife and mother of Oedipus
- she tells Oedipus not to trust in the oracles
- she tries to protect Oedipus from the awful truth

Jocasta

- she alternately condemns and upholds the authority of the oracles as best suits the direction of the argument at the moment

Oedipus

- protagonist
- his name means "swollen-foot"
- he inspires both pity and fear

Oedipus

- a hereditary curse has been placed on his family, and he unknowingly has fulfilled the terms of the prophecy that he would kill his father (Laius) and marry his own mother (Jocasta)

Oedipus

- when he curses the murderer of Laius he is cursing himself and predicting his own exile and consequent life of "wretchedness."

Oedipus

- he is wise, revered by his subjects, and dedicated to the discovery of truth
- he wants to rid Thebes of the plague, but fate and the gods have other things in store for him

Chorus of Theban Elders

- men of Thebes who honor and respect the king and the gods
- their odes reveal both a strong attachment to the king as well as grounding in religious culture

Creon

- brother of Jocasta
- Oedipus feels threatened by Creon and believes that he covets the throne
- Creon defends himself saying he has no desire to be king and that Oedipus harms himself in making such accusations

Messenger

- tells Oedipus that King Polybos of Corinth is dead
- Oedipus learns from the messenger that Polybos was not his father
- the messenger had been given Oedipus as an infant by one of Laius' men

Shepherd of Laius

- reveals his information only after Oedipus threatens his life
- admits to receiving the infant (he gave to Polybus' messenger) from Laius and Jocasta
- Oedipus eventually realizes his own identity and his crimes of patricide and incest after hearing the shepherd's story

Second Messenger

- announces and describes Jocasta's suicide
- predicts future sorrows for a people whose kings descend from this polluted line

The Chorus

- choral odes bring an additional viewpoint to the play
- offer a broader and more socio-religious perspective than those offered by individual characters

THEMES

- quest for identity and truth
- nature of innocence and guilt
- nature of moral responsibility

Imagery

- references to light and darkness to predict the future

Example of Imagery

- The priest says at the beginning: "All the house of Kadmos is laid waste; all emptied, and all darkened"

Example of Imagery

- Oedipus promises Creon: "Then once more I must bring what is dark to light."

Example of Foreshadowing

- Teiresias tells Oedipus that it is he who is blind
- "But I say that you, with both your eyes, are blind. You cannot see the wretchedness of your life"

SUMMARY

- Oedipus Rex is the story of a king of Thebes upon whom a hereditary curse is placed and who therefore has to suffer the tragic consequences of fate.

SUMMARY

- During the time of plague, fires, and other forms of decimation, Oedipus decides to take action to restore life and prosperity to his kingdom.

SUMMARY

- Oedipus discovers, through his quest for truth, that his identity is not what he thought.
- He learns he has killed his father, married his mother, and had children with her.

SUMMARY

- Oedipus' wife/mother -
Jocasta - kills herself
and Oedipus blinds
himself and goes into
exile
- Creon becomes King of
Thebes