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Prestwick House
Literature
Teaching Unit
Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



Medea

by Euripides

- Learning objectives
- Study Guide with short-answer questions
- Background information
- Vocabulary in context
- Multiple-choice test
- Essay questions
- Literary terms



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Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. briefly identify the following people, stating reasons for their actions and listing at least two salient personality traits for each: Medea, Jason, and King Creon.
2. identify the function the Chorus serves in this play.
3. discuss the manner in which the Messenger is one of the conventions in Greek theater.
4. write a paragraph or two on each of the following sentences, using evidence from the play to support your opinion:
 - A. Medea can be said to represent all women of this time who suffer as a result of their inferior status in Greek society.
 - B. Uncontrolled emotions of hate and jealousy can overcome reason and bring destruction to all.
 - C. Fate plays a role in the lives of characters in this play.
 - D. Hubris, or excessive pride, leads to a person's downfall.
5. refute or support the following point, and back up your opinion by citing information from the text: Medea fulfills the definition of a tragic hero.
6. prove, by referring to the text, that Medea is or is not a sympathetic character.
7. identify the three classical unities and point out how they operate in this play.
8. explain the idea of deus ex machina and point out how it operates in this play.
9. explain some concepts and techniques involved in Greek drama, including hamartia, the Chorus, dramatic irony, and the Greek idea of tragedy.

Questions for Essay or Discussion

1. Write a brief sketch of these characters, identifying and explaining their actions, motivation, and salient personality features: Medea, Jason, and Creon.
2. Explain the functions of the Chorus in this play, and illustrate these with specific references to the text.
3. What is the basic meaning and function of the three classical unities? How do they operate in *Medea*?
4. Explain the term *deus ex machina*, and how it operates in this play.
5. Discuss, using specific examples from the play, the following themes and show how they are universal truths:
 - A. Childless people do not suffer the same worries and cares of those who do have children.
 - B. Being an alien in a foreign country is painful.
 - C. Unrestrained love is harmful, and moderation is best in all things.
 - D. The societal status of women can be seen as changing.
6. Discuss how the Greeks view fate and explain its function in this play.
7. Does Medea fit the definition of a tragic hero?
8. Prove that Medea, while she is a witch, is not insane. If she were simply a person who kills her children because she hears voices, why would this not be a tragic drama?
9. Discuss how messengers are used in Greek plays and why they are used in this fashion.

Medea

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1. Who relates the background of the play to the audience? What important information is provided?

2. What has Creon, King of Corinth, done that causes Medea a great deal of pain and anguish?

3. How does the Nurse feel about what has happened?

4. Toward the end of her first speech, what does the Nurse tell us she fears? Why does she have this fear?

5. In what sense can the Nurse's comment be a foreshadowing of trouble? What in Medea's background would lead to this conclusion?

22. Why has Jason come to see Medea, and how does Medea react to his offer?

23. How does Jason respond to her accusations?

24. Does Medea accept Jason's explanation? Do you suppose most readers accept his explanation?

25. What two points that we have heard before in the play does the Chorus repeat?

26. Who is Aegeus, and where has he been?

27. What does Medea offer Aegeus, and what does she ask of him?

45. When the Messenger tells Medea the news of the death of Creon and his daughter, what does Medea say? What is the Messenger's reaction to her words?

46. What does she next say that can appear to confirm the Messenger's suspicions of her?

47. The Messenger gives a vivid picture with graphic descriptions of the deaths of Creon and his daughter. Euripides also use some literary devices in this speech. Identify each one listed:

- A. "but the gold / chain held her tightly in its clutch" _____
- B. "her flesh flowing off the bone
like pine sap" _____
- C. "Humanity is...a shadow" _____
- D. "those who seem wise
pay the greatest penalty for stupidity" _____

48. After this speech, why does Medea rush into the house? How does the Chorus feel about this action?

49. The Chorus then mentions a popular idea in Greek literature—the idea of Fate controlling human lives and says, "O unlucky woman!" What at the end of the play might fit in with this theme?
