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Literature
Teaching Unit
Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



Antigone

by Sophocles

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



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Antigone

Objectives

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

1. identify the main conflict of the play and elaborate on its moral complexities.
2. compare and contrast the following characters, assessing such aspects as personality traits, behavior, motivations, values, and beliefs:
 - Antigone
 - Creon
 - Ismene
 - Haemon
 - the Chorus
3. define the role of the Chorus, and cite examples of Choral odes that expand on some of the play's themes.
4. discuss the main arguments of both Creon and Antigone, weighing the strengths and weaknesses of each one.
5. discuss Antigone's views on life and death, and explain why she is not afraid to die for her disobedience of Creon's order.
6. track Creon's progression from a reasonable man motivated by good intentions, to an irrational and stubborn man motivated by pride.
7. discuss the question of whether a compromise could be possible between Antigone and Creon, and identify a shared character trait which might impede any hope of compromise.
8. identify and discuss the ways in which Creon has violated the natural order by essentially burying a live person while, at the same time, refusing burial to a dead man.
9. identify the signs in the natural world that act as indicators that order has been upset and the gods are angry about it.
10. explain what the ancient Greeks meant by pollution, and cite images from the text which make it clear that the city has been polluted as a result of Creon's edict.
11. discuss the role of fate as it applies to Antigone and her family, as well as to Creon and his family.

Antigone

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Explain Creon's reasons for forbidding the burial of Polynices. In your opinion, does Creon have valid reasons for the edict?
2. What reasons does Antigone give for disobeying the edict? Do you think she is justified in breaking the law? What would you have done if you were in her situation?
3. Explain Ismene's reasons for refusing to help Antigone with the burial. Why does she later decide to claim responsibility for it?
4. According to Antigone, is it more important to please the world of the living, or the world of the dead? What reasons does she give for her beliefs? Why does the threat of the death penalty fail to have an effect on her?
5. Creon and Antigone disagree about the issue of whether Polynices should receive burial rites. Can you think of a compromise that would satisfy both parties? If not, explain why a compromise between the two is impossible.
6. Although Creon and Antigone are in conflict with one another over the issue of Polynices' burial, they are similar to one another in many ways. What character traits do they share? Which shared character trait prevents each one from understanding the other's point of view?
7. Throughout the play, Antigone is often called "foolish," and, at times, she is described as "insane." Do you think that Antigone acted foolishly? Do you believe that she is insane? Why or why not?
8. What is the cause of Creon's downfall? Do you think he deserves the fate he receives? What, if anything, would you do differently if you were in Creon's position?
9. What type of people make up the Chorus? Why do you think Sophocles chose this particular group of people? In what ways might the play have been different if the Chorus had been comprised of young Theban women?
10. Throughout the play, several characters accuse Creon of tyranny—a type of government in which a single ruler holds absolute power, often suppressing the rights of the citizens. In what ways is Creon like a tyrant? Do you think he originally intended to govern like a tyrant?

summoning – sending for; calling upon
suppliant – a beggar
talons – claws
thrice – three times
transgression – a crime or wrongdoing
treading – walking
tyranny – a form of government in which a single ruler holds absolute power
tyrants – cruel and oppressive rulers
unhallowed – unholy; evil
unlamented – not mourned over
unperplexed – not confused; clear-headed
unswerving – straight; direct
uprightly – virtuously, morally
uttered – voiced, expressed
valor – courage, bravery
vengeance – revenge, punishment
venture – an endeavor; a task
villainous – wicked
viper – a snake
whither – where
yoke – a burden

1. As the play opens, Antigone tells her sister, Ismene, that an edict has been placed over the city of Thebes. What is this edict, and who has commanded it?

2. What is the punishment for disobeying the edict?

3. During her first speaking part, Ismene reveals that she and Antigone have been “robbed of our two brothers.” She says that both brothers died on the same day “by doubled hand.” What does she mean by the phrase, “by doubled hand”?

13. Creon uses a metaphor to describe his country. What is it? What role does Creon see himself playing in the metaphor?

14. The Chorus tries to assure Creon that no one is foolish enough to disobey his edict and risk death. However, Creon seems unconvinced and says, "...but often profit has destroyed men through their hopes." What does he mean by this statement?

15. What news does the guard bring to Creon?

16. How does the Chorus respond to this news?

17. How does Creon respond to the Chorus's theory?

18. What does Creon accuse the guards of? Does his accusation seem reasonable?

19. How does Creon feel about money? What well-known proverb expresses his thoughts about money?

33. Creon declares:

...Now I am no man,
but she is a man, if power lies with her
with impunity...

What does he mean?

34. As Creon and Antigone argue, their conflict regarding Polynices' burial is made clear. Briefly explain each one's main point. Does either character attempt to compromise or understand the other's point of view? What major character trait do they have in common?

35. As Ismene enters, what does Creon accuse her of, and what does he compare her to? Does his accusation seem rational?

36. How does Ismene respond when Creon asks her if she is guilty of helping Antigone with the burial? What is Antigone's immediate response upon hearing Ismene's reply?

37. What two reasons does Ismene give for wanting to share responsibility for the burial with Antigone?

38. What argument does Ismene make to Creon in an attempt to save Antigone's life?
