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Teaching Unit™

# Sample

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## Literature Teaching Unit

Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



### Oedipus Rex

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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 **Prestwick House**

P.O. Box 658, Clayton, DE 19938  
[www.prestwickhouse.com](http://www.prestwickhouse.com)  
800.932.4593

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## Objectives

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

1. write a character sketch for these characters; identify their actions, motivation, and salient personality features: Oedipus, Tiresias, Jocasta, and Creon.
2. explain the function and importance of the chorus in the play.
3. identify how the Greek theater convention of the three unities is observed in the play. Explain the techniques used in the play to maintain the three unities.
4. define dramatic irony and identify how it is used in the play.
5. identify instances of the theme that man's fate is more important than his free will, give examples of its occurrence in the text, and explain why it is central to play.
6. discuss the role of prophecies and oracles in the play, particularly the important role of the seer Tiresias, and how the belief or disbelief of certain characters in prophecies contributes to the plot.
7. discuss the importance of the concept of blindness and sight in the play, and identify in what ways various characters have vision or are blind.
8. identify in what ways Oedipus is a classic Greek tragic hero. Discuss whether he has a tragic flaw, and, if so, identify what it is.
9. define the term catharsis, and explain how the Greek audience would achieve catharsis by observing this play.
10. identify how Sophocles builds suspense throughout the play.
11. discuss the symbolism of the crossroads where Oedipus murders Laius.
12. identify how Greek religious concerns arise in the play.
13. discuss the moral messages Sophocles intended to communicate to his audience, including the dangers of excessive pride and the disrespect of the gods and their will.
14. discuss the role of the gods, particularly Apollo, in the play.

### Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. How does Oedipus treat those who are reluctant to obey him throughout the play? What does this tell you about Oedipus' character?
2. In what ways is Oedipus a good king? In what ways is he a good person? How do these virtues result in negative consequences for Oedipus? How do they relate to the city of Thebes?
3. Explain the function of the character Tiresias in the play. In what ways does his presence emphasize Oedipus' failings? How is the blindness and/or vision of other characters significant within the play?
4. What is the function of the god Apollo in the play? What role does Apollo play in Oedipus and his family members' lives?
5. Compare and contrast Creon's and Oedipus' characteristics and behavior. Separately examine their interactions early in the play and their final encounter.
6. In what ways is Oedipus heroic? Point to specific instances in the play that demonstrate his heroism. In what ways does he fit the profile of a classic Greek tragic hero?
7. What is Oedipus' tragic flaw, if he has one at all? Why does this particular flaw result in his downfall?
8. Examine how Jocasta, Oedipus, and Creon regard prophecies throughout the play. What are their reasons for and against believing them? When do they seek them?
9. Identify how fate and free-will play out in the lives of Oedipus and Laius. How do prophecies enter into the character's decisions? What is the ultimate point of the play regarding fate and free-will?
10. Explain the morals Sophocles wanted to communicate to his audience. Identify how those morals are suggested in the play.
11. Explain the symbolism of the crossroads at which Oedipus murders Laius. Examine the interaction of fate and free-will during this event.
12. What significant roles do servants and messengers serve in the play? Identify moments when their presence is crucial to the plot.
13. In what significant ways does the chorus contribute to the play? Give specific instances of where the chorus serves important functions.

## VOCABULARY (CONT.)

**stayer** – the one who stops and restrains

**strophe** – the first part of a choral ode or kommos

**suppliants** – people who makes request from a position of powerlessness

**tertiary** – unimportant, tangential

**throng** – a crowd

**tragedy** – dramatic genre, loftier and more serious than comedy, often with a sad ending

**tyche** – the Greek word for “chance,” personified as a goddess

1. What is your first impression of Oedipus? What characteristics of Oedipus are you aware of after he gives the opening speech?

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2. What problem is afflicting Thebes at this time?

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3. Why have the Priest and many citizens gathered as suppliants, and how do they view Oedipus? How does this view contribute to Oedipus' status as a classic tragic hero?

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4. Assuming that, like Sophocles' audience, you know what is to happen, explain how the following quote is an example of dramatic irony. “[L]et us never recall of your reign/that we first stood straight, but stumbled later.”

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28. What does Oedipus mean by the statement, “even if you cannot see, you still understand/what sickness plagues our city”?

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29. Explain what Tiresias means by his first statement to Oedipus. “How terrible to know/when it does not help the knower.”

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30. What is Tiresias’ reaction to Oedipus’ plea for help?

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31. How does Oedipus feel about Tiresias’ behavior? Why does he think Tiresias has a special responsibility to help the city?

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32. What terrible thing does Oedipus accuse Tiresias of doing? How does he further insult the seer?

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33. Goaded into anger by Oedipus, what does Tiresias tell him?

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82. How does Oedipus interpret Jocasta’s behavior?

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83. What is the chorus’ response to Jocasta’s “wild grief”?

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84. How does the messenger’s information change the central question in the play?

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85. What does Oedipus mean when he declares himself the “child of Chance”? Why is this an example of dramatic irony?

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86. What behaviors has Sophocles presented as evil and dreadful?

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87. To heighten the suspense and create a distraction before the final climax, the Greek playwrights often included brief songs. What false hope is the chorus creating?

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