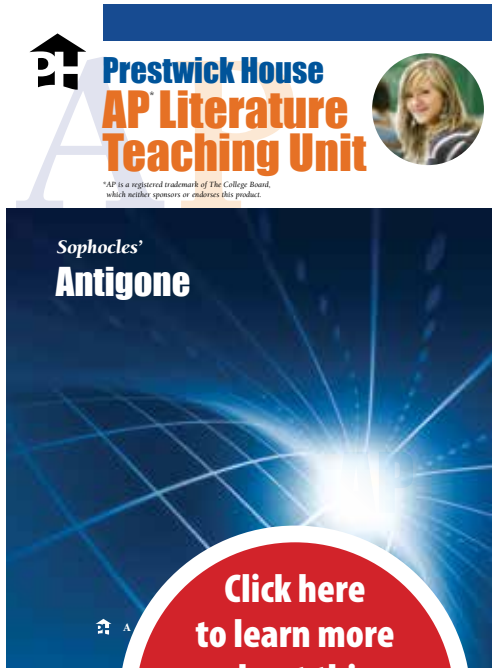




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Teaching Unit

Antigone

by Sophocles

written by Tom Zolpar



Prestwick House

Item No. 303295

Antigone

Objectives

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

1. analyze the use of Aristotle's three unities in the play
2. analyze the role of dramatic irony in the play
3. analyze roles of free will and fate in the hero's downfall
4. examine how Sophocles builds suspense in the play
5. respond to multiple-choice questions similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition exam
6. respond to free response questions similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition exam

Antigone

Lecture

I. Social and Political—Athens 5th century BCE:

Sophocles was born in Athens, Greece, in 497 BCE and was the best-known of the ancient Greek playwrights. The Athenian government was an “exclusionary democracy,” run by elected officials in the form of an open assembly. Only about ten percent of the population was eligible to participate. Women, slaves, and other “non-citizens” were excluded. Although he was a member of the ruling class, Sophocles was aware of the social inequalities in Athenian society. His plays include repeated attempts to warn his fellow Greeks of the divine retribution that would come to them as a result of their prejudices and injustice to the poor.

II. Religious Ideas:

Contrary to common misconceptions, the Greek pantheon consisted of hundreds of deities in a complex hierarchy. The most familiar “Olympian” gods, perhaps the closest to humans, were a relatively small part of the overall scheme.

The gods, while immortal and powerful, were not *all*-powerful in the sense of our modern concept of God. They were themselves subject to fate and to each other’s will. They were also subject to—and bound to enforce—a body of laws and traditions so ancient that their origins lay beyond even the oldest myths. Among those laws and traditions were laws governing the treatment of blood relations. The entire conflict in *Antigone* stems from the “unnatural” occurrence of two brothers waging war against one another and killing one another. This conflict is further compounded by another blood relation’s—their uncle Creon’s—refusal to grant one proper funeral rites. Antigone’s point against Creon is that *his* prohibition of a funeral for Polynices is a human law, and she *must* obey the older, stronger divine law.

The Greeks believed, to a limited extent, in free will, always accepting that a person would eventually have to face the human and cosmic consequences of his or her own actions and decisions. Still, free will was not more powerful than Destiny. While *Oedipus Rex* is an example of an individual’s inability to avoid his destiny, *Antigone* portrays the suffering that comes as a consequence of a person’s own actions.

Still, as Antigone’s life and death are so clearly shaped by the curses visited upon her father and grandfather (see Section V. Antigone’s Backstory), destiny cannot be completely dismissed either.

Antigone

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Who is the tragic hero in this play?
2. What role does the Chorus play in *Antigone*?
3. Trace the development of each of the following themes:
 - A. Any excess, even an excessive devotion to state or religion, is a fault and leads to misfortune.
 - B. Pride and stubbornness give rise to tyranny and are character flaws that cause suffering and—invariably—tragedy.
 - C. In any conflict between the divine and human law, divine laws take precedence.
 - D. One is personally responsible for one's own suffering, but suffering produces wisdom.
4. Identify and explain the instances of irony in the play.
5. What are Creon's contradictory opinions on loyalty? How do they contribute to his downfall?
6. Discuss Antigone's refusal to compromise and her decision not to allow Ismene to assume any part of the blame for burying Polynices.

Antigone

1. What is the setting of the play?

2. Why, according to Antigone, is Zeus tormenting her and her sister?

3. To whom does Antigone refer as general? Why does she use that term?

4. What exposition does Ismene provide in her opening speech?

5. What new suffering must Antigone and Ismene, endure?

6. What does Antigone plan to do? Why? What will be the consequence of this act?

7. What further exposition does Ismene provide?

49. Whose instruction has Creon rejected?

50. What is Haemon implying when he says, “Then she’ll die—and in her death kill someone else”? How does Creon interpret this statement?

51. What does Creon imply in his description of how he will execute Antigone?

52. What or who is Eros whom the Chorus praises in this ode?

53. What does the Chorus’s ode on Eros suggest?

54. What literary device is Sophocles employing in this ode to Eros?

55. To whom do Antigone’s (and the Chorus’s) references to the “Bride of Hades” allude?
