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Oedipus Rex
BY SOPHOCLES



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Name: _____

Date: _____

Pre-Reading

Ancient Greek Theater

Objective: Obtaining information about the design of the ancient Greek stage

Activity

It is believed that theater originated in Ancient Greece. As far back as the 6th century BC, Greek dramatists began honoring Dionysus with plays, the earliest of which featured only one actor and a chorus. Later, additional actors were added, creating more complex character relationships and conflicts within the play. What did the earliest theaters look like, and how did the Greeks manage to put on a show for thousands of people with no electricity, no microphones, and no digital effects?

For this activity, use the Internet or library resources to label the parts of the Greek theater on the following page. Then, answer the questions.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Pre-Reading**Oedipus' Family Tree****Objective:** Understanding Oedipus' familial relationships**Activity**

When spectators in ancient Greece first watched Sophocles' play *Oedipus Rex*, they were already familiar with the story; the entertainment came from the suspense of watching the characters learn the truth. The audience's prior knowledge of the story not only supplied the play's dramatic irony, but it helped them better comprehend the dialogue and action onstage.

For today's audiences, who are generally unfamiliar with the Oedipus myth, the plot of the play and the way in which fate manipulates the characters may be difficult to understand. Many people don't know who the characters in the play are, what their relationships are with one another, and how a prophecy binds them to their fate. This makes for a very interesting family tree.

For this activity, fill in the blanks of the family tree that follows. Use the names provided in the box.

Name: _____

Date: _____

During Reading**Found Poem****Objective:** Writing a found poem**Activity**

A “found” poem is a poem made up entirely of phrases or quotations found in the text. Go back through the play and make up a found poem of your own. The poem could tell the reader something about Oedipus’ emotional state, but this is not necessary; it may be totally unrelated to the action of the story, which is one of the best parts of writing a found poem.

Your poem should be at least 10 lines long. The lines do not need to rhyme, but they certainly may. You can arrange the phrases in any way you like and change the punctuation, but do not deviate from Sophocles’ actual words. Give the poem a title, which may or may not come from the play. Below is an example taken entirely from the Priest’s speech in lines 15-62.

Destructive Intervention

The house of Cadmus is drained
from the tribute we paid to the cruel songstress.
We first stood straight, but stumbled later
with help from god.
Rule over men?
Oedipus, greatest in the eyes of all,
Far better to rule over
the contingencies of the divine.
Nothing matters, neither tower nor ship,
and Hades grows rich with groans and wails.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Lines 538-725**Advice Column****Objective:** Identifying conflict in the play**Activity**

The conflict in *Oedipus Rex* is clear from the very beginning of the play: the gods are angry that Laius' murder has gone unavenged, and the killer is still at large in Thebes. From the perspective of Oedipus, Creon, or Jocasta, write a letter to an advice columnist asking for suggestions about on how to proceed. What advice might each of these characters seek? After writing your letter, write the columnist's response to your letter.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Lines 1-937**Societal Views**

Objective: Comparing and contrasting ancient societal views to those of today

Activity

It is always interesting to examine the beliefs of another culture, especially an ancient culture, and compare them to contemporary beliefs or one's own. Sometimes, we see that we have progressed significantly since the earlier centuries of human history; other times, we find that particular beliefs are timeless and universal. Early in the play, the characters and chorus make a variety of statements that reflect both individual and societal views of life. Some of these viewpoints have not changed since Sophocles' time, while others have.

Follow these steps to complete this activity:

1. Read the list of statements provided. They all come from the first half of the play.
2. Select a statement from the list that you find interesting, and think about its meaning. Then, write brief responses to the following questions:
 - What ideas come to mind when you read the statement?
 - What societal view is being expressed?
 - How is this view similar to or different from our modern view of a similar topic?
 - Do you agree or disagree with the statement? Why?
3. Using your responses to the questions as a guide, write a persuasive essay or speech expressing your thoughts.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Wrap-Up

Tragedy and the Tragic Hero

Objective: Evaluating a tragedy through its common characteristics

Activity

Tragedy is a dramatic form that has its origins in Greek theater. Aristotle, a Greek philosopher, theorized that the popularity of tragedy resulted from the emotional cleansing (catharsis) audiences received after witnessing dramatized pain.

Most tragedies contain these features:

- The play's resolution is catastrophic and inevitable.
- A protagonist's choice is most often the crux of the tragedy.
- Not only is the protagonist affected by the disaster, but innocent bystanders are affected as well.
- The protagonist has a tragic flaw, or hamartia (the "error of judgment"), which leads to catastrophe.

In addition, the tragic hero often has these qualities:

- is neither wholly good nor wholly bad
- is usually a noble or a person of power and influence
- suffers from a tragic flaw, which leads to his or her downfall
- is responsible for his or her actions
- eventually realizes the error on judgement
- accepts death and faces it with honor

Answer the questions that follow to determine if *Oedipus Rex* fits the definition of a tragedy. Then, complete the chart by providing examples portraying Oedipus as a tragic hero.