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Medea
Euripides



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Prestwick House

P.O. Box 658, Clayton, DE 19938

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To The Student

Although we may read a novel, play, or work of non-fiction for enjoyment, each time we read one, we are building and practicing important basic reading skills. In our ever-more complex society, in which reading has become more and more crucial for success, this, in itself, is an important reason to spend time reading for enjoyment.

Some readers, however, are able to go beyond basic reading techniques and are able to practice higher thinking skills by reflecting on what they have read and how what they read affects them. It is this act of reflection—that is, stopping to think about what you are reading—that this journal is attempting to encourage.

To aid you, we have included writing prompts for each section; however, if you find something that you wish to respond to in the book more compelling than our prompts, you should write about that. We hope you enjoy reading this book and that the act of responding to what you have read increases this enjoyment.

After you read the indicated sections, choose the questions to which you will respond. Keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers to these prompts, and there is no one direction in which you must go.

Pre-Reading

1. The play you are about to read is an ancient Greek tragedy, written by the playwright Euripides, in the early fifth century BC. Before reading, familiarize yourself with some basic elements of ancient Greek tragedy. Using the Internet or library resources, define the following terms: prologue, parados, episode, stasimon, kommos, and exodus. Keep your list. When you have finished reading the play, you will be able to go back and check your list to see if *Medea* contains some or all of the elements you listed.
2. Before reading *Medea*, consider the subject of revenge, a major motif in the play. When people believe that they have been offended, mistreated, or wronged by another person, a common reaction is to retaliate in some way. In other words, people often want to punish those who have wronged them. Some people satisfy their thoughts of revenge by acting on them, while others plan revenge in their minds, but never actually act on those plans.

Think about a time in your life when you felt that someone had wronged you. What did the person do? How angry were you? Did you think about punishing that person? If so, what did you want to do? Did you follow through with your plan for revenge? If so, did it make the situation better or worse? Write a paragraph or two in response to these questions.

Medea

Imagine you are in the Nurse's situation. You are extremely worried, but you do not know what to do. Write a letter to an advice columnist, asking for help. Explain your predicament and describe your fears. Explain why you feel powerless to do anything. Include any information you have gathered so far, especially regarding Medea's state of mind.

6. The Tutor reveals to the Nurse that things are even worse than they first appeared. The Tutor explains that he overheard someone say that Creon, the king of Corinth, plans to exile Medea and her children from Corinth. The Tutor then tells the Nurse that she must keep this information secret because Medea does not yet know Creon's plans.

Imagine you are a writer for a magazine. This month's issue is all about secrets—telling them, keeping them, breaking them, etc. Your assignment is to write a “Dos and Don'ts” piece about secrets. The piece should include two lists. One list should contain your top five “dos and don'ts” for *secret-telling*. The other list should contain your top five “dos and don'ts” for *secret-keeping*. Use examples from your personal experiences to write your piece.

7. As the Nurse and the Tutor converse about Creon's plans to exile Medea from Corinth, they make it clear that Jason is the one to blame for this new state of affairs. If Jason had not betrayed Medea and married Creon's daughter, then Medea would not have become angry and Creon would have no reason to exile her. The Nurse and the Tutor speak of Jason's selfishness and agree that he has been disloyal to Medea and their children. The Tutor then makes the following statement:

**Every single person loves himself
more than his fellow man, if a father
does not love his children because of his bed.**

Analyze the Tutor's quote and decide what you think it means. Then, rewrite the Tutor's quote in your own words. Finally, write at least one paragraph explaining why you agree or disagree with what the Tutor is stating.

Medea

12. While Medea rages inside the house, wishing aloud for her own death, the women of the Chorus try to calm her down and advise her. Offering sympathy, support, and advice, the Chorus urges Medea to come out of the house and listen to it. However, Medea remains inside, raging and moaning about her situation.

Imagine you are a member of the Chorus, standing outside of Medea's house with the other women. Despite your desperate pleas urging Medea to come out, she refuses to obey. You and the other members of the Chorus decide on a different tactic to get Medea's attention. You will each create a sign to hold up, which Medea can read if she looks out her window. Each sign will consist of a short phrase or slogan (similar to a picket sign). The signs should grab Medea's attention and deliver a message. Write down at least five possible phrases you might use for your sign. Here's an example to get you started:

COME OUT MEDEA! THE WOMEN OF CORINTH ARE ON YOUR SIDE!

13. When Medea finally emerges from the house, she makes an angry speech, detailing the various injustices that women in her society must suffer. Read Medea's entire speech, beginning at the following line:

**Of all things that live and have intelligence,
we women are the most wretched creatures.**

In your own words, list Medea's complaints about the unjust things women must endure. You should be able to gather at least five complaints from Medea's speech. Rank the severity of each complaint according to your own opinion, with the first one on the list being the worst injustice. After writing and ranking your list, consider women around the world in the 21st century. Are some of Medea's complaints still valid today? If you think so, make a check mark on your list next to that complaint and write a short explanation of why you think it is still valid. If you do not think that one of Medea's grievances is still relevant to women today, explain why.

Medea

Think about how you would feel if you had less than twenty-four hours to pack up your belongings and leave your home. Imagine that, like Medea, you don't even have a place to go. What would you do? First, make a list of five steps you would take if you were faced with this situation. Arrange your list in chronological order. Then, imagine that you can take only one suitcase with you. Make a list of ten absolutely essential items that you would put in your suitcase.

21. In a lengthy speech to the Chorus, Medea reveals her murderous plans, discussing in great detail the various strategies she has been pondering.

Imagine you are a member of the Chorus. You have just heard all about Medea's horrifying scheme, and now you feel that you must warn Jason of her plans. Write a letter to Jason warning him that he and his new family are in great danger. In your letter, summarize everything you heard Medea say. Include her various plans, and her motivations for carrying out those plans. Advise Jason on what he should do to try to protect himself and his new family from the wrath of Medea.

22. After Medea reveals her plans to the Chorus, the Chorus responds by sympathizing with Medea's situation and with the plight of women in general. Instead of attempting to persuade Medea to abandon her murderous plans, the Chorus appears to resign itself to the fact that Medea will carry out her revenge no matter what.

Revise the Chorus' part for this scene, making the Chorus members plead with Medea *not* to carry out her plans. What might the Chorus say to Medea, in an attempt to persuade her to change her mind? What are some strong arguments the Chorus could make? Write a new ode for the Chorus with this purpose in mind. Make your song at least ten lines long, and try to keep it in the dramatic style of the choral odes you have read so far. Here's an example to help you get started:

**Oh, poor dishonored and reckless Medea!
Harming another will never bring you peace!**