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Sophocles'

The Three Theban Plays:

Antigone, Oedipus the King, Oedipus at Colonus

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Teaching Unit

Sophocles
The Three Theban Plays:
Antigone, Oedipus the King, Oedipus at Colonus

Penguin Edition: Robert Fagles Translation

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Item No. 310073

The Three Theban Plays

Objectives

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

1. analyze the purpose and use of Aristotle's three unities.
2. analyze the role of dramatic irony in tragedy.
3. analyze roles of free will and fate in the hero's downfall.
4. examine how suspense is built in tragedy.
5. examine themes and character types common to tragedy.
6. respond to multiple-choice questions similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition exam.
7. respond to writing prompts similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition exam.
8. offer a close reading of *Antigone*, *Oedipus the King*, and *Oedipus at Colonus* and support all assertions and interpretations with direct evidence from the text, from authoritative critical knowledge of the genre, or from authoritative criticism of the plays.

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Who is the tragic hero in *Antigone*? *Oedipus the King*? *Oedipus at Colonus*?
2. What role does the Chorus play in each of these plays?
3. To what extent does *Oedipus at Colonus* adhere to the typical conventions of Greek tragedy?
4. Trace the development of each of the following themes through the three plays:
 - Any excess, even an excessive devotion to state or religion, is a fault and leads to misfortune.
 - Pride and stubbornness, character flaws that cause suffering and, inevitably, tragedy, give rise to tyranny.
 - In any conflict between the divine and human law, divine laws take precedence.
 - One is personally responsible for one's own suffering, but suffering produces wisdom.
 - Although people cannot control or avoid destiny, destiny alone does not absolve them from being responsible for their own actions.
 - The fact that one generation's destiny can be influenced by the previous generations' actions is unjust.
5. Identify and explain instances of irony in each of the plays.
6. How does Creon exemplify varying attitudes about loyalty? How does his role change as the three plays unfold?
7. Discuss the effect of refusing to yield or adapt one's viewpoint, even in the face of convincing arguments and evidence.

The Three Theban Plays

Antigone

1. What is the setting of the play?

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

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

4. What new suffering must Antigone and Ismene endure?

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

60. What is suggested by the Chorus's saying Eurydice's "silence promises grief"?

61. What is the significance of Creon's speech as he enters carrying Haemon's body?

62. What does Creon's accusation to the Messenger echo?

63. What background information does the Messenger's description of Eurydice's suicide fill in for the audience? How does this information intensify the tragedy for Creon?

64. Does Sophocles agree with Creon's assessment: "once more / a crushing fate's come down upon my head!"? Why or why not? What perspective does the Chorus's final verse support?

24. How does the messenger's information change the central question in the play?

25. The revelation that Polybus was not the real father of Oedipus also brings up what other corroborating evidence that the Messenger presents?

26. What is the climax of this play?

27. Characterize Jocasta's and Oedipus' views on finding out the truth through the shepherd.

28. What effect does Sophocles achieve during the dialogue between Oedipus and the shepherd, as they grow closer to revealing and understanding the truth?

29. Why does Sophocles have a messenger describe the scene of Jocasta's suicide and Oedipus' disfigurement instead of portraying them?
