

Name: _____
Period: ____ Date: _____
Ms. Wagner's English IV

Oedipus the King **Study Guide**

Note: This study guide is for your benefit. I will not collect it. Moreover, some questions reflect a different translation, so see me if you have difficulties with this.

Prologue

1. What's your impression of Oedipus? What characteristics of Oedipus are you aware of after he gives the opening speech?
2. What problem is afflicting Thebes at this time?
3. What action has Oedipus taken to find an answer to this problem?
4. Why is Oedipus a respected leader?
5. When Creon returns from Delphi, what does Oedipus insist that he do? Why?
6. What does Creon report?
7. Explain Oedipus' reactions as Creon gives this information.
8. What happened to Laius, the former king?
9. What does Oedipus promise at the end of the prologue? Why, according to Oedipus, must his resolution be strong?

Parados/ Ode of Entry

The parados follows the prologue. In the parados the chorus enters and chants an ode. Throughout the play the chanted odes of the chorus comment to the audience on the action of the play. The chorus speaks the feelings of the members of the community. Choragos is the leader of the chorus and speaks for the others in the dialogue sections.

1. What feelings are the members of the chorus expressing?
2. What solution to the plague does the chorus suggest? Why?

First Episode

1. Reread Oedipus' long speech. What is his tone?
2. Assuming that, like Sophocles' audience, you know what is to happen, what are examples of dramatic irony in this speech?
3. What does the chorus want Oedipus to consider? What is his response? What does Oedipus consider "strange"?
4. Describe Tiresias. What is the public opinion of Tiresias? (Remember, the chorus is the voice of the people.)
5. What is Tiresias' attitude toward Oedipus and Oedipus' reaction to Tiresias?
6. Goaded into anger by Oedipus, what does Tiresias tell Oedipus?
7. What is Oedipus' reaction? Of what does he accuse Tiresias?
8. What is the chorus' opinion of this exchange between Oedipus and Tiresias?

Second Choral Ode

1. What does the chorus think will happen to the killer of Laius?
2. Although there is confusion about which one to believe, Tiresias or Oedipus, whom does the chorus support? Why?

Second Episode

1. Why has Creon come to confront Oedipus?
2. What does Creon suggest about Oedipus?
3. What opinion of the matter does the chorus express?
4. What does Oedipus accuse Creon of? On what does he base this accusation?
5. What arguments does Creon use to defend himself?
6. What does the chorus suggest to Oedipus?
7. What is Oedipus' answer to the chorus? What does he plan to do?
8. In what way does Creon provide contrast to Oedipus?
9. Why does Oedipus decide to let Creon go and not put him to death?
10. What advice does the chorus give Jocasta when she inquires about the details of the argument between her husband and brother?
11. Does Jocasta follow the advice?
12. What is Jocasta's opinion of soothsayers? What does she base this opinion on?
13. Why is Oedipus chilled by her story?
14. After questioning Jocasta about the details of Laius' death, what does Oedipus suspect?

15. Oedipus tells Jocasta, “for I have reached a pitch of wild foreboding.” What does Oedipus describe to her that explains this feeling?
16. How will Oedipus determine if he was the man who killed Laius?
17. According to Oedipus, why did he kill these men as he traveled on the road to Thebes?
18. What other bit of the information that Jocasta gives suggests Oedipus is guilty?
19. At this point, how does Oedipus see himself?
20. What opinion does the chorus express?
21. What does Jocasta insist?

Choral Dialogue in the Third Choral Ode

Sophocles uses the chorus to speak directly to the Athenian people; he is both warning them of dangers and moralizing to them of truth.

1. In Strophe I, what is the chorus asking? Explain, “Let me be reverent in the ways of right.”
2. According to the chorus, what is the danger of pride?
3. What warning and statement of truth is stated to the people of Athens in Anti Strophe 2?

Third Choral Ode

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

Third Episode

1. Why is Jocasta praying? What does she want?
2. Explain Jocasta's point when she says, "Our heavens are heavy with fear when we see our leader distracted, as helpless sailors are terrified by the confusion of their helmsman."
3. What news does the messenger bring?
4. How does Jocasta interpret this news?
5. How does Oedipus react to the news of Polybus' death? What does he fear?
6. What does Jocasta say that became the basis for Freud's ideas on what he termed the "Oedipus complex"?
7. What information does the messenger give Oedipus to put an end to his dread of the oracle?
8. What is Jocasta's reaction to this new information from the messenger?
9. What is Oedipus insisting? How does he interpret Jocasta's behavior?
10. How has Sophocles created suspense? (What are you dreading?)

Fourth Episode

1. Who arrives in this scene?

2. Why does Oedipus threaten to kill this Shepard?
3. What may we infer when the Shepard says, “No man living is more wretched than Oedipus”?

Fifth Choral Ode

1. What is the tone of the first strophe?
2. What is the contrast between Anti Strophe 1 and Strophe 2?
3. What is the public’s attitude toward Oedipus?

Exodus

1. The second messenger makes the statement, “The greatest griefs are those we cause ourselves.” What two self-imposed horrors does the messenger describe?
2. How does the chorus react when they see Oedipus?
3. According to Oedipus, why had he blinded himself, not killed himself?
4. In what ways has Oedipus changed from what he was at the beginning of the plays?
5. What three things does Oedipus want from Creon?
6. How does Creon, who is now king, treat Oedipus?
7. Explain the final statement of the chorus, “and let none presume on his good fortune...”
8. In what way is Oedipus heroic?