

# *Oedipus Rex*

## Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition Teaching Unit

### Study Guide Student Copy

1. What is significant about the fact that the first line of the play is a question?
2. How does Oedipus choose the spokesman of the group of supplicants?
3. What is your first impression of Oedipus?
4. What problem is afflicting Thebes at this time?
5. What is the House of Cadmus?
6. How does the Priest say the supplicants view Oedipus? How does this begin to establish Oedipus as an Aristotelian tragic hero?

7. In case we didn't already know it, what exposition does the Priest provide in this scene?
8. Why do the supplicants believe that Oedipus will be able to find a solution to the famine?
9. Why does Oedipus claim he suffers even more than the supplicants?
10. What impression do we get from Oedipus based on his language?
11. What action has Oedipus taken to find an answer to the city's problem?
12. What is Oedipus and Creon's relationship?
13. What is foreshadowed by Oedipus' promise to the Priest?
14. Why does the Priest suspect Creon brings good news?

15. When Creon arrives from Delphi, what does Oedipus insist that he do? What does this indicate about his character?
16. Why do you suppose Creon wants to talk to Oedipus in private first?
17. What does Creon report from the Oracle?
18. What is Oedipus' reaction to Creon's information?
19. Explain the dramatic irony in Oedipus' interrogation of Creon.
20. What is ironic about the one survivor's testimony?
21. What theory does Oedipus immediately develop about Laius' death?
22. Why did the citizens of Thebes not investigate Laius' murder at the time it occurred?

23. What does Oedipus promise to do? Why, according to Oedipus, must his resolution be strong?
24. Why does the Chorus appear at this point in the play?
25. Whose voices does the Chorus represent?
26. Give details of how the Chorus describes the city to the gods.
27. What does Ares represent to the Chorus? What various things do they wish for him?
28. What is ironic about the curse Oedipus places on the murderer of Laius?
29. Reread Oedipus' long speech beginning, "Ye pray; 'tis well, but would ye hear my words." What is his tone?
30. Why does Oedipus insist that *he* will seek out and avenge Laius' murderer?

31. In this speech, Oedipus refers to Laius' descendants as "ill-fated," but to his own good fortune in obtaining Laius' throne as driven by "chance." Explain the difference between these two concepts, and why Oedipus might choose to characterize these events in different ways.
32. Structurally, why is it appropriate for the Chorus to appear now?
33. Once again, in whose voice does the Chorus speak?
34. Why is it significant that it was Creon whom Oedipus sent to the Oracle and now it is Creon whom Oedipus has sent to get Tiresias?
35. Explain what Tiresias means by his first statement to Oedipus. "How terrible to know when it does not help the knower."
36. Why does Tiresias at first seem to refuse to help Oedipus?
37. What terrible thing does Oedipus accuse Tiresias of doing?
38. Goaded into anger by Oedipus, what does Tiresias finally tell him?

39. The truth revealed to Oedipus, what does Tiresias predict for him?
40. What is Oedipus' reaction to Tiresias' revelations? Of what does he accuse Tiresias?
41. How does Oedipus try to discredit Tiresias?
42. How does the Chorus serve as the "conscience" of the play?
43. In what ways is Oedipus blind according to Tiresias?
44. What prophecy for Oedipus does he reiterate?
45. How is Tiresias' response to being ordered to leave comic and ironic? What traits of Oedipus' does this emphasize?
46. What does Tiresias mean when he predicts, "This very day will sire you and destroy you"?

47. Why does Tiresias say that Oedipus, of all people, should understand his riddles?
48. Whom does the Chorus believe, Oedipus or Tiresias? Why?
49. What arguments does Creon use to defend himself?
50. Explain the irony of Oedipus' calling himself wise.
51. Why would the Chorus assert that no one is better able to end the feud between Oedipus and Creon than Jocasta?
52. In what way does Creon's behavior contrast with Oedipus'?
53. Why does Jocasta believe Oedipus and Creon should be ashamed of themselves?
54. What does Creon say that persuades Jocasta to urge Oedipus to believe him?

55. At this point, what appears to be Oedipus' *hamartia*?
56. For whose sake does Oedipus finally free Creon?
57. What is unusual about Jocasta's initial reaction when Oedipus reveals the accusation against him?
58. What is Jocasta's opinion of soothsayers? On what does she base this opinion?
59. What is significant about Jocasta's account of Laius' prophesy and death?
60. After questioning Jocasta about the details of Laius' death, what does Oedipus suspect? Why is this a significant moment in the play?
61. Why does Sophocles use interrogation as a means of exposition rather than show the scenes of Laius' death and Oedipus' encounter with him?
62. What happened to the servant who survived the attack on Laius?



63. What does Oedipus relate about his past to explain his fears?
64. Why did Oedipus kill the men at the crossroads?
65. What character trait does Oedipus' killing of Laius reinforce? What will probably prove to be this trait's dramatic significance?
66. What is ironically similar about the reasons Laius attempted to kill his child, and Oedipus fled Corinth? What does each action suggest about fate and free will?
67. How will Oedipus determine whether he was the man who killed Laius?
68. What acts of hubris do Oedipus and Jocasta commit?
69. What concerns does the Chorus have about the current state of religious belief?
70. Why is Jocasta pleased at the news of Polybus' death?

71. How does Oedipus respond to the news of his father's death?
72. What information does the messenger give Oedipus to put an end to his dread of the Oracle? How does this man know the truth?
73. What is the meaning of Oedipus' name? Why is this significant?
74. Why is Oedipus excited by the messenger's information? Whom does he insist on questioning?
75. How does the messenger's information change the central question in the play?
76. What does Jocasta fear Oedipus will learn if he continues to seek the truth of his parentage?
77. What does Oedipus mean when he declares himself the "child of Chance"? Why is this an example of dramatic irony?
78. To heighten the suspense and create a distraction before the final climax, the Greek playwrights often included brief songs. What false hope is the Chorus creating?

79. Why is the shepherd so reluctant to identify Oedipus as the child he gave to the messenger?
80. What is the climax of this play?
81. What behaviors has Sophocles presented as evil and dreadful?
82. During the dialogue between Oedipus and the shepherd, what happens to their lines as they get closer and closer to the revelation of the truth?
83. What is the contrast between Antistrophe 1 and Strophe 2?
84. Explain the Chorus' statement, "All-seeing time discovered you unwilling." Why is this concept central to the play?
85. How do you feel about Oedipus? Do you see him as a victim of a cruel fate or as a man who was at least partly to blame for his own sorrow?
86. Why does Sophocles have a messenger describe the scene of Jocasta's suicide and Oedipus' disfigurement instead of portraying them?

87. What does the servant report is Oedipus' explanation for his self-mutilation?
  
88. Oedipus believes the gods hate him more than any other man. Does anything justify their hatred? Why do you think Oedipus has been chosen to live out such a terrible fate?
  
89. How does this speak to the central issue of the play?
  
90. Why must Oedipus seek Creon's permission to go into exile? Why does Creon not grant it immediately?
  
91. Besides exile, what else does Oedipus ask of Creon?
  
92. Why is Oedipus concerned about his daughters' futures and not his sons?
  
93. How does Creon treat Oedipus in this final section?
  
94. According to the Chorus when is the only appropriate time to call a man "blessed"?