

**Oedipus Rex**(a.k.a *Oedipus the King*)

By Sophocles

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Hour \_\_\_\_\_

**Reading Guide & Study Questions**

**Directions:** Answer the following questions in complete sentences. Use your book to find specific words and phrases as needed. Write your answers neatly on lined paper (or type them). Individual sections will be handed in as we continue our reading and discussion of the play; you will be informed of each individual due date as they arrive. We will discuss these questions in small groups as well as a whole class, both during and after reading. The entire document will be an important resource for you in preparing for the unit test and our analytical writings.

**Prologue**

1. Where does the play take place?
2. Which character begins the play? A playwright very carefully introduces a play. Why might Sophocles have selected this character to introduce the play?
3. Oedipus identifies the citizens of Thebes as "scions of the ancient Cadmean line." Who was Cadmus?
4. Which three characters speak in the Prologue? What attitude does Oedipus assume toward the suppliants seeking his help?
5. Who are Pallas and Apollo? Why are these deities mentioned in the Prologue?
6. What does the priest ask Oedipus to do?
7. What initial step does Oedipus indicate he has already taken?
8. What is the significance of Delphi?
9. Who is Creon?
10. What is the message from the oracle at Delphi with which Creon returns?
11. What single clue about the murder of King Laius is revealed by Creon?
12. What does Oedipus think about this clue? What might this perception foreshadow?
13. What research method is Oedipus encouraged to use to discover who the murderer of Laius is?
14. What prevented Thebes from tracking down the murderer of Laius at the time the murder occurred?
15. What was the Sphinx?
16. What does Oedipus promise to do at the end of the Prologue?
17. Of what symbolic significance are the olive boughs, strewn at the altar steps as the Thebans address Oedipus? Why does Oedipus tell the suppliants to lift up their olive boughs as they depart?

### **Ode of Entry**

18. In Strophe I, what does the Chorus ask?
19. In Antistrophe I, to which god and goddesses does the Chorus appeal for rest from their suffering?
20. In Strophe II and Antistrophe II, the Chorus bewails their situation in Thebes. Describe the condition of the people of Thebes as the play begins.
21. What is the message of the Chorus in Strophe III and Antistrophe III?
22. At the conclusion of Antistrophe II, to what new god and his attendants does the Chorus appeal for safety from death?
23. Compare the poetry of the "Ode of Entry" with the poetry of the "Prologue." (This does not have to be elevated, intellectual discussion, but some astute observations from intelligent 9<sup>th</sup> graders is expected.)

### **Episode One**

24. What is the substance of Oedipus' pledge to the people of Thebes?
25. What does Oedipus think is unlucky about Laius' fatherhood? What actually was unlucky about Laius' fatherhood?
26. Who were Labdacus and Polydorus?
27. What is the task of the Chorus in this scene?
28. What might be suggested by the fact that Oedipus had to send twice for Tiresias?
29. At his entrance, how is Tiresias described? What audience attitude should this description establish?
30. Why does Tiresias at first refuse to tell Oedipus the truth?
31. How does Oedipus react when Tiresias reveals to him the truth?
32. Whom does Oedipus assume is behind Tiresias' claims? Why?
33. What comparison does Oedipus make between himself and peers like Tiresias? What does this tell us about Oedipus?
34. When the Chorus intercedes between the argument of Oedipus and Tiresias, of what does the Chorus remind Oedipus?

### **Second Choral Ode**

35. Tiresias says Oedipus is guilty. How do the elders react to Tiresias' charge?

### **Episode Two & Choral Dialogue**

36. What motivates Creon's entrance at the beginning of this episode?
37. Why does Oedipus accuse Creon of conspiracy?
38. How does Creon defend himself against Oedipus' accusation?
39. What does Oedipus threaten to do?
40. What does Jocasta attempt to do?
41. Is Jocasta successful in her attempt? Explain.
42. How does Jocasta try to assure Oedipus that he is not guilty of Laius' death?

43. What is Jocasta's view of prophecy?
44. Why is Oedipus frightened by the information Jocasta gives?
45. What happened to the one surviving witness to Laius' murder?
46. Who does Oedipus believe are his parents and where does he think he was born?
47. Why does Oedipus go to the Delphic Oracle? What does the Oracle tell him?
48. After hearing the Oracle's information, where does Oedipus go?
49. What happened at this place?
50. What does Oedipus fear?
51. At this point, is Oedipus suspicious? Does he think Laius and Jocasta are his parents? Explain.
52. Jocasta tells Oedipus the story of Laius' death. Why does Oedipus find Jocasta's story comforting?
53. How does Jocasta try to reassure Oedipus?
54. What request does Oedipus make?

### **Third Choral Ode**

55. In Strophe I, what wish does the Chorus express?
56. In your opinion, is Oedipus a tyrannical ruler? Explain.
57. Is Oedipus responsible for his own fate? Explain.
58. In what way, specifically, can the words of the Chorus in Antistrophe I and Strophe II apply to Oedipus?
59. What concern does the Chorus express in Antistrophe II?

### **Episode Three**

60. Notice that Jocasta appears alone on the stage at the opening of the scene. What prayer does she make and to whom does she make it?
61. What news does the Messenger deliver to Oedipus?
62. What is Oedipus' reaction to this news?
63. What is Jocasta's reaction?
64. What further information does the Messenger give Oedipus?
65. Whom does the Chorus identify as the herdsman mentioned by the Messenger?
66. Why does Jocasta ask Oedipus not to seek out the herdsman and then leave?
67. How does Oedipus interpret Jocasta's emotional behavior?
68. What is Oedipus' view of the role of Chance (Fortune) in his life?
69. Is Oedipus' view correct? Explain.
70. Explain the irony of the arrival of the Messenger occurring just after Jocasta's prayer. Is the Messenger's news really the good news she thinks that it is? Explain.

### **Fourth Choral Ode**

*Notice: In Strophe I the Chorus addresses the mountain Cithaeron on which Oedipus was exposed as a baby. In Antistrophe I the Chorus addresses Oedipus and speculates about the identity of his parents.*

71. Whom do the Chorus suggest as possible parents of Oedipus?

### **Episode Four**

72. Who had employed the herdsman?  
73. Why is the herdsman reluctant to answer Oedipus' and the Messenger's questions?  
74. What revelation does the herdsman make?

### **Fifth Choral Ode**

75. What general comment on human life does the Chorus make based on the example of Oedipus?  
76. Briefly summarize the account of Oedipus' life given by the Chorus in Antistrophe I and Strophe II.  
77. What horrible fact about Oedipus' marriage does the Chorus point out?

### **Epilogue & Choral Ode**

78. What news does the 2<sup>nd</sup> Messenger (Palace Official) announce?  
79. What is the symbolic significance of Oedipus' self-blinding?  
80. What does Oedipus intend to do? Why?  
81. Whom does Oedipus blame for his sorrows?  
82. What reasons does Oedipus give for his self-blinding?  
83. How does Oedipus feel about Creon at this point?  
84. What requests does Oedipus make of Creon?  
85. What future does Oedipus foresee for his two daughters?  
86. What important truth about Oedipus' life does Creon point out?  
87. What general lesson does the Chorus draw from the example of Oedipus' life?

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**Vocabulary**

- |     |  |     |  |     |  |
|-----|--|-----|--|-----|--|
| 5.  | scions<br>elegiac<br>palls<br>petitioners<br>fledglings<br>essaying<br>Presbyter<br>striplings<br>oracles  | 13. | xanthic<br>succor  | 27. | mantic<br>gad  |
| 6.  | ineffectual<br>decimates<br>suppliants<br>consummate<br>atoner<br>disenthralled<br>ruthless<br>primed<br>prowess<br>buoyancy<br>omens<br>stature | 14. | remission  | 28. | malice<br>calumny  |
| 7.  | treble<br>perplexed<br>covenant<br>redeem<br>effulgent<br>chapelets  | 15. | sacrament<br>pestilence<br>ally<br>degradation<br>invoked<br>sanction<br>progeny | 29. | taunt<br>fathom<br>onslaught<br>filcher<br>lunacy<br>slinking<br>jobbery<br>laden<br>malevolence |
| 8.  | mandate<br>enjoins<br>battens<br>festers   | 16. | perjurer   | 31. | commission   |
| 10. | brigands   | 17. | brazen<br>incarnate<br>intuitive<br>didactic                                     | 33. | sway<br>covet<br>constraint<br>anarchist   |
| 11. | piety<br>avenge<br>muster<br>resolute<br>purge   | 18. | begrudge   | 34. | circumspect<br>adamant   |
| 12. | tremulous<br>cipher  | 19. | flinty   | 35. | wrangle  |
|     |  | 20. | canker   | 37. | annulled<br>primal   |
|     |  | 21. | goad<br>unscathed  | 38. | compunction  |
|     |  | 22. | purblind<br>gibes<br>pinnacled   | 39. | insensate<br>abdicate<br>foundering  |
|     |  | 23. | suborning<br>vamper<br>conjurer<br>theology<br>doting<br>myrmidon<br>appallingly | 43. | recompense<br>unnerves<br>befell<br>ferment  |
|     |  | 24. | dormant<br>scourge<br>scuddling<br>dawdles                                       | 44. | scruple<br>trice   |
|     |  | 26. | prophecy   | 45. | wretch   |
|     |  | 27. | incarnadine<br>caparisoned<br>coruscates   | 46. | enshrine<br>genesis<br>lulls   |

- 46. brazen
- 48. impiety  
brash  
sacrilege  
wantonness  
trespass
- 51. mongering
- 52. scabbard  
preordained
- 60. descent  
paltry  
wax  
wane  
fealty
- 61. sapient
- 64. rebuked
- 67. infamy
- 69. self-incurred
- 70. dirge  
founts  
ensanguined
- 72. flits  
adamantine  
eludes  
havoc
- 73. fructify  
fetters
- 74. parricide  
citadel  
pariah
- 76. putrescence  
clemency  
impious
- 78. encompass  
consort
- 79. suffice
- 81. elucidator