

SOPHOCLES (496?-406 B.C.)

Antigone

*An English Version by Dudley Fitts and
Robert Fitzgerald*

Person Represented

ANTIGONE

ISMENE

EURYDICE

CREON

HAIMON

TEIRESIAS

A SENTRY

A MESSENGER

CHORUS

*SCENE: Before the Palace of Creon, King of
Thebes. A central double door, and two
lateral doors. A platform extends the length of
the façade, and from this platform
three steps lead down into the “orchestra”, or
chorus-ground. TIME: Dawn of the
day after the repulse of the Argive army from
the assault on Thebes.*

PROLOGUE

[ANTIGONE and ISMENE enter from the
central door of the Palace.]

ANTIGONE:

Ismene, dear sister,

You would think that we had already suffered
enough

For the curse on Oedipus:

I cannot imagine any grief

That you and I have not gone through. And
now — 5

Have they told you of the new decree of our
King Creon?

ISMENE:

I have heard nothing: I know

That two sisters lost two brothers, a double
death

In a single hour; and I know that the Argive
army

Fled in the night; but beyond this, nothing. 10

ANTIGONE:

I thought so. And that is why I wanted you
To come out here with me. There is something
we must do.

ISMENE:

Why do you speak so strangely?

ANTIGONE:

Listen, Ismenê:

Creon buried our brother Eteoclês 15

With military honors, gave him a soldier’s
funeral,

And it was right that he should; but

Polyneicês,

he fought as bravely and died as miserably,—

They say that Creon has sworn

No one shall bury him, no one mourn for him,
20

But this body must lie in the fields, a sweet
treasure

For carrion birds to find as they search for
food.

That is what they say, and our good Creon is
coming here

To announce it publicly; and the penalty —

Stoning to death in the public square

There it is, 25

And now you can prove what you are:

A true sister, or a traitor to your family.

ISMENE:

Antigone, you are mad! What could I possibly
do?

ANTIGONE:

You must decide whether you will help me or
not.

ISMENE:

I do not understand you. Help you in what? 30

ANTIGONE:

Ismene, I am going to bury him. Will you
come?

ISMENE:

Bury him! You have just said the new law
forbids it.

ANTIGONE:

He is my brother. And he is your brother, too.

ISMENE:

But think of the danger! Think what Creon
will do!

ANTIGONE:

Creon is not enough to stand in my way. 15

ISMENE:

Ah sister!

Oedipus died, everyone hating him

For what his own search brought to light, his
eyes

Ripped out by his own hand; and Iocaste died,
His mother and wife at once: she twisted the
cords 40

That strangled her life; and our two brothers
died,

Each killed by the other’s sword. And we are
left:

But oh, Antigone,

Think how much more terrible than these
Our own death would be if we should go

against Creon 45

And do what he has forbidden! We are only
women,

We cannot fight with men, Antigone!

The law is strong, we must give in to the law

In this thing, and in worse. I beg the Dead

To forgive me, but I am helpless: I must yield
50

To those in authority. And I think it is
dangerous business

To be always meddling.

ANTIGONE:

If that is what you think,

I should not want you, even if you asked to come.
You have made your choice, you can be what you want to be.
But I will bury him; and if I must die, 55
I say that this crime is holy: I shall lie down
With him in death, and I shall be as dear
To him as he to me.
It is the dead
Not the living, who make the longest
demands:
We die for ever...
You may do as you like
Since apparently the laws of the gods mean
nothing to you.
ISMENE:
They mean a great deal to me, but I have no
strength
To break laws that were made for the public
good.
ANTIGONE:
That must be your excuse, I suppose. But as
for me,
I will bury the brother I love.
ISMENE:
Antigone,
I am so afraid for you!
ANTIGONE:
You need not be:
You have yourself to consider, after all.
ISMENE:
But no one must hear of this, you must tell no
one!
I will keep it a secret, I promise!
ANTIGONE:
Oh tell it! Tell everyone
Think how they'll hate you when it all comes
out 70
If they learn that you knew about it all the
time!

ISMENE:
So fiery! You should be cold with fear.
ANTIGONE:
Perhaps. But I am doing only what I must.
ISMENE:
But can you do it? I say that you cannot.
ANTIGONE
Very well: when my strength gives out, I shall
do no more. 75
ISMENE:
Impossible things should not be tried at all.
ANTIGONE:
Go away, Ismene:
I shall be hating you soon, and the dead will
too,
For your words are hateful. Leave me my
foolish plan:
I am not afraid of the danger; if it means
death, 80
It will not be the worst of deaths —death
without honor.
ISMENE:
Go then, if you feel that you must.
You are unwise,
But a loyal friend indeed to those who love
you.
[Exit into the Palace. ANTIGONE goes off, L.
Enter the CHORUS.]
PARODOS
CHORUS:
Now the long blade of the sun, lying [Strophe
1] 85
Level east to west, touches with glory
Thebes of the Seven Gates. Open, unlid
Eye of golden day! O marching light
Across the eddy and rush of Dirce's stream, 2
Striking the white shields of the enemy 90
Thrown headlong backward from the blaze of
morning!
2 Dirce: a stream west of Thebes. [Editor's note]
CHORAGOS: 3

Polyneices their commander
Roused them with windy phrases,
He the wild eagle screaming
Insults above our land, 95
His wings their shields of snow,
His crest their marshaled helms.
CHORUS: [Antistrophe 1]
Against our seven gates in a yawning ring
The famished spears came onward in the
night;
But before his jaws were sated with our blood,
100
Or pine fire took the garland of our towers,
He was thrown back; and as he turned, great
Thebes—
No tender victim for his noisy power—
Rose like a dragon behind him, shouting war.
CHORAGOS:
For God hates utterly 105
The bray of bragging tongues;
And when he beheld their smiling,
Their swagger of golden helms,
The frown of his thunder blasted
Their first man from our walls 110
CHORUS: [Strophe 2]
We heard his shout of triumph high in the air
Turn to a scream; far out in a flaming are
He fell with his windy torch, and the earth
struck him.
And others storming in fury no less than his
Found shock of death in the dusty joy of battle
115
CHORAGOS:
Seven captains at seven gates
Yielded their clanging arms to the god
That bends the battle-line and breaks it.
These two only, brothers in blood,
Face to face in matchless rage, 120
Mirroring each the other's death,
Clashed in long combat.
CHORUS: [Antistrophe 2]

But now in the beautiful morning of victory
Let Thebes of the many chariots sing for joy!
With hearts for dancing we'll take leave of
war: 125

Our temples shall be sweet with hymns of
praise,

³Leader of the Chorus. [Editors' note]

And the long night shall echo with our chorus.

Journal Entry One - Prologue and Parodos - *Antigone*

First Thoughts

1. How do you feel about Antigone's
attitude toward her brothers and toward her
sister, Ismene?

Shaping Interpretations

2. In their first scenes together, Antigone
and Ismene are foils, characters who have
contrasting or opposite qualities. How would
you characterize each sister? Does
Sophocles seem to side with one sister over
the other? Do you? Explain.

3. Literature and Religion describes ancient
Greek burial practices. What did you learn
there that helps explain the importance to
Antigone of a proper burial for Polyneices?
(Check the notes you took while reading.)

4. We haven't met Creon yet. What reasons
do you think he would have given for
leaving Polyneices' body unburied?

5. In verbal irony, what is said is the
opposite of what is meant. Where does
Antigone use verbal irony in her scenes with
Ismene? How does this make you feel about
Antigone?

6. At the end of the Parodos, what hopes for
the future does the Chorus express? Do you
think these expectations will be fulfilled?
Why, or why not?

Connecting with the Text

7. In line 54, Antigone says to Ismene, "You
have made your choice, you can be what
you want to be." How would you respond to
this statement about our ability to control
our lives?

Extending the Text

8. In lines 46–47, Ismene says, ". . . We are
only women, / We cannot fight with men,
Antigone!" What do you think of this
argument? Is it an argument that people still
use today? Explain.

9. What motivates Antigone to break
Creon's law? What motivates Ismene to
respect it? Do people today have similar
attitudes toward the law? Explain.



SCENE I

CHORAGUS:

But now at last our new King is coming:
Creon of Thebes, Menoikeus' son.

In this auspicious dawn of his reign 130
What are the new complexities

That shifting Fate has woven for him?

What is his counsel? Why has he summoned
The old men to hear him?

[Enter CREON from the Palace, C. He
addresses the CHORUS
from the top step.]

CREON:

Gentlemen: I have the honor to inform you
that our Ship of
State, which recent storms have threatened to
destroy, has come
safely to harbor at last, guided by the merciful
wisdom of Heaven. I
have summoned you here this morning
because I know that I can
depend upon you: your devotion to King Laios
was absolute; you
never hesitated in your duty to our late ruler
Oedipus; and when

Oedipus died, your loyalty was transferred to his children.
Unfortunately, as you know, his two sons, the princes Eteocles and Polyneices, have killed each other in battle, and I, as the next in blood, have succeeded to the full power of the throne.
I am aware, of course, that no Ruler can expect complete loyalty from his subjects until he has been tested in office.
Nevertheless, I say to you at the very outset that I have nothing but contempt for the kind of Governor who is afraid, for whatever reason, to follow the course that he knows is best for the State; and as for the man who sets private friendship above the public welfare, —I have no use for him, either. I call God to witness that if I saw my country headed for ruin, I should not be afraid to speak out plainly; and I need hardly remind you that I would never have any dealings with an enemy of the people. No one values friendship more highly than I; but we must remember that friends made at the risk of wrecking our Ship are not real friends at all.
These are my principles, at any rate, and that is why I have made the following decision concerning the sons of Oedipus:
Eteocles, who died as a man should die, fighting for his country, is to be buried with full military honors, with all the ceremony that is usual

when the greatest heroes die; but his brother Polyneices, who broke his exile to come back with fire and sword against his native city and the shrines of his fathers' gods, whose one idea was to spill the blood of his blood and sell his own people into slavery— Polyneices, I say, is to have no burial: no man is to touch him or say the least prayer for him; he shall lie on the plain, unburied; and the birds and the scavenging dogs can do with him whatever they like.
This is my command, and you can see the wisdom behind it. As long as I am King, no traitor is going to be honored with the loyal man. But whoever shows by word and deed that he is on the side of the State,—he shall have my respect while he is living and my reverence when he is dead.

175

CHORAGOS:

If that is your will, Creon son of Menoikeus, You have the right to enforce it: we are yours.

180

CREON:

That is my will. Take care that you do your part.

CHORAGOS:

We are old men: let the younger ones carry it out.

CREON:

I do not mean that: the sentries have been appointed.

CHORAGOS:

Then what is it that you would have us do?

CREON:

You will give no support to whoever breaks this law. 185

CHORAGOS:

Only a crazy man is in love with death!

CREON:

And death it is; yet money talks, and the wisest

Have sometimes been known to count a few coins too many.

[Enter *SENTRY* from *L.*]

SENTRY:

I'll not say that I'm out of breath from running, King, because every time I stopped to think about what I have to tell you, I felt like going back. And all the time a voice kept saying, "You fool, don't you know you're walking straight into trouble?"; and then another voice: "Yes, but if you let somebody else get the news to Creon first, it will be even worse than that for you!" But good sense won out, at least I hope it was good sense, and here I am with a story that makes no sense at all; but I'll tell it anyhow, because, as they say, what's going to happen's going to happen, and—
190
195
CREON:
Come to the point. What have you to say?
SENTRY:
I did not it. I did not see who did it. You must not punish me for what someone else has done.
CREON:
A comprehensive defense! More effective, perhaps,
If I knew its purpose. Come: what is it?
SENTRY:
A dreadful thing... I don't know how to put it—

CREON:
Out with it!
SENTRY:
Well, then;
The dead man—
Polyneices—
[Pause. The SENTRY is overcome, fumbles
for words. CREON
waits impassively.]
out there—
someone, — 205
new dust on the slimy flesh!
[Pause. No sign from CREON.]
Someone has given it burial that way, and
Gone ...
[Long pause. CREON finally speaks with
deadly control.]
CREON:
And the man who dared do this?
SENTRY:
I swear I 210
Do not know! You must believe me!
Listen:
The ground was dry, not a sign of digging, no,
Not a wheel track in the dust, no trace of
anyone.
It was when they relieved us this morning: and
one of them,
The corporal, pointed to it.
There it was, 215
The strangest—
Look:
The body, just mounded over with light dust:
you see?
Not buried really, but as if they'd covered it
Just enough for the ghost's peace. And no sign
Of dogs or any wild animal that had been
there. 220
And then what a scene there was! Every man
of us

Accusing the other: we all proved the other
man did it,
We all had proof that we could not have done
it.
We were ready to take hot iron in our hands,
Walk through fire, swear by all the gods,
It was not I! 225
I do not know who it was, but it was not I!
[CREON's rage has been mounting steadily,
but the SENTRY
is too intent upon his story to notice it.]
And then, when this came to nothing,
someone said
A thing that silenced us and made us stare
Down at the ground: you had to be told the
news,
And one of us had to do it! We threw the dice,
230
And the bad luck fell to me. So here I am,
No happier to be here than you are to have me:
Nobody likes the man who brings bad news.
CHORAGOS:
I have been wondering, King: can it be that the
gods have done this? 235
CREON: [*Furiously.*]
Stop!
Must you doddering wrecks
Go out of your heads entirely? "The gods!"
Intolerable!
The gods favor this corpse? Why? How had he
served them? 240
Tried to loot their temples, burn their images,
Yes, and the whole State, and its laws with it!
Is it your senile opinion that the gods love to
honor bad men?
A pious thought! —
No, from the every beginning
There have been those who have whispered
together, 245
Stiff-necked anarchists, putting their heads
together,

Scheming against me in alleys. These are the
men,
And they have bribed my own guard to do this
thing.
Money! [*Sententiously.*]
There's nothing in the world so demoralizing
as money. 250
Find that man, bring him here to me, or your
death
Will be the least of your problems: I'll string
you up
Alive, and there will be certain ways to make
you
Discover your employer before you die;
And the process may teach you a lesson you
seem to have missed 260
The dearest profit is sometimes all too dear:
That depends on the source. Do you
understand me?
A fortune won is often misfortune.
SENTRY:
King, may I speak?
CREON:
Your very voice distresses me.
SENTRY:
Are you sure that it is my voice, and not your
conscience? 265
CREON:
By God, he wants to analyze me now!
SENTRY:
It is not what I say, but what has been done,
that hurts you.
CREON:
You talk too much.
SENTRY:
Maybe; but I've done nothing.
CREON:
Sold your soul for some silver: that's all
you've done.
SENTRY:

How dreadful it is when the right judge judges wrong! 270

CREON:

Your figures of speech

May entertain you now; but unless you bring me the man,

You will get little profit from them in the end.

[Enter CREON into the Palace.]

SENTRY:

“Bring me the man” —!

I’d like nothing better than bringing him the man! 275

But bring him or not, you have seen the last of me here.

At any rate, I am safe! [Exit SENTRY.]

ODE I

CHORUS: [Strophe 1]

Numberless are the world’s wonders, but none More wonderful than man; the stormgray sea Yields to his prows, the huge crests bear him high; 280

Earth, holy and inexhaustible, is graven

With shining furrows where his plows have gone

Year after year, the timeless labor of stallions.

[Antistrophe 1]

The lightboned birds and beasts that cling to cover, 285

The lithe fish lighting their reaches of dim water,

All are taken, tamed in the net of his mind;

The lion on the hill, the wild horse windy-maned,

Resign to him; and his blunt yoke has broken

The sultry shoulders of the mountain bull.

[Strophe 2]

Words also, ant thought as rapid as air, 290

He fashions to his good use; statecraft is his,

And his the skill that deflect the arrows of snow,

The spears of winter rain: from every wind He has made himself secure—from all but one:

In the late wind of death he cannot stand.

[Antistrophe 2]

O clear intelligence, force beyond all measure! 295

O fate of man, working both good and evil!

When the laws are kept, how proudly his city stands!

When the laws are broken, what of his city then?

Never may the anarchic man find rest at my hearth,

Never be it said that my thoughts are his thoughts. 330

Journal Entry 2 - Scene 1 and Ode 1

Antigone

Reading Check

- What reasons does Creon give for not allowing Polyneices to be buried?
- How does the Choragos react to Creon’s decision?
- In lines 83–87, what news is the Sentry reluctant to deliver to Creon?
- What attitude toward human beings does the Chorus express in Ode 1? What one fact tempers their attitude?

Shaping Interpretations

1. Why do you think the Choragos does not oppose Creon’s decree? What motive does Creon assign to those who might oppose him?

2. In line 113, the Choragos asks Creon, “. . . can it be that the gods have done this?” Why does this suggestion enrage Creon? What does the suggestion imply?

3. Dramatic irony is a situation in which the audience knows something that a character does not. What dramatic irony do you sense each time Creon refers to the “man” who has buried Polyneices?

4. On the basis of Scene 1, how would you characterize Creon’s strengths and weaknesses as a leader? Is he a believable character? Why, or why not?

5. What law does Creon champion in this scene, and who supports his view here? What other view has been expressed in the play so far, and who expresses it?

6. What do you predict will happen when Creon discovers the truth about the burial of Polyneices? How might he and Antigone resolve their conflicting values?

Extending the Text

7. In Ode 1, what opinion does the Chorus express about the importance of law in society? Is that opinion pertinent to our attitude toward law today? Explain.



SCENE II

[*Re-enter SENTRY leading ANTIGONE.*]

CHORAGOS:

What does this mean? Surely this captive woman

Is the Princess, Antigone. Why should she be taken?

SENTRY:

Here is the one who did it! We caught her In the very act of burying him. —Where is Creon?

CHORAGOS:

Just coming from the house.

[*Enter CREON, C.*]

CREON:

What has happened? 305

Why have you come back so soon?

SENTRY:

O King,

A man should never be too sure of anything:

I would have sworn

That you'd not see me here again: your anger

Frightened me so, and the things you

threatened me with; 310

But how could I tell then

That I'd be able to solve the case so soon?

No dice-throwing this time: I was only too glad to come!

Here is this woman. She is the guilty one:

We found her trying to bury him. 315

Take her, then; question her; judge her as you will.

I am through with the whole thing now, and glad of it.

CREON:

But this is Antigone! Why have you brought her here?

SENTRY:

She was burying him, I tell you!

CREON: [*Severely.*]

Is this the truth?

SENTRY:

I saw her with my own eyes. Can I say more? 320

CREON:

The details: come, tell me quickly!

SENTRY:

It was like this:

After those terrible threats of yours King.

We went back and brushed the dust away from the body.

The flesh was soft by now, and stinking, 325

So we sat on a hill to windward and kept guard.

No napping happened until the white round sun

Whirled in the center of the round sky over us:

Then, suddenly,

A storm of dust roared up from the earth, and the sky 330

Went out, the plain vanished with all its trees

In the stinging dark. We closed our eyes and endured it.

The whirlwind lasted a long time, but it passed;

And then we looked, and there was Antigone!

I have seen 335

A mother bird come back to a stripped nest, heard

Her crying bitterly a broken note or two

For the young ones stolen. Just so, when this girl

Found the bare corpse, and all her love's work wasted,

She wept, and cried on heaven to damn the hands 340

That had done this thing

And then she brought more dust

And sprinkled wine three times for her brother's ghost.

We ran and took her at once. She was not afraid,

Not even when we charged her with what she had done.

She denied nothing.

And this was a comfort to me, 345

And some uneasiness: for it is a good thing

To escape from death, but it is no great pleasure

To bring death to a friend.

Yet I always say

There is nothing so comfortable as your own safe skin!

CREON: [*Slowly, dangerously.*]

And you, Antigone, 350

You with your head hanging—do you confess this thing?

ANTIGONE:

I do. I deny nothing.

CREON: [*To SENTRY:*]

You may go.

{*Exit SENTRY. To ANTIGONE:*}

Tell me, tell me briefly:

Had you heard my proclamation touching this matter?

ANTIGONE:

It was public. Could I help hearing it? 355

CREON:

And yet you dared defy the law.

ANTIGONE:

I dared.

It was not God's proclamation. That final

Justice

That rules the world below makes no such

laws.

Your edict, King, was strong,

But all your strength is weakness itself against

360

The immortal unrecorded laws of God.

They are not merely now: they were, and shall

be,

Operative for ever, beyond man utterly.

I knew I must die, even without your decree:

I am only mortal. And if I must die 365

Now, before it is my time to die,

Surely this is no hardship: can anyone

Living, as I live, with evil all about me,

Think Death less than a friend? This death of

mine

Is of no importance; but if I had left my

brother 370

Lying in death unburied, I should have

suffered.

Now I do not.

You smile at me. Ah Creon,

Think me a fool, if you like; but it may well be

That a fool convicts me of folly.

CHORAGOS:

Like father, like daughter: both headstrong,

deaf to reason! 375

She has never learned to yield.

She has much to learn.

The inflexible heart breaks first, the toughest

iron

Cracks first, and the wildest horses bend their

necks

At the pull of the smallest curb.

Pride? In a slave?

This girl is guilty of a double insolence, 380

Breaking the given laws and boasting of it.

Who is the man here,

She or I, if this crime goes unpunished?

Sister's child, or more than sister's child,

Or closer yet in blood—she and her sister 385

Win bitter death for this!

[*To servants:*]

Go, some of you,

Arrest Ismene. I accuse her equally.

Bring her: you will find her sniffing in the

house there.

Her mind's a traitor: crimes kept in the dark

390

Cry for light, and the guardian brain shudders:

But now much worse than this

Is brazen boasting of barefaced anarchy!

ANTIGONE:

Creon, what more do you want than my death?

CREON:

Nothing.

That gives me everything.

ANTIGONE:

Then I beg you: kill me.

This talking is a great weariness: your words

395

Are distasteful to me, and I am sure that mine

Seem so to you. And yet they should not seem

so:

I should have praise and honor for what I have

done.

All these men here would praise me

Were their lips not frozen shut with fear of

you. 400

[*Bitterly.*]

Ah the good fortune of kings,

Licensed to say and do whatever they please!

CREON:

You are alone here in that opinion.

ANTIGONE:

No, they are with me. But they keep their
tongues in leash.

CREON:

Maybe. But you are guilty, and they are not.

405

ANTIGONE:

There is no guilt in reverence for the dead.

CREON:

But Eteocles—was he not your brother too?

ANTIGONE:

My brother too.

CREON:

And you insult his memory?

ANTIGONE: [*Softly.*]

The dead man would not say that I insult it.

CREON:

He would: for you honor a traitor as much as

him. 410

ANTIGONE:

His own brother, traitor or not, and equal in

blood.

CREON:

He made war on his country. Eteocles

defended it.

ANTIGONE:

Nevertheless, there are honors due all the

dead.

CREON:

But not the same for the wicked as for the just.

ANTIGONE:

Ah Creon, Creon, 415

Which of us can say what the gods hold

wicked?

CREON:

An enemy is an enemy, even dead.

ANTIGONE:

It is my nature to join in love, not hate.

CREON: [*Finally losing patience.*]

Go join them, then; if you must have your

love,

Find it in hell! 420

CHORAGOS:

But see, Ismene comes:

[Enter ISMENE, guarded.]

Those tears are sisterly, the cloud
That shadows her eyes rains down gentle
sorrow.

CREON:

You too, Ismene,

Snake in my ordered house, sucking my blood
425

Stealthily—and all the time I never knew
That these two sisters were aiming at my
throne!

Ismene,

Do you confess your share in this crime, or
deny it?

Answer me.

ISMENE:

Yes, if she will let me say so. I am guilty. 430

ANTIGONE: [*Coldly.*]

No, Ismene. You have no right to say so.

You would not help me, and I will not have
you help me.

ISMENE:

But now I know what you meant; and I am
here

To join you, to take my share of punishment.

ANTIGONE:

The dead man and the gods who rule the dead
435

Know whose act this was. Words are not
friends.

ISMENE:

Do you refuse me, Antigone? I want to die
with you:

I too have a duty that I must discharge to the
dead.

ANTIGONE:

You shall not lessen my death by sharing it.

ISMENE:

What do I care for life when you are dead? 440

ANTIGONE:

Ask Creon. You're always hanging on his
opinions.

ISMENE:

You are laughing at me. Why, Antigone?

ANTIGONE:

It's a joyless laughter, Ismene.

ISMENE:

But can I do nothing?

ANTIGONE:

Yes. Save yourself. I shall not envy you.

There are those who will praise you; I shall
have honor, too. 445

ISMENE:

But we are equally guilty!

ANTIGONE:

No more, Ismene.

You are alive, but I belong to Death.

CREON: [*To the CHORUS:*]

Gentlemen, I beg you to observe these girls:

One has just now lost her mind; the other,

It seem, has never had a mind at all. 450

ISMENE:

Grief teaches the steadiest minds to waver,
King.

CREON:

Yours certainly did, when you assumed guild
with the guilty!

ISMENE:

But how could I go on living without her?

CREON:

You are.

She is already dead.

ISMENE:

But your own son's bride!

CREON:

There are places enough for him to push his
plow. 455

I want no wicked women for my sons!

ISMENE:

O dearest Haimon, how your father wrong
you!

CREON:

I've had enough of your childish talk of
marriage!

CHORAGOS:

Do you really intend to steal this girl from
your son?

CREON:

No; Death will do that for me.

CHORAGOS:

Then she must die? 460

CREON: [*Ironically.*]

You dazzle me.

—But enough of this talk!

[*To GUARDS:*]

You, there, take them away and guard them
well:

For they are but women, and even brave men
run

When they see Death coming.

[*Exeunt ISMENE, ANTIGONE, and
GUARDS.*]

ODE II

CHORUS: [*Strophe I*]

Fortunate is the man who has never tasted
God's vengeance! 465

Where once the anger of heaven has struck,
that house is shaken

For ever: damnation rises behind each child
Like a wave cresting out of the black

northeast,

When the long darkness under sea roars up
And bursts drumming death upon the

windwhipped sand. 470

[*Antistrophe I*]

I have seen this gathering sorrow from time
long past

Loom upon Oedipus' children: generation
 from generation
 Takes the compulsive rage of the enemy god.
 So lately this last flower of Oedipus' line
 Drank the sunlight! but now a passionate word
 475
 And a handful of dust have closed up all its
 beauty
 What mortal arrogance [*Strophe 2*]
 Transcends the wrath of Zeus?
 Sleep cannot lull him, nor the effortless long
 months
 Of the timeless gods: but he is young for ever,
 480
 And his house is the shining day of high
 Olympos.
 All that is and shall be,
 And all the past, is his.
 No pride on earth is free of the curse of
 heaven.
 The straying dreams of men [*Antistrophe 2*]
 485
 May bring them ghosts of joy:
 But as they drowse, the waking embers burn
 them;
 Or they walk with fixed eyes, as blind men
 walk.
 But the ancient wisdom speaks for our own
 time:
Fate works most for woe 490
With Folly's fairest show.
 Man's little pleasure is the spring of sorrow.

Journal Three - Scene 2 and Ode 2 *Antigone*

First Thoughts

1. What would you say is the greatest force motivating Antigone in this scene—pride, love, or principle? Explain your response.

Shaping Interpretations

2. Since there is usually only one stage setting in a Greek drama, important actions often take place offstage. In Scene 2, the Sentry describes a crucial event that we do not witness. What does he compare Antigone to when she discovers that Polyneices' corpse has been unburied? How does this simile make you feel about Antigone?

3. In lines 75–76, the Chorus accuses Antigone of being “headstrong, deaf to reason,” and unyielding. Later, Creon calls her behavior “barefaced anarchy.” Could either accusation apply to Creon himself? Would you support Antigone's view of herself or Creon's view of Antigone? Why?

4. Why do you think Ismene changes her mind about her brother's burial? Do you think Antigone is justified in rejecting Ismene's support, or is she being too hard on her sister? Explain.

5. In Ode 2, the Chorus makes an allusion, or reference, to the Oedipus myth that you read about in “The Myth of Oedipus” found in “Greek Drama: Out of Ritual.” Look back at those pages. Why does “God's

vengeance” loom over the House of Oedipus? What human fault does the Chorus say is responsible for this “curse of heaven”?

Extending the Text

6. In line 49 of Scene 2, the Sentry says, “There is nothing so comfortable as your own safe skin!” Where do you hear similar sentiments in the world today—about saving your own skin first?

7. Antigone tells Creon she is obeying the laws of God, not the law imposed by the king. Do such conflicts still happen today? In a democracy, how are such conflicts resolved?



SCENE III

CHORAGOS:

But here is Haimon, King, the last of all your sons.

Is it grief for Antigone, that brings him here,
 And bitterness at being robbed of his bride?

495

[*Enter HAIMON.*]

CREON:

We shall soon see, and no need of diviners.
—Son,
You have heard my final judgment on that girl:
Have you come here hating me, or have you come
With deference and with love, whatever I do?
HAIMON:
I am your son, father. You are my guide. 500
You make things clear for me, and I obey you.
No marriage means more to me than your continuing wisdom.
CREON:
Good. That is the way to behave: subordinate
Everything else, my son, to your father's will
This is what a man prays for, that he may get 505
Sons attentive and dutiful in his house,
Each one hating his father's enemies,
Honoring his father's friends. But if his sons
Fail him, if they turn out unprofitably,
What has he fathered but trouble for himself 510
And amusement for the malicious?
So you are right
Not to lose your head over this woman.
Your pleasure with her would soon, grow cold, Haimon,
And then you'd have a hellcat in bed and elsewhere.
Let her find her husband in Hell! 515
Of all the people in this city, only she
Has had contempt for my law and broken it.
Do you want me to show myself weak before the people?
Or to break my sworn word? No, and I will not.
The woman dies. 520
I suppose she'll plead "family ties." Well, let her.
If I permit my own family to rebel,

How shall I earn the world's obedience?
Show me the man who keeps his house in hand,
He's fit for public authority.
I'll have no dealings 525
With law-breakers, critics of the government:
Whoever is chosen to govern should be obeyed—
Must be obeyed, in all things, great and small,
Just and unjust! O Haimon,
The man who knows how to obey, and that man only, 530
Knows how to give commands when the time comes.
You can depend on him, no matter how fast
The spears come: he's a good soldier, he'll stick it out.
Anarchy, anarchy! Show me a greater evil!
This is why cities tumble and the great houses rain down, 535
This is what scatters armies!
No, no: good lives are made so by discipline.
We keep the laws then, and the lawmakers,
And no woman shall seduce us. If we must lose,
Let's lose to a man, at least! Is a woman stronger than we? 540
CHORAGOS:
Unless time has rusted my wits,
What you say, King, is said with point and dignity.
HAIMON: [*Boyishly earnest.*]
Father:
Reason is God's crowning gift to man, and you are right
To warn me against losing mine. I cannot say—
—
I hope that I shall never want to say! —that you 545
Have reasoned badly. Yet there are other men

Who can reason, too; and their opinions might be helpful.
You are not in a position to know everything
That people say or do, or what they feel:
Your temper terrifies them—everyone 550
Will tell you only what you like to hear.
But I, at any rate, can listen; and I have heard them
Muttering and whispering in the dark about this girl.
They say no woman has ever, so unreasonably,
Died so shameful a death for a generous act: 555
"She covered her brother's body. Is this indecent?
She kept him from dogs and vultures. Is this a crime?
Death? —She should have all the honor that we can give her!"
This is the way they talk out there in the city.
You must believe me: 560
Nothing is closer to me than your happiness.
What could be closer? Must not any son
Value his father's fortune as his father does his?
I beg you, do not be unchangeable:
Do not believe that you alone can be right. 565
The man who thinks that,
The man who maintains that only he has the power
To reason correctly, the gift to speak, to soul—
—
A man like that, when you know him, turns out empty.
It is not reason never to yield to reason! 570
In flood time you can see how some trees bend,
And because they bend, even their twigs are safe,
While stubborn trees are torn up, roots and all.

And the same thing happens in sailing:
Make your sheet fast, never slacken,—and
over you go, 575
Head over heels and under: and there's your
voyage.
Forget you are angry! Let yourself be moved!
I know I am young; but please let me say this:
The ideal condition
Would be, I admit, that men should be right by
instinct; 580
But since we are all too likely to go astray,
The reasonable thing is to learn from those
who can teach.
CHORAGOS:
You will do well to listen to him, King,
If what he says is sensible. And you, Haimon,
Must listen to your father. —Both speak well.
585
CREON:
You consider it right for a man of my years
and experience
To go to school to a boy?
HAIMON:
It is not right
If I am wrong. But if I am young, and right,
What does my age matter?
CREON:
You think it right to stand up for an anarchist?
590
HAIMON:
Not at all. I pay no respect to criminals.
CREON:
Then she is not a criminal?
HAIMON:
The City proposes to teach me how to rule?
CREON:
And the City proposes to teach me how to
rule?
HAIMON:
Ah. Who is it that's talking like a boy now?
595

CREON:
My voice is the one voice giving orders in this
City!
HAIMON:
It is no City if it takes orders from one voice.
CREON:
The State is the King!
HAIMON:
Yes, if the State is a desert.
[Pause.]
CREON:
This boy, it seems, has sold out to w woman.
HAIMON:
If you are a woman: my concern is only for
you. 600
CREON:
So? Your “concern”! In a public brawl with
your father!
HAIMON:
How about you, in a public brawl with justice?
CREON:
With justice, when all that I do is within my
rights?
HAIMON:
You have no right to trample on God's right.
CREON: [Completely out of control.]
Fool, adolescent fool! Taken in by a woman!
605
HAIMON:
You'll never see me taken in by anything vile.
CREON:
Every word you say is for her!
HAIMON: [Quietly, darkly.]
And for you.
And for me. And for the gods under the earth.
CREON:
You'll never marry her while she lives.
HAIMON:
Then she must die. —But her death will cause
another. 610
CREON:

Another?
Have you lost your senses? Is this an open
threat?
HAIMON:
There is no threat in speaking to emptiness.
CREON:
I swear you'll regret this superior tone of
yours!
You are the empty one!
HAIMON:
If you were not my father, 615
I'd say you were perverse.
CREON:
You girlstruck fool, don't play at words with
me!
HAIMON:
I am sorry. You prefer silence.
CREON:
Now, by God—!
I swear, by all the gods in heaven above us,
You'll watch it, I swear you shall
[To the SERVANTS:]
Bring her out! 620
Bring the woman out! Let her die before his
eyes!
Here, this instant, with her bridegroom beside
her!
HAIMON:
Not here, no; she will not die here, King.
And you will never see my face again.
Go on raving as long as you've a friend to
endure you. 625
[Exit HAIMON.]
CHORAGOS:
Gone, gone.
Creon, a young man in a rage is dangerous!
CREON:
Let him do, or dream to do, more than a man
can.
He shall not save these girls from death.

CHORAGOS:

These girls?

You have sentenced them both?

CREON:

No, you are right 630

I will not kill the one whose hands are clean.

CHORAGOS:

But Antigone?

CREON: [*Somberly.*]

I will carry her far away

Out there in the wilderness, and lock her

Living in a vault of stone. She shall have food,

As the custom is, to absolve the State of her death. 635

And there let her pray to the gods of hell:

They are her only gods:

Perhaps they will show her an escape from death,

Or she may learn,

though late,

That piety shown the dead is pity in vain. 640

[*Exit CREON.*]

ODE III

CHORUS:

Love, unconquerable [*Strophe*]

Waster of rich men, keeper

Of warm lights and all-night vigil

In the soft face of a girl:

Sea-wanderer, forest-visitor!

Even the pure Immortals cannot escape you,

And mortal man, in his one day's dusk,

Trembles before your glory.

Surely you swerve upon ruin [*Antistrophe*]

The just man's consenting heart, 650

As here you have made bright anger

Strike between father and son—

And none has conquered but Love!

A girl's glance working the will of heaven:

Pleasure to her alone who mock us, 655

Merciless Aphrodite.⁴

Journal Entry Four- Scene 3 and Ode 3

Antigone

First Thoughts

1. What is your first impression of Haimon?
How does your view of him change as the scene progresses?

Shaping Interpretations

2. In this scene, Creon withstands a powerful assault on his thinking. Who makes the attack, and what effect does it have on Creon?
3. In line 29, Creon says that Antigone will probably plead “family ties” to avoid being punished for breaking the law. How has Creon completely misjudged Antigone’s **character**?
4. What **metaphors** does Haimon use to argue that Creon should be more flexible? In lines 76–79 of Scene 2, Creon uses a similar argument against Antigone. At this point in the play, do you think that both Antigone and Creon should be more yielding, or do you believe that there are some principles that a person cannot compromise? Explain your opinion.
5. How do Creon’s attitudes toward women seem to influence his decision about Antigone?
6. Why do you think Creon changes his mind about how to punish Antigone? How can he believe that he can absolve himself, or the state, of her death?
7. In Ode 3, the Chorus asserts that love is

Haimon’s **motive** in defending Antigone. What other motivation can you suggest for Haimon’s actions? What support can you find in the text of the play?

8. At this point in the play, what do you think of Haimon’s threat in line 119? Do you think he is serious, or do you think he is trying to pressure his father into changing his mind?

Extending the Text

9. “The State is the king!” declares Creon in line 107. “Yes,” replies Haimon, “if the State is a desert.” What does Haimon mean? Which contemporary figures can you think of who might express views like Creon’s and Haimon’s?



SCENE IV

CHORAGOS: [*As ANTIGONE enter guarded.*]

But I can no longer stand in awe of this,
Nor, seeing what I see, keep back my tears.
Here is Antigone, passing to that chamber
Where all find sleep at last 660

ANTIGONE:

Look upon me, friends, and pity me [*Strophe I*]

Turning back at the night's edge to say
Good-by to the sun that shines for me no
longer;

Now sleepy Death

Summons me down to Acheron,⁵ that cold
shore: 665

There is no bridesong there, nor any music.

⁴Goddess of Love. [Editors' note]

⁵A river of the underworld, which was ruled by Hades. [Editors' note]

CHORUS:

Yet not unpraised, not without a kind of
honor,

You walk at last into the underworld;

Untouched by sickness, broken by no sword.

What woman has ever found your way to
death? 670

ANTIGONE:

[*Antistrophe I*]

How often I have heard the store of Niobe,⁶
Tantalos' wretched daughter, how the stone
Clung fast about her, ivy-close: and they say
The rain falls endlessly

And rifting soft snow; her tears are never
done. 675

I feel the loneliness of her death in mine.

CHORUS:

But she was born of heaven, and you

Are woman, woman-born. If her death is
yours,

A mortal woman's, is this not for you

Glory in our world and in the world beyond?
680

ANTIGONE:

You laugh at me. Ah, friends, friends,

[*Strophe 2*]

Can you not wait until I am dead? O Thebes,
O men many-charioted, in love with Fortune,
Dear spring of Dirce, sacred Theban grove,
Be witnesses for me, denied all pity, 685
Unjustly judge! and think a word of love
For her whose path turns

Under dark earth, where there are no more
tears.

CHORUS:

You have passed beyond human daring and
come at last

Into a place of stone where Justice sits 690

I cannot tell

What shape of your father's guilt appears in
this.

ANTIGONE:

[*Antistrophe 2*]

You have touched it at last: that bridal bed
Unspeakable, horror of son an mother
mingling: 695

Their crime, infection of all our family!

O Oedipus, father and brother!

Your marriage strikes from the grave to
murder mine.

I have been a stranger here in my own land:

⁶Niobe boasted of her numerous children, provoking Leto, the mother
of Apollo, to destroy them. Niobe wept profusely, and
finally was turned into a stone on Mount Sipylus, whose streams are
her tears. [Editors' note]

All my life

The blasphemy of my birth has followed me.

700

CHORUS:

Reverence is a virtue, but strength

Lives in established law: that must prevail.

You have made your choice,

Your death is the doing of your conscious
hand.

ANTIGONE:

[*Epode*]

Then let me go, since all your words are bitter,
705

And the very light of the sun is cold to me.

Lead me to my vigil, where I must have

Neither love nor lamentation; no song, but
silence.

[*CREON interrupts impatiently.*]

CREON:

If dirges and planned lamentations could put
of death,

Men would be singing for ever.

[*To the SERVANTS:*]

Take her, go! 710

You know your orders: take her to the vault
And leave her alone there. And if she lives or
dies,

That's her affair, not ours: our hands are clean.

ANTIGONE:

O tomb, vaulted bride-bed in eternal rock,

Soon I shall be with my own again 715

Where Persephone ⁷ welcome the thin ghost
underground:

And I shall see my father again, and you,
mother,

And dearest Polyneices—

dearest indeed

To me, since it was my hand

That washed him clean and poured the ritual
wine: 720

And my reward is death before my time!

And yet, as men's hearts know, I have done no
wrong,

I have not sinned before God. Or if I have,

I shall know the truth in death. But if the guilt
Lies upon Creon who judged me, then, I pray,

725

May his punishment equal my own.

CHORAGOS:

O passionate heart,
Unyielding, tormented still by the same
winds!

7 Queen of the underworld. [Editors' note]

CREON:

Her guards shall have good cause to regret
their delaying.

ANTIGONE:

Ah! That voice you no reason to think voice of
death!

CREON:

I can give you no reason to think you are
mistaken. 730

ANTIGONE:

Thebes, and you my fathers' gods,
And rulers of Thebes, you see me now, the
last

Unhappy daughter of a line of kings,
Your kings, led away to death. You will
remember

What things I suffer, and at what men's hands,
735

Because I would not transgress the laws of
heaven.

[*To the GUARDS, simply:*]

Come: let us wait no longer.

[*Exit ANTIGONE, L., guarded.*]

ODE IV

CHORUS:

All Danae's beauty was locked away {*Strophe*
I}

In a brazen cell where the sunlight could not
come:

A small room, still as any grave, enclosed her.
740

Yet she was a princess too,

And Zeus in a rain of gold poured love upon
her.

O child, child,

No power in wealth or war

Or tough sea-blackened ships 745

Can prevail against untiring Destiny!

{*Antistrophe 1*}

And Dryas' son 8 also, that furious king,
Bore the god's imprisoning anger for his pride:
Sealed up by Dionysos in deaf stone,
His madness died among echoes. 750
So at the last he learned what dreadful power
His tongue had mocked:

For he had profaned the revels,

And fired the wrath of the nine

Implacable Sisters⁹ that love the sound of the
flute. 755

8 Drays' son: Lycurgus, King of Thrace. [Editors' note]

9 The Muses. [Editors' note]

[*Strophe 2*]

And old men tell a half-remembered tale
Of horror done where a dark ledge splits the
sea

And a double surf beats on the gray shores:

How a king's new woman, ¹⁰sick

With hatred for the queen he had imprisoned,
760

Ripped out his two son's eyes with her bloody
hands

While grinning Ares ¹¹ watched the shuttle
plunge

Four times: four blind wounds crying for
revenge,

[*Antistrophe 2*]

Crying, tears and blood mingled, —Piteously
born,

Those sons whose mother was of heavenly
birth! 765

Her father was the god of the North Wind

And she was cradled by gales,

She raced with young colts on the glittering
hills

And walked untrammelled in the open light:

But in her marriage deathless Fate found

means 770

To build a tomb like yours for all her joy.

Journal Entry Five - Scene 4 and Ode 4

Antigone

Reading Check

- Whose fate does Antigone compare to her own?
- What does Antigone say is the cause of her death?
- What does Antigone look forward to in death?
- What curse does she put on Creon?

First Thoughts

- How does Antigone's first speech make you feel? Do you think Sophocles wants you to feel more sympathetic toward her than before, or less? Explain.

Shaping Interpretations

- How is Antigone's **tone** in this scene different from her tone in earlier scenes? Do you think the change results from circumstance or from a change in her character? Explain.
- Beginning at line 25, Antigone accuses the Chorus of laughing at her and denying her "all pity." What do you think she means by pity, and how does the Chorus respond to her?
- What does Antigone mean in line 41 when she says that her father's "marriage strikes

from the grave to murder” her own marriage? How does the Chorus argue against this view in lines 45–48?

5. How do you feel about the Chorus’s opinion, in lines 47–48, that Antigone is responsible for her own death?
6. In line 69, Antigone asks that Creon’s punishment equal her own. What do you **predict** will happen to Creon in the final scene? Why do you think so?
7. In Antigone’s last lines in the scene, what does she ask the gods to remember? What **motives** do you think she has for making this public request?
8. The side notes in Ode 4 explain **allusions** to three Greek myths. Reread those notes. What does Antigone have in common with Danae, Lycurgos, and Cleopatra? Do you think Sophocles is using this ode to condemn Antigone for her pride or to praise her courage in accepting her fate? Explain.

Extending the Text

9. In Greek **tragedies**, characters’ fates are closely tied to the histories of their families. How do some people today account for their current circumstances by looking to the past?



SCENE V

[Enter blind TEIRESIAS, led by a boy. The opening speeches of TEIRESIAS should be in singsong contrast to the realistic lines of CREON.]

TEIRESIAS:

This is the way the blind man comes, Princes,
Princes,
Lock-step, two heads lit by the eyes of one.

CREON:

What new thing have you tell us, old
Teiresias?

TEIRESIAS:

I have much to tell you: listen to the prophet,
Creon. 775

CREON:

I admit my debt to you. But what have you to
say?

TEIRESIAS:

Listen, Creon:

I was sitting in my chair of augury, at the
place

Where the birds gather about me. They were
all a-chatter,

As is their habit, when suddenly I heard

A strange note in their jangling, a scream, a
785

¹⁰Eidothea, second wife of King Phineus, blinded her stepsons. (Their mother, Cleopatra, had been imprisoned in a cave.). Phineus was the son of a king, and Cleopatra, his first wife, was the daughter of Boreas, the North Wind; but this illustrious ancestry could not protect his sons from violence and darkness. [Editors’ note]

¹¹God of war. [Editors’ note]

Whirring fury; I knew that they were fighting,
Tearing each other, dying
In a whirlwind of wings clashing. And I was
afraid.

I began the rites of burnt-offering at the altar,
But Hephaistos ¹² failed me: instead of bright
flame, 790

There was only the sputtering slime of the fat
thigh-flesh

Melting: the entrails dissolved in gray smoke,
The bare bone burst from the welter. And no
blaze!

This was a sign from heaven. My boy
described it,

Seeing for me as I see for others. 795

I tell you, Creon, you yourself have brought
This new calamity upon us. Our hearths and
altars

Are stained with the corruption of dogs and
carrion birds

That glut themselves on the corpse of
Oedipus’ son.

The gods are deaf when we pray to them, their
fire 800

Recoils from our offering, their birds of omen
Have no cry of comfort, for they are gorged
With the thick blood of the dead.

O my son,

These are no trifles! Think: all men make
mistakes,

But a good man yields when he knows his
course is wrong, 805

And repairs the evil. The only crime is pride.

Give in to the dead man, then: do not fight
with a corpse—
What glory is it to kill a man who is dead?
Think, I beg you:
It is for your own good that I speak as I do. 810
You should be able to yield for your own
good.
CREON:
It seems that prophets have made me their
especial province.
All my life long
I have been a kind of butt for dull arrows
Of doddering fortune-tellers!
No, Teiresias: 815
If your birds—if the great eagles of God
himself
Should carry him stinking bit by bit to heaven,
I would not yield. I am not afraid of pollution:
No man can defile the gods.
Do what you will,
Go into business, make money, speculate 820
In India gold or that synthetic gold from
Sardis,
Get rich otherwise than by my consent to bury
him.
Teiresias, it is a sorry thing when a wise man
¹² God of fire. [Editors' note]
Sells his wisdom, lets out his words for hire!
TEIRESIAS:
Ah Creon! Is there no man left in the world—
825
CREON:
To do what? —Come, let's have the aphorism!
TEIRESIAS:
No man who knows that wisdom outweighs
any wealth?
CREON:
As surely as bribes are baser than any
baseness.
TEIRESIAS:
You are sick, Creon! You are deathly sick!

CREON:
As you say: it is not my place to challenge a
prophet. 830
TEIRESIAS:
Yet you have said my prophecy is for sale.
CREON:
The generation of prophets has always loved
gold.
TEIRESIAS:
The generation of kings has always loved
brass.
CREON:
You forget yourself! You are speaking to your
King.
TEIRESIAS:
I know it. You are a king because of me. 835
CREON:
You have a certain skill; but you have sold
out.
TEIRESIAS:
King, you will drive me to words that—
CREON:
Say them, say them!
Only remember: I will not pay you for them.
TEIRESIAS:
No, you will find them too costly.
No doubt. Speak:
Whatever you say, you will not change my
will.
TEIRESIAS:
Then take this, and take it to heart!
The time is not far off when you shall pay
back
Corpse for corpse, flesh of your own flesh.
You have thrust the child of this world into
living night,
You have kept from the gods below the child
that is theirs: 845
The one on a grave before her death, the other,
Dead, denied the grave. This is your crime:

And the Furies and the dark gods of Hell
Are swift with terrible punishment for you.
Do you want to buy me now, Creon?
Not many days, 850
And your house will be full of men and
women weeping,
And curses will be hurled at you from far
Cities grieving for sons unburied, left to rot
Before the walls of Thebes.
These are my arrows, Creon: they are all for
you. 855
[To BOY:]
But come, child: lead me home.
Let him waste his fine anger upon younger
men.
Maybe he will learn at last
To control a wiser tongue in a better head.
[Exit TEIRESIAS.]
CHORAGOS:
The old man has gone, King, but his words 860
Remain to plague us. I am old, too,
But I cannot remember that he was ever false.
CREON:
That is true... . It troubles me.
Oh it is hard to give in! but it is worse
To risk everything for stubborn pride. 865
CHORAGOS:
Creon: take my advice.
CREON:
What shall I do?
CHORAGOS:
Go quickly: free Antigone from her vault
And build a tomb for the body of Polyneices.
CREON:
You would have me do this?
CHORAGOS:
Creon, yes!
And it must be done at once: God moves 870
Swiftly to cancel the folly of stubborn men.
CREON:

It is hard to deny the heart! But I
Will do it: I will not fight with destiny.
CHORAGOS:
You must go yourself, you cannot leave it to
others.
CREON:
I will go.
—Bring axes, servants: 875
Come with me to the tomb. I buried her, I
Will set her free.
Oh quickly!
My mind misgives—
The laws of the gods are mighty, and a man
must serve them
To the last day of his life! 880
[Exit CREON.]
PAEN¹³
CHORAGOS:
God of many names [Strophe 1]
CHORUS:
O Iacchos
son
of Kadmeian Semele
O born of the Thunder!
Guardian of the West
Regent
of Eleusis' plain
O Prince of maenad Thebes
¹³ A hymn here dedicated to Iacchos (also called
Dionysos). His father was Zeus, his mother was
Semele, daughter of Kadmos. Iacchos' worshippers
were the Maenads, whose cry was "Evohe evohē."
[Editors' note]
and the Dragon Field by rippling Ismenos:¹⁴
885
CHORAGOS:
God of many names [Antistrophe 1]
CHORUS:
the flame of torches
flares on our hills
the nymphs of Iacchos

dance at the spring of Castalia: ¹⁵
from the vine-close mountain
come ah come in ivy:
Evohe evohē! Sings through the streets of
Thebes 890
CHORAGOS:
God of many names [Strophe 2]
CHORUS:
Iacchos of Thebes
heavenly Child
of Semele bride of the Thunderer!
The shadow of plague is upon us:
come
with clement feet
oh come from Parnasos
down the long slopes
across the lamenting water 895
CHORAGOS:
[Antistrophe 2]
Io Fire! Chorister of the throbbing stars!
O purest among the voices of the night!
Thou son of God, blaze for us!
CHORUS:
Come with choric rapture of circling Maenads
Who cry Io Iacche! 900
God of many names!
EXODOS
[Enter MESSENGER, L.]
¹⁴ A river east of Thebes. From a dragon's teeth (sown near the river)
there sprang men who became the ancestors of the Theban
nobility. [Editors' note]
¹⁵ A spring on Mountain Parnasos. [Editors' note]
MESSENGER:
Men of the line of Kadmos ¹⁶you who live
Near Amphion's citadel:
I cannot say
Of any condition of human life "This is fixed,
This is clearly good, or bad." Fate raises up,
And Fate casts down the happy and unhappy
alike: 905
No man can foretell his Fate.
Take the case of Creon:

Creon was happy once, as I count happiness:
Victorious in battle, sole governor of the land,
Fortunate father of children nobly born.
And now it has all gone from him! Who can
say 910
That a man is still alive when his life's joy
fails?
He is a walking dead man. Grant him rich,
Let him live like a king in his great house:
If his pleasure is gone, he would not give
So much as the shadow of smoke for all he
owns. 915
CHORAGOS:
Your words hint at sorrow: what is your news
for us?
MESSENGER:
They are dead. The living are guilt of their
death.
CHORAGOS:
Who is guilty? Who is dead? Speak!
MESSENGER:
Haimon.
Haimon is dead; and the land that killed him
Is his own hand.
CHORAGOS:
His father's? or his own? 920
MESSENGER:
His own, driven mad by the murder his father
had done.
CHORAGOS:
Teiresias, Teiresias, how clearly you saw it
all!
MESSENGER:
This is my news: you must draw what
conclusions you can from it.
¹⁶ Kadmos, who sowed the dragon's teeth, was the founder of Thebes;
Amphion played so sweetly on his lyre that he charmed
stones to form a wall around. [Editors' note]
CHORAGOS:
But look: Eurydice, our Queen:
Has she overheard us? 925

[Enter UERYDICE from the Palace, C.]

EURIDICE:

I have heard something, friends:

As I was unlocking the gate of Pallas' ¹⁷
shrine,

For I needed her help today, I heard a voice
Telling of some new sorrow. And I fainted
There at the temple with all my maidens about
me. 930

But speak again: whatever it is, I can bear it:
Grief and I are no strangers.

MESSENGER:

Dearest Lady,

I will tell you plainly all that I have seen.

I shall not try to comfort you: what is the use,
Since comfort could lie only in what is not
true? 935

The truth is always best.

I went with Creon

To the outer plain where Polyneices was lying,
No friend to pity him, his body shredded by
dogs.

We made our prayers in that place to Hecate
And Pluto, ¹⁸ that they would be merciful. And
we bathed 940

The corpse with holy water, and we brought
Fresh-broken branches to burn what was left
of it,

And upon the urn we heaped up a towering
barrow

Of the earth of his own land.

When we are done, we ran

To the vault where Antigone lay on her couch
of stone. 945

One of the servants had gone ahead,

And while he was yet far off he heard a voice
Grieving within the chamber, and he came
back

And told Creon. And as the King went closer,
950

The air was full of wailing, the words lost,

And he begged us to make all haste. "Am I a
prophet?"

He said, weeping, "And must I walk this road,
The saddest of all that I have gone before?
My son's voice calls me on. Oh quickly,
quickly!

Look through the crevice there, and tell me ⁹⁵⁵
If it is Haimon, or some deception of the
gods!"

We obeyed; and in the cavern's farthest corner
We saw her lying:

¹⁷ Pallas Athene, goddess of wisdom. [Editors' note]

¹⁸ Hecate and Pluto (also known as Hades) were deities of the
underworld. [Editors' note]

She had made a noose of her fine linen veil
And hanged herself. Haimon lay beside hers,
960

His arms about her waist, lamenting her,
His love lost under ground, crying out
That his father has stolen her away from him.

When Creon saw him the tears rushed to his
eyes

And he called to him: "What have you done,
child? Speak to me. 965

What are you thinking that makes your eyes so
stranger?

O my son, my son, I come to you on my
knees!"

But Haimon spat in his face. He said not a
word,
Staring—

And suddenly drew his sword

And lunged. Creon shrank back, the blade
missed; and the boy, ⁹⁷⁰

Desperate against himself, drove it half its
length

Into his own side, and fell. And as he died
He gathered Antigone close in his arms again.
Choking, his blood bright red on her white
cheek.

And now he lies dead with the dead, and she is
his ⁹⁷⁵

At last, his bride in the houses of the dead.

[Exit EURDICE into the Palace.]

CHORAGOS:

She has left us without a word. What can this
mean?

MESSENGER:

It troubles me, too; yet she knows what is best,
Her grief is too great for public lamentation,
And doubtless she has gone to her chamber to
weep 980

For dead son, leading her maidens in his dirge.
CHORAGOS:

It may be so: but I fear this deep silence.

MESSENGER: [Pause.]

I will see what she is doing. I will go in.

[Exit MESSENGER into the Palace.]

[Enter CREON with attendants,
bearing HAIMON'S body.]

CHORAGOS:

But here is the King himself: oh look at him,
Bearing his own damnation in his arms. 985

CREON:

Nothing you say can touch me any more.

My own blind heart has brought me
From darkness to final darkness. Here you see
The father murdering, the murdered son—
And all my civic wisdom! 990

Haimon my son, so young, so young to die,
I was the fool, not you; and you died for me.

CHORAGOS:

That is the truth; but you were late in learning
it.

CREON:

This truth is hard to bear. Surely a god
Has crushed me beneath the hugest weight of
heaven, 995

And driven me headlong a barbaric way
To trample out the thing I held most dear.

The pains that men will take to come to pain!

[Enter MESSENGER from the Palace.]

MESSENGER:

The burden you carry in your hands is heavy,
But it is not all: you will find more in your
house. 1000

CREON:

What burden worse than this shall I find there?

MESSENGER:

The Queen is dead.

CREON:

O port of death, deaf world,
Is there no pity for me? And you, Angel of
evil,

I was dead, and your words are death again.

Is it true, boy? Can it be true? 1005

Is my wife dead? Has death bred death?

MESSENGER:

You can see for yourself.

[*The doors are opened, and the body
of EURDICE is disclosed within.*]

CREON:

Oh pity!

All true, all true, and more than I can bear!
1010

O my wife, my son!

MESSENGER:

She stood before the altar, and her heart
Welcome the knife her own hand guided.

And a great cry burst from her lips for

Megareus¹⁹ dead,

And for Haimon dead, her sons; and her last
breath 1015

Was a curse for their father, the murdered of
her sons.

And she fell, and the dark flowed in through
her closing eyes.

CREON:

O God, I am sick with fear.

Are there no swords here? Has no one a blow
for me?

MESSENGER:

Her curse is upon you for the deaths of both.

1020

CREON:

It is right that it should be. I alone am guilty.

I know it, and I say it. Lead me in,

Quickly, friends.

I have neither life nor substance. Lead me in.

CHORAGOS:

You are right, if there can be right in so much
wrong. 1025

The briefest way is best in a world of sorrow.

CREON:

Let it come,

Let death come quickly, and be kind to me.

I would not ever see the sun again.

CHORAGOS:

All that will come when it will; but we,
meanwhile, 1030

Have much to do. Leave the future to itself.

CREON:

All my heart was in that prayer!

CHORAGOS:

Then do not pray any more: the sky is deal

CREON:

Lead me away. I have been rash and foolish.

I have killed my son and my wife. 1035

I look for comfort; my comfort lies here dead.

Whatever my hands have touched has come to
nothing.

Fate has brought all my pride to a thought of
dust.

¹⁹ Megareus, brother of Haimon, had died in the assault on Thebes.
[Editors' note]

[*As CREON is being led into the house, the
CHORAGOS advances and speaks
directly to the audience.*]

CHORAGOS:

There is no happiness where there is no
wisdom;

No wisdom but in submission to the gods. 1040

Big words are always punished,

And proud men in old age learn to be wise.

Journal Entry Six - Scene 5, Paean, and Exodos *Antigone*

Reading Check

- What mistakes does Teiresias say Creon has made?
- What does Teiresias predict will happen to Creon?
- The violent **resolution** of the **plot** takes place offstage. What does the Messenger report about Antigone, Haimon, and Eurydice?

First Thoughts

- How do you feel about what happens to the characters at the play's end?

Shaping Interpretations

- Why is it **ironic** that the prophet Teiresias is blind?
- Why do you think Creon finally agrees to free Antigone and bury Polyneices? What lines give clues to his **motives**?
- The Paeon is recited after Creon has changed his mind but before the **plot** is **resolved**. At this point in the play, why is it appropriate for the Chorus to call on the god Dionysos to "come with clement feet"? What is the Chorus asking the god to heal?
- In lines 32–76 of the Exodos, the

Messenger says that Creon buried Polyneices first and then went to free Antigone. How do you **predict** events might have turned out if Creon had reversed the order of his tasks?

6. How would you describe the major **conflict** in *Antigone*? Is the conflict between absolute good and absolute evil, or is the conflict between opposing views of what is good? What position does Sophocles seem to take on this question?
7. Find lines from the play that you think are especially important. Then, state what you think is the main **theme** in the play—what does it reveal about human life? How do you feel about the theme?
8. At the end of this **tragedy**, Eurydice blames Creon for the disastrous turn of events. Creon accepts her curse, saying, “I alone am guilty” (line 121). What do you think of Creon’s statement of sole responsibility?
- 9.



Extending the Text

10. Many people criticize current movies and television shows for being too violent. How would you **compare** the level of violence you see in movies and television with the level of violence you witness in *Antigone*? How do you feel about having violent actions take place offstage rather than onstage?

