

OEDIPUS THE KING

SOPHOCLES

*Study guide written
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Greek Sphinx ca. 530 BCE
Metropolitan Museum of Art

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Essential Questions

1. How is the literary theory described in Aristotle's *Poetics* necessary to our appreciation of *Oedipus the King* and to tragedy in general (both ancient and modern)?
2. How does an understanding of the political milieu (*i. e.*, the Age of Pericles) in which Sophocles lived help us to understand his work, especially *Oedipus the King*?
3. What are the literary conventions of classical tragedy, and how do they shape our understanding of Greek theatre in general as well as *Oedipus the King* in particular?
4. How does the nature and purpose of the Great *Dionysia* (and associated myths of Dionysus) help us understand Greek theatre and *Oedipus the King*?
5. How does acquaintance with myths surrounding the fall of the House of Cadmus shed light on *Oedipus the King*?
6. How does the ancient Greek understanding of fate, free will and *hubris* (overweening pride) aid our appreciation of the tragedy that befalls Oedipus?
7. What are the unique literary features that Sophocles used to shape his material?

INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITIES

1. POETRY

“Sins of the Father” by W.D. Ehrhart

A theme that runs throughout the myths of the great houses (Atreus, Cadmus) is that **the sins of the fathers are visited upon the sons**. A sin may not be punished by its perpetrator in his lifetime, but instead be passed on to a descendent who is innocent.

(When students do research into Oedipus’s family-- the house of Cadmus-- they will learn that Laius, Oedipus’s father, raped Chrysippus, the son of Pelops, king of Pisa. Chrysippus killed himself and the king laid a curse on Laius: when Laius and Jocasta had a son, this child would grow up to kill his father and marry his mother.)

One way to introduce the question of the inevitability of fate in a context students will readily understand is by reading and discussing W. D. Ehrhart’s poem about bullying.

The speaker, whose daughter is distraught after having been bullied at school, is caught up short when he realizes that he himself was guilty of bullying several fellow students when he was an adolescent:

It makes me want someone
to pay. It makes me think—O Christ, it makes
me think of things I haven't thought about
in years. (ll 8-11)

The last lines seem to suggest a certain kind of cruel justice:

Now there's nothing I
can do but stand outside my daughter's door
listening to her cry herself to sleep. (ll 21-23)

Available online at **The Writers Almanac** [access date: Jan. 1, 2013]
<http://writersalmanac.publicradio.org/index.php?date=2010/12/06>

“Sins of the Father” by W.D. Ehrhart, from *The Bodies Beneath the Table*. Adastra Press, 2010.

INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITIES (CONT.)

2. TRAGEDY IN THE NEWS

Ask students to visit an online news site and type the word “tragedy” into the search box. They may then select an article to read and report back to the class about how the idea of “tragedy” is understood in the 21st century.

After the discussion, launch into reading a selection of the *Poetics** to compare how Sophocles understood tragedy in relation to literary theory. To what extent is human pride or an “error in judgment” (usually attributed to ignorance or blindness) responsible for a tragedy? Can natural disasters in which no human involvement plays a part be considered “tragic”?

(*See *Poetics*, sections XIII-XV)

3. TRAGEDY IN HISTORY AND MODERN LITERATURE

Ask students to brainstorm a list of public figures and/or literary characters, past or present, who have suffered some sort of fall, not necessarily resulting in death. Then ask them to debate whether these figures would qualify as “tragic” according to Aristotle (see p. 6).

Examples:

Tiger Woods (golf legend)

Lance Armstrong (cycling legend)

Oscar Pistorius (the “blade runner”)

Bernard Madoff (investment guru)

Jerry Sandusky (Penn State coach)

Whitney Houston (pop singer)

2Pac Shakur (hip-hop artist)

Notorious B. I. G. (hip-hop artist)

Abraham Lincoln (16th president of the U.S.)

Darth Vader (Luke Skywalker’s father in *Star Wars*)

Steve Biko (Anti-apartheid freedom fighter)

Saruman (a wizard in *Lord of the Rings*)

Piggy (a character in *Lord of the Flies*)

John Kennedy Jr. (only son of JFK)

Aristotle's Poetics (the essentials)

Poetics available at Project Gutenberg: <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/1974/1974-h/1974-h.htm>

NOTE: if time is an issue, skip to the next page for a summary of Aristotle's description of the tragic hero. At the very least, students must be familiar with that.

READ Parts VI-VII, IX (last pgh.)-XVI, XVIII (last pgh.) and answer the following:

1. According to Aristotle, what are the six parts to a tragedy? Why does he consider plot the “soul of the tragedy”? How does he distinguish between character and action? Simple and complex action? (section VI)
2. What is the proper structure of the plot? (section VII, IX last pgh., X, XI)
3. What are the separate parts into which tragedies were divided? (section XII)
4. In constructing the “perfect tragedy,” what are the circumstances that occasion fear and pity? What situations are NOT tragic? (section XIII-XIV)
5. Why should a tragedy observe the three classical unities of time, place and action? (See Freytag's Triangle)
6. What qualities should the character of the tragic hero possess? (section XV)?
7. What kinds of recognition does Aristotle identify? Which does he consider the most effective? (section XVI)
8. How important is the chorus? (section XVIII last pgh.)

DEFINE

Parts of a Greek tragedy:

*prologue, parode (parados), episode (scene),
stasimon (choral ode), exode (exodos)*

Freytag's Triangle: structure and unity of plot based on Aristotle's description of the unity of action: exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, resolution (the other two unities are time and place)

Parts of the choral ode: *strophe, antistrophe, epode*

Deus ex machina (“god from the machine”)

Denouement (“untie the knot”) also: *catastrophe*, resolution

Catharsis (“purification”)

Anagnorisis (“knowing again” or recognition)

Hamartia (“missing of the mark”; often mistranslated as “tragic flaw”)

Peripeteia (“reversal”)

In medias res (“in the middle of things”)

RESOURCES

Freytag's Triangle: <http://www2.cnr.edu/home/bmcmamus/freytag.html>

Glossary of Drama Terms: http://highered.mcgraw-hill.com/sites/0072405228/student_view0/drama_glossary.html

Greek Terms Used in Tragedy: <http://internetshakespeare.uvic.ca/Library/SLT/drama/classical%20drama/terms.html>

Literary Terms and Definitions: http://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/lit_terms.html

Outline of Aristotle's Theory of Tragedy in The Poetics: <http://www.cnr.edu/home/bmcmamus/poetics.html>

Tragedy the Basics: <http://faculty.gvsu.edu/websterm/Tragedy.htm>

ARISTOTLE ON TRAGIC HEROES

Just as it was true in Aristotle's time, our attention today is riveted on those who are "like us but better than us" (neither blamelessly good nor wickedly evil) who make errors in judgment that may lead to a reversal in fortune and a recognition of guilt resulting from having experienced a change from ignorance to knowledge. When people like this fall, we feel pity and fear because we can see ourselves in them.

To what extent does Oedipus's fall elicit a similar *catharsis* (purging of the emotions of pity and fear) in the audience? Oedipus's fall should leave the audience with a profound sense of tragic waste.

In the *Poetics*, Aristotle described the most successfully constructed tragic heroes* as exhibiting the following:

- The hero is basically a good person, albeit usually a proud or even arrogant one, but nevertheless one we admire and with whom we sympathize.
- He is of high estate (since the higher they are, the harder they fall); in Greek tragedy, the heroes were kings.
- He commits *hamartia* or an error in judgment (*hamartia* is an archery term meaning "a missing of the mark") that leads to his downfall, from a high estate to a low estate.
IMPORTANT: *Hamartia* is NOT synonymous with "tragic flaw." This is a mistranslation, but the term is widely used.
- He undergoes a recognition. There can be no tragedy (or resulting catharsis in the audience) if the hero fails to make the discovery that causes his ignorance to be transformed into knowledge.

*Aristotle singles out Oedipus of Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* as the epitome of a tragic hero.

RESEARCH TOPICS ON *OEDIPUS THE KING*

DIRECTIONS

- In order to appreciate the cultural context of classical Greek tragedy, it is necessary to conduct some research into the life and times of Sophocles.
- Volunteer for one of the topics below. Everyone is to read and take notes on Bernard Knox's essays "Greece and the Theater" (pp. 13-30) and the "Introduction" to *Oedipus the King* (pp. 131-153) in your text.
- Then, working in small groups, you will do further research and prepare an annotated bibliography of 5-8 credible sources pertaining to your topic.
- Your group will lead a discussion on it, accompanied by visual aids, lasting 30 minutes. You must involve your audience in active participation.

TOPIC 1 Sophocles and Pericles

Research the life of Sophocles and situate him in the history of Athens in the fifth century BCE. Why did such a flowering of the arts occur at this time? To what extent was Pericles responsible for Athens' Golden Age? Explain why Pericles is important in Greek history. Focus on the values he praised in his Funeral Speech for the Athenian war dead (delivered 431 BCE in the first year of the Peloponnesian War: see <http://www.historyguide.org/ancient/funeral.html>). What does Pericles value in men of Athens? In Athens itself? Quote some relevant passages. (After reading *Oedipus the King* you will judge whether Oedipus lives up to these ideals of the Athenian man and his belief in intelligence. If so, then why does he suffer?)

TOPIC 2 Conventions of Greek Tragedy

How was a Greek tragedy staged? What sorts of costumes did the actors wear? What did the stage look like? How was a Greek tragedy structured? (Be specific about the parts and supply English translations of Greek terms). How was music and dance incorporated into the performance? What are the three unities and why did Greek playwrights observe them? See Aristotle on unity of action. (Include pictures and diagrams of various theatres).

(continued next page)

TOPIC 3 Origins and Development of Greek Tragedy

What were the origins of Greek tragedy, comedy and satyr? How did theatre evolve in style and content from Thespis, Aeschylus, Sophocles through Euripides and Aristophanes? Read the myths associated with Dionysus and explain why Greek tragedy became associated with him. What was the nature and purpose of the Great Dionysia? What role did it play in city life? How was it organized? How did a playwright win? Who were the most frequent winners?

TOPIC 4 The Curse on the House of Cadmus

Account for the curse on the house of Cadmus from the founding of Thebes (beginning with Zeus's abduction of Europa) to its destruction as depicted in Aeschylus' play, *Seven Against Thebes*. A good place to start is Edith Hamilton's *Mythology: Timeless tales of Gods and Heroes*, Part V The Royal House of Thebes pp. 372-391). Hamilton does not go into ALL the family secrets: thus, you will need to do some research on Laius's provocation of Pelops, the King of Pisa. Why is it useful to know these myths? Include a family tree. Explain how Sophocles drew upon the "Theban Cycle" for the subject matter of three of his most well-known plays (*Antigone*, *Oedipus the King*, *Oedipus at Colonus*).

TOPIC 5 Philosophy and Religion in *Oedipus the King*

What religious and philosophical themes are reflected in *Oedipus the King* as a result of the debate over the importance of the gods and the validity of prophecy that was current in Sophocles' time? How did the Greeks view fate, destiny and *hubris*? How important was the oracle at Delphi in Greek life? How did the god Apollo become associated with prophecy? What role does Sophocles assign to Tiresias in the play? (Look up the myths surrounding Tiresias and explain how and why he went blind and later made a prophet). Account for the presence of the sphinx at the gates of Thebes.

OEDIPUS THE KING DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

DIRECTIONS: Take notes on the following questions as you read and study the play. Use them as starting points for class discussions. Refer to page and line numbers as you note key passages.

Prologue

1. What is the function of the long speech delivered by Oedipus as the play begins? What does it suggest about him? How would you characterize his tone? What kind of a king has he been? Why does the priest remind Oedipus of his victory over the sphinx so long ago? Why is there a plague on the land?

(Note that pestilence is associated with the crime of a king; Shakespeare exploited this idea in his own tragedies. The health of the kingdom is dependent upon the "health" of its sovereign. The sentient universe reacts to hidden sin.)

2. At Creon's return, Oedipus dismisses the suggestion that he relate the oracle to him privately and asks that it be given in the hearing of all. What does this suggest about Oedipus' virtues? His confidence? Does he seem at all arrogant? (Note that Oedipus already knows about the plague and has acted upon it; why does he ask the priest about the suppliants anyway?)
3. Sophocles wants to account for why the investigation of Laius' murder has been deferred. Is Creon's answer satisfactory? Does the play suggest that Oedipus should have asked these questions a long time ago? Did ambition contribute to his error in judgment? Explain.
4. Point out the dramatic irony in Oedipus' first speech (Prologue). Then go back over the Prologue and find other examples. Do the same for the remainder of scene one.

(Note that dramatic irony is one of the distinguishing literary features that Sophocles brought to his material. Another is the imagery of light and dark and of seeing and blindness.)

In dramatic irony, the audience is made aware of information unknown to some of the actual characters in the play. The audience possesses information the characters do not, and is so able to measure words and deeds against their understanding of the truth.)

Parados

5. The **Chorus** enters chanting a song or ode called the **Parados**. It is accompanied by dancing and flute music. Here, the Chorus represents the elders of Thebes. They remain on stage (at a level lower than the principals) for rest of the time. The choral odes and dances separate scenes and comment on the action, reinforce the emotion, and interpret the situation. When the chorus participates in dialog, the lines are spoken by the Choragos, their leader. Analyze the *Parados*: what is the Elders' commentary on action so far, what emotions are reinforced, and what is their interpretation of the situation? Note the imagery of suffering and death. What is their attitude toward the gods?

*(SUGGESTION: Try reading the chorus out loud. Sophocles used a chorus of 15. A group of 7-8 students can read the strophe and another group of 7-8 can read the antistrophe and the entire group can read the epode together. Depending on the size of the class, even two students reading together will produce the right effect. Some editions of the play label the **strophe**, **antistrophe** and **epode**, if there is one. If yours does not, simply assign parts according to stanzas --the first stanza is the strophe and the second is the antistrophe. If present, the epode is the stanza that follows the antistrophe and normally takes the form of a short line following a longer one. The important question to ask is: What is the effect of hearing one part of the speech spoken from the right side of the acting space and the other from the left? The strophe simply refers to the part of the chorus accompanied by dance movement from right to left; the antistrophe is the answer and movement is from left to right. The epode is a sort of conclusion.)*

Episode (Scene) 1

1. Oedipus has a long speech at the beginning of scene 1 in which he asks for the killer of Laius to come forward. What is the nature of the curse that Oedipus lays upon the murderer? Analyze the speech for multiple layers of irony.
2. Why has the blind prophet Tiresias been summoned, and why is he so slow to respond?
3. Analyze the dramatic irony in the exchange between the prophet and Oedipus. Why is Oedipus suspicious of him? What is shocking about Oedipus' conduct toward Tiresias as the prophet refuses to answer Oedipus's questions?
4. Finally, why does Tiresias reveal the truth that Oedipus himself is the murderer he seeks? Is his revelation properly motivated? If so, what light is thrown on his original refusal to speak?
5. Analyze thoroughly Tiresias's speeches ("You are the king no doubt. . ." p. 183 and "I will go. . ." p. 185) and comment on his use of the imagery of seeing and blindness. Note that he is also referring to the incest, something the audience will pick up on, but something that Oedipus is not "hearing." Evaluate Tiresias's final words. Does he already know that Oedipus will blind himself once he allows himself to believe the truth? If so, what should we make of Oedipus's insistence later on that the blinding hand was his own?
6. Is there any justification for Oedipus's suspicion of Creon? What is revealed about Oedipus's character when he accuses Creon and Tiresias of conspiring against him?
7. How is the Choragos (character who represents the chorus of Theban elders) attempting to mediate throughout this scene?

Choral Ode (Stasimon) 1

8. What is the function of this Chorus? How much are the elders of Thebes able to accept of what Tiresias revealed? What imagery permeates their speeches? At this point in the action, on whose side is the Chorus?

Episode (Scene) 2

1. Contrast Oedipus' and Creon's approach to political power and how they view the role of the king. What might Pericles have to say about Creon? (Refer to the Funeral Oration.) What would Pericles have to say about Oedipus's handling of the investigation into Laius's murder?
2. How does Creon (like Tiresias) put his finger on Oedipus's "error in judgment"? Cite lines in which Creon makes astute observations about Oedipus's character, both before and after Jocasta's entrance.
3. Evaluate Creon's argument that he does not have the desire to leave a comfortable life in order to be king. Is a certain amount of ambition necessary to be an effective leader?
4. How is Jocasta characterized in her first speech? How does she respond to the quarreling of her brother and her (son) husband? What is the attitude of the Chorus?
5. Jocasta tries to dispel Oedipus's theory that Tiresias and Creon have been plotting against him. How does her "proof" that oracles (and prophets) are not to be trusted result in disquieting him instead? At what point does Oedipus begin to doubt his innocence?
6. Analyze thoroughly Tiresias's speeches ("You are the king no doubt. . ." p. 183 and "I will go . . ." p. 185) and comment on his use of the imagery of seeing and blindness. Note that he is also referring to the incest, something the audience will pick up on, but something that Oedipus is not "hearing." Evaluate Tiresias's final words. Does he already know that

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7. Is there any justification for Oedipus's suspicion of Creon? What is revealed about Oedipus's character when he accuses Creon and Tiresias of conspiring against him?
8. How is the Choragos (character who represents the chorus of Theban elders) attempting to mediate throughout this scene?

Choral Ode (Stasimon) 2

9. What is the attitude of the Chorus regarding the action in scene 2? Why do they invoke Zeus and warn against the dangers of pride?

Episode (Scene) 3

1. As this scene opens, Oedipus believes he might indeed be the murderer of Laius, and Jocasta is praying to the gods. Comment on the irony.
2. What is the dramatic effect of the introduction of the Corinthian messenger? What is his "good news" regarding Polybus and Merope? What other information does he reveal? Why is he credible?
3. How does Jocasta alleviate Oedipus's fear that the other half of the prophecy, that he will marry his mother, may come true, even though Polybus is dead?

(Note that this is the source of Freud's "Oedipus Complex" in which he says that it is a normal stage of development for a female child to want to marry her father--also known as the "Electra Complex"--and for a male child to want to marry his mother. Neurosis ensues if the child does not grow out of this stage.)

4. After the Corinthian messenger reveals that he was the very man who had received the child Oedipus from the Theban shepherd, how does Oedipus's murder investigation take a different turn? (Note that Jocasta and Laius had not named their baby. Polybus and Merope named him "Oedipus" or "swollen foot" for the child's ankles had been pierced and tied together so that he would not crawl away. Another meaning is "on the track of knowledge.")
5. At what point does Jocasta realize the truth? How does Oedipus misunderstand her behavior? How is his reaction consistent with his character? (Recall his behavior with Tiresias and Creon.) What does he mean by "I am the son of Chance"? Would having stopped the investigation at this point done any good?

(Note that regicide cannot go unpunished.)

Choral Ode (Stasimon) 3

6. How does the chorus echo Oedipus's questions about his identity? Who do they think he is? Examine closely the structure of this choral ode.

Episode (Scene) 4

1. What is the dramatic function of the Corinthian shepherd, who is still on stage?
2. How is the Theban shepherd's reaction to his summons to the palace similar to that of Tiresias in scene 1? How does Oedipus react to the shepherd's testimony? Compare Oedipus' treatment of the shepherd to his treatment of Tiresias and Creon under questioning. Would Pericles approve? Do you?
3. How does the Theban shepherd precipitate Oedipus's recognition that he is not only Laius's killer but also the husband of his own mother?

Note that this scene is very short. Once the climax (the recognition) is reached, the denouement occurs quickly.

Choral Ode (Stasimon) 4

4. How do the people feel about Oedipus now? They refer to Oedipus as “my great example”—of what?
5. Note the foreshadowing at the conclusion of the ode.

Exit Scene (Exodos)

1. Violent acts take place off stage in Greek tragedy; thus, Jocasta’s suicide and Oedipus’s self-blinding are not depicted. Instead, messenger speeches are a standard device of tragedy (a sole witness to a violent deed comes before the populace to describe what he has seen). Analyze the imagery and emotional effect of the messenger’s report of Jocasta and Oedipus’s reactions to the truth of the oracle.
2. Why doesn’t Oedipus simply kill himself? How is Oedipus’ quest for his true identity the major concern of the play (even more important than finding the murderer of Laius)? How would his suicide have lessened this quest?
3. How does the earlier use of images taken from seeing and blindness prepare us for the actual blinding of Oedipus? Why is the self-blinding appropriate and meaningful? Why does Oedipus make the point that the blinding hand was his own? Recall that Tiresias predicted that Oedipus would leave Thebes as a blind beggar tapping a stick before him. Do his words carry the same weight as those of the oracle (who never mentioned a self-blinding)?
4. Comment on Oedipus’ long speech after he blinds himself. Does he reveal any change in character as a result of his suffering? If so, what? Does he take responsibility for making the oracle come true? Analyze the imagery of sight in this and other speeches of Oedipus in the Exodos.

5. What is the purpose of the scene with the children Antigone and Ismene? Why do you think the boys do not appear? What does it show about Oedipus? How is Oedipus's behavior consistent to the end?
 6. Comment on Creon's reaction to events as he is thrown into the role of king. What image of Creon is left by his final words to Oedipus?
 7. What is the effect of the final (relatively brief) comments of the Chorus? Why do they mention the riddle of the sphinx one last time? Go back over the text and note how the recurring motif of the sphinx unifies the play. Argue that the answer to the riddle of the sphinx is "Oedipus."
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OEDIPUS THE KING WRITING TOPICS

1. To what extent may we view the Riddle of the Sphinx as a metaphor for the life and tragedy of Oedipus? Refer to evidence from the play to support your position.
2. How do an understanding of the origins of Greek tragedy and the conventions of Greek theatrical performance aid our understanding of *Oedipus the King*? Refer to evidence from the play (as well as your knowledge of Greek drama) to support your commentary.
3. Discuss the theme of seeing and blindness in *Oedipus the King*. Refer to evidence from the play (particularly references to “eyes”) to support your commentary.
4. Is Oedipus the victim of fate or is he responsible for his own tragedy? Was he a pawn of the gods to punish the sins of his father, Laius? If not, in what sense did he “miss the mark”? Does Oedipus exercise any sort of free will? Refer to evidence from the play to support your position.
5. According to the critic Bernard Knox, in Greek, the name Oedipus (*Oida Pous*) meant both “swollen-foot/ “club foot” as well as “on the track of knowledge.” A Greek audience would pick up on this word-play immediately. How does knowledge of the double meaning of *oida pous* contribute to a modern non-Greek audience’s understanding of Oedipus and emphasize important themes? Refer to evidence from the play in your discussion.
6. Sophocles’s audience was familiar with the Theban cycle, of which the story of Oedipus occupies a prominent position. Analyze how Sophocles created and maintained interest in a story whose ending was known by all. Refer to specific literary and theatrical techniques that enhance the story. Support your discussion with examples from the play.

(continued next page)

7. One of the undercurrents in *Oedipus the King* is changing Greek attitudes toward the ancient Greek gods (pre-Olympian and Olympian), their importance in daily life, and the prophets through whom they spoke. Discuss the roles of Tiresias and Jocasta plus the references to Apollo and the Delphic oracle in *Oedipus the King*. Support your discussion with specific references to the play.

8. The Greek audience knew the plot and the outcome of the tragedies performed at the *Dionysia* because subject matter of the plays was ancient myth. Yet, a myth or paraphrase of a story is not the same as a meticulously crafted play. Thoroughly discuss Sophocles' use of literary techniques (such as imagery and dramatic irony) to emphasize major themes (such as seeing and blindness) that would have interested and delighted the audience of *Oedipus the King*.

OEDIPUS AND MODERN POETRY

Modern take-offs on the Oedipus myth offer rich opportunities for discussion, critical analysis, creative writing and oral interpretation. Below are instructions for a short oral interpretation of a modern poem based on the Oedipus myth (see next page for a list of suggested poems). The reflection on the activity may come in as a paper in hard copy or as a blog set up for the purpose. Free blogs are available at www.edublogs.org and www.weebly.com (among many others!).

PLANNING

- Choose the poem
- Will you perform by yourself or with a partner?
- Analyze the poem (subject, speaker, speaker's attitude toward the subject, structure, literary features that reinforce the attitude, use of allusion, etc.)
- Is there a “twist” on the myth or is it more of an elaboration on the original?

ORAL INTERPRETATION

INTRODUCTION: Write a brief introduction to the piece that you will read before you perform the poem: this should be a creative way to prepare your audience for what they are about to hear. The introduction will include the theme, title and author. (If you are doing a part of the long “Jocasta” poem, introduce your section only and mention how it fits into the whole.)

PRESENTATION: energy, intensity, appropriate tone (the audience should react appropriately—laugh in the right places or not laugh at all!)

SCRIPT: use it but do not let it get in the way (no memorization needed but you should maintain good eye contact).

VOICE: is loud enough and easy to understand the words (no mumbling or monotone, pace is not too fast)

MOVEMENT: appropriate hand and body movements add to the performance. They need not be elaborate! You do NOT have to move too far!

PERSONALITY of the piece or character, rather than the student delivering it, is communicated.

REFLECTION: length: 1 ½ pp in hard copy or as a blog post

- What was your contribution to the oral interpretation (describe the process of figuring out the delivery and your role in it if this was a group effort)?
- Explain how formal analysis helped you in your oral interpretation.
- How did the auditory element contribute to meaning that was perhaps not obvious if you merely read the poem on the printed page?

SUGGESTED POEMS

“Myth” by Muriel Rukeyser

<http://wonderingminstrels.blogspot.com/2000/12/myth-muriel-rukeyser.html>

“Not Being Oedipus” by John Heath-Stubbs

www.whs.babienko.net/CollegePrep/Assignments/Oedipus/OedipusPoems.doc

“Scars” by Peter Meinke

http://www.amazon.com/Scars-Pitt-Poetry-Peter-Meinke/dp/082295592X/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1361389128&sr=1-1&keywords=Meinke+Scars

“Jocasta” by Ruth Eisenberg

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OEJwYXgM6ME>

(These links were functioning as of February 21, 2013)

WRITING A MODERN TRAGEDY

DIRECTIONS:

This project may be done by individuals, pairs or small groups of no more than five students. The challenge is to write a one-act tragedy based on a modern figure who could be considered “tragic”. This play **MUST** be structured as a classical Greek tragedy with all its parts: prologue, *parados*, 3-4 scenes + choral odes, *exodos*. Students will then present their plays in a Dionysia and the audience will vote on the play they think is best. The winner/s will then receive an ivy wreath that will have the privilege to wear for the rest of the day!

STRUCTURE: your play observes the conventions (for example, the **Prologue** provides necessary “back story”; the **recognition** would not occur in scene 1; each individual **chorus** (*stasimon*) comments on the preceding **scene** (*episode*) attached to it, there are no more than **3 individual speakers** on stage at once, if there is a scene of **violence** it occurs offstage but is reported in gory detail by a “messenger-type” character, the **chorus** should include some sort of formal chanting accompanied by music and dance movements, the final Chorus in the **Exodos** (*exode*) comments on the entire action as a whole now that the truth has been discovered, etc.). The chorus is composed of strophe, and antistrophe. The chain of events depicted allows the audience to envision themselves within a chain of events that could happen to anyone as epitomized by ____’s fall.

PLOT: what is the purpose and message of the story? The action is of some magnitude (it is not trivial). The action begins *in medias res*, becomes increasingly more complicated, moves to a climax (the recognition) and the falling action is resolved swiftly in the *denouement*. There are no extraneous details; everything makes sense. Stage directions are included. There is no *deus ex machina*; events flow logically from the episodes or scenes. Each action leads inexorably to the next (unity of action). The best plots are complex: a *peripeteia* (reversal) leads to the *anagnorisis* (climactic recognition due to the discovery); the combination of a hero’s change from ignorance to knowledge and a fall from good fortune to bad (catastrophe or scene of suffering) is superior to a hero’s fall from good fortune to bad (a simple plot). The best discovery turns upon surprise. Is your play as tightly constructed? The plot should be **MORE** important than character, according to Aristotle. (Refer to **Freytag’s Triangle**)

CHARACTER: your characterization of ____ adheres to Aristotle’s observations about the tragic hero (is consistently portrayed, is realistic, is like us but better than us, is basically good, commits an error in judgment, recognizes his error, etc.) and excites pity and fear within the audience when the truth is finally revealed. The character is not sinful or morally weak; he is simply “blind.” Who are the rest of the

characters? Tone and gestures fit the character. By the end of the play, you have made the audience feel pity and terror for _____, but we believe he merits punishment even though it may be harsher than he deserves.

THOUGHT: there is a theme implied or directly stated (but not as a “moral to the story”).

SONG AND SPECTACLE: the song of the chorus is an organic part of the plot, not a decoration or distraction. Spectacle is least important and does not need to be represented in your play.

PERFORMANCE: you read with expression, your script adheres to all of the above.

WRITTEN REFLECTION: comments on how well you adhered to Aristotle’s *Poetics*, given the nature of your chosen protagonist.

Common Core **ANCHOR** Standards Met in the *Oedipus the King* Unit

READING

Key Ideas and Details

Standard 1. Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

Standard 2. Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development.

Standard 3. Analyze how and why individuals, events or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.

Craft and Structure

Standard 5. Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

Standard 8. Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.

Standard 9. Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

Range of Reading and Level of Text Complexity

Standard 10. Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.

WRITING

Production and Distribution of Writing

Standard 5: Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.

Research to Build and Present Knowledge

Standard 7: Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

Standard 8: Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source, and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism.

Range of Writing

Standard 10: Write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences.

SPEAKING AND LISTENING

Comprehension and Collaboration

Standard 1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas

Standard 4: Present information, findings, and supporting evidence such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

Standard 5: Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations.

LANGUAGE

Conventions of Standard English

Standard 1: Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

Standard 2: Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

Vocabulary Acquisition and use

Standard 6: Acquire and use accurately a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level.

SOURCES: <http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/CCRA/R> & <http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RL/11-12>