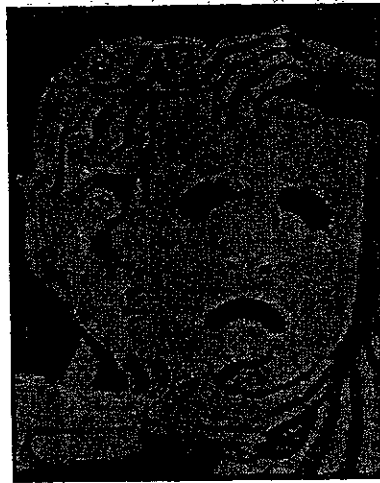


**SOPHOCLES'**  
***ANTIGONE***



Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

AP Literature and Composition

Milewski

Introduction to Antigone by Sophocles

- **Tragedy:** Verse drama in which a noble protagonist falls to ruin during a struggle caused by a flaw (hamartia) in his character or an error in his rulings or judgments.

*Greek Tragedy:*

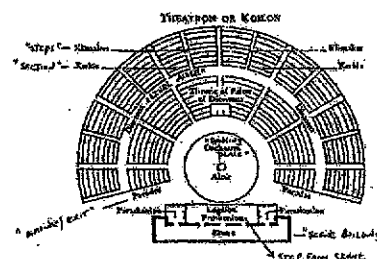
*Conventions of a Greek Tragedy*

1. All parts (both dialogue and choruses) are in verse.
2. **Rule of three actors:** There are no more than three speaking parts on stage at one time; all parts are divided among the *protagonists* [first actor], the *deuteragonist* [second actor], and the *triagonist* [third actor]. Some plays are played with only two actors.
3. **Use of masks:** Masks covering the head were worn by both actors and chorus. The reasons for this may be both practical and religious.
4. **The Chorus:**
  - Comments on the actions
  - Fills in the background and extends the story in time and space
  - Acts as an intermediary between characters and audience
  - Sometimes takes part directly in the action
  - Makes the action in the palace more one of public concern
  - Makes the action more real to the audience: makes the affairs of kings, queens, heroes/heroines a concern to the citizens
  - May be both actor and narrator
  - Provides lyrical relief
  - Directs emotions through music and dance
  - May direct sympathy towards one or more of the characters
  - May represent a female or male perspective opposed to an actor or favoring one
  - To understand the chorus, try to see each song in the context of what immediately precedes and what follows and ponder what each song adds to the whole.
5. **Performance:** All the Greek tragedies were written for a single performance and for competition in a dramatic festival: the most important was the City (or Great) Dionysia in early spring.

6. **Trilogy:** All tragedies were presented in trilogies; three tragedies were produced to be produced in a series at the competition by each of the three selected playwrights (in order for them to compete they had to first be "awarded a chorus"); these were followed by a satyr play (a play in tragic diction on a mythological theme with a happy ending using a chorus of satyrs). The group of three tragedies (a trilogy) with the satyr play is sometimes called a tetralogy.

7. **Parts of Plays:** Greek tragedies are not divided into acts: the division is into spoken and sung parts

- **Prologue:** everything before the entrance of the chorus. Not every play has a prologue.
  - **Parodos:** entrance song of the chorus as they file in along the parodoi.
  - **Episode:** dialogue between choral stages.
  - **Stasimon:** choral song.
  - **Exodus:** everything after the last stasimon.
- **Greek Theater:** The Greek theater was an open-air stone structure with tiered seating, a stage, and a ground-level orchestra. It was an outgrowth of festivals honoring the god Dionysus. In these festivals, called *Dionisiya*, the Greeks danced and sang hymns called dithyrambs that sometimes told stories.



## *The Greek Theater vs. Modern Theater*

### Greek Theater

1. Religious Festival- act of worship
2. Cultural Centrality- every citizen attended these days
  - annual festivals
  - judges vote on which playwright's was the best

### Modern Theater

1. Entertainment Purposes
2. Lack of Cultural Centrality- citizens choose to attend the theater

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_  
AP Literature and Composition  
Milewski  
Introduction to Antigone by Sophocles

## *Glossary of Greek Drama*

Anagnorisis Startling discovery; moment of epiphany; time of revelation when a character discovers his true identity.

Antagonist Chief opponent of the protagonist in a Greek play.

Catharsis In a tragedy, the arousal of pity and fear in an audience in order to purge them of these emotions and release tension.

Dramatic Irony Failure of a character to see or understand what is obvious to the audience. Oedipus, for example, was unaware early on of what the audience knew: that he was married to his own mother, Jocasta.

Dionysus Patron god of Greek drama; god of wine and vegetation. Dionysus, called Bacchus by the Romans, was the son of Zeus and one of the most important of the Greek gods. Dionysus died each winter and was reborn each spring, a cycle his Greek devotees identified with the death and rebirth of nature. He thus symbolized renewal and rejuvenation, and each spring the Greeks celebrated his resurrection with ceremonies that eventually included drama contests. The most prestigious of these festivals was the Greater Dionysia, held in Athens for five days and participated in by playwrights such as Sophocles, Aeschylus and Euripides. Festivals held in villages and small towns were called the Rural Dionysia.

Episode Scene or section of a play with dialogue. An episode may be compared with acts or scenes in a Shakespeare play. Episodes come between the odes sung by the chorus.

Exode (Exodus) Final scene of a play after the last stasimon.

Hamartia Character flaw or judgment error of the protagonist of a Greek tragedy. *Hamartia* is derived the Greek word *hamartanein*, meaning to err or to make a mistake. The first writer to use the term was Aristotle, in *The Poetics*.

**Hybris or Hubris** Great pride. Hybris often is the character flaw (hamartia) of a protagonist in Greek drama. Pride was considered a grave sin because it placed too much emphasis on individual will, thereby downplaying the will of the state and endangering the community as a whole. Because pride makes people unwilling to accept wise counsel, they act rashly and make bad decisions.

**Machine** Armlike device in an ancient Greek theater that could lower a "god" onto the stage from the "heavens." The Greek word for machine, *mechane*, later gave rise to a pejorative Latin term, *deus ex machina* (*god from a machine*), to describe a contrived event in a literary work or film. A contrived event is a plot weakness in which a writer makes up an incident--such as a detective stumbling upon an important clue or a hero arriving in the nick of time to save a damsel in distress--to further the action. The audience considers such events improbable, realizing that the writer has failed to develop the plot and the characters in such a way that their actions spring from their motivations. The term (pronounced *DAY ihs ex MAHK in uh* or *DE ihs ex MAHK in uh*) is usually used adverbially, as in *The policeman arrived deus ex machina to overhear the murderer admit his guilt to his hostage*. However, it can also refer to a character who becomes the "god from the machine."

**Mask** Face covering with exaggerated features and a mouth device to project the voice. Greek actors wore masks to reveal emotion or personality; to depict the trade, social class or age of a character; and to provide visual and audio aids for audience members in the rear of the theater.

**Ode** Poem sung in a play or a festival.

**Prologue** Introduction of a play that provides background material.

**Protagonist** Main character in an ancient Greek play.

**Stasimon** - Song sung during the play, between episodes of action.

**Trilogy** Group of three plays on a related subject or theme.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

AP Literature and Composition

Milewski

Introduction to Antigone by Sophocles

## *Sophocles' Biography*

Born in 495 B.C. about a mile northwest of Athens, Sophocles was to become one of the great playwrights of the golden age. The son of a wealthy merchant, he would enjoy all the comforts of a thriving Greek empire. He studied all of the arts. By the age of sixteen, he was already known for his beauty and grace and was chosen to lead a choir of boys at a celebration of the victory of Salamis. Twelve years later, his studies complete, he was ready to compete in the City Dionysia--a festival held every year at the Theatre of Dionysus in which new plays were presented.

In his first competition, Sophocles took first prize--defeating none other than Aeschylus himself. More than 120 plays were to follow. He would go on to win eighteen first prizes, and he would never fail to take at least second.

An accomplished actor, Sophocles performed in many of his own plays. In the *Nausicaa* or *The Women Washing Clothes*, he performed a juggling act that so fascinated his audience it was the talk of Athens for many years. However, the young athenian's voice was comparatively weak, and eventually he would give up his acting career to pursue other ventures.

In addition to his theatrical duties, Sophocles served for many years as an ordained priest in the service of two local heroes--Alcon and Asclepius, the god of medicine. He also served on the Board of Generals, a committee that administered civil and military affairs in Athens, and for a time he was director of the Treasury, controlling the funds of the association of states known as the Delian Confederacy.

One of the great innovators of the theatre, he was the first to add a third actor. He also abolished the trilogic form. Aeschylus, for example, had used three tragedies to tell a single story. Sophocles chose to make each tragedy a complete entity in itself--as a result, he had to pack all of his action into the shorter form, and this clearly offered greater dramatic possibilities. Many authorities also credit him with the invention of scene-painting and periaktoi or painted prisms.

Of Sophocles' more than 120 plays, only seven have survived in their entirety. Of these, *Oedipus the King* is generally considered his greatest work. This tragedy of fate explores the depths of modern psychoanalysis as Oedipus unwittingly kills his father and marries his mother in an attempt to avoid the very prophecy he ultimately fulfills. A masterful work of plot and suspense, *Oedipus the King* is often heralded as a "perfectly structured" play. And although Oedipus cannot escape his fate, he finally finds peace in the sequel, *Oedipus at Colonus*, after enduring the worst the fates had to offer.

In *The Women of Trachis*, Sophocles presents another well-rounded female character--Deianira, the wife of Heracles. Although the focus of the play is oddly split between Deianira and Heracles himself, this drama does offer a powerful and touching study of a jealous woman. His greatest character drama, however, is probably *Electra*. When Aeschylus treated this story, he was concerned primarily with the ethical issues of the blood feud. Sophocles dismisses the ethical question and addresses himself to the problem of character. What kind of woman was Electra that she would want so desperately to murder her own mother?

Shortly after the production of *Oedipus at Colonus* in 405, Sophocles passed away. He joined Aeschylus who had long since gone to his grave and Euripides who had passed on a few months earlier. Thus the first great age of tragedy came to an end.

## Sophocles' Innovations

Until Sophocles' time, dramatists wrote plays three at a time. The second play continued the action of the first, and the third play continued the action of the second. The entire three-play series was called a trilogy. Sophocles broke with tradition by writing single plays that stood alone as dramatic units. *Ajax* is an example of a stand-alone Sophocles play. The Oedipus series of plays (*Oedipus the King*, *Oedipus at Colonus* and *Antigone*) is not technically a trilogy (although sometimes referred to as one) because the plays were written years apart as single units.

Sophocles also emphasized people more than his predecessors; taking characters in well-known plots from mythology and dressing them up as real human beings with noble but complex personalities vulnerable to pride and flawed judgment. Audiences in ancient Athens did not go to a Sophocles play to be entertained by a plot with a surprise ending. They already knew the ending. They went to a Sophocles play to see how the characters reacted to the forces working for or against them--mostly against. Thus, Sophocles' plays required superb writing and characterization to hold the interest of the audience.

In portraying his characters, Sophocles raised irony to high art, making the characters unwitting victims of fate or their own shortcomings. The irony was both verbal (with characters speaking words laden with meaning unknown to them) and dramatic (with characters ensnaring themselves in predicaments charged with danger that they do not recognize but that the audience well knows will lead to disaster). The audience knew, for example, what Oedipus did not know (until the end of *Oedipus the King*): that the man he killed and the woman he married were his father and mother. This type of dramatic irony occurs often in Sophocles' plays, allowing the audience to become engrossed with a character's response to a situation rather than the eventual outcome of the situation.

Another of Sophocles' innovations was an increase in the number of actors in plays from two to three, presenting more opportunities to contrast characters and create foils. He also introduced painted scenery, enhanced costuming, and fixed the number of persons in the chorus at 15. The chorus also diminished in importance; it was the actors who mattered.

"The key to his work was provided by Matthew Arnold in the phrase to the effect that Sophocles possessed an 'even-balanced soul,' "drama critic John Gassner wrote in *Masters of the Drama* (New York: Random House, 1954, Page 42). "He comprehended both the joy and grief of living, its beauty and ugliness, its moments of peace and its basic uncertainty so concisely expressed by his line 'Human life, even in its utmost splendor and struggle, hangs on the edge of an abyss.' "

Sophocles' handling of human tragedy was influenced, in part, by the tragedies of war. During his lifetime he had witnessed the devastating Persian and Peloponnesian wars and even participated in a war when he served as a general with Pericles to quell rebellion on Samos, an Aegean island.

Besides military duty, Sophocles served as a city treasurer, helping to control the money of the Delian Confederacy of states. He also served as member of a governing council and as a priest in the service of Asclepius, the god of medicine, to whom he was especially devoted. Well into old age, he remained productive in civic activities and writing. He wrote *Oedipus at Colonus*, for example, when he was over 90. It was that play which saved him from a charge of mental incompetency brought by his sons. According to ancient accounts by Cicero and Plutarch, when Sophocles appeared in



court, he read from *Oedipus at Colonus*, which he was working on at that time. So impressed were the members of the jury that they acquitted him, apparently realizing that only a man fully in charge of his faculties could write such beautiful words. Sophocles died about 405. He and his wife, Nicostrate, had a son, Iophon, who was also a tragedian. Sophocles and his mistress, Theoris of Sicyon, had a child named Agathon. Agathon was the father of Sophocles the Younger, also a writer.

### *Characteristics of a Sophoclean Tragedy*

1. It is based on events that already took place and with which the audience is familiar.
2. The protagonist is a person of noble stature.
3. The protagonist has a weakness, and because of it, becomes isolated and suffers a downfall.
4. Because the protagonists' downfall is not entirely his or her own fault, the audience may end up pitying him or her.
5. The fallen protagonist gains self-knowledge. He has a deeper insight into himself and understands his weakness.
6. The audience undergoes *catharsis*, a purging of emotions, after experiencing pity, fear, shock, and other strong feelings. The people go away feeling better.
7. The drama usually unfolds in one place in a short period of time, usually about a day.

## Antigone

*Antigone* was probably the first of the three Theban plays that Sophocles wrote, although the events dramatized in it happen last. Antigone is one of the first heroines in literature, a woman who fights against a male power structure, exhibiting greater bravery than any of the men who scorn her. *Antigone* is not only a feminist play but a radical one as well, making rebellion against authority appear splendid and noble.

### Character List

**Antigone** - Child of Oedipus and Jocasta, and therefore both Oedipus's daughter and his sister. Antigone appears briefly at the end of *Oedipus the King*, when she says goodbye to her father as Creon prepares to banish Oedipus. She appears at greater length in *Oedipus at Colonus*, leading and caring for her old, blind father in his exile. But Antigone comes into her own in *Antigone*. As that play's protagonist, she demonstrates a courage and clarity of sight unparalleled by any other character in the three Theban plays. Whereas other characters—Oedipus, Creon, Polynices—are reluctant to acknowledge the consequences of their actions, Antigone is unabashed in her conviction that she has done right.

**Creon** - Oedipus's brother-in-law, Creon appears more than any other character in the three plays combined. In him more than anyone else we see the gradual rise and fall of one man's power. Early in *Oedipus the King*, Creon claims to have no desire for kingship. Yet, when he has the opportunity to grasp power at the end of that play, Creon seems quite eager. We learn in *Oedipus at Colonus* that he is willing to fight with his nephews for this power, and in *Antigone* Creon rules Thebes with a stubborn blindness that is similar to Oedipus's rule. But Creon never has our sympathy in the way Oedipus does, because he is bossy and bureaucratic, intent on asserting his own authority.

**Polynices** - Antigone's brother along with Eteocles. Polynices' burial is the crux of the conflict of the play. Polynices fights with Eteocles regarding control of Thebes, and wages war on the city to claim what is rightfully his. However, since Polynices and Eteocles end up killing each other, and because Polynices died attacking Thebes, Creon maintains that no one should bury Polynices or mourn him because he is a traitor.

**Tiresias** - Tiresias, the blind soothsayer of Thebes, appears in both *Oedipus the King* and *Antigone*. In *Oedipus the King*, Tiresias tells Oedipus that he is the murderer he hunts, and Oedipus does not believe him. In *Antigone*, Tiresias tells Creon that Creon himself is bringing disaster upon Thebes, and Creon does not believe him. Yet, both Oedipus and Creon claim to trust Tiresias deeply. The literal blindness of the soothsayer points to the metaphorical blindness of those who refuse to believe the truth about themselves when they hear it spoken.

**Haemon** - Creon's son, who appears only in *Antigone*. Haemon is engaged to marry Antigone. Motivated by his love for her, he argues with Creon about the latter's decision to punish her.

**Ismene** - Antigone's sister. Ismene's minor part underscores her sister's grandeur and courage. Ismene fears helping Antigone bury Polynices but offers to die beside Antigone when Creon sentences her to die. Antigone, however, refuses to allow her sister to be martyred for something she did not have the courage to stand up for.

**Chorus** - Sometimes comically obtuse or fickle, sometimes perceptive, sometimes melodramatic, the Chorus reacts to the events onstage. The Chorus's reactions can be lessons in how the audience should interpret what it is seeing, or how it should *not* interpret what it is seeing.

**Eurydice** - Creon's wife and Haemon's mother.