



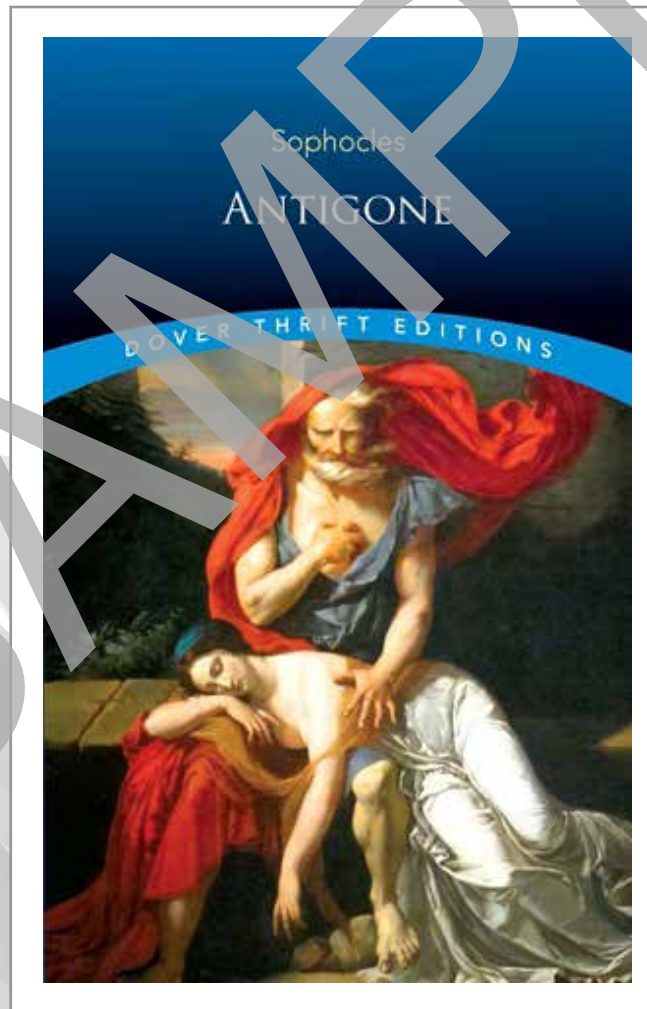
TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 9-12

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

Antigone

Sophocles



READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

Antigone

Sophocles

TEACHER GUIDE

NOTE:

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

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Skills and Strategies

Thinking

Comparing, evaluating,
analyzing details

Writing

Ads, directions

Listening/Speaking

Participation in discussions,
participation in dramatic
activities, describing,
defending opinions

Comprehension

Predicting, sequencing,
story mapping, cause/effect,
inference, problem solving

Vocabulary

Compound words, words in
context

Literary Elements

Character analysis, setting,
plot, figurative language

Overview of *Antigone* and Sophocles

Sophocles (c. 496-c. 413 BC) was born outside Athens into a rich family. His father got him the best tutors—including a famous musician who helped him acquire the skills he would use later in composing the music and words for the choruses in his tragedies. He became a prolific Greek playwright and wrote 123 plays, of which only seven tragedies still exist. These include *Ajax*, *Antigone* (441 BC), *Electra*, *Oedipus Rex* (c. 428), and *Oedipus at Colonus*. Every year at the annual spring festival of the god Dionysus, he and two other tragic poets presented three plays. Eighteen times he won the first prize in this competition!

Before Sophocles came along, there were no more than two speaking actors in a play and the chorus consisted of 12 members. He added three more chorus members, included a third speaking actor, and added stage scenery for the first time. Sophocles was well-liked and often ended up getting elected for public positions he did not necessarily wish to hold. He is considered one of the three great tragedians of ancient Greece (along with Aeschylus and Euripides). *Antigone* is still one of the most frequently performed classical Greek plays. Although it was written over 2,400 years ago, students will recognize that some of the themes and conflicts are the same ones that crop up in the daily news today: political struggle, the woman's role, fratricide, moral vs. legal responsibility, revenge, punishment, divided loyalties, love and death.

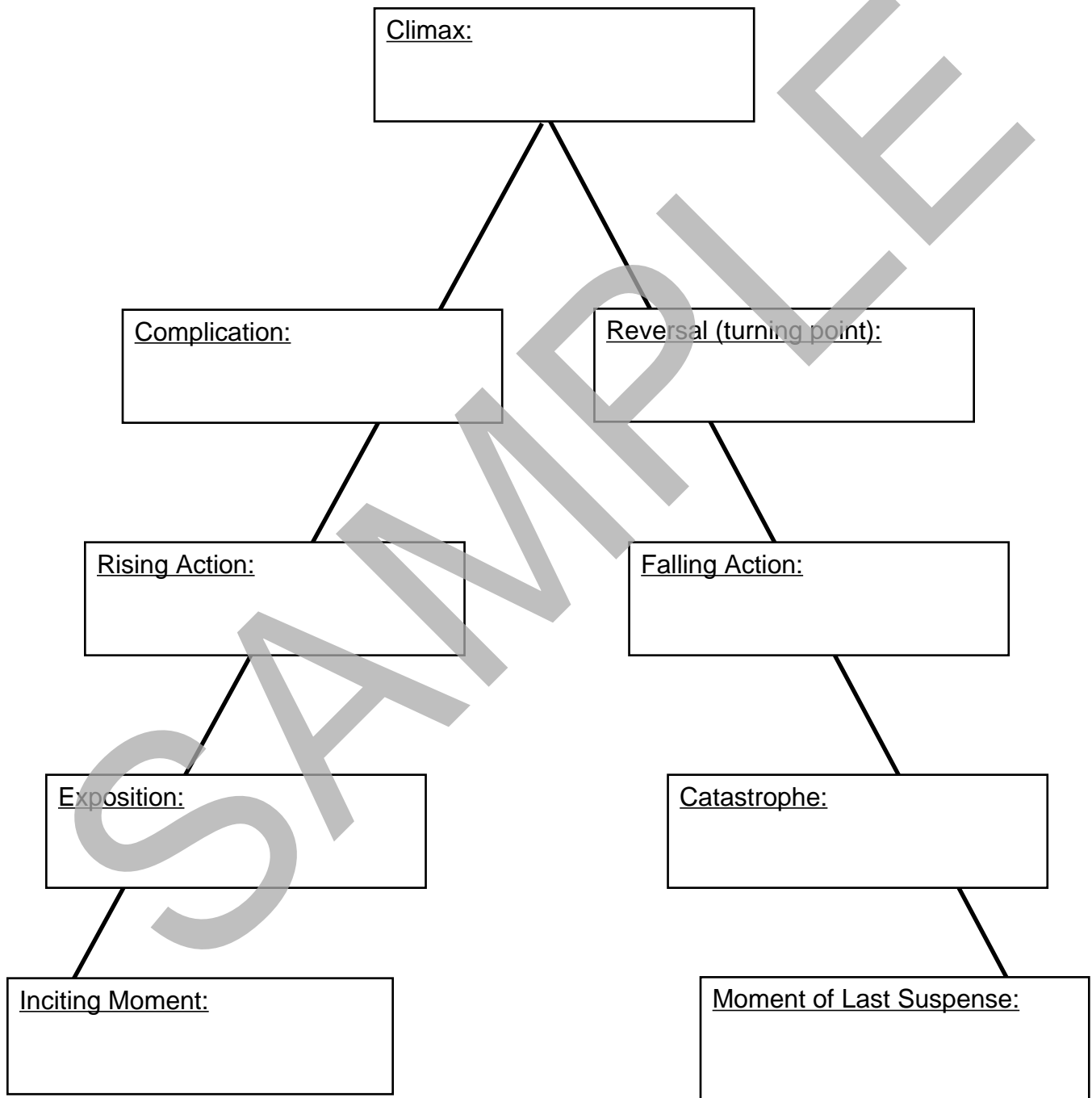
Plot Summary

[Before the story opens, Oedipus unwittingly killed his father and married his mother, Jocasta. When they learned the horrible truth, Jocasta committed suicide and Oedipus blinded himself. Oedipus had two daughters, Antigone and Ismene, and two sons, Polynices and Eteocles; the brothers were bitter rivals. The two agreed to take turns ruling Thebes, but when it was Eteocles' turn, Polynices and his father-in-law prepared an attack on the seven gates to the city. The brothers killed each other and their uncle, Creon, took over. He forbade anyone to bury the traitor, Polynices.]

As the story opens, Antigone is telling Ismene of her plans to give their brother Polynices a proper burial. Ismene tries to dissuade her, reminding her that Creon will kill anyone who defies him. The Chorus (Theban Senators) enters and describe the battle ending in the brothers' deaths. Creon is enraged by a sentinel's announcement that someone has defied him by sprinkling dust on the body. The sentinel returns later with Antigone, who boldly admits that she has overstepped his law and buried her brother. When Creon orders Ismene brought to him, she tries to say that she helped

Freytag's Pyramid (Dramatic Structure)

As you read, place key events in the story on the pyramid below.



Literary Analysis: Hubris

Hubris is excessive pride and arrogance—an element of Greek tragedy. How has hubris been demonstrated at this point in the story? (Creon is outraged that his edict has been ignored by someone who sprinkled dust on Polynices.) Who points out the boldness of one who is “wresting his country’s laws to his own will” (p.15)? (the chorus)

Comic Relief

Comic relief is a humorous scene in the course of a serious drama—usually introduced to provide relief from emotional intensity. The contrast actually heightens the seriousness of the story. Point out that the nervous, talkative sentinel provides comic relief on pages 10-11 after the emotionally intense scene it follows—where Creon threatens death to anyone who buries the body.

Pages 13-22

hoar 13
windfall 16
tutelary 19

illimitable 14
cruse 17
tyranny 19

hapless 15
conversant 18
troth 22

bier 15
uncensured 18

Discussion Questions

1. Can you think of a poem or song or famous quote that expresses the same idea as the Chorus on page 14? (“Only he knows no refuge from the tomb.”)
2. Why has the sentinel returned? (to report that Antigone has been caught in the act) Has his attitude changed? (He is elated.) How was Antigone captured? (She returned to finish burying the body and offered no resistance when accused.) Does the sentinel seem to feel sorry for her? (Somewhat; “a pleasant though a pitiful sight to me,” p.17.)
3. Why do you think Sophocles included the detail about the “hurricane” (p.16)? (This supernatural detail—the sudden wind that blew up around Antigone as she buried the body—suggests that she has divine support.)
4. What is Antigone’s attitude after she is caught? (unrepentant) Did she want to get caught? (She wanted her actions known.) Do you think her uncle would have had mercy if she had acted repentant? How do you feel toward her at this point?

Further Reading

For comparison with other tragedies—

Oedipus Rex (Sophocles)

Hamlet, Romeo and Juliet, or Titus Andronicus (Shakespeare)

The Monk's Tale (Chaucer)

The Duchess of Malfi (Webster)

For beautiful maps and geographical photos—

Atlas of the Greek World by Peter Levi

For comparison of this translation by Sir George Young with another—

Sophocles I (Antigone) translated by Elizabeth Wyckoff) or

The Oedipus Plays of Sophocles, translated by Paul Roche

For analysis of the elements of *Antigone*—

Greek Tragedy: A Literary Study by H.D.F. Kitto (1954)

For a good introduction to ancient Greece—the Greek city state, Greek life and character, etc.—

The Greeks by H.D.F. Kitto (1962)

Another survey of Greek culture—with 48 pages of photographs—

The Greek Experience by C.M. Bowra (1959)

Yet another good survey of Greek culture—

The Greek World, edited by Hugh Lloyd-Jones (1962)

For the fascinating story of archeology in Greek lands—

The Greek Stones Speak by Paul Mackendrick (1966)