



 Prestwick House

Activity Pack

OEDIPUS REX

BY SOPHOCLES



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Written by Katie Mitchell

Name: _____

Date: _____

Pre-Reading

Oedipus' Family Tree

Objective: Understanding Oedipus' familial relationships

Activity

When spectators in ancient Greece first watched Sophocles' play *Oedipus Rex*, they were already familiar with the story; the entertainment came from the suspense of watching the characters learn the truth. The audience's prior knowledge of the story not only supplied the play's dramatic irony, but it helped them better comprehend the dialogue and action onstage.

For today's audiences, who are generally unfamiliar with the Oedipus myth, the plot of the play and the way in which fate manipulates the characters may be difficult to understand. Many people don't know who the characters in the play are, what their relationships are with one another, and how a prophecy binds them to their fate. This makes for a very interesting family tree.

For this activity, fill in the blanks of the family tree that follows. Use the names provided in the box.

Name: _____

Date: _____

During Reading**Plot Summation**

Objective: Interpreting and summarizing events in a literary work

Activity

A summary is a brief restatement of key events and ideas in your own words. It can be a useful tool in preventing you from getting lost in an overabundance of details, thus, helping you to see the big picture. Keep this sheet in a notebook or folder as you read *Oedipus Rex*, and after each part of the play, record two to three sentences that reveal the key events and ideas for that section.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Lines 1-100**Symbolic Collage**

Objective: Creating a collage based on a motif in the play

Activity

While a modern work of literature usually reveals its themes gradually, subtly, and implicitly, an ancient Greek tragedy introduces the play's themes and motifs at the very beginning. A careful dissection and analysis of the first 100 lines or so will reveal all the major ideas and themes of the play.

Reread the initial conversation between Oedipus and the Priest in lines 1-97. When you finish reading, use the following chart to assign a motif from the list to each quotation. You will use each motif at least once. After you have completed the chart, choose one of the motifs and create a collage illustrating it. Print images that relate to your motif from the Internet or cut some from magazines or newspapers. Then, organize them on a sheet of poster board. You may also include relevant quotes or sayings in your collage. The first motif has been listed for you.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Lines 1-537**Making Predictions**

Objective: Analyzing examples of foreshadowing to make predictions

Activity

Foreshadowing is a term that refers to hints and clues in a work of literature that reveal what is going to happen. Sometimes the foreshadowing is obvious, but sometimes the reader is unable to recognize an example of foreshadowing until the event it refers to comes to pass. In *Oedipus Rex*, there is a great deal of foreshadowing early in the play. Most of it appears in the prophesies of Tiresias, the blind soothsayer, who reluctantly tells Oedipus why there is a plague upon Thebes.

This activity has two parts: First, read the lines included on the chart that follows and make a prediction about future events in the play—what do you think the lines are hinting at? Then, after reading the play, return to this chart to complete the final column by recording what actually happened.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Lines 538-725**Advice Column****Objective:** Identifying conflict in the play**Activity**

The conflict in *Oedipus Rex* is clear from the very beginning of the play: the gods are angry that Laius' murder has gone unavenged, and the killer is still at large in Thebes. From the perspective of Oedipus, Creon, or Jocasta, write a letter to an advice columnist asking for suggestions about on how to proceed. What advice might each of these characters seek? After writing your letter, write the columnist's response to your letter.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Lines 1-937**Societal Views**

Objective: Comparing and contrasting ancient societal views to those of today

Activity

It is always interesting to examine the beliefs of another culture, especially an ancient culture, and compare them to contemporary beliefs or one's own. Sometimes, we see that we have progressed significantly since the earlier centuries of human history; other times, we find that particular beliefs are timeless and universal. Early in the play, the characters and chorus make a variety of statements that reflect both individual and societal views of life. Some of these viewpoints have not changed since Sophocles' time, while others have.

Follow these steps to complete this activity:

1. Read the list of statements provided. They all come from the first half of the play.
2. Select a statement from the list that you find interesting, and think about its meaning. Then, write brief responses to the following questions:
 - What ideas come to mind when you read the statement?
 - What societal view is being expressed?
 - How is this view similar to or different from our modern view of a similar topic?
 - Do you agree or disagree with the statement? Why?
3. Using your responses to the questions as a guide, write a persuasive essay or speech expressing your thoughts.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Lines 938-1099**Rewriting Text****Objective:** Adapting scenes to another format**Activity**

In the middle of the play, a conversation takes place among Jocasta, the Messenger, Oedipus, and the Chorus regarding Oedipus' adoptive parents, his childhood, and his right to the Corinthian throne. The scene contains lines spoken by those four characters, with Oedipus sometimes questioning the Messenger and sometimes talking to Jocasta. This portion of the play could be adapted to a narrative because the numerous characters involved, the movement in and out of the palace, and the emotional nature of the conversation lend themselves to description.

Rewrite lines 938-1099 as a narrative, as if the play were a novel and this portion of the text were a chapter. You should preserve the essence of the dialogue among characters, but you do not need to use the lines of the play verbatim. You may eliminate some lines and add others. You could also modernize the language and write the dialogue in colloquial speech. In addition, you will have to invent setting and character details that are missing from the play's stage directions.

The following is an example based on the conversation between Oedipus and Tiresias in lines 315-485:

A small passage opened in the crowd as the people reverently made way for the aged seer. The man's chiton was practically in rags, frayed and tattered by a life of self-denial and suffering. A cloth was wrapped around his face where his useless eyes were set. Despite his disability and the poor condition of his costume, the soothsayer walked toward Oedipus with the proud step of a prince, flanked by several guides and attendants.

"I come by request of the king," a strong voice announced from the feeble frame. "I am Tiresias, prophet of Apollo. Where might I find Oedipus?"

A whisper hissed through the audience of Thebans, who all gawked at the strange man. Some questioned whether he was a man at all, or if, instead, he was the manifestation of a god—perhaps Apollo himself or Dionysus returned to the city of his birth.

Oedipus walked down the steps of the palace to greet his guest.

"O Tiresias, who grasps all things, both what can be learned and what is unspeakable, both of heaven and treading the earth, I am Oedipus. If you cannot see, you can still understand what sickness plagues our city. Our fields have gone barren, the people starve, children die before they are born, storm clouds cover the Theban sky, preventing the light of Helios from touching our city...all of this we suffer. You, who knows the minds of the immortals, can help us. Tell us, wise prophet, why do the gods punish us?"

Name: _____

Date: _____

Lines 938-1559**Rewriting Figurative Language**

Objective: Writing similes, metaphors, personification, and hyperbole

Activity

Choose any six examples of figurative language in this section of the play and rewrite them as another literary device. Your examples and rewritten phrases must exemplify at least three of the devices. Use the chart provided to complete this activity. One has been done for you as an example.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Lines 1254-1439**Creating a Newscast**

Objectives: Synthesizing information from the text
Writing a script

Activity

The conventions of Greek theater require that all violent acts occur offstage. This is the case in *Oedipus Rex* when Jocasta kills herself and Oedipus gouges out his eyes. The Servant rushes out to deliver the horrific news that Jocasta, is dead. He described her as “hanging, all twisted up in a twisted noose” (1292-1293). Then, the servant tells the people about Oedipus’ reaction: “...he removed from her garment the golden brooches which she was wearing; he lifted them and struck the sockets of his own eyes...” (1297-1299).

For this activity, you will work in a small group to create a newscast of the event. Imagine that your news team is live at Oedipus’ palace, just after the suicide. What details will you want to report? Reread this section of the play to determine what happened. Use your imagination to supply important information that has not been provided in the text.

Each member of your group must have a speaking role in the newscast; therefore, you will need to post reporters in different locations or doing different things. For example, one person might be in the studio, one person might be interviewing the servant, and another might be reporting on the crowd’s reaction to the events. Once you have determined how many reporters your group needs and which group members will fill them, write the script of the newscast. Remember to include reporters’ names and the name of the TV channel broadcasting your report.