OEDIPUS THE KING  (Oedipus = “swollen foot”)

Prior to seeing this play, all Greek audiences would be aware of the following myth surrounding the story of Oedipus.

Synopsis: Apollo, the God of Truth, predicted in an oracle that King Laius of Thebes would die at the hands of his son, Oedipus. So he determined that when his child was born, he would bind his feet and leave him on a lonely mountain to die. A kind shepherd rescued the infant child and brought him to Corinth where he was raised by the King Polybus. The adult Oedipus learns of Apollo’s warning to Oedipus that he will kill his father, so he leaves Corinth to avoid the fate of the oracle, thinking King Polybus to be his real father. Unfortunately, on his journey fleeing Corinth he gets in a brawl with Laius and kills him without knowing he is his truth father and commits the sin of Patricide. Oedipus continues on to Thebes where he answers the riddle of the Sphinx and becomes the hero, who wins the hearts of the citizens and Jocasta the Queen. He marries Jocasta without realizing he is marrying his mother and commits the sin of incest. When he learns of his true identity from the old shepherd who bore him away as a child, he gouges his eyes out, never to look upon himself or his children again. Jocasta, his wife/mother, kills herself. Oedipus banishes himself from Thebes at the end of the play.

For each of the sections noted below, write out your responses to the questions for each section in your journal notebook. Organize your notes around each section of the play.

ANTIGONE

Prior to seeing this part of this play, the Greek audience would be familiar with the following details surrounding the myth of Antigone.

Synopsis: Oedipus has died of old age at Colonus, while exiled from his home in Thebes. Antigone and Ismene return to Thebes after their father's death at Colonus, hoping to stop the war between their brothers, Polyneices and Eteocles. Eteocles, the younger son, claimed the kingship of Thebes belonged to him, exiling his older brother Polyneices from Thebes. Polyneices then attacked Thebes with a massive army representing seven regions from the southern portion of the Greek continent. Neither son wins because both die in battle. Creon declares himself the new Theban king and that Eteocles will be buried and honored as a hero while Polyneices' body will rot away and be eaten by dogs in disgrace for trying to overthrow Thebes with the southern army. Penalty for trying to bury his body will be death. Antigone insists that her brother's body must be buried so that his spirit can rest in peace. Thus begins Antigone's journey....

Prologue (1-161)
1. What causes the conflict between Antigone and her sister Ismene?
2. What does Antigone mean when she says “I will be a criminal but a religious one.” (ll. 74-75) when she refers to her proposed deed?

First Episode (162-384)
3. What have we already learned about Creon before he appears on stage?
4. What reason does Creon give for his ruling concerning Polyneices’ and Eteocles’ bodies?
   Explain his edict fully.
5. What news does the Sentry bring to Creon?
6. What is Creon's reactions to the Sentry's news?
7. First Ode – Human Strengths and Limitations: In the Chorus' "Ode to Man," make a list of man's civilized skills.(lines 331-375)

**Second Episode (385-625)**
8. Describe what the Sentry saw Antigone doing at the beginning of this section.
9. How does Antigone view the relationship between the laws made by man and those created by the gods?
10. What is Creon's view of the relationship between man and woman and the importance of blood ties vs. the ties of citizenship?
11. What is Antigone's attitude with regard to her deed?
12. What does Ismene do and say when brought before Creon? How has she changed since the prologue? Describe Antigone's response to Ismene.

**Third Episode (630-806)**
13. What arguments does Haimon (Creon's son) use to try to persuade Creon to change his mind re: Antigone's punishment.
14. What is Creon's reaction to Haimon's argument? What is Creon's attitude toward women?
15. What is the point that Haemon is attempting to make to Creon with the analogies of the tree and the ship?
16. What threat does Haemon make?
17. Why does Creon change Antigone's punishment from public stoning to burial alive in a cave?

**Fourth Episode (807-987)**
18. What new side of Antigone's character do we see in the beginning of the fourth episode?
19. What comfort does the Chorus offer Antigone in this scene?

**Fifth Episode (988-1151)**
20. Teiresias, the blind prophet, appears in the fifth episode. What omens does Teiresias report? What do these omens mean?
21. What is Creon's initial reaction to Teiresias' report?
22. What course of action does the Chorus recommend to Creon? What is Creon's reaction to this recommendation?
23. What has Creon learned about the law?

**Exodus (1153 to end)**
24. What happens to Antigone, Haimon and Eurydice?
25. How is Teiresias' prophecy from Scene 5 fulfilled in this scene?
26. How has Creon changed since the beginning of the play? What does Creon finally come to recognize at the end of the play?
27. Explain the final "moral lesson" said by the chorus in the last stanza of the play.
MEDEA by Euripides

Background on Jason & Medea mythology:

Jason was born the son of Aeson, in Iolcus. When his father lost the kingship, Jason was secretly given the famous centaur Chiron, who raised him. As a young man Jason returned to Iolcus. The king, Pelias (the man who had deprived Aeson of the kingship) was afraid that Jason would usurp him, so he persuaded Jason to set off on an expedition to capture the Golden Fleece, the pure gold skin of a ram which was in a sacred grove in Colchis (a barbarian region to the east of the Euxine Sea, the Greek name for the Black Sea), where it was guarded by a dragon.

Jason put together a band of adventurers called the Argonauts, among whom were some major figures of Greek mythology (e.g., Hercules, Orpheus). They took their name from the ship they sailed in, the Argo. The heroes had a number of adventures on the way to Colchis, including passing through the legendary Clashing Rocks (the Symplegades). Upon arrival in Colchis, King Aeetes set them a number of tasks, including yoking two fire-breathing bulls, ploughing a field with them, sowing the field with teeth from the dragon of Cadmus, and then fighting against the warriors who arose from the sown teeth.

To complete these tasks Jason enlisted the help of Medea, daughter of King Aeetes. She fell in love with Jason and helped him with her magic to complete the tasks set by Aeetes and to steal the Golden Fleece. She then escaped with Jason, killing her brother in order to scatter his body on the sea so that Aeetes would have to hold up his pursuit of Jason and Medea. In order to understand Euripides' play, it is essential to recognize that Medea, in addition to being a female with magical powers, is also a barbarian (i.e., non-Greek).

For each of the sections noted below, write out your responses to the questions for each section in your journal notebook. Organize your notes around each section of the play.

Study Guides for Medea

ACT ONE
1) What background facts do we learn from the Nurse’s opening speech? Lines 1-25
2) What new trouble has the Tutor heard of? Lines 35-40
3) What purpose does the women’s chorus serve so far? What commentary do they offer? Lines 90-93
4) What do we learn about Medea’s past in lines 95-120?
5) If Medea’s were a native of the city of Corinth, would she be treated differently?
6) What new misfortune does Creon bring to Medea? Lines 133-135
7) What reason does Creon give for banishing Medea? Lines 148-154
8) What one request of Medea’s does Creon grant? Is he really being merciful? Lines 205-213
9) What does Medea mean when she says “It is easier to stand in battle three times, in the front line...than to bear one child.” Line 227
10) What does Medea resolve to do? Lines 235-240
11) What reason does Jason give for Medea’s exile? Lines 264-265
12) What has Medea done for Jason? Lines 285-295
13) What justification does Jason offer for his actions? Lines 310-323
14) What does Medea plot to do in lines 356-364?
15) What does the Women’s Chorus say about hatred? Lines 365-378
17) What act of reconciliation does Medea tell to the Women’s Chorus? Explain her motive 490-502

ACT TWO
18) What violent act opens Act II in lines 10-15?
19) Why does Medea refer to her gift to Jason’s wife as “sick peace”? Lines 25-26
20) What fate does Jason decree for he and Medea’s sons? What is Medea’s reaction? Lines 27-34
21) What do you think is Medea’s motive in asking Jason whether he would be grieved if his children were killed? Lines 48-55
22) What does Medea mean when, after offering the gift to Jason’s new wife, she states that “Her sun is rising, mine is going down to a red sunset.” Lines 98-99
23) What does Medea mean when she says “the bait” is laid”? Lines 103-104
24) Describe the first Corinthian woman’s warning. Lines 115-125
25) What opinion do the women have about good & evil and the role of vengeance? Lines 131-144
26) What news does the Tutor bring when the children return from Jason’s brides chamber? Lines 176-180
27) How do Medea and the audience learn of the fate of Creon and his daughter? Describe their fate. Lines 200-208
28) How is the death of Medea’s children staged?
29) What justification does Medea give for killing her sons? Lines 325-326
30) What final comfort does Medea refuse to allow Jason to have?

Final Reflection: Euripides produced this play about the fury of a mistreated foreign woman in 431 B.C.E, just as Athens was at the height of its civil war against the Sparta. What does the fate of Medea and of those who mistreat and oppress her say to its own time? Might it shed any light on the problem of terrorism in our own time? What happens to the characters of both when one human being treats another as Jason treats Medea? What happens to Medea when she gets her terrible revenge? Does this play inspire “pity (for unmerited suffering) and fear (for the suffering of someone like ourselves) as Aristotle says tragedy should do? Or does it simply horrify us?