***Oedipus Rex* Reading Guide**

As we read Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex*, consider these topics. You will want to take careful notes over the reading. These topics will serve as springboards for in-class discussions and writing assignments. Remember that you are always expected to validate your opinions with textual evidence. It is important to make note of passages that correlate with these topics.

Pay attention to Sophocles’ use of:

* Mimesis
* Catharsis
* Hamartia
* Hubris
* Sophrosyne
* Eusebeia
* Phronesis
* Anagnorisis
* Logos

Remember the characteristics of a tragic hero:

* Generally highborn
* Good
* Good intentions
* True to life—human
* Exhibits tragic flaw – often hubris
* Causes his own downfall
* Evokes both pity and fear in audience/reader

Consider how the play includes four different types of conflict:

* Man vs. man
* Man vs. nature
* Man vs. self
* Man vs. society

Watch for the following themes:

* The quest for identity
* Nature of innocence and guilt
* Nature of moral responsibility
* Sight versus blindness
* Limitations of human will vs. fate
* Abuse of power

Finally, reflect on:

* Direct and indirect characterization
* Foreshadowing
* Situational irony
* Tragedy
* Tragic flaw
* Unity of time, space, and action

Reading Topics:

* The play begins in media res – in the middle of things. Of what are we in the middle? (11).
* Is Oedipus a good king? Explain (11).
* The Priest relates several problems to Oedipus. What is happening in Thebes? (12).
* Note the dramatic irony when Oedipus says, “Not one of you is as sick as I am” (13). How is this an example of dramatic irony?
* Oedipus has already taken action against the plague. What has he done? (13).
* What does Apollo tell Creon they must do to overcome the plague? (14).
* Creon gives Oedipus a clue about Laius’ murderer, but it is wrong. What is the clue? (15).
* Oedipus says, “I shall fight for him in this matter, as if for my own father” (19). What literary device is used here?
* Oedipus has taken another action to save Thebes. What else has he done? (20).
* Tiresias is highly respected, and revered even by the king. How can we tell? (21).
* Why is Tiresias so reluctant to tell Oedipus what he knows? (21-22).
* Oedipus has a temper! Where does his attitude shift? (22).
* What does Tiresias reveal when he says, “You are the unholy polluter of this land”? (22).
* Oedipus cannot accept Tiresias’ message. He believes that someone must have put Tiresias up to this. Whom does he blame? (24).
* What is foreshadowed when Tiresias says, “This very day will sire you and destroy you”? (26).
* There is a humorous exchange between Oedipus and Tiresias at the top of page 26. Explain.
* Just before the second choral ode, Tiresias says something very important to Oedipus and asks that the king consider his words carefully. How might this play have been different if Oedipus had listened to his advice? (26).
* Does the chorus decide to believe Tiresias? (28).
* What does Creon think of his brother-in-law’s charges? (28).
* One of the most famous lines in the play comes on page 30, when Creon says “I don’t know; I prefer to keep quiet in matters when I don’t comprehend them” (30). What makes this line so memorable?
* Creon asks Oedipus to be reasonable. How does he explain things? (31).
* Is Oedipus really suspicious of Creon, or has all of this just stunned him? (32).
* What does Jocasta say on page 33 that sounds motherly? How is this ironic?
* Jocasta denies the power of prophecy for the first time on pages 35-36. What does she say?
* Why did the servant ask to be moved to the country? (37).
* Oedipus shares his story with Jocasta on pages 38-39. Where do we see further evidence of his hot temper?
* Jocasta denies the power of prophecies for a second time on page 40. What does she say?
* The third choral ode is very important. What will happen if Oedipus defeats the oracle? (41).
* What does Jocasta do on page 42 that flies in the face of her earlier statements?
* How does Oedipus react to the news of Polybus’ death? (44).
* The messenger thinks that he is comforting Oedipus when he is really making things much worse. What does he say? (46).
* The murder witness played an important role in Oedipus’ early life. What was it? (48).
* Jocasta makes an ominously prophetic statement on page 49, but Oedipus misinterprets his wife. What does he believe she is worried about?
* Oedipus’ temper shows up again. What is he doing this time? (52).
* Why is the shepherd so afraid? (52).
* The fifth choral ode presents the fate of Oedipus. How does the chorus feel about their king?
* What happened to Jocasta? (55).
* What happened to Oedipus? (58).
* Creon makes an important observation on page 60. What is it?
* Where does Oedipus achieve eusebia and phronesis?