

The ANTIGONE of Sophocles

In both personality and achievement, Sophocles was a true son of Athen's Golden Age. He was an accomplished musician, actor and conversationalist; he won prizes for his dramas, of which the Antigone is perhaps the best known; he served his native city as both a general and a financial administrator.

STUDY QUESTIONS:

1. Like most Greek tragedies, the Antigone is a story of conflict. What serves as the major theme of conflict in this play?
Conflict over who is the ruler of the city of the Gods - Creon is the ruler supreme, the ruler of the city of the Gods - Creon is the ruler supreme.
2. What are other themes of conflict revealed in these passages from the Antigone?
Faithfulness to state or to family. Ismene - Antigone. Honor to father or to justice (Creon - Haemon).
3. How relevant are these themes to our present-day society?
Very - the same themes constantly arise in modern times. Law + justice - Families are torn up their government. (people of the world) established due to economic of people ages of rule - emotion battle of state or religion.

THE CHARACTERS

- Antigone - daughters of Oedipus
- Ismene
- Creon - King of Thebes
- Chorus of Old Men
- Watchman
- Haemon - son of Creon

PLOT: This play concerns the last of the misfortunes of the family of Oedipus. Condemned by fate to kill his father and marry his mother, Oedipus has gone off into exile, blinded by his own hand. His wife-mother has committed suicide, and his two sons, which were born to him and his wife-mother, have killed each other in battle, one attacking the city with a foreign force, one defending it. Only Antigone and her sister Ismene remain of the children of Oedipus. The throne has passed to their uncle, Creon, since no other sons of the royal family survive.

ANTIGONE: My sister, dear Ismene, my own sister, . . . what is this edict they are saying that Creon has proclaimed to all the city? You know of it?

ISMENE: No word. . . , Antigone, for good or bad, has come to me since we were robbed of our two brothers, murdered in one day by the double blow.

ANTIGONE: But I knew everything, and sent for you to come outside so you could hear alone.

ISMENE: What is the trouble? For your restlessness shows that your mind is seething with dark thoughts.

ANTIGONE: What? Has not Creon judged of our two brothers, one worthy of a grave, the other not? They say that he has buried Eteocles with due respect, regarding right and custom, to be esteemed among the dead below. But the corpse of Polynices, so they say, our ruler has commanded none shall mourn or bury him, but leave unwept, unburied; sweet treasure for the birds that will appraise his corpse as lovely food. And such decrees they say good Creon sets for you and me, even for me, and will come here to make his order plain to those who do not know; nor takes the matter lightly, but whoever should disobey in anything, will find his death by public stoning in the city. So now you know, and you shall soon reveal if you are really nobly born, or just the coward daughter of a noble line.

ISMENE: If Creon has commanded this, poor sister, how could I help? How could I be of use?

ANTIGONE: Decide if you will share the work with me --

ISMENE: What venture now? What are you thinking of?

ANTIGONE: If you will help my hand to lift the dead.

ISMENE: You plan to bury him against the law?

ANTIGONE: My brother and yours, I will, if you will not. I never will be caught deserting him.

ISMENE: Reckless still, when Creon has forbidden?

ANTIGONE: He has no right to keep me from my own.

ISMENE: Think, sister, how our father died, despised and scorned, when sins discovered by himself forced him to strike both eyes with his own hand. His mother and his wife, the double name, outraged her life with rope twisted for hanging. And lastly, our two brothers, in one day, each murdering the other - wretched ones - worked out their death with one another's hands. Now we in turn, we two left all alone, think how we shall die more miserably if, in defiance of the strength of law, we should resist the order of the king. We must remember first, that we were born women, who should not strive with men; and next, as we are ruled by the stronger, so we must yield to men in this and even things more painful. I, therefore, asking all the dead forgiveness,

*Antigone asks
Ismene if
is better
to be
against the
law
than
to die*

since I am forced, will yield to those in office.
Only a fool does more than he is able.

ANTIGONE: I would not urge you. No. Nor if you wished to do so, would I welcome you to help me. Follow your own nature. I will bury him. To die in doing that is beautiful. For I shall rest, beloved, with him I loved, performing righteous deeds in ways unsanctioned. For I must please the dead below much longer than people here. For I shall be there always. You, if you will, insult the laws of gods.

ISMENE: I do them no dishonor, but to work against the state, my strength is weak for that.

ANTIGONE: Make these excuses. I will go to heap the earth above the brother whom I love.

(Enter Creon from the palace.)

CREON: Old men, the gods have once again restored the safety of our city, tossed about upon the heavy sea. So I have brought you here, apart from all the rest, by order, because I know you always have respected the power of the throne in the time of Laius; again, when Oedipus upheld the state. And even when he died, with faithful hearts you stood around the children of his house. And since these two have fallen in one day by double doom, each murdered by the other and stained by blood from one another's hand, I now possess the power and the throne by closeness of relation to the dead. Whoever should regard or make his friend more than his land, I count no man at all. Nor would I ever make that man my friend who is an enemy against my land. Such are the principles by which I make this city prosper. In accord with them I have announced to all the citizens the law about the sons of Oedipus. Eteocles, who fell defending this city, while winning all distinction with his spear, let him be laid within the grave, and crowned with honors worthy of the noblest dead. However, for his brother Polynices, who came from exile and then tried to burn his native land and all his father's gods with fire, and tried to taste his people's blood, and lead the rest in slavery, this man, (And I have published this throughout the city) no one shall honor with a grave and none lament, but let his corpse be left unburied for birds and dogs to eat, a shameful sight. This is my wish. Evil men shall never stand before the just in honor because of me. But he who is well-minded toward the state will be esteemed by me in life and death.

CHORUS: Son of Menoecus, Creon, this is your will toward both the city's enemy and friend. And you have power to take

what course you wish in dealing with the dead, or us,
the living.

CREON: Then be observant keepers of these orders.

CHORUS: Please lay this burden on some younger man.

CREON: But watchers for the body have been found.

CHORUS: If so, what further task have you for us?

CREON: You must not side with those who disobey.

CHORUS: Who is such a fool? What man is in love with death?

CREON: Death is what he will earn. Yet greediness has often
ruined men through futile hopes.

(Enter Watchman)

WATCHMAN: The corpse, someone has buried and gone away, and
sprinkled thirsty dust upon the flesh and done the
fitting rites.

CREON: What do you say? What man has dared to do this?

WATCHMAN: I do not know. The ground was hard and dry and bare,
unbroken, without the track of wheels, no sign of
the doer. And when the first daywatch reported it,
annoying wonder fell upon us all, for he had disappeared,
not in a grave, but only dust was lightly scattered
over, as though somebody shunned a dreadful curse.
No signs appeared that any beast of prey or any dog had
come to him, or torn him. Then angry words came
clashing among us, guard cursing guard, and would have
turned to blows, with none to stop us. For each man was
guilty; no one convicted; all denied all knowledge.
We were prepared to handle red-hot iron, to walk through
fire, and swear by all the gods we had not done, nor
knew who planned or did it. At last, when no more questions
came, one spoke and made us turn our faces to the ground
in fear. We did not know how we could answer, nor if
we did the thing that he advised, how we could prosper.
His advice was this: the matter should be brought to
you, not hidden. And this seemed best. The lot selected
me, unlucky as I am, to win the prize. So here I am,
unwilling and unwelcome. For no one likes the bringer
of bad news.

CHORUS: My thoughts, sir, have been hinting for some time,
perhaps this may have been the work of gods?

CREON: Stop, before you anger me by talking, and you are proved
at once both old and foolish. You speak intolerably,

saying gods have any thought for such a corpse as this. Rewarding service, did they cover him who came to burn their pillar-circled shrines, and votive treasures, and to burn their land and scatter all their laws upon the winds? Or do you see gods honoring the wicked? That cannot be. But from the first, some men in town have been dissatisfied with me, shaking their heads in secret, and have not kept their necks within the harness as they should, like men who are contented with my rule. I have no doubt that by such men as these the watchmen have been bribed, and led to do this. For nothing evil as money ever grew in use among mankind. This ruins cities, this drives so many men from home, instructs and leads the honest minds of men astray to deal in treachery, and teaches men to know all wickedness and godless deeds. Those who buried him for money can be sure that they will pay the price, sooner or later. As Zeus has still my reverence, know this, I tell it to you and I swear it, if you fail to find the man who buried him, and bring him here to me, before my eyes, mere death will not suffice for you, until hung up alive, you have revealed this outrage.

(Watchman leaves.) . . .

(Enter Watchman, leading Antigone.)

WATCHMAN: Now here she is, the one who buried him. We caught her in the act. But where is Creon?

CHORUS: He comes out of the palace just in time.

(Enter Creon.)

CREON: But what is this I am coming just in time for?

WATCHMAN: I could have sworn I would not soon be here again, right after I was stormed by threats. I come, although I break my oath in coming, and bring this girl caught honoring the dead. Sir, you take her now, and question as you wish. But I am free, by right, for good and all from all this trouble.

CREON: You bring her here, and found her where, and how?

WATCHMAN: Burying the man. Now you know everything.

CREON: You understand and mean the things you say?

WATCHMAN: I saw her burying the corpse you had forbidden.

CREON: Where did you see her? Was she caught in the act?

WATCHMAN: This is the way it was. When we came there will all those awful threats of yours on us, we swept off all the dust that hid the body, and laid the wet corpse altogether bare; we sat upon the hill against the wind so that the stink from his body would not hit us. Each kept the other man awake with threats, if any should be careless of his task. For some time this went on, until the sun's bright circle stood within the arch of heaven; the heat burned. Suddenly a whirlwind lifted a cloud of dust from earth that blurred the sky, and filled the plain, and tattered all the leaves within the wood, and all the air was choked. We closed our eyes and faced the plague of gods. And when the storm had passed, after some time, the girl was seen. She cried a piercing cry, the bitter cry of a mother bird, as when within the empty nest, she sees the bed stripped of her young. She, when she saw the corpse was bare, began to weep, and cursed the doers. At once, she brought dry, thirsty dust in her hands, and raising up a jar of hammered bronze, she crowned the dead with offerings poured three times. On seeing this, at once we hurried forward and quickly caught her. She was not confused. We charged her with her past and present doings; she denied nothing, to my joy and pain. For getting clear of trouble brings great joy, but bringing friends to grief is very painful. However, to consider all such things less weighty than my safety, that's my way.

CREON: You there, you, with head bent toward the ground. Do you acknowledge or deny this crime?

ANTIGONE: I say I did it; I will not deny.

CREON: (To Watchman) Go where you will, clear of a serious charge.

(WATCHMAN leaves)

(To Antigone) You tell me now, and not at length, but briefly, you knew the edict had forbidden this?

ANTIGONE: I knew. How could I help it? It was plain.

CREON: And you presumed to disobey these laws?

ANTIGONE: Yes. For it was not Zeus who made this edict, and Justice, dwelling with the gods below, had never set such laws as these among men. Nor did I think your edicts of such force, that you, being just a man, could override unwritten and unchanging laws of gods. Their life is not of now or yesterday, but always. No man knows when they appeared. In view of them, I would not, through the fear of human will, meet judgment from the gods. That I must die before my time, I shall gain. For when one lives, as I, in many troubles, how can he help but find a gain in death? Meeting my death this way does not pain me. But when my mother's son had died, if I had left his corpse unburied, I would have grieved.

ANTIGONE: For this, I am not grieved. And if I seem to do some foolish things at present, perhaps the man who charges folly is the fool.

CHORUS: The headstrong, savage temper of this child comes from her headstrong father. She does not know the way to bend before her griefs and troubles.

CREON: Yet I would have you know most stubborn spirits fall hardest, and the strongest iron, baked within a furnace to excessive hardness, you see most often snap, most often shatter. And horses, showing temper, I have found are managed by a little leather bridle. There is no room for pride in those who are their neighbors' slaves. This girl was skilled in pride when she transgressed the laws that had been published. And then, that done, the further insolence, to boast of it and laugh at having done it. I am no longer man, she is the man, if this success remains with her unchallenged.

ANTIGONE: You want what more than, having caught, to kill me?

CREON: I? Nothing. Having that, then I have all.

ANTIGONE: So, why delay? For nothing in your words can give me pleasure. May they never please. And what I say, I am sure, displeases you. Yet how could I have gained more glorious glory, then placing my own brother in a grave? All here would say that they approve of this if fear of speaking did not seal up their lips. For rulers, fortunate in much besides, have power to do and say what they desire.

CREON: Of all the Thebans you alone think so.

ANTIGONE: They also do, but shut their mouths to you.

CREON: And are you not ashamed to act unlike them?

ANTIGONE: No, there is no disgrace in honoring a brother.

CREON: Then was it not a brother, who died, his rival?

ANTIGONE: Mine, by one mother and one father too.

CREON: Then why pay honors that dishonor him?

ANTIGONE: The dead man would not testify to that.

CREON: Yes, if you honor him just like the wicked.

ANTIGONE: It was no slave, who died, it was his brother.

CREON: Wasting this land, and he defending it.

ANTIGONE: Yet all the same, these rites are claimed *Rites on the dead*
by death. *whether good or bad*

CREON: The good should not share with the bad alike.

ANTIGONE: Who knows but this is blameless there below?

CREON: A hated man, though dead, is not a friend.

ANTIGONE: My nature joins in love and not in hate.

CREON: Then go down there; if you must love, love them.
But while I live, no woman masters me. *Not just disobedience I'm*
low dishonour of Creon
from a woman

(ENTER HAEMON)

CREON: We shall soon know, and more than seers could say.
My son, because you learned the sentenced fate
of your bride, do you come raging at your father?
Or are we dear to you, do what we may?

HAEMON: My father, I am yours. And you devise the wisest rules
for me that I shall follow. No marriage ever will be
thought more gain to me than the wisdom of your management.

CREON: Yes, so it should be settled in your heart, my
son, to stand behind your father's judgments.
For this men pray to have obedient children grow *62 idea of*
up about them in their homes, to pay their father's *death of*
enemy with evil things, and honor, as their father *children*
does, his friend. But he who has unprofitable
children, what shall we say but that he has
produced pain for himself, loud laughter for his
foes? My son, do not give up your better judgment *Caution to*
for any girl because of pleasure's bidding, while *about the*
knowing that embraces soon grow cold when she who
shares your house with you is false.
What ulcer can be worse than the faithless friend?
With loathing, leave this girl, as if she were your
enemy, to find a man in Hades. For since I caught
her, the only one in the city in open disobedience,
I will not make myself a liar to the city, but
I shall kill her. Let her pray to Zeus, the god
of kindred.
But he who forces law with violence, and thinks
that he can dictate to the rulers, that man will
never win applause from me. Whoever is established
by the state should be obeyed in matters large
and small, in matters just, and things unjust as well.

CREON: Obedience saves most lives whose course is steady. And so, we must defend the public order and we must not be subject to a woman. Better defeat, if need be, from a man, than to be known as weaker than a woman. *2-then*
fabiano

HAEMON: Father, the gods plant reasoning in men, the highest of all things that we possess. I could not say, nor would know how to say, in what respects you have not spoken rightly. But surely someone else can be right too. I naturally watch for you all things that men will do, or say, or find to blame. For your eye terrifies the common man and checks the words you would not wish to hear. But I can hear these murmurs in the dark. I know just how the city mourns this girl, "She, of all women, least deserving it, is suffering worst death for noblest deeds. And when her brother fell in bloody fight, and lay unburied she would not leave him to be devoured by savage dogs and birds. Is she not worthy of some golden honor?" Such guarded talk spreads secretly around. To me, my father, nothing that I own is dearer than your welfare and success. For what can be of more delight to children than a successful father's honored name? Or to a father than his son's renown? When any man thinks he alone is wise, and that in speech and thought there is none like him, when he will be revealed, will be found empty. No though a man is wise, there is no shame to learn, learn much, and not be too firm. You see along the winter streams how trees bend down and save branches, while all those remaining stiff go trunk and root to ruin. So, he who tightly draws the vessel's sail, and never slackens, soon upsets the boat, and ends it all with benches upside down. Lay down your temper and give way to change. If an opinion is allowed from me, though younger, I still think a man should be by nature, very thoughtful. And if not, for usually the scale does not incline so, then it is good to learn from good advisors.

Caution
Creon not
to kill
Antigone.
that Creon
is on her side &
his leadership
shouldn't be
too strict

CREON: Then is it merit to respect the evil?

HAEMON: I would not ever wish to honor evil.

CREON: Is she not tainted with the same disease?

HAEMON: With one accord, the men of Thebes say no.

CREON: And shall the city tell me how to rule?

HAEMON: You see, there, you have spoken like a child.

CREON: And so I am to govern in this land by reasoning that is other than my own?

HAEMON: There is no city belonging to one man.

CREON: Is not the city thought to be the ruler's?

HAEMON: That is fine! To rule alone, the land deserted.

CREON: This boy, it seems, is championing the woman.

HAEMON: If you are a woman. All my care is for you.

CREON: Shameful, to press a case against your father.

HAEMON: No. For I see you offending justice.

CREON: Do I offend when I respect my office?

HAEMON: You do not respect it, trampling on gods' rights.

CREON: Disgusting nature, that bends before a woman.

HAEMON: But you will never find me yield to evil.

CREON: But all your words, at least, are for that girl.

HAEMON: For you, for me, and for the gods below.

CREON: You shall mourn your teaching, void yourself of wisdom.

HAEMON: Were you not my father, I would call you foolish.

CREON: You woman's slave, do not talk like that to me.

HAEMON: You wish to speak and when you speak, hear nothing.

CREON: Really? But no, by Zeus, be sure of this: You shall not heap affronts on me so lightly. Bring me that hatred thing at once, so she can die before his eyes, beside her bridegroom.

HAEMON: Not at my side. So never think of that. For she shall never die while I am near. And you shall never see my face again. Rave on with friends who wish to yield to you.

(HAEMON LEAVES)

*Haemon's
Antigone's
agreed
to be
beholden to
is not
in order
to die*

(CREON LEAVES)

(ENTER ANTIGONE, led by guards)

ANTIGONE: Citizens of my native land, see me going on my last way, looking for the last time on the light of the sun that is for me no more. No, but Hades, where all must sleep, is leading me alive to Acheron's shore, without having my share in the wedding songs, for never has any song that crowns the wedding sung out for me; no, I shall marry Acheron.

CHORUS: Famous, and glorious, and with praise, you depart for that deep place of the dead, not wasted by blows of slow disease, and not sharing in the wages of the sword, but self-possessed, alone among men, you may go alive to Hades. You rushed to the utmost edge of daring, and fell on the deepest foundation stone of right, but you fell grievously... In reverent action is some reverence. Yet power when in the care of someone should in no manner be overthrown. But your self-willed temper destroyed you.

ANTIGONE: Unwept, unfriended, without marriage-song, I am led in sorrow on this appointed way. I shall be able to see the sacred eye of the sunlight no more, unhappy as I am. Yet none of my friends weep for my tearless destiny.

(ENTER CREON)

CREON: You know, of course, that songs and wails before death would never stop, if thought to be of use. So take that girl away immediately. When you have closed her in a vaulted grave, as I have said, leave her alone and helpless, to die, if so she wishes, or to stay alive within her grave, in such a home. For we are clean in reference to this girl. But she shall be deprived of life on earth.

ANTIGONE: He has spoken this word, meaning my death.

CREON: No, I cannot speak a comforting word. You are sentenced to die. *Creon won't yield*

ANTIGONE: City of my fathers in the land of Thebes, gods, the first to be born, I am led and I cannot stay longer. Look at me, you commanders of Thebes, the last daughter remaining in the house of your kings, see what I suffer and from what men, for I honored what should be honored.

(ANTIGONE is led away by the guards)