

Antigone Questions 1-18

1. The clash between Antigone and Creon is not only a clash of persons. It is also a clash
2. There appear to be a number of discrepancies in the play”
 - a. The rites over the body of Polyneices are performed twice. The second time the guards catch Antigone. Why does Antigone go back a second time?
 - b. When Creon has exonerated Ismene and reaffirmed his sentence on Antigone, the chorus asks what form of punishment he will inflict. Creon tells them that Antigone is to be locked in a cave with a small amount of food. She will die of starvation. But the decree proclaims that the punishment is death by stoning. Why did Creon change the punishment?
 - c. When Creon is beaten down by Teiresias and asks the chorus what he is to do, they reply” “Go and release Antigone.” This is what we expect him to do. But goes first to bury the body of Polyneices and therefore arrives at the tomb too late. Why does Creon stop first to bury Polyneices?
 - d. After the tragedy in the cave, Creon brings back on stage the body of Haemon, but not the body of Antigone. The play’s central character is supposed to be Antigone. Why is she forgotten?

The discrepancies can be explained as errors on the part of Sophocles or as conscious and pertinent elements of his play. Can you determine any dramatic reasons why Sophocles handled these elements as he did? For example, if Creon stopped to bury Polyneices before freeing Antigone, was he not showing reverence to the gods? Was his worship too late? Were the gods punishing him for his tardy recognition of their authority? What was Sophocles’ intention?

3. Sophocles begins his play with the two girls—Antigone and Ismene—two lonely figures, one of whom proposes to defy the king, while the other counsels obedience to the will of the state. Why is this an effective way to begin the play?
4. What expressions in the dialogue highlight the difference in character and view of the two sisters? What is the spectator’s emotional reaction to each of the two sisters?
5. What function does the chorus perform when it first appears? What other functions does the chorus perform throughout the remainder of the play? What is the chorus’s view of the various events of the play? What impression of the chorus does Sophocles wish the reader or spectator to get?
6. When we first see Creon, he is majestic and powerful. What do we learn of his character from his first speech? What is the dominant force in his personality?
7. Two maxims were well ingrained in the mind of the Periclean Greek: “Remember what you are,” and “Nothing in excess.” In what way does Creon reveal that he has forgotten these maxims?
8. What function in the play does the guard or sentry serve? What information does he give the audience concerning Creon’s relationship with the people he rules? What does Creon fear? What do the guards fear? The guard mentions a curious fact: animals did not get at the body of Polyneices. What inferences does Sophocles wish you to draw from this fact?

9. The chorus recites an ode which extols the virtues of man. What are the limits to man's achievements? Under what conditions can he prosper? In what way is the ode a comment on the flaw in Creon's character and a foreshadowing of the tragedy that is to come?
10. Why is Ismene brought back into the play? Why does Sophocles have Ismene remind Creon that Antigone is Haemon's betrothed? Why is there no scene in the play between Antigone and Haemon?
11. Sophocles wishes us to know that Creon is morally insensitive, that he has complete lack of ordinary human sympathy and understanding. How are these qualities revealed in his attitude toward Antigone, toward Ismene, toward Haemon, toward Teiresias? How does Creon change after his argument with Teiresias? Is the change believable? Before Eurydice dies, she curses Creon. Is she justified in this hatred of her husband before her death? What, if anything, was wrong in the relationship between the husband and wife?
12. The ode of the chorus after Antigone and Ismene are removed is ironic. Why? (Creon is present to hear it. It is recited as a comment on Antigone. It explains why disaster befell her. Actually, it is Creon whom the words fit. How?)
13. What information do we get from Haemon in the angry dialogue with his father? (We learn of the intensity of his love for Antigone. We learn what the ordinary citizen thinks of Antigone.) How does Sophocles wish us to view the love between Antigone and Haemon? Is there evidence in the play to prove that Antigone loved Haemon? Why is Haemon unable to move his father?
14. The episodes in which the chorus sings of the power of love; in which the chorus admires Antigone, yet considers her a rash, headstrong girl; and in which Creon sends a sorrowful and friendless Antigone to her death highlight the clash of the power and love themes in the play. What references to power and to love do you find in these episodes? Are there similar references in other episodes? What makes Antigone's farewell moving? Why is her farewell ironic?
15. What function, if any, does the ode of the chorus recounting the tragedies of Danae, Lycurgus, and the two sons of Phineus and Cleopatra have in the play? In other words, is this ode pertinent or irrelevant?
16. What is the ironic purpose in Teiresias' prophecy? What relationship is there between Teiresias' prophecy and Creon's subsequent actions? What is ironic in Creon's actions?
17. Why does Sophocles introduce Eurydice so late in the play? What tragic events does she learn from the messenger? How does she react? How are Eurydice's actions related to the power-love theme?

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ANTIGONE ESSAY TOPICS

Try writing a critical essay, proving with evidence from *Antigone* the validity of any one of the following statements:

1. *Antigone* is essentially a political play dealing with the conflict between the laws of a state and the conscience of an individual citizen of the state.
2. *Antigone* is conceived in the heroic tradition and is a study of an ideal heroine, rare in the world of reality.
3. *Antigone* is an Aristotelian tragedy of character. *Antigone* is the perfect tragic protagonist.
4. It is not *Antigone* who is the tragic protagonist of *Antigone* but Creon, the ruler of Thebes.
5. *Antigone* is a story of conflict and suffering set within a political and religious framework and thereby universalized.
6. *Antigone* deals with conflicts arising from three demands made upon human psyche; the demands of religion (Zeus); the demands of the state (Thebes); and the demands of the human instincts (Aphrodite).
7. Creon is defeated because he does not realize that there are certain ultimates in human life that must be respected because they are divine.
8. People like *Antigone* who are desperate enough or noble enough to follow their own instinct or ideals will recoil against shortsighted statecraft, and the defeat of a tyrant will seem like the carrying out of a divine law.