

AP Literature

Oedipus Rex

1. Describe the structure of the play. How is its plot constructed and developed? Explain the focus of each scene. What is the purpose of poetic odes that punctuate the dramatic action of the play?
2. What makes Oedipus a tragic hero? What makes his predicament fascinating rather than merely horrifying? Account for the continued appeal of the play.
3. How does Oedipus exhibit weakness of character? Point to lines that reveal him as imperfectly noble in his words, deeds, or treatment of others.
4. Identify and explain the different types of irony and paradox in *Oedipus Rex* (ex. Tiresias, though blind, is a seer.) Cite at least four other uses of these devices.
5. Discuss the purpose of Oedipus blinding himself and its relationship to the theme of Oedipus (Blindness at the beginning of the play).
 - a.) How is imagery of light and darkness employed throughout the play? How is it related to Oedipus's blindness?
 - b.) Discuss Sophocles numerous references to sight as a symbol of seeing and knowing truth (Look at the speeches of Tiresias and Oedipus).
6. What roles do the chorus and choragus assume? Compare their functions in the beginning, middle and end of the play. Cite specific examples of its "ideal spectator" function in commenting on the action. Consider the relationship between the odes and the episodes, as well as the content of the odes themselves.
7. Consider the character of Jocasta. Is she a "flat" character—a generalized queen figure—or an individual with distinctive traits of personality? Point to speeches or details in the play to back up your opinion.
8. Several image chains run throughout *Oedipus Rex*. Cite several examples of each of the following and show how each series of images is integrated with the themes of the play:
 - a. ship metaphors and harbor haven symbolism
 - b. metaphors of vision and blindness
 - c. hunting and tracking metaphors
9. Evaluate Oedipus's actions. Is he to blame for what happens? Account for his change of attitude and manner by comparing his speech and behavior in the opening and closing scenes.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Tiresias says, "Things will be / As we shall see. Fate's engine / Is beyond the control of man's hands." In what way is Oedipus a victim of fate? In what way is he personally "responsible" for his "punishment"? Remember that while he did not knowingly kill his father, he did kill a man at the crossroads.
2. Do you agree with the notion that life is tragic and full of suffering? Do you believe that anything can happen to anyone and that even the innocent suffer? Is this part of the message that Sophocles wants the audience to take with them when they leave a performance of *Oedipus the King*? Why or why not?
3. Consider the fact that despite the best efforts of both Oedipus and his parents, they were unable to avoid their fate. Do you find this ironic? Why or why not? Is Sophocles suggesting that fate is ironic? Why or why not?
4. After Oedipus realizes that he has killed his father and married his mother, the chorus warns, "We are all Oedipus, but to some heaven is merciful, / Forbidding the unfolding of the pattern / To the ultimate horror, the thing we have seen." Are they saying that fate is not necessarily destiny? That even though something is foreordained, it does not necessarily have to come to pass?
5. Should we blame Oedipus for his actions? Pardon him? Pity him? Discuss.
6. At the close of the play, the chorus warns, "Call no man happy till his days surcease." Do you agree with this? Why or why not?

Oedipus Essay Prompt:

Write an essay in which you argue whether Oedipus is to blame for what happens. Is it fate or free will? Account for his change of attitude and manner by comparing his speech and behavior in the opening and closing scenes. Be sure to state your claim precisely, distinguishing your claims from alternative or opposing claims. Develop your claim and counter claim fairly and thoroughly, supplying the most relevant evidence for each, while pointing out the strengths of your claim and the limitations of the counterclaim. Use specific rhetorical devices to support your assertions. Provide a concluding statement or section that supports the argument presented.