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Reflections: A Student Response Journal



*Oedipus Rex*  
Sophocles



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*Oedipus Rex*  
**Sophocles**



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## To The Student

Although we may read a novel, play, or work of non-fiction for enjoyment, each time we read one, we are building and practicing important basic reading skills. In our ever-more complex society, in which reading has become more and more crucial for success, this, in itself, is an important reason to spend time reading for enjoyment.

Some readers, however, are able to go beyond basic reading techniques and are able to practice higher thinking skills by reflecting on what they have read and how what they read affects them. It is this act of reflection—that is, stopping to think about what you are reading—that this journal is attempting to encourage.

To aid you, we have included writing prompts for each section; however, if you find something that you wish to respond to in the book more compelling than our prompts, you should write about that. We hope you enjoy reading this book and that the act of responding to what you have read increases this enjoyment.

After you read the indicated sections, choose the questions to which you will respond. Keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers to these prompts, and there is no one direction in which you must go.

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## *Oedipus Rex*

### **Pre-Reading**

1. *Oedipus Rex* is a very famous play by Sophocles. It is one of the very few ancient Greek plays that have survived into the modern era.

Without beginning to read the play or even looking at the book jacket, write a text message to a friend, telling the person what you think happens in this play.

2. Reading a play is very different from seeing it actually performed. In many ways, there are great challenges in reading a play versus reading other forms of literature, such as novels or poetry. What kinds of things should a reader do to understand a play, such as *Oedipus Rex*, by reading it instead of watching actors perform it? Write a preface for a study guide on *Oedipus Rex*, telling students how reading a play is different from reading other types of literature and giving them practical advice about how to study a play. There is no need to discuss the actual play; your guide should be able to be applied to any play.

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## *Oedipus Rex*

In reading the notes provided to you in the text, you will see that Hades, who is often thought of as a malevolent god, is also known as the god of wealth. This creates a link between wealth and evil. In fact, the two have been connected for a long time. You may have even heard the old adage that “money is the root of all evil.”

Does wealth bring evil with it, though? Do you think that being rich makes a person inherently evil? Write an opinion piece for a financial magazine, giving your views about whether wealth makes a person evil, as the priest in *Oedipus Rex* implies.

6. The priest, seeing the death and destruction that has come to Thebes, begs Oedipus to save the city. Oedipus is a learned man, an intellectual, and he has proven the strength of his mind and his body many times. What is his first line of defense when it comes to saving Thebes, though? He sends his brother-in-law to visit the oracle at Delphi, a very famous and wise person who is said to be the representative of the gods on earth, to learn what the gods think should be done.

*Oedipus Rex* was written thousands of years ago. If Oedipus were alive today, consulting the oracle at Delphi may not be his first step to getting the city back on track. Most modern government leaders, even kings, would probably use other methods of fixing problems in their communities. As the President of the United States, write a letter to Oedipus, telling him what modern government leaders might do if they were in his situation.

7. The priest alludes to the fact that Oedipus defeated the last thing that was a threat to Thebes: the Sphinx. The story goes that the goddess Hera sent the Sphinx, a monster that was part lion, part eagle, and part woman, to terrorize Thebes. The Sphinx would ask riddles of anyone who tried to pass her. If the person got the riddle wrong, she would eat him. Oedipus was the only one who could defeat the Sphinx, correctly answering the riddle that she posed.

As you can imagine, the people of Thebes were overjoyed that Oedipus defeated the Sphinx. Write a proclamation to be presented to Oedipus, thanking him, on behalf of the people of Thebes, for saving them from the awful Sphinx.

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*Oedipus Rex*

14. Oedipus has heard what the gods have decreed: that Thebes will be successful and productive again only if the man who killed Laius is exiled from the city. Seeking a second opinion, he sends for Tiresias, a gifted holy man who has the ability to see into the future.

Predicting the future, or being a “seer,” is a type of extra-sensory perception. Many believe, even today, that psychics have the power to see into the future. Do you believe in such things? Write a posting for the website for The Association of American Psychics, telling them your views about psychic ability. Can people really predict the future, or is it impossible to do so?

15. Tiresias can “see” into the future, yet he is physically blind. This is an example of Sophocles’ use of irony. In fact, irony plays a big role in Oedipus’ downfall, as you will see later in the play.

Using Tiresias as an example, write a message to a classmate, explaining how irony works. What does it mean when something is ironic?

16. Oedipus bullies Tiresias into telling him what he knows about the murder of Laius. Tiresias hesitates to tell Oedipus the truth, that Oedipus, himself, is the murderer and, as such, is also the person who has brought the curse onto Thebes. It could be that Tiresias is trying to spare Oedipus’ feelings, but, of course, who would want to be the person to tell the king such bad news? Finally giving into Oedipus’ threats, Tiresias tells Oedipus the information he wants to hear. Rather than being pleased at getting what he wants, however, Oedipus flies into a rage.

It appears that Oedipus is a bit emotionally unstable. True, he is the king, so he has the right to say and do whatever he pleases. Even so, he does have an awful temper.

As a psychiatrist, write a psychological evaluation of Oedipus, using examples from the play to describe his behavior and explaining why Oedipus acts the way he does.

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## Oedipus Rex

Write a royal proclamation from Queen Jocasta that will be presented to the people of Thebes. In this proclamation, reassure the public that the king is doing everything he can to fight the plagues in Thebes, but also caution them about falsely interpreting the signs from the gods, telling them what can happen if they misinterpret the signs.

25. Jocasta tells Oedipus the details of her first husband, Laius' murder. It is assumed that he was killed by a band of thieves, but no one in Thebes witnessed the attack, so no one can say what happened with any certainty. The only people who know what happened are the killers, the men who were killed, Laius, and the men in his entourage.

The murder of the king must have been a pretty shocking event in the city of Thebes. The mystery surrounding the king's death can only add to the intrigue of his murder. Write a set of headlines for the *Theban Times*. You may also include an actual article about the murder.

26. Oedipus has some pretty serious thinking to do. He almost had his best friend, Creon, exiled, and he socked harshly to the otherwise highly regarded soothsayer, Tiresias. When Jocasta tells him the details of how her first husband, Laius, was killed, however, Oedipus remembers an altercation in which he was involved that sounds very similar. Could Oedipus really be the slayer of the previous king of Thebes?

As Oedipus, write a diary entry, something only you would read, in which you try to figure out if you could possibly have killed Laius.

27. Where Oedipus is short-tempered and volatile, Jocasta is calm and rational. For example, when Oedipus first hears that he may be the man who is causing the problems in Thebes, he blows up into a rage. When he tells Jocasta about it, however, she tells him that there must be a perfectly rational explanation and urges him to calm down. In terms of temperament, Oedipus and Jocasta certainly complement each other.