

ANTIGONE

SOPHOCLES

translated by

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PERSONS REPRESENTED

ANTIGONE (an tig' ə nē'), daughter of Oedipus, former King of Thebes

ISMENE (is mē' nē), another daughter of Oedipus

EURDYCE (yōō rid' i sē'), wife of Creon

CREON (krē' än'), King of Thebes, uncle of Antigone and Ismene

HAIMON (hī mən), Creon's son, engaged to Antigone

TEIRESIAS (tī rē' sē əs), a blind prophet

A SENTRY

A MESSENGER

CHORUS

CHORAGOS (kō rā' gəs), leader of the chorus

A BOY who leads Teiresias

GUARDS

SERVANTS

Prologue—Scene 2

Scene. Before the palace of CREON, King of Thebes. A central double door, and two lateral doors. A platform extends the length of the facade, and from this platform three steps lead down into the "orchestra," or chorus-ground.

Time. Dawn of the day after the repulse of the Argive¹ army from the assault on Thebes.

Prologue

ANTIGONE and ISMENE enter from the central door of the Palace.]

ANTIGONE. Ismene, dear sister,
You would think that we had already suffered enough
For the curse on Oedipus:²
I cannot imagine any grief
That you and I have not gone through. And now—
Have they told you of the new decree of our King Creon?

ISMENE. I have heard nothing; I know
That two sisters lost two brothers, a double death
In a single hour; and I know that the Argive army
Fled in the night; but beyond this, nothing.

ANTIGONE. I thought so. And that is why I wanted you
To come out here with me. There is something we must do.

ISMENE. Why do you speak so strangely?

ANTIGONE. Listen, Ismene:
Creon buried our brother Eteocles
With military honors, gave him a soldier's funeral,
And it was right that he should; but Polyneices,
Who fought as bravely and died as miserably,—
They say that Creon has sworn
No one shall bury him, no one mourn for him,
But his body must lie in the fields, a sweet treasure
For carrion birds³ to find as they search for food.
That is what they say, and our good Creon is coming here
To announce it publicly; and the penalty—
Stoning to death in the public square!

There it is,

◀ **Critical Viewing** This Greek temple is dedicated to Poseidon, god of the sea. What does it suggest about the importance of the gods in ancient Greece? Explain. **[Draw Conclusions]**

1. **Argive** (är' giv') from Argos, the capital of a section of ancient Greece.

2. **curse on Oedipus** reference to the fate of Oedipus, who was doomed by a decree of the gods to kill his father and marry his mother while ignorant of their true identities.

Literary Analysis

Protagonist and Antagonist What conflict between Antigone and Creon does Antigone begin explaining here?

3. **carrion** (kar' ē ən) **birds** scavenger birds, such as vultures.

✓ Reading Check

What order will Creon give about Polyneices' body?

And now you can prove what you are:
A true sister, or a traitor to your family.

ISMENE. Antigone, you are mad! What could I possibly do?

30 **ANTIGONE.** You must decide whether you will help me or not.

ISMENE. I do not understand you. Help you in what?

ANTIGONE. Ismene, I am going to bury him. Will you come?

ISMENE. Bury him! You have just said the new law forbids it.

ANTIGONE. He is my brother. And he is your brother, too.

35 **ISMENE.** But think of the danger! Think what Creon will do!

ANTIGONE. Creon is not strong enough to stand in my way.

ISMENE. Ah sister!

Oedipus died, everyone hating him
For what his own search brought to light, his eyes
40 Ripped out by his own hand; and Iocaste died,
His mother and wife at once: she twisted the cords
That strangled her life; and our two brothers died,
Each killed by the other's sword. And we are left:
But oh, Antigone,

45 Think how much more terrible than these
Our own death would be if we should go against

Creon

And do what he has forbidden! We are only women,
We cannot fight with men, Antigone!

50 The law is strong, we must give in to the law
In this thing, and in worse. I beg the Dead
To forgive me, but I am helpless: I must yield
To those in authority. And I think it is dangerous
business

To be always meddling.

ANTIGONE. If that is what you think,

55 I should not want you, even if you asked to come.
You have made your choice, you can be what you want to be.
But I will bury him; and if I must die,
I say that this crime is holy: I shall lie down
With him in death, and I shall be as dear
60 To him as he to me.

It is the dead,
Not the living, who make the longest demands;
We die for ever . . .

You may do as you like,

Reading Skill
Summarizing Review Ismene's speech and then retell the tragic history of Antigone's family.

Literary Analysis
Protagonist and Antagonist What details in Antigone's speech give the reader reason to sympathize with Antigone?

55 Since apparently the laws of the gods mean nothing to you.

ISMENE. They mean a great deal to me; but I have no strength
To break laws that were made for the public good.

ANTIGONE. That must be your excuse, I suppose. But as for me,
I will bury the brother I love.

70 ISMENE. Antigone,
I am so afraid for you!

ANTIGONE. You need not be:
You have yourself to consider, after all.

ISMENE. But no one must hear of this, you must tell no one!
75 I will keep it a secret, I promise!

ANTIGONE. Oh tell it! Tell everyone!
Think how they'll hate you when it all comes out
If they learn that you knew about it all the time!

ISMENE. So fiery! You should be cold with fear.

80 ANTIGONE. Perhaps. But I am doing only what I must.

ISMENE. But can you do it? I say that you cannot.

ANTIGONE. Very well: when my strength gives out, I shall do no more.

ISMENE. Impossible things should not be tried at all.

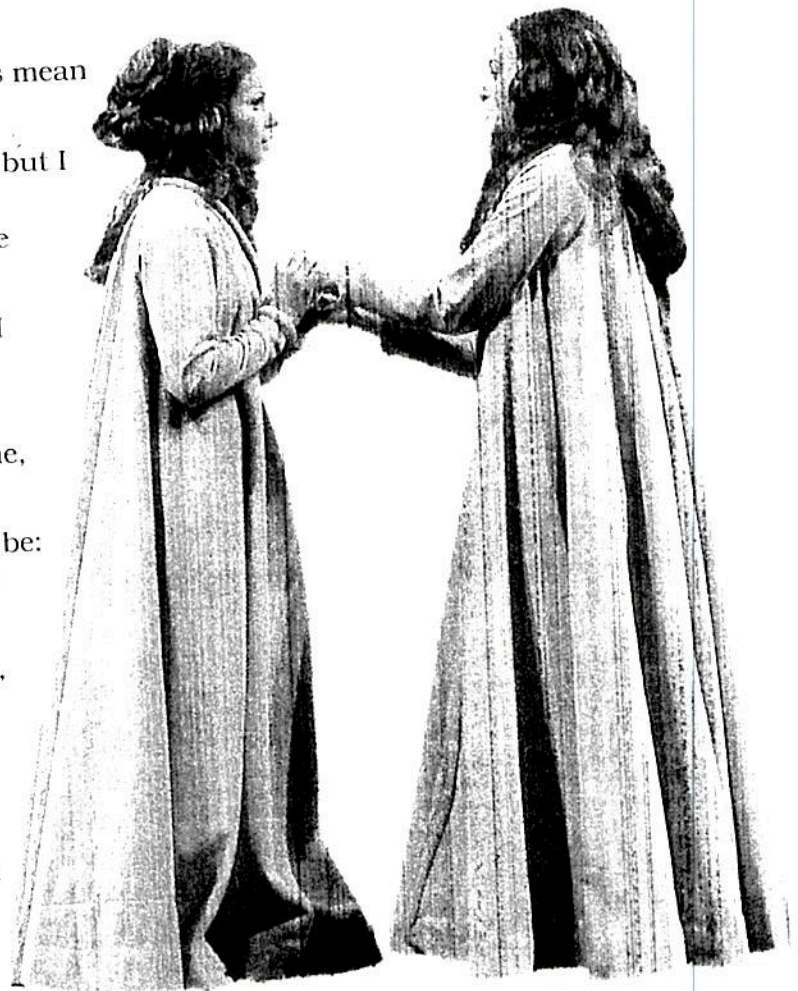
ANTIGONE. Go away, Ismene:

85 I shall be hating you soon, and the dead will too,
For your words are hateful. Leave me my foolish plan:
I am not afraid of the danger; if it means death,
It will not be the worst of deaths—death without honor.

ISMENE. Go then, if you feel that you must.

90 You are unwise,
But a loyal friend indeed to those who love you.

Exit into the Palace. ANTIGONE goes off, left. Enter the CHORUS.]



A Critical Viewing
Which details of this image convey the intense emotions of Antigone and Ismene's conversation?
[Analyze]

Reading Check

What does Antigone ask Ismene to decide?

Parados

CHORUS.

[STROPHE 1]

Now the long blade of the sun, lying
Level east to west, touches with glory
Thebes of the Seven Gates.⁴ Open, unlidded
Eye of golden day! O marching light
5 Across the eddy and rush of Dirce's stream,⁵
Striking the white shields of the enemy
Thrown headlong backward from the blaze of morning!

CHORAGOS. Polyneices their commander

Roused them with windy phrases,
10 He the wild eagle screaming
Insults above our land,
His wings their shields of snow,
His crest their marshalled helms.

CHORUS.

[ANTISTROPHE 1]

Against our seven gates in a yawning ring
15 The famished spears came onward in the night;
But before his jaws were sated with our blood,
Or pinefire took the garland of our towers,
He was thrown back; and as he turned, great Thebes—
No tender victim for his noisy power—
20 Rose like a dragon behind him, shouting war.

CHORAGOS. For God hates utterly
The bray of bragging tongues;
And when he beheld their smiling,
Their swagger of golden helms,
25 The frown of his thunder blasted
Their first man from our walls.

CHORUS.

[STROPHE 2]

We heard his shout of triumph high in the air
Turn to a scream; far out in a flaming arc
He fell with his windy torch, and the earth struck him.
30 And others storming in fury no less than his
Found shock of death in the dusty joy of battle.

CHORAGOS. Seven captains at seven gates
Yielded their clanging arms to the god
That bends the battle-line and breaks it.
35 These two only, brothers in blood,
Face to face in matchless rage,
Mirroring each the other's death,
Clashed in long combat.

4. **Seven Gates** The city of Thebes was defended by walls containing seven entrances.

5. **Dirce's** (dur' saz) stream small river near Thebes into which the body of Dirce, one of the city's early queens, was thrown after her murder.

Vocabulary Builder
sated (sāt' id) adj.
satisfied; provided with more than enough

Reading Skill
Summarizing
Reread the Parados and summarize Polyneices' attack on Thebes.

CHORUS.

[ANTISTROPHE 2]

But now in the beautiful morning of victory
Let Thebes of the many chariots sing for joy!
With hearts for dancing we'll take leave of war:
Our temples shall be sweet with hymns of praise,
And the long night shall echo with our chorus.

Scene II

CHORAGOS. But now at last our new King is coming:
Creon of Thebes, Menoikeus⁶ son.
In this auspicious dawn of his reign
What are the new complexities
That shifting Fate has woven for him?
What is his counsel? Why has he summoned
The old men to hear him?

[Enter CREON from the Palace, center. He addresses the CHORUS from the up step.]

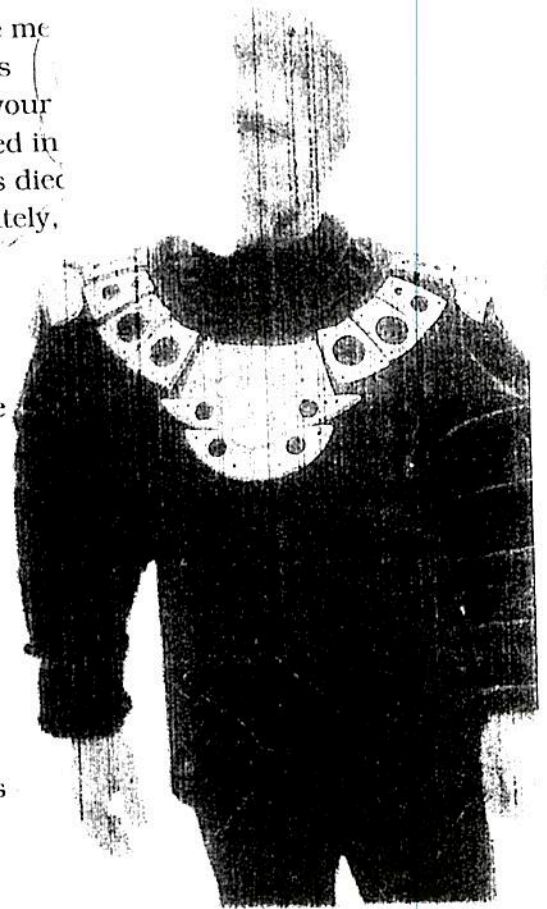
CREON. Gentlemen: I have the honor to inform you that our
Ship of State, which recent storms have threatened to
destroy, has come safely to harbor at last, guided by the me-
ciful wisdom of Heaven. I have summoned you here this
morning because I know that I can depend upon you: your
devotion to King Laios was absolute; you never hesitated in
your duty to our late ruler Oedipus; and when Oedipus died
your loyalty was transferred to his children. Unfortunately,
as you know, his two sons, the princes Eteocles and
Polyneices, have killed each other in battle; and I, as
the next in blood, have succeeded to the full power of
the throne.

I am aware, of course, that no Ruler can expect complete
loyalty from his subjects until he has been tested in
office. Nevertheless, I say to you at the very outset
that I have nothing but contempt for the kind of
Governor who is afraid, for whatever reason, to follow
the course that he knows is best for the State; and as for
the man who sets private friendship above the public
welfare,—I have no use for him, either. I call God to
witness that if I saw my country headed for ruin, I
should not be afraid to speak out plainly; and I need
hardly remind you that I would never have any dealings

6. Menoikeus' (me noi' ke as)

Reading Check

What does Creon indicate that he puts above private friendship?



>Critical Viewing What elements of this actor's appearance reflect Creon's status as king? [Interpret]

with an enemy of the people. No one values friendship more highly than I; but we must remember that friends made at the risk of wrecking our Ship are not real friends at all.

These are my principles, at any rate, and that is why I

35 have made the following decision concerning the sons of Oedipus: Eteocles, who died as a man should die, fighting for his country, is to be buried with full military honors, with all the ceremony that is usual when the greatest heroes die; but his brother Polyneices, who broke his
40 exile to come back with fire and sword against his native city and the shrines of his fathers' gods, whose one idea was to spill the blood of his blood and sell his own people into slavery—Polyneices, I say, is to have no burial: no man is to touch him or say the least prayer for him; he shall lie
45 on the plain, unburied; and the birds and the scavenging dogs can do with him whatever they like.

This is my command, and you can see the wisdom behind it. As long as I am King, no traitor is going to be honored with the loyal man. But whoever shows by word and
50 deed that he is on the side of the State,—he shall have my respect while he is living, and my reverence when he is dead.

CHORAGOS. If that is your will, Creon son of Menoikeus,
You have the right to enforce it: we are yours.

55 **CREON.** That is my will. Take care that you do your part.

CHORAGOS. We are old men: let the younger ones carry it out.

CREON. I do not mean that: the sentries have been appointed.

CHORAGOS. Then what is it that you would have us do?

CREON. You will give no support to whoever breaks this law.

60 **CHORAGOS.** Only a crazy man is in love with death!

CREON. And death it is; yet money talks, and the wisest
Have sometimes been known to count a few coins too many.

[Enter SENTRY from left.]

SENTRY. I'll not say that I'm out of breath from running, King,
because every time I stopped to think about what I have to
65 tell you, I felt like going back. And all the time a voice kept saying, "You fool, don't you know you're walking straight into trouble?"; and then another voice: "Yes, but if you let somebody else get the news to Creon first, it will be even worse than that for you!" But good sense won out, at least I hope it was

Literary Analysis
Protagonist and Antagonist How do Creon's words in lines 42–49 show that he is Antigone's antagonist?

Reading Skill
Summarizing Summarize the main points in Creon's speech.

70 good sense, and here I am with a story that makes no sense
at all; but I'll tell it anyhow, because, as they say, what's
going to happen's going to happen, and—

CREON. Come to the point. What have you to say?

SENTRY. I did not do it. I did not see who did it. You must not
75 punish me for what someone else has done.

CREON. A comprehensive defense! More effective, perhaps,
If I knew its purpose. Come: what is it?

SENTRY. A dreadful thing . . . I don't know how to put it—

CREON. Out with it!

80 **SENTRY.** Well, then;
The dead man—
Polyneices—

*[Pause. The SENTRY is overcome, fumbles for words. CREON waits
impassively.]*

out there—
someone,—

85 New dust on the slimy flesh!

[Pause. No sign from CREON.]

Someone has given it burial that way, and
Gone . . .

[Long pause. CREON finally speaks with deadly control.]

CREON. And the man who dared do this?

SENTRY. I swear I
90 Do not know! You must believe me!

Listen:

The ground was dry, not a sign of digging, no,
Not a wheeltrack in the dust, no trace of anyone.
It was when they relieved us this morning: and one of them,
95 The corporal, pointed to it.

There it was,


The strangest—

Look:

100 The body, just mounded over with light dust: you see?
Not buried really, but as if they'd covered it
Just enough for the ghost's peace. And no sign
Of dogs or any wild animal that had been there.

And then what a scene there was! Every man of us
Accusing the other: we all proved the other man did it,

Write the SENTRY's report
through line 102.

 Reading Check

What has happened to
Polyneices' body?

105 We all had proof that we could not have done it.
We were ready to take hot iron in our hands,
Walk through fire, swear by all the gods,
It was not I!
I do not know who it was, but it was not I!

[CREON'S rage has been mounting steadily, but the SENTRY is too intent upon his story to notice it.]

110 And then, when this came to nothing, someone said
A thing that silenced us and made us stare
Down at the ground: you had to be told the news,
And one of us had to do it! We threw the dice,
And the bad luck fell to me. So here I am,
115 No happier to be here than you are to have me:
Nobody likes the man who brings bad news.

CHORAGOS. I have been wondering, King: can it be that the
gods have done this?

CREON. [*Furiously*] Stop!

120 Must you doddering wrecks
Go out of your heads entirely? "The gods!"
Intolerable!
The gods favor this corpse? Why? How had he served them?
Tried to loot their temples, burn their images,
Yes, and the whole State, and its laws with it!
125 Is it your senile opinion that the gods love to honor bad men?
A pious thought!—

No, from the very beginning
There have been those who have whispered together,
Stiff-necked anarchists, putting their heads together,
130 Scheming against me in alleys. These are the men,
And they have bribed my own guard to do this thing.

Money! [*Sententiously*]
There's nothing in the world so demoralizing as money.
Down go your cities,
135 Homes gone, men gone, honest hearts corrupted,
Crookedness of all kinds, and all for money!

[*To SENTRY*] But you—!
I swear by God and by the throne of God,
The man who has done this thing shall pay for it!
140 Find that man, bring him here to me, or your death
Will be the least of your problems: I'll string you up
Alive, and there will be certain ways to make you
Discover your employer before you die;

Literary Analysis

Protagonist and Antagonist What does Creon's fear of people scheming against him show about his conflict with Antigone?

Vocabulary Builder
sententiously (*sen-ten-shəs-lē*) *adv.* in a way that shows excessive fondness for wise sayings; in lecturing tones

And the process may teach you a lesson you seem
to have missed:

The dearest profit is sometimes all too dear:
That depends on the source. Do you understand
me?

A fortune won is often misfortune.

SENTRY. King, may I speak?

CREON. Your very voice distresses me.

SENTRY. Are you sure that it is my voice, and not your
conscience?

CREON. By God, he wants to analyze me now!

SENTRY. It is not what I say, but what has been done,
that hurts you.

CREON. You talk too much.

SENTRY. Maybe; but I've done nothing.

CREON. Sold your soul for some silver: that's all you've done.

SENTRY. How dreadful it is when the right judge judges wrong!

CREON. Your figures of speech

May entertain you now; but unless you bring me the man,
You will get little profit from them in the end.

[Exit CREON into the Palace.]

SENTRY. "Bring me the man"—!

I'd like nothing better than bringing him the man!
But bring him or not, you have seen the last of me here.
At any rate, I am safe!

[Exit SENTRY.]

Ode I

CHORUS.

[STROPHE 1]

Numberless are the world's wonders, but none
More wonderful than man; the stormgray sea
Yields to his prows, the huge crests bear him high;
Earth, holy and inexhaustible, is graven
With shining furrows where his plows have gone
Year after year, the timeless labor of stallions.

[ANTISTROPHE 1]

The lightboned birds and beasts that cling to cover,
The lithe fish lighting their reaches of dim water,
All are taken, tamed in the net of his mind;
The lion on the hill, the wild horse windy-maned,



A Critical Viewing
What does this ancient
Greek helmet indicate
about the type of
weapons against
which the sentry was
prepared to defend
himself? **[Infer]**

 **Reading Check**

What does Creon
order the sentry to
do?

Resign to him; and his blunt yoke has broken
The sultry shoulders of the mountain bull.

[STROPHE 2]

Words also, and thought as rapid as air,
He fashions to his good use; statecraft is his,
15 And his the skill that deflects the arrows of snow,
The spears of winter rain: from every wind
He has made himself secure—from all but one:
In the late wind of death he cannot stand.

[ANTISTROPHE 2]

O clear intelligence, force beyond all measure!
20 O fate of man, working both good and evil!
When the laws are kept, how proudly his city stands!
When the laws are broken, what of his city then?
Never may the anarchic man find rest at my hearth,
Never be it said that my thoughts are his thoughts.

Vocabulary Builder
deflects (dē flekts') v.
turns or makes go
to one side

Reading Skill
Summarizing Summa-
rize the main ideas in
lines 10–24 of the
chorus's ode.

Scene 2

[Re-enter SENTRY leading ANTIGONE.]

CHORAGOS. What does this mean? Surely this captive
woman
Is the Princess, Antigone. Why should she be
taken?

SENTRY. Here is the one who did it! We caught her
In the very act of burying him.—Where is Creon?

5 **CHORAGOS.** Just coming from the house.

[Enter CREON, center.]

CREON. What has happened?
Why have you come back so soon?

SENTRY. [Expansively] O King,
A man should never be too sure of
anything:
10 I would have sworn
That you'd not see me here again: your
anger
Frightened me so, and the things you
threatened me with;
But how could I tell then
That I'd be able to solve the case so soon?
15 No dice-throwing this time: I was only too
glad to come!

✓ **Critical Viewing**
Judging from this
image, what is
Antigone's reaction to
her capture?
[Connect]



Here is this woman. She is the guilty one:
We found her trying to bury him.
Take her, then: question her; judge her as you will.
I am through with the whole thing now, and glad of it.

CREON. But this is Antigone! Why have you brought her here?

SENTRY. She was burying him, I tell you!

CREON. [*Severely*] Is this the truth?

SENTRY. I saw her with my own eyes. Can I say more?

CREON. The details: come, tell me quickly!

SENTRY. It was like this:

After those terrible threats of yours, King,
We went back and brushed the dust away from the body.
The flesh was soft by now, and stinking,
So we sat on a hill to windward and kept guard.
No napping this time! We kept each other awake.
But nothing happened until the white round sun
Whirled in the center of the round sky over us:
Then, suddenly,

A storm of dust roared up from the earth, and the sky
Went out, the plain vanished with all its trees
In the stinging dark. We closed our eyes and endured it.
The whirlwind lasted a long time, but it passed:
And then we looked, and there was Antigone!
I have seen

A mother bird come back to a stripped nest, heard
Her crying bitterly a broken note or two
For the young ones stolen. Just so, when this girl
Found the bare corpse, and all her love's work wasted,
She wept, and cried on heaven to damn the hands
That had done this thing.

And then she brought more dust
And sprinkled wine three times for her brother's ghost.
We ran and took her at once. She was not afraid,
Not even when we charged her with what she had done.
She denied nothing.

And this was a comfort to me,
And some uneasiness: for it is a good thing
To escape from death, but it is no great pleasure
To bring death to a friend.

Yet I always say
There is nothing so comfortable as your own safe skin!
CREON. [*Slowly, dangerously*] And you, Antigone,

Literary Analysis
**Protagonist and
Antagonist** Has
Creon realized that he
is Antigone's
antagonist before this
point? Explain.

 Reading Check

What has the sentry
seen Antigone doing?

You with your head hanging,—do you confess this thing?

ANTIGONE. I do. I deny nothing.

60 **CREON.** [To SENTRY]

You may go.

[Exit SENTRY.]

[To ANTIGONE] Tell me, tell me briefly:
Had you heard my proclamation touching this matter?

ANTIGONE. It was public. Could I help hearing it?

CREON. And yet you dared defy the law.

65 **ANTIGONE.**

I dared.

It was not God's proclamation. That final Justice
That rules the world below makes no such laws.

Your edict, King, was strong,
But all your strength is weakness itself against
70 The immortal unrecorded laws of God.
They are not merely now: they were, and shall be,
Operative forever, beyond man utterly.

I knew I must die, even without your decree:
I am only mortal. And if I must die
75 Now, before it is my time to die,
Surely this is no hardship: can anyone
Living, as I live, with evil all about me,
Think Death less than a friend? This death of mine
Is of no importance; but if I had left my brother
80 Lying in death unburied, I should have suffered.
Now I do not.

You smile at me. Ah Creon,
Think me a fool, if you like; but it may well be
That a fool convicts me of folly.

85 **CHORAGOS.** Like father, like daughter: both headstrong, deaf to
reason!

She has never learned to yield.

CREON.

She has much to learn.

The inflexible heart breaks first, the toughest iron
Cracks first, and the wildest horses bend their necks
90 At the pull of the smallest curb.

Pride? In a slave?

This girl is guilty of a double insolence,
Breaking the given laws and boasting of it.
Who is the man here,
95 She or I, if this crime goes unpunished?
Sister's child, or more than sister's child,

Vocabulary Build
edict (ē' dikt') n.
public order; decree

Literary Analysis
Protagonist and Antagonist Which details in this scene solidify Antigone's role as protagonist and Creon's role as antagonist?

Or closer yet in blood—she and her sister
Win bitter death for this!

[To SERVANTS] Go, some of you,

Arrest Ismene. I accuse her equally.

Bring her: you will find her sniffing in the house there.

Her mind's a traitor: crimes kept in the dark
Cry for light, and the guardian brain shudders;

But how much worse than this

Is brazen boasting of barefaced anarchy!

ANTIGONE. Creon, what more do you want than my death?

CREON.

Nothing.

That gives me everything.

ANTIGONE.

Then I beg you: kill me.

This talking is a great weariness: your words
Are distasteful to me, and I am sure that mine
Seem so to you. And yet they should not seem so:
I should have praise and honor for what I have done.
All these men here would praise me
Were their lips not frozen shut with fear of you.

[Bitterly]

Ah the good fortune of kings,

Licensed to say and do whatever they please!

CREON. You are alone here in that opinion.

ANTIGONE. No, they are with me. But they keep their tongues in
leash.

CREON. Maybe. But you are guilty, and they are not.

ANTIGONE. There is no guilt in reverence for the dead.

CREON. But Eteocles—was he not your brother too?

ANTIGONE. My brother too.

CREON.

And you insult his memory?

ANTIGONE. [Softly] The dead man would not say that I insult it.

CREON. He would: for you honor a traitor as much as him.

ANTIGONE. His own brother, traitor or not, and equal in blood.

CREON. He made war on his country. Eteocles defended it.

ANTIGONE. Nevertheless, there are honors due all the dead.

CREON. But not the same for the wicked as for the just.

ANTIGONE. Ah Creon, Creon,

Vocabulary Builder

brazen (brā' zen)

adj. shameless; bold

Reading Skill

Summarizing Summarize the argument in lines 120–130.

✓ Reading Check

What does Creon decide will be done with Antigone?

Which of us can say what the gods hold wicked?

CREON. An enemy is an enemy, even dead.

ANTIGONE. It is my nature to join in love, not hate.

135 **CREON.** [Finally losing patience] Go join them, then; if you
must have your love,
Find it in hell!

CHORAGOS. But see, Ismene comes:

[Enter ISMENE, guarded.]

Those tears are sisterly, the cloud
That shadows her eyes rains down gentle sorrow.

140 **CREON.** You too, Ismene,
Snake in my ordered house, sucking my blood
Stealthily—and all the time I never knew

✓ Critical Viewing
What details of this
image suggest that
the chorus is pleading
with one of the
characters? Explain.
[Analyze]



That these two sisters were aiming at my throne!

Ismene,

Do you confess your share in this crime, or deny it?

Answer me.

ISMENE. Yes, if she will let me say so. I am guilty.

ANTIGONE. [*Coldly*] No, Ismene. You have no right to say so.
You would not help me, and I will not have you help me.

ISMENE. But now I know what you meant; and I am here
To join you, to take my share of punishment.

ANTIGONE. The dead man and the gods who rule the dead
Know whose act this was. Words are not friends.

ISMENE. Do you refuse me, Antigone? I want to die with you:
I too have a duty that I must discharge to the dead.

ANTIGONE. You shall not lessen my death by sharing it.

ISMENE. What do I care for life when you are dead?

ANTIGONE. Ask Creon. You're always hanging on his opinions.

ISMENE. You are laughing at me. Why, Antigone?

ANTIGONE. It's a joyless laughter, Ismene.

ISMENE. But can I do nothing?

ANTIGONE. Yes. Save yourself. I shall not envy you.
There are those who will praise you; I shall have honor, too.

ISMENE. But we are equally guilty!

ANTIGONE. No more, Ismene.
You are alive, but I belong to Death.

CREON. [*To the CHORUS*] Gentlemen, I beg you to observe these
girls:

One has just now lost her mind; the other,
It seems, has never had a mind at all.

ISMENE. Grief teaches the steadiest minds to waver, King.

CREON. Yours certainly did, when you assumed guilt with the
guilty!

ISMENE. But how could I go on living without her?

CREON. You are.
She is already dead.

ISMENE. But your own son's bride!

Literary Analysis

Protagonist and Antagonist How does the contrast between the sisters emphasize Antigone's role as the protagonist?

Vocabulary Builder

waver (wā' vər) v. show indecision; fluctuate

✓ Reading Check

What does Ismene say she wants to do?

CREON. There are places enough for him to push his plow.
I want no wicked women for my sons!

ISMENE. O dearest Haimon, how your father wrongs you!

CREON. I've had enough of your childish talk of marriage!

180 **CHORAGOS.** Do you really intend to steal this girl from your son?

CREON. No; Death will do that for me.

CHORAGOS.

Then she must die?

CREON. [Ironically] You dazzle me.

—But enough of this talk!

185 [To GUARDS] You, there, take them away and guard them well:

For they are but women, and even brave men run
When they see Death coming.

[Exit ISMENE, ANTIGONE, and GUARDS.]

Literary Analysis
Protagonist and Antagonist What fact may force Haimon to become involved in the conflict between Creon and Antigone?

Literature in Context Humanities Connection

Greek Chorus

In ancient Greek theater, the chorus was central to both the production and the meaning of a tragedy. Through dance and song, the chorus helped to tell the story, commented on the action, and divided the scenes with *odes* (songs). The chorus's commentary often expressed the audience's feelings. For Sophocles, a member of the chorus was an Everyman, an average Athenian citizen. A Greek chorus consisted of 12 or 15 young men, called *choreuts*, who were about to do their required military service.



▲ Objects like this vase reveal the importance of music and dance to Greek culture.

◀ In a modern-day production, this chorus reacts to events taking place on stage.

Connect to the Literature

Identify a speech by the chorus in Scene 2 that probably mirrored the thoughts and feelings of the audience. Explain your choice.

CHORUS.

[STROPHE 1]

Fortunate is the man who has never fasted God's vengeance!
Where once the anger of heaven has struck, that house is
shaken

For ever: damnation rises behind each child
Like a wave cresting out of the black northeast,
When the long darkness under sea roars up
And bursts drumming death upon the windwhipped sand.

[ANTISTROPHE 1]

I have seen this gathering sorrow from time long past
Loom upon Oedipus' children: generation from generation
Takes the compulsive rage of the enemy god.
So lately this last flower of Oedipus' line
Drank the sunlight! but now a passionate word
And a handful of dust have closed up all its beauty.

[STROPHE 2]

What mortal arrogance
Transcends the wrath of Zeus?⁷

Sleep cannot lull him, nor the effortless long months
Of the timeless gods: but he is young for ever,
And his house is the shining day of high Olympus.⁸

All that is and shall be,
And all the past, is his.

No pride on earth is free of the curse of heaven.

[ANTISTROPHE 2]

The straying dreams of men
May bring them ghosts of joy:
But as they drowse, the waking embers burn them;
Or they walk with fixed eyes, as blind men walk.
But the ancient wisdom speaks for our own time:
Fate works most for woe
With Folly's fairest show.
Man's little pleasure is the spring of sorrow.

7. **Zeus** (zōōs) King of all Greek gods, he was believed to throw lightning bolts when angry.

8. **Olympos** (ō lim' pās) mountain in Greece where the gods were believed to live in ease and splendor (also spelled "Olympus").

Reading Skill**Summarizing**

Summarize the main ideas in the concluding ode.