

Antigone Homework

Lesson 1: Prologue- Scene 2

Background for Prologue and Parados:

The Greeks believed that the spirit of a dead person could enter Hades only after the body had been purified and buried. Until the proper rites were performed, the person hovered at the gate of Hades, neither alive nor completely dead.

Women in ancient Greece had to depend on male relatives for support. Girls married when they were thirteen or fourteen, and their husbands often were more than twice their age. Women in wealthy households were secluded, had no legal rights, and did not inherit property. If a woman's husband died, a man in her family, her guardian, would try to find her another husband.

Response Questions for Prologue and Parados (Parados begins on line 101):

1. Teiresias is a blind prophet. How important might the detail of the prophet's blindness be to the story?
2. How are Antigone and Ismene contrasted in the first lines of the play?
3. In a few sentences, express Ismene's argument against aiding Antigone as she explains it in lines 41-69.
4. In verbal irony, what is said is the opposite of what is meant. Where does Antigone use verbal irony with Ismene?
5. In the Parados, Polynices is compared to an animal. What animal is it, and how does this metaphor make you feel about Polynices?
6. Which of Antigone's last lines are meant to produce the most emotional effect?
7. What hopes for the future does the Chorus express?
8. How does the Parados differ in tone and content from the Prologue?

Background for Scene 1 and Stasimon 1 (Stasimon 1 begins on line 343):

The original audience for *Antigone* might have read between the lines in Creon's first speech to the Chorus. They might have seen some political commentary. Athens was a democracy, but there were memories of its previous rulers, who worked hard to preserve their family identities-and their family welfare. Even in the democracy, aristocratic families were known to promote their own interests. Thus, it would have been important for the audience to hear Creon distancing himself from Polynices, a rebellious family member, and decrying nepotism.

Response Questions for Scene 1 and Stasimon 1:

1. In Creon's first words to the Chorus, what were the "storms" that threatened to destroy the Ship of State?
2. What reasons does Creon give for not allowing Polynices to be buried?
3. How does the arrival of the Sentry affect this scene?
4. What news is the Sentry reluctant to deliver?
5. How does the Sentry's announcement—there is evidence that Creon's command has been disobeyed—affect the action of the plot?
6. Retell the order of events of the Sentry's story.

Background for Scene 2 and Stasimon 2 (Stasimon 2 begins on line 597):

Creon's comment about his nieces underscores Ismene's role as a foil to Antigone. Ismene's main purpose in the play is to emphasize, through her own weakness, Antigone's strength. The curse that afflicts the royal family is a thread that runs throughout the play. In Stasimon 2, the Chorus identifies Antigone's suffering as a consequence of the sin and downfall of Oedipus.

Notice that the language of Stasimon 2 is more metaphorical and alliterative than that of the dialogue. The Stasimon also contains several historical and mythological allusions, whereas the dialogue is more plainly spoken.

Response Questions for Scene 2 and Stasimon 2:

1. What does the Sentry compare Antigone to when she discovers that Polynices' corpse has been unburied? How does this simile make you feel about Antigone?
2. Why do you think Ismene changes her mind about her brother's burial? Do you think Antigone is justified in rejecting Ismene's support, or is she being too hard on her sister? Explain.
3. According to Stasimon 2, the House of Oedipus has been "shaken" by the Gods. What human fault does the Chorus say is responsible for this?
4. So far in the play, which characters have shown that they have this fault? Explain.
5. As you continue to read the play, consider which character, Antigone or Creon, suffers more in this play. Depending on which character you choose, how much blame should the other character shoulder?

Read up to page 37, line 640