



# Teaching the *Antigone* in Wisconsin

## A Resource Guide for Educators

Prepared by  
Kerry Lefebvre



Center for the Humanities  
University Wisconsin-Madison  
University Club Building, 3rd Floor  
432 East Campus Mall, Madison WI 53706  
608-263-3412 [info@humanities.wisc.edu](mailto:info@humanities.wisc.edu)



## *Introduction and Overview*

### **Reading Across Time and Space**

The *Antigone* is an ancient Greek tragedy, written and performed in a specific cultural and historical context in classical Athens. This specific context influenced the way the play was written and the characters within it, but the play also investigates more universal issues about humanity that have resonated with a variety of people throughout the centuries. The text thus has both ancient and modern aspects, a situation that presents unique opportunities and challenges for educators. As much as we should understand the ancient context of this play, we should also celebrate its ability to speak across time and space.

### **How to Use this Guide**

The units in this guide progress from the historical and cultural background of Greek tragedy, to close reading and analysis of the *Antigone*, and finally to the ways in which we can approach the play as modern readers and performers. Units 1 and 2 are important for the cultural background to this play, and we recommend covering at least the most important information from these units. Unit 3 provides more specific background to Sophocles and the Theban myths. Units 4 through 7 focus on close readings of the text in order to explore gender and identity as well as larger themes. Units 8 and 9 explore the role of performance in the classroom as well as other contemporary applications of the *Antigone*.

We believe that the historical and cultural background is necessary to understanding the play, the characters, and their decisions, and that the units complement one another. However, the lesson plans and activities provided in this guide are designed to allow you the opportunity to tailor the way you teach the text to your own course, interests, and goals. The individual units could be taught over one or several days, and you can mix and match ideas from the various sections to create your own syllabus. Each section includes a combination of project ideas, study/discussion questions, and suggestions for further teaching of the theme or issue covered, as well as recommendations for material and concepts to be covered in lecture.

*Focused Reading:* although the guide assumes that one has read the entire play, most units include the line numbers for a focused reading—an area of the play from which the major ideas and themes of that unit are drawn and which can serve as an example of the major concepts discussed.

*Objective:* a short summary of the goals of each unit.

*Preparatory Reading:* readings designed to provide the necessary background information for instructors. These readings are drawn from accessible scholarly works on Greek history, culture, and drama and can be found online at <http://humanities.wisc.edu/programs/great-texts/antigone/center-resources.html>.

*Additional Readings and Resources:* readings that provide further background information for instructors as well as a variety of materials (especially from the internet) that might aid instructors in creating handouts, for example. Readings can be found online at both <http://humanities.wisc.edu/programs/great-texts/antigone/center-resources.html> and <http://humanities.wisc.edu/programs/great-texts/antigone/web-resources.html>, and web addresses are provided where appropriate.

*Handouts and Presentation Materials:* handouts that can be used in the classroom with students or as general background for instructors. Copies of these handouts can be found online at <http://humanities.wisc.edu/programs/great-texts/antigone/center-resources.html>.

*Lecture points:* the ideas and concepts we recommend that instructors cover in class; however, instructors should feel free to add, adjust, and customize these ideas to fit their own goals and objectives for the unit. Since every teacher has a different teaching preparation style, we provide some basic tools here—the goal was to provide enough information for teachers to construct an entire unit out of the materials, but to leave room for flexibility and adaptation to different course and teaching needs. Whatever an instructor’s approach, lecture should always model the sort of close reading desired from students, by using as many examples from the text as possible to support and reinforce points.

*Discussion questions:* questions meant to foster discussion and analysis. As mentioned above, these questions can be used for in-class discussion, small group activities, or in-class writing assignments.

*Assignment and Project Ideas:* ideas for in-class and take-home assignments for students. These suggested projects and assignments are flexible and can be mixed and matched for each unit.

*Suggestions for expanding this unit:* ideas to explore more areas of the Classical world in the classroom or to draw connections between the *Antigone* and other areas of modern life or students’ current curriculum.

### **Close Reading Strategies**

Most of the lesson plans include *focused readings*, which are segments of the *Antigone* that illustrate a certain theme or idea for that particular unit. During discussion and for assignments, students should be encouraged to support their interpretations with evidence from the text. Close reading lends itself well to group work and to small-group discussions, and is an excellent way for students to learn both critical thinking and analysis skills as they make connections, use evidence to support their views, and discuss the impact of various literary techniques. For close reading to work successfully, it’s important that the teacher always remind the students to point to the passage/line/occurrence that supports their position as they share their ideas. Close reading teaches students the difference between “opinion” or “personal reaction” and “analysis.”

Reading a portion of text out loud as a class or small group, followed by group analysis, can be an excellent way to develop close reading skills in the classroom.

### **A Note of Caution on Plagiarism**

As with other “great texts” and much of classical literature, there is a wealth of information readily available on the *Antigone*, which can be tempting material to plagiarize from the web or other study guides. Teachers may consider discussing their policies on academic honesty and the differences between paraphrasing, summarizing, citation, and undocumented use of other sources. It is also recommended that teachers make plagiarism less likely by customizing their assignments to their classes and avoiding generic and widely-used prompts for take-home essay assignments and other projects. The more specific a prompt can be—responding to a quote or to another theme or piece of material from the current curriculum—and the more specific evidence from the play required will help to reduce the opportunity for plagiarism.

### **For Further Information**

If you have any questions about this guide, or would like additional information on any of the materials here, please feel free to contact the author, Kerry Lefebvre, at [klefebvre@wisc.edu](mailto:klefebvre@wisc.edu).

## Lesson Plans and Activities

### Unit 1: Text and Context—Background on Greek Civilization

The world we know as Ancient Greece is a diverse and complex place and has a long history ranging over millennia. A unified political entity or state known as Greece did not exist until the 19<sup>th</sup> century; in antiquity, rather, ‘Greece’ comprised individual city-states (*polis*, sg.; *poleis*, pl.) which could band together in defense against a common enemy (as in the Persian Wars) or could be gathered together under the protection and power of another city-state (as with ‘imperial’ Athens). For the most part, though, city-states remained separate, often with their own cultural and political institutions.

Ancient Greek people were diverse in several ways—for example, regional dialects of Greek were spoken and written—and inhabited different areas of the ancient Mediterranean. In addition to mainland Greece and the Peloponnese, Greeks lived throughout the Aegean, along the coast of Asia Minor (modern day Turkey), colonized throughout the western Mediterranean, and had contact with other major civilizations.

Perhaps most familiar to modern students of antiquity are the Greek gods and goddesses and the many myths and stories that trace their interaction with the human world. Although no Greek gods appear as characters in the *Antigone*, they fill the back-stories of Thebes, and Greek religious practices are fundamental to the action of the play.

**Focused Reading:** lines 250-260, 405-440, 1196-ca. 1210 [passages concerned with burial rites]

**Objective:** Provide background and context for the production of the *Antigone* and introduce major concepts from Greek history and culture.

**Preparatory Reading:** (available as pdfs online)

- “Greek Geography,” “Greek History,” in Powell, *Classical Myth*: pp. 53-68.
- “[People and Land](#),” “[City-States](#),” “[Religion](#),” “[Democracy and Law](#),” in Amos and Lang, *These Were the Greeks*: pp. 4-11, 37-48, 71-82, 105-116.
- “[Death and Beyond](#),” in Pomeroy, et. al., *Ancient Greece: A Political, Social, and Cultural History*, pp. 263-266.

**Additional Readings and Resources:**

- “[Wars with Persia](#),” “[Imperial Athens](#),” in Amos and Lang, *These Were the Greeks*: 59-70, 93-104. (available as pdfs online)
- Thomas R. Martin, *An Overview of Classical Greek History from Mycenae to Alexander*, available through Perseus:
  - <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.04.0009%3Achapter%3D1>
- The Olympian Gods: An Overview:
  - <http://www.temple.edu/classics/olympians/index.html>
- Collection of images of the Olympian gods:

- <http://www.theoi.com/>
- <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/artifactBrowser> [artifact type→keyword→divinities]
- Images of Athens (under “Greece and sites outside of Greece with Greek architecture”):
  - [http://wings.buffalo.edu/AandL/Maecenas/general\\_contents.html](http://wings.buffalo.edu/AandL/Maecenas/general_contents.html)
- Map of the Ancient Greek world:
  - Powell, *Classical Myth*, pp. 54-56
  - [http://plato-dialogues.org/tools/gk\\_wrlld.htm](http://plato-dialogues.org/tools/gk_wrlld.htm)
- Athenian Daily Life:
  - <http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/classics/dunkle/athnlife/index.htm>

**Handouts/Presentation Materials:** (available as pdfs online)

- [Timeline](#) of major periods and events from Greek history
- [Greek Gods and Goddesses](#), to review deities and their spheres of influence
- [Greek Religion and Funerary Practice](#)

**Lecture points:** Using the preparatory materials above, the lecture should provide background information from Greek history and culture, including:

- Discuss the geography and resources of Greece.
- Locate important Greek cities on a map, especially Athens (the city in which Greek drama was produced) and Thebes (the setting of the *Antigone*).
- Discuss important events and developments from the timeline of Greek history, including the rise to prominence of Athens in the fifth century B.C.E.
- Explain the nature of the city-state (*polis*).
- Discuss Athens’ relationship with democracy, especially during the fifth century B.C.E., as well as the basic workings of Athenian democracy.
- Review the major Olympian gods and their particular spheres of influence.
- Introduce major concepts related to Greek religion and funerary ritual.

**Discussion Questions:**

- How do the geography, climate, and culture of one’s homeland affect his or her view of the larger world? How might the geography of Greece have affected the ancient Greek worldview? Do you see any evidence of this perspective within the *Antigone*?
- What events in Greek history are happening during the fifth century B.C.E.? How might these events influence the creation of literature during this time?
- What is a *polis*?
- How is Athens different from other city-states? How does democracy work in Athens? How is it different from our current government in the United States?
- Who are the main deities in ancient Greece, and what are their particular spheres of influence?
- Why do no gods appear in the *Antigone*? Even if there are no gods present on stage during the play, are the gods involved in this play at all? What parts of the play support your ideas? This could be a good theme to trace throughout the *Antigone* while you read.

- Why is correct practice of funerary ritual so important to the ancient Greeks? Why and how are funerary rituals important in the *Antigone*? How do they create conflict within the play?

### Assignment and Project Ideas:

- *Reading/Response Journal*. Now is a good time to ask your students to keep a reflection journal in which they respond to the text and material covered in class. You might ask them to write 1-2 pages of personal response to the text, to find points of identification, or to highlight confusing or problematic passages. Or you could use the discussion questions in these lesson plans to create your own *guided journal*—a handout of prompts to which you require the students to respond when reading the play. This could be an on-going project, a group activity, or an in-class writing assignment at the end of each class period.
- *Research on Ancient Greece*. Request students to research various aspects of the ancient Greek world, especially those related to Athens. Good topics might include: Greek art and architecture (even a particular building, e.g. the Parthenon), ancient Sparta, ancient Troy, a focused project on a particular deity, temple, or cult site (e.g. Apollo and Delphi), women in ancient Greece, or another major Greek author (e.g. Homer, Aeschylus, Euripides, Herodotus, Thucydides). It is usually best to direct students toward resources (see bibliography and recommended web resources) and to limit them to these sources. This research could take the form of a short *essay* or an *in-class oral presentation*.

### Suggestions for Expanding this Unit:

- Read selections from Homer that present scenes of the underworld or of the dead interacting with the living. What do we learn about the Greek attitude toward death and the afterlife from these episodes?
  - *Iliad*, Book 23. At the beginning of the book, Achilles' friend Patroclus, who has been killed by the Trojan hero Hector, appears to Achilles in a dream. What does Patroclus ask Achilles? How does the afterlife work, according to Patroclus?
  - *Iliad*, Book 24. Achilles, mourning Patroclus, has killed Hector, has abused Hector's body, and has refused to bury the body. Why does Priam go to the Greeks' camp? How does he appeal to Achilles?
  - *Odyssey*, Book 11. Elpenor, one of Odysseus' comrades, has died, unbeknownst to Odysseus. What does Elpenor request of Odysseus and the rest of the crew? What sorts of people does Odysseus meet in the underworld? What is he allowed and not allowed to do?
  - *Odyssey*, Book 24. The beginning of this book depicts the arrival of the recently-dead suitors to the underworld. How do they get there? With whom do they communicate, and what sorts of sorts of stories are told?
- Using Perseus Digital Library and [www.theoi.com](http://www.theoi.com), compile details on the iconography of the major Olympian deities. What attributes usually appear with certain gods or goddesses? What details in art help identify particular gods and goddesses?

## Unit 2: Origins and Development of Tragedy

Although we call it “Greek drama,” the tragic and comic plays we read were originally produced in the very specific cultural world of fifth-century Athens. Plays were written for religious festivals, especially for the City Dionysia, a festival honoring the god Dionysus. Performed at the Theater of Dionysus on the Athenian Acropolis, the plays were bound up in the religious, political, and artistic concerns of that particular *polis*.

Although the origins of tragedy are murky (perhaps developed out of the *dithyramb*, perhaps created by the semi-legendary actor Thespis), choral poetry had long been important to Greek culture, and it is likely that tragedy evolved as one speaker stepped away from a chorus and began to interact with it as an individual. The major tragedians (Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides) would add further innovations—additional actors, more stage props and settings—and these three quickly became the canon of Greek tragedy, by 400 B.C.E., even as tragedies continued to be written and performed after that date.

Three Greek dramatists competed at the City Dionysia with three tragedies plus one satyr play, a usually irreverent and ribald play also dealing with mythological material. Comedies would also be performed at this festival (and at the other dramatic festival, the Lenaia), an occurrence that demonstrates the Greek conception of tragedy and comedy as complementary dramatic forms.

**Focused Reading:** 100-162

**Objective:** Explore the origins of tragedy, as well as the physical and cultural contexts in which tragedy was performed.

**Preparatory Readings:** (available as pdfs online)

- [“Introduction,” “Festival, Theatre, Performance,” “Tragedy,”](#) in Sommerstein, *Greek Drama and Dramatists*, pp. 1-22.
- “Defining Tragedy,” “Origins, Festival, and Competition,” in Scodel, *An Introduction to Greek Tragedy*, pp. 1-14, 33-55.
- “Dionysus, god of the Theater,” in Powell, *Classical Mythology*, pp. 284-289.

**Additional Readings and Resources:**

- [“The Physical Space of the Polis: Athens on the Eve of War,”](#) in Pomeroy, et. al., *Ancient Greece: A Political, Social, and Cultural History*, pp. 301-311. (available as pdf online)
- Introduction to Greek Tragedy:
  - <http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/classics/dunkle/tragedy/index.htm>
- Plan of the Athenian Acropolis:
  - <http://plato-dialogues.org/tools/acropol.htm>
- Images and plans of the Theater of Dionysus:
  - <http://www.stoa.org/gallery/awmcathens/theaterOfDionysusFromAbove>
  - <http://www.stoa.org/gallery/awmcathens/theaterOfDionysusSeats>
  - Powell, *Classical Mythology*, p. 285
- Basic plan of a Greek theater:
  - <http://academic.reed.edu/humanities/110tech/graphics/theaterdiagram.jpg>

- Amy Cohen's blog and site on creating Greek masks:
  - <http://greekplaymasks.blogspot.com/>
  - <http://www.tempioscuri.com/MaskingBook/MaskingGuide.htm>

**Handouts/Presentation Materials:** (available as pdf online)

- [Greek Drama: An Introduction](#)

**Lecture points:**

- Go over some possibilities for the origins of tragedy (e.g. Thespis, dithyrambs).
- Discuss the importance of the chorus and choral performances in Greek culture. Remind students that tragedy is poetry (vs. prose) and would have been set to rhythm (meter) and music.
- Review the cultural context of Athenian drama:
  - The City Dionysia—religious festival in honor of Dionysus
  - *public* and *civic* nature of performances
  - other events during the City Dionysia (Scodel, *An Introduction to Greek Tragedy*, pp. 40-41)
  - competitive nature of drama—three dramatists competing with four plays each (three tragedies and one satyr play)
  - liturgy system and *choregos*—public and private funding
- Review the physical location of the Theater of Dionysus:
  - Athenian Acropolis—physical representation of Athens' wealth and power, rebuilt after destruction during Persian Wars (480 B.C.E.)
  - locate other buildings on the Acropolis, especially the Parthenon (religious space, also used for housing treasury)
  - public, civic, political, religious aspects all bound together in one space in Athens
- Provide a diagram of an ancient Greek theater. Locate the major parts of the theater (e.g. *orchestra*, *skene*, *parodoi*).
- Review the major tragedians (Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides) and their dates/time periods.
- Discuss developments in fifth-century tragedy, e.g. Sophocles' addition of a third actor, the use of the *skene* and *mechane*.
- Discuss the legacy of fifth-century tragedy and the continuation of drama into later centuries.

**Discussion Questions:**

- It seems that even the Greeks did not always have a clear explanation for the origins of tragedy. Are there elements of modern society (things we do or say) whose origins are similarly unclear? Why do these elements continue to exist?
- What difference does it make that Greek tragedy, including the *Antigone*, is poetry and would have been set to rhythm and music? What effects do you think that poetry and music have on an audience that prose might lack? Does poetry lack certain effects of prose?
- What are some important elements of the cultural context of Greek drama and performance? What would an ancient Greek person see or experience during a festival like the City Dionysia?



- Are there any areas of modern life that combine various cultural elements (e.g. political, religious, social)? What similarities or differences do you see between your culture and that of the ancient Greeks?
- If you were an ancient Greek person sitting in the Theater of Dionysus, what other buildings or landmarks could you have seen? What effects, if any, do you think these sights would have had on you?
- What are the parts of the Greek theater? What words are familiar to us in English? How have these words changed (or not changed) meaning over time?

### Assignment and Project Ideas:

- *Visual representation of a Greek theater.* Have students (either alone or in small groups) create a model or diagram (two- or three-dimensional) of a Greek theater, with its major parts labeled. Ask students to explain (e.g. in a short *essay* or labeled on their project) where in an ancient Greek city they might find this theater and what types of ceremonies and festivals might happen there.
- *Masks.* Following or using Amy Cohen’s blog (cited above) as inspiration, have students (individually or in small groups) create masks based on ones used in the ancient Greek theater. They can model them on certain characters from the *Antigone*, and this activity could be combined with those from Unit 8.
- *Journal Entries.* Have students reflect on the ways in which their own culture has influenced their lives and how these ways are similar or different from ancient Greece. For example, do students feel that certain monuments, religious events, political institutions, etc, are particularly influential on their lives? Why or how?
- *Essay.* Students could write a *research essay* on certain aspects of ancient Athenian life, or on certain aspects of the physical city (e.g. the Acropolis, the agora, etc). Students can also write *analysis* essays on any of the choral odes in the *Antigone* (see Literary Terms handout), answering questions like:
  - What themes or images are prominent in this choral ode? How do these themes or images relate to the play as a whole?
  - What information, if any, does the chorus provide that could be important for understanding the play?
  - Are the choral odes random, or do they fit in with the scenes that happen around them?
  - Make sure students use textual support from the play as the basis for their analysis.

### Suggestions for Expanding this Unit:

- Read Book 18 of Homer’s *Iliad*, focusing on the description of Achilles’ shield. Discuss what role does music and choral song and dance play on this shield, especially in the functioning of a peaceful world. Why might it be significant that the greatest Greek hero has such scenes on his shield?
- Research the other major tragedians (Aeschylus and Euripides) in more detail. What do we know about their lives? What sorts of plays did they write? Read a specific play (Euripides’ *Medea* is a good choice) and consider it in light of the *Antigone*—how is it similar or different from Sophocles?

- Read examples from Greek prose and compare them to the poetry and language of Sophocles. What effects do poetry and prose have on these texts? What similarities or differences do your students see? The histories of Herodotus and Thucydides, as well as some of the philosophy of Plato, might be good choices, since they were written under similar cultural circumstances as Greek drama.

## Unit 3: Sophocles and the Theban Legend

Sophocles is one of the three major tragedians of fifth-century B.C.E. Athens, and we know many of the details of his life, including his involvement with Athenian politics. Although only a few of his plays survive from antiquity, Sophocles wrote over 100 plays and was well-regarded during and after his lifetime—the comic poet Aristophanes, after Sophocles’ death, amended his play *The Frogs* to include several positive references to Sophocles.

One of the challenges for students of classical mythology is understanding the fact that the stories and myths were (and are) extremely adaptable for each writer or artist’s unique purposes. The Greeks had no sacred texts, like the Bible or Koran, so there was no one, correct, infallible version of stories about their gods and heroes. The main myths in drama (e.g. the Trojan War, the Theban legend) have very early origins in Greek history (even into the Bronze Age), and were treated in literary sources beginning in the Archaic period. Various authors at various points in time tell the same stories in different ways, and Sophocles is no exception. Although his audience would have likely known the basics of the plot to the *Antigone*, how an author like Sophocles told the story always varied.

The *Antigone* was the first time that Sophocles turned toward the myths of Thebes for material, but it was not the last—he would later write *Oedipus the King* (436-426 B.C.E.) and *Oedipus at Colonus* (produced posthumously, 401 B.C.E.). Although these three plays deal with the same cycle of myths, they were never conceived of or performed as a trilogy, even though tragedians were known to write trilogies (e.g. Aeschylus’ *Oresteia*).

**Focused Reading:** 1-162, 1115-1151 [choral odes that provide background to Thebes]

**Objective:** Provide information about Sophocles as a playwright and examine the mythological background to the *Antigone*.

**Preparatory Reading:** (available as pdfs online)

- “[Sophocles](#)” in Sommerstein, *Greek Drama and Dramatists*, pp. 41-48.
- “[The Myths of Thebes](#)” and “[The Battle Before Thebes](#)” in Powell, *Classical Myth*, pp. 473-501.

**Additional Readings and Resources:**

- Mythology Character Glossary:
  - <http://www.oup.com/us/companion.websites/0195153448/studentresources/main/glossary/characterglossary/?view=usa>
- Background on Sophocles, available at the Perseus encyclopedia:
  - <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.04.0004%3Aalphabetic+letter%3DS%3Aentry+group%3D7%3Aentry%3Dsophocles>
- Oedipus and the Sphinx:
  - <http://www.theoi.com/Gallery/M18.3.html>

**Handouts/Presentation Materials:** (available as pdf online)

- [Antigone's Origins](#): Cadmus' family tree

### Lecture Points:

- Provide information about Sophocles' life, including:
  - his dates (b. ca. 497/6 B.C.E.—406/5 B.C.E.)
  - held political office
  - *Oedipus at Colonus* produced after death, 401 B.C.E.
- Discuss Sophocles' dramatic output (over 100 plays), concentrating on the seven extant plays and their possible production dates (Sommerstein, *Greek Drama and Dramatists*, pp. 42-43).
- Provide information about the mythological background to the *Antigone*, especially:
  - multiple stories about the founding of Thebes
  - Laius, Jocasta, and the oracles related to them and their child
  - Oedipus—raised in Corinth, returns to Thebes, incident with Sphinx
  - children of Jocasta and Oedipus
  - Seven Against Thebes—the conflict that sets up the *Antigone*
- Discuss the flexibility of Greek mythology, noting that the Greeks had no sacred texts, so stories were free to develop in different ways in different places at different times.
  - For example, Scodel notes that the Theban plays of Sophocles contradict themselves—in the *Antigone*, Antigone claims to have buried her brother, but in the *Oedipus at Colonus*, she is not even allowed to see his tomb (Scodel 2010, 28).
- Emphasize the fact that the Oedipus plays are NOT a trilogy:
  - *Antigone*, possibly ca. 442 B.C.E.
  - *Oedipus the King*, ca. 436-426 B.C.E.
  - *Oedipus at Colonus*, 401 B.C.E., posthumous production

### Discussion Questions:

- When did Sophocles live? What are some of the highlights of his life? How did contemporary Athenians view Sophocles during and after his lifetime?
- What are some of the most important events in Antigone's family history? Which do you think has/have the most impact on the play?
- Does the play provide any information about the mythological background to Antigone's family? Where do we hear about characters like Cadmus, Dirce, Laius, Oedipus, etc?
- Why is it important for us to know the background of Antigone's family?
- What about Greek culture allows Greek poets to manipulate myths and stories? If Greek myths and stories are flexible, what effects would this phenomenon have on an audience in a Greek theater?
- If the audience generally knows what will happen in the course of a play, what about the play remains interesting or exciting to an audience?
- Can you think of any contemporary parallels for Greek mythology—stories that can be molded to suit particular artistic needs or desires?
- When do we think the *Antigone* was performed? When were Sophocles' *Oedipus the King* and *Oedipus at Colonus* produced? Does it surprise you that these plays are not a trilogy? Does it make a difference (if any) that the poet returned to this troubled family

several times? What stories do we in modern society return to repeatedly for art and entertainment?

### **Assignment and Project Ideas:**

- *Journal Entry or Essay:* Have students reflect on a favorite story that has been re-performed and reinterpreted in a variety of ways—a fairy tale, a comic book super hero, a standard plot. How have different people adapted or changed the story over time? Why would writers, artists, etc, adapt this material?
- *Creative Writing:* Have students pick a familiar story or myth and create their own adaptation of it—they could tell the story through a particular character or include new details to give the story their own particular spin. Then ask students to explain their artistic choices.

### **Suggestions for Expanding this Unit:**

- Have students (individually or in small groups) investigate other stories from the Theban family tree, e.g. Europa, Cadmus and the founding of Thebes, Semele and Dionysus, Oedipus and the Sphinx, etc. Their findings can take the form of a short *essay*, a *journal entry*, or *in-class presentation*.
- Read one or both of *Oedipus the King* and *Oedipus at Colonus*. Are the characters in this play similar or different from the ones we find in *Antigone*? What difference does it make (if any) that they were written at different points in Sophocles' career?
- Read Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes* and/or Euripides' *The Phoenician Women*, other tragedies that involve similar events in Theban mythology. What characters or events do these authors focus on? How do their focal points affect the telling of the stories?
- Have students investigate other popular topics and sets of stories for Greek drama, e.g. the Trojan War and the homecoming of the Greek heroes. What sorts of stories were popular for Greek drama? Why would the Greeks return to this type of subject matter so often?

## Unit 4: The Character of Antigone—Gender, Identity, and Female Roles

Although we have essentially no written records of what life was like for ancient Greek women, especially Athenian women, scholars have been able to paint a fairly clear picture about what life would have been like for elite women in ancient Greece. Athenian citizen women were kept sheltered, and nearly every aspect of their lives was controlled by male guardians (e.g. her husband or father); however, women were very important to the health of the *oikos* (the family, the household, and all its goods) and of the *polis*, primarily through their ability to create legitimate children and heirs.

The normative roles for females, then, involved supporting the strength of the *oikos* (via dowries and producing heirs) and participation in certain religious rituals, including the funeral lament. Antigone's motives and values in this play are driven by these female roles that are focused on the *oikos* and on ritual. Sophocles expresses these values through the Greek word *philos*, a word with a wide variety of meanings—friend, relative, ally, and loved one, for example. Antigone uses this word in reference to her family and loved ones (e.g. “loved brother,” 81; her exchange with Creon about love and enemies, 520ff), unlike Creon, who (we will see) uses the political connotations of *philos*.

Thucydides reports that Pericles, in an oration given at the public funeral and commemoration of that year's war dead, advises that the women of Athens aim to never be talked about: “Your renown is great...if your reputation has the least circulation among men, whether for virtue or for blame” (Thucydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, 2.45). On the opposite end of the spectrum is Antigone, a character who seems to act more like a Heroic hero than the typical Athenian elite female. Why, then, has Sophocles written Antigone in this way, and how does her personality affect the play? Can Antigone, even as a female, be a hero?

**Focused Reading:** 1-160; 525-581

**Objective:** Introduce Antigone as a character in the play, as well as the many cultural factors that influence her decisions and internal makeup.

**Preparatory Reading:** [N.B. We have included a large amount of secondary material for this unit, but much of it will be applicable for the next few units, and much of it is easy to read; available as pdfs online]

- [“Women and the City of Athens,”](#) [“Private Life in Classical Athens,”](#) and [“Images of Women in the Literature of Classical Athens,”](#) in Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves*, pp. 57-112.
- [“Oikos and Polis,”](#) especially “Death and Beyond,” in Pomeroy, et. al., *Ancient Greece: A Political, Social, and Cultural History*, pp. 253-266.
- [“Women in Classical Athens: Heroines and Housewives](#) (part 1),” and [“Women in Classical Athens: Heroines and Housewives”](#) (part 2) in Fantham, et. al., *Women in the Classical World*, pp. 68-127; especially pp. 68-101. Contains some images of explicit vase paintings.

### Additional Readings and Resources:

- “[Women in the Bronze Age and Homeric Epic](#),” in Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves*, pp. 16-31. [the *Antigone* is ‘set’ in the mythological Bronze Age/age of Homeric epic; available as pdf online]
- Diotima, Materials for the Study of Women and Gender in the Ancient World:
  - <http://www.stoa.org/diotima/>
- Athenian Daily Life:
  - <http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/classics/dunkle/athnlife/index.htm>

### Handouts/Presentation Materials: (available as pdf online)

- [Homeric Heroes](#), a guide to heroic values based on the *Iliad*

### Lecture Points:

- Discuss the cultural background for women, especially women in fifth-century Athens, emphasizing:
  - the importance of women to the household and family (*oikos*)
  - the regulation of various aspects of women’s lives and sexuality by their male relatives and by the state
- Review (from Unit 1) the importance of proper burial and emphasize the important role females played in burial rites.
- Discuss the masculine and heroic and masculine aspects of Antigone’s character in these scenes, especially:
  - Antigone’s focus on honor and nobility (20-40)
  - her focus on action and deeds (40-50)
  - her willingness to proclaim these deeds (85)
  - her wish to die nobly (95)
- Discuss how Ismene acts as a foil for Antigone as well as how Ismene represents more traditional female values and roles, including:
  - Ismene’s reluctance to transgress the law (60)
  - her reminders that women “are ruled, by those who are stronger” (60-70)
  - her emphasis on silence (85)
  - her unwillingness to abandon Antigone (95-100)

### Discussion Questions:

- What were the expectations of elite Athenian females, especially during the fifth-century B.C.E.? What sorts of things could they do and not do? What important roles did they play for the benefit of the *oikos* (the household, the family)?
- What was the role of women in ancient Greek burial rites?
- What is Antigone’s dilemma at the beginning of the play? What are her duties to her family (her *oikos*), and what are her duties to her city (the *polis*)?
- Why does the fact that Creon is Antigone’s uncle (and last living male guardian) complicate her dilemma?
- In what terms does Antigone understand her ‘crime’? Why does she say that she will “be a criminal—but a religious one”?
- In what ways is Antigone like a masculine, Homeric hero at the beginning of the play? How is she a doer of deeds and speaker of words?

- In what ways does Antigone behave or not behave like a traditional elite female? Why do you think that Sophocles would write about such a transgressive female? In what ways could Antigone have been frightening to an ancient Athenian audience?
- What other elements of Antigone’s character do you see?
- How does Ismene act as a foil to Antigone? What is Ismene like? What are Ismene’s reasons for her behavior?
- How does Antigone treat Ismene? Why does she act like this?
- Is it strange, according to Greek cultural practice, that Antigone and Ismene meet outside the gates of the palace? How or why?
- Read the scene in which Ismene reappears during Antigone’s confrontation with Creon, beginning around line 530. Why does Sophocles include her in this scene? Is this the same Ismene we saw at the beginning of the play? How should we understand her behavior (throughout the play) in terms of its cultural context?
- When does Ismene exit the play? Why is her exit not announced or mentioned? What happens to Ismene, do you think? Why do we never find out? Is the silence concerning Ismene and her fate connected to Pericles’ comments about women (see above)?
- How would you define a hero in your own terms? How would you define a hero in terms of Homeric epic (the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*)? Does Antigone fit either of these paradigms? Can Antigone, as a female, be a hero? In what ways is Antigone heroic and not heroic? Be sure to create a definition for a hero before judging her.

#### **Assignment and Project Ideas:**

- *Debate.* Stage a debate in class—divide the students up into two groups and assign one group to be Antigone, the other Ismene. Using the text as evidence, debate whose course of action is the most appropriate at this point (in the play, in the family saga, etc).
- *Journal Entry.* Students can reflect on the similarities and differences between their own lives and/or modern society and the lives of ancient Greeks. For example, what sorts of gender expectations do students encounter in their lives? How does society treat those who do or do not observe these expectations? What sorts of loyalties are active in students’ lives? Do they ever feel conflicted by these loyalties?
- *Research Essay.* Have students research an aspect of women’s lives in ancient Greece. Some good topics might be: children, childhood, and adolescence; the structure and organization of the *oikos*; the Greek wedding; women’s religious roles; women in ancient Sparta; etc. It is usually best to direct students toward resources (see bibliography and recommended web resources) and to limit them to these sources.

#### **Suggestions for Expanding this Unit:**

- Read other accounts of the Seven Against Thebes as mentioned above (Aeschylus’ *Seven Against Thebes* and Euripides’ *Phoenician Women*). How are they different from the *Antigone*? How does Antigone feature as a character in the other plays? Why would Sophocles use Antigone as a focal point for his drama?
- Read other tragedies with unconventional female characters (e.g. Euripides’ *Medea*, Aeschylus’ *Oresteia*, Sophocles’ *Women of Trachis*). Why would tragedians put these types of women onstage in plays? What sorts of issues do the tragedians explore through the perspective of women? Why are these issues important?



## Unit 5: The Character of Creon—Gender, Identity, and Male Roles

Ancient Greece was a patriarchy—one in which males held power over (and responsibility for) both the *polis* and the *oikos*. Creon, whose name means simply “one who rules” (a generic name for a ruler), has been suddenly left in charge of the remainder of the family and the city, through the deaths of the other males in Oedipus’ family. Sophocles explores how a person might react when *oikos* and *polis* come into conflict and when loyalties are divided.

Creon’s values and motives are based in his responsibilities as a leader of a *polis*, and he defines himself with reference to the political sphere. As discussed in Unit 4, the Greek word *philos* covers a range of meanings and connotations. Whereas Antigone uses it to describe familial love, Creon uses this word to describe political relationships (e.g. “anyone thinking another man more a *friend* than his own country, I rate him nowhere,” 182-184; his exchange with Antigone about enemies and love, 520ff).

In this type of patriarchy, it was critical for citizen men to have a male heir to ensure the stability of the *oikos* and their possessions. In classical Athens, males could become citizens only if their fathers were citizens (and, eventually, only if both parents were citizens) and if their fathers recognized them as legitimate through Greek social and political institutions. The father-son relationship, therefore, was important in Athenian life. The *Antigone*, however, presents a picture of father and son developing into conflict, despite the bond between them.

**Focused Reading:** 160-780

**Objective:** Introduce Creon as a character in the play, as well as his concerns about the *polis* and his relationship with his son Haemon.

**Preparatory Reading:** (available as pdfs online)

- [“The Archaic Age Tyrants,”](#) in Pomeroy, et. al., *Ancient Greece: A Political, Social, and Cultural History*, pp. 123-126.
- Review readings from Unit 4, focusing on the power and control that men had, especially over their female family members.
- Review [“Democracy and Law,”](#) originally introduced in Unit 1, in Amos and Lang, *These Were the Greeks*, pp. 105-116.

**Lecture Points:**

- Discuss the ways in which males exercised control in ancient Greece, especially in fifth-century Athens, emphasizing their role in both the *oikos* and *polis*.
- Emphasize the patriarchal and patrilineal structure of ancient Athenian society, noting the importance of sons as heirs to their fathers.
- Discuss the importance of the father-son relationship for male citizenship, including:
  - recognition of son by father as legitimate
  - inclusion into a father’s deme and phratry (social/political male groupings) as important step in citizenship

- Discuss the Greek concept of a Greek concept of a *tyrannos*, emphasizing the fact that the connotation of this word changed over time, from neutral to negative.

### Discussion Questions:

- What did it mean to be a *tyrannos* in ancient Greece? How did the word *tyrannos* change over time for the Greeks? How does the English word *tyrant* reflect its origins in ancient Greece?
- How would you characterize Creon? Is he a tyrant according to our modern definition? What good traits does Creon possess?
- Examine Creon's opening speech. What are his concerns? How does he feel about the city and its citizens? What are his motivations for banning the burial of Polyneices? What would drive Creon to place the concerns of the *polis* over those of his family?
- What has Polyneices done to the *polis*? How do Polyneices' actions (prior to the start of the play) justify Creon's behavior?
- How does Creon interact with the chorus and the sentry? Look especially at his language after line 280. What is the sentry's attitude toward Creon?
- Read Creon's speech beginning around line 475. What does Creon think about roles for women and men? Does his speech reflect beliefs common for fifth-century Athenians?
- Haemon enters the scene around line 630. What is his initial attitude toward his father like?
- Read Creon's speech beginning at line 640. According to Creon, what is the ideal relationship between fathers and sons like? What is the ideal ruler like? What are his thoughts on gender?
- Starting around line 690, what sorts of things is Haemon attempting to suggest to Creon? How does Creon react to this advice? How do they include gender in their argument? How has Haemon's attitude toward his father changed by the end of this scene?
- Has Creon's character changed at all throughout this part of the play? Why or why don't you believe so?
- Why does Creon choose the particular method of killing Antigone that he does?
- How would you characterize the father-son relationship between Creon and Haemon? Why is this such an important relationship in ancient Athens? Are Creon and Haemon similar or different in terms of their personalities?
- Think back to your definitions of a hero from Unit 4. In what ways is Creon heroic? In what ways is Haemon heroic? Have you needed to adjust your definition of a hero for Antigone, Creon, or Haemon?

### Assignment and Project Ideas:

- *Compare and Contrast.* Ask students, in *journal entries* or short *essays* to reflect on the similarities and differences between ancient Greek culture and their own.
  - In what ways are modern relationships with parents similar or different from the one we see in Creon and Haemon?
  - What do students think make a good ruler or a good government, and how do their ideas compare to those of Creon?
  - How are modern ideas about gender roles similar or different from the ones expressed in this play?

- *Creative Writing.* Have students write (a scene for a play, a poem, a short story, etc) from the perspective of Creon or Haemon. What are their feelings and motivations for their actions in the *Antigone*? Be sure students use passages from the text in order to support their creative efforts.

**Suggestions for Expanding this Unit:**

- Read and discuss *Oedipus the King*, also known by its Greek title, *Oedipus Tyrannos*. In what ways is Oedipus a tyrant, according to the various connotations of the word? How are Oedipus and Creon similar and different in their attitudes toward their citizens and their rule over the *polis* and *oikos*?
- Read *Oedipus the King* and *Oedipus at Colonus*. Creon features in all three of Sophocles' Theban plays, but is he the same character/person throughout? What is consistent or inconsistent about his character? Why might Sophocles have written the character in these ways?

## Unit 6: Death and Marriage

Marriage was the major rite of passage for elite Athenian women, and their life cycles were defined by marriage and by childbirth. A young girl was expected to be a virgin and was called a *parthenos* (cf. the Parthenon—the temple of Athena *Parthenos*); upon her marriage, a female became a *nymphē*, or bride. She left her natal home and family and joined her husband's family in the hope that she would bear a male heir. It was not until a female gave birth to her first child that she became a *gune*, a married adult woman. For elite women, the only real life option involved marriage and childbearing, and memorials of females who died before reaching their marriage were lamented for their inability to experience this rite of passage for themselves.

Marriages in ancient Athens were rarely love matches, since they were arranged by the bride and groom's families primarily for economic interests—to preserve or increase the wealth of the *oikos*. Love was not unknown to the Greeks, and they had several words to describe different types of love. We have already seen one word for a particular type of love (*philos*; more a familial, friendly, or political love), but another important one for this play is *eros* (physical desire or erotic love). *Eros* is the type of “love” sung about in the choral ode beginning at line 780, a passage that bridges Haemon's scene with Creon and Antigone's acceptance of her death. Why does Sophocles reflect on *eros* at this particular moment?

**Focused Reading:** 530-580; 740-988

**Objective:** Explore how the themes of marriage and death correspond and merge in the *Antigone*.

**Preparatory Reading:** (available as pdfs online)

- Review passages on marriage from previous units, especially Unit 4; for example:
  - Pomeroy, “[Women in the Bronze Age](#),” *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves*, pp. 62-70.
  - [Oikos and Polis](#),” especially “Death and Beyond,” “Pomeroy et. al., *Ancient Greece*, pp. 257-263.
- “[Women in Classical Athens: Heroines and Housewives](#)(part 1) and (part 2),” Fantham et al, 68-101 (Unit 4; Units 5-6) and Fantham et al, 101-127 (Unit 4)

**Lecture Points:**

- Discuss the importance of marriage for elite females in ancient Greece, especially:
  - marriage as the defining rite of passage for females
  - marriage arranged by bride's male family members
  - girls married young, typically to an older man
- Discuss what marriage means for males, including:
  - marriage could be arranged by relatives when groom was younger
  - groom often much older than young bride
- Emphasize the fact that elite Greek marriages were rarely love matches and were focused on the production of legitimate heirs.

### Discussion Questions:

- How and why do people in ancient Athens get married? What is a typical marriage ceremony or procession like?
- We learn around line 570 that Haemon and Antigone are engaged to be married. Why would Sophocles wait until this point in the play to reveal this information? Who tells us about the engagement? Why would she be the one to provide this information?
- How does the play become more complicated (if at all) if Antigone and Haemon's relationship can be described as "mutual love" (570)?
- Read Haemon's scene with Creon, especially lines 740-760. Does Haemon reveal anything about his feelings for Antigone in this scene? What does he mean at line 751? What do you think motivates Haemon to claim that his father "will never again set eyes upon [his] face"?
- Why might Haemon and Antigone never appear on stage together? Do we ever witness evidence of Antigone's feelings toward Haemon? Is Haemon strange (culturally speaking) for having feelings for Antigone?
- Read the choral passage beginning at line 781. How does the chorus characterize love? Do we see evidence of this definition of love in the play? Why would the chorus talk about *eros* (erotic love) at this point in the play?
- Why does Antigone claim that her "husband is to be the Lord of Death"? How are marriage and death similar? Are the rituals (e.g. processions) similar in any way?
- Antigone is described with maternal imagery throughout the play (e.g. 425-430, as a mother bird who has lost its young). Why would Sophocles include these details, if she herself will never be a mother?
- Whom does Antigone claim will be waiting for her in the afterlife? What actions has Antigone done in life that will enable her to see her loved ones?
- How does Antigone explain her reasoning that she would have taken this extraordinary action only for her brother? Why not for children or a husband?
- Once you have read the entirety of the play, return to the messenger speech in which the death of Haemon is described (ca. 1192). How and why does Haemon die? Why does Sophocles claim that "he has won the pitiful fulfillment of his marriage within death's house"? What does this quote mean?

### Assignment and Project Ideas:

- *Journal Entry or Essay.* Have students analyze and reflect on one of the important themes, images, or ideas they have encountered in the *Antigone* (e.g. sacrifice, marriage, death, divine vs. human laws, gender roles, etc). What issues does the play bring up, and how does Sophocles present them? Make sure students use references from the play to support their ideas.
- *Research.* Request that students research various aspects of death and funeral practices in the ancient Greek world. It is usually best to direct students toward resources (see bibliography and recommended web resources) and to limit them to these sources. This research could take the form of a short *essay* or an *in-class oral presentation*.
- *Compare/contrast.* Have students choose and analyze another famous death or love scene (e.g. Romeo and Juliet). How do Haemon and Antigone compare with other famous couples of art and literature? How are their feelings, motivations, and actions the

same or different? Students' findings can be presented in a *journal entry*, *essay*, or *in-class presentation*.

- *Creative Writing*. Students could use a creative writing project to explore the relationship between Haemon and Antigone. For example, what would the two of them discuss if they were ever on stage together? Make sure students support their ideas and work with passages from the text.

### **Suggestions for Expanding this Unit:**

- Read selections from Xenophon's *Oeconomicus*, a work of the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E., but one which was written by an Athenian and features Sophocles as a member of a dialogue. What does the *Oeconomicus* and its characters say about marriage and household management? Do you think it is serious or ironic? How do the ideas presented in this work contradict or complement ideas from the *Antigone*? A translation can be found at Perseus:
  - <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3atext%3a1999.01.0212%3atext%3dEc>.

## Unit 7: Conflict and Resolution

All of the characters in the *Antigone* have conflicting loyalties and ties that create conflict for themselves and others, and Sophocles provides few easy answers or black and white issues. Sophocles' language reflects the complexities that his characters face. For example, we have seen that the Greek word *philos* covers a wide variety of meanings—friend, relative, ally, and loved one, to start with—and a variety of characters use this word throughout the play. Do these characters use words in the same way, and how might their use of language reflect the moral ambiguity of the play?

It might be easy to sympathize more with certain characters (like Antigone) more than others, but it is important to look at the play's conflicts from as many angles as possible. Could it be that Antigone places too much emphasis on her family? Antigone comes from a family—one that features figures like Laius and Oedipus—that could be considered too close together already, and she is already too close (and too related) to her brother Polyneices in some ways. Which characters do we define as heroes, and can we use one definition for all the heroes in the play? Who is tragic in this play, and how do we define tragedy?

Athenian drama affords a diversity of perspectives for many of the issues it raises, as the *Antigone* exemplifies. The Athenian *polis*, especially under a democratic system, required debate and different viewpoints, and thus it is likely that drama both exemplifies this desire for debate and acts it out as well.

**Focused Reading:** 988-1352; review: 441-581; 631-780; 805-945

**Objective:** Examine the types of conflict that appear in the *Antigone* and discuss how they are or are not resolved by the end of the play.

**Preparatory Reading:** (available as pdfs online)

- “Antigone,” in Scodel, *An Introduction to Greek Tragedy*, pp. 106-119.
- “Famous Prophets: Tiresias,” in Powell, *Classical Myth*, pp. 334-336.

**Lecture Points:**

- Emphasize the importance of both civic and religious institutions for ancient Greeks.
- Emphasize the importance of the family and the *oikos* for ancient Greeks, especially in Athens.
- Review the structure of the play, e.g. who is onstage when, and what happens in each scene.

**Discussion Questions:**

- How many and what kind of conflicts do you see in this play? Which characters are in conflict (e.g. Antigone/Ismene, Antigone/Creon, Creon/Haemon, Tiresias/Creon, etc)?
- What sorts of loyalties do these characters have? At what points do they come into conflict with other loyalties or the loyalties of other characters? Do any characters take their views too far?

- Which character do you think is wholly right in their actions? Wholly wrong? Partially right or wrong?
- Think back to the cultural context of ancient tragedy. Why might Sophocles want to put these types of conflicts onstage in a play? Why would he include so much gray area in these conflicts?
- Read Antigone’s speech beginning at line 450. What does she mean by “God’s ordinances, unwritten and secure”? How does she think Creon is overriding these ordinances? How does Creon respond to Antigone in this scene (e.g. his comments on “established laws,” 481)? Is there a way to reconcile divine and civic laws and ordinances?
- Does Antigone care about the state at all? Does Creon care about the family, *oikos*, or religion? What parts of the play lead you to your ideas?
- Who is Tiresias? Why would Sophocles bring in a new character so late in the play? Why, according to the Tiresias, have the normal religious rites and divination practices been disturbed (ca. 1015)?
- Can Creon’s claims around line 1040 (about Zeus) be considered going too far against the gods or Greek religion? Do you think that’s typical of Creon’s behavior in the play so far?
- How does Creon react to Tiresias? Why? What does Tiresias prophesy will happen, beginning around line 1065?
- Note that, at line 1080, Tiresias re-emphasizes that people from other cities (Polyneices’ allies in his attack on Thebes) are also being hurt by this decree, i.e. Creon has decreed that the allies are also to be left unburied. Why would Sophocles include this detail so late in the play? How does it affect the various conflicts in the play?
- What does Creon mean around line 1095? What do you think has caused him to start to change his mind? What do you think of Creon’s statements around line 1110?
- Read the messenger’s speech beginning around 1155. What does the messenger say about chance, fortune, and human life? How can his words serve as a moral or lesson for the *Antigone* as a whole?
- Who is Eurydice? What is her role on stage? Why is it significant that the chorus claims that she “is gone, without a word of good or bad”? What happens to Eurydice? Why would Sophocles include her in this way in the play?
- Read the messenger’s speech beginning around line 1192. What news does he relate about Polyneices? What happens at the cave, and how does it fit in with other themes and conflicts in the play (e.g. death, marriage, sacrifice, fathers and sons)?
- Creon changes his mind and intends to put the situation right again. Why is he too late to do that?
- What, by the end of the play, has happened to the various members of Creon’s family, his *oikos*? How is this punishment (the destruction of the *oikos*) fitting for Creon? Why does Creon survive—would death be a better punishment for him? What sorts of thoughts does Creon have about his fate and life at the end of the play?
- How do you feel about Creon at the end of the play? Have your feelings changed over the course of the play? Has Creon changed over the course of the play? Has he learned anything? What should we learn from Creon?



- At the end of the play, what resolution (if any) do you see to the types of conflict you discovered in the course of the play?
- Does the structure of the play correspond with the various types of conflict and resolution in the play?
- The characters in this play seem to use the same words (e.g. friend, enemy, love, justice, honor) to support their own view. Do they use these words in the same way? Does the play provide a single definition of these words, or perhaps multiple versions?
- Who do you think is the main character in this play? What would happen if we re-named the play *Creon*?

### **Assignment and Project Ideas:**

- *Reading/Response Journal* or *Essay*: In either of these types of assignments, ask students to reflect on issues like:
  - What more contemporary examples of civil disobedience have students experienced or encountered in other forms of art and literature? Why do people engage in civil disobedience—what are their goals, and why have they chosen these methods? Have they been successful?
  - What are some examples of contemporary art forms (music, plays, literature, etc) that force us to consider complex moral issues? Why would people use art to explore morality and other difficult questions?
  - What is tragedy? How would students define tragedy according to the *Antigone*? How would they define it based on their own life experiences or on other forms of art and literature?
- *Debate*. Have students, either individually or in groups, choose a pair of characters at conflict in the play and debate the point of contention from their perspective. Make sure that both sides use quotes and evidence from the play as evidence with which they support their points.
- *Creative Writing*. Have students respond to a major theme or idea through a form of creative writing. Students could take up the perspective of one or more character or could write a scene involving these characters that we do not see in Sophocles. Make sure students explain what specific parts of the play have influenced their project.

### **Suggestions for Expanding this Unit:**

- *Tragedy*. After students have contemplated what makes a tragedy, have them compare and contrast the *Antigone* to another work of literature encountered in their current curriculum. What is tragic about both works? How do other writers from other cultural backgrounds envision tragedy? How can a work be tragic, even if it does not possess the label ‘tragedy’? Does a strict definition of ‘tragedy’ exist?

## Unit 8: Performance and Interpretation

As modern students of the *Antigone*, we often spend so much time reading the text of the play and discussing it as a text, it can be easy to forget that the play was performed throughout antiquity and has been performed throughout the intervening centuries. Reading the text—which is often a translation from the original Greek—is different from seeing a performance, especially when the details of a performance can change depending on the time, place, and goals of a production.

Performance (both inside and outside the classroom) can allow students to synthesize ideas and themes presented and explored in the play with both the historical reality of the play and their own modern experiences and reactions to the *Antigone*. Performance is a creative way to allow students to put their own ideas and interpretations into literal action. How could different artistic choices affect the message and meaning of one particular play?

**Objective:** Explore the opportunities of including drama and performance in the classroom and investigate the afterlife of the *Antigone* in art and performance throughout the ages.

**Preparatory Reading:** (available as pdf online)

- “[Embodied Engagement: Lesson Plans for \*Antigone\*](#),” prepared by Kristin Hunt and Mary McAvoy.

**Additional Readings and Resources:**

- Didaskalia: The Journal for Ancient Performance:
  - <http://www.didaskalia.net/>
- Ancient Greeks, Modern Lives: Poetry, Drama, Dialogue:
  - <http://ancientgreekmodernlives.org/>
- “Hip Hop Theatre: Theatre of Now,” thoughts on tragedy and modern performance:
  - [http://ancientgreekmodernlives.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/banks\\_essay\\_REV\\_01-26.pdf](http://ancientgreekmodernlives.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/banks_essay_REV_01-26.pdf)
- The Archive of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama:
  - <http://www.apgrd.ox.ac.uk/>
- Amy Cohen’s blog and site on creating Greek masks:
  - <http://greekplaymasks.blogspot.com/>
  - <http://www.tempioscuri.com/MaskingBook/MaskingGuide.htm>

**Handouts/Presentation Materials:** (available as pdfs online)

- [Adventures in Translation](#)
- [Antigone’s Afterlife, a guide to adaptations in film and music](#)

**Lecture Points:**

- Present the ‘Adventures in Translation’ handout and discuss the differences and similarities in the translations.
- Enact all or some of the activities from the “Embodied Engagement” lesson plans.

### Discussion Questions:

- After you have worked through some of the lesson plans from “Embodied Engagement,” how have the various activities provided a new or different perspective on the text and on reading the *Antigone*?
- We have read the *Antigone*, but it is important to remember that it would have been performed in antiquity and has been ever since. How is reading a text different from seeing a performance? Which do you prefer and why? How might the format of the *Antigone*—written or performed—influence how you think about the play’s themes, ideas, and messages?
- After you’ve read the ‘Adventures in Translation’ handout, think about how translation from an ancient language affects both reading and performance. Which translation do you prefer? What about it appeals to you? Which translation would you prefer to read? Which would you prefer to see performed?
- If you were putting on a production of the *Antigone*, what sort of translation would you look for? What qualities would be important to you—poetic language, intelligibility for the audience, etc?
- If you were putting on a production of the *Antigone*, what other artistic choices would you make? Be sure to explain *why* you would make these choices and to what *effect*. For example:
  - Who would play what parts? Would you use female actors, or, like the ancient Greeks, only use male actors? What difference would the gender of the actors make to your performance?
  - What would the stage setting look like? Would you specify the setting of the play (e.g. in ancient Greece, in 21<sup>st</sup>-century Wisconsin, etc) in any way? What sort of props and backdrops would you use?
  - What would the costumes look like? Would they, like the stage setting, be specific to any certain time or place?
  - What would the chorus look like, and how would it act? Would you have a chorus-leader speak the lines, multiple chorus-leaders share lines, or would the whole chorus speak all the lines? Where would the chorus be on stage? How would they enter and exit?
  - Would you use any sort of musical accompaniment? Throughout the whole play, or only in the choral odes?
  - Would you focus on a central theme or message for your production? How would you ensure that this theme or message comes across to the audience?

### Assignment and Project Ideas:

- *Performance*. Using the “Embodied Engagement” lessons and what they have learned about the *Antigone*, have students stage short, *in-class performances*. Passages of around 200 lines work well, especially ones that include both choral passages and character dialogue, and are ideal for small groups. Use the discussion questions above to guide students through making choices for the staging, costuming, and other details of their performance. Students can explain their artistic choices, with reference to the play, (and get creative!) in a *playbill*, which can be distributed during their performance.

- *Critique.* Using the “Antigone’s Afterlife” guide to later incarnations of the *Antigone*, allow students to choose a version of the play or interpretation of a character and write an *essay* critiquing it. Students should answer questions like:
  - What themes and ideas from the *Antigone* has the artist or writer chosen to emphasize? How has he or she achieved this goal?
  - How do artistic choices (costumes, stage settings, etc) influence the work and your reaction to it? Why do you think the artist has made certain choices?
  - What passages from the play itself are influencing your critique?
- *Non-performance art.* Have students, either individually or in groups, respond to the *Antigone* in another form of media. Ideas for interpretive projects might include: art projects (book cover, painting, sculpture, drawing), music performance (original composition, CD compilation, musical performance), creative writing (poetry, graphic novel), journalism (print or broadcast interview, articles, newspapers), film and tv (tv talk show), etc. Students can be creative about the form of their project, but make sure they explain their project in a *journal entry* or *in-class presentation*.
- *Language.* Have students write an *essay* or *journal entry* (or give an *in-class presentation*) in which they reflect on the power of language to create perception, ideas, and images. Students who speak another language well could translate a passage of *Antigone* into their own language and reflect on their experience as translators.

#### **Suggestions for Expanding this Unit:**

- *Reading and Performance.* Examine another text or play that can be both read and performed, especially one that students might be familiar with from their current curriculum (e.g. Shakespeare, Tennessee Williams, George Bernard Shaw, etc). Read scenes or excerpts from a work and then view a stage or film production of that same scene or excerpt. What is different between the two forms of media? Which do students prefer and why?

## Unit 9: The Politics of *Antigone*

The *Antigone* presents its readers and audiences—both ancient and modern—with many difficult situations and questions. The play and the characters in it are shades of gray as opposed to black and white; the play thus allows for a variety of competing viewpoints to make their claims. These questions and ambiguities provoked ‘political’ thought for the ancient Athenians and explored questions, among others, about the relationship of Athenians to the *polis*.

The *Antigone* has continued to resonate with people throughout time and space and lends itself to re-performance and reinterpretation. It has become a ‘political’ text for a variety of people in different contexts, since it poses (but may or may not provide easy answers to) so many questions about power and authority. *Antigone* has become linked with civil disobedience, and she and the play can help the modern world to work through these complicated questions about right and wrong, especially when the boundaries between them are less than perfectly clear.

**Focused Reading:** 162-222, 280-314, 441-581, 639-780, 806-943

**Objective:** Explore the application of the *Antigone* to politics over time and to contemporary discussions of civil disobedience.

**Preparatory Readings:** (available as pdfs online)

- “[Teaching Politics Using Antigone](#),” Kimberly Cowell-Myers, *Political Science and Politics* (2006), Vol. 39: 347-349.
- “[Polis and Tragedy in the Antigone](#),” Philip Holt, *Mnemosyne* (1999), Vol. 52: 658-690.

**Additional Readings and Resources:** (available as links or pdfs online)

- A brief introduction to civil disobedience and the *Antigone*:
  - <http://www.suite101.com/content/civil-disobedience-in-antigone-and-the-modern-world-a292167>
- “Against Relevance,” thoughts on the relevance of classic texts in the classroom:
  - [http://chronicle.com/blogs/brainstorm/against-relevance/38096?sid=cr&utm\\_source=cr&utm\\_medium=en](http://chronicle.com/blogs/brainstorm/against-relevance/38096?sid=cr&utm_source=cr&utm_medium=en)
- Haleh Sahabi: Our *Antigone* in Tehran:
  - <http://english.aljazeera.net/indepth/opinion/2011/06/2011638221479547.html>
- Le Figaro’s review of The Palestine National Theater’s *Antigone*, performed in Jerusalem:
  - <http://plus.lefigaro.fr/note/the-palestine-national-theaters-antigone-goes-to-jerusalem-20110607-478421>
- From NY’s ‘Die Walküre’ to Tehran’s ‘Antigone’: Survival within Death:
  - <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/tehranbureau/2011/05/from-new-yorks-die-walkure-to-tehrans-antigone-survival-within-death.html>
- From Deseret News archives: ‘Too Much Memory’ puts modern spin on ‘Antigone’:
  - <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/700005687/Too-Much-Memory-puts-modern-spin-on-Antigone.html>
- “[Antigone as Moral Agent](#),” Helene Foley. In Silk, M.S., ed. 1996. *Tragedy and the Tragic: Greek Theatre and Beyond*. Oxford.

- “The Politics of Antigone,” Lane and Lane. In Euben, J.P., ed. 1986. *Greek Tragedy and Political Theory*. Berkeley.
- “Women and the Tragic Denial of Difference: Three Versions,” A.W. Saxonhouse. In Saxonhouse, A.W. 1992. *Fear of Diversity: The Birth of Political Science in Ancient Greek Thought*. Chicago.
- “Antigone and the Languages of Politics,” J.P. Euben. In Euben, J.P. 1997. *Corrupting Youth: Political Education, Democratic Culture, and Political Theory*. Princeton.

### Handouts/Presentation Materials:

- [Antigone’s Afterlife](#), a guide to adaptations in film and music (see Unit 8)

### Lecture Points:

- Review (see Unit 7 as well as Units 4 and 5) the positions of Antigone and Creon. Go over their motivations, goals, behavior and decisions, and the authority each has for these actions.
- Discuss the issues and questions (pertinent both to Ancient Greece as well as other times and places) that the *Antigone* presents on stage, especially those related to power and authority.
- Discuss certain performances or incarnations of Antigone (see above for links to articles and performance reviews), making sure to go over the cultural background relevant for each performance or ‘Antigone’ (e.g. Anouilh’s production in Nazi-occupied France, Haleh Sahabi in modern-day Tehran, etc.).

### Discussion Questions:

- In what ways was tragedy ‘political’ to the ancient Greeks? What important issues did the *Antigone* present on stage for its ancient audience?
- How could the *Antigone* be read in a ‘political’ way today? How has it been ‘political’ in various adaptations?
- What is civil disobedience? In what ways is Antigone being disobedient in this play? What motivates her disobedience—what are her goals, and why are they so important to her?
- Based on her statements and actions, do you consider Antigone to be a criminal or a hero? Using the text, create a case for both categories.
- Consider terms and ideas like: justice, authority, power, legitimacy.
  - How does the *Antigone* reflect on or define these terms? Does the play give one or multiple view of justice, authority, etc?
  - How do the various characters in the *Antigone* establish and maintain their view of justice, authority, power, legitimacy, etc? How do they support their views and claims?
  - How does this play help us think about these ideas and terms? What sorts of issues does it make us confront? Why are these issues still relevant after so many years?
  - How do we use these terms today? Are we always consistent?
  - How do people (today or throughout history) establish and maintain their view of justice, authority, power, legitimacy, etc? Are their methods similar or different to those found in the *Antigone*?

- What do these terms mean in different contexts (e.g. government/politics, religion, gender, culture, ethnicity, geography, etc)? How do these terms shift if you change context or change geographic location? How do these terms remain the same, despite any changes in context?
- How have people performed and interpreted the *Antigone* over time? For example, why would the *Antigone* be an important production by French people under Nazi rule? What themes and messages have the most appeal for contemporary society?
- How can the *Antigone*'s message and themes change depending on who is performing it, where, for what purpose, etc?
- What sorts of contemporary or modern-day 'Antigones' have you encountered in art, literature, history, or the news? What types of qualities make them 'Antigones'?
- Does the *Antigone* relate at all to recent and current events in Wisconsin, or can you use this play to discuss these events? Should the residents of Wisconsin learn anything from this play? If so, what lessons can the play teach us?

### Assignment and Project Ideas:

- *Research*. Have students investigate other examples of civil disobedience, both close to home and elsewhere. What are or were their goals, and what methods of disobedience have they chosen? Are or have their efforts been successful? What cultural and social factors have influenced their behavior? Students' findings can take the form of an *essay* or *in-class presentation*.
- *Journal entry* or *essay*. Have students, in either format, reflect on the concept of civil disobedience, power, and authority. For example, reflection questions might include:
  - Why do people engage in civil disobedience, and what types of goals and methods do they have and employ?
  - What forms of authority have students encountered in their lives? How do they react to this authority? Have they ever been tempted to resist this authority? What methods did they use, and what were their goals?
  - Have students ever been in a position of authority? How was this authority established, and what sorts of power did they have?
  - In what ways can they relate to the various characters' struggles with power and authority in the *Antigone*? Make sure they provide textual examples to support their ideas.

### Suggestions for Expanding this Unit:

- Read Thoreau's *Civil Disobedience*. What type of civil disobedience does he discuss, and why is he discussing it? What cultural factors have influenced this work and Thoreau's disobedience? How does he express his ideas and goals? How are these ideas and goals similar to or different from those of the *Antigone*?