

2010 Reading Guide for Antigone

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The translation we are using may strike you as very formal and old-fashioned. Sit loosely with it and just try to get the gist of what's going on and what these characters are like. Seeing and hearing the play performed will help a lot!

We are discussing the play in two sessions, Thursday 2/11 and Tuesday 2/16. Try reading at least the first half before our first discussion: pages 1-22. Feel free to read beyond this mid-way point. For our second session we'll discuss the last four lines on page 24 through the chorus's final comment on page 52. In both sessions we will watch parts of a film version, which will help give you a vivid feeling for the conflict, but you will understand the play best if you can read it beforehand. Then you will see the entire play in a live production on Thursday 2/18. Lucky you!

For helpful background on events the play refers to, read the last paragraph of the "Note" that begins on page v. There we learn of the tragedy of Antigone's father Oedipus and what has just happened to her two brothers, Eteocles and Polynices. Note especially the last sentence of this paragraph.

Imagine you are in the audience of Sophocles' play, sitting in an outdoor stadium, hearing actors telling a story whose basic plot is familiar to everyone. Particular details are inventions of the playwright. Sophocles gives dramatic emphasis to two competing sets of values. What does Creon believe is right? What does Antigone believe? Is it possible that they are both right and they are both wrong? Is one more right than the other?

As you read and watch this play in terms of our theme, ask yourself what kind of authority Antigone and Creon possess. And what kind of power does each character in the play possess? If you make notes on these questions and on the following topics, you will prepare yourself to put thoughts together for a paper on this play.

1. For session one, as you read the opening scene, a conversation between Antigone and Ismene (1-4), notice what is important to each sister. Make notes (in the margin or on a separate sheet of paper) of what each sister values.
2. The first time you read the play, feel free to skip the chorus sections . The

chorus sections are actually interesting and important, but they can be confusing at first. Use your own judgment. Do notice when individual characters enter and exit before and after the chorus.

3. On page 7 we meet Creon for the first time. In his first very long speech (7-9), make note of what he thinks is important. Doing this for both Antigone and Creon will help you see how their values conflict with each other. How do they each claim authority from what they value?
4. Notice on page 13 how the Sentinel stands up to Creon. Does this tell us anything about people's attitudes toward the authority of their king?
5. On page 25 for session two, we meet Creon's son Haemon as he interacts with his father. You will notice a change in both men as the scene progresses. What happens as Creon increasingly claims authority as ruler of Thebes?
6. Beginning on page 30, Antigone interacts mostly with the chorus. How is she different now from earlier scenes? How is she the same?
7. On page 37 we meet a famous wise man, Tiresias, who is old and blind but very powerful. What does he say that causes Creon to reconsider his position?
8. What power, if any, does Creon's wife Eurydice demonstrate?
9. By the end of the play, how do you feel about Creon? Do you think he loses power when he "yields"? Does Antigone's final action affect what she has claimed as moral authority?

OK, try choosing a character that is interesting or important enough to you to spend some time with. Try some free writing about this character and his/her relationship to power and/or authority.