

Study Guide for *Oedipus the King*

1. In the beginning, what clues do we get to Oedipus' character?
2. What faults in his character are revealed as the play progresses?
3. How is Creon related to Oedipus?
4. According to Creon's report, what was the cause of Thebes' misfortune?
5. Upon what gods does the chorus call in its prayer for help for Thebes? Why is each one significant?
6. Oedipus' proclamation set what form of punishment for the murderer of Laius?
7. What is Oedipus' reaction to Tiresias' prophecy? Does he believe it?
8. Whom does Oedipus blame for the supposed plot against him?
9. What, says Creon, are his reasons for not wanting to be king?
10. What is Oedipus' physical defect? What caused it? How does he feel about it? What does his name mean?
11. How and why had Oedipus killed Laius?
12. What seems to be Oedipus' chief reaction to the news of Polybus' death?
13. How does he think he might have been the cause of Polybus' death?
14. How does Oedipus interpret Jocasta's reluctance for him to learn his true identity?
15. Why are Oedipus' children referred to as "monstrous"? For which of them is he most concerned?
16. According to Oedipus, what superhuman power urged him to blind himself?
17. Describe Creon's attitude toward the blinded Oedipus?
18. What final warning and advice does Creon give Oedipus?
19. How does each of the points of Tiresias' prophecy come true?
20. What moral does the chorus draw from Oedipus' story, at its close?
21. Why is it important to know the legend before the play begins? How does the phrase *in medias res* relate to the play?
22. What does the priest tell of the condition of the city at the beginning of the play?
 - a. What kind of leader does the situation call for?
 - b. Before the play begins, what has Oedipus done to address the problem?
 - c. What does this reveal about his character?

- d. Is Oedipus the kind of leader who will effectively deal with the problem facing Thebes? Explain.
23. What importance to the play is Oedipus' decision to have Creon give the oracle's reply in public? Why does Oedipus do this? What character trait does Oedipus reveal as he questions Creon?
 24. How does the decision to send for Tiresias influence the plot? In his questioning of Tiresias, what additional character trait do we discover in Oedipus? Note especially the speech on page 38 (white) or page 20 (brick red).
 25. What does Jocasta's speech on page 61 (white) or page 52 (brick red) reveal about her attitude toward religion?
 26. When does Oedipus turn from interest in finding the murderer to interest in learning his own identity? In what sequence does Oedipus learn his fate? How does he react to this revelation?
 27. What is the ultimate irony of the play? List examples of dramatic irony which foreshadow this.
 28. Document the unity of action or plot: list the plot episodes, the part between the choral odes, and show how each results from the preceding one except the arrival of the messenger from Corinth.
 29. What are the functions of the chorus? Give examples.
 30. Take notes on each of the prophecies and put down exactly what is predicted about Oedipus' life by the oracle and by Tiresias. What in the play is not predicted about Oedipus? Since the play proves the truth of the prophecy, how can Oedipus be said to have acted as a free agent with a free will?
 31. Apollo is the god of light, of the sun, of intellectual achievement, and the god who controls disease and health. Analyze Oedipus' reaction to these aspects of Apollo, particularly at the beginning and end of the play?
 32. Discuss spiritual and intellectual blindness in the play with regard to Tiresias, Apollo, and Oedipus.