

LEARNING STRATEGIES:

Discussion Groups, Graphic Organizer, Marking the Text, Oral Reading

Literary Terms

Stage directions are instructions written into the script of a play that indicate stage actions, movements of performers, or production requirements.

My Notes

Learning Targets

- Infer character motive and compare characters from *Antigone*.
- Analyze a classic Greek drama and examine its text features.

Stage Directions

Stage directions are often placed within parentheses and printed in italics. When reading a play script, use this text feature to help you visualize the story's setting and characters' movement. Note: "left" and "right" directions are from the actor's point of view as he or she faces the audience. Skim/scan the text of the opening scene of *Antigone*. What key information is provided by the stage directions?

Preview

In this activity, you will read the opening scene and complete a character analysis.

Setting a Purpose for Reading

- Read the opening scene between Antigone and Ismene. As you read, focus on the dramatic, emotional nature of the dialogue and each character's motivation or intent.
- Circle unknown words and phrases. Try to determine the meanings of the words by using context clues, word parts, or a dictionary.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Few records exist that can tell the story of the life of Sophocles (c. 496 B.C.—406 B.C.), one of the great playwrights of the golden age of ancient Greece. He spent his life in the historically and politically important city-state of Athens, where he benefited from family wealth, good social connections, an excellent education, a winning personality, and a talent for writing plays that perfectly captured the spirit of his time and place. He wrote over 100 plays, but only seven remain. Sophocles, along with Aeschylus and Euripides, is considered a master of Greek tragedy. During his time, ancient Greece was known to be in its golden age of art and forward thinking. Sophocles is credited with several innovations to the dramatic form. Increasing the number of characters in a play, for example, allowed him to make the plots more complex and interesting to audiences. By focusing on characters' fatal flaws, poor decisions, and moral dilemmas, he created suspenseful plays that also evoked audiences' sympathies.

Drama

Antigone

by Sophocles

ANTIGONE: daughter of Oedipus

ISMENE: daughter of Oedipus, sister of Antigone

CREON: king of Thebes

EURYDICE: wife of Creon

HAEMON: son of Creon and Eurydice, engaged to Antigone

TEIRESIAS: an old blind prophet

BOY: a young lad guiding Teiresias

GUARD: a soldier serving Creon

MESSENGER

CHORUS: Theban Elders

ATTENDANTS

[Thebes,¹ in front of the palace, which stands in the background, its main doors facing the audience. Enter Antigone leading Ismene away from the palace]

ANTIGONE Now, dear Ismene, my own blood sister,
do you have any sense of all the troubles
Zeus keeps bringing on the two of us,
as long as we're alive? All that misery
which stems from Oedipus? There's no suffering,
no shame, no ruin—not one dishonour—
which I have not seen in all the troubles
you and I go through. What's this they're saying now,
something our general has had proclaimed
throughout the city? Do you know of it?
Have you heard? Or have you just missed the news?
Dishonours which better fit our enemies
are now being piled up on the ones we love.

ISMENE I've had no word at all, Antigone,
nothing good or bad about our family,
not since we two lost both our brothers,
killed on the same day by a double blow.
And since the Argive² army, just last night,
has gone away, I don't know any more
if I've been lucky or face total ruin.

ANTIGONE I know that. That's why I brought you here,
outside the gates, so only you can hear.

ISMENE What is it? The way you look makes it seem
you're thinking of some dark and gloomy news.

ANTIGONE Look—what's Creon doing with our two brothers?
He's honouring one with a full funeral
and treating the other one disgracefully!
Eteocles, they say, has had his burial
according to our customary rites,
to win him honour with the dead below.
But as for Polyneices, who perished
so miserably, an order has gone out
throughout the city—that's what people say.
He's to have no funeral or **lament**,
but to be left unburied and unwept,

¹ **Thebes:** an influential city in ancient Greece

² **Argive army:** refers to the city of Argos, where Polyneices raised an army to fight his brother Eteocles for the throne

My Notes

GRAMMAR & USAGE

Parallel Structure

Parallel structure is the use of similar word patterns to express ideas of equal importance. It creates rhythm that can serve to create emphasis. Notice this example from lines 5 and 6: "There's no suffering, no shame, no ruin...." Here, Sophocles uses the repeated word pattern of "no" followed by a noun in each listed item. What does this structure emphasize about Antigone's experience?

lament: expression of grief

Soul Sisters

My Notes

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ISMENE

a sweet treasure³ for the birds to look at,
for them to feed on to their heart's content.
That's what people say the noble Creon
has announced to you and me—I mean to me—
and now he's coming to proclaim the fact,
to state it clearly to those who have not heard.
For Creon this matter's really serious.
Anyone who acts against the order
will be stoned to death before the city.
Now you know, and you'll quickly demonstrate
whether you are nobly born, or else
a girl unworthy of her splendid ancestors.

Oh my poor sister, if that's what's happening,
what can I say that would be any help
to ease the situation or resolve it?

ANTIGONE

Think whether you will work with me in this
and act together.

ISMENE

In what kind of work?
What do you mean?

ANTIGONE

Will you help these hands
take up Polyneices' corpse and bury it?

ISMENE

What? You're going to bury Polyneices,
when that's been made a crime for all in Thebes?

ANTIGONE

Yes. I'll do my duty to my brother—
and yours as well, if you're not prepared to.
I won't be caught betraying him.

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ISMENE

You're too **rash**.
Has Creon not expressly banned that act?

ANTIGONE

Yes. But he's no right to keep me from what's mine.

ISMENE

O dear. Think, Antigone. Consider
how our father died, hated and disgraced,
when those mistakes which his own search revealed
forced him to turn his hand against himself
and stab out both his eyes. Then that woman,
his mother and his wife—her double role—
destroyed her own life in a twisted noose.
Then there's our own two brothers, both butchered
in a single day—that ill-fated pair
with their own hands slaughtered one another
and brought about their common doom.
Now, the two of us are left here quite alone.
Think how we'll die far worse than all the rest,
if we defy the law and move against
the king's decree,⁴ against his royal power.
We must remember that by birth we're women,

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rash: impulsive

³ **sweet treasure:** refers to Polyneices' body left unburied, which birds and other creatures will gorge on

⁴ **king's decree:** a rule or edict issued by the king

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ANTIGONE

and, as such, we shouldn't fight with men. Since those who rule are much more powerful, we must obey in this and in events which bring us even harsher agonies. So I'll ask those underground for pardon—since I'm being compelled, I will obey those in control. That's what I'm forced to do. It makes no sense to try to do too much.

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ISMENE

I wouldn't urge you to. No. Not even if you were **keen** to act. Doing this with you would bring me no joy. So be what you want. I'll still bury him. It would be fine to die while doing that. I'll lie there with him, with a man I love, pure and innocent, for all my crime. My honours for the dead must last much longer than for those up here. I'll lie down there forever. As for you, well, if you wish, you can show contempt for those laws the gods all hold in honour.

100

ANTIGONE

Let that be your excuse. I'm going now to make a burial mound for my dear brother.

ISMENE

Oh poor Antigone, I'm so afraid for you.

ANTIGONE

Don't fear for me. Set your own fate in order.

ISMENE

Make sure you don't reveal to anyone what you intend. Keep it closely hidden. I'll do the same.

ANTIGONE

No, no. Announce the fact— if you don't let everybody know, I'll despise your silence even more.

ISMENE

Your heart is hot to do cold deeds.

ANTIGONE

But I know, I'll please the ones I'm duty bound to please.

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ISMENE

Yes, if you can. But you're after something which you're incapable of carrying out.

ANTIGONE

Well, when my strength is gone, then I'll give up.

ISMENE

A vain attempt should not be made at all.

ANTIGONE

I'll hate you if you're going to talk that way. And you'll rightly earn the loathing of the dead. So leave me and my foolishness alone—we'll get through this fearful thing. I won't suffer anything as bad as a disgraceful death.

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ISMENE

All right then, go, if that's what you think right. But remember this—even though your mission makes no sense, your friends do truly love you.

[Exit Antigone and Ismene. Enter the Chorus of Theban elders]

My Notes

keen: eager

Literary Terms

In drama, **stichomythia** is the delivery of dialogue in a rapid, fast-paced manner, with actors speaking emotionally and leaving very little time between speakers.

Second Read

- Reread the scene to answer these text-dependent questions.
 - Write any additional questions you have about the text in your Reader/Writer Notebook.
1. **Key Ideas and Details:** Read lines 25–47 carefully. How does Antigone summarize Creon’s proclamation? How will this ruling affect her family?
 2. **Key Ideas and Details:** In lines 62–72, why does Ismene recount their family’s history to her sister? What purpose might she have for this reminder?
 3. **Key Ideas and Details:** The conflict between Antigone and Ismene becomes clearly stated in lines 92–98. Explain this conflict and how it advances the plot.
 4. **Craft and Structure:** What effect is created by the juxtaposition of the terms *hate* and *love* in lines 114 and 121? What does the use of these terms reveal about each sister?