

## Remote Learning Packet

*NB: Please keep all work produced this week. Details regarding how to turn in this work will be forthcoming.*

**April 20-24, 2020**

**Course:** 11 Humane Letters

**Teacher(s):** Mr. Brandolini david.brandolini@greatheartsirving.org

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### Weekly Plan:

Monday, April 20

- Read and annotate Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*, lines 1-526 (p. 159-185)
- Answer reading questions

Tuesday, April 21

- Read and annotate *Oedipus the King*, lines 527-953 (p. 186-208)
- Answer reading questions

Wednesday, April 22

- Read and annotate *Oedipus the King*, lines 954-1310 (p. 209-232)
- Answer reading questions

Thursday, April 23

- Read and annotate *Oedipus the King*, lines 1311-1684 (p. 233-251)
- Answer reading questions

Friday, April 24

- Read the attached lecture
- Compose a 1-2 page essay on *Oresteia* and *Oedipus*

### Statement of Academic Honesty

I affirm that the work completed from the packet is mine and that I completed it independently.

I affirm that, to the best of my knowledge, my child completed this work independently

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Student Signature

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Parent Signature

## Monday, April 20

Read and annotate *Oedipus the King*, lines 1-526 (p. 159-185) and answer the reading questions.

For the time being, we will move ahead with our next Greek Tragedy, courtesy of Sophocles, before revisiting some ideas from the *Oresteia* at the end of the week. Much like the House of Atreus in the *Oresteia*, Thebes boasts a storied and tumultuous history. We've included a brief account of the immediate history of *Oedipus the King*'s characters here:

*An oracle informed [Laius] that he would be killed by his own son, and, as a result, Laius refrained from intercourse with his wife, until one night, in a drunken rage, he had intercourse with her anyway.*

*When Jocasta bore a son, Laius had his feet pinned together (to keep his ghost from walking) and ordered a shepherd to abandon the baby on Mount Cithaeron near Thebes. Instead, the shepherd gave the baby to a friend from Corinth. This friend delivered the baby to Polybus, king of Corinth, and he and his wife, Meriophe, adopted the child, giving him the name "Oedipus", which seems to mean "swollen foot" or "sore foot".*

*When he was older, a drunken man questioned Oedipus' parentage, though his mother would not speak to him about the matter. Instead, he went to Delphi to learn about his background, where the oracle instead told him that he would kill his father and marry his mother. Horrified, he abandoned Corinth, and headed towards Thebes where he decided to try his luck as an exile. On the way, a chariot ran him off the road and grazed his foot. In anger, Oedipus killed the driver, the passenger, and all of his retainers except one, who escaped.*

*Upon arriving at Thebes, he encountered the monstrous Sphinx, possibly sent by Hera as punishment against the Thebans for failure to atone for the crimes of Laius. The Sphinx was eating Thebans. Before killing them, the monster posed a riddle: "What goes on four legs in the morning, two at midday, and three in the evening?" Only when the riddle was answered would the Thebans be spared the agony of the Sphinx, but no one had been able to solve the riddle. Laius had gone to Delphi to learn how to rid Thebes of the Sphinx, but reports of his demise by bandits came back to Creon, brother-in-law of Laius and acting ruler of Thebes. Creon decreed that whoever could solve the riddle would become the next king. Oedipus encountered the Sphinx and quickly realized that the answer was "man". The Sphinx, in her anger, threw herself off a cliff.*

*Oedipus became king of Thebes and married Jocasta. She bore two sons, Polynices and Eteocles, and two daughters, Antigone and Ismene. A plague followed and the stage was set for the action of Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*.*

-from <http://www.classics.upenn.edu/myth/php/tragedy/index.php?page=thebes>

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## Friday, April 24

### 1. Lecture

Towards the end of the *Republic*, we saw Plato suggest that imitation/poetry's value could perhaps lie in communicating or exploring difficult ideas in a more digestible and beautiful way. In his *Poetics*, Aristotle essentially agrees, and argues that the Tragedy is among the highest forms of fictional expression. He defines tragedy as "an imitation of an action [movement of story/character] that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude" (*Poetics* VI). For Aristotle, such an action must be single, focused, and aimed at stirring a cathartic pity and fear within the audience. The key to great tragedy is that it captures the singular movement of a particularly noble, but not perfect man's soul: it is a movement from fortune to misfortune, brought about due to his *hamartia*, or tragic flaw. This flaw is not typically something minor, but rather a fundamental blindness in the tragic hero's soul that affects his mind and will, a fault of which he himself is not aware and is unable to control, resulting in tragic error. While we have examined this idea in both Achilles and Odysseus, the singular focus of a Tragedy makes the effects of the hero's flaw all the more apparent and visceral.

Witnessing the recognition of this tragic flaw and its consequences arouses both "pity and fear": pity for the character due to one's distance from the "unmerited misfortune" (*Poetics* XIII), and fear due to the immediacy of sharing in that suffering despite the distance. Both are brought about due to an innate sense of justice: we pity the seemingly unjust suffering of an otherwise good man, but also fear the recognition that this otherwise virtuous man is, for the most part, directly responsible for what has occurred.

While the *Eumenides* ends Aeschylus' trilogy with a hopeful movement from revenge to the establishment of justice by lawful trial, the movement of Orestes' character itself is nonetheless tragic throughout the dramas. In both the *Oresteia* and *Oedipus the King*, the extent to which fate has placed the hero into an unwinnable situation is a central dilemma. The important thing that these dramas highlight is that even despite the circumstances of fate (or as Jocasta impiously puts it, "chance"), what a man does with his circumstances is the essential action of the play. Aristotle emphasizes the importance of the good man coming to a *recognition*, a reversal of fortune or action that makes his flaw known and obvious to him; while painful, this process in fact grants the hero the opportunity to free himself from his *hamartia*

and move towards resolution and reconciliation. For the *Oresteia*, this involves a recognition of the flaws within the House of Atreus, and the sickness of retaliation and revenge. As for Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*, The extent to which Oedipus exemplifies this will hopefully become clear as your turn towards your writing for this week.

**2. Essay Prompt: choose ONE of the following. Any prompt chosen should include a total of at least 3 meaningful citations and/or quotations of examples:**

- A. In light of the lecture above, attempt to identify Oedipus' tragic flaw and the moment his flaw is made clear and recognized. Explore how he ultimately benefits, learns from, and/or is redeemed by his suffering.
- B. Drawing from both the *Oresteia* (either a specific play or the trilogy as a whole) and *Oedipus the King*, explore how both plays demonstrate the principle of stirring pity and fear within the audience. *Note that this is not a subjective reflection of whether or not you personally felt pity and fear. Rather, it is an account of how these plays show examples of characters who wrestle with their circumstances of fate and the extent to which they seem responsible for their suffering.*

**Reminder: Next week, we will be taking a brief interlude in our study of the Ancients to read Shakespeare's *Hamlet*:**

Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, ISBN 978-0-7434-7712-3

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**Monday: *Oedipus* lines 1-526 Reading Questions**

*Answer in complete sentences.*

1. How does Oedipus respond to the plight of his people and the priest's request for help in the beginning of this section?

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2. What oaths does Oedipus make after learning the cause of the plague and how to stop it?

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3. What does Tiresias reveal to Oedipus, and how does Oedipus receive the prophet's words?

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**Tuesday: *Oedipus* lines 527-953 Reading Questions**

*Answer in complete sentences.*

1. How does Creon defend himself against the charge made against him by Oedipus? Does he convince the king of his innocence?

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2. What is Jocasta's attitude toward prophecies and oracles in this section?

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3. What does Oedipus reveal to Jocasta about his past near the end of this section?

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**Wednesday: *Oedipus* lines 954-1310 Reading Questions**

*Answer in complete sentences.*

1. Pride is denounced by the chorus in lines 954-997. Are they speaking of the pride of a particular person? If so, state who you think they are speaking of and why.

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2. What news arrives from a Corinthian messenger in this section, and how does it change the narrative of the drama?

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3. Briefly evaluate Jocasta's advice to Oedipus in lines 1069-1078. Is it wise or unwise advice, and why?

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4. Why did Jocasta seek to have her child killed?

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Thursday: *Oedipus* lines 1311-1684 Reading Questions

Answer in complete sentences.

1. What are the fates of both Jocasta and Oedipus in this final section?

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2. In what state is the relationship between Oedipus and Creon by the end?

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3. Does the chorus pity Oedipus, find him at fault, or both?

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4. How do you interpret the final two lines of *Oedipus the King*? Based on the events of this drama, is happiness impossible in this life, or should the happiness of any given person not be judged until the end of his or her life?

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