*Oedipus the King* Discussion Questions

**Directions**: Complete each question as we read *Oedipus the King*. Be prepared to cite evidence from the text in support of your answers. This means you will have to note pages where such evidence exists.

**Prologue**

1. How does Oedipus characterize himself [who does he think he is]? What does he think of his accomplishments [what does he think his accomplishments say about who he is]?

2. How do the people of the kingdom feel about Oedipus? What sort of ruler do they think he is?

3. What is wrong with the City of Thebes?

4. What request does the Priest make of Oedipus on behalf of the people?

5. What has Oedipus already done and what does this action say about the type of king he is?

6. What is the purpose of building up Oedipus as a leader and showing off his leadership abilities?

7. What does Creon inform Oedipus they must do to rid the city of the plague?

8. How should the audience react to Creon’s message? Why should they have known this?

9. What knowledge does Oedipus have about the death of the former king, Laius?

10. How/why would this effect the audience?

11. What motive does Oedipus assign to the killer of Laius [why does he believe Laius was killed]?

12. What does Oedipus commit himself to accomplishing?

13. Why, besides the fact that the Oracle says to, does Oedipus feel the need to accomplish this task he has committed himself to?

14. Explain the dramatic irony of the commitment based on your answers in 12 & 13.

15. What is the dramatic purpose of the prologue? That is, how does the prologue set the mood/tone?

**Chorus** [ode of entry]

1. What is the function of the chorus here? [Inform, warn, explain, create]?

2. What does the chorus fear?

3. How does the chorus react to the message of Creon?

4. What conditions in Thebes does the Chorus describe?

**Episode 1**

1. Oedipus’ opening speech is full of dramatic irony. Identity and explain at least 3 instances.

2. Who does Oedipus call for? Why does he call for this individual?

3. What information does Oedipus receive from this individual?

4. What does Oedipus accuse Creon of? Why?

5. Explain what Oedipus thinks he knows about the death of the former king and the threat he faces.

**Third Episode**

**Jocasta appears at the beginning of the scene alone on stage.**

1. What prayer does she make and to whom does she make it?

**After her prayer a Messenger arrives.**

1. What news does he deliver to Oedipus?

2. What is Oedipus’ reaction to this news?

3. What is Jocasta’s reaction?

4. What would be the audience’s reaction?

5. What further information does the Messenger give to Oedipus?

6. Whom does the Chorus identify as the herdsman mentioned by the Messenger?

7. Why does Jocasta ask Oedipus not to seek out the herdsman mentioned by the Messenger?

8. How does Oedipus interpret Jocasta’s emotional behavior to the news?

9. What does Oedipus fear he is guilty of?

10. What is Oedipus’ view of the role of Chance (or “Fortune”) in his life?

11. Is Oedipus’s view correct? Explain your answer.

12. Explain the irony of the arrival of the Messenger occurring just after Jocasta’s prayer. Is the Messenger’s news really the good news she thinks it is?

**Fourth Choral Ode**

In this ode the Chorus addresses the mountain Cithaeron on which Oedipus was exposed as a baby. In the antistrophe the Chorus addresses Oedipus and speculates about the identity of his parents.

1. Whom do they suggest as possible parents?

2. Do they feel this is a good thing?

**Fourth Episode**

1. By whom had the Herdsman been employed?

2. Why is the Herdsman reluctant to answer the questions of Oedipus and the Messenger?

3. What information does the Herdsman share?

**Fifth Choral Ode**

4. What general comment on human life does the Chorus make based on the example of Oedipus?

5. Summarize briefly the account of Oedipus’ life given by the Chorus here.

6. What horrible fact with regard to Oedipus’ marriage does the Chorus point out?

7. What does Oedipus finally realize?

8. What news does the Second Messenger announce?

9. What is the symbolic significance of Oedipus’ self-blinding?

10. What does Oedipus intend to do? Why?

11. Whom does Oedipus blame for his sorrows? Why must he do this?

12. What reasons does Oedipus give for his self-blinding?

13. How does Oedipus feel about Creon at this point?

14. What request does Oedipus make of Creon?

15. What future does Oedipus foresee for his two daughters?

16. What important truth about Oedipus’ life does Creon point out to Oedipus?

17. What general lesson does the Chorus draw from the example of Oedipus’s life?