

The Oedipus Story

*All the knowledge you need to know
before reading Antigone*



Tragedy:

- ✦ *A literary genre whose definition was established by Aristotle.*
- ✦ *Any literary work in which a worthy but imperfect protagonist suffers a downfall (or “tragic fall”) resulting from his or her hamartia, or tragic flaw, or from the intervention of nature or fate.*
- ✦ *The emotional results of the ordeal produce a catharsis of pity and fear in the readers.*

Source:

Werlock, Abby H. P. “Tragedy.” *The Facts On File Companion to the American Short Story*, Second Edition. New York: Facts On File, Inc., 2009. *Bloom's Literature*. Facts On File, Inc. Web. 24 June 2015



Tragic Hero:

★ *The "tragic hero" is typically of high stature and encounters a reversal of fortune or "tragic fall" through a fault of character or an uncontrollable accident. Happy at the outset, a tragic hero experiences a succession of hardships resulting from his or her hamartia or "tragic flaw."*

Source:

Boucquey, Thierry, gen. ed. "Tragedy." *Encyclopedia of World Writers, 14th through 18th Centuries*. New York: Facts On File, Inc., 2005. *Bloom's Literature*. Facts On File, Inc. Web. 24 June 2015



Once Upon a Time . . .

- ▶ *It all began in Greece, in a city-state by the name of Thebes.*
- ▶ *King Laius and Queen Jocasta were expecting their first child when they received a rather disturbing prophesy:*



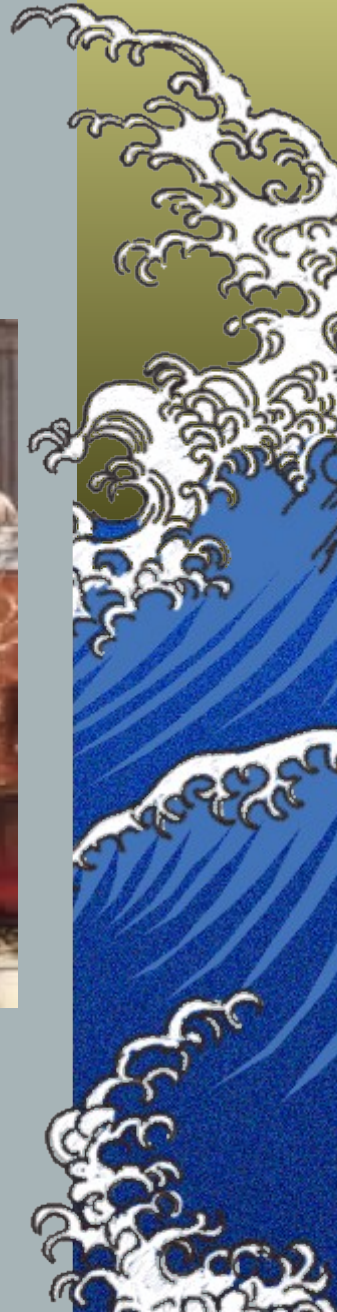
Their son would kill his
father.

*That's King Laius for those of you not following too
closely.*



What to do?

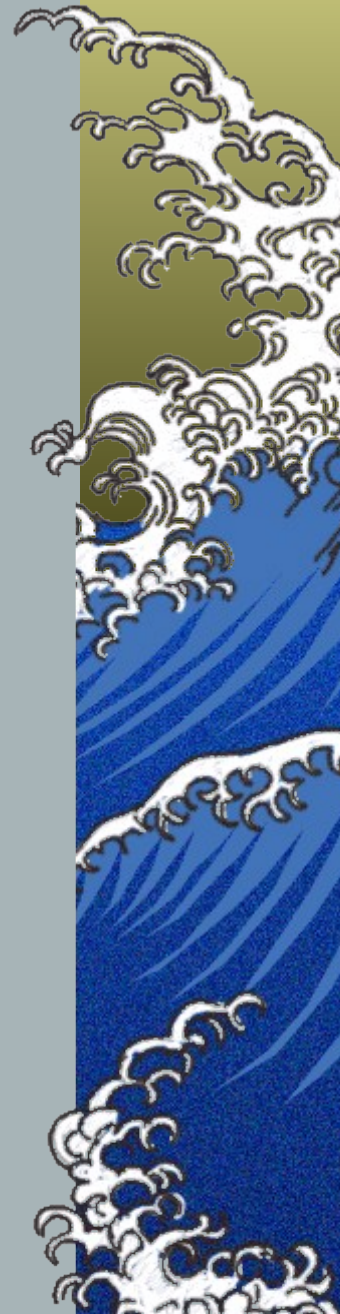
- ★ *Faced with this prophecy, Laius and Jocasta decide to KILL their new baby.*
- ★ *They pierce and bind their son's ankles in order to abandon him to his death on a mountainside. They entrust this task to one of their faithful shepherds.*



What to do?



- ✦ *The shepherd doesn't like this situation at all. He can't kill the baby either!*



Cithaeron

- ▶ *On the mountainside of Cithaeron, different shepherds bring their sheep to graze.*
- ▶ *The shepherd from Thebes gives the baby to a shepherd from Corinth, thinking the baby will never make it back to Thebes. Right?*



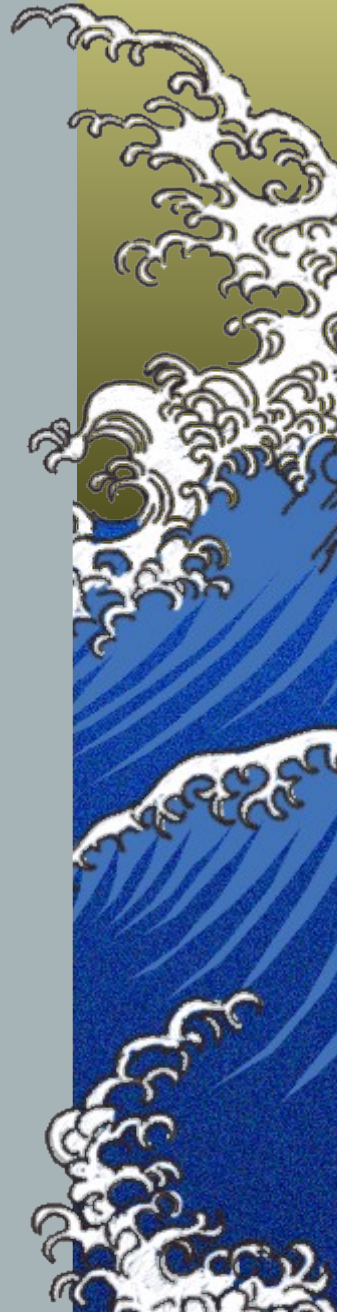
WRONG



Corinth



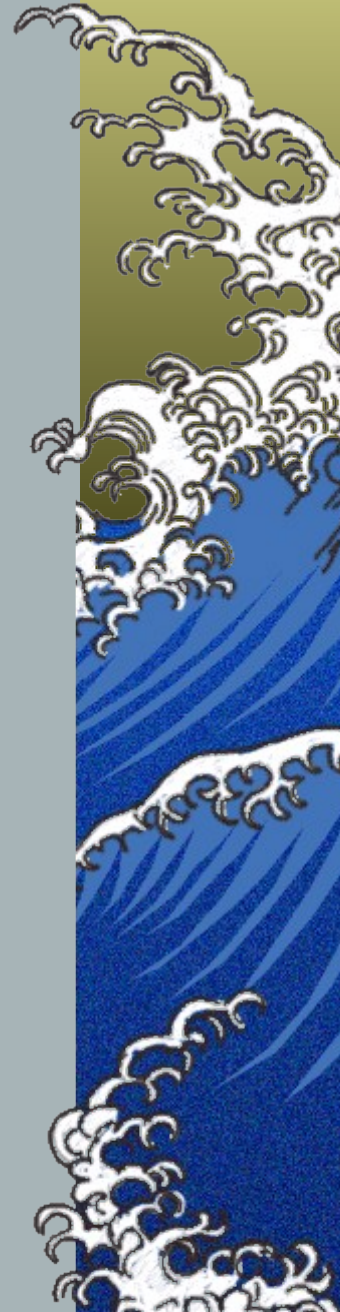
- ✦ *Shepherd #2 gives the baby to King Polybus and Queen Merope of Corinth, who haven't been able to have their own children.*
- ✦ *They raise Oedipus (whose name means swollen foot) as their child, never telling him that he is, in fact, adopted.*



The TRUTH



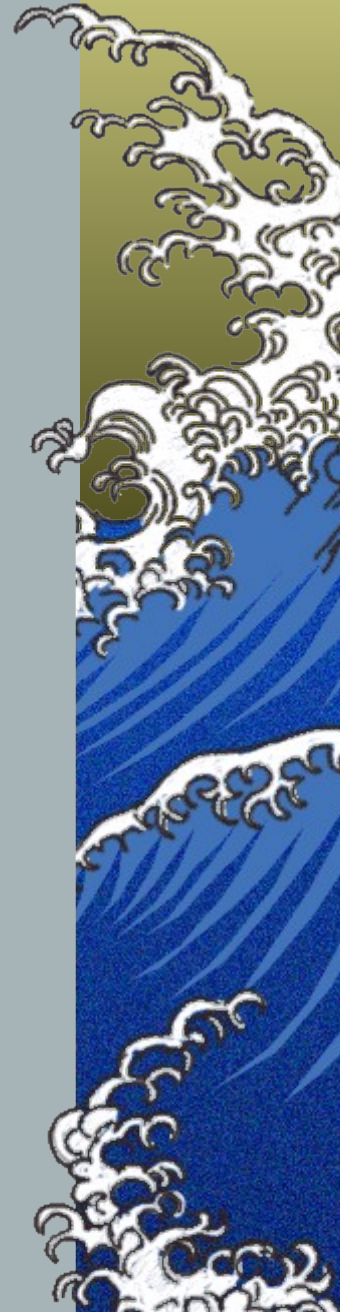
- ✦ *But, the truth will surface.*
- ✦ *At a wedding several years later, a guest who has indulged a bit too much, tells Oedipus that Polybus and Merope are not his parents.*





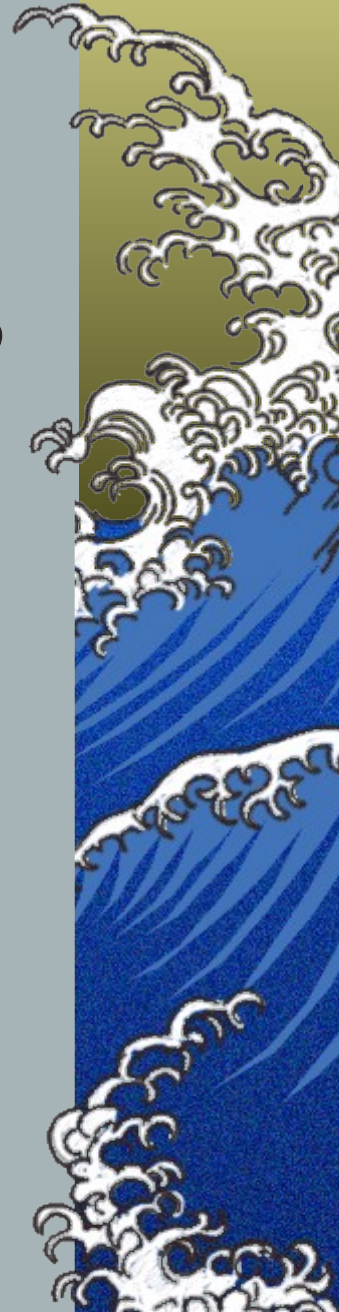
Denial

- ✦ *Oedipus confronts Polybus and Merope, who promptly deny it.*



A Riddle

- ★ *Oedipus loves a good riddle, so he decides to go to the Oracle at Delphi to ask it about his parents, hoping for a straight answer.*



The Oracle at Delphi

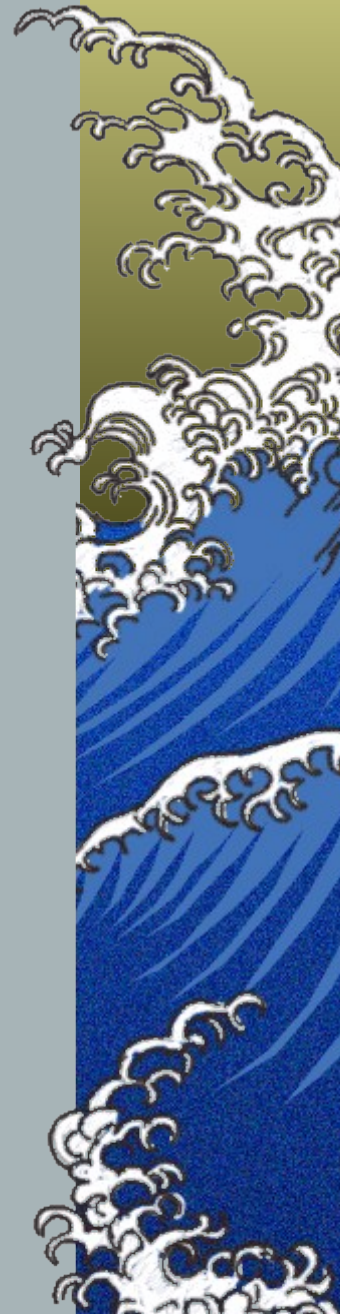


- ▶ *Of course, the Oracle isn't really good at straight answers.*
- ▶ *Oedipus asks the Oracle if Polybus and Merope are his real parents.*
- ▶ *The Oracle answers him by giving him a prophesy:*



“You will kill your father and
beget (*have*) children by your
mother.”

(seems very similar to the prophecy given to Laius
and Jocasta)



Go west young man!

- ★ *Oedipus decides that he can't go back home (Corinth), otherwise he may kill his father (Polybus) and marry his mother (Merope).*



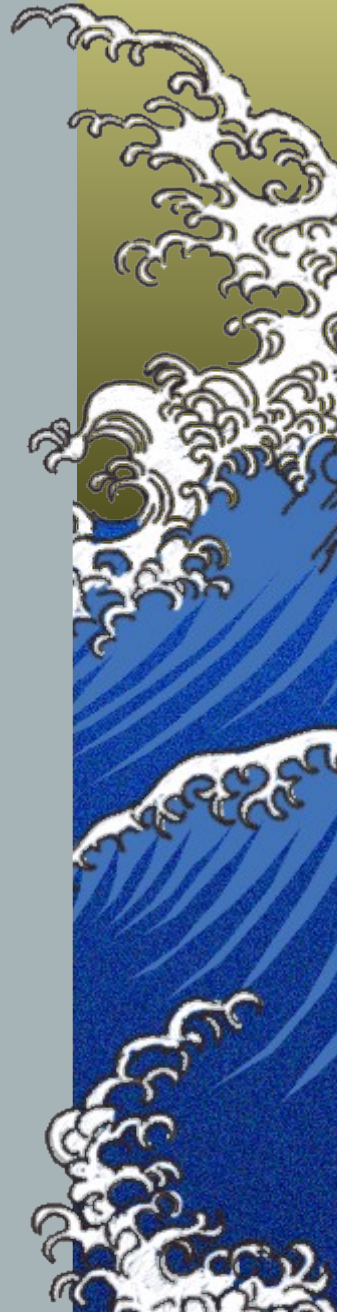
But, as the reader, we know . . .

- ▶ *Polybus and Merope are not his “real” parents.*
- ▶ *Therefore, he could go back to Corinth if he wanted to.*
- ▶ *The worst way that he could head is towards Thebes.*
- ▶ *Therefore, he unknowingly heads towards Thebes, the home of his biological parents (Laius and Jocasta).*

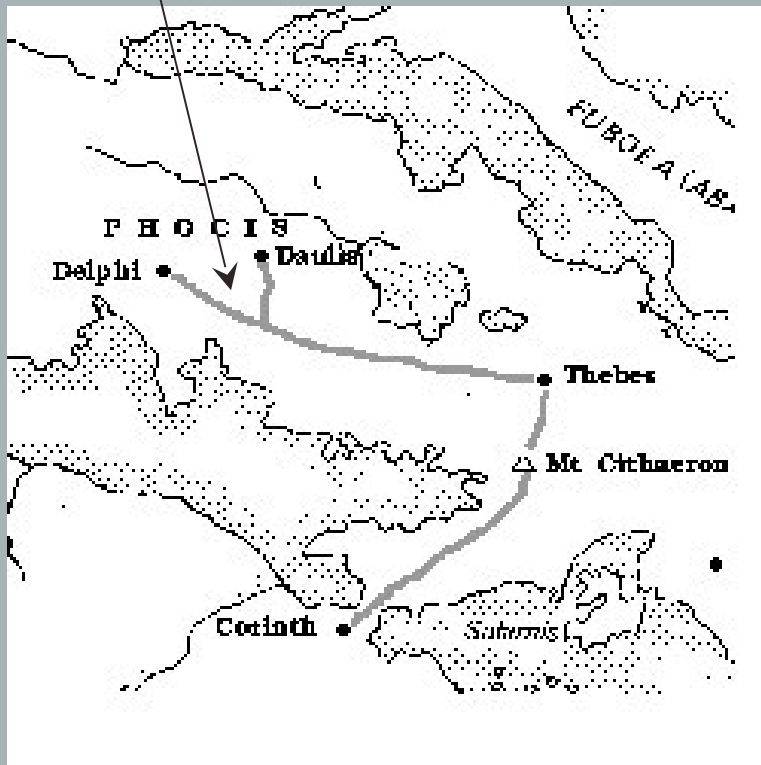


Meanwhile, back in Thebes . . .

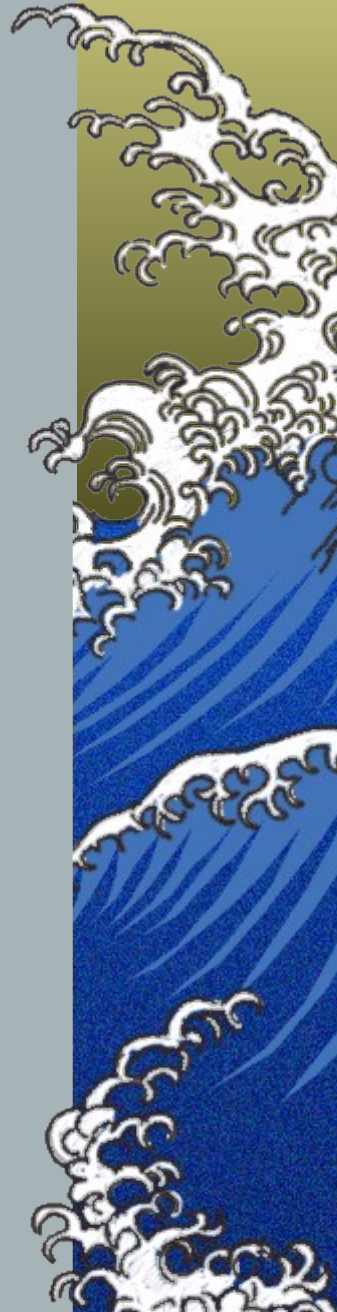
- ▶ *A plague has beset the people of Thebes in the form of the Sphinx.*
- ▶ *The Sphinx asks a riddle and kills those unable to answer correctly.*
- ▶ *To help his people, King Laius decides to travel to the Oracle at Delphi to seek a solution.*



At the crossroads

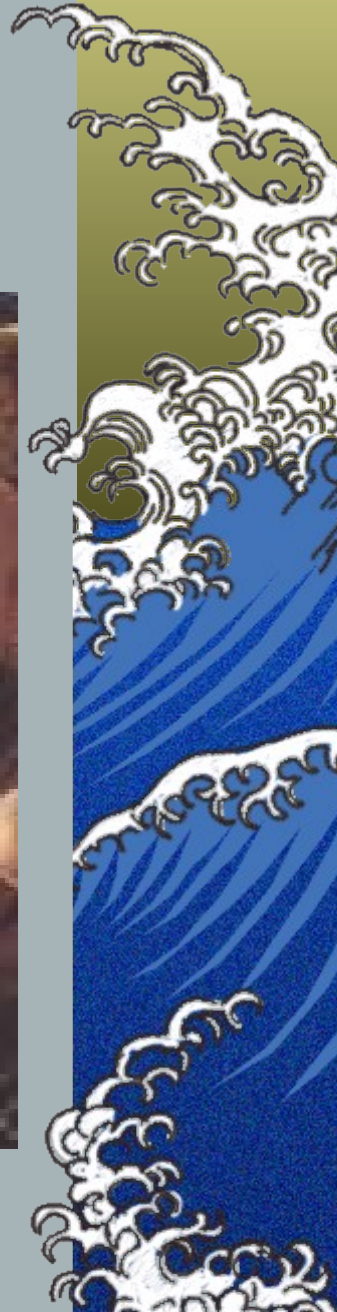


- ✦ *Guess who meets at the crossroads of three roads?*
- ✦ *If you guessed Oedipus and King Laius, you'd be right.*
- ✦ *Oedipus is running from the Oracle and Laius to it.*



Father and Son Meet

- ▶ *Only, neither knows that they are father and son!*
- ▶ *They argue over who has the right of way.*
- ▶ *Legend has it that Laius strikes Oedipus, and Oedipus gets a little angry.*
- ▶ *They fight and Oedipus kills King Laius.*



First part fulfilled

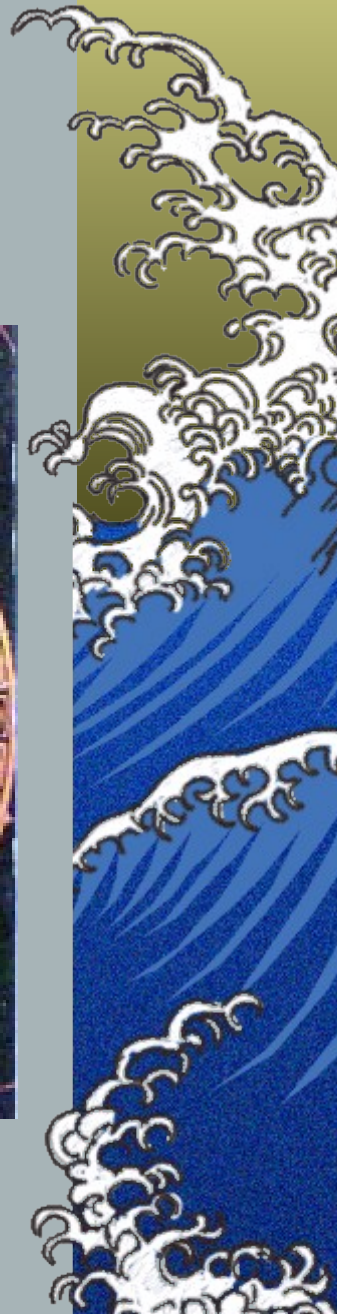


- ★ *If you've been following closely, you will realize that the first part of the Oracle's prophecy to Oedipus has now been fulfilled.*



Thebes

- ▶ *Oedipus continues onto Thebes and meets the Sphinx, which is still terrorizing the people.*
- ▶ *The Sphinx asks Oedipus its riddle:*



“What goes on four legs in the morning, two legs at noon, and three legs in the evening?”



His Reward

- ✦ *After correctly answering the riddle (MAN) and ridding Thebes of the Sphinx, the people wish to reward Oedipus by making him their king (who has mysteriously disappeared).*
- ✦ *The easiest way to accomplish this promotion is for him to marry the queen, Jocasta (his birth mom).*



Second part of Oedipus'
prophecy fulfilled!



Happily ever after????

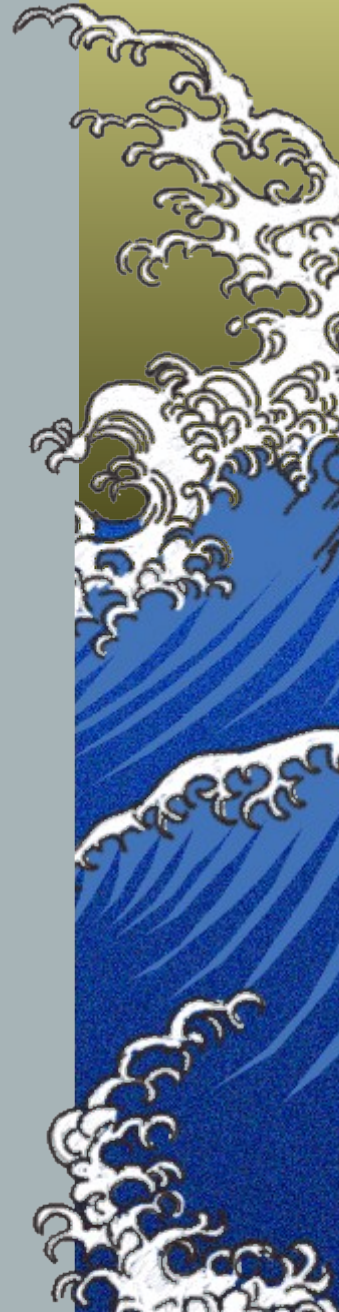
- ▶ *Oedipus and Jocasta marry and over the years have four children:
2 boys, Eteocles and Polynices, and 2 girls, Ismene and Antigone.*
- ▶ *This is the point at which Sophocles' play Oedipus Rex begins.*



A Plague Strikes Thebes

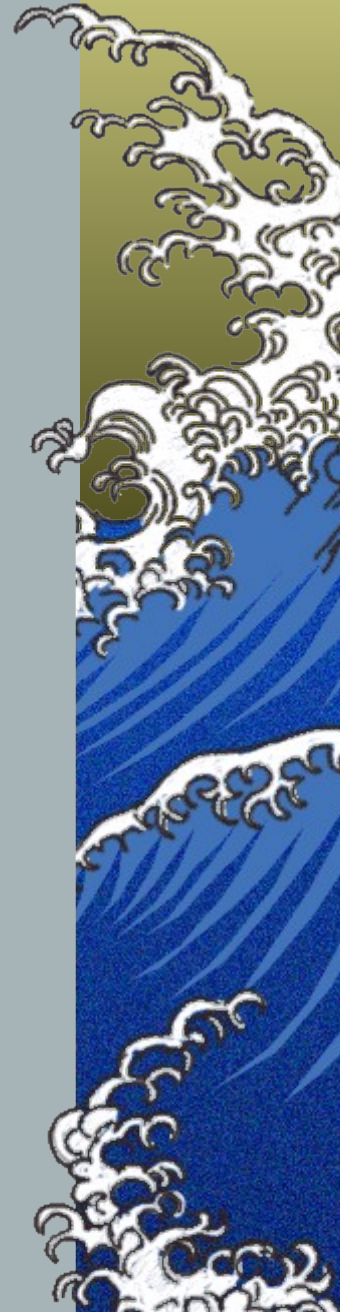


- ▶ *Crops, herds, and citizens start dying.*
- ▶ *The Delphic Oracle is consulted and reveals that Thebes is suffering because it is harboring the murderer of Laius.*
- ▶ *The murderer must be brought to justice or exiled from Thebes.*



Oedipus the Tragic Hero

- ▶ *Oedipus declares he will save Thebes (again) and begins an investigation.*
- ▶ *After ignoring the truth from Tiresias the blind seer, Oedipus summons the old shepherd who knows the truth.*



The Truth will be Revealed

- ✦ *Jocasta realizes the truth before Oedipus learns it, and begs him to stop investigating.*

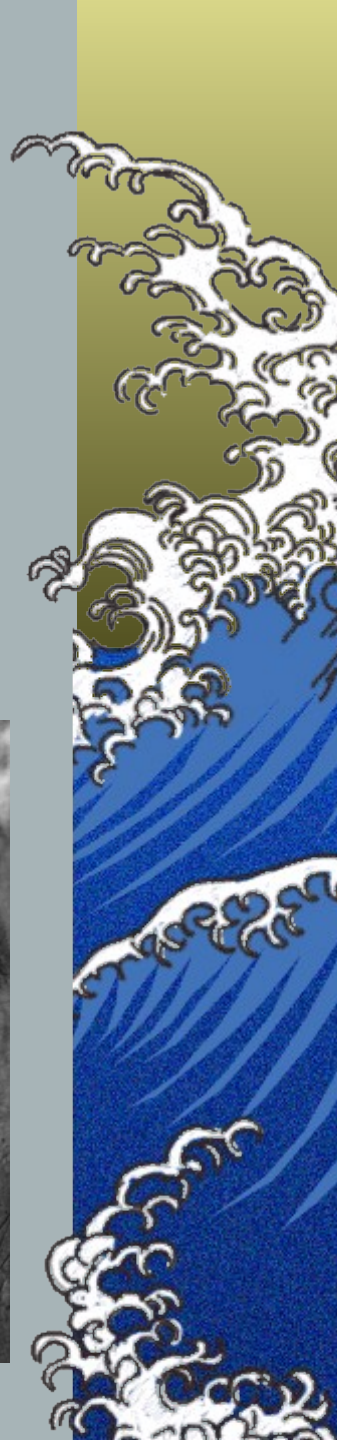


- ✦ *Stubborn Oedipus will not stop when he realizes that he can learn the truth of his own birth.*



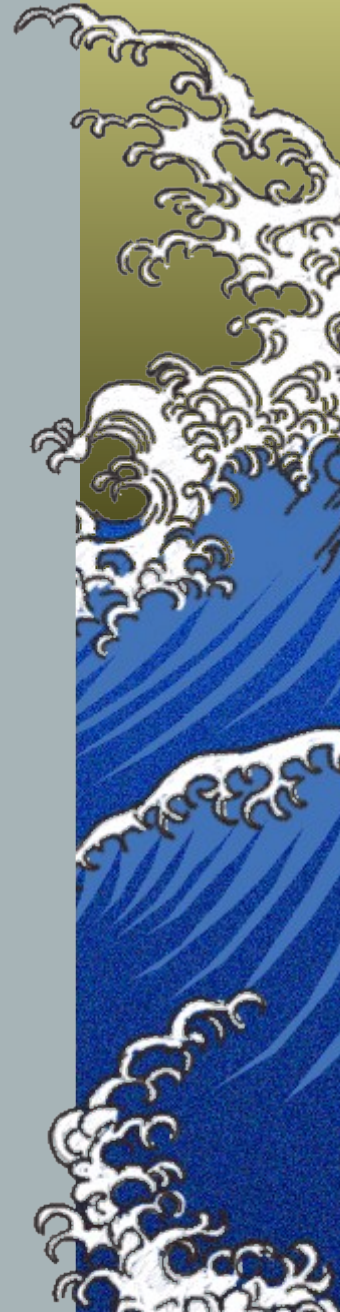
Tragedy Must Result in Suffering

- ▶ *The shepherd's story reveals the awful truth.*
- ▶ *Jocasta meanwhile has hanged herself.*
- ▶ *Oedipus, now 'seeing' the truth, stabs out his own eyes to blind himself.*
- ▶ *He then goes into exile.*



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Thebes must go on



- ▶ *Jocasta's brother Creon rules until Eteocles and Polynices are old enough to rule.*
- ▶ *Upon reaching ruling age, the two brothers arrange to each rule Thebes on alternating years.*



Tragic Civil War

- ✦ *Eteocles rules first but then refuses to let Polynices have his turn.*
- ✦ *Polynices raises an army and attacks seeking to take Thebes.*
- ✦ *The attack fails, but the two brothers kill each other in the battle.*



The Family Curse must Continue



- ✦ *Creon is ruler again.*
- ✦ *He has Eteocles buried with honors but orders Polynices to be left unburied rotting in the sun as an enemy of Thebes.*
- ✦ *The play begins the next day with Antigone mourning the death and fate of her brother.*

