

Conflicting Motivations

My Notes

Setting a Purpose for Reading

- As you read the following scene, mark the text for evidence of each character's motivations and beliefs.
- Circle unknown words and phrases. Try to determine the meanings of the words by using context clues, word parts, or a dictionary.

[Enter the Guard, with Antigone]

CHORUS LEADER

What's this? I fear some omen from the gods.
I can't deny what I see here so clearly—
that young girl there—it's Antigone.
Oh you poor girl, daughter of Oedipus,
child of a such a father, so unfortunate,
what's going on? Surely they've not brought you
here
because you've disobeyed the royal laws,
because they've caught you acting foolishly?

**The Chorus Leader
Sees Antigone**

430

GUARD

This here's the one who carried out the act.
We caught her as she was burying the corpse.
Where's Creon?

[The palace doors open. Enter Creon with attendants]

CHORUS LEADER

He's coming from the house—and just in time.

CREON

Why have I come “just in time”? What's happening?
What is it?

GUARD

My lord, human beings should never take an oath
there's something they'll not do—for later thoughts
contradict what they first meant. I'd have sworn
I'd not soon venture here again. Back then,
the threats you made brought me a lot of grief.
But there's no joy as great as what we pray for
against all hope. And so I have come back,
breaking that oath I swore. I bring this girl,
captured while she was honouring the grave.
This time we did not draw lots. No. This time
I was the lucky man, not someone else.
And now, my lord, take her for questioning.
Convict her. Do as you wish. As for me,
by rights I'm free and clear of all this trouble.

440

The Guard

450

CREON

This girl here—how did you catch her? And where?

GUARD

She was burying that man. Now you know
all there is to know.

CREON

Do you understand just what you're saying? Are
your words the truth?

GUARD

We saw this girl giving that dead man's corpse
full burial rites—an act you'd made illegal.
Is what I say simple and clear enough?

CREON

How did you see her, catch her in the act?

460 GUARD
It happened this way. When we got there,
after hearing those awful threats from you,
we swept off all the dust covering the corpse,
so the damp body was completely bare.
Then we sat down on rising ground up wind,
to escape the body's putrid rotting stench.
We traded insults just to stay awake,
in case someone was careless on the job.
That's how we spent the time right up 'til noon,
when the sun's bright circle in the sky
had moved half way and it was burning hot.
470 Then suddenly a swirling windstorm came,
whipping clouds of dust up from the ground,
filling the plain—some heaven-sent trouble.
In that level place the dirt storm damaged
all the forest growth, and the air around
was filled with dust for miles. We shut our mouths
and just endured this **scourge** sent from the gods.
A long time passed. The storm came to an end.
That's when we saw the girl. She was shrieking—
a distressing painful cry, just like a bird
480 who's seen an empty nest, its fledglings gone.
That's how she was when she saw the naked corpse.
She screamed out a lament, and then she swore,
calling evil curses down upon the ones
who'd done this. Then right away her hands
threw on the thirsty dust. She lifted up
a finely made bronze jug and then three times
poured out her tributes to the dead.
When we saw that, we rushed up right away
and grabbed her. She was not afraid at all.
490 We charged her with her previous offence
as well as this one. She just kept standing there,
denying nothing. That made me happy—
though it was painful, too. For it's a joy
escaping troubles which affect oneself,
but painful to bring evil on one's friends.
But all that is of less concern to me
than my own safety.

CREON
You there—you with your face
bent down towards the ground, what do you say?
Do you deny you did this or admit it?

500 ANTIGONE
I admit I did it. I won't deny that.

CREON *[to the Guard]*

You're dismissed—go where you want. You're free—
no serious charges made against you.

[Exit the Guard. Creon turns to interrogate Antigone]

Tell me briefly—not in some lengthy speech—
were you aware there was a proclamation
forbidding what you did?

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scourge: instrument of suffering

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ANTIGONE

I'd heard of it. How could I not? It was public knowledge.

CREON

And yet you dared to break those very laws?

ANTIGONE

Yes. Zeus did not announce those laws to me. And Justice living with the gods below sent no such laws for men. I did not think anything which you proclaimed strong enough to let a mortal override the gods and their unwritten and unchanging laws. They're not just for today or yesterday, but exist forever, and no one knows where they first appeared. So I did not mean to let a fear of any human will lead to my punishment among the gods. I know all too well I'm going to die—how could I not?—it makes no difference what you decree. And if I have to die before my time, well, I count that a gain. When someone has to live the way I do, surrounded by so many evil things, how can she fail to find a benefit in death? And so for me meeting this fate won't bring any pain. But if I'd allowed my own mother's dead son to just lie there, an unburied corpse, then I'd feel distress. What's going on here does not hurt me at all. If you think what I'm doing now is stupid, perhaps I'm being charged with foolishness by someone who's a fool.

510

Divine vs. Civil Law

520

CHORUS LEADER

It's clear enough the spirit in this girl is passionate—her father was the same. She has no sense of compromise in times of trouble.

530

CREON [*to the Chorus Leader*]

But you should know the most **obdurate** wills are those most prone to break. The strongest iron **tempered** in the fire to make it really hard—that's the kind you see most often shatter. I'm well aware the most tempestuous horses are tamed by one small bit. Pride has no place in anyone who is his neighbour's slave. This girl here was already very **insolent** in contravening laws we had proclaimed. Here she again displays her proud contempt—having done the act, she now boasts of it. She laughs at what she's done. Well, in this case, if she gets her way and goes unpunished, then she's the man here, not me. No. She may be my sister's child, closer to me by blood than anyone belonging to my house

540

Creon's Reply

550

WORD CONNECTIONS

Multiple Meanings

The word **passionate** has several meanings related to one idea: having or showing strong emotions. Can you figure out the variations in tone or meaning of this word? Which meaning is most accurate for the context used in line 535?

obdurate: hardhearted or inflexible

tempered: hardened

insolent: disrespectful

WORD CONNECTIONS

Roots and Affixes

Contra- is a commonly used prefix, meaning “against.” A common root word is *venire* or *vene*, meaning “to come.” Knowing these two word parts, what is the meaning of “contravening” in line 545?

who worships Zeus Herkeios¹ in my home,
but she'll not escape my harshest punishment—
her sister, too, whom I accuse as well.
She had an equal part in all their plans
to do this burial. Go summon her here.
I saw her just now inside the palace,
her mind out of control, some kind of fit.

[Exit attendants into the palace to fetch Ismene]

560

When people hatch their mischief in the dark
their minds often convict them in advance,
betraying their treachery. How I despise
a person caught committing evil acts
who then desires to glorify the crime.

ANTIGONE

Take me and kill me—what more do you want?

CREON

Me? Nothing. With that I have everything.

ANTIGONE

Then why delay? There's nothing in your words
that I enjoy—may that always be the case!
And what I say displeases you as much.
But where could I gain greater glory
than setting my own brother in his grave?
All those here would confirm this pleases them
if their lips weren't sealed by fear—being king,
which offers all sorts of various benefits,
means you can talk and act just as you wish.

570

Opinion of the People

CREON

In all of Thebes, you're the only one
who looks at things that way.

ANTIGONE

They share my views, but they keep their mouths
shut just for you.

CREON

These views of yours—so different from the rest—
don't they bring you any sense of shame?

580

ANTIGONE

No—there's nothing shameful in honouring
my mother's children.

CREON

You had a brother killed fighting for the other side.

ANTIGONE

Yes—from the same mother and father, too.

CREON

Why then give tributes which insult his name?

ANTIGONE

But his dead corpse won't back up what you say.

CREON

Yes, he will, if you give equal honours to a wicked man.

ANTIGONE

But the one who died was not some slave—it was
his own brother.

590

CREON

Who was destroying this country—the other one
went to his death defending it.

¹ **Zeus Herkeios:** refers to an altar where sacrifices and libations were offered to Zeus; Zeus was the Divine protector of the house and the fence surrounding it; *herkos* means “fence” in Greek

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Moral Dilemma

	ANTIGONE	That may be, but Hades ² still desires equal rites for both.
	CREON	A good man does not wish what we give him to be the same an evil man receives.
	ANTIGONE	Who knows? In the world below perhaps such actions are no crime.
	CREON	An enemy can never be a friend, not even in death.
	ANTIGONE	But my nature is to love. I cannot hate.
600	CREON	Then go down to the dead. If you must love, love them. No woman's going to govern me—no, no—not while I'm still alive.
	<i>[Enter two attendants from the house bringing Ismene to Creon]</i>	
	CHORUS LEADER	Ismene's coming. There—right by the door. She's crying. How she must love her sister! From her forehead a cloud casts its shadow down across her darkly flushing face—and drops its rain onto her lovely cheeks.
610	CREON	You there—you snake lurking in my house, sucking out my life's blood so secretly. I'd no idea I was nurturing two pests, who aimed to rise against my throne. Come here. Tell me this—do you admit you played your part in this burial, or will you swear an oath you had no knowledge of it?
	ISMENE	I did it—I admit it, and she'll back me up. So I bear the guilt as well.
	ANTIGONE	No, no—justice will not allow you to say that. You didn't want to. I didn't work with you.
	ISMENE	But now you're in trouble, I'm not ashamed of suffering, too, as your companion.
620	ANTIGONE	Hades and the dead can say who did it—I don't love a friend whose love is only words.
	ISMENE	You're my sister. Don't dishonour me. Let me respect the dead and die with you.
	ANTIGONE	Don't try to share my death or make a claim to actions which you did not do. I'll die—and that will be enough.
	ISMENE	But if you're gone, what is there in life for me to love?
	ANTIGONE	Ask Creon. He's the one you care about.
	ISMENE	Why hurt me like this? It doesn't help you.

² **Hades:** King of the Underworld and god of the dead

Ismene

- 630 ANTIGONE If I am mocking you, it pains me, too.
ISMENE Even now is there some way I can help?
ANTIGONE Save yourself. I won't envy your escape.
ISMENE I feel so wretched leaving you to die.
ANTIGONE But you chose life—it was my choice to die.
ISMENE But not before I'd said those words just now.
ANTIGONE Some people may approve of how you think—
others will believe my judgment's good.
ISMENE But the mistake's the same for both of us.
ANTIGONE Be brave. You're alive. But my spirit died
some time ago so I might help the dead.
640 CREON I'd say one of these girls has just revealed
how mad she is—the other's been that way
since she was born.
ISMENE My lord, whatever good sense people have by birth
no longer stays with them
once their lives go wrong—it abandons them.
CREON In your case, that's true, once you made your choice
to act in evil ways with wicked people.
ISMENE How could I live alone, without her here?
CREON Don't speak of her being here. Her life is over.
650 ISMENE You're going to kill your own son's bride?
CREON Why not? There are other fields for him to plough.
ISMENE No one will make him a more loving wife
than she will.
CREON I have no desire my son should have an evil wife.
ANTIGONE Dearest Haemon, how your father wrongs you.
CREON I've had enough of this—you and your marriage.
ISMENE You really want that? You're going to take her
from him?
CREON No, not me. Hades is the one who'll stop the marriage.
CHORUS LEADER So she must die—that seems decided on.
660 CREON Yes—for you and me the matter's closed.

[Creon turns to address his attendants]

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inevitable: sure to happen

sovereign: king

No more delay. You slaves, take them inside.
From this point on they must act like women
and have no liberty to wander off.
Even bold men run when they see Hades
coming close to them to snatch their lives.

[The attendants take Antigone and Ismene into the palace, leaving Creon and the Chorus on stage]

THIRD

ODE

CHORUS—Strophe 1

670

Those who live without tasting evil
have happy lives—for when the gods
shake a house to its foundations,
then **inevitable** disasters strike,
falling upon whole families,
just as a surging ocean swell
running before cruel Thracian winds
across the dark trench of the sea
churns up the deep black sand
and crashes headlong on the cliffs,
which scream in pain against the wind.

Antistrophe 1

680

I see this house's age-old sorrows,
the house of Labdakos³ children,
sorrows falling on the sorrows of the dead,
one generation bringing no relief
to generations after it—some god
strikes at them—on and on without an end.
For now the light which has been shining
over the last roots of Oedipus' house
is being cut down with a bloody knife
belonging to the gods below—
for foolish talk and frenzy in the soul.

Strophe 2

690

Oh Zeus, what human trespasses
can check your power? Even Sleep,
who casts his nets on everything,
cannot master that—nor can the months,
the tireless months the gods control.
A **sovereign** who cannot grow old,
you hold Olympus as your own,
in all its glittering magnificence.
From now on into all future time,
as in the past, your law holds firm.
It never enters lives of human beings
in its full force without disaster.

³ **Labdakos:** father to Laius, grandfather to Oedipus

700 Antistrophe 2

Hope ranging far and wide brings comfort
to many men—but then hope can deceive,
delusions born of volatile desire.
It comes upon the man who's ignorant
until his foot is seared in burning fire.
Someone's wisdom has revealed to us
this famous saying—sometimes the gods
lure a man's mind forward to disaster, and he
thinks evil's something good. But then he
lives only the briefest time free of catastrophe.

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.
5. **Key Ideas and Details:** In lines 437–450, what are the guard's feelings about returning to speak to Creon? Why does he refer to himself as “the lucky man” in line 447?
6. **Craft and Structure:** Why is the windstorm significant in the development of the plot? What explanation does the guard give for its cause?
7. **Key Ideas and Details:** In lines 508–518, Antigone clearly states her rationale for acting against Creon's proclamation. How can you connect her reasoning to the play's themes so far?

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8. **Key Ideas and Details:** Why does Antigone admit what she has done even though she knows Creon will punish her? Provide evidence from the text to support your inference.

9. **Craft and Structure:** What is the meaning of the metaphors Creon uses in lines 538–542? What do they imply about how he will treat Antigone?

10. **Key Ideas and Details:** In lines 570–577, what key point do Creon and Antigone disagree on?

11. **Key Ideas and Details:** Consider the juxtaposition of lines 597–598. What do these brief statements by Antigone and Creon reveal about why these two characters disagree?

12. **Key Ideas and Details:** How and why has Ismene's attitude changed since the beginning of the play?

13. **Craft and Structure:** What key information does Ismene reveal in line 650, and how does Creon respond? Why?

14. **Craft and Structure:** In Strophe 1, what extended metaphor does the Chorus use to portray a family punished by the gods?