

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Period: \_\_\_\_\_

English 10  
*Antigone* – Activity 4.10 (“Chorus Lines”)

**CHORUS** (a group of actors who moved and sang together) – acted as one character and spoke in unison during the Choral Odes, which separated the scenes of the drama. The Chorus might:

- Set the mood
- Summarize
- Represent a point of view
- Side with various characters
- Warn of disaster

Choral Odes contain a great deal of **figurative language** – imaginative language not meant to be taken literally, such as similes or metaphors.

**Figurative language:**

- **Imagery** – descriptive language used to create images by appealing to our five senses (example: greasy, stringy cheese on the pizza)
- **Simile** – a comparison of two unlike things or ideas using the words like or as (example: the moon was as white as milk)
- **Metaphor** – a comparison of two unlike things or ideas in which one thing is spoken of as if it were another (example: the moon was a crisp white cracker)
- **Personification** – giving human qualities to an animal, object, or idea (example: the wind howled as the storm approached)

Below is the First Ode with a summary of the ode and annotations on the use of figurative language by Sophocles. In this ode, the Chorus comments on events that happened before the play opens – the fight between Antigone’s brothers Eteocles and Polyneices as Polyneices attacks Thebes to take the throne from his brother.

Figurative Language	Chorus Lines: Actual Text	Summary
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FIRST ODE <sup>1</sup>		
CHORUS—Strophe 1 <sup>2</sup>		
Personification – “You” referring to the sunlight Imagery – glowing; golden	O ray of sunlight, most beautiful that ever shone on Thebes, city of the seven gates, you’ve appeared at last, you glowing eye of golden day, moving above the streams of Dirce, <sup>3</sup> driving into headlong flight the white-shield warrior from Argos, who marched here fully armed, now forced back by your sharper power.	Ray of the sun, most beautiful at the seven gates of Thebes, you appeared at last. The man in white from Argos who marched here to fight is now forced back by your light.
Personification – “your sharper power” giving sunlight human qualities		
CHORUS LEADER		
Imagery – “piercing screams” Metaphor – “an eagle” referring to the warrior – what does it say about the warrior to compare him to an eagle? Simile – “wings as white as snow”	Against our land he marched, sent here by the warring claims of Polyneices, with piercing screams, an eagle flying above our land, covered wings as white as snow, and hordes of warriors in arms, helmets topped with horsehair crests.	Sent by Polyneices’ desire for the crown, he flew over our land like an eagle covered in snow-white wings with weapons.

## Figurative Language

## Chorus Lines: Actual Text

## Summary

### CHORUS—Antistrophe 1<sup>4</sup>

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**Personification** – “threats to swallow us”; “spears thirsting to kill”

**Imagery** – “gorged themselves on Theban blood”

tanding above our homes,  
he ranged around our seven gates,  
with threats to swallow us  
and spears thirsting to kill.  
Before his jaws had had their fill  
and gorged themselves on Theban blood,  
before Hephaistos<sup>5</sup> pine-torch flames  
had seized our towers, our fortress crown,  
he went back, driven in retreat.  
Behind him rings the din of war—  
his enemy, the Theban dragon-snake,  
too difficult for him to overcome.

He and his army circled around our seven gates ready to kill us. Before he could attack and take our tower, he was driven back. Thebes, his enemy, was too hard to conquer.

### CHORUS LEADER

**Imagery** – “golden pride”

Zeus hates an arrogant boasting tongue.  
Seeing them march here in a mighty stream,  
in all their clanging golden pride,  
he hurled his fire and struck the man,  
up there, on our battlements, as he began  
to scream aloud his victory.

Zeus – the king of gods – hates a bragger. Seeing them march here filled with pride, Zeus hurled a lightning bolt at him as he stood on our tower shouting about his victory.

### CHORUS—Strophe 2

**Personification** – “breathing raging storms”

The man swung down, torch still in hand,  
and smashed into **unyielding** earth—  
the one who not so long ago attacked,  
who launched his furious, enraged assault,  
to blast us, **breathing raging storms**.  
But things turned out not as he’d hoped.  
Great war god Ares<sup>6</sup> assisted us—  
he smashed them down and doomed them all  
to a very different fate.

The fighter fell to the hard ground – the man who not long ago attacked us. But he didn’t get what he wanted as the war god Ares helped us. Ares killed them all.

### CHORUS LEADER

Seven captains at seven gates  
matched against seven equal warriors  
paid Zeus<sup>7</sup> their full bronze tribute,  
the god who turns the battle tide,  
all but that pair of wretched men,  
born of one father and one mother, too—  
who set their conquering spears against each other  
and then both shared a common death.

The seven captains of Thebes stationed at our seven gates honored Zeus except for two horrible men. These men – who were brothers – fought each other for power and both died.

### CHORUS—Antistrophe 2

Now victory with her glorious name  
has come, bringing joy to well-armed Thebes.  
The battle’s done—let’s strive now to forget  
with songs and dancing all night long,  
with Bacchus<sup>8</sup> leading us to make Thebes shake.

Now the goddess victory brings joy to Thebes. The fight is over – let’s try to forget and move on with music and dancing, with the god of wine Bacchus leading us in celebration.

**Analysis:** Through the use of figurative language, there is a contrast in the way the Chorus speaks of the new day that dawned after the defeat of the army that was sent by Polyneices’ “warring claim” compared to the attack on Thebes. It is clear they do not approve of what Polyneices did. The bright and golden day brings hope to the city. The extended metaphor of comparing the warrior to an eagle carries through the whole ode. The eagle flies over the seven gates of the city – a predator that stalks and kills its prey with violence. However, Zeus comes down to save the city, striking down the warrior for his arrogance. The Chorus highlights the Greeks’ belief in the role the gods play in determining human fate and helps us understand their desire to stay in the gods’ favor.