

CLASSICAL STUDIES

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Classical Studies

OEDIPUS THE KING

HIGHER LEVEL



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Oedipus the King, by Sophocles

Any analysis of *Oedipus the King* must focus on two things: Oedipus' character and the complex plot. Other minor characters can be more briefly analysed and usually the same evidence/quotes used to examine the themes and the character of Oedipus himself can apply.

Central Themes
<p>Fate vs Free Will/Prophecy: Centre to the plot are two prophecies and the people who try to avoid their fates. In Ancient Greece, prophecies were a significant part of life and society; and yet, they understood how tricky these things could be. Just as books or movies like <i>Harry Potter</i> or <i>The Matrix</i> show, prophecies can be defined by the actions of those they are about – the protagonist of these stories, like many Ancient Greeks, might have legitimately asked “Would the prophecy have happened if I hadn't heard it?”</p>
<p>Wisdom and knowledge: “Know Thyself” was written above the oracle's temple at Delphi. To understand a prophecy, the Greeks believed you needed to have greater insight into who you are. Oedipus showed a lack of wisdom when he heard the prophecy about his killing his father and marrying his parents – a wise man would not try and avoid fate. He now shows less wisdom has he acquires more knowledge about what has happened in the past. Just because he knows more does not mean he understands more or is wiser for it.</p>
<p>Blindness – Figurative vs Literal: Oedipus' lack of wisdom is highlighted by the central theme or motif of blindness. The ironically blind seer Tiresias <i>sees</i> more, has more <i>insight</i>, and is <i>wiser</i>; Oedipus, the determined detective, drives for truth, acquires what information he can, but can never <i>see</i> the truth clearly, never has <i>insight</i>, remains knowing but <i>unwise</i>. Not until the end, when the truth hits him all too hard and he decides to punish himself with ironically and tragically: blinding himself with his mother/wife's broaches – the clothes of the woman whose true relationship to himself he could not (or perhaps would not) see.</p>
<p>Determination – Oedipus the Detective: Oedipus asks many questions in his search for the truth. He does not leave any stone unturned. He is even driven to angry extremes in his search for truth – threatening his kin, blind seers, and old shepherds/slaves in his quest.</p>
<p>Power – Oedipus the Tyrant/Ruler: Ultimately the title of the play is King Oedipus. Sophocles play is exploring the nature of ruling through Oedipus and the plot. What happens when a king seeks the one causing his city suffering, only to find he is the unknown culprit? Oedipus' temper and determined nature, and his pride in his own abilities, drives him to the brink of killing his bother-in-law, to declaring a proven seer of the God Apollo a liar, and (in the backstory) to murder his own (unknown) father.</p>



Hubris:

The absolute centre of all of these themes is **Hubris** – the Ancient Greeks favourite trait in their tragic Heroes and Heroines. **Oedipus has pride in himself, his skills and intelligent as a ruler and detective, his ability to defy Apollo and fate** (though he does show some fear of it). It was his pride that led him to believe he was **above the will of the gods and destiny**; it was his pride and **hot-temper** that led him to kill Laius at the crossroads; it was his pride that leads him now to bring curses down on an unknown culprit, to accuse a blind seer and his trusted brother-in-law and friend of treachery, and to continue blindly down to path in search of a truth that he ought to never learn.

Episodes of King Oedipus		
Section:	Lines	Stasimons and Dialogues
Prologue	Lines 1-151	Oedipus and Priest; Oedipus and Creon coming from Delphi
Parados	Lines 151-216	Chorus sing of the suffering of Thebes and pray to the Gods for relieve especially Apollo.
Episode 1	Lines 216-514	Oedipus and Chorus; Oedipus and Tiresias
Episode 2	Lines 512-875	Chorus Stasimon asking who the guilty man is and how could it be Oedipus as Tiresias had proclaimed. Oedipus accusing Creon; Jocasta tells Oedipus of 3 Roads and the death of her baby despite of the prophecy.
Episode 3	Lines 875-1085	Chorus Stasimon on destiny and the dangers of tyranny and ignoring the gods' will. Jocasta, Messenger, and Oedipus.



Episode 4	Lines 1102-1189	Chorus Stasimon on how the riddle of Oedipus' birth will reveal "tomorrow's moon"; Oedipus questions shepherd
Episode 5	Lines 1189-1530	Chorus Stasimon on the fall of Oedipus; attendant/messenger reveals the death of Jocasta and blinding of Oedipus; Oedipus comes on stage, humble before Chorus and Creon; Creon proclaims that they will wait for Apollo's command before sentencing Oedipus to exile. Oedipus embraces his daughters and is led indoors

Central Characters

Character: Oedipus



Key Quotes: (Your translation may differ)

Some quotes are more important than others; you must decide which to prioritise – these lists are not exhaustive and will not guarantee a full answer.

"You freed us from the Sphinx, you came to Thebes and cut us loose from the bloody tribute we had paid that harsh, brutal singer. We taught you nothing, no skill, no extra knowledge, still you triumphed."

– Priest, Prologue, to Oedipus about his clever success with the Sphinx.

Background (as we know it from the start of the play):

- From the cursed line of **Cadmus**, founder of Thebes.
- Defeater of the **Sphinx** and **new** king of Thebes after the **mysterious death of Laius**.
- Noble son of **Polybus** the king of Corinth.

Characteristics/traits (Adjectives):

Proud/Hubristic, **Clever/intelligent**, **foolish/naïve/blind**, **hot-tempered**, authoritative, good ruler, slightly paranoid, **determined**, honest, confident,

Summary of Oedipus' Most Important Actions in Plot:

- Sends **Creon** to the oracle. Asks all the proceedings to be spoken **openly before the elders of Thebes**.
- Proclaims a curse on the murderer of Laius and all who protect.
- Sends **Creon** for Tiresias on **Creon's** advice.
- **Threatens Tiresias**, refutes Creon's accusations and accuses Tiresias and Creon of conspiracy.
- **Threatens Creon**, tries to proclaim him guilty without trial or proof.
- He is calmed by Jocasta and the Chorus.
- Questions Jocasta on the story of the 3 roads, Laius death, and reveals his

"Best of men..."

- Priest, Prologue, to Oedipus.

"Speak out, speak to us all."

- Oedipus, Prologue, to Creon asking the prophecy to be public.

"No, I'll start again – I'll bring it all to light myself." – Oedipus,

- Prologue, vowing to reveal the truth.

"Banish this man – whoever he may be – never shelter him, never speak a word to him, never make him partner to your prayers, your victims burned to the gods... he is a plague..."

- Oedipus, Episode 1, unknowingly/ironically cursing himself.

"I curse myself as well... If by any chance he proves to be an intimate of our house, here at my hearth, with my full knowledge, may the curse I just called down on him strike me!"

- Oedipus, Episode 1, unknowingly/ironically curing himself again.

"On Creon's cure I sent the escorts, twice, within the hour."

- Oedipus, Episode 1, connecting Creon to Tiresias.

"You scum of the earth, you'd enrage a heart of stone! You won't talk? Nothing moves you? Out with it, once and for all!"

- Oedipus, Episode 1, insulting Tiresias and showing his anger.

"Shall I say more, so you can really rage?"

- Tiresias, Episode 1, to Oedipus emphasising Oedipus' anger.

"You cannot see how far you've gone in guilt."



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tiresias, Episode 1, highlighting Oedipus' blindness. <p>“You’ve lost your power, stone-blind, stone-deaf – senses, eyes blind as stone!”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Oedipus, Episode 1, to Tiresias showing his anger.
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - reasons for leaving Corinth. Sends for the Shepherd of Laius. Hears the messenger from Corinth but does not make the connection between himself and Laius and Jocasta's stories. - Intensely questions the Shepherd and discovers the truth. Blinds himself. <p>Returns to stage to beg for pity and exile; begs Creon to grant him exile; Creon proclaims he shall remain till the will of the god Apollo is known.</p>	<p>“Blind, lost in the night, endless night that nursed you! You can't hurt me or anyone else who sees the light...” – Oedipus, Episode 1, insulting Tiresias' blindness but ironically showing his own.</p> <p>“[Creon] so hungry to overthrow me he sets this wizard on me, this scheming quack, this fortune-teller peddling lies, eyes peeled for his own profit – seer blind in his craft.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Oedipus, Episode 1, insulting Tiresias; connecting Tiresias to Creon without evidence; ironically highlighting his own ignorance. <p>“Oedipus the ignorant...”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Oedipus, Episode 1, to Tiresias, talking sarcastically but also ironically/unknowingly referring to his own ignorance. <p>“I would suggest his words were spoken in anger, Oedipus ... yours too, and it isn't what we need.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Chorus, Episode 1, to Oedipus showing the anger of both Oedipus and Tiresias.
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“True, but a slur might have been forced out of him, by anger perhaps, not any firm conviction.”

– Chorus, Episode 2, talking to Creon of Oedipus’ temper.

“You, plotting to kill me, kill the king – I see it all, the marauding thief himself scheming to steal my crown and power!”

– Oedipus, Episode 2, accusing Creon without prove.

“Oedipus: No matter – I must rule. Creon: not if you rule unjustly.”

– Oedipus and Creon, Episode 2, discussing what it means to rule.

“Look at you, sullen in yielding, brutal in your rage – you will go too far. It’s perfect justice: natures like yours are hardest on themselves.” – Creon, Episode 2, to Oedipus.

“Loose, ignorant talk started dark suspicions and a sense of injustice cut deeply too.”

– Chorus, Episode 2, on the ignorance of Oedipus.

“Strange, hearing you just now... my mind wandered, my thoughts racing back and forth.” – Oedipus, Episode 2, to Jocasta.

“I have a terrible fear the blind seer can see” – Oedipus, Episode 2, to Jocasta upon hearing more details of Laius murder at 3 roads; showing some insight.

“Ai – now I can see it all, clear as day.”

– Oedipus, Episode 2, to Jocasta beginning to see some of the truth

“I am afraid, Jocasta, I have said too much already. That man – I’ve got to see him.”

– Oedipus, Episode 2, to Jocasta showing more restraint.



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	<p>“the one in the lead and the old man himself were about to thrust me off the road – brute force – and the one shouldering me aside, the driver, I strike him in anger!” – Oedipus, Episode 2, reflecting on the incident at the crossroad, showing his anger.</p> <p>“But now, all the prophecies I feared – Polybus packs them off to sleep with him in hell! They’re nothing, worthless.” – Oedipus, Episode 3, doubting prophecy.</p> <p>“A dreadful prophecy, stranger, sent by the gods.” – Oedipus, Episode 3, to messenger still fearing the prophecy.</p> <p>“I must know it all, must see the truth at last.” – Oedipus, Episode 3, to Jocasta showing his determination for the truth.</p> <p>“So, you won’t talk willingly – then you’ll talk with pain.” – Oedipus, Episode 4, to Shepherd.</p> <p>“Twist his arms back, quickly!” – Oedipus, Episode 4, showing his wrath.</p> <p>“You’re a dead man if I have to ask again.” – Oedipus, Episode 4, showing his anger.</p> <p>“O god – all come true, all burst to light! O light – now let me look my last on you! I stand revealed at last – “ – Oedipus, Episode 4, on the pain of knowing the truth and seeing the light – asking for blindness and ignorance.</p> <p>“You you’ll see no more the pain I suffered, all the pain I caused! Too long you looked on the ones you never should have seen, blind to the</p>
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**ones you longed to see, to know!
Blind from this our on! Blind I
darkness – blind!**” – Messenger
palace, Episode 5, relaying Oedipus’
speech upon blinding himself –
ironically Oedipus blinds himself now
that he can see the truth.

“Apollo, friends, Apollo – he ordained my
agonies – these, my pains on pains!”
– Oedipus, Episode 5, showing he
recognises it was his neglect of Apollo
that led to his pain.

“I, with *my* eyes, how could I look my
father in the eyes when I go down to
death?”

– Oedipus, Episode 5, on his
blindness.

“I wronged him [Creon] so, just now, in
every way. You must see that – I was
wrong, so wrong.”

– Oedipus, Episode 5, showing his
regret in his prior abuses of power.

**“Oh but this I know... I would never
have been saved from death – I have
been saved for something great and
terrible, something strange. Well, let
my destiny come and take me on its
way!”**

– Oedipus, Episode 5, now
accepting his destiny.

**“People of Thebes, my countrymen,
look on Oedipus. He solved the
famous riddle with his brilliance, he
rose to power, a man beyond all
power. Who could behold his
greatness without envy? Now what a
black sea of terror has overwhelmed
him. Now as we keep our watch and
wait the final day, count no man
happy till he dies, free of pain at last.”**
-Chorus Exodus



Opinion/Synopsis of Character:

Oedipus' character is central to the plot of the play. All the themes of the play are tied to his character and his interaction with the other characters. Therefore, your opinion of his character is vital to answering most questions that may arise on a paper.

Oedipus is **clever and proud**, he tries to avoid his fate because he lacks **the insight into his own faults**, believing he can defy the will of the gods. His pride leads him to think himself more capable and worthier than other men, making him **determined** to be a good ruler and to discover the one at fault for the plague. However, this pride and his own **lack of wisdom** means that when the truth confronts him through Tiresias, Creon, Jocasta and the Messenger from Corinth, **he denies the truth and presses on blindly searching for his version of the truth**. His blind determination and pride in his own abilities also lead him to make aggressive outbursts against Creon, Tiresias and the shepherd; portraying him as a knowing and yet **unjust ruler – a Tyrant**.

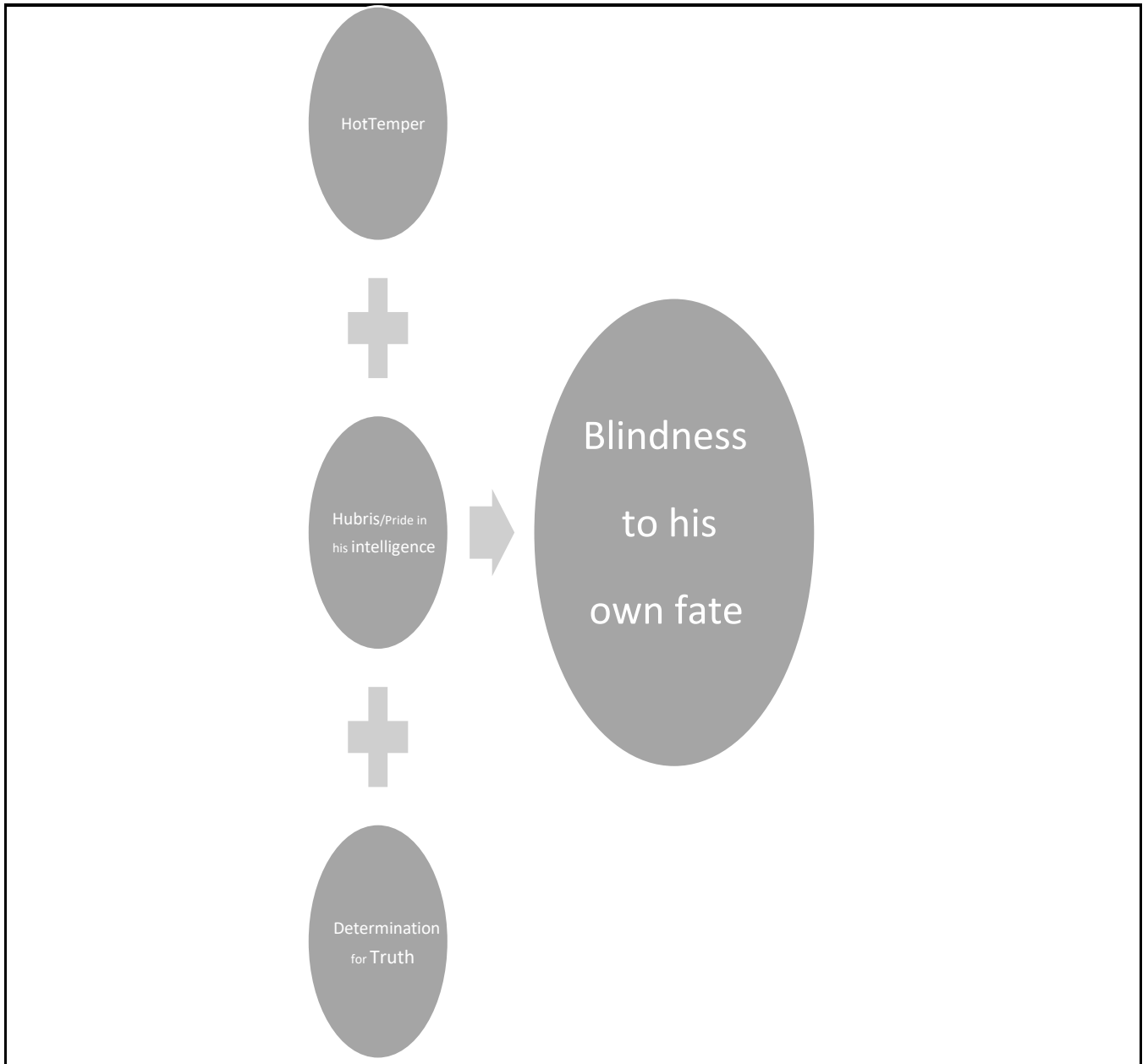
He only accepts his own faults when he has exhausted all other possibilities and intensely questioned the shepherd – witness to his birth and his murdering of Laius.

By the end of the play, we see Oedipus character as completely reversed: **he is humble and humbled, blinded and yet can see the truth more clearly**. Even so, he tries to give a command at the end of the play, but Creon reminds him that he has no more power now.

Oedipus is at fault for believing himself capable of avoiding his own fate – as willed by the god Apollo – and above the reproach of his subjects. However, when he truly discovers his own fate and the truth, he has clearer insight and accepts his own guilt and insists on suffering the punishment as he had proclaimed for the murderer at the start of play. He even shows some insight into the future of his children's lives, prophesising their own unhappy ends. For this we can commend him.

A Diagram helping you to visualise **what causes Oedipus' blindness to the truth:**





Character: Tiresias



Overview of Character

Tiresias resists revealing the truth to Oedipus, saying it will not change the outcome of events – and this is true since it is not through Oedipus' encounter with Creon or Tiresias that the truth will be revealed. However, he allows himself to be goaded by Oedipus into accusing Oedipus and revealing the truth. He reflects some of Oedipus' temper, and yet he has the insight to know that any action he takes or words he says will **not** change his fate or anyone else's.

Tiresias encounter with Oedipus explores the themes of wisdom, anger, power, and fate.

Key Quotes

“Blind as you are, you can feel all the more...”

– Oedipus, Episode 1, to Tiresias highlighting Tiresias' literal blindness but also insight.

“How terrible – to see the truth when the truth is only pain to him who sees!”

– Tiresias, Episode 1, talking about the pain of wisdom or insight/knowledge of the truth.

“You criticize my temper... unaware of the one *you* live with, you revile me.”

– Tiresias, Episode 1, showing Tiresias' subversive attitude to Oedipus.

“What will come will come. Even if I shroud it all in silence.”

– Tiresias, Episode 1, showing his stoicism (acceptance of fate) and wisdom.

“The truth with all its power lives inside me.” – Tiresias, Episode 1, talking to Oedipus.

“I say you are the murderer you hunt” – Tiresias, Episode 1, accusing Oedipus.

“True, it is not your fate to fall at my hands. Apollo is quite enough, and he will take some pains to work this out.” – Tiresias, Episode 1, showing faith in Apollo and fate.

“I would suggest his words were spoken in anger, Oedipus...”

– Chorus, Episode 1, to Oedipus showing the anger of both Oedipus and Tiresias.

Adjectives

Wise, blind literally but insightful figuratively, hot-tempered, arrogant, subversive, stoic (accepting of fate), pious (accepting of the will of the gods).

“So, you mock my blindness? Let me tell you this. You with your precious eyes, you’re blind to the corruption of your life, to the house you live in, those you live with -” – Tiresias, Episode 1, to Oedipus.

“The double lash of your mother and your father’s curse will whip you from this land one day, their footfall treading you down in terror, darkness shrouding your eyes that now can see the light!”

– Tiresias, Episode 1, to Oedipus showing insight into the future.

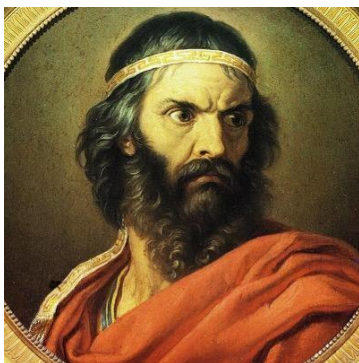
“This day will bring your birth and your destruction.” – Tiresias, Episode 1, to Oedipus prophesising Oedipus fate.

“Blind who now has eyes, beggar who now is rich, he will grope his way towards a foreign soil...”

– Tiresias, Episode 1, to Oedipus prophesising Oedipus fate.

“And if you find I’ve lied from this day onward call the prophet blind.”

– Tiresias, Episode 1, to Oedipus prophesising Oedipus fate.



**Character:
Creon**

Key Quotes

“I don’t know. And when I don’t, / keep quiet.”

– Creon, Episode 2, showing his humility and wisdom.

“How could kingship please me more than influence, power without a qualm?”

– Creon, Episode 2, to Oedipus on ruling/power.

Overview of Character

Creon represents a more tamed and considerate ruler than Oedipus; he is a man he respects the will of the gods and does not hunger for power. His encounter with Oedipus highlights what it means to rule justly.

Adjectives

Just, wise, loyal, honest, pious

“Time alone can bring the just man to light –“ – Creon, Episode 2, to Oedipus.

“Good advice my lord, for anyone who wants to avoid disaster. Those who jump to conclusions may go wrong.” – Chorus, Episode 2, praising Creon’s words.

“Oedipus: No matter – I must rule.

Creon: Not if you rule unjustly.”

– Oedipus and Creon, Episode 2, discussing what it means to rule.

“First I wanted the god to clarify my duties.”

– Creon, Episode 5, showing his trust in the gods’ will.

“And this time, I assume, even you will obey the god’s decrees.”

– Creon, Episode 5, to Oedipus about obeying the prophecies of Apollo.

“Still the king, the master of all things? No more: here your power ends. None of your power follows you through life.”

– Creon, Episode 5, on the end of Oedipus’ reign.

Character: Jocasta



Key Quotes

“A prophet? Well then, free yourself of every charge!... Nothing human can penetrate the future.” – Jocasta, Episode 2, to Oedipus.

“Whatever the god needs and seeks he’ll bring to light himself, with ease.”

– Jocasta, Episode 2, to Oedipus.

Overview of Character

Jocasta shares Oedipus' fault in defying the will of gods; however, she differs in one significant way: she does not fear prophecies, Oedipus does. She respects that all things are fated by Apollo and will be as they will be, but she denies to prophetic insight of Apollo's priests and oracles. This insult to the gods is not a slight one and is an impiety against Apollo. She is punished by having fate and insight into the truth revealed to her. It is what could be called an **ironic punishment**.

Her interactions with Oedipus explore the idea of fate, free will, and prophecy.

Adjectives:

Loving, Caring, foolish, naïve, proud, impious

“So much for prophecy. It’s neither here nor there.” – Jocasta, Episode 2, to Oedipus.

“You prophecies of the gods, where are you now?” – Jocasta, Episode 3, after messenger from Corinth brings news of Polybus’ death.

“Listen to *him*, see for yourself what all those awful prophecies of god have come to.” – Jocasta, Episode 3, to Oedipus.

“It’s all chance, chance rules our lives.” – Jocasta, Episode 3, to Oedipus.

Character: Chorus of Theban Elders

Key Quotes



Role in Play

The role of the Chorus in *King Oedipus* is primarily to highlight certain themes throughout – particularly through their stasimon. They also give insight – through the chorus leader – into the emotions of key characters, and how we should react to their actions.

“Apollo, Healer of Delos... Apollo, archer astride the thunderheads of heaven... Apollo, lord of light, I beg you –”

– Chorus, Parados, three times praying to Apollo lord of healing and prophecy.

“The skilled prophet scans the birds and shatters me with terror! I can’t accept him, can’t deny him, don’t know what to day, I’m lost, and the wings of dark foreboding beating – I cannot see what’s come, what’s still to come...”

– Chorus, Episode 2, Stasimon on prophecy and tyrants.

“No, not till I see these charges proved will I side with his accusers.

– Chorus, Episode 2, in Stasimon holding their judgement.

“Those who jump to conclusions may go wrong.”

– Chorus, Episode 2, on the dangers of making conclusions without proof.

“Destiny guide me always, destiny find me with reverence pure in word and deed.”

– Chorus, Episode 3, Stasimon on destiny and tyranny.

“Pride breeds the Tyrant.”

– Chorus, Episode 3. Stasimon about destiny and abuse of power, and dangers of ignoring prophecy.

“If I am a true prophet, if I can grasp the truth, by the boundless skies of Olympus, at the full moon of tomorrow, Mount Cithaeron you will know how Oedipus glories in you –“

– Chorus, Episode 4, on Oedipus’ birth.

“You are my great example, you, your life, your destiny, Oedipus, man of misery – I count no man blest.” – Chorus, Episode 5, on fall of Oedipus.



“O child of Laius, would to god I’d never seen you, never never!”

– Chorus, Episode 5, on fall of Oedipus.

“I tell you truth, you gave me life my breath leapt in you and now you bring down night upon my eyes.”

– Chorus, Episode 5, on Oedipus fall connected to light and dark, insight and blindness.

“People of Thebes, my countrymen, look on Oedipus. He solved the famous riddle with his brilliance, he rose to power, a man beyond all power. Who could behold his greatness without envy? Now what a black sea of terror has overwhelmed him. Now as we keep our watch and wait the final day, count no man happy till he dies, free of pain at last.”

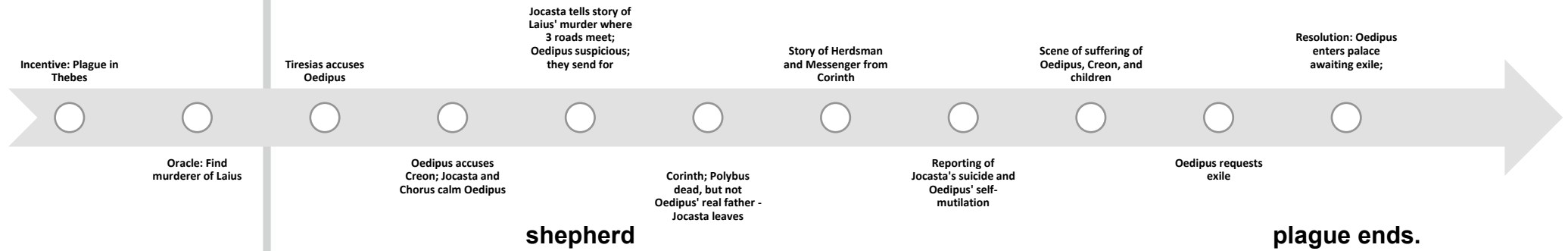
– Chorus Exodus



Plotting the Plot

The most difficult aspect to analysing Sophocles is unravelling his plots. In Oedipus the King there are two: the main plot and the Backstory. The former progresses normally – into the future – the other is in the past and is revealed in reverse.

The Main Plot (in the Present):



The Subplot/Backstory as it's revealed (in the Past):

Polybus and Merope are given Oedipus, and abandoned child, as their adoptive parents by a Corinthian Sheperd.

Laius had been murdered where 3 roads meet; Oedipus is the unknown culprit.

Oedipus is King of Thebes and married to Jocasta

The Theban shepherd, had been given the baby Oedipus by Jocasta and Laius, their son, to be left to die of exposure. Feeling pity he instead gives the child to the Corinthian shepherd/messenger

Oedipus had left his home in Corinth because accusations he was not Polybus' son; at Delphi he heard to prophecy.

Oedipus had defeated the Sphinx

STUDY BREAKDOWN

OEDIPUS:

- Thebans opinion of him
- No control over destiny, shows greatness in reaction
- Detective qualities
- Qualities as a ruler
- A 'very great man'
- 'Unbroken' at the end (heroic qualities)
- Great qualities lead to downfall
- Contribution to his own downfall
- A heroic character?

TIRESIAS ENCOUNTER:

- Summary
- Why did Oedipus send for him?
- Oedipus' character
- Behaviour of both men

CHORUS:

- Role of the Chorus
- Attitude towards Oedipus
- Attitude towards oracles and prophecies

JOCASTA:

- Role of Jocasta
- Character
- Importance
- Attitude towards oracles and prophecies

ORACLES-PROPHECY-FATE:

- Importance/Role
- Man's subordinate position
- Attitude of: -Jocasta – Oedipus – Chorus

OTHER:

- Use of irony
- Oedipus and Creon relationship (leadership qualities)
- 'Where three roads meet' – importance/turning point?



OEDIPUS: DRAMATIC IRONY

QUESTION: Discuss the use of dramatic irony in Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*

Instructions:

- The question asks about how irony is used
- You, therefore, need to phrase your answer in a way that links to how it is used
- Some examples of how it is used: helps to build suspense/drama, gives insight into characters, provides turning points in the play, heightens Oedipus' fall from grace, helps develop themes

Oedipus:

- Irony is at the centre of Oedipus' role in the tragedy
- Oedipus identifies himself as the saviour of Thebes. He tells the people that they should pray to him to save them, as he did before. He takes sole responsibility for saving the city that he loves. The irony is that whereas we could initially view Oedipus as the doctor/detective attempting to solve the mystery, the reality is that Oedipus is the plague/murderer that he seeks. Oedipus claims he will seek out the murderer of Laius as though he were his own father and little did he know that was the truth.
- Every mention Oedipus makes about the murderer of Laius and the punishment he will suffer is ironic because unbeknownst to Oedipus he is speaking about himself.
- To further heighten the sense of tragedy around Oedipus Sophocles provides further irony. We learn from Oedipus that he left Polybus and Merope in Corinth because he heard the terrible fate he was to suffer. However, in his attempt to avoid it he ensured it would be fulfilled.
- The irony surrounding Oedipus and his life heightens the tragedy at the end when Oedipus learns the truth. Even though he has committed awful crimes one can't help but feel pity and maybe even respect Oedipus given how he conducts himself and follows through with the promise to save the city. This is down to Sophocles' use of irony as the consistent references to Oedipus' ignorance of the truth, through irony, make the audience aware that Oedipus is not necessarily a bad person but a victim of fate.

Irony in the Investigation:

- The investigation itself is littered with irony.
- Some of this will have been touched on in reference to Oedipus but those references are only about irony in Oedipus's role/life
- This point centres on the irony that occurs throughout the investigation.
- Oedipus calls on Tiresias to save the city which leads to confrontation. Tiresias is eventually led to reveal that Oedipus is guilty of the crime. Oedipus absolutely refuses to believe the prophecy and resorts to undermining the role of prophets. The irony here is that if Oedipus had listened to Tiresias he may have avoided learning the truth about his relationship with Jocasta and Laius. However,



Oedipus was never going to accept blame for a crime he believed he didn't commit.

- Later in the tragedy Oedipus demands that the witness to the crime appear before him. Oedipus sees him as his last hope but, ironically, he will serve to confirm disaster for Oedipus.
- Before this, however, a messenger arrives claiming to have good news. He gives the word that Polybus is dead and this is greeted by Jocasta as good news. The irony here is that the news for the messenger is good because it means Oedipus can return to Corinth as King, however, for Jocasta and Oedipus it means that Oedipus could not be guilty of killing his father. It is only when Oedipus sheds light on his concerns over Merope that the messenger reveals a truth to Oedipus, ironically, to put him at ease. Having revealed that Oedipus was adopted by Polybus and Merope Oedipus is confused, but Jocasta has now learned the truth. Although Jocasta tries to stop Oedipus exploring the issue further, she fails. Oedipus still cannot see the truth and believes Jocasta wants him to stop investigating because she believes his birth may be dishonourable. The role of the messenger is very ironic as although he appears on scene to give good news and help, he makes things significantly worse.
- Expanding on the messenger is the irony that he also happens to be the man who took the baby Oedipus from the Theban tasked with getting rid of him. Once the witness (Shepherd) arrives, we see the full irony of the situation when we learned that not only is the Shepherd the man who can confirm or deny who killed Laius he is also the man who gave the baby Oedipus to the messenger all those years ago. The man Oedipus viewed as his final hope is the man who confirms that Oedipus did not just kill Laius, he killed his father and married his mother. A further irony here is that the two men who started this journey for Oedipus in saving his life, are the two people who many years later, reveal the tragic truth to him.
- The irony here is extremely telling and without a doubt adds to the drama and suspense of the investigation. What could also be argued is that the irony makes the tragedy seem more plausible and so all the more tragic.

The role of Jocasta:

- One of the key roles of Jocasta in the text is as a support for Oedipus and as a voice against prophecy.
- The irony of both her ignorance towards her fate and her ignorance regarding her attempts to help Oedipus heighten both the sympathy and lack of sympathy the audience/reader would feel for her character.
- As a support for Oedipus she calms the tension with Creon and tells him to ignore the claims of Tiresias. She completely dismisses the idea of prophecy on the basis that she believes she avoided her own fate. The irony is obviously that she has been living in infamy with her son for at least fifteen years. Her beliefs on prophecy are grounded in ignorance which makes it all the more tragic but also ironic when she learns the truth.
- Her attempts to help Oedipus with the investigation also turn things against Oedipus. Her attempt to help Oedipus works against him. The key here is the 'three roads'. When Jocasta mentions this Oedipus has a moment of realisation



which leads him to begin considering himself as the culprit. It is now that his character changes and he becomes more anxious. He demands more information about Laius and the more Jocasta tries to help the more she makes things worse.

- Jocasta attempts to be a loving and supportive wife but her attempts are all grounded in ignorance. She is unaware she has coupled with her son and even more clueless regarding his role in the death of her husband. The irony of all this is that Jocasta has actually been living with the man who killed her husband for several years. Not only that but all of her attempts to help and comfort Oedipus leads to both their downfalls.
- Sophocles use of irony here emphasises the power of fate and prophecy in the ancient world. Irony here also makes Oedipus look like more of a victim of Jocasta and Laius' ignorance rather than of his own actions.

Theme of Blindness:

- The theme of blindness is central to the tragedy.
- It is supported heavily by Sophocles' use of irony.
- This theme centres on the interaction between Oedipus and Tiresias
- After the encounter goes badly, Oedipus makes fun of Tiresias because he is physically blind. Tiresias retorts by saying that although he may be physically blind he can see the truth whereas, even with eyes, Oedipus is blind to the truth of his life. The irony is very effective here as it highlights to the audience how ignorant Oedipus is to what he has done. It is at this stage that we realise that Oedipus will need to reveal the truth himself as he will not even listen to the prophet.
- The theme of blindness comes full circle in the end when Oedipus blinds himself (Tiresias had referenced this in the encounter). Ironically, it is only when Oedipus is physically blind that he see's the truth. He accepts that Tiresias was right, and he accepts that he was wrong to accuse Creon. He accepts the consequences of the crime he has committed and accepts he must live with the consequences.
- However, Sophocles very cleverly uses irony here to garner sympathy for Oedipus and to build back up his character. Oedipus proclaims he is the only one who could live with what he did. He punishes himself and saves the city just as he promised. Yes, he has been humbled, but blinding himself has given him clarity and allowed him to be at some sort of peace with what he has done.
- It is through his use of irony that Sophocles delivers the theme of blindness which is central to the downfall of Oedipus but also helps redeem a measure of both respect and sympathy when the tragedy comes to its end. It also confirms mans subordinate position in the universe in the sense that Oeidpus remains ignorant of what he has control over in his life (self blinding).



Sample Paragraph: *Note: Fill in the blanks regarding evidence. Look back over the events mentioned and throw in more detailed information*

Irony is employed by Sophocles to **develop the theme of blindness**. The irony used to support this central theme is most noticeable in the **(1)** interaction with Tiresias and **(2)** Oedipus' blinding of himself **(2 evidence points)**. Oedipus had called on Tiresias to assist Thebes in ridding the city of the plague **(context)**. However, after Oedipus initially demonstrates great respect for Tiresias' ability, the encounter goes badly. Tiresias refuses to reveal his knowledge to Oedipus and after reluctantly revealing what he knows the two engage in a hostile back and forth in which Oedipus ridicules Tiresias because he is physically blind **(include ref.) [development: displaying knowledge]**. Tiresias retorts by saying that although he may be physically blind, he can see the truth whereas, even with eyes, Oedipus is blind to the truth of his life **[development: linking to the question]**. The **irony** is apparent here as it highlights to the audience how ignorant Oedipus is to the crimes he has committed. It strengthens the suspense of the story and casts further doubt on Oedipus' ability to solve the crime **[Engagement: 'use of']**. It is at this stage we realise that Oedipus will need to reveal the truth himself as he will not listen to the prophet. Further to this, at the end of the encounter, Tiresias reveals a final prophecy to Oedipus which implies future blindness **(include ref.)**. The irony of this is even lost on the audience until the end of the tragedy **[Engagement/Development: 'use of' and knowledge]**. The theme of blindness comes full circle in the end when Oedipus physically blinds himself **[Evidence 2]**. Ironically **[Engaging with wording of question]**, it is only when Oedipus is physically blind that he sees the truth. He accepts that Tiresias was right, and he accepts that he was wrong to accuse Creon. He accepts the consequences of the crime he has committed and accepts he must live with the consequences **(include ref)**. However, Sophocles very cleverly uses irony here to garner sympathy for Oedipus and redeem some aspects of his character **['use of']**. Oedipus proclaims he is the only one who could live with what he did. He punishes himself and saves the city just as he promised. Yes, he has been humbled, but blinding himself has given him clarity and allowed him to be at some sort of peace with what he has done. However, in a final cruel twist of irony, Oedipus accepts that Apollo has ordained his miseries, but he claims responsibility for blinding himself. The irony of Tiresias' prophecy is lost on Oedipus, but Sophocles has very cleverly used irony to make the audience aware that the one act Oedipus believes was his own action only confirms **man's subordinate position in the universe [reference to wording of past question]**. It is through his use of irony that Sophocles delivers the theme of blindness which is not only central to the downfall of Oedipus but also helps redeem his character and enforce that fate dictates man's position in the world **[last sentence not only links to wording of question and our first sentence but it develops it slightly to summarize the overall point]**.



The role of the chorus in 'Oedipus the King'Function of the Chorus:

The chorus acts as a link between the audience and the actors. They are a reflection of what the audience is thinking. In 'Oedipus the King' the Chorus is made up of citizens of Thebes. They can comment, advise, disagree with what is being said. The **leader** also represents the Chorus.

Evidence/References:**Page 168**

1. The opening address called the *parados* begins after Creon has delivered the news from Delphi. The Chorus are unaware what Creon has said and wonder what the oracle of Apollo has said.

They wonder what the oracle of Apollo says 'What wonder from the gold vaults of Delphi'. They pray to Zeus's daughter Athene and Artemis and Apollo for deliverance from the deadly plague. They describe the effects of the plague on themselves and the Thebans, children are dying in the womb, crops are failing 'Thebes is dying' there are numberless deaths. (page 169) They finish by begging the gods Zeus, Apollo, Artemis and Dionysus to drive away disease. Page (170) **Page 174 – Highlight the plight of the plague for the audience and make an appeal to the Gods for help**

2. They give advice to Oedipus and tell him to consult the Oracle of Apollo. He has already done so. Oedipus "I've not been slow with that. On Creon's cue I sent the escorts, twice, within the hour". It allows Sophocles to introduce us to the character of Creon and the nature of the relationship between Oedipus and his brother-in-law. They then tell him about the rumours concerning Laius's death, "killed they say by certain travellers" **Page 175 – Advise Oedipus and provide information on the crime**

3. They intervene in the Tiresias scene. They try to calm Oedipus when he is shouting at Tiresias '*I would suggest his words are spoken in anger, Oedipus...yours too, and is isn't what we need*' (Page 182) – **Act as a support for Oedipus and also as a peacemaker**

4. The Choral Ode **page 186-7**. Comes after the Tiresias scene. Towards the end of the Tiresias scene Tiresias concludes by saying that the murderer is a native Theban – Oedipus goes into the palace. Then Tiresias goes on to say that the murderer is revealed at last, '*brother and father both to his children he embraces, to his mother son and husband both - .. he spilled his fathers blood*' Whoever it is cannot escape detection 'but he cannot outrace the dread voices of Delphi' They are shocked at Tiresias words and don't know what to think '*I can't accept him, can't deny him, don't know what to say*' They finish by saying that until they have proof in Oedipus' guilt they will continue to believe in their king. '*No, not till I see these charges proved will I side with his accusers*' – **Demonstrates how they are conflicted between their trust in Oedipus and their trust in oracles/prophecy**



5. The leader of the chorus tries to pacify Creon when he appears in the scene after he has been accused of conspiracy (**page 188**) *'but a slur might have been forced out of him, by anger perhaps, not by any firm conviction.'* When Jocasta appears they greet her *'with her help you must put this fighting of yours to rest'* – giving the reader some insight into the character of Jocasta. – **Help give an insight into Jocasta's character and defend Oedipus's words against Creon**

6. Later the whole chorus intervenes to defend Creon's reputation and support his plea that he has not committed treason (**page 197**) *'The man's your friend, your kin, he's under oath- don't cast him out, disgraced branded with guilt on the strength of hearsay only'* – **Attempt to calm Oedipus and prevent him from harming Creon**

7. The chorus reluctantly tell Jocasta briefly how the quarrel between Creon and Oedipus began (**page 199**) they reiterate their belief in their king and leave. Then Jocasta questions Oedipus who in turn questions her about Laius' death...which leads to him beginning to have doubts. – **Retell quarrel with Creon and clarify their trust in Oedipus**

8. After Jocasta has told Oedipus of the circumstances of Laius' death Oedipus begins to despair that he is the killer, the leader of the chorus tells him to hope until he questions the witness to Laius' death *'My lord, you fill our hearts with fear. But at least until you question the witness, do take hope'* (**page 207**) – **Try to reassure Oedipus as he turns more desperate**

9. Jocasta dismisses prophets and prophecies *'So much for prophecy. It's neither here nor there.'* And the chorus voice their disapproval at this lack of respect for the gods. (**page 209**) *'Destiny guide me always....' Zeus and his laws are all powerful. They respect the gods and oracles* They go on to say that if any man gets above himself with no fear of justice or reverence he is heading for a fall. *'If any man comes striding, high and mighty in all he says and does...let a rough doom tear him down...'* (**Page 210**) – **Vocalise their unease with Jocasta's contempt for prophecy and call for destiny and the Gods to guide them**

10. **Page 223** After Jocasta has rushed off into the palace they express fear of what she may do, "I'm afraid that from this silence something monstrous may come bursting forth" heighten suspense, and prepare the audience for what will happen with Jocasta. – **heighten suspense and drama of the scene**

11. When Oedipus says on **page 224** that he will never fail to search and learn his birth, the Chorus agree and wonder who his mother is, bride of Apollo, Hermes, Dionysus. – **Demonstrate their respect for Oedipus in listing numerous Gods as his potential parents**

12. They identify the shepherd as one of Laius' men. **Page 225. - Investigation**

13. When Oedipus realises who his parents are they comment. **Page 233.** They talk about the greatness of Oedipus, how they looked up to him "You outranged all men" they mention the Sphinx, Oedipus being king, then his downfall and they are deeply sympathetic. "is there a man more agonized", "Now I weep like a man who wails the dead" – **split of admiration and pity for Oedipus. Once respected but now he has fallen from grace and they mourn the fall.**



14. They speak to the messenger at the palace about Jocasta and from him we learn about her awful death. **Page 235 – interaction with Chorus gives us an outlet to learn of what happened to Jocasta (functional)**

15. In the final action of the play the chorus highlight the downfall of Oedipus – they sympathise with their king *'I pity you but I can't bear to look' they see his wounds and shudder in horror.* (page 239) - **demonstrate further sympathy and pity for Oedipus while also emphasising how far he has truly fallen**

16. 'alive and blind' They wonder if Oedipus' blinding of himself is for the best *'better to die than be blind'* (page 242) He tells them the reason why he blinded himself. – **Another outlet for the audience to understand Oedipus' actions. Highlight Oedipus plight with their comments on blindness.**

17. They end the play by asking the audience to look on Oedipus as a man who has solved the riddle with his brilliance and risen to power. Now he is a broken man – **it could happen to anyone.** 'count no man happy till he dies, free of pain at last'. – **get the final message across that even the greatest man can fall**

THREE ROADS MEET

There is no doubting that Jocasta's mentioning of Laius being murdered at a place where three roads meet is the turning point of the play. Prior to Jocasta revealing this information Oedipus had been solely focused on finding out who had killed Laius, the previous King of Thebes. Thebes was suffering from plague and the Oracle at Delphi had informed them that they had to find the killer of Laius in order to save the city. Oedipus took sole responsibility for doing so. This led to his questioning of the Chorus but most importantly of Creon and Tiresias. Oedipus is under the impression that Laius had been killed by a group and after Tiresias had stated that Oedipus killed Laius, Oedipus vehemently denied the accusations and accused both Tiresias and Creon of plotting to overthrow him, charges they both denied. Oedipus in absolutely no way believes he has any part to play and any accusation leading that way is dismissed as being a plot against him. He is confident and assured of his innocence, but the mention of the three roads changes this.

Once Jocasta mentions the three roads everything begins to change. Oedipus had previously been extremely confident in his role as detective but the minute those words are uttered he begins to question things. He seems concerned by what Jocasta has said and asks her further questions, "Where did this thing happen". Be precise. He demands a description of Laius, "Describe him". Oedipus becomes shaken by what has been revealed and eventually reveals the story of his coming to Thebes in which he openly admits to killing a man and his attendants at that location. He also reveals the prophecy which led him to Thebes. The importance here is that the Oedipus who appeared confident and sure of his innocence earlier is now in a position where he is trying to prove his innocence. He acknowledges that he fears the blind seer can see. The investigation has been turned on its head and now Oedipus is determined to clear his name and learn about his family. This would not have happened if Jocasta had not mentioned the three roads.



Jocasta's revealing of this vital information also leads Oedipus to question Jocasta further about any witnesses. This leads Oedipus to demanding the arrival of the shepherd who witnessed the murder of Laius. It is now clear that this man, as Oedipus says, is his only hope of proving his innocence, "He is my last hope". What Oedipus does not know is that the shepherd will not only reveal the truth about the murder but also the truth about his life. The shepherd is the key to the whole investigation and without Jocasta's mentioning of three roads it is unclear as to whether or not the investigation would have reached this stage. The convenient arrival of the messenger to inform Oedipus of the death of Polybus becomes more pivotal as given the interactions after the revealing of three roads a new emphasis has been placed on the importance of the prophecy that Oedipus was given regarding his parents. Oedipus' revealing of this to the messenger leads the messenger to reveal the truth about Oedipus' birth and parents and this heightens the importance of the arrival of the shepherd who inevitably reveals the reality of Oedipus' crimes, although Jocasta, having learned the truth, tries to stop him. The new emphasis placed on Oedipus' birth comes about as a result of Jocasta mentioning the three roads and this identity crisis results in the revelation of the truth about Oedipus.

The revealing of the three roads also causes a distinct character change in Oedipus. Gone is the confident, determined King working to save his city and on comes the anxious, unsure, relentless man trying to prove his innocence and learn the truth about his life. Jocasta herself even confides to the Chorus that he is beside himself and his voice tells of terror. Oedipus is so unsure about his part in the death of Laius that he reveals that Tiresias may have in fact but right to accuse him of the murder. This lack of certainty leads to Oedipus becoming tyrannical to the point that he believes that Jocasta tried to stop him going further with the investigation because she may be ashamed of his true birth and to the point that he is willing to have the shepherd beaten into revealing the truth. It is in fact only after Oedipus has learned the truth and blinded himself that although he is bloodied and sightless he returns to that strong character from the beginning of the story. It is as if the mentioning of the three roads creates so much uncertainty with Oedipus that he becomes a shell of the man that he was. There is no doubting that in respect to the investigation, the revealing of the truth and Oedipus's character that Jocasta's mentioning of Laius's death at a place where three roads meet is the turning point of the play.



Oedipus qualities as ruler of Thebes

Positives:

Persistent/Determined [can also be argued as ruthless/relentless]: Refuses to stop the investigation despite warnings from Tiresias, Jocasta and the Shepherd. When Jocasta mentions that Laius was killed at a place '**where three roads meet**' he knows he may have been involved but still persists with the investigation. He demands the witness be called to the city, again knowing he may bring his downfall, '**I've got to see him.**' When Jocasta learns the truth and tries to get Oedipus to stop the investigation, '**my suffering is enough**' he refuses saying that he will not stop '**for all the world.**'

Pro-Active: From the beginning, he consistently appears to be a step ahead in the investigation. He had sought the advice of the Oracle before the Chorus suggested it and he also sent Creon to consult Tiresias, again before the Chorus suggested it, '**I acted at once.**'

Caring/Selfless: Demonstrates his pity and concern for the people of Thebes from the beginning of the tragedy. He brings the investigation to a conclusion, despite the consequences to himself, and then accepts his banishment in order to save the city. At the beginning he declares to the people that he is '**ready to help**' and will '**do anything**' to save the city. He states that his '**spirit grieves for the city.**'

Responsible: Takes on the responsibility of solving the murder himself and goes to extreme lengths to do so. This is all done in order to save his people. He volunteers to bear the burden for saving the city on his own shoulders, '**I'll do everything.**'

Intelligent: Oedipus had previously saved Thebes by solving the riddle of the Sphinx. This is what put him in the position of power in the first place and this is why the people of Thebes turn to him to save them from the current plague. The people '**rate him first of men**' and see him as their '**greatest power**'.

Negatives:

Arrogant: He boasts over having saved the city in the past. In particular this shows in his interaction with Tiresias when he ridicules his blindness and questions where Tiresias was fifteen years ago when the city needed saving. Controversially, towards the beginning of the tragedy he questions why the Chorus are praying to the gods for help when he can answer them himself.

Rash/Paranoid: The first sign of this is the interaction with Tiresias. Once Tiresias refuses to reveal his knowledge Oedipus is enraged and irrationally accuses Tiresias of having been involved in the plot. He furthers this baseless claim by then turning on his trusted brother in law, Creon and claiming that Creon must have orchestrated the whole thing. This fallout leads Oedipus to declare that he wants Creon dead, with the appeal of the Chorus on Creon's behalf seemingly being the only thing that stops Oedipus, '**I want you dead.**'



Tyrannical: He refers to Tiresias as the ‘**scum of the earth**’ and his statement that were it not for his being blind he would have Tiresias be physically forced to reveal his knowledge. He shows this side again with the old Shepherd towards the end of the tragedy. The shepherd is reluctant to reveal what he knows and so Oedipus calls for him to be restrained and says he expects the Shepherd will ‘**talk with pain.**’ The most telling line in relation to Oedipus’ obsession with power is when he declares that he ‘**must rule.**’

Ignorant: Has to be told why the people are outside of his palace at the beginning. This suggests he may not have been aware of their suffering or his need to address it. He consistently asks for information to be repeated and appears to not be listening at times when he refers to a single murderer having just been told there were multiple parties involved. His dismissal of prophecy could also be viewed as ignorant.

The End of the Tragedy; Oedipus shows his ‘greatness’ and/or is ‘unbroken’ at the end

‘Unbroken’/‘Greatness’

Accepts role of Prophecy/Fate

- Having emerged on stage after blinding himself and realising the truth of his life, he finally accepts that Apollo has ‘**ordained his miseries**’ but he blinded himself, ‘**I did it all myself.**’
- He did this so that he would not have to see the Theban people
- He also could not bear to look at his children.
- Further to this it would mean that in the afterlife he would not have to set eyes on his parents.
- This falls into the ‘unbroken’ category because, at least according to himself, he inflicted the blinding on himself, an horrific act, and is willing to present himself to his people.
- He is humbled into accepting that prophecy (and Tiresias) and fate have dictated what has occurred in his life, however, is still unaware that his blinding had actually been prophesised by Tiresias.
- When compared to Jocasta, Oedipus’ actions here are those of a man accepting his crime and punishment.

Accepts that he has committed an awful crime

- Oedipus accepts full responsibility for his actions.
- He makes no attempt to defend himself and demands that the people of Thebes see him and approach him to witness the guilty man.
- However, he is ‘unbroken’ once again in the sense that the truth about his life has not necessarily led to a complete move away from the confident character at the beginning of the tragedy. Just as at the beginning, Oedipus wants his people to witness him and actually declares that there is not a man alive, but himself, who could live with what he has done.



Accepts punishment

- Further evidence of the events not breaking him is his sense of responsibility to Thebes.
- Despite his personal downfall he has not lost sight of the ultimate goal, to save the city by punishing the murderer of Laius.
- Oedipus sets out the punishment of exile for the guilty party and in line with this he requests that Creon, in his new capacity as King, exile him.
- He essentially orchestrates his own banishment in order to ensure he receives the appropriate punishment and saves the city thus fulfilling the commitment he made to his people at the beginning of the tragedy.

Oedipus Greatness

- A good point to look at is '**where three roads meet**'
- This is the turning point of the investigation as the evidence of Laius' murder now points towards Oedipus.
- Oedipus continues to investigate despite the risk to himself.
- **Review the information from the 'three roads meet' question**
- ***Link to the word 'greatness':***
- Greatness in the way he continues to pursue the investigation despite knowing it could incriminate him.
- Greatness in the depth of questioning in which he leads Jocasta through in order to learn more about the circumstances of Laius' death.
- Greatness in the pursuit of the surviving witness (shepherd) who inevitably reveals Oedipus as both the father killer and husband to his mother.
- Greatness in his blinding of himself as a form of self-punishment for the crimes that he has committed.
- Greatness in his accepting of his Fate and his subsequent exile (to save the city)
- Greatness in choosing to continue to live (contrasting Jocasta) and doing so on his own terms.



The role of Oracles and Prophecies

Oracles: Delphi

Prophecy: Tiresias

Oracles:

- Oedipus sends Creon to Delphi to consult the Oracle and from the Oracle they learn that the only way to stop the plague is to find and punish the murderer of Laius.
- This sets in motion the investigation which will lead Oedipus to not only finding the murderer but also discovering the truth about his own life.
- Laius and Jocasta initiated their own fates after they received information from the Oracle that their son was destined to marry his mother and kill his father.
- This Oracle set in motion the events that results in Oedipus becoming the adopted son of Polybus and Merope and thus leaving Laius, Jocasta and Oedipus living in ignorance of their fate.
- This also leaves Jocasta to the conclusion that oracles and prophecies carry no weight and are only hearsay. She uses this example as justification for Oedipus to dismiss the claims that Tiresias has made against him.
- Oedipus tells of how he travelled to Delphi, having been told he was adopted, in order to consult the Oracle. The information he received from the Oracle led him to abandon Corinth and essentially led him to the three roads where he unknowingly murdered his own father, which in turn led him to Thebes and to the marriage bed of his mother.
- In both cases an attempt has been made to avoid fate, on the basis of the information that Laius, Jocasta and Oedipus all received from the Oracle at Delphi. Despite living comfortably in the knowledge that they had avoided their fates, there can be no doubting the impact that it had, long term, in ensuring that fate was fulfilled. It is telling that at the beginning of the tragedy that it is the information received from the Oracle that sets in motion the events that will lead Jocasta and Oedipus to revealing the truth about their lives. This clearly demonstrates the pivotal role that Oracles play in both the context of the tragedy and the events that occur on stage. Oedipus essentially verbalises this towards the end of the tragedy when declares that Oedipus declares that Apollo ordained all of his miseries.



Prophecy:

- Tiresias represent prophecy in the tragedy.
- It is important to note that as a prophet he interprets the messages of the Oracles.
- Oedipus calls him to the palace to interpret the Oracle and support the investigation.
- Tiresias makes clear that he knows exactly what the Oracle meant and knows exactly who the murderer is but refuses to reveal the information. This leads to the dramatic encounter that takes place between the two. His refusal also leads to the fallout between Oedipus and Creon.
- Jocasta convinces Oedipus to pay no heed to prophecy as she firmly believes that no mortal can interpret the meaning of the gods.
- This leads not only Jocasta and Oedipus, but also the Chorus, to question the validity of prophecy. The Chorus challenge for the fate to be fulfilled, otherwise they will refuse to honour it in future.
- This leads to the anti-prophecy theme that develops in the text.
- Jocasta represents the anti-prophecy voice and Oedipus is relatively easily led to accepting the same beliefs.
- The Chorus, however, are reluctant and directly challenges prophecy.
- In the end prophecy wins out and Oedipus humbly accepts that Tiresias was right, confirming mans subordinate position in the universe.
- The irony at the end of the tragedy lies in the fact that despite accepting all that fate has done to him, Oedipus still believes he had at least some control over things in blinding himself.
- He remains ignorant of the fact that Tiresias had actually prophesised it in their early interaction, devastatingly driving home the point that despite realising how little control he had over the events in the tragedy, even the one aspect he believes he had control over he didn't.

