

Reading and Discussion Questions for *Oedipus the King*

For the WRC assignment for Week 12: Type responses to questions 1-3 below. Responses must be typed and must be at least one fully developed paragraph (7-9 sentences) each; be sure to cite relevant details from the play to illustrate and support your responses.

Review your responses with an instructor in the WRC. Ask the WRC instructor to sign your type-written responses.

For class discussion and activities: Be sure that you can answer *all* of the following questions. Keep in mind when reviewing the play and discussing the following questions that *Oedipus the King* is a tragedy--a play that portrays a conflict between human beings and some superior, overwhelming force. It ends sorrowfully and disastrously with the "tragic hero" suffering a fall from happiness (and power, typically) and experiencing a consequent reversal of fortune. The tragic hero is not "Everyman"; rather, he(or she) is a "hero" in the classical sense—larger than life, virtuous, noble, just, compassionate, powerful—but the tragic hero usually suffers from some "tragic flaw" of character. This tragic flaw, often *hubris*, usually causes the hero's downfall.

Questions for WRC assignment:

1. Discuss the role of fate in the play.
2. Discuss instances of dramatic irony in the play.
3. Aristotle has said that a tragedy arouses our pity and our fear. How are our pity and our fear aroused when reading Oedipus?

Additional questions for class discussion and activities:

4. What virtues does Sophocles extol in the play?
5. What, ultimately, leads to Oedipus' downfall?
6. Discuss the role (or metaphorical implications) of the "blind seer," Teresias, in the play.
7. Are there any points in the play when Oedipus could have acted differently to avoid his downfall? Explain.
8. What characteristics do Oedipus and his father (King Laios) share that help us to better understand the result of their encounter on the road?