Oedipus the King Study Guide

Prologue (1-150):
1. Thebes turns to Oedipus to save them again by ridding them of a terrible plague. Sophocles may have written this play shortly after a great plague which struck Athens; Thucydides' History presents a powerful depiction of this plague. (Read on for several screens in the Thucydides link) Compare the two and how they function in each text.
2. All call upon the Healer Apollo. What does Apollo have to do with healing? Why should Oedipus consult this god's oracle? Visit Delphi, taking advantage of the available pictures.
3. Consider: does Oedipus strike you as arrogant in this scene and others, or is Oedipus a case of the saying of that great philosopher and baseball great Dizzy Dean -- "It ain't bragging if you can do it"?
4. Pay close attention to any references to sight, eyes or blindness, as vision is an important metaphor in this play.
5. After Creon enters and tells the words of Apollo, note the discrepancy between the number of outlaws in the account of each character. Why do you think Oedipus says "thief" while Creon says "thieves"? This will happen again later.
6. If you have read Pericles' Funeral Oration, consider the extent to which Oedipus embodies the characteristics of the ideal Athenian as described by Pericles.

Parodos (151-212):
1. The Chorus calls on a series of gods for help. Why invoke these gods in particular?

First Scene (216-462):
1. This scene is filled with many instances of dramatic irony. Find at least three.
2. Why does Tiresias refuse to help Oedipus?
3. Why can't Oedipus understand the information Tiresias does give to him?
4. Note the complexity of Oedipus' character, a mixture of paranoia and an earnest desire to save the city.

First Stasimon (463-511):
1. The Chorus is completely confused by the accusations of Tiresias.
2. Consider the images of hunting and wildness here, as they will return later.

Second Scene (573-953):
1. Arguably, this is the key scene.
2. Is Creon especially admirable here? Compare his actions and wishes to Oedipus'.
3. Read carefully Jocasta's account of her lost child which begins at 705, and then Oedipus' reaction to it. Does anything in his reaction strike you as strange? Consider this especially in light of the almost identical story he tells later in the same scene. Why doesn't Oedipus make a connection?
4. Pay close attention to Jocasta's denunciation of oracles.
5. Think about the larger resonances of Oedipus' comment (845) "How can one be the same as many?"
Second Stasimon ()
1. The Chorus describe a wild, impious, violent man. Whom do they mean?
2. What is the connection between this wild man and "the sacred dance" (896) ?

Third Scene (911-1085):
1. Consider the general force of Jocasta's on-going aspersion of oracles in the light of what is about to happen.
2. Note: lines 980-2 are underlined in the German translation of this play which Freud owned
3. 1032: why is the connection between Oedipus' name and his ankles so important?
4. At what point do you think that Jocasta begins to suspect the truth?
5. When the Shepherd arrives, why won't he talk willingly?
6. When Jocasta runs off the stage, Oedipus thinks she is afraid he will be proven a peasant. Why does this idea make him so happy (1076ff) ? And how does Jocasta seem to you now?

Third Stasimon (1086-1109):
1. The Chorus' takes Oedipus' hope and runs with it, imagining him to be the foundling son of a god.

Fourth Scene (1215-1310):
1. Aristotle believed this was the finest tragedy because the protagonist's recognition of the truth coincides with the reversal of his fortunes. Where, exactly, does this occur in the play?
2. Note the half-line exchanges between Oedipus and the Herdsman; this marks the heightened suspense and excitement in the dialogue. With the remark "Her own baby?" Oedipus' world collapses.

Fourth Stasimon (1186-1221):
1. Oedipus is now a paradigm of misfortune.

Fifth Scene (1222-1432):
1. What was Oedipus trying to do when he finds his wife-mother dead?
2. Is blinding an appropriate punishment? Why doesn't he commit suicide?
3. 1295 The Messenger instructs all to "pity" Oedipus. Think about the other references to pity in this drama.

Kommos (1298)-1415:
- A kommos is a scene of lamentation in lyrical meters between actor and chorus.
- How would you describe Oedipus' state of mind and attitude here? Does anything surprise you about the way he views his disaster?
- Think about the Chorus' near panic about him, their complete inability to respond coherently to his presence.

Sixth Scene and Exodus (1416-end):
- Again: How would you describe Oedipus' state of mind and attitude here?
- Is Creon fair to Oedipus? Consider especially his admonition at 1523. Consider how the drama would change if the closing lines of the chorus were absent; some scholars believe the texts ends with Creon's words.
- Why are Oedipus' daughters in particular so special to him?
- What effect has blindness had on his knowledge?
Oedipus the King (Study Guide)

Prologue
1. According to the priest, what is happening throughout Thebes?
2. What does the priest want Oedipus to do?
3. What does Oedipus want to know from the Elder?
4. Where and on what mission has Oedipus sent Creon?
6. According to Creon, why does Thebes suffer? (Hint: What unjust event has happened in the past?)
6. According to Creon, what is the problem in finding witnesses or getting to the root of the problem?
7. What is Oedipus' attitude about "break[ing] this plague"?

Ode of Entry
1. According to the Chorus, what are conditions in the city?
2. For what do they pray?

First Episode
1. What is ironic about Oedipus' claim that he is "stranger to the story"?
2. What penalties does Oedipus decree on the guilty party?
3. What is ironic about Oedipus' statement "his marriage bed my bed of seed"?
4. According to the chorus, what divine being knows the truth about who the killer is?
5. According to the chorus, who might be able to help discover the murderer's identity?
6. What are the rumors surrounding the murder/murderer?
7. How does Oedipus treat Tiresias at first?
8. What does Tiresias know?
9. How does Oedipus react?
10. What accusation does Oedipus hurl at Tiresias?
11. What is Tiresias response?
12. As the conversation continues, what happens to Oedipus' composure?
13. What does Tiresias accuse Oedipus of being "wrapped together in"? What is the sin (you know, but he doesn't)?
14. Explain Tiresias statement: "These very gibes you mouth at me will soon be hurled by every mouth at you."
15. Whom does Oedipus now accuse? What is his reasoning?
16. What seems to emerge as one of Oedipus' character flaws?
17. According to Tiresias, what will Oedipus discover today?

Second Choral Ode
1. How does the Chorus feel about the possibility of Oedipus' guilt?
2. Where/why might Tiresias (the prophet) be wrong?

Second Episode
1. How does Creon react to the accused charges against him?
2. How does Oedipus treat Creon?
3. How does Oedipus link Creon and Tiresias to the crime? Why?
4. What is Creon's argument against Oedipus’ accusations? Why does Creon not need to be King?
5. In his speech to Oedipus, what is important to Creon?
6. How does Jocasta soothe both men’s anger?

**Choral Dialogue**
1. What does the Chorus urge Oedipus to do?
2. What "evidence" does Jocasta, unknowingly reveal in her conversation with Oedipus?
3. What “evidence” does Oedipus unknowingly reveal in his speech?
4. Whom do Jocasta and Oedipus agree to summon the palace?

**Third Choral Ode**
1. According to the Chorus, what kind of man does “Heaven never trips to falls”?
2. To whom do they pray (Hint: a god)?

**Third Episode**
1. According to Jocasta, why can't Oedipus "gage the present from the past"?
2. What does she mean by "We are gone to pieces at the sight of whom the Steersman of the ship astray by fright"?
3. What seemingly "good news" does the messenger bring?
4. How did this person die? What is Oedipus’ reaction?
5. What is Jocasta's advice to Oedipus on how to deal with the second part of the oracle (sleeping with his mother)?
6. What tragic newsflash does the messenger give about Oedipus’ parents?
7. At what point does Jocasta know? What does she attempt to do?
8. Of what is Oedipus still clueless? What within him blinds him to this reality?

**Fourth Choral Ode**
1. What does the Chorus seem to celebrate prematurely?

**Fourth Episode**
1. What does the shepherd violently tell the messenger to do? Why?
2. At what point does Oedipus clue into the horrible tragedy that has unfolded before his eyes? How does he react?

**Fifth Choral Ode**
1. According to the Chorus, what is man’s pattern? What do they mean?
2. According to Creon, what catches us all in the end, and who sits in judgment?

**Epilogue**
1. What tragedy does the Official report? Explain the gruesome details.
2. What is Oedipus’ emotional and physical condition?

**Choral Dialogue**
1. What central question does the Chorus ask Oedipus about his actions?
2. What is Oedipus’ response (reasoning)?
3. Whom does Oedipus curse?
4. How does Creon say to treat Oedipus?
5. What does Oedipus ask Creon to for him? Jocasta? His children?
6. According to Oedipus, what will be the future woes for his children?
7. What special request does Oedipus ask of Creon concerning his children?
8. What final advice (and I-told-you-so) does Creon give Oedipus?

**Envoi**
1. Summarize and interpret the last lines of the play.