

## OEDIPUS THE KING: Sophocles

### PLOT SUMMARY:

- Thebes is under affliction and is desperate for a solution. ● Creon returns to report that the affliction is a result of religious pollution since the murderer of their former king Laius has never been caught. Oedipus swears to find the murderer and curses him.
- Oedipus summons the blind Prophet Tiresias for help. He is forced to reveal the truth which Oedipus finds too bitter ● This creates tension between Oedipus and Creon  
Jocasta's account of Laius' death burdens Oedipus' conscience ● He sends for the only surviving witness of the fields where he now works as a shepherd.
- Oedipus reveals his life story to Jocasta as they wait for the shepherd. Oedipus has hope however because he has been told that Laios was murdered by several robbers. However the mention of the place \*crossroads,\* bothers him ● A man arrives from Corinth with the news of Polybus' death. This messenger is the former shepherd who was given baby Oedipus to kill but ended taking the baby to childless Polybus and Merope of Corinth.
- Jocasta now realised the truth and begs Oedipus to stop asking questions. She runs into the palace where she commits suicide.
- The shepherd arrives, Oedipus questions him but he begs to leave without answering questions
- Oedipus threatens him with torture and execution. It emerges that the child he gave away to Polybus and Merope was Laius' son Oedipus ● The truth comes out.  
Oedipus finds Jocasta dear and plucks his eyes out a heavier punishment than meeting death where a man is at peace. ● Oedipus asks Creon to take care of his daughters as his son's are old enough to take care of themselves, give Jocasta a decent burial and he goes into exile.

### JOCASTA:

Queen of Thebes. She is wife of late Laius former king of Thebes. She is the wife and at the same time mother of King Oedipus. She acts as a foil to Oedipus. Oedipus tried to seek out the truth from her yet she at first does not know of the facts just like Oedipus. Though truth \*(Oedipus his son killed Laius his father and married her-his mother)\* dawns on her before it does to Oedipus. She becomes hesitant to find out the truth because she is living and protective and knows that in knowing the truth, their lives would be ruined so \*she feels safe if they continue living in ignorance and blindness of the truth\* She is open, loving, protective and all in all a good queen.

### TIRESIUS:

He is a revered prophet of Thebes. He has been blessed with Immortality. He is the only one in Thebes who is aware of the facts of Oedipus' life by the time the play begins. He first undergoes soul searching before saying anything. He tells Oedipus the truth he seeks to find when Oedipus disrespects him. \*He is elderly, blind but despite his incapability to see, he has been given the gift of seeing into the future\* He is excellent at reading and perceiving people. He is wise enough to know that not everyone takes their fate well. He is \*respectful, trustworthy, intelligent, reliable, levelheaded/rational, obedient, calculative, loyal, flexible, foresighted, God fearing, responsible, selfless, confident, courageous, hawk-eyed, authoritative etc\*

### **\*CHORUS**

Plays a very important role in Greek tragedies by giving the background information, commenting on the characters' actions and revealing the psychological and emotional tenor of the action. Chorus helps the audience to purge emotions (Catharsis) and draw lessons. Chorus is formed of Thebes Citizens who witness Oedipus' tragedy. They are a link between the actors and the audience because they voice the emotions, anxieties and concerns of the people watching the tragedy.

### **\*Corinthian Shepherd:**

This is an old man from Corinth who brings the news of the Corinthian king's death. He is the man who had presented the infant Oedipus to the Corinthian ruler after he had been abandoned by the Theban Shepherd.

### **Theban shepherd:**

Another old man who was a confidante of King Laius. He is the sole witness of Laius' murder and the one who handed over the infant Oedipus to the Corinthian Shepherd. Although these two shepherds are minor characters, \*they play a major part in unraveling the mystery of Oedipus' birth and Laius' murder.

### **Antigone and Ismene:**

These are daughters of Oedipus and Jocasta. They make an appearance in the play but are not signed any dialogue.

CREON is Jocasta's brother. He is a responsible and loyal Theban citizen. He too acts as a foil to the more \*impulsive Oedipus\* He is in the play to provoke and guide Oedipus to his final realisation that he is a murderer and participant in incest. He advocates for the asking of an Oracle to solve their problem with Thebes. He is accused of trying to overthrow King Oedipus by King Oedipus himself. He gets a chance later on to rule in place of him. He faces a blind Oedipus and does not wish to harm him. He grants him his last wishes (descent burial to JOCASTA, take care of Oedipus' daughters and lead him to the direction of exile). He is seen as Judicious, rational, consistent, respectful, obedient, intelligent, reliable, Foresighted, honest, responsible, loyal, open minded etc

## Lessons:

1. You reap what you sow (Oedipus )
2. The hand of fate is inescapable
3. Pride goes before a fall(Oedipus)
4. The will of god superceeds the will of man.
5. To be slow when making decisions/To think twice before act (Oedipus)
- 6 Time tells it all /There is light at the end of the tunnel
7. Disobedience and arrogance are recipe for destruction (Oedipus)
8. A friend in need is a friend indeed (Creon and Oedipus at the end)
9. What is done cannot be undone (Laius' death)
10. A good turn deserves the other\* (Jocasta and Laius to Oedipus )

We are aware we draw lessons from the themes, actions of the characters here especially the chorus(character relationships), Words of the playwright etc. It is good if we avoid negations and use proverbs, idioms etc. Lessons include here

## OEDIPUS THE KING:

Oedipus is the king of Thebes a man ruled by his fate. He is the protagonist of the play. He is \*believed to be the son of Polybus and Merope of Corinth but he is the son of King Laius and Jocasta of Thebes\*. He is to murder his father and marry his own mother. He is born therefore when his fateful destiny is predetermined. He is unaware of these facts and does not know that even before the action of the play starts he has already committed these dreadful acts. He is \*arrogant, stubborn, proud, impulsive, irrational, disrespectful, abusive, mischievous, courageous, strongwilled, shortsighted, aggressive, vengeful, incorrigible, myopic, etc