

***Oedipus the King* Study Questions**

Use the **unbracketed** line numbers for your reading.

Part 1. Lines 1-322

1. Where does the opening action of the play take place?
2. What is the importance of irony in the play?
3. At the start of the play, what crisis is facing the city of Thebes?
4. From what did Oedipus save the Thebans some years ago?
5. What has Oedipus sent his brother-in-law Creon to do?
6. What are three qualities that describe Oedipus at the beginning of the play? Write down the evidence for each quality that you identify, including page number.
7. As Creon explains, who was king of Thebes before Oedipus? What happened to him?
8. What is the message that Creon brings from the oracle at Delphi?
9. What clue does Creon reveal about the murder of King Laius? How does Creon know about the clue?
10. How does Oedipus respond to the clue about Laius' murder?
11. What seems to be the mood of the Chorus during this time?
12. What do you imagine the Chorus is doing as they recite their lines?
13. What punishment does Oedipus announce will befall anyone who conceals the identity of the murderer of King Laius? What does Oedipus wish upon the murderer?

Part 2. Lines 322-769

1. According to his speech to Chorus Leader, for whom has Oedipus already sent twice? Why?
2. What are two unique characteristics of Teiresias?
3. Why is Teiresias reluctant to tell Oedipus the truth?
4. What bombshell does Teiresias finally drop on Oedipus?
5. What is Oedipus' reaction to this information?
6. Who does Oedipus believe is behind Teiresias' accusation? Why?
7. In light of his actions in this scene, what kind of person does the Chorus Leader seem to be? What might his function be?
8. What seems to be the state of mind of the Chorus now?
9. With whom does the Chorus seem to side: Teiresias or Oedipus?
10. What is Oedipus' attitude toward Creon? Identify two lines that reveal Oedipus' state of mind.
11. How are Oedipus and Creon related?
12. Of what does Oedipus accuse Creon? What argument does Creon use to argue that he has no plans to take over the throne?
13. Which character seems more reasonable in the argument: Oedipus or Creon? Why?

Part 3. 770-1105

27. Who comes in and breaks up the fight?
28. What is your first impression of Jocasta? Identify two lines that support your response.
29. What seems to be the function or purpose of the Chorus Leader in this scene? What is he like?
30. Why does Oedipus finally back off in his argument with Creon?

31. What proof does Jocasta offer that mere mortals cannot foresee the future?
32. What detail from Jocasta's account of Laius' murder pricks Oedipus' memory?
33. What eyewitness to the murder of Laius is still alive? Why isn't he at the palace?
34. Why did Oedipus go to Delphi as a young man to consult the oracle? What did he learn there and what did he do as a result of the prophecy?
35. What happened at the crossroads where three roads meet? What does the encounter tell us about Oedipus' character?
36. What is Jocasta's reaction to Oedipus' growing alarm as he recalls the past?
37. Why doesn't Sophocles have Oedipus and Jocasta catch on to the truth more quickly?
38. What good news does the messenger bring Jocasta?
39. Why is the messenger's news reassuring for Oedipus in light of the prophecy from the oracle at Delphi?
40. What aspect of the message from the oracle still troubles Oedipus?

Part 4. 1095-end

41. What does the messenger say to put Oedipus' mind at ease about his parents, Polybos and Merope? What is the effect of the message on Oedipus?
42. What evidence does the messenger reveal to prove that Oedipus is not the son of Polybos and Merope?
43. Why does Jocasta repeatedly try to stop Oedipus from questioning the messenger?
44. What is Oedipus determined to do? What does this reveal about his personality?
45. What seems to be the mood of the Chorus as they consider Mount Cithaeron, the place Oedipus was abandoned as a baby?
46. What is the final piece of the puzzle that only the shepherd can supply?
47. Who vouches for the shepherd's trustworthiness? Why is he appropriate for this function?
48. How does Sophocles build suspense and keep our interest during Oedipus' confrontation with the shepherd?
49. What are the dreadful sins that Oedipus has committed that are unforgivable in his society?
50. Where is Jocasta during this crucial scene? Would you have had her present if you were Sophocles? Why or why not?
51. What line do you believe represents the climax of this scene? Write down the line including page number. Why is it the climax?
52. What contrasts concerning Oedipus does the Chorus draw?
53. Find an example of a *paradox* in the Chorus' comments?
54. What does the Second Messenger reveal has happened inside the palace? What has Jocasta done? What has Oedipus done?
55. What does Oedipus say should now happen to him? Why is this both ironic and appropriate?
56. Who becomes king now that Oedipus has been disgraced?
57. Who is Oedipus most worried about? What does Oedipus ask Creon to do to help them?
58. What advice or moral does the Chorus offer at the very end of the play?