



## [Antigone](#), by Sophocles

### **In A Nutshell**

Sophocles is considered one of the great ancient Greek tragedians. Among Sophocles's most famous plays are the three parts of the *Oedipus* trilogy: *Oedipus the King*, *Oedipus at Colonus*, and *Antigone*. These plays follow the fall of a great king, Oedipus, and later the tragedies that his children suffer. The *Oedipus* trilogy has had a wide-reaching influence and is particularly notable for inspiring Sigmund Freud's theory of the "Oedipus Complex," which describes a stage of psychological development in which a child sees their father as an adversarial competitor for his or her mother's attention (or in non-psychology speak, it's the kill-the-father-sleep-with-the-mother complex).

Each play of the *Oedipus* trilogy offers a different spin on the Oedipus myth that Sophocles's audience would have been familiar with. The plays were not performed together, but rather were performed separately, at the time each was written: *Antigone* in 440 B.C., *Oedipus the King* in 430 B.C., and *Oedipus at Colonus* in 401 B.C.

Although the Oedipus plays were performed separately, they are largely coherent thematically when considered together. Instances of self-injury and suicide in *Oedipus the King*, for example, suggest the tenacity of life in a world controlled by fate, but considered more broadly in the context of all three plays, the prevalence of suicide and self-injury also suggests the sense of profound desperation and need for control experienced by humans controlled by fate. Despite their general coherence, some discrepancies do exist. For example, while Creon

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is the undisputed King at the end of *Oedipus the King*, in *Oedipus at Colonus* it's Polyneices and Eteocles who are battling for the throne. Maybe Sophocles forgot.

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## Big Picture Study Questions

- 1 How are women portrayed in *Antigone*?
- 2 Discuss the conflict between fate and destiny on one hand and free will on the other. Which dominates? How does each character grapple with their limited free will?
- 3 How do the play's main characters (Creon, Antigone, Ismene) see themselves? How is this similar or different from how they are perceived by others?

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