Oedipus Study Guide Questions

 Tiresias: What is the function and importance of Tiresias in Oedipus? What does he bring to the characters he confronts? How is he treated? What does his message have to do with the larger themes of the play?

Note that in Greek mythology:

- Tiresias accidentally came across Athena while she was bathing, so she blinded him.
- At his mother's pleading Athena gave Tiresias the gift of prophecy to compensate for his blindness.
- Among his prophecies were: A warning to Pentheus to recognize and honor Dionysus when he first appeared in Thebes.
- · A prediction of the greatness of Heracles.
- He revealed to Oedipus that Oedipus had unknowingly murdered his own father.
- Advice to Odysseus on how to placate Poseidon
- 2. The Chorus: Some say the chorus represent elders or citizens of Thebes. Others say they share the perspective of the audience. Can both of these perspectives be true, or are they mutually exclusive?
  - What is the dramatic function of the chorus in Oedipus?
  - How does the playwright represent the chorus?
  - What values are associated with them?
  - · What dramatic purpose do they serve?
  - What part of the community do they represent?
  - What message do they convey to the audience?
- 3. Physical & Moral Blindness:
- Trace the motifs of blindness and sight throughout the play; what do they suggest about the play's larger themes?
- "Oedipus can see, but he arrogantly believes that he can circumvent prophecy; Tiresias cannot see physically, but he is expert at divining the will of the gods." Defend the previous sentence with multiple examples. At the end of the play, then, why does Oedipus blind himself; is this an act of weakness or one of strength?
- Do other characters suffer from this moral blindness, e.g. Jocasta, who can't see swollen-footed Oedipus, who looks like Laius, as her son?
- Agree or disagree: "Oedipus's pride prevents him from seeing the truth, and this is why he takes such a fall. Oedipus is blinded by his pride and cannot accept that he could not avoid his fate. The irony is that the only time Oedipus is not blinded by his pride, is when he blinds himself physically."
- 4. <u>Full & Partial Knowledge</u>: Men often aspire to full knowledge; partial knowledge involves perils as well as protections. Who are the characters with partial knowledge and what happens when they seek full knowledge? What conclusions can you draw from considering the idea of 'knowledge' in Oedipus? Could man's desire to know all (grasp/possess knowledge) be considered a form of hubris?
- 5. Fate & Free Will:
- To what extent is Oedipus a dupe of the gods who have sealed his fate? To what extent does
  Oedipus bring about his own downfall? [Hint: If someone prophesied that you would kill your
  father and marry your mother, the prudent person would avoid killing all men and resist marrying
  an older woman.]
- Do Oedipus's attempts to escape his fate and even his search for truth constitute an attempt to be all-seeing and all-knowing? Or does Oeidpus actually gain stature because he is striving against

# **Oedipus Study Guide Questions Tiresias**

**Phillip Mitsis, Ioannis Ziogas** 

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