

# Oedipus Rex

## Practice Multiple-Choice Questions

### PRACTICE MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS 1 – 5

Carefully read the passage below before answering the multiple-choice questions that follow.

- OEDIPUS: O Tiresias, who grasp all things,  
both what can be learned and what is unspeakable,  
both of heaven and treading the earth,  
5 even if you cannot see, you still understand  
what sickness plagues our city, and we find, lord,  
you alone are our savior and defender.  
For Phoebus, if you have not heard this also  
10 from the messengers, in response to our question  
said relief from this sickness would only come  
if we should discover and punish well  
the murderers of Laius or send them forth  
as fugitives from this land. Therefore,  
15 grudging nothing from the speech of birds  
or something known from another sort  
of divination, save yourself and the city,  
and save me, and ward off all the pollution  
from the dead man. We are in your hands,  
and to help a man from troubles when you have  
20 the power is the sweetest of labors.
- TIRESIAS: Alas, alas! How terrible to know  
when it does not help the knower; for knowing this  
well I let it slip—I should not have come here.
- 25 OEDIPUS: What's this? How dispiritedly you have come!
- TIRESIAS: Send me home, for you will bear your lot easily  
and I mine, if you will yield to me.
- 30 OEDIPUS: You speak neither clearly nor helpfully  
to this city, which raised you, if you guard your thoughts.
- TIRESIAS: For I see that your words come at the wrong time,  
and since I would not suffer the same thing...
- 35 OEDIPUS: No, by the gods, don't hold back what you know, when  
all of us as suppliants bow down before you.
- TIRESIAS: None of you understand, but I shall never  
40 reveal my own troubles, and so I shall not say yours.
- OEDIPUS: What are you saying? You will not explain  
what you understand, but rather intend  
to betray us and destroy the city.

- 45           TIRESIAS:        I cause no pain for you or myself. Why do you vainly seek this? For you can learn nothing from me.
- OEDIPUS:        You worst of wicked men! You would anger a stone! Will you reveal nothing, but instead show yourself unmovable and impractical?
- 50
- TIRESIAS:        You have found fault with my anger, but your own, living within you, you did not see, but blamed me.
- 55           OEDIPUS:        Who could hear such words and not grow angry, words with which you dishonor the city?
- TIRESIAS:        It will end the same, though I hide it in silence.
- 60           OEDIPUS:        Why not, then, tell me what will come anyway?
- TIRESIAS:        I should explain no further. At these things, if you wish, rage as much as your heart is able.
- 65           OEDIPUS:        Indeed, since I am so angry, I'll pass over none of what I understand. Know that I think you, too, had your hand in this deed and did it, even though you did not kill with your own hands. But if you could see, I would think the deed yours alone.
- 70
- TIRESIAS:        Really? I say to you: abide by that decree you made earlier, and from this day address neither these men here nor me, since you are the unholy polluter of this land.
- 75           OEDIPUS:        Did you throw out this word so boldly? And where do you think you will escape it?
- 80           TIRESIAS:        I have escaped it, for I hold the potent truth.
- OEDIPUS:        Who told you to say this? It is no prophecy!
- TIRESIAS:        You did! For you forced me to speak unwillingly!

- I. What is ironic about Oedipus' appeal to Tiresias?
- A. Oedipus does not really want to know the truth.
  - B. Tiresias already knows the truth.
  - C. Oedipus believes knowing the truth will help him.
  - D. Tiresias' answer will anger Oedipus.
  - E. Oedipus threatens to punish Laus' murderers.

2. At his first entrance, Tiresias essentially admits that he knows
  - A. the answers to all of Oedipus' questions.
  - B. who killed Laius.
  - C. Oedipus is a tyrant.
  - D. the cause of the city's plague.
  - E. the answer to the Sphinx's riddle.
  
3. Dramatically, Tiresias' riddles serve to
  - A. anger Oedipus.
  - B. build suspense.
  - C. provide exposition.
  - D. introduce the conflict.
  - E. suggest the theme.
  
4. Responding to Oedipus' anger Tiresias hints at Oedipus'
  - A. hamartia.
  - B. hubris.
  - C. hybris.
  - D. tragic flaw.
  - E. emotional catharsis.
  
5. Oedipus' anger at Tiresias' words illustrates his
  - A. hamartia.
  - B. hubris.
  - C. hybris.
  - D. peripeteia.
  - E. catharsis.

## PRACTICE MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS 6 – 10

Carefully read the passage below before choosing the best answer to the multiple-choice questions that follow:

OEDIPUS: O wealth and power and skill reaching  
beyond skill, in a much-envied life  
how much resentment gathers up inside you,  
if for the sake of this realm, which the city put  
5 into my hands as a gift, not something sought,  
the trusted Creon, my friend from the beginning,  
beguiles me and secretly desires to oust me,  
engaging this craftily-working wizard,  
10 this tricky beggar, who sees clearly only  
for profit, but is blind when it comes to skill.

So tell me, when are you the wise seer?  
How is it that, when the singing hound was here,  
you never said how the citizens might be freed?  
15 Even though the riddle could not be solved by  
the first man who met it, but required prophecy.  
But you did not come forth with this, knowing some clue  
from birds or gods; instead I came along,  
the idiot Oedipus! I stopped her,  
20 working from intellect, not learning from birds.  
The very man you're trying to overthrow,  
thinking to stand beside Creon's throne.  
I think you both—you and the one who framed these  
things—  
25 will regret your urge to cleanse the land, but if you  
were not so old, you'd learn now what such words earn.

CHORUS: To us it seems that both this man's words  
and your own, Oedipus, were said in anger.  
30 But we must not dwell on such things. Only this:  
how best we may fulfill the god's instructions

TIRESIAS: Even though you are a tyrant, I must at least  
be granted an equal reply, for I, too,  
35 have the right to speech. For I am no slave to you,  
at all, but to Loxias, so I will not be  
written off as Creon's client. I will reply,  
since you reproach me as blind: You, even though you  
see clearly, do not see the scope of your evil,  
40 nor where you live, nor with whom you dwell.  
Do you know your true descent? And secretly  
you are an enemy to your own kin,  
both under the earth and on it. Striking you  
from both sides the terrible hounds of your mother's  
45 and father's curse will drive you from this land;  
though you see well enough now, then you will be blind.  
What place will not be harbor to your shouting?  
What Cithaeron will not echo back your cries,

50 when you truly understand that wedding?  
 You sailed home into it, no proper harbor  
 after such good sailing before! Nor do you  
 perceive the multitude of other evils,  
 which will make you the equal of your children.  
 60 Go ahead—insult Creon and this mouth of mine,  
 for of all mortals who will be destroyed  
 root and branch, there is not one sadder than you.

OEDIPUS: Am I to tolerate hearing this from this man?  
 65 No, to hell with him! No! Turn around quickly  
 and head back home, far away from here.

TIRESIAS: I would not have come here, if you had not called me.

6. Oedipus' calling his own life "much-envied" (line 2) is an example of (a)
  - A. verbal irony.
  - B. situational irony.
  - C. dramatic irony
  - D. cathartic incident.
  - E. pathetic fallacy
7. When Tiresias calls Oedipus a "tyrant" (line 33) he means that Oedipus
  - A. did not inherit the throne.
  - B. married a reigning queen.
  - C. took the throne by force.
  - D. is an unlawful king.
  - E. is wicked and cruel.
8. Tiresias' calling Oedipus blind is both
  - A. metaphoric and prophetic.
  - B. literal and figurative.
  - C. insulting and insolent.
  - D. comic and suspenseful.
  - E. impolitic and treasonous.
9. Cithaeron is the name of
  - A. Oedipus' true father.
  - B. the Oracle at Delphi.
  - C. the mountain where Oedipus was left to die.
  - D. the crossroads where Oedipus killed Laius.
  - E. Oedipus' true mother.
10. Tiresias' parting line emphasizes the irony of Oedipus'
  - A. familial curse.
  - B. need for information.
  - C. metaphoric blindness.
  - D. rudeness and insolence.
  - E. proneness to anger.

## Practice Multiple-Choice Questions 11 – 15

Carefully read the passage below from Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* and then answer the multiple-choice questions that follow:

*[Enter JOCASTA from the palace.]*

5 JOCASTA: Why, unhappy men, do you stir up this  
unwelcome revolution of the tongue? Aren't you  
ashamed to stir private evils when the land is  
so sick? Come inside, and you, Creon, return home;  
don't make this foolish grief into something big.

10 CREON: Sister, this husband of yours, Oedipus, judges  
terrible things for me, choosing two evils:  
to forsake my fatherland or to die.

15 OEDIPUS: I concede this, for, my lady, I caught him  
basely conspiring against me with evil craft.

CREON: May I live no more, but die accursed, if I have done  
against you any of what you accuse me.

20 JOCASTA: By the gods, Oedipus, believe this,  
respecting this oath to the gods most of all,  
then me and these who are here with you.

*Str.*

25 CHORUS: Yield to these wishes and thoughts,  
my lord, I pray.

OEDIPUS: What would you have me yield?

30 CHORUS: Respect a man who never before was foolish  
and now is powerful from his oath.

OEDIPUS: Do you know what you seek?

35 CHORUS: I do.

OEDIPUS: Then tell me why.

40 CHORUS: Never should you cast out a friend, who is  
bound with an oath,  
dishonored, with only the charge of obscure words.

OEDIPUS: Know well that when you seek this, you seek either  
my destruction or exile from this land.

45 CHORUS: No, by the foremost of all the gods,  
the Sun! May I perish godless and friendless,  
the worst fate, if I have this in mind!

- 50 But for me, the dying land eats away  
at my ill-starred heart, if this fight between you two  
will join itself to our old problems.
- OEDIPUS: Then let him go, since I must either die  
or be driven by force from this land, dishonored.  
60 For I pity your speech, since it is piteous,  
not his. He will be hated wherever he goes.
- CREON: You are clearly hateful in yielding, and severe  
when you pass from anger. But personalities  
65 like yours are justly painful to themselves.
- OEDIPUS: Will you not let me be and go away?
- CREON: I'll go,  
70 finding you ignorant, but just in their eyes.
- [Exit CREON offstage.]*
- Ant.*
- 75 CHORUS: Lady, why do you hesitate  
to take this man inside the house?
- JOCASTA: I would learn what has befallen.
- 80 CHORUS: Suspicion through unknown words  
came, and even an unjust word can bite.
- JOCASTA: From both of them?
- 85 CHORUS: Yes.
- JOCASTA: But, what was the cause?
- 90 CHORUS: It has done enough to me, enough when the land  
already suffers so, that it should stay departed.
- OEDIPUS: Do you see where you've gotten, despite your good  
intentions, trying to ease and blunt my anger?
- 95 CHORUS: My lord, I've said it not only once,  
but know that I am mad, helpless in rational thought,  
if I forsake you,  
who, when my dear country was lost in troubles,  
100 set her upright again.  
But now, become once more our guide to better things!
- JOCASTA: By the gods, tell me also, my lord,  
what problem puts you in so much anger!
- 105 OEDIPUS: Since I respect you, my wife, more than them, I shall  
speak of Creon and what he plots against me.

- JOCASTA: Speak, if you will explain the quarrel clearly.
- 110 OEDIPUS: He said I was the murderer of Laius.
- JOCASTA: Knowing this for himself, or learning from hearsay?
- 115 OEDIPUS: He sent that criminal seer, since regarding his own affairs, he keeps his tongue unstained.
- JOCASTA: You now, free yourself from these matters; listen to me and learn why nothing mortal can show you anything of prophecy.
- 120 I shall tell a quick tale to prove my words. A prophecy came to Laius once—I won't say from Apollo himself, but from his servants—that death would come to him from his child, whoever was born to him from me. But then,
- 125 just as the report is, some foreign brigands slew him where the three wagon-roads meet. Yet three days had not passed from the birth of my child, when that man, binding his ankles together, sent him in another's hands into the wild
- 130 of the mountain. And so Apollo brought about neither that he slay his father nor that Laius suffer the terrible thing he feared from his child. Such things the speeches of seers predict, you should ignore; for whatever the god requires, he himself will easily reveal.
- 135
- OEDIPUS: Hearing you just now, my lady, how my soul wanders, how my mind shakes me!
- 140 JOCASTA: What care compels you to say such a thing?
- OEDIPUS: I thought I heard you say this: that Laius was cut down where the three wagon-roads meet.

11. All of the following are possible themes of this scene EXCEPT
- Honor those who honor the gods.
  - Public matters take precedence over private ones.
  - Traitors must be dealt with swiftly.
  - Accusations must be based on more than suspicion.
  - One must listen and reason to learn the truth.
12. In the conflict between Oedipus and Creon, the Chorus and Jocasta both represent
- morality and justice.
  - justice and piety.
  - piety and mercy.
  - justice and mercy.
  - morality and mercy.



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13. Oedipus, in claiming that either he or Creon must be banished, reinforces Creon's role of
- A. protagonist.
  - B. antagonist.
  - C. villain.
  - D. hero.
  - E. foil.
14. Jocasta's attempt to reassure her husband is ironic because
- A. she makes Oedipus begin to suspect the truth of his curse.
  - B. she says that Laius' prophesy did not come directly from Apollo.
  - C. Laius' son was taken to die in the mountains.
  - D. she claims to put no faith in prophesies.
  - E. Oedipus has already determined Creon's guilt.
15. Jocasta's disregard for prophesy is an example of
- A. hamartia
  - B. hubris
  - C. catharsis
  - D. insolence
  - E. blindness

## PRACTICE MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS 16 – 20

Carefully read the following passage and then select the *best* answers to the multiple-choice questions below:

OEDIPUS: Nor will you be deprived, when I am gone so far  
into expectations. For how could I speak to one  
more important than you as I meet such fortune?  
My father is Polybus of Corinth,  
5 my mother Merope of the line of Dorus.  
I was thought the greatest of the citizens there,  
before chance befell me, worthy of marvel,  
but not worthy, at least, of my energy.  
At a banquet a man overwhelmed by drink  
10 called me a fraud in whom I claimed for my father.  
That day I tried to hold in my anger,  
but the next day I went home and asked  
my mother and father, and they angrily  
treated the insult as the speech of a drunkard.  
15 I rejoiced with them both at this, but still  
it chafed me always, for the rumor spread far.  
Unknown to my mother and father I set out  
to Delphi, and Phoebus sent me away  
as unworthy of the answers I had sought,  
20 but telling me other terrible, awful things—  
that I must sleep with my mother, and  
that I would bring to light a brood unbearable  
for men to see, and that I must be the slayer  
of the father who sired me. I heard and fled,  
25 henceforth to share with Corinth only the stars,  
where I would never see completed  
the disgrace of those evil oracles of mine.  
In my travels I came to that place  
in which you say that your king was lost.  
30 And to you, lady, I shall speak the truth.  
When traveling near that very triple road,  
a herald and a man riding there  
in a chariot, like the man you described  
encountered me. Both the one in front  
35 and the old man himself drove me from the road  
with force. In my anger I struck the driver  
turning me off the road, and the old man,  
when he saw, watched me as I passed the chariot  
and struck me on the head with the two-pronged goad.  
40 But he more than paid for it and soon was struck  
by the scepter from this very hand, lying  
on his back, at once thrown out of the car.  
I killed them all. But if that stranger  
had some connection with Laius,  
45 who would be more wretched than this man you see?  
What man would be more hateful to God,  
the man whom no man, foreign or citizen,  
may receive at home, nor anyone address,

- 50 but all must cast from their house? And no other  
called down such curses on me than myself!  
I even stain the dead man's bed with the hands  
at which he perished. Am I so evil?  
Not entirely unholy? If I must flee,  
then in my flight I may neither see my own kin  
60 nor step inside my fatherland, or I must  
take my mother in marriage and kill my father  
Polybus, who raised and sired me. Who would not,  
judging these things, say truly in my case  
that they come from a cruel divinity?  
65 Never, o holy reverence of the gods,  
never may I see this day, but I would rather  
be blotted out from humanity before  
I saw this stain of my doom arrive upon me.
- 70 CHORUS: Although these things trouble us, my lord, until  
you learn from the one who was present, have hope.
- OEDIPUS: Indeed, this much of hope is left to me:  
only to await that man, the herdsman.
- 75 JOCASTA: And what do you want of him, when he appears?
- OEDIPUS: I shall tell you; for if he is found saying  
the same tale as you, I shall have escaped this woe.
- 80 JOCASTA: What special tale did you hear from me?
- OEDIPUS: You said he reported that brigands  
killed Laius. If, then, he still says the same  
85 number, I did not kill him, for surely one man  
could not be equal to many. But if he  
clearly names a single man, a lone traveler,  
then already this deed comes down upon me.
- 90 JOCASTA: Yet, know that his account stood thus, and he cannot  
take it back now, for the city heard these things,  
not I alone. But even if he does alter  
something from his previous story,  
not even thus, my lord, will he bring to  
95 light Laius' killer truly accomplished,  
whom, indeed, Loxias said must die at the hands  
of my child. Yet my poor boy never slew  
him, but rather perished himself long before.  
And so I would not look to prophecies,  
100 not here or anywhere else.
- OEDIPUS: You reason well, but, nevertheless, send someone  
to fetch the servant, and don't neglect it.
- 105 JOCASTA: And soon I shall, but let us go inside the house,  
for I would do nothing but that it is your wish.

[*Excunt omnes.*]

110 CHORUS:

*Str. 1*

115 If only fate may find me still acting  
with reverent holiness in words  
and all my deeds, for which lofty laws  
are ordained, born  
in heaven above, their only  
father Olympus,  
120 no mortal form of men  
bore them, nor does  
forgetfulness ever lull them to sleep.  
In them is a great god, who does not grow old.  
Audacity sires the tyrant—audacity, if  
125 filled up rashly with all excess,  
neither timely nor useful,  
scaling the highest eaves  
rushes into precipitous necessity  
where it suffers from its ill-placed foot.  
130 I pray that God  
will never end the struggle  
that is good for the city:  
I will never cease clinging to God as my protector.

135 *Str. 2*

But if someone goes  
disdainful in hands or speech,  
nor fearing Justice,  
140 nor revering the seats of the holy gods,  
let a bad fate take him,  
the wages of unlucky insolence,  
unless he reaps his profit justly  
and retreats from impious acts,  
145 or if he touches untouchable things in his folly.  
What man can protect himself, warding  
away the shafts of anger when such things happen?  
For if deeds like this are honored,  
why must I dance?

150 *Ant. 2*

No longer will I worship  
at the inviolate navel of the world,  
155 nor at Abae,  
nor ever in the Olympian shrine,  
unless these events are made  
manifestly clear to all mortals,  
But, o powerful one, if you are correctly called that,  
160 Zeus, who rule all things, may they not elude  
you and your eternal, deathless empire!

165

For already the old prophecies of Laius  
are waning and being set aside.  
Apollo does not seem to be honored;  
faith wanders, lost.

16. The fact of Polybus and Merope's continuing to lie to Oedipus about his parentage helps illustrate the role of
  - A. free will.
  - B. fate or destiny.
  - C. hamartia.
  - D. catharsis
  - E. peripeteia.
  
17. The dramatic impact of Oedipus' telling Jocasta of his visit to the Oracle is that the audience
  - A. witnesses Jocasta's calamity.
  - B. hears Oedipus' story.
  - C. sees Jocasta realize the truth.
  - D. develops empathy for Oedipus.
  - E. figures out the solution.
  
18. What evidence does this scene reveal that Oedipus still does not realize the truth?
  - A. He expresses no remorse for killing Laius.
  - B. He believes he must banish himself from Thebes.
  - C. He admits to visiting the Oracle.
  - D. He believes he cannot return to Corinth.
  - E. He fears that his day of doom has arrived.
  
19. Jocasta's reluctance to send for the herdsman suggests that she is
  - A. aware of the whole truth.
  - B. fearful that Oedipus might actually be Laius' killer.
  - C. impatient to wait until the herdsman arrives.
  - D. hurt by Oedipus' apparent disbelief in her story.
  - E. confident of Oedipus' innocence.
  
20. The Chorus's final Antistrophe establishes what aspect of tragedy?
  - A. the role of destiny
  - B. the role of free will
  - C. the role of divine wrath
  - D. the role of worship
  - E. the role of impiety