Sophocles (c. 495 – 405 BCE) was one of the three great tragedians of ancient Greece. His plays, along with those of his peers, paved the way for drama as we now know it, enjoy it, and experience it today. Sophocles began writing plays during a time period in which there were no “how-to handbooks” to guide him. Instead, the playwright tapped into his creative genius and produced plays that are still relevant today. Even without the modern advantages we have today, Sophocles could enthrall an audience with a handful of actors and a resounding chorus. His tragedies revolve around the timeless tales of heroes or heroines struggling with both internal and external conflicts that result in a tragic endings.

*Antigone*, one of Sophocles most famous and widely read plays, portrays a strong-willed woman who is forced to choose between duty to her gods and family and loyalty to her king—a king who is as strong-willed as the heroine. Sophocles uses the characters and situations to express his ideas of how people should behave and the values that they should hold. Antigone’s struggle with her personal convictions and that of oppressive authority is a story to which everyone can relate, regardless of whether you are wearing a toga or blue jeans.

As you read the play, consider how Antigone’s struggles mirror your own struggles. Imagine how her story would be told on the big screen, complete with special effects. Is her story so different from those of our modern day heroes and heroines? Is her story so different from your own?

**Prologue** –

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| |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | |  | In Thebes, directly in front of the royal palace, which stands in the background, its main doors facing the audience. Enter **ANTIGONE** leading **ISMENE** away from the palace |  | |  | **ANTIGONE** |  | |  | Now, dear Ismene, my own blood sister, |  | |  | do you have any sense of all the troubles |  | |  | Zeus keeps bringing on the two of us, |  | |  | as long as we’re alive? All that misery |  | | 5 | which stems from Oedipus? There’s no suffering, |  | |  | no shame, no ruin—not one dishonor— |  | |  | which I have not seen in all the troubles |  | |  | you and I go through. What’s this they’re saying now, |  | |  | something our general has had proclaimed |  | | 10 | throughout the city? Do you know of it? |  | |  | Have you heard? Or have you just missed the news? |  | |  | Dishonors which better fit our enemies |  | |  | are now being piled up on the ones we love. |  | |  | **ISMENE** |  | |  | I’ve had no word at all, Antigone, |  | | 15 | nothing good or bad about our family, |  | |  | not since we two lost both our brothers, |  | |  | killed on the same day by a double blow. |  | |  | And since the Argive army, just last night, |  | |  | has gone away, I don’t know any more |  | | 20 | if I’ve been lucky or face total ruin. |  | |  | **ANTIGONE** |  | |  | I know that. That’s why I brought you here, |  | |  | outside the gates, so only you can hear. |  | |  | **ISMENE** |  | |  | What is it? The way you look makes it seem |  | |  | you’re thinking of some dark and gloomy news. |  | |  | **ANTIGONE** |  | | 25 | Look—what’s Creon doing with our two brothers? |  | |  | He’s honoring one with a full funeral |  | |  | and treating the other one disgracefully! |  | |  | Eteocles, they say, has had his burial |  | |  | according to our customary rites, |  | | 30 | to win him honor with the dead below. |  | |  | But as for Polyneices, who perished |  | |  | so miserably, an order has gone out |  | |  | throughout the city—that’s what people say. |  | |  | He’s to have no funeral or lament, |  | | 35 | but to be left unburied and unwept, |  | |  | a sweet treasure for the birds to look at, |  | |  | for them to feed on to their heart’s content. |  | | | |
|  | That’s what people say the noble Creon |
|  | has announced to you and me—I mean to me— |
| 40 | and now he’s coming to proclaim the fact, |
|  | to state it clearly to those who have not heard. |
|  | For Creon this matter’s really serious. |
|  | Anyone who acts against the order |
|  | will be stoned to death before the city. |
| 45 | Now you know, and you’ll quickly demonstrate |
|  | whether you are nobly born, or else |
|  | a girl unworthy of her splendid ancestors. |
|  | **ISMENE** |
|  | Oh my poor sister, if that’s what’s happening, |
|  | what can I say that would be any help |
| 50 | to ease the situation or resolve it? |
|  | **ANTIGONE** |
|  | Think whether you will work with me in this |
|  | and act together. |
|  | **ISMENE** |
|  | In what kind of work? |
|  | What do you mean? |
|  | **ANTIGONE** |
| 55 | Will you help these hands |
|  | take up Polyneices’ corpse and bury it? |
|  | **ISMENE** |
|  | What? You’re going to bury Polyneices, |
|  | when that’s been made a crime for all in Thebes? |
|  | **ANTIGONE** |
|  | Yes. I’ll do my duty to my brother— |
| 60 | and yours as well, if you’re not prepared to. |
|  | I won’t be caught betraying him. |
|  | **ISMENE** |
|  | You’re too rash. |
|  | Has Creon not expressly banned that act? |
|  | **ANTIGONE** |
|  | Yes. But he’s no right to keep me from what’s mine. |
|  | **ISMENE** |
| 65 | O dear. Think, Antigone. Consider |
|  | how our father died, hated and disgraced, |
|  | when those mistakes which his own search revealed |
|  | forced him to turn his hand against himself |
|  | and stab out both his eyes. Then that woman, |
| 70 | his mother and his wife—her double role— |
|  | destroyed her own life in a twisted noose. |
|  | Then there’s our own two brothers, both butchered |
|  | in a single day—that ill-fated pair |
|  | with their own hands slaughtered one another |
| 75 | and brought about their common doom. |
|  | Now, the two of us are left here quite alone. |
|  | Think how we’ll die far worse than all the rest, |
|  | if we defy the law and move against |
|  | the king’s decree, against his royal power. |
| 80 | We must remember that by birth we’re women, |
|  | and, as such, we shouldn’t fight with men. |
|  | Since those who rule are much more powerful, |
|  | we must obey in this and in events |
|  | which bring us even harsher agonies. |
| 85 | So I’ll ask those underground for pardon— |
|  | since I’m being compelled, I will obey |
|  | those in control. That’s what I’m forced to do. |
|  | It makes no sense to try to do too much. |
|  | **ANTIGONE** |
|  | I wouldn’t urge you to. No. Not even |
| 90 | if you were keen to act. Doing this with you |
|  | would bring me no joy. So be what you want. |
|  | I’ll still bury him. It would be fine to die |
|  | while doing that. I’ll lie there with him, |
|  | with a man I love, pure and innocent, |
| 95 | for all my crime. My honors for the dead |
|  | must last much longer than for those up here. |
|  | I’ll lie down there forever. As for you, |
|  | well, if you wish, you can show contempt |
|  | for those laws the gods all hold in honor. |
|  | **ISMENE** |
| 100 | I’m not disrespecting them. But I can’t act |
|  | against the state. That’s not in my nature. |
|  | **ANTIGONE** |
|  | Let that be your excuse. I’m going now |
|  | to make a burial mound for my dear brother. |
|  | **ISMENE** |
|  | Oh poor Antigone, I’m so afraid for you. |
|  | **ANTIGONE** |
| 105 | Don’t fear for me. Set your own fate in order. |
|  | **ISMENE** |
|  | Make sure you don’t reveal to anyone |
|  | what you intend. Keep it closely hidden. |
|  | I’ll do the same. |
|  | **ANTIGONE** |
|  | No, no. Announce the fact— |
| 110 | if you don’t let everybody know, |
|  | I’ll despise your silence even more. |
|  | **ISMENE** |
|  | Your heart is hot to do cold deeds. |
|  | **ANTIGONE** |
|  | But I know |
|  | I’ll please the ones I’m duty bound to please. |
|  | **ISMENE** |
| 115 | Yes, if you can. But you’re after something |
|  | which you’re incapable of carrying out. |
|  | **ANTIGONE** |
|  | Well, when my strength is gone, then I’ll give up. |
|  | **ISMENE** |
|  | A vain attempt should not be made at all. |
|  | **ANTIGONE** |
|  | I’ll hate you if you’re going to talk that way. |
| 120 | And you’ll rightly earn the loathing of the dead. |
|  | So leave me and my foolishness alone— |
|  | we’ll get through this fearful thing. I won’t suffer |
|  | anything as bad as a disgraceful death. |
|  | **ISMENE** |
|  | All right then, go, if that’s what you think right. |
| 125 | But remember this—even though your mission |
|  | makes no sense, your friends do truly love you. |
|  | Exit **ANTIGONE** away from the palace. ISMENE watches her go and then returns slowly into the palace |