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## ***Oedipus: The King***

### **Sophocles**

#### **Who was Sophocles?**

Sophocles was one of the three greatest Greek tragedians, other two being Aeschylus and Euripides. Sophocles was born in 496 B.C. and died in 406 B.C. Of the more than 120 plays of Sophocles known to antiquity only 7 tragedies have survived intact into modern times. They are- *Antigone*, *Oedipus Rex* or *Oedipus Tyrannus*, *Electra*, *Ajax*, *Trachiniae*, *Philoctetes*, and *Oedipus at Colonus*

#### **When was *Oedipus Tyrannus* first performed?**

The *Oedipus Tyrannus* was first performed shortly after the great plague which paralyzed Athens in 429 B.C. In his title character Sophocles created a man who epitomizes the helpless human struggle against nemesis, the ever-present power which could topple in an instance the fortunes of men and critics alike.

#### **Why do the people of Thebes throng at the door of the royal house at the beginning of the play?**

A group of Theban critics led by a priest of Zeus comes at the market palace and near Athens's temple to inform the King Oedipus that the city has been overtaken by a great disaster; the land has become barren, the herds of sheep are hungry upon the Pastures which used to be green; the women of the city are giving birth to dead children; people are dying in large numbers of the plague The priest then appeals to Oedipus to come to the help of his subjects.

#### **Comment on the role of Creon in King Oedipus.**

Creon is the once brother-in-law of Laius and now of Oedipus. Before the play begins, he is sent by Oedipus to the Oracle of Apollo at Delphi to find out the reason for the plague in Thebes. He returns with the news that in order to rid the city of its woes, Oedipus must find the murderer of King Laius his predecessors. Oedipus feels threatened by Creon and believes that he covets the throne. When Tiresias tells that unbelieving Oedipus was himself responsible for Laius's murder, Oedipus immediately assumes that Creon is in collusion with Tiresias for the throne. When Creon defends himself, saying that he has no desire to become a king, Oedipus grows more incensed and would have called for Creon's death except for the pleading of Jocasta. But at the end of the play, after Oedipus has blinded himself, Creon becomes king and acts with compassion towards repentant Oedipus.



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**“You freed us from the Sphinx?” – Who is the speaker? Who freed them? What was Sphinx?**

**Or,**

**What is Sphinx riddle?**

Here the speaker is the old priest in Sophocles’s play *Oedipus: The King*.

King Oedipus freed them from the riddle of Sphinx.

The Sphinx is said to have guarded the entrance to Greek city of Thebes, asking a riddle to travellers to allow them passage. She asked the passer-by the most famous riddle in history: “Which creature has one voice and yet become four-footed and two-footed and three-footed?” She strangled and devoured anyone who could not answer. Oedipus solved the riddle by answering: “Man-who crawls on all fours as a baby, then walks on two feet as an adult, and then uses a walking stick in old age.”

**“Pay the killers back- whoever is responsible”- Who speaks this and to whom? Explain the context.**

This is god Apollo’s oracle delivered at Delphi. This is reported by Creon before Oedipus.

Oedipus had sent Creon to find out the cause why Thebes was suffering in plague. Creon came back after enquiring from Delphi. He comes to know that it is essential to find out the murderers of King Laius. Until the murderers are not found out Thebes cannot be rescued from plague.