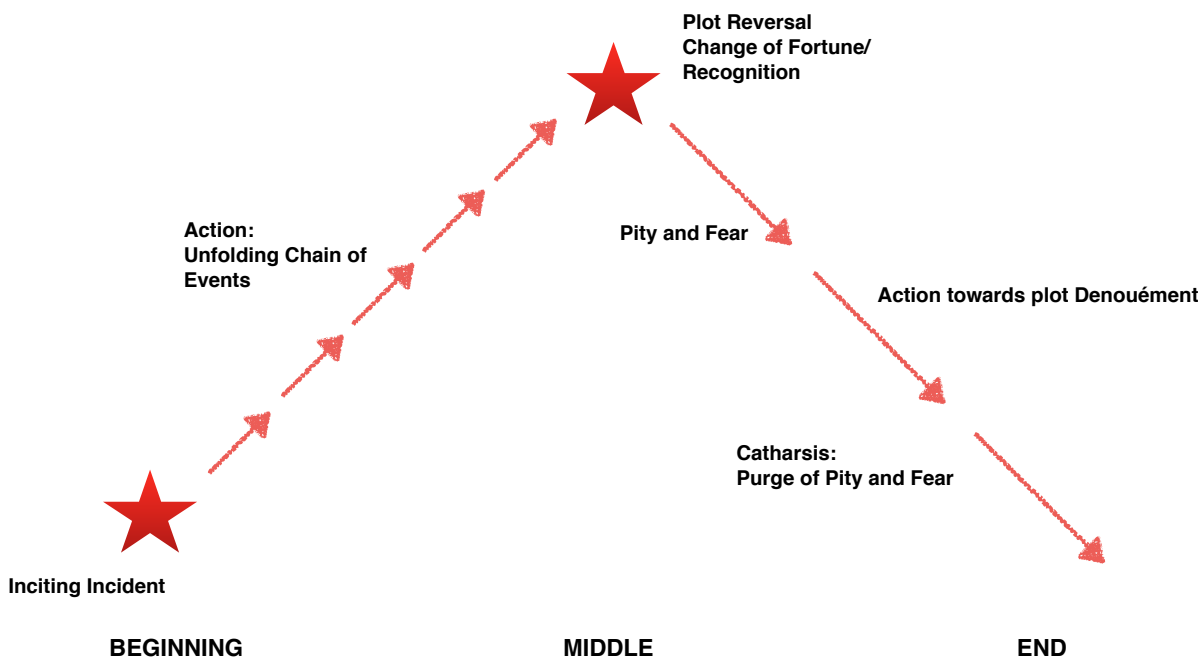


WRITING ESSENTIALS IN STYLE & COMPOSITION

Week 11: Tragedy

In the next four assignments we will learn about storytelling. First we will discuss tragedy, then comedy and finally you will write a film script. With each of these assignments we will focus on the main elements of a good story: solid plot, strong character development, convincing dialogue and vivid descriptions. Look at the chart below and think about this structure as you read *Antigone*. What do you think all the parts mean?

Aristotle's Tragic Plot Structure



Definition of Tragedy from *Aristotle's Poetics*:

"A tragedy, then, is the imitation of an action that is serious and also, as having magnitude, complete in itself; in language with pleasurable accessories, each kind brought in separately in the parts of the work; in a dramatic, not in a narrative form; with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions."

Let's look at Aristotle's definition and think about the meaning of each phrase:

- imitation of an action
- serious and having magnitude
- complete in itself
- in language with pleasurable accessories
- in a dramatic, not in a narrative form
- with incidents arousing pity and fear
- to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions.

This tragic aspect need not occur in a play – it can occur in a novel or an epic poem or almost any kind of literature. It is the experience of something bad, such that it gives us a certain pleasure viewing it. There is a certain sensual experience, a catharsis as Aristotle puts it, which somehow is good for us. We also learn from this, and tragic literature itself is aware of this. In Aeschylus' play *Agamemnon*, there is the idea of *Pathei Mathein* (to learn by suffering), and other Greek tragic plays echo this insight.

Note that there is always (or almost always) some kind of conversion in tragedy. Some character experiences a change of heart or mind as a result of what they learn or experience. They realize that they are guilty of something, or they see that they lack in compassion somehow. Often it happens too late, as in the example from Sophocles below. As a result of this growth in compassion, or sympathy, the character changes and grows. We seem to learn with the character about our need to grow in compassion.

Also, there is always a religious aspect to tragedy, because it deals with the most important questions about life and death: Why does suffering occur? Is there redemption for human beings? How are we supposed to react to suffering? Is there any benefit at all to suffering for anyone, whether the suffering is our own or someone else's? What does suffering tell us about God (or the gods)? How are we supposed to think about God (or the gods) after we have experienced suffering? How do we relate to powers above us? Is there any kind of "recompense" after we have suffered undeservedly?

According to Aristotle a tragic hero is a character who is noble or virtuous in some way but has a flaw (their tragic flaw) which inevitably leads to their downfall. Who is the tragic hero in *Antigone*? Ponder these questions as you read *Antigone*.

Reading 1: Antigone by Sophocles
An Abridged and Adapted Version of Sophocles' Play*

Characters:

Antigone
Ismene
Chorus
Creon
Sentry
Choragos
Haimon
Tiresias
Messenger
Eurydice

Scene: Various scenes from the Battle of Thebes. Then scene changes. Antigone and Ismene enter.

Antigone Ismene, dear sister, have they told you of the new decree of our King Creon?

Ismene I have heard nothing.

Antigone I thought so. Sister, there is something we must do.

Ismene Why do you speak so strangely?

Antigone Listen, Ismene. Creon buried our brother Eteocles with military honors, gave him a soldier's funeral, but Polyneices, who fought as bravely and died as miserably, they say that Creon has sworn no one shall bury him, no one mourn for him.

And the penalty? Stoning to death in the public square! There it is. And now you can prove what you are: A true sister or a traitor to your family.

Ismene I do not understand you.

Antigone Ismene, I am going to bury Polyneices!

Ismene Bury him! You have just said that the new law forbids it.

Antigone He is my brother. And he is your brother too.

Ismene But think of the danger! Think what Creon will do.

Antigone Creon is not strong enough to stand in my way!

Ismene Ah sister! We are only women. We cannot fight with men, Antigone. The law is strong, we must give in to the law in this thing and worse. I beg the dead to forgive me, but I am helpless: I must yield to those in authority.

Antigone If that is what you think, I should not want you, even if you asked to come. You have made your choice, you can be what you want to be. But I will bury him, and if I must die, I say that this crime is holy. You may do as you like, since apparently the laws of the gods mean nothing to you.

Ismene They mean a great deal to me, but I have no strength to break the laws that were made for the public good.

Antigone That must be your excuse, I suppose. But as for me, I will bury the brother I love.

Ismene Impossible things should not be tried at all.

Antigone Go away, Ismene. I shall be hating you soon, and the dead will too, for your words are hateful.

Leave me my foolish plan: I am not afraid of the danger; if it means death, it will not be the worst of deaths—death without honor.

Ismene Go then if you feel you must. You are unwise, but a loyal friend indeed to those who love you.

[Exit all but the chorus.]

Chorus Now the long blade of the sun, lying level east to west, touches with glory Thebes of the Seven Gates. Open, unlidded Eye of Golden Day!

Chorogas But now at last our new King is coming: Creon of Thebes. In this auspicious dawn of his reign, what are the new complexities that shifting Fate has woven for him?

[Enter Creon. He addresses the Chorus from the step of the palace.]

Creon Gentlemen, I have the honor to inform you that our Ship of State, which recent storms have threatened to destroy, has come safely to harbor at last.

Unfortunately, as you know, the two sons of Oedipus, Polyneices and Eteocles, have killed each other in battle, and I as the next in blood have succeeded to the full power of the throne. I am aware, of course, that no ruler can expect complete loyalty from his subjects until he has been tested in office.

Nevertheless, I say to you at the very outset that I have to follow the course that I know is best for the State; and as for the man who sets private friendship above the public welfare—I have no use for him.

Now, I have made the following decision concerning the sons of Oedipus: Eteocles, who died fighting for Thebes, shall be buried with full military honors, but his brother, Polyneices, who broke his exile to come back with fire and sword against his native city, is to have no burial.

No man is to touch him or say the least prayer for him; he shall lie on the plain, unburied, and the birds and the scavenging dogs can do with him whatever they like.

This is my command. As long as I am King, no traitor is to be honored with the loyal man. But the loyal man shall have my reverence when he is dead.

[Chorus claps. Sentry enters.]

Sentry The dead man . . . Polyneices . . . out there . . . someone . . . new dust on the slimy flesh.

Someone has given Polyneices' body burial!

Creon *[angrily]* And the man who dared do this?

Sentry I swear, I do not know. You must believe me! It was not I! I don't know who it was, but it was not I!

Choragos I have been wondering, King, can it be that the gods have done this?

Creon *[furiously]* Stop! Must you doddering wrecks go out of your heads entirely?
"The Gods!" Intolerable!

The gods favor this corpse? Why? How had he served them? Tried to loot their temples, burn their images, yes, and the whole State, and its laws with it?

No, from the very beginning there have been those who have whispered together, stiff-necked anarchists, putting their heads together, scheming against me in alleys. These are the men, and they have bribed my own guard to do this thing.

[Sententiously] Money! There's nothing in the world so demoralizing as money!
Down go your cities, homes gone, men gone, honest hearts corrupted,
Crookedness of all kinds, and all for money!

[To sentry] But you! I swear by the throne of God, the man who has done this thing shall pay for it. Find that man and bring him here to me, or your death will be the least of your problems!

Sentry King, may I speak?

Creon Your very voice distresses me.

Sentry It is not what I say, but what has been done, that hurts you.

Creon You talk too much. *[Angrily]* Go find the man! *[Exit Sentry and Creon]*

Chorus: Numberless are the world's numbers, but none more wonderful than man.

O clear intelligence, force beyond all measure! O fate of man, working both good and evil! When the laws are kept, how proudly that city stands. When the laws are broken, what of his city then?

[Re-enter Sentry leading Antigone]

Chorogas What does this mean? Surely this captive woman is the princess Antigone? Why should she be taken?

Sentry Here is the one who did it! We caught her in the very act of burying him.

 Where is Creon?

Chorogas Just coming from the house.*[Enter Creon]*

Creon What has happened? Why have you come back so soon?

Sentry Here is the woman. She is the guilty one: We found her trying to bury Polyneices again! Take her, then; question her; judge her as you will. I am through with this whole thing now, and glad of it.

Creon But this is Antigone! Why have you brought her here?

Sentry She was burying him, I tell you.

Creon *[angrily]* Is this the truth?

Sentry I saw her with my own eyes. Can I say more?

Creon And you, Antigone, with your head hanging—do you confess this thing?

Antigone I do. I deny nothing.

Creon *[To sentry]* You may go.

[To Antigone] Tell me briefly: Had you heard my proclamation touching this matter?

Antigone It was public. Could I help hearing it?

Creon And yet you defy the law?

Antigone I dared. It was not God's proclamation. Your edict, king, was strong, but all your strength is weakness against the immortal unrecorded laws of God.

[Pause] You smile at me Creon. You think me a fool, but it may well be that a fool convicts me of folly.

Chorogas *[to audience]* Like father, like daughter. Both headstrong and deaf to reason. She has never learned to yield.

Creon She has much to learn. The inflexible heart breaks first. The toughest iron cracks first, and the wildest horses bend their necks at the pull of the smallest curb.

Pride? This girl is guilty of a double insolence. Breaking the laws and then boasting of it. Who is the man here, she or I, if the crime goes unpunished?

[To servants] Go, some of you. Arrest Ismene. I accuse her equally.

Antigone *[desperately]* But Creon, what do you want more than my death?

Creon Nothing. That gives me everything.

Antigone Then I beg you: kill me. I should have praise and honor for what I have done.

[Pointing to the chorus] All these men here would praise me were their lips not frozen shut with fear of you. Ah, the good fortune of kings. Licensed to say and do whatever they please!

Choragos But see, Ismene comes. Those tears are sisterly and sorrowful!

Creon Ismene, do you confess your share in this crime, or do you deny it? Answer me.

Ismene Yes, if Antigone will let me say so. I am guilty.

Antigone *[coldly]* No, Ismene. You have no right to say so. You would not help me.

Ismene But now I know what you meant; and I am here to join you, to take my share of the punishment.

Antigone No, Ismene. You are alive, but I belong to death.

Creon *[to the chorus]* Gentlemen, I beg you to observe these girls: One has just now lost her mind; the other, it seems, never had a mind at all.

Ismene Grief teaches the steadiest minds to waver, king.

Creon Yours certainly did when you assumed guilt with the guilty!

Ismene O King, but how could you sentence Antigone to death knowing that she is to marry your own son!

Creon There are places enough for him to push his plow. I want no wicked women for my sons!

Ismene O, dearest Haimon, how your father wrongs you!

Creon I've had enough of this childish talk of marriage.

Chorogas Do you really intend to steal this girl from your son?

Creon No, death will do that for me.

Chorogas Then she must die?

Creon Yes!

[to the guards] You there, take them away and guard them well, for they are but women, and even brave men run when they see Death coming.

[all exit except chorus]

Chorus What mortal arrogance transcends the wrath of Zeus? Sleep cannot lull him, nor the effortless long months of the timeless gods: but he is young forever. And his house is the shining day of high Olympos. All that is and shall be, And all that is past is his. No pride on earth is free from the curse of heaven.

[enter Creon.]

Chorogas But here is Haimon, King, the last of all your sons.

[enter Haimon.]

Creon Son, You have heard my final judgment on that girl. Have you come here hating me, or have you come with deference and with love, whatever I do?

Haimon I am your son, father. You are my guide. No marriage means more to me than your continuing wisdom.

Creon Good. That is the way to behave: subordinate to your father's will.

You are right not to lose your head over this woman. Of all the people in this city, only she has had contempt for my law and broken it.

Do you want me to show myself weak before the people? Or to break my own word? No, and I will not. The woman dies. I'll have no dealings with law-breakers.

[Forcefully] Whoever is chosen to govern should be obeyed—must be obeyed, in all things great and small, just and unjust! Haimon, anarchy is the greatest evil!

Haimon *[Earnestly]* Father, Reason is God's crowning gift to man. Yet there are other men who can reason too; and their opinions might be helpful.

You are not in a position to know everything that people say or do, or what they feel. Your temper terrifies them—everyone will tell you only what you like to hear.

But I, at any rate, can listen, and I have heard them muttering and whispering in the dark about this girl. They say no woman alive has ever, so unreasonably, died so shameful a death for such a generous act.

[More earnestly] It is not reason never to yield to reason! In flood time you can see how some trees bend, and because they bend, even their twigs are safe. The stubborn trees are torn up, roots and all.

Forget you are angry. Let yourself be moved!

Choragos You will do well to listen to him, King. If what he says is sensible. And you, Haimon, must listen to your father—both speak well.

Creon *[to chorogas]* You consider it right for a man of my years and experience to go to school to a boy?

Haimon It is not right if I am wrong. But if I am young and right, what does my age matter?

Creon *[in rage]* My voice is the one giving orders in this city!

Haimon It is no city if it takes orders from one voice.

Creon The state is the King!

Haimon Yes, if the state is a desert.

Creon *[Completely out of control]* Fool, adolescent fool! Taken by a woman.

Haimon *[Threateningly]* You are determined that she must die, but her death will cause another.

Creon Are you out of your mind? Is this an open threat?

[In another rage] I swear by the Gods in heaven above us that you'll watch your woman die.

[To the servants] Bring her out! Bring this woman out! Let her die before his eyes! Here, this instant! With the bridegroom beside her.

Haimon Not here. She will not die here, King. And you will never see my face again. Go on raving as long as you have a friend to endure you. *[exit Haimon]*

Chorogas Gone, gone. Creon, a young man in a rage is dangerous.

Creon Let him do, or dream to do, more than a man can. He shall not save these girls from death.

Chorogas These girls? You have sentenced them both?

Creon No, you are right. I will not kill the one whose hands are clean.

Chorogas But Antigone?

Creon *[Somberly]* I will carry her far away out there in some wilderness and lock her living in a vault of stone. She shall have food, as the custom is, to absolve the state of her death. And let her pray to the Gods of Hell: They are her only Gods!

[exit Creon]

Chorus Love, unconquerable waster of rich men, keeper of warm lights and all night vigil in the soft face of a girl. Sea-wanderer, forest-visitor! Even the pure immortals cannot escape you, and mortal man, in his one day's dusk, trembles before your glory.

[enter Creon and Antigone with guards at her side]

Chorogus But I can no longer stand in awe of this, nor seeing what I see, keep back my tears. Here is Antigone passing to that chamber where all find sleep at last.

Antigone Look upon me, friends, and pity me. There is no bridesong for me, nor any music.

Chorus I cannot tell what shape your father's guilt appears in this.

Antigone You have touched it at last. The blasphemy of my birth has followed me.

Chorus Reverence is a virtue, but strength lives in established law. You have made your choice; your death is the doing of your conscious hand.

Antigone Then let me go, since all your words are bitter and the very light of sun is cold to me.

Creon *[interrupts impatiently]* If dirges and lamentations could put off death, men would be singing forever. Take her, go! Our hands are clean.

Antigone *[To the chorus]* Remember that I died because I would not transgress the laws of heaven.

[To the guards] Come, let us wait no longer.

[exit guards and Antigone]

Chorus No power in wealth or war or tough sea-blackened ships can prevail against untiring Destiny!

[Enter Tiresias, the old blind prophet, led by a boy.]

Tiresias This is the way the blind man comes, Princes, Princes, lock-step, two heads lit by the eyes of one.

Creon What newest thing have you to tell us, old Tiresias?

Tiresias I have much to tell you: listen to the prophet, Creon.

Creon I am not aware that I have ever failed to listen.

Tiresias Then you have done well and ruled wisely, King. But now you stand once more at the edge of fate.

Creon What do you mean? Your words are a kind of dread.

Tiresias Listen, Creon. I was in my place of augury where the birds gather around me. They were all a-chatter, as is their habit, when suddenly I heard a strange note in their jangling, a scream, a whirring fury; I knew that they were fighting, tearing each other, dying—and I was afraid. This was a sign from heaven.

Creon What do you mean?

Tiresias I tell you Creon, you yourself have brought this new calamity upon us. Our hearts and altars are stained with the corruption of dogs and carrion birds that glut themselves on the corpse of poor Polyneices.

The gods are deaf when we pray to them, their fire recoils from our offering, their birds of omen have no cry of comfort, for they are gorged with the thick blood of the dead.

O, my son, these are not trifles! Think: all men make mistakes, but a good man yields when he knows his course is wrong and repairs the evil he has done. The only crime is pride.

Give in to the dead man.

Creon No, Tiresias, If your birds—if the great eagles of God himself should carry him stinking bit by bit into heaven, I would not yield. I am not afraid of pollution.

Tiresias Then take this, and take it to heart!

[In a warning voice] The time is not far off when you shall pay back corpse for corpse, flesh for flesh. You have denied the dead a grave, and this is your crime.

The Furies, and the dark gods of hell are swift with terrible punishment for you. Not many days hence your house will be full of men and women weeping, and curses will be hurled to you from afar.

[To his boy servant] Come child, lead me home. Let him waste his fine anger on younger men.

[exit Tiresias]

Choragos The old man has gone, king, but his words remain to plague us. I am old, but I cannot remember that he was ever false.

Creon That is true, and it troubles me. Oh, it is hard to give in, but it is worse to risk everything for stubborn pride.

Choragos Take my advice. Go quickly and free Antigone from her vault, and build a tomb for Polyneices.

Creon I will do it; I will not fight with destiny! The laws of the gods are mighty and a man must serve them to the last days of his life!

Chorus Io, fire! Clorister of throbbing stars! O purest among the voices of the night! Thou son of Zeus, blaze for us. Come with choric rapture of circling maenads who cry *Io Iacche!* God of many names!

Messenger *[To the chorus]* Oh, how fate casts down the happy and unhappy alike. No man can foretell his fate. Creon was happy once, and now that happiness is gone from him.

Choragos Your words hint at sorrow. What is your news for us?

Messenger They are dead.

Choragos Who is guilty? Who is dead? Speak!

Messenger Haimon is dead and the hand that killed him is his own.

Choragos Tiresias, Tiresias, how clearly you saw it all!

[Startled as he sees queen Eurydice passing] But look. Eurydice, our queen.
Has she overheard us?

Eurydice *[Eurydice enters and addresses the messenger]* I have heard something
friends, and I fainted with all my maidens around me. But speak again:
whatever it is, I can bear it. Grief and I are no strangers.

Messenger Dearest Lady, I went with Creon to the outer plain where Polyneices was lying,
no friend to pity him, his body shredded by dogs. We buried Polyneices there.

Then we went to the vault where Antigone lay on her couch of stone. In the
cavern's farthest corner, we saw her lying: She had made a noose of her fine
linen veil and hanged herself.

Your son, Haimon, lay beside her—dead by his own hand. Dead out of anger
for Creon's unjust laws and stubborn pride.

Eurydice *[horror struck, grief stricken]* O Fate! O pride! My son is dead . . .

[The queen leaves, sobbing]

Choragos She has left without a word. What can this mean?

Messenger Doubtless she went to her chamber to weep for her dead son.

Choragos It may be so, but I fear her actions.

[Creon enters] But here is Creon: oh look at him, bearing his own damnation
in his arms.

Creon Nothing you can say can touch me anymore. My own blind heart has brought me from darkness to final darkness. My son Haimon is dead because of my *[sarcastically]* civic wisdom!

Choragos This is the truth, but you were late in learning it.

Messenger The burden you carry in your hands is heavy, but this is not all: you will find more in your house.

Creon What burden worse than my son's death shall I find there?

Messenger The queen is dead.

Creon O pity! All true, true, and more than I can bear! O my wife! My son!

[To choragus] Lead me away. I have been rash and foolish. I have killed my son and my wife. I look for comfort: my comfort lies here dead. Whatever my hands have touched has come to nothing.

Fate has brought all my pride to a thought of dust.

[Choragos leads Creon and exits]

Chorus There is no happiness where there is no wisdom; No wisdom but in submission to the gods.

Big words are always punished, and proud men in old age learn to be wise.
[Exit]

*(source: <https://chargerenglish.wikispaces.com/file/view/Antigone.doc>)

Assignment:

- Choose between the following:
 - #1. Write a tragedy according to the definition of Aristotle's tragedy.
 - #2. Write an essay analyzing a famous Greek or Shakespearean tragedy. (Or an essay on the topic of tragedy and approved by tutor.)
- If you choose #1: think about Aristotle's Definition of tragedy.
Try to follow his guidelines:
 - fiction, imitation, art, not history
 - significant, serious, heavy, having magnitude
 - complete in itself, has beginning, middle and end
 - written with pleasing language
 - arouses pity and fear in the audience
 - ends with catharsis, release of emotion and tension
 - Write 1,000-1,500 words.
 - It can be a scene from a play, an epic, a novel, a history, or even from something personal such as a journal or an autobiography.
 - Strong recommendation: choose a famous literary, biblical or historical figure who could be viewed as tragic and write a story about them. Or re-tell their story in a modern setting.
- If you choose #2: analyze a tragedy to show who the tragic hero is, if and how it fits with Aristotle's definition of tragedy. Write 1,000-1,500 words. Follow the standard essay format: introduction, state your thesis clearly, three (or more) body paragraphs which support your thesis, conclusion. Remember you may choose your own topic with approval from tutor.

Invention:

Option #1

Exposition: Introduce the scene and the characters. How does your story begin?

Rising Action: What is the conflict in the story? Could be: man vs. man, man vs. the world/society or man vs. himself. How does the action and tension begin to unfold?

Climax: What is the plot reversal? Change of fortune?

Falling Action: What is the action that leads toward the ending catharsis? What action arouses pity and fear in the audience?

End: What is the catharsis? What event causes the release of emotion and tension?

Who is the tragic hero and what is their tragic flaw?

Invention:

Option #2

Thesis: What is your main point?

Introduction

Supporting Reason #1:

Supporting Reason #2:

Supporting Reason #3:

Supporting Reason #4: (optional)

Conclusion:
