

### **Oedipus Myth**

The king and queen of Thebes learned from the oracle that their newborn son would kill his father and marry his mother. Afraid that this prediction might come true, King Laios and Queen Jocasta gave their baby, Oedipus, to a shepherd with orders to leave him to die on a mountainside. However, the shepherd decided instead to give the baby to the childless king and queen of Corinth.

Oedipus grew up believing that he was the true son of the king and queen of Corinth. Therefore, when he learned of the oracle's prediction, he left home to avoid this fate. On his travels, he encountered an arrogant old man who tried to run him off the road with his chariot. Honor was at stake, and the two men fought, resulting in the stranger's death by Oedipus' hands.

Continuing on his way, Oedipus encountered a sphinx outside the city of Thebes. In order to proceed, Oedipus would have to solve a riddle. If he was unable to solve the riddle, he would die by the sphinx. Luckily, Oedipus was able to solve the following riddle: What creature goes on four legs in the morning, two legs in the afternoon, and three legs in the evening? With the sphinx defeated, Oedipus was welcomed with open arms by the people of Thebes.

The people were so pleased to be rid of the sphinx that they offered Oedipus the hand of the queen, whose husband, King Laios, had recently been killed. Oedipus married Jocasta and became the king of Thebes. The couple had four children: Polyneices, Eteocles, Antigone, and Ismene.

Several years later a plague hit Thebes. After consulting the oracle about the situation, Oedipus learned that he needed to find the man who killed King Laios. In doing this, Oedipus discovered that he was the man who killed King Laios. Furthermore, he learned that he was not the true son of the king and queen of Corinth, but in fact the son of King Laios and Queen Jocasta. Thus, Oedipus had killed his father and married his mother fulfilling the oracle's prediction. Horrified by this new information, Jocasta kills herself and Oedipus gouges out his eyes as punishment for being blind to the truth.

### ***Antigone* Background**

After Oedipus learned the truth about his life, he left Thebes. His two sons, Polyneices and Eteocles, were to inherit the kingship. The brothers agreed to trade off power from year to year. However, at the end of the year when Polyneices came to assume power, Eteocles refused to relinquish his command and drove Polyneices away. In order to obtain power, Polyneices sought help from other kings and led a military expedition against his brother and Thebes. Polyneices and Eteocles ended up killing each other in battle. Creon, their uncle, takes over rule of the city and declares that Polyneices, because of his rebel behavior, may not receive a proper burial. It was the duty of the women in the family to prepare the dead for burial, a duty Antigone takes very seriously, even though it means disobeying Creon.