

Question 1

Best Answers This Week: Oedipus

Almost everyone needed to look up "dramatic irony."

Discuss why Oedipus the King is a classic example of "dramatic irony." Use examples from the text to support your point.

Your answer: Oedipus the King, written by Sophocles, is a classic example of dramatic irony because throughout the play, we see several instances where the audience knows more than the characters in the play. The first example of dramatic irony that I will present is the oath that Oedipus makes in the beginning of the play to find Laios' killer and to kill him or banish him from the kingdom. Oedipus exclaims, "we could be saved only by tracking down Laios' killers only by killing them or sending them into exile." [Lines 416-417] If Oedipus had known in the beginning that he was Laios' killer, he would have never made such an oath. A second example of dramatic irony is when Oedipus approaches Kreon and accuses him of being Laios' killer. Oedipus says, "What? You here? Murderer! You dare come here, to my palace, when it's clear you've been plotting to murder me and seize the throne of Thebes? You're the bandit, you're the killer." [Lines 702-706] This example not only shows that Oedipus (the real murderer) is accusing Kreon (the innocent) but Oedipus also accuses Kreon of wanting to take over the (and he stresses, his) kingdom. Kreon ends up taking over in the end, after all as a promise to Oedipus. A third example of dramatic irony is seen in the conversation between Oedipus and his wife/mother Jacosta. Jacosta assures Oedipus that the gods are wrong, and while Jacosta tells Oedipus her story about her baby, whose feet were bound together and left in the mountains, a memory comes to Oedipus' mind. The audience knows at this point that Jacosta is Oedipus' mother, but Oedipus fails to realize the connection. A fourth example of dramatic irony comes at the end, when Jacosta runs into the palace, screaming. "God help you Oedipus, you were born to suffer, born to misery and grief. These are the last words I will speak, ever Oedipus." [Lines 1338-1342] Oedipus immediately dismisses what she has just said, and it is pretty obvious that Jacosta was telling him, "You are the murderer and I am going to kill myself now!" Oedipus immediately states, "I must discover who I am...Perhaps Jacosta is ashamed of my low birth, ashamed to be my wife. Like all women, she is proud." [Lines 1349-1352] These four examples make it clear that Oedipus the King is a dramatic irony.

Discuss why Oedipus the King is a classic example of "dramatic irony." Use examples from the text to support your point.

Oedipus the King is a classic example of dramatic irony in that the audience knows that Oedipus is the killer throughout the play, but Oedipus himself is unaware of this fact.

Tragic irony, which is a form of dramatic irony, is found throughout Oedipus the King. Tragic irony frequently creates an ominous tone - the audience is aware that something bad will happen and recognizes subtle hints in the play. Early in the play, Oedipus states that he pities his subjects more than himself: "I grieve for them, for their sorrow and loss, far more than I grieve for myself" (112-113). These lines foreshadow the pitiful state that Oedipus will find himself in by the conclusion of the play. The lines emphasize that Oedipus is wholly unaware of the suffering he will encounter with the loss of his site, power, and family. The audience, already knowing the ultimate outcome of the play, would pick up on the irony in the fact that Oedipus pities others more than himself.

Throughout the play, Oedipus receives information that hints at the possibility that he may be the killer, but remains unaware that the truth will lead to his downfall. The play focuses on the facts that are revealed throughout the play about the murder. Each piece of evidence builds the irony of the play, as the whole truth is not evident until all the facts are accumulated at the end of the play. Every piece of new information reveals more about the events surrounding the murder but do not give Oedipus a complete view of what is actually taking place. Oedipus the King is a classic example of dramatic irony because the audience recognizes this incomplete information as leading to Oedipus as the murderer, but Oedipus himself is unaware that each piece of information further seals his own doom.

Dramatic irony typically consists of the main character receiving information that gives a glimpse of the truth but not the whole truth. The whole action the play is built on Oedipus resolving the mystery surrounding the murdered king. An example of this takes place when Oedipus says that he believes "by avenging Laios' death, I protect myself" (171). In this case, the audience would again be aware that Oedipus is actually damning himself by vowing to reveal the truth and avenge the slain king.

Oedipus the King is a classic example of dramatic irony because the entire focus of the play is on Oedipus unknowingly condemning himself by demanding to know the truth about the murderer of the former king. The entire action of the play is built on the dramatic irony that the murderer that Oedipus seeks is himself.

Discuss why Oedipus the King is a classic example of "dramatic irony." Use examples from the text to support your point.

Dramatic irony is a form of situational irony where the main character has limited knowledge while the audience or another character has a more complete picture. In Oedipus the King, Oedipus himself is the victim of this irony. He has been told by the oracle that he will kill his father and marry his mother. He moves away from his family to prevent this from happening. But Teiresias the prophet intimates that there is more than meets the eye. In lines 495-499 he states "I say you live in shame, and you do not know it, do not know that you and those you love most wallow in shame, you do not know in what shame you live. Of course Oedipus thinks that he is an old fool and begins to insult him. Teiresias then says to Oedipus in lines 558-562 "Tell me, Oedipus, who are your parents? Do you know? You do not even know the shame and grief you have brought your family, but the curse of your mother, the curse of your father will whip you, whip you out of Thebes forever."

But in the context of when the play was written and how it was performed, the audience has the ultimate knowledge that Oedipus does not have. The audience in Sophocles's time knew the whole story of Oedipus from the beginning and knew how it would end. So when Oedipus struggles to uncover the truth about what really happened, it is very suspenseful for the audience.

Of course the ultimate irony is that as Oedipus tries so hard to avoid the unspeakable evil of the oracle's prediction, he commits the very act because of the deception of others. He states in lines 1242-1246 he states "Long ago, Apollo told me I was doomed to sleep with my mother and spill my father's blood, murder him with these two hands of mine. That's why I never returned to

Corinth." But when the truth is finally revealed, Oedipus cannot live with what he has feared most.

Question 2

How does Sophocles use the metaphor of eyes, seeing, and blindness as a literary device? Again, use examples from the text to support your point.

How does Sophocles use the metaphor of eyes, seeing, and blindness as a literary device? Again, use examples from the text to support your point.

When Oedipus is quarreling with Teiresias and begins to mock him, Teiresias tells him " You have eyes to see with, but you do not see yourself, you do not see the horror shadowing every step of your life, the blind shame in which you live, you do not see where you live and who lives with you, lives always at your side.....But the curse of your mother, the curse of your father will whip you, whip you again and again, wherever you turn, it will whip you out of Thebes forever, your clear eyes flooded with darkness." (p757)

Here the metaphor that is being used is in relation of things to come, the foreshadowing of what lies ahead for Oedipus. "You do not see yourself" is in reference to Oedipus not knowing from where he is from. He has questioned who his parents were ever since being called a "bastard" (p767).

"The blind shame in which you live and who lives with you, lives always at yours side." This is reference to Oedipus still not knowing who he truly is, the heir of Laios and Jocasta. Jocasta is his wife but he later will learn she is truly his mother and that he has been blind to the fact this whole time.

"The curse of your mother, the curse of your father....your clear eyes flooded with darkness." The curse of his mother was that they were destined to sleep together, and the curse of his father was that he was destined to kill him. His eyes being floodedsd with darkness is yet again a foreshadow of what is to come to Oedipus. He being blind from the truth, he intentionally blinds himself as to not see the world, and when he dies not be able to look at the dead or look back on his life.

"...clawing even more misery into you I cannot look at you." (p784) Here Chorus tells Oedipus that continuing to take out his eyes with the brooches of Jocasta has made it a sore sight to see.

"..darkness spilling into me, my black cloud smothering me forever,"(p784) Oedipus yells this as the physical and emotional pain settle in to where he knows he will be forever blind and never see with eyes again.

"Why should I have eyes? Why when nothing I saw was worth seeing?"(p785) Oedipus poses the question to Leader. I feel here Oedipus was reflecting or looking back on his life and seeing no positive future. He was blinded by his fate to begin with, so he wanted to be blind to the rest of the world because there was nothing for him.

"Oedipus I wish you had never seen the man you are." (p785) Leader says this wishing him that he never found out that he was the true son of Laios and Jocasta. Leader still wished that Oedipus was blind to the truth so that he wouldn't have taken his eyes.

" How could my eyes, when I went down into that black, sightless place beneath the earth, the place where the dead go down, how, how could I have looked at anything, with what human eyes could I have gazed on my father, on my mother-- oh gods, my mother!" (p786) Oedipus is explaining his final decision for taking out his eyes. The best part of it though is that he describes the "place where the dead go down" as a sightless place. The physical and the spiritual realms come together for his reason. It is possible that Oedipus took out his eyes just in case it was with those eyes that one would see the world of the dead. This gives us a slight idea that in the event of one's death that all was dark but yet some must have wondered what one had seen.

"But more than anything, Kreon, I want to touch them (his daughters) let me touch them with these hands of mine." This is Oedipus' plea to Kreon to "see" his daughters but he makes it clear he wants to touch them. When one is blind the other senses is how they "see" and encounter the world. This is in a sense his "new sight" although he would not be able to see facial expressions.

Finally we come to what I feel is the moral which is given to us by Chorus. I feel it is an explanation of why Oedipus will continue to suffer even in his death because he can not look back on his life. It is because he suffered both an emotional and physical pain to blindness.

"Keep your eyes on the last day, on your dying. Happiness and peace, they were not yours unless at death you can look back on your life and say I lived, I did not suffer." (p791)

How does Sophocles use the metaphor of eyes, seeing, and blindness as a literary device? Again, use examples from the text to support your point.

The metaphor of eyes, seeing and blindness by Sophocles is used extensively throughout the text. When Teiresias tells Oedipus that he is the killer that he seeks, Oedipus tells him in line 503 "You have no truth, you're blind. Blind in your eyes. Blind in your ears. Blind in your mind." Teiresias answers him by say in line 553-558 "You have eyes to see with, but you do not see yourself, you do not see the horror shadowing every step of your life, the blind shame in which you live, you do not see where you live and who lives with you." This is referencing Oedipus' lack of knowledge regarding his true identity and who his parents truly are. Teiresias finally prophesies using the metaphor of sight in lines 618-620 "Now he has eyes to see with, but they will be slashed out; rich and powerful now, he will be a beggar."

The most powerful mention of eyes and sight is of course the act of Oedipus gouging his eyes out. He can't stand to look at what he has done by killing his real father and sleeping with his real mother. Right before he gouges out his eyes, he looks up to the sun to see the light for one final time and states "never again flood these eyes with your white radiance, oh gods, my eyes." He feels he belongs in the dark underworld and the act of blinding himself symbolizes plunging himself into darkness. He also can't stand to look at his children knowing that they were born from an unspeakable act. He states in line 1772 "And my children, how would the sight of them born as they were born, be sweet? Not to these eyes of mine, never to these eyes."

And finally, I believe that Sophocles is also making the statement that mere men can never see everything, even though they may try. Oedipus was a victim of circumstances beyond his control and in one instance the chorus goes on about how the "past present and future are not made clear to mortal eyes." referring to the gods and their ultimate control.

How does Sophocles use the metaphor of eyes, seeing, and blindness as a literary device? Again, use examples from the text to support your point.

Sophocles uses the metaphor of sight as literary device to build Oedipus's inability to see the truth that he is the one who has murdered the king and that it is his "blindness" that brought him to Thebes in the first place.

Sophocles uses Oedipus's meeting with Teiresias to develop the metaphor of sight. While Teiresias is physically blind, Oedipus is blind in many ways. He is blind to the fact that Polybus and Merope are not his natural parents, Jocasta is both his wife and his mother, and the murderer he is searching for is he. Sophocles uses the words of the blind prophet to emphasize Oedipus's lack of foresight: "You called me blind. Now hear me speak, Oedipus. You have eyes to see with, but you do not see yourself, you do not see the horror shadowing every step of your life, the blind shame in which you live" (551-556). Sophocles through the metaphor of sight reveals ironically, that it is the blind prophet who has the ability to see what is actually happening in Oedipus's life, while Oedipus has no idea of what is about to happen to him.

It is in fact Oedipus's blindness concerning his real parents that drove him from Corinth and led him to Thebes. Oedipus's inability to see the truth is what ultimately put him in a position to fulfill his prophecy. By attempting to avoid his fate, he fulfills it by unknowingly killing his natural father. This further enforces Sophocles's metaphor of sight in that Oedipus blindly killed his father and married his mother.

Sophocles also uses the metaphor of sight when Oedipus blinds himself at the end of the play. Throughout the entire play, Oedipus was obsessed with seeing the whole truth concerning the murder of the king. At the end of the play, when Oedipus sees that he has murdered his father and had children with his mother, he cannot bear to see the reality of what he has done and blinds himself: "Why should I have eyes? Why, when nothing I saw was worth seeing" ? (1723-1724).

Sophocles uses the metaphor of sight as a literary device to show that Oedipus does not really have the foresight or visionary sense that he believes he does.