
Antigone: Theme And Conflict Of A Play

In the Sophocles tragedy *Antigone*, the title character is the more sympathetic character due to the fact that she was absurdly punished for essentially having an opinion and following through with it. Antigone simply believed that even though her brother Polynices fought for the opposing side in the war, he deserved the same right of a proper burial that her brother Eteocles, who was a soldier in the winning side of the war, had already received. Though the new ruler of Thebes, Kreon, had declared the act illegal, Antigone decided to bury her brother anyway, and she was willing to face whatever punishment that would come her way. Later on in the tragedy, Antigone would declare her reasoning for this action by stating, "It was not Zeus who made this proclamation; nor was it justice dwelling with the gods below who set in place such laws as these for humankind." (Sophocles, 38)

Right away in this play by the ancient Greek tragedian, Sophocles, a great sense of importance is directed at the idea of "doing what is right". A perfect example of this comes from the mouth of Antigone on the seventy-second line of the story, when she states, "To me it's fine to die performing such a deed." (Sophocles, 22) This line alone means that Antigone realizes that she would rather do what is right, even if others want to make her think that it is wrong. This particular line is addressed to Antigone's sister, Ismene. At this point in the story, Antigone is trying to convince her sister to understand that what is law is not always moral.

In *Antigone*, the matter of "doing what is right" also ties in with another major theme: stressing the value and importance of family in our lives. This idea is a stronghold throughout the entire Greek tragedy, but it is unique in the sense that it is addressed from the very beginning. In Antigone's first words in Sophocles' play, she emphasizes the value in her relationship to her sister by stating "Ismene, my own sister, sharing the same blood." (Sophocles, 19) This signifies that family is important to the character of Antigone, as this is stated directly before the audience hears about the deaths of her two brothers. Antigone goes on to say "He (Kreon) has no business keeping me from what is mine." (Sophocles, 21) This line shows that Antigone is openly stating that it would not be immoral, or truly wrong to bury her fallen brother, even if it is declared illegal by the those in command in Thebes.

Throughout the majority of Sophocles' *Antigone*, the audience sees Kreon showing complete disdain for the idea of allowing an enemy soldier to have a proper burial. Kreon thinks this knowing full well that the deceased man's brother fought and died in the same war, and that he was in fact the uncle of the two men, along with Antigone and Ismene. In lines 486-490, Kreon proclaims "No, whether she's my sister's child, or tied to me closer by blood than all my household under Zeus, she won't escape from a most evil doom, nor will her sister, her blood-kin, the other whom I hold equally guilty in the planning of this tomb." (Sophocles, 39) These lines from Kreon suggest that he does not care too much for family, and that he prefers to value politics and his own power. These lines also infer the idea that Kreon willingly wants to punish Ismene, in addition to Antigone, simply because he can. It could be suggested that Kreon did not care for Oedipus, even though they were family, and that he wants to terminate the memory of him by eliminating every person that closely associated with him. These particular lines portray Kreon as a ruthless leader, with heart as a mere non-factor in his decision making, causing him to be an extremely non-sympathetic character.

Though she is the main protagonist of this tragedy, Antigone's character certainly has her own flaws. One of these flaws would be the fact that she defied the law. Though she had good intentions, the law has the final say. She may have felt that burying her brother was the correct action to take, but ultimately it could be looked at as an act of stubbornness. Additionally, her suicide could be viewed as an act of stubbornness, as it was the ultimate resistance to Kreon's orders. Had she waited only a little while longer, she would have walked out of her chamber a free woman.

Much like the situation with Antigone, Kreon is not entirely bad. By the end of the Greek tragedy, he realizes his mistakes after he is hit with a series of unfortunate events. These events include the deaths of his son, Haemon, along with his very own wife, Eurydice. After these events take place, he understands that he has done wrong, though it proves to be too little too late. While Kreon realizes his mistakes, he still seems to be confused as to why bad things are suddenly happening to him. Statements such as, "Oh! Oh harbor of Hades, unpurifiable, why, oh why are you destroying me?" (Sophocles, 72) suggest that he does not fully understand that what he has done was wrong.

In many instances throughout the play, Kreon displays resilience. He does so by showing a willingness to do anything in order to try to justify the reasoning for his desired punishment for Antigone. He goes out of his way to provide outlandish statements about her to a person very close to the two of them: Kreon's son, Haemon, who also happens to be fiancé of Antigone. In his statements to his son, Kreon tries to make Haemon side with him by asking him, "Saying your father is unjust, most evil one?" (Sophocles, 50) This displays that the father is trying to guild his son to take his side on this issue. He does not have real reasons to give to his son, so Kreon does his best to coerce him to side with his direct bloodline. Later on, Kreon tells Haemon that "There is no way that you will marry her alive!" (Sophocles, 51), which comes across as an act of desperation. Eventually, Kreon tries to display his dominance over his son by saying, "Don't try to coax me with such words, you woman's slave." (Sophocles, 51) Ultimately, his attempted intimidation over his son does not work, as Haemon sides with his wife-to-be. This act angers his father even more, and it is the final tipping point that leads to the abrupt sentence for Antigone. This is a clear sign that Kreon simply wants things his way, and that he wants to feel empowered.

The main take away from this writing should be that Antigone was unnecessarily punished for doing what she felt was right, and that Kreon did not care so much about what happened, but rather about the fact that he wanted to make a point to the kingdom of Thebes that he was a powerful man. While both characters suffered during portions of Antigone, viewers are able to be much more sympathetic towards Antigone. Kreon will certainly ache from the pain of his deceased family members, but it was ultimately his decisions that led to their deaths. Kreon had plenty of time to weigh his options, and he had many opportunities to change his stance on the punishment of Antigone. He is directly responsible for her death, and audiences and readers will not find it as easy to sympathize with him.

The story of Antigone could truly represent any individual who has ever been an underdog in any given situation. Each day, many people face consequences for actions that they deemed appropriate, but that others have a problem with. However, not all daily situations are as drastic as the one displayed in Sophocles' Antigone. These different moments can come in many different forms, and they almost never look the same from person to person. During the many stages of life, every person is faced with moments that put them in Antigone's perspective.

