Reading Comprehension Worksheet

Grade 10

Answer Key

Antigone: Law or Conscience?

A scene adapted from Sophocles' Antigone*, an ancient Greek tragedy*

Background: The brothers Eteocles and Polynices have killed each other in a war over the throne of Thebes. Their uncle Creon, now king, orders that Eteocles be buried with honor but that Polynices, who led an army against the city, be left unburied. Anyone who disobeys will be put to death. Their sister Antigone believes the gods require that every person be buried. She has just been caught covering her brother's body with earth and brought before the king.

CREON: Did you know about my order?
ANTIGONE: I knew. Everyone knew. You made certain of that.
CREON: And still you dared to break the law?
ANTIGONE: That law did not come from Zeus. Your order is the word of a man, and no man can overrule the unwritten laws of the gods. Those laws are not for today or yesterday. They live forever, and no one knows when they began.

CREON: You speak as if you ruled this city.
ANTIGONE: I speak as a sister. If I had left my mother's son to lie unburied, that would have caused me pain. This punishment does not.
CREON: Proud words. But remember: the hardest iron, tempered in the fire, is the first to crack and shatter.
ANTIGONE: Everyone here agrees with me. Fear is the only thing that keeps their mouths shut.

CREON: You alone see it that way.
ANTIGONE: They see it too. They simply bow to you.
CREON: An enemy is never a friend, not even in death.
ANTIGONE: I was not born to share in hatred, but to share in love.
CREON: Then go below and love the dead. As long as I live, no woman will rule me.

What happens next: Creon sentences Antigone to be sealed in a cave. Only after the prophet Teiresias warns him that the gods are angry does Creon change his mind, and by then it is too late. His stubbornness costs him his son and his wife, and he is left alone with his grief.

Part A: Multiple Choice

Circle the best answer.

1. Why did Creon order that Polynices remain unburied?

   Answer: a) Polynices had led an army against Thebes.

2. What is Antigone's main argument for breaking Creon's law?

   Answer: b) The unwritten laws of the gods are higher than any human law.

3. What does Creon mean when he says the hardest iron is the first to crack?

   Answer: b) Stubborn, unbending people are the ones who break.

4. Which reason does Creon give at the end of the scene for holding firm?

   Answer: c) He refuses to let a woman rule him.

Part B: True or False

Write T for true or F for false.

5. Antigone claims she did not know about Creon's order.

   Answer: False

6. Antigone says the citizens agree with her but are afraid to speak.

   Answer: True

7. Creon changes his mind in time to save everyone.

   Answer: False

Part C: Elements of Greek Tragedy

A Greek tragedy follows a person of high status whose tragic flaw, often hubris (excessive pride), leads to a downfall. The conflict usually involves powerful ideas in opposition, and the ending stirs pity and fear in the audience.

8. Which character shows hubris in this scene? Support your answer with two lines.

   Creon shows hubris. He insists "no woman will rule me" and refuses to listen when Antigone says the citizens agree with her. His iron metaphor is ironic, because he is the one who refuses to bend.

9. Explain the central conflict in this scene. What two kinds of law are in opposition?

   The conflict is between human law and divine law. Creon believes the king's order must be obeyed to keep the city stable, while Antigone believes the gods' unwritten law to bury the dead is higher than any ruler's command.

Part D: Think and Explain

10. Many readers debate whether Antigone or Creon is the true tragic hero of the play. Which do you choose? Support your answer with evidence from the scene and the summary.

Sample answer: Creon is the tragic hero. He is a king of high status, his pride is his tragic flaw, and he realizes his mistake only after it is too late, losing his son and his wife. Antigone suffers, but she never changes, while Creon experiences the downfall and painful recognition that define a tragedy. (Accept well-supported answers for Antigone.)