Reading Comprehension Worksheet

Grade 10

Name: _____ Date: _____

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?
    a) Polynices had led an army against Thebes.
    b) The gods commanded it.
    c) Antigone asked him to.
    d) There was no room in the city.

2. What is Antigone's main argument for breaking Creon's law?
    a) She did not know about the law.
    b) The unwritten laws of the gods are higher than any human law.
    c) Polynices was innocent.
    d) The people of Thebes asked her to do it.

3. What does Creon mean when he says the hardest iron is the first to crack?
    a) Iron is a weak metal.
    b) Stubborn, unbending people are the ones who break.
    c) Thebes needs better weapons.
    d) Antigone will soon be forgiven.

4. Which reason does Creon give at the end of the scene for holding firm?
    a) He fears the gods.
    b) He wants to protect Antigone.
    c) He refuses to let a woman rule him.
    d) The people demand it.

Part B: True or False

Write T for true or F for false.

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

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

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

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.

_____

_____

_____

_____

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

_____

_____

_____

_____

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.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____