OEDIPUS REX
(OEDIPUS THE KING)
WRITTEN BY SOPHOCLES
Tragedy

- The imitation of an action that is serious, complete and of a certain magnitude.
- Tragedy shows rather than tells.
- As the end of a tragedy, there is a catharsis (purging).
- Plays were performed by two principle actors at first and later three.
Greek Tragedy

- Actors wore masks
  - Sometime the masks had amplification devices built in.
  - Costumes were elaborate.
- Always set outside.
- Takes place in a single day.
- Female roles played by men.
- Always includes a chorus.
  - Chorus were used to provide information on the unfolding events.
- Tragic actors wore boots called kothurnoi, this elevated them above the rest.
The Play

- Setting: Royal house of Thebes
- Published: 429 BC
- Protagonist: Oedipus Rex
- Antagonist: Fate

Pay attention to the traditional Greek elements.
- Think about the acting style, scenery, costumes and timeline.

Chronologically what happens before the play begins?
Oedipus

- King of Thebes
- Name = “Swollen Foot”
  - Because of the Prophecy, he was taken from his house as a baby and left in the mountains with his feet bound together.
  - He killed his father, Laius, travelling to Thebes and married his mother, Jocasta.
Before Oedipus was King, he was walking down a road and was nearly ran over by King Lauis.

They both fight and Lauis dies.

Later, Oedipus meets the Sphinx who has been plaguing the city of Thebes.

Oedipus solves the riddle, saves the city and becomes King of Thebes.

Oedipus Marries and older woman named Jocasta.

The play begins.
Thebes is struck by a Plague. The Oracle of Apollo says the sickness is a result of the wrongful murder of King Lauis.

Teiresias tells King Oedipus that he is the murderer and that he is living incestuously.

Jocasta says that Lauis, her first husband, would be killed by their child. This never happened since they abandoned the baby and her husband was killed by robbers.
Basic Summary

- Oedipus begins to suspect that he was the abandoned baby and he was the one responsible for killing King Lauis on the road.
- A messenger and a servant confirm the story.
- Jocasta Hangs herself.
- Oedipus stabs his eyes out.
Jocasta

- Wife and mother of Oedipus.
- Jocasta realized before Oedipus that he is her son and was responsible for killing his father.
Vertical & Horizontal Axis

**Vertical Axis**
- 6 components (Aristotle)
  - Theme (thought)
  - Spectacle
  - Music
  - Diction
  - Characters
  - Plot

**Horizontal Axis**
- Exposition
- Conflict
- Climax
- Falling Action
- Denouncement
Major Themes
Oedipus Rex
Major Themes

- **Sight & Blindness**
  - Literal & Metaphorical references made.
    - He is praised for his clear thinking and comprehension, yet he is blind to the truth for many years.
    - He blinds himself at the end.
    - Even the smartest person can make mistakes.

- **Free Will**
  - Is our path predetermined or do we have free will?

- **Guilt & Shame**
  - Oedipus declares that he will find the guilty party.
  - Emotional guilt
  - The shame of sleeping with your mother.
Major Conflict

- No one wants to provide Oedipus with any information.
- Teiresias tells Oedipus he is responsible for the plague.
- Oedipus’s struggle against fate.
Rising Action

- Creon returns from the Oracle with news about the plague.
- The solution is to find the murderer of King Lauis.
- Teiresias accuses Oedipus.
- Oedipus argues with Creon.
- Jocasta tell Oedipus about the three roads.
Climax of Oedipus Rex

- When Oedipus Learns that he is responsible for the plague.
- His realization that he did kill his father and slept with his mother.
Falling Action

- Jocasta hangs herself
- Oedipus pokes out his own eyes.
- Creon becomes king.
- Oedipus is banished from Thebes.
UNITY OF ACTION IN OEDIPUS THE KING

Incentive moment
(plague and promise of Oedipus)

Peripeteia
Messenger arrives from Corinth:
Polybus not real father of Oedipus

Jocasta tells story of murder of Laius;
mention of 3 roads makes Oedipus suspicious;
they send for Herdsman

Oedipus and Creon quarrel
Teiresias accuses Oedipus
Oedipus puts curse on murderer of Laius

Climax
(stories of Herdsman and Messenger)
Anagnorisis

Catastrophe
Reporting of Jocasta’s suicide
and Oedipus’ self-blinding
Scene of suffering with Oedipus,
Creon and children
Oedipus requests exile

Resolution
(departure of Oedipus ends plague)