

ANTIGONE

By Sophocles

Adapted by Paul Caywood

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STORY OF THE PLAY

In ancient Thebes, Antigone determines to give a sacred burial to her brother Polynices, who had died on the battlefield. But her uncle, Creon the tyrant king, forbids her to do so under pain of death, because, he says, Polynices was a traitor. Will Antigone give up her family, her fiancé, and even her own life to do what she believes is right?

Sophocles lived in Athens, Greece, from 495-406 B.C. His plays were performed in a large amphitheater in the great city Dionysia, where a festival of drama was held each April. "Antigone" completes Sophocles' dramatic trilogy: "Oedipus the King," "Oedipus at Colonus," and "Antigone." This adaptation deals only with the tragic tale of what happened to the young Theban girl, Antigone. Gone are the lengthy philosophical speeches of the narrator. (In ancient Greek tragedies, the narrator consisted of twelve or more men who spoke and moved in unison.) All characters who appeared on the stage were played by three actors in masks and elaborate costumes.

This adaptation was first presented at Manual High School in Peoria, Illinois.

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

(2 m, 2 w, 2 flexible, 3 narrators)

Antigone: Grieving sister determined to give her brother a sacred burial.

Ismene: Another sister, not as brave as Antigone.

Creon: Tyrannical king.

Haemon: King's son, in love with Antigone.

Captain of the Guards: May be played by male or female.

Sentry: May be played by male or female.

Narrators 1 – 3: Help tell the story, may be male or female.

(Pronunciation of the Greek names: Antigone, An-tig-uh-nee; Creon, Cree-ahn; Ismene, Iz-me-nee; Haemon, Hay-mahn; Eurydice, U-rid-uh-see.)

SETTING

Thebes, in Greece, fifth century B.C. Only the necessities for carrying out the acting of the play are on the stage. A table with a dark-colored tablecloth that drops to the floor is at RC. There may be some scrolls, as well as any other items which will suggest the time and place there, too. The so-called throne chair should be large and ornamented. Two wooden chairs are at the table. A high stool is DL.

COSTUMES

Since this is a kind of concert presentation of "Antigone," it is performed in modern dress. Antigone and Ismene wear somewhat longer, dark-colored dresses that do not hinder movement nor attract attention to the clothing. Creon and Haemon wear dark-colored suits, ties, and shoes. The Guard and Sentry wear slacks and sports coats that are not too patterned or bright colored. The emphasis of this presentation should be on the acting and the story.

PRODUCTION NOTES

Here are some hints on performing the roles in "Antigone." Actually, the parts in the play are not difficult to portray. Analyze the character you are to play and see why he or she does what he does or believes what he believes. Then, ask yourself, "How can I show these qualities in the playing of the character?" Relax, speak with a confident voice, and move in a secure way. Let the audience know you are in command of the character.

Antigone has a background that makes her determined to bury Polynices. She has been taught that it is a family's sacred duty to bury their dead. Therefore, she will do it, regardless of the punishment.

Ismene is the opposite of her sister. She is quite insecure. She seems to believe as Antigone believes, but she is afraid to carry out what she knows is right. Actually, she is typical of the women of her time and place -- scared to challenge men.

Creon is "stubborn and tyrannical." Indeed, he must have his way. No one has ever dared to defy his orders or wishes. All of this is shown in the early parts of the play. But at the end, he is defeated and has nothing left but remorse. He will grieve for the rest of his life.

Haemon is young. His father has always told him what to do, and he has done it. Obedience would seem to have been his byword in the past. But now, Antigone is the most important person in his life, and he becomes a man by pursuing her -- at any cost.

The **Guard** and the **Sentry** are used to taking orders. Ordinarily, they pretend to be brave and efficient. But when it appears they will get the blame for a mistake or a failure to do what they have been ordered to do, they show their fear and cowardice. The Guard makes excuses: "Wasn't me done it." The Sentry is proud of himself for having found Antigone on the battlefield and now can show off his supposed shrewdness to Creon.

The **Narrators** are primarily storytellers, but do, at times, show feelings for what is going on in the story. They speak smoothly and always remain poised and confident.

Once more to the actors: think, believe, perform.

ANTIGONE

(The LIGHTS come up slowly on the stage. NARRATORS enter DL and sit on a high stools there.)

NARRATOR 1: We're going to tell you a story that involves violence, love, hate, duty, and death. The tale of Antigone has come down to us from ancient Thebes. Thebes was a proud city in Greece that rivaled Athens with its power and splendor. Just a year before our story begins, Oedipus, the king of Thebes, died. But, shortly before that, Oedipus had decreed that upon his death his two sons, Eteocles and Polynices, would rule the kingdom in alternate years. So, Eteocles, the elder brother, immediately took over the throne.

NARRATOR 2: But at the end of a year, he refused to surrender power to his younger brother. Polynices was furious and persuaded seven chieftains from surrounding territories to bring their armies to Thebes and help him take over the kingdom he'd been promised. A bitter, savage battle was fought outside the city walls. But after three days, the invaders fell back and eventually ran away. But Eteocles and Polynices didn't run away. They ran at each other. The two struggled in fierce combat. They flailed their swords in the air and then stabbed each other time after time. Both of them cried out in awful pain and, finally, fell dead on the bloody battlefield.

NARRATOR 3: When word of their deaths was brought to Creon, their uncle, he quickly declared himself king of Thebes. His first pronouncement was to forbid the burial of the body of the "traitorous" Polynices. But, in Thebes, it was the sacred duty of a family to give a respectable burial to their dead. And that's what Antigone, one of Polynices' sisters, meant to do. Here she is now.

(ANTIGONE enters UR and comes to C. She looks around.)

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ANTIGONE: (*Calling.*) Ismene. (*A beat.*) Ismene!

(*ISMENE enters hurriedly UL and comes to ANTIGONE.*)

ANTIGONE: (*Cont'd.*) Have you heard the news?

ISMENE: What news? I've heard nothing, be it good or bad. I only know that we've lost our two dear brothers in one day.

ANTIGONE: Yes. And now Creon has proclaimed that Eteocles shall be buried with enough ceremony and trumpets and mourners to carry him to eternal glory. (*Turns away R.*) But poor Polynices. He's to be left among the rotting bodies on the battlefield for vultures to feed on. (*Turns back to Ismene.*) Oh, Ismene, you and I are now alone. We must fend for ourselves.

ISMENE: But Creon is our uncle. He'll take care of us.

ANTIGONE: (*Looks at Ismene.*) Will he?

ISMENE: Of course, he will. He's the king. We're the daughters of the dead king, Oedipus.

ANTIGONE: Oh, you foolish, innocent girl. Just moments ago, I learned our "noble king" has decreed that anyone who disobeys his order and buries Polynices' body shall be stoned to death. (*Comes to Ismene.*) Some say the order was announced especially for you and me.

ISMENE: No. He wouldn't dare to.

ANTIGONE: Wouldn't he? You misjudge our "dear" uncle.

ISMENE: But to die --

ANTIGONE: Yes, die. That's why I called you here.

ISMENE: What do you mean?

ANTIGONE: Can you face danger? If necessary, are you willing to sacrifice your life?

ISMENE: I don't know. I'm afraid.

ANTIGONE: Everyone's afraid. Let your fear drive you on.

ISMENE: Please, Antigone. Father always took care of us.

ANTIGONE: Our father is dead. So are our brothers. Now we'll live in constant peril. Can you endure pain?

ISMENE: (*Much disturbed.*) Antigone -- what are you planning to do?

ANTIGONE: (*Extends a hand to Ismene.*) Take my hand and we'll go bury the dead.

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ISMENE: (*Shocked.*) Surely you wouldn't defy Creon's order and bury Polynices.

ANTIGONE: He's our brother. I won't abandon him.

ISMENE: But we're mere women. We weren't meant to fight against men.

ANTIGONE: Nonsense!

ISMENE: If we defy Creon, he'll punish us even worse than he would murderers and traitors.

ANTIGONE: I'll accept the sentence. (*Walks RC.*) Please leave me now. I'll not press you further.

ISMENE: (*Crosses to Antigone, who is turned away from her.*) But you won't try to bury Polynices?

ANTIGONE: Go wherever you like. I'm determined to bury our brother.

ISMENE: No, Antigone.

ISMENE: Yes.

ISMENE: Please, try to understand me. I wasn't made to war against the state.

ANTIGONE: Apologies mean nothing to me.

ISMENE: I beg you, Antigone. Don't be a martyr. Live. Marry your beloved Haemon and find peace.

ANTIGONE: Forsake Polynices? There'd never be peace in my heart.

ISMENE: (*Looks at Antigone.*) I fear for you.

ANTIGONE: Don't be afraid for me, but for yourself. I'm only doing what I have to do.

ISMENE: You're doomed to fail.

ANTIGONE: Then I'll fail, but I'll have tried. Go ahead, say I'm mad. Maybe I am. But I'll risk suffering the worst of pain to do something good and honorable.

ISMENE: Go then if you must. (*Embraces ANTIGONE.*) You wonderful fool!

(*ISMENE watches ANTIGONE leave UR and then hurries out UL.*)

NARRATOR 1: So, in the darkness of night, Antigone crept away to carry out her sacred duty. She sidled her way through the shadowy corridors of the palace and moved

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