What Happened Before Antigone???

Greek audiences may not have been familiar with the particulars of [Antigone](https://www.gradesaver.com/antigone/study-guide/character-list#antigone)'s story, but they would have recognized the setting of the play and the initial context of its plot - namely, the city of Thebes and the seeming curse that afflicts all members of the royal family. Before we begin to explore the details of this particular story, let's review everything that's happened before the beginning of the action.

Antigone is the daughter of Oedipus, Greek drama's most infamous figure. Oedipus was a king who married his own mother after killing his own father - not knowing that either were his parents. The story of Oedipus The King, [Sophocles](https://www.gradesaver.com/author/sophocles)' most renowned work, is useful for giving us insight into Antigone's doomed lineage and should be understood prior to reading Antigone.

Oedipus is born of Laius and Jocasta, rulers of Thebes. Warned in a prophecy that Oedipus will grow up to murder his father and marry his mother, Laius and Jocasta arrange for his death - instructing a herdsman to kill the child. But the herdsman pities little Oedipus, and instead of killing him, passes him on to another herdsman from a neighboring kingdom, where Oedipus is raised by the king and queen as their own.

Later in his life, Oedipus himself hears the prophecy that he will kill his father and marry his mother. He flees the new kingdom, thinking he can avoid his fate. Along the way, however, he kills a stranger, who turns out to be his father Laius, and also solves the riddle of the Sphinx, saving Thebes and becoming her king (as well as Jocasta's new husband). The terms of the prophecy are thus fulfilled. Oedipus learns this only after he has been in power in Thebes for some time. A plague begins to kill the Theban citizens, and an oracle informs the king that Thebes is being punished because Laius' murderer dwells among them. Oedipus sets out to learn the culprit's identity, and soon discovers that Laius was the stranger he killed, and worse, that Jocasta and Laius were his true parents. Jocasta is able to put the pieces of the puzzle together some time before her husband-son, and in despair she hangs herself. Oedipus, upon discovering her body, blinds himself with her broaches and leaves the city, entrusting his daughters, Antigone and [Ismene](https://www.gradesaver.com/antigone/study-guide/character-list#ismene), to the care of [Creon](https://www.gradesaver.com/antigone/study-guide/character-list#creon)(Jocasta's brother).

In the days preceding the start of the action of Antigone, Thebes has been torn apart by war. When Oedipus fell from grace, his sons Polyneices and Eteocles were too young to ascend to rule, and so the kingdom was entrusted to Creon, the brother of Jocasta. The brothers soon reach the suitable age to take over, but they continue to entrust rule to Creon, knowing that a curse seems to follow their family. But soon enough, they begin fighting over who will rule Thebes - Polyneices, as the older brother, believes he has the birthright, but Eteocles ousts him, which sends Polyneices looking for refuge in Argos. There he raises a powerful army, which he uses to invade Thebes -- leading to his own death and that of Eteocles. Creon ascends to the throne once more. It is at this point that the play begins.