

ANTIGONE: Essay Topics

Directions: Choose **one** of the following and write a well-organized **evaluative** essay. An evaluative essay presents an educated opinion; it judges how good or bad, effective or ineffective, right or wrong, appropriate or inappropriate a literary critique is (in this case). Your thesis and paper needs a definite slant, or point of view, that you clearly develop with substantiated support. [In identifying your topic, mention your critic's name in the first paragraph if you choose #1, 2, or 3].

***Challenge question.

1. "What was genuinely new in the plays of Sophocles was their greater emphasis on the development of individual character. His characters are no longer playthings of the gods, but rather they act in accordance with definite ideas of their own. All of Sophocles' protagonists display unshakable will power. ROBERT FLACELIERE suggests that Antigone, rather than Creon, is the play's best example of inflexible will power. **Support, refute, or qualify** this statement.
2. BERNARD W. M. KNOX says, "Antigone, as a heroine of the resistance of tyrannical power, has deservedly become one of the Western world's great symbolic figures; she is clearly presented, in her famous speech, as a champion of a higher morality against the overriding claims of state necessity, which the intellectuals of Sophocles' time had begun to formulate in philosophical terms. But Creon, too, is given his due; he is not a mere tyrant of melodrama but a ruler whose action stems from political and religious attitudes which were probably shared by many of the audience. Antigone and Creon clash not only as individuals, but also as representatives of two irreconcilable social and religious positions. The nature of Creon's assertion of state against family, refusal of burial to a corpse, is repellent, but the principle behind it was one most Athenians would have accepted as valid." Evaluate this statement, using textual support to substantiate your point of view.
3. ***ALVIN B. KERNAN states, "In discussions of *Antigone*, critics have tended to choose sides. Some have argued that Antigone is right and that sacred matters--the laws of the gods--always take precedence over the laws of the state. Others have argued with equal strength that Creon is right and that the good of the city must come before any 'higher laws,' for it is in the city that people must live. The question is complicated by the unattractive natures of both Antigone and Creon." Support or refute this statement: the conflict of this play is irreconcilable because there are two goods opposing one another."

4. **Discuss the differences** between Antigone and Ismene in their views of women. How does each sister's view shape the choices she makes in the play? How consistent is each in her view?
5. Go back and revisit Aristotle's concept of tragedy and the tragic hero. Discuss in a **persuasive essay** whether Sophocles seems to view "unshakable will power" -- a quality of both Antigone and Creon -- as a virtue or tragic flaw.
6. ***Antigone, Creon, and Haemon consistently throw out the word "mad" when referring to one another. "Yet they call each other mad when one's action or what he/she is saying does not go along with common sense or the laws in the society. It is true that when a character is mad, he/she is more courageous and wild enough to not be afraid of death, and that is what makes other people think of this character as 'mad'." **Discuss and evaluate this quote**, and write an essay in which you argue or refute convincingly the madness of one of the aforementioned characters.