**A Discussion of Themes in *Antigone***

**Fate and Free Will**

A central theme of *Antigone* is the tension between individual action and fate. While free choices, such as Antigone’s decision to defy Creon’s edict, are significant, fate is responsible for many of the most critical and devastating events of the trilogy. By elevating the importance of fate, it is suggested that characters cannot be fully responsible for their actions. It becomes difficult, for example, to blame Oedipus for marrying his mother given his ignorance.

Questions about **Fate and Free Will**

1. Do some characters seem to control their fates more than others? If so, how do they do it?
2. How does Oedipus’s fate impact the fates of other members of his family?

Create a case for or against this statement: Antigone is not limited by fate, rather by the knowledge of her fate.

**Rules and Order**

*Antigone* contrasts two types of law and justice: divine or religious law on one hand, and the law of men and states on the other. Because of the centrality of fate and the rule of the gods in the lives of the main characters of the play, religious rites and traditions are elevated to the status of law. While questions of law and justice play a role in all three plays of the *Oedipus* trilogy, they are most prominent in *Antigone*, in which Antigone’s standards of divine justice clash with Creon’s will as the head of state.

Questions about **Rules and Order**

1. To what extent is adherence to the law of the state associated with virtue? Adherence to divine law?
2. How compatible are divine and state law in *Antigone*? Where does conflict arise?

Create a case for or against this statement: Antigone’s adherence to religious rites as divine law is as self-serving as Creon’s creation of laws that serve his interests.

**Determination**

Determination is a nearly universal character trait amongst the cast of *Antigone*. Despite the important role of fate in the lives of the characters, Creon, Antigone, Ismene, and Polynices are all driven, at times stubbornly, to pursue their goals. Determination in the play is linked to hubris and proves less an asset than a flaw to the characters that possess it.

Questions about **Determination**

1. To what extent is determination an asset to characters in *Antigone*? How is it a hindrance?
2. What, if any, correlation exists between determination and self-deception in the play?
3. Are all of the determined characters in *Antigone* stubborn and arrogant, or do some exhibit a reasonable degree of determination? What might this suggest?

Create a case for or against this statement: Determination to seek, to know, and to pursue principle is depicted as tantamount to self-injury in the *Oedipus* trilogy.

**Power**

Power both corrupts and metaphorically blinds characters in *Antigone*. The clearest example of power is Eteocles and Polynices. Also consider King Creon who seems arrogant, unperceptive, and insensitive to people around him.

Questions about **Power**

1. How is Creon the Brother-in-Law (from *Oedipus the King*) different from Creon the King?
2. Explain the amount of power women have in. How do they exercise their power?

Create a case for or against this statement: In *Antigone*, power corrupts. When Creon is the King's brother-in-law, he was a reasonable man, whereas when he inherits the role of king, he becomes cruel and seems to act out in order to maintain his position of power.

**Women and Femininity**

*Antigone* explores a contrast between the behavior expected of women and the reality of their role in society. Creon expects men to be the primary actors in society and women to take a secondary and subservient role. Opinionated Antigone challenges these notions as she takes center stage and presents formidable challenges to the men around her.

Questions about **Women and Femininity**

1. Discuss Ismene’s perception of her role as a woman in ancient Greek society. Does her behavior match the opinions she voices?
2. Why does Creon feel so threatened by Antigone? Does this have anything to do with her womanhood?
3. Do Antigone and Ismene fulfill more stereotypically masculine roles than their brothers Eteocles and Polynices?

Create a case for or against this statement: Creon gives Antigone a harsh punishment simply because she is a woman; if the law-breaker had been a man, he would not have been sentenced to death.

**Mortality**

Self-injury and suicide are almost universally prevalent among the main characters in the *Oedipus* trilogy, and particularly in *Antigone*. Antigone, Haemon, and Eurydice each commit suicide; Polynices and Eteocles willingly take actions that result in their deaths. The frequency of suicide and death more broadly suggest that in the context of the plays, life is tenuous, and that taking one’s own life is an acceptable, if tragic, way of dying. Furthermore, self-injury and suicide seem to be the only ways in which characters in *Antigone* are able to influence their destinies.

Questions about **Mortality**

1. Why do some characters, such as Antigone, look favorably on death?
2. Why do Haemon and Eurydice kill themselves?

Create a case for or against this statement: Suicide in *Antigone* is a consequence of characters’ frustration that they have no influence over their own fate.

Suicide in *Antigone* is employed by characters who accept and are at peace with their fate.

Suicide in *Antigone* is employed by characters who are trying to