

Audience Guide

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Look for discussion cues!



This icon will appear throughout the audience guide with questions to prompt discussion about the production, the world of the play, and theatre in general.

Character Breakdown (source: *Antigone X* script)

The women:

ANTIGONE X: Fierce, smart, proud, a bit of a firebrand, not afraid of a fight. Can be blindly stubborn.

ESME: Smart like her sister Antigone, but ruled more by reason and love; more willing to engage via indirect methods than overt attack. Yet she is no pushover.

TIRESIAS: The blind prophet, the soothsayer, the oracle. Tiresias is midway through her 7-year curse, btw, stuck being a female for 3 ½ more years.

EURYDICE: The wife of Creon, queen of Thebes, wants to believe that everyone is fine and everyone is going to make the right choice but then....

The men:

CREON: Absolutely powerful. A bit of a demagogue, but then that's OK because he always was on the right side, right? Right? He rules because he is supposed to and the people want him. Or so he thinks.

HAEMON: Son of Creon. More of a romantic than his father; he is more of an observer of people and capable of seeing the less obvious within them.

HERM THE SENTRY-MESSENGER-GUARD: Smart enough to know when he has to kowtow to authority; capable of playing dumb, playing innocent to get away with delivering the news that people don't want to hear.

ZENO THE AIDE-DE-CAMP: The one who gets stuck having to deal with all of Creon's awful directives, the one who gets put in charge of the worst possible details. First a yes man, then....

PLUS: ALL ACTORS DOUBLE AS CHORUS MEMBERS, playing numerous smaller roles, including refugees, soothsayers, wailers, soldiers, a boy. Birds, wild dogs. Frenzied dancers. They could even be the wind.

Antigone's World

Where did these plays come from?

Greek tragedy was a popular and influential form of drama performed in theatres across ancient Greece from the late 6th century BCE. The most famous playwrights of the genre were Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides and many of their works were still performed centuries after their initial premiere. Greek tragedy led to Greek comedy and, together, these genres formed the foundation upon which all modern theatre is based.

Sophocles – Celebrity tragic playwright

The 5th-century BCE poet and dramatist Sophocles is considered one of the most successful tragedians of his time. Although Sophocles wrote at least 120 plays, only seven have survived. Of his surviving plays, the most famous is *Oedipus the King*, also known as *Oedipus Rex* or *Oedipus Tyrannos* ('Tyrannos' signifies that the throne was not gained through an inheritance). The play is part of a trilogy along with *Antigone* and *Oedipus at Colonus*.

Antigone X is a modern adaptation of Sophocles' *Antigone*.

The Oedipus Trilogy by Sophocles

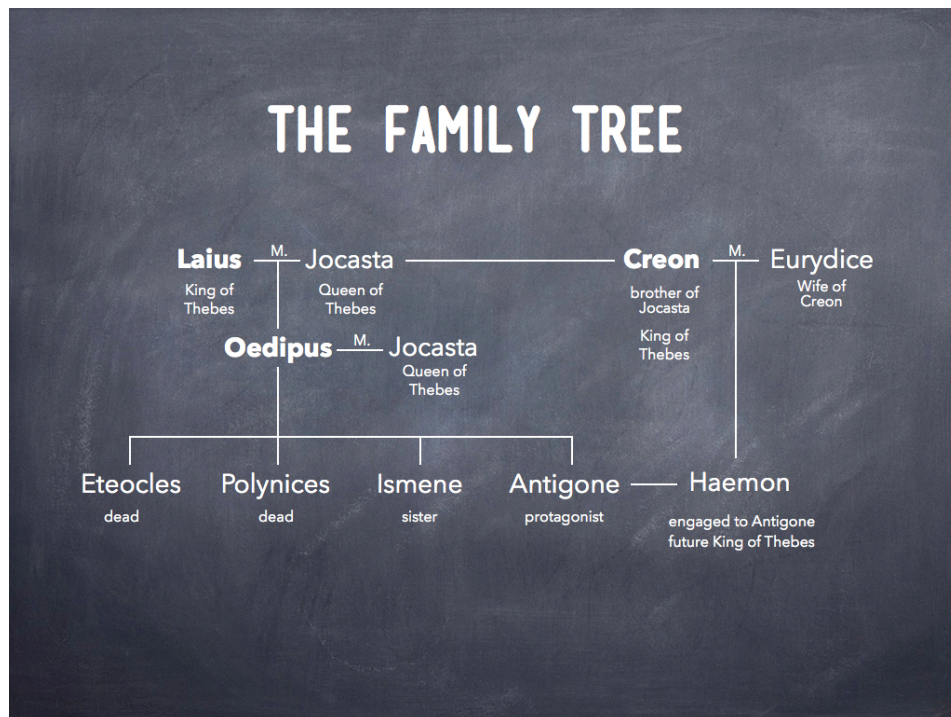
Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* and *Antigone* explore issues related to responsibility towards family, gods, and law. Both tragedies also uncover interesting facets of individual autonomy, and the conflicts that emerge with society, and within society. This particular dichotomy between the individual and the collective, mainly represented by Oedipus and Antigone's interaction towards the laws, is particularly significant in the shaping of civil society. Oedipus, the man who knew, found out what he did not know. Antigone knows what to do, but she ignores the laws. Both tragedies represent universal questions about individual liberty, justice, and responsibility.

The Trilogy

1. **Oedipus Rex:** The plot - an old myth already known to most of the audience - was simple: a prophecy claiming he would kill his father and lie with his mother forces Oedipus to leave his home of Corinth and unknowingly travel to Thebes (his actual birthplace). On route he fulfills the first part of the prophecy when he kills a man, the king of Thebes and his true father. Upon arriving in Thebes, he saves the troubled city by solving the riddle of the Sphinx, then he marries the widowed queen (his mother) and becomes the new king. Later, when a plague has befallen the city, Oedipus is told that to rid the city of the plague he must find the murderer of the slain king. Unknowingly, ignorant of the fact that he was the culprit, he promises to solve the murder. When he finally learns the truth, he realizes he has fulfilled the prophecy; he blinds himself and goes into exile.

2. **Oedipus at Colonus:** Oedipus at Colonus continues the story twenty years later, during which time Creon and Oedipus's two sons, Antigone's brothers Polyneices and Eteocles, have turned against him. Antigone, who has been serving as her father's guide, leads Oedipus to Colonus. Oedipus is confronted by Elders of Colonus, who warn Oedipus he is trespassing on holy ground. Antigone delivers a compelling plea on her father's behalf, and the Elders promise to leave Oedipus's fate to Athen's King Theseus. Ismene arrives with news that Oedipus's sons have been fighting over the throne and that his brother-in-law, Creon, plans to force Oedipus back and bury his body on the threshold of Thebes to protect his city and his position. Respectful of the prophecies, Theseus grants Oedipus the rights of Athenian citizenship and protection. When Creon seizes Ismene and Antigone, Oedipus calls upon Theseus, who rescues both daughters. Polyneices has arrived to convince his father to return home. Oedipus curses him as a liar, disowns him and his brother, and predicts their bloody fate. Though Antigone begs her brother not to continue his quest for the throne, Polyneices is determined, asking his sisters to honor his grave.

3. **Antigone:** Antigone opens one day after the battle between Polyneices and Eteocles. Both are dead. Creon, who supported Eteocles, has ordered the young man's body to be properly buried with all the honors of state. Polyneices, who led Argos against Thebes, has been ordered left for the vultures. Antigone is caught between loyalty to the law and love for Polyneices and decides to defy Creon's edict by honoring her brother's grave. Ismene warns Antigone that they would be writing their own death warrants and entreats her sister to stop the cycle of suicidal actions. Undaunted and defiant, Antigone determines to do it alone.



Syrian Women Displaced By War Make Tragedy Of 'Antigone' Their Own



By Alice Fordham

Barefoot in a yoga studio in Lebanon's capital Beirut, a couple dozen actresses raise voices and stretch bodies that had grown used to being quiet and still.

"Go on," they cry as a clapping exercise speeds up, and they fill the room with whoops and uninhibited yells.

But these women aren't professional actresses. In fact, they're refugees from Syria, and this production of the Greek tragedy *Antigone* is a project designed to help them deal with their trauma.

**"WE WERE NOT BORN JUST TO LISTEN,
JUST TO OBEY, JUST TO RECEIVE ORDERS.
WE SHOULD BE ABLE TO STAND UP FOR
SOMETHING IN OUR LIVES."**

MONA, A SYRIAN REFUGEE AND ACTRESS

"The play *Antigone* was an opportunity for us to voice everything inside of us," says one woman, Wisam Succari. "It's a story which takes place in the context of a war and we, too, as Syrians, have fled a war."

Antigone was written by Sophocles more than 2,000 years ago about mythical wars in what is now Greece

but the organizers of the project see many parallels with Syria.

At the opening of the play we meet Antigone, a princess, in the aftermath of a horrible civil war in which both her brothers died. One brother was on the winning side and is buried with honors. The other was on the losing side and the new king decrees he'll rot, unburied.

Antigone is outraged: She sees this as being against all the laws of decency and buries him herself, even though she knows that means the king will kill her, too, which he does.

The dilemma of whether to do the right thing, even if it's self-destructive, seems to speak to these women, who saw a peaceful uprising met with force and turned into a multi-polar war that consumed their country.

'I Feel Antigone Resembles Me. A Lot'

Syrian producer Itab Azzam worked to raise money — mainly from private donors — for the project. "It's actually about women taking control of their lives. Antigone's not a victim."



The women work with writers to incorporate their own experiences into the script. Many lost loved ones and now live in poverty.

"I feel that Antigone resembles me a lot. A lot," says Mona, a 28-year-old mother of two, with wide expressive eyes and a floral headscarf. She lived in Damascus and watched her neighborhood rise up in rebellion.

"We were not born just to listen, just to obey, just to receive orders," says Mona, who only gave one name. "We should be able to stand up for something in our lives."

When men were rounded up by the regime or attacked by rival militias, women sometimes tried to defend them. Mona says many died to protect husbands and sons: "So *Antigone* reflects the situation of a lot of women in Syria."

Still afraid of the regime, Mona doesn't want her last name used. She's lost everything, and lives in Beirut in a hovel and worries about how to feed her kids.

But asked if charities should spend money on theater when there's so much poverty, she says yes, absolutely.

"Our lives have drastically changed for the better," she says. Their psychological well-being has improved. Several say they feel alive again, more human.

Drilling To The Core Of The Tragedy

The first performance was earlier this week. Backstage, the actresses tried to steady their nerves, while also calming down their children. Plus, the project helped the women by paying them for their work as actresses and providing childcare for them during rehearsals.



The lights dim and Mona takes the sparse stage for a monologue weaving her life with Antigone's story. Would the princess have defied the king if she'd had kids? Would it have been different if she'd been a commoner?

"We are not princesses," she says in a clear, light voice with more pathos than self-pity. "No one knows of us and no one would speak of us if we died. Even in death, there are lucky people."

Mona goes on to say she now feels Antigone with her when she's cooking and cleaning, even in her dreams. Sometimes she feels brave and defiant like the tragic heroine, even if at other moments — like when she's harassed on the street by men — she is timorous and silent.

Opening night goes well. The women celebrate. "I want to kiss everyone!" cries Mona.



Out front, the audience is left thinking.

"I'm still a little bit in shock," says James Sadri, an activist on Syria issues. "It was a very emotional play."

Sadri knows all about Syria, but having the refugees in front of him, he says, "there is nothing more powerful than that, than drilling really to the core of your heart and the tragedy of what's happening in Syria."

In the Sophocles play, the king remains in power but broken and sorrowful.

In the final lines, the chorus says that great words of proud men are always punished in the end.

Alison Meuse contributed to this report.

Source: <https://www.npr.org/sections/parallels/2014/12/12/370343232/syrian-women-displaced-by-war-make-tragedy-of-antigone-their-own>

Discuss the article!

- What facts can you share about the refugee crisis? How much of it do you hear in the daily news? Why do you think this is?
 - What other news headlines do you remember from the past week?
- If you were to adapt *Antigone* for today's audience, where would you set it? Would it be in Greece? Syria? Somewhere else?



Truth to Power

The Power of a Group of Individuals



Photo Credit: Jenna Schoenefeld

It starts with one. All of these photos were taken on March 14, 2018 during the student-led walkouts of America's schools in protest of gun violence.



Photo Credit: Erin Schaff

Photo Credit: Ruth Fremson



Photo Credit: Annie Tritt

How do these photos make you feel?
Empowered? Intimidated?
Compare the photo on the top left with the photo on the bottom right. *What is different? What is the same?*



Antigone and female power

The meatiest roles for women were written thousands of years ago
Those ancient Greeks could teach Hollywood a thing or two (By E.W.)



ON THE bloodied Boeotian plains outside the seven gates of Thebes, Ismene struggles to persuade her sister Antigone to obey the edict of their uncle Kreon, the new head of state: “We’re girls,” she cries. “Girls cannot force their way against men.” Antigone will have none of it. She is determined to perform the sacred burial rites for her brother, Polyneikes, who was slain in a brutal civil war when he refused to relinquish the throne. Having deemed Polyneikes an enemy of the state, Kreon forbids any citizen from mourning his corpse. But Antigone is not easily cowed by the seemingly arbitrary decrees of men.

Classical Athenian tragedy was written and performed by men for a largely male audience. But that didn’t mean ancient playwrights shied from creating powerful,

WE’RE GIRLS.
GIRLS CANNOT
FORCE THEIR
WAY AGAINST
MEN.

Ismene, *Antigone* by
Sophocles

flawed and fiercely independent female characters. Euripides’s *Medea* responds to her husband’s betrayal by murdering his new wife and their own children. Sophocles’s *Electra* avenges her father’s death by conspiring in the murder of her mother. Antigone is as striking a force in Greek tragedy as any Oedipus or Agamemnon. This helps explain why Sophocles’s play endures: having premiered in the late 440s BC, it has remained a classic of Western theatre ever since.

The drama of “Antigone” hinges on the conflict between competing moral claims. For Kreon, good citizenship trumps all; after a bloody civil war, he demands law and order: “Obedience saves lives. Obedience must be defended.” In Antigone’s transgression, he sees the dangerous primacy of personal

will over the authority of the state. “If a man puts family or friend ahead of fatherland,” Kreon declares, “I count him absolutely good for nothing.” But Antigone appeals to a higher order, “the unwritten, unfaltering, unshakeable ordinances of the gods that no human being can ever outrun.” For the Greeks, the washing, anointing and burying of the dead was an ethical imperative, especially when it came to family. So, which understanding of the “law” is right?



“There is a sad irony in the fact that some of the best roles for women were written thousands of years ago, and at a time when women were forbidden to act in the theatre. *Hollywood could certainly learn a thing or two from the ancient Greeks.*”



That Antigone should be a woman made sense to Hegel, a German philosopher, who saw this conflict in gendered terms. Kreon, in Hegel’s view, stands for the masculine law of the state, whereas Antigone represents the feminine law of the home. There are times when these codes clash, nowhere more dramatically than in matters of life and death. In battle a death may be “glorious” death in the eyes of the state, but it is still tragic for the surviving family. For Hegel, “Antigone” captures the way that the interests of the state and the interests of the family are often irreconcilably opposed.

Hegel’s gendered division between the state and the home may seem slightly outdated, but he was right to highlight the play’s essential conflict between masculine and feminine. Kreon’s anger at Antigone takes on a distinctly misogynistic tone: “I will not be bested by a woman,” he rages. “Tie them up! No more free-running women!” Masculinity is aligned not with the state so much as with patriarchy, tyranny and despotism. Femininity is a necessary part of its undoing – a democratic force that values the dignity and rights of the individual. Though things don’t end well for Antigone (“You choose to live autonomously,” the chorus tells her, “and so you die”), it is clear where Sophocles’s sympathies lie. Indeed, he presciently understood what studies have since confirmed: the most reliable indicator of a state’s stability is how it treats its women.

There is a sad irony in the fact that some of the best roles for women were written thousands of years ago, and at a time when women were forbidden to act in the theatre. Hollywood could certainly learn a thing or two from the ancient Greeks. A recent report from the Center for the Study of Women in Television and Film found that women comprised only 12% of lead roles in 2014's top-grossing films (a drop of 4 percentage points since 2002), and make up less than a third of all speaking characters. Most female roles are also somehow relational to men, such as mothers and wives. Antigone, however, was not only a daughter, sister, niece and lover, but also a political actor, and an allegory for resistance to authoritarian rule. So it is hardly surprising that Sophocles's classic tragedy has withstood the test of time. What is so unexpected is that his remarkable heroine lacks more modern peers.

Correction: An earlier version of this post claimed Medea killed her betraying husband, when in fact she spared him. Sorry.

Source: <https://www.economist.com/blogs/prospero/2015/10/antigone-and-female-power>

Respond to the article!

- The article gives examples of 'flawed and fiercely independent female characters', including Medea, Electra, and of course, Antigone. What are some modern-day examples of these 'fiercely independent' female characters?
 - Follow up: Although we may be able to identify strong female characters from the 21st century, the article states, "*Hollywood could certainly learn a thing or two from the ancient Greeks.*" What do you make of this quotation?
- **Spoiler alert!**: As the article articulates, "things don't end well for Antigone". What do you make of the ending of the play? Do you agree with the sentiment of Sophocles' chorus to Antigone: "You choose to live autonomously, and so you die"?



The X of *Antigone X*

An interview with playwright Paula Cizmar by Jeff Janisheski

Jeff: My first question is: why *Antigone*? Why now?

Paula: Dean David Bridel wanted me to write an adaptation of *Antigone* for the MFA Acting class at the University of Southern California. I took the project on before the election. After the election the play became even more urgent in terms of why it should exist now: it's about a woman standing up to an authority that she knows is wrong. This is what has made it endure for over 2,000 years.

As I continued, it became more important for it to be about standing up to an authoritarian leader who isn't making sense anymore. What's really interesting about Creon is that when you first hear him in the play he almost sounds reasonable: there's just been a war, he wants to restore law and order, and everybody is afraid and wants to put their safety in the hands of someone who says, "I'm strong and I will take care of you."

But what starts to happen, of course, is that power corrupts him. And the idea that somebody is going to take a stand against that corrupt power is truly important. That is what draws people to this play. And the fact that it was a woman was really important, especially after the 2016 election. It became clear to me with the various Women's Marches that women had to lead a resistance against a leader who was making no sense and didn't value them. While this play is not designed to be a response to the current government, it certainly is a response to authoritarianism anywhere.

Jeff: The different aspects of resistance in the play are only gaining more relevance and meaning with the current administration – in terms of #MeToo and other resistance movements erupting.

Paula: Exactly. When I started the play, I think we all assumed that Hilary Clinton was going to win the election. So, the notions of rising up to authoritarianism or rising up against a demagogue were more abstract. But now it's embodied in the flesh with our current president. The resistance that Antigone instigates – and the resistance that a lot of women now are trying to cling to – is a direct result of the current president that we have: it's aimed against that mindset and that kind of baseless and nonsensical authoritarianism. So, yes, it's a play about resistance and I think that focus sharpened after the election.

Jeff: Can you talk about some of the important dramaturgical interventions and changes you've injected into the script? For example, the figure of Ismene (Esme) returning at the end.

Paula: The character of Ismene was really important to me, so I called her Esme to make the distinction that she's not the Ismene you know from the original.

I wanted to investigate why Ismene disappears in Sophocles' play. Why does Antigone say there's no one left to mourn her, or Creon say there's no one left? Why do they keep forgetting Esme? And why do we remember the sister who resists and the other one is a forgotten figure? Ismene was with Oedipus when he put himself into exile. She was there and yet she gets forgotten and neglected. So, I wanted to examine why: is it strictly the ego of Antigone or is Antigone trying to downplay her participation so that Esme will be protected and someone from the family will survive?

I wanted Esme to be that person who was always there to support her family; she had to go through the same insane problems that Antigone did and endure the same humiliation of being from that family that Antigone had to – and yet she doesn't get credit or recognition. But Esme is not going to let the family die: her resistance at the end of *Antigone X* is a way of carrying on her sister's torch, of showing that the battle isn't over.

I wanted Esme to be linked to the resistance because it's not going to stop. If you strike one of us down, another one will stand up in her place. We just can't stop. The play might be over, but there's work to be done.

Jeff: Is that why you changed the name from Ismene to Esme? So that her identity shifts in your play compared to Sophocles'?

Paula: Yes. I kept with the basic personality traits of all the other characters except for Ismene. Hence, I changed her to Esme. I wanted it to be close enough so it was recognizable. I also love that name and was thinking of J.D. Salinger's *For Esme—with Love and Squalor*. I wanted it to be absolutely clear: this is not the old Ismene, this is a different character. She's not to be forgotten, she's not to be left behind.

Jeff: The other thing that shifts dramaturgically is that Sophocles' original – despite being called *Antigone* – is really Creon's play. But what I loved about your adaptation is how you end with Esme.

Paula: That was intentional. From the very beginning, when I decided to change Ismene's name I also decided that she was going to end the play. She represents the future. And I wanted her to end the play with the line "This isn't over," which can be read in multiple ways: as a threat, a warning or a promise. And it was important to me that the play shift away from being Creon's play. I wanted there to be attention paid to the fact that the chief mover and shaker in this play – the one who creates all the trouble and stands up to power – is Antigone.

Jeff: Why the X in *Antigone X*?

Paula: X is always the unknown. X is the thing you're solving in an equation. X also represents every man, every woman, everybody: X allows somebody to not be claimed by any one particular group or family or clan; so, X is the collective. Thus, she's Antigone X. She could be anyone – from any time, any era, any place.

Sophocles wrote this about a specific time and specific characters that were important to the Greeks. But the play has survived for over 2,000 years. I wanted to pay some kind of homage to the fact that this play is ancient but also contemporary. To put that X in there creates a place that's not nailed down. The X is the unknown, it's everything. It's got a connotation of belonging and connecting to a larger thing.

Jeff: What were your personal influences as a playwright?

Paula: In college, I always wrote poetry and my intention was to be a poet. I never, ever thought of entering the theater at all. I think it was just the slight detour of working on the campus newspaper that took me to playwriting, and ultimately my playwriting became some kind of weird convergence between poetry and storytelling.

I thought that if I wanted to earn a living as a writer that it was probably going to have to be some form of journalism. So, I took a practical route and became a reporter briefly. And it was the unearthing of stories, of digging into stories and doing research as a journalist – combined that with my interest in poetry and music – that ultimately converged and created my playwriting style.

Jeff: When we last spoke, you were talking about this being a play about war: the aftermath of war and the psychology of war on people; and how war dehumanizes people and renders them invisible, where identities get erased. And you've added a beginning that brings the brutality of war to the forefront. Can you talk more about those deep concerns of yours and how they're threaded through the play?

Paula: We can't miss the fact in the original *Antigone* that there has just been a war. I've been bothered since 9/11 about America's involvement in wars, our military interventions and invasions overseas. There are countries in the Middle East now that are involved in civil wars that could be part of the destabilizing influence we had as Americans since 9/11.

But the thing that really disturbed me the most was thinking back to who the victims are in these wars. They're almost always the little people who are powerless. They're frequently women and they're often children. I wanted there to be someone who is saying, "Enough." And I think that's what Antigone is doing in this play also. She's saying, "Enough."

Hence that one speech that we were both just talking about. The fact that there are these places all around the world where, after wars or during wars, people have gone missing. It's disturbing to me. And the whole idea of an unmarked grave or mass graves is something that is viscerally disturbing to me.

The longer you're on the planet and the more you read about human atrocities – and the more you learn about mass graves like in Bosnia and Rwanda – the more you understand that this play is deeply disturbing. Because Sophocles was saying, 2,400 years ago, we cannot allow people to become anonymous victims in wars. We can't allow people to go unmarked and unburied.

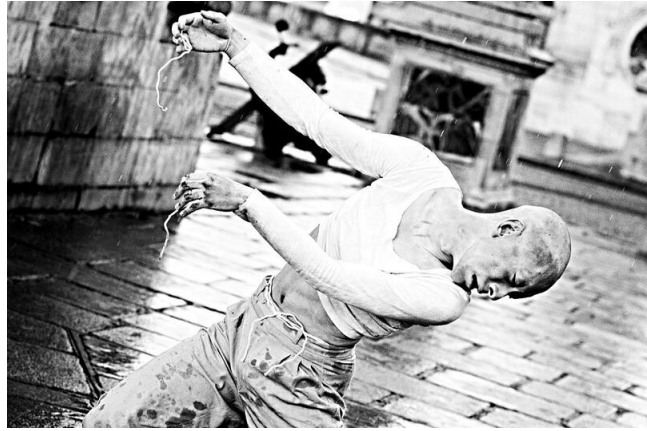
So that one speech we were talking about a minute ago is really about unmarked graves, mass graves and people turning on their own people. It's not just invaders from the outside, but about people killing their own people: people attacking their neighbors and people who are part of their community.

Jeff: What do you want the audience to get out of *Antigone X*?

Paula: At the end of the play, Esme says "And this isn't over." I do want people to understand that you can't be complacent. That you can't assume that people are going to do the right or decent thing. You have to be very careful about who has power and how they wield it. And you have to be prepared to resist.

This play is my anti-authoritarian steak coming out and saying, "Stop it!" I want people to be left with a feeling that they have to do something. It doesn't matter what it is. It can be small. There are going to be people who are going to take direct action, people who will take indirect action and people who will at least just realize that we can't sit back and let other people take care of us. But we have to do something. That's what I would like.

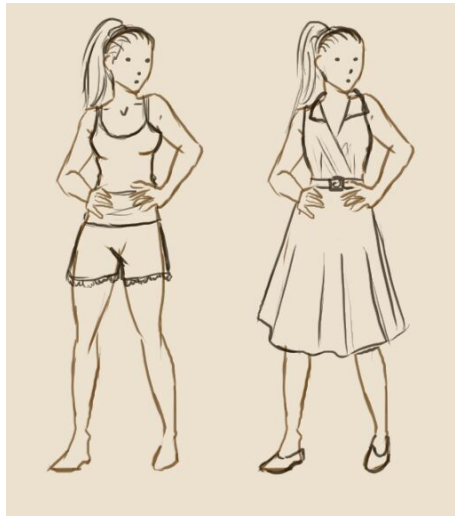
The Journey of a Costume
Costumes designed by Maria Huber
Step One: Concepts & Research



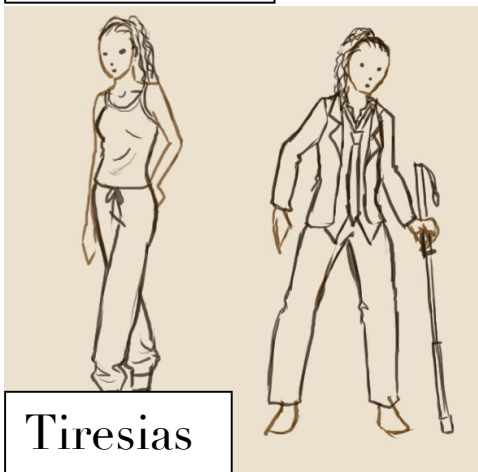
After reading the script, a costume designer will begin to look for inspiration for their costume designs. They may look for colors, images, moods, etc.

When you wake up in the morning, what inspires you to pick the clothes you wear to school or work? Function? Fashion? Utility? Comfort? When you dress yourself in the morning, you are in essence your own costume designer.

Step 2: Sketches, Renderings, and Fittings



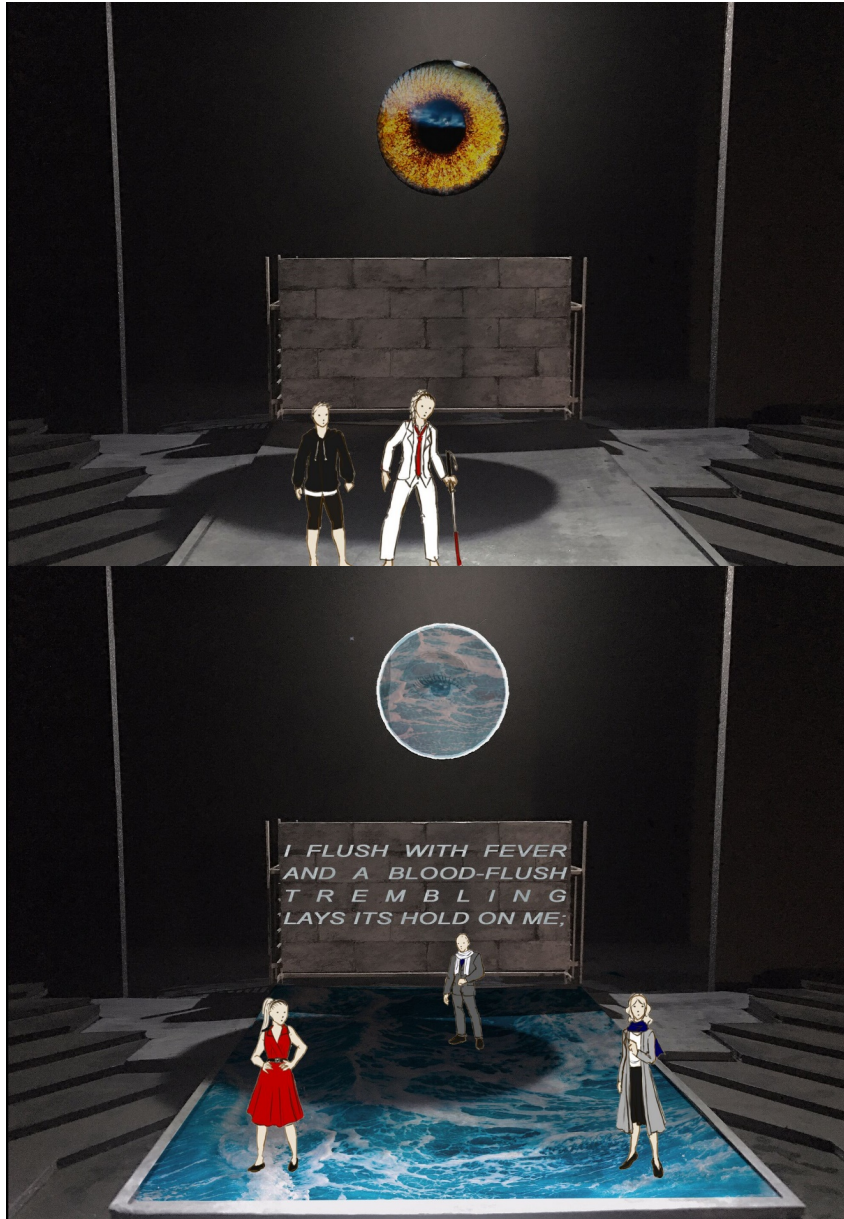
Antigone



Tiresias

This is where the designer's inspiration begins to take form and is constructed into a reality. Along the way, the designer needs to take things into consideration, such as the actor that will be wearing the costume as well as the other technical elements in the show: lighting, scenic, etc.

With the model set and lighting...



Here are some examples of the various technical elements coming together. Now that you have seen a brief journey of costume design, look for these elements when you watch *Antigone X*.

*How do these costumes complement the actors' bodies and movements?
How do these costumes inhabit the world of the play?*

Pre & Post Show Discussion Questions



Before seeing the play

Where does your moral compass reside? Does it reside in the law? In humanity? In those you know and care for? How often do you check in with this compass?

Now that you've found your compass, find your line in the sand. Where do you draw it? Does it differ depending on the context?

How does your moral compass and your line in the sand work together? Are they in conflict in certain areas of your life? Or are they in concert?

After seeing the play

How did the design elements of the play help tell the story? What parts of the set, lighting, sound, video, costumes, etc. stood out?

The original play *Antigone* is 2,000 years old (give or take). How do you think the original production affected politicians in ancient Greece? What are the differences? What is the same?

So far this semester, you have seen plays that shed light on political power and the power of an individual. How does *Antigone X* speak to *Dreamers: Aqui y Alla* and *We Are Proud to Present...*?