

Antigone

*A Modern Adaptation
by David Alberts*

Based on *Antigone*
by Sophocles

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DEDICATION

*For my daughters Morgan, Sarah, and Samantha, and my
grandchildren Juliana, Kash, Leo, and Averie
– the joys of my life.*

STORY OF THE PLAY

Two brothers lie dead at the gates of the ancient city of Thebes, each killed by the other in the final battle of a bloody civil war fought for the throne of Thebes.

King Creon decrees that one brother, Eteocles, defender of Thebes, is to be given a hero's burial. The other brother, Polyneices, leader of the rebel forces, is to be left lying where he fell outside the city gates, unburied, and unmourned. Anyone who violates Creon's decree will be stoned to death.

Antigone, sister of the fallen brothers, believes that Creon's decree is a dishonor to Polyneices and an offense to the gods, and she decides to bury Polyneices, no matter the consequences.

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

(2 m, 4 f, 5 flexible, extras)

ANTIGONE: (f) Daughter of Oedipus.

ISMENE: (f) Her sister.

CREON: (m) Their uncle, King of Thebes.

SENTRY

HAEMON: (m) Creon's son and Antigone's fiancé.

TEIRESIAS: A blind soothsayer/prophet.

HELPER FOR TEIRESIAS: A child.

SOLDIER

CAPTAIN

EURYDICE: (f) Creon's wife and Queen of Thebes.

SERVANT OF EURYDICE (f)

PEOPLE OF THEBES

GUARDS AND SOLDIERS

SETTING

Sophocles' original play was set in Thebes, a city-state in Ancient Greece, in the 13th century, BCE. This version of *Antigone* can be set in any place and in any time period.

Scene 1: Outside the walls of the Palace of Thebes.

Scene 2: In front of the Palace of Thebes.

Scene 3: The same.

Scene 4: The same.

Scene 5: The same.

Scene 6: A dungeon in the Palace of Thebes.

Scene 7: In front of the Palace of Thebes.

Scene 8: The same.

Scene 9: The same.

Epilogue: The same.

PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTES

Antigone was written by Sophocles (c. 496 – 405 BCE) in 441 BCE. It was likely performed that same year at the Festival of Dionysus, which was held every year in Athens in honor of Dionysus, the god of the harvest, wine, revelry, and theatre.

Although this adaptation is put into modern language, it retains the original characters and overall plot of the play, and conveys the sense of ancient Greek philosophy, myths, and legends on which the play is based. The Chorus sections have been eliminated to allow the play to focus on the conflict between Antigone and Creon, and to allow the plot to move forward without lengthy philosophical discussions between the Chorus and characters in the play.

Stage directions are provided as suggestions for the performance of the play, and to help readers of the play to envision the interaction between and among characters in the play.

Antigone can be performed on a bare stage, or with minimal set pieces and scenery to indicate each location. Music and dance were an essential part of ancient Greek drama performance and can be integrated into the play as the director determines. The sound of the gong that signals the beginning of each scene can be live or recorded. The sound of a loud, deep-sounding gong is preferable to the decorative, table-top variety.

The play must flow smoothly from one scene to the next, without any breaks between scenes. The sound of the gong should occur as the scenes change. If music or dance is added to the play, the music or dance should not interrupt the flow of the scenes.

Scene 1

(AT RISE: Outside the walls of the Palace of Thebes. SFX: A loud gong, repeated three times. ANTIGONE enters, wearing a hooded robe. She pauses for a moment at her entrance and looks around cautiously, then crosses to CS and stands waiting. After a moment, ISMENE enters from US, also wearing a hooded robe. She pauses at her entrance, and she sees ANTIGONE.)

ISMENE: *(Half-whispered.)* Antigone!

(ANTIGONE turns to the sound of ISMENE'S voice. Ismene lowers her hood. Antigone recognizes her and holds out her arms to her. Ismene hurries to Antigone. They embrace.)

ANTIGONE: Ismene, dear sister. Were you followed? Did anyone see you?

ISMENE: No, Antigone. No one. What's going on? Why all the secrecy?

ANTIGONE: *(Lowers her hood.)* Our uncle Creon has spies everywhere. That's why I wanted to meet you outside the palace walls. Have you heard what's happened?

ISMENE: I've heard that the civil war is over, that our brothers killed each other in the final battle, and Uncle Creon is now King of Thebes. Is there more than that I should know?

ANTIGONE: There is, Ismene.

(ANTIGONE moves ISMENE a few steps to the side.)

ANTIGONE: *(Cont'd.)* Listen to me. Creon intends to make a decree that our brother Eteocles, who defended Thebes against the rebel forces, is to be given a hero's burial.

ISMENE: The gods be praised for that.

ANTIGONE: But our brother Polyneices, who fought against Eteocles, is to be left lying outside the gates of Thebes, unburied and unmourned. Whoever disobeys Creon's decree is to be stoned to death.

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ISMENE: I can't believe Creon would do that. To leave Polyneices unburied and deny him passage to the afterlife dishonors him and disgraces our family and is an offense to the gods.

ANTIGONE: Oh, I can believe it. Creon instigated the conflict between Eteocles and Polyneices over the throne of Thebes that led to the civil war, and with their deaths, he became King of Thebes in their place. Creon hopes to distract the people from his own corruption with his decree. The gods will attend to Creon in their own time, Ismene. But until then, we mortals have work to do.

ISMENE: What "work" do you mean, Antigone?

ANTIGONE: (*After a beat.*) I'm going to bury Polyneices.

(*ISMENE looks at HER in disbelief.*)

ISMENE: Bury Polyneices?

ANTIGONE: Will you help me, Ismene? Will you help me bury our brother? Will you help me fulfill the sacred promise we made to Polyneices at Colonus before our father Oedipus' death there. (*SHE takes ISMENE'S hands.*) With these hands, Ismene, yours, and mine together, we can honor Polyneices and strike a blow against Creon and his tyrannical decree.

ISMENE: You're strong, Antigone. You've always been strong. And you have the will and the determination to do this. But I don't have the strength of will that you do. I must obey Creon's decree. (*ISMENE pulls her hands away.*) I'm sorry, Antigone. I can't help you.

ANTIGONE: Then I'll do it alone.

ISMENE: I'm afraid for you, Antigone. I've already lost my two brothers. I can't bear to lose my only sister as well.

ANTIGONE: I've made up my mind, Ismene. If I die for burying Polyneices, I die with the knowledge that I've acted honorably, for love of my brother, and with the certainty that the gods will reward me in the afterlife. I fear only that the gods will treat you harshly for choosing a man's law over their own laws.

End of Freeview

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