**Oedipus Theme**

*Theme* is the central idea or dominating concept in a work of literature. It is aligned with the thesis in a work of non-fiction while in fiction, poetry, and drama theme is the abstract concept that is made concrete through its representation in character, action, and imagery.

Yikes. It’s actually pretty easy to figure out the theme in a work of literature. One way is to be a careful reader and notice repeating patterns and symbols (“motifs”). These almost always lead you to the theme. Think of “theme” as the lesson that people should learn from the story, and remember that theme is never ever never just one word, it is always a phrase or sentence. So when you are asked to figure out the theme of a literary work, it is incorrect to say “love” or “war” or “betrayal” or “courage” or “injustice” any other one-word answer. You need to make an actual statement about love, war, betrayal, courage, or injustice in order to state the theme.

Take *Romeo and Juliet*, for instance. If you were asked, “What is a theme that is found in *Romeo and Juliet*?”, you would be wrong to say “Love is a theme.” However, if you said something along the lines of “Love is often thought to cure all problems, but oftentimes it leads to even more heartache and problems”, you would be stating a possible theme in that play.

Remember, too, that there is no giant (or even tiny) “Theme Handbook” that English teachers go running to in order to confirm or deny what you think is a theme in a specific story is actually an officially licensed theme. So when asked to determine theme, just make a statement about a big concept that you found in the story and then defend your statement with evidence from the story. It’s really that simple.

**Assignment**

1) Now, for *Oedipus Rex*, recall the work we did on human power (free will) vs. divine power (fate). It seems one of the big ideas that Sophocles has written about in *Oedipus Rex* is the relationship between humans and gods in terms of fate and free will. **What theme might be suggested from all this talk about gods, humans, and their complicated relationship?**

2) We also looked at all that sight/blindness/light/dark imagery**. What theme might all this imagery be pointing to?**

3) Further, think about why Oedipus ended up in Thebes all those years ago: he was running away from his problems. Then look at what happened: he killed his dad, outwitted the Sphinx, married his mom, had some kids, became King of Thebes, caused his wife to commit suicide, alienated his brother-in-law, poked his eyes out, and banished himself from his city and life of luxury. **What might Sophocles be saying about running away from your problems?**