***Oedipus the King***

King Oedipus, aware that a terrible curse has befallen Thebes, sends his brother-in-law, Creon, to seek the advice of [Apollo](http://www.pantheon.org/articles/a/apollo.html). Creon informs Oedipus that the curse will be lifted if the murderer of Laius, the former king, is found and prosecuted. Laius was murdered many years ago at a crossroads.  
  
 Oedipus dedicates himself to the discovery and prosecution of Laius’s murderer. Oedipus subjects a series of unwilling citizens to questioning, including a blind prophet. Teiresias, the blind prophet, informs Oedipus that Oedipus himself killed Laius. This news really bothers Oedipus, but his wife Jocasta tells him not to believe in prophets, they've been wrong before. As an example, she tells Oedipus about how she and King Laius had a son who was prophesied to kill Laius and sleep with her. Well, she and Laius had the child killed, so obviously that prophecy didn't come true, right?   
  
 Jocasta's story doesn't comfort Oedipus. As a child, an old man told Oedipus that he was adopted, and that he would eventually kill his biological father and sleep with his biological mother. Not to mention, Oedipus once killed a man at a crossroads, which sounds a lot like the way Laius died.   
  
 Jocasta urges Oedipus not to look into the past any further, but he stubbornly ignores her. Oedipus goes on to question a messenger and a shepherd, both of whom have information about how Oedipus was abandoned as an infant and adopted by a new family. In a moment of insight, Jocasta realizes that she is Oedipus’s mother and that Laius was his father. Horrified at what has happened, she kills herself. Shortly thereafter, Oedipus, too, realizes that he was Laius’s murder and that he’s been married to (and having children with) his mother. In horror and despair, he gouges his eyes out and is exiled from Thebes.

***Oedipus at Colonus***

Oedipus was eventually exiled from Thebes. After years of wandering with his daughter Antigone, Oedipus arrived at a grove in Colonus, a village near Athens.

In the meantime, Oedipus’ sons—each claiming the right to the throne of Thebes—prepared to go to war. Eteocles, the younger son, supported by Creon, took over the throne. He and his brther Polynices were supposed to share it six months at a time. Once in power, he did not wish to give it up. Polynices gathered an army to attack Thebes.

Interest was awakened in the former king when it was learned that a prophecy promised victory in battle to the city in which Oedipus was buried. Suddenly , the aged pariah became of great value to any city which proved his final resting place.

Both Polynices and Creon came to bring Oedipus away. But Oedipus, defended by King Theseus of Athens, chose to stay at Colonus. Creon attempted to kidnap Antgone in order to force Oedipus’ hand, but she was rescued by Theseus. Polynices admitted to Oedipus that e should have remained by his father’s side, but Oedipus was unforgiving. He foresaw that the brothers would slay themselves in battle. Polynices knew that he would die in battle, but decided to fight anyway—as an example to his supporters. Antigone vowed to see that his body would receive a proper burial.

The gods themselves summoned Oedipus to his mysterious end in the grove, a scene witnessed only by the great Theseus, who swore never to reveal it. Evidently, it was a victorious and exalted exit for one who had lived such a life of suffering.

Assisted by six chieftains, Polynices attempted to invade Thebes. The seven men led attacks against each of the seven gates of Thebes; Eteocles defended the gate attacked by Polynices. The two brothers, as Oedipus predicted, died at each other’s hands. Then, the Theban army finally beat back the attack.

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