Close Reading Activity

**Comparison of Textual Translations of**

**Sophocles’ Antigone**

Created by Nicole M. Mathias for Jackson Liberty High School’s Vertical Team Committee’s 2010-2011 Pathways Project

The following project provides four translations of an excerpt of Episode II from Sophocles’ Antigone. The passages begin immediately following Antigone’s speech upon delivery to Creon by the guard who has caught her defying Creon’s edict and burying her brother, Polynieces.

Sources:

Antigone: Sophocles. Storr, F. 1912. About,com Classic Literature; Loeb Library Edition. Originally published by Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA and William Heinemann Ltd, London. Accessed Nov. 2010 <http://classiclit.about.com/library/bl-etexts/sophocles/bl-soph-ant.htm>

Johnston, Ian. Sophocles: Antigone. Malaspina University-College, Nanaimo, BC, Canada. 2003. This text was last revised in May 2005. <http://www.mlahanas.de/Greeks/Texts/Sophocles/Antigone.htm>

Sophocles. *Antigone,* translated by E. H. Plumptre. Vol. VIII, Part 6. The Harvard Classics. New York: P.F. Collier & Son, 1909–14; Bartleby.com, 2001. [www.bartleby.com/8/6/](http://www.bartleby.com/8/6/). Nov. 2010

The Internet Classics Archive by Daniel C. Stevenson, Web Atomics. World Wide Web presentation is copyright © 1994-2009, Daniel C. Stevenson, Web Atomics. Antigone By Sophocles:Translated by R. C. Jebb. <http://classics.mit.edu/Sophocles/antigone.html>

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| Translated by R. C. Jebb | **LEADER OF THE CHORUS**  The maid shows herself passionate child of passionate sire, and knows not how to bend before troubles.  **CREON**  Yet I would have thee know that o'er-stubborn spirits are most often humbled; 'tis the stiffest iron, baked to hardness in the fire, that thou shalt oftenest see snapped and shivered; and I have known horses that show temper brought to order by a little curb; there is no room for pride when thou art thy neighbour's slave.-This girl was already versed in insolence when she transgressed the laws that had been set forth; and, that done, lo, a second insult,-to vaunt of this, and exult in her deed.   Now verily I am no man, she is the man, if this victory shall rest with her, and bring no penalty. No! be she sister's child, or nearer to me in blood than any that worships Zeus at the altar of our house,-she and her kinsfolk shall not avoid a doom most dire; for indeed I charge that other with a like share in the plotting of this burial. |
| Translation by Ian Johnston | CHORUS LEADER                                                              It’s clear enough           the spirit in this girl is passionate—           her father was the same. She has no sense           of compromise in times of trouble.  CREON *[to the Chorus Leader]*           But you should know the most obdurate wills           are those most prone to break. The strongest iron           tempered in the fire to make it really hard—           that’s the kind you see most often shatter.                                   540           I’m well aware the most tempestuous horses           are tamed by one small bit. Pride has no place           in anyone who is his neighbour’s slave.           This girl here was already very insolent                                                  [480]           in contravening laws we had proclaimed.           Here she again displays her proud contempt—           having done the act, she now boasts of it.           She laughs at what she’s done. Well, in this case,           if she gets her way and goes unpunished,           then she’s the man here, not me. No. She may be                        550           my sister’s child, closer to me by blood           than anyone belonging to my house           who worships Zeus Herkeios in my home,**[\*](https://records.viu.ca/~johnstoi/sophocles/antigone.htm" \l "note4#note4)**           but she’ll not escape my harshest punishment—           her sister, too, whom I accuse as well.           She had an equal part in all their plans                                                    [490]           to do this burial. |
| Translation by F. Storr | CHORUS A stubborn daughter of a stubborn sire, This ill-starred maiden kicks against the pricks.  CREON Well, let her know the stubbornest of wills Are soonest bended, as the hardest iron, O'er-heated in the fire to brittleness, Flies soonest into fragments, shivered through. A snaffle curbs the fieriest steed, and he Who in subjection lives must needs be meek. But this proud girl, in insolence well-schooled, First overstepped the established law, and then-- A second and worse act of insolence-- She boasts and glories in her wickedness. Now if she thus can flout authority Unpunished, I am woman, she the man. But though she be my sister's child or nearer Of kin than all who worship at my hearth, Nor she nor yet her sister shall escape The utmost penalty, for both I hold, As arch-conspirators, of equal guilt. |
| Translated by E. H. Plumptre | |  | | --- | | *Chor.*  The maiden’s stubborn will, of stubborn sire | | The offspring shows itself. She knows not yet | | To yield to evils. | |  | | CREON.  Know, then, minds too stiff | | Most often stumble, and the rigid steel | | Baked in the furnace, made exceeding hard, | | Thou seest most often split and broken lie; | | And I have known the steeds of fiery mood | | With a small curb subdued. It is not meet | | That one who lives in bondage to his neighbours | | Should boast too loudly. Wanton outrage then | | She learnt when first these laws of mine she crossed, | | But, having done it, this is yet again | | A second outrage over it to boast, | | And laugh at having done it. Surely, then, | | She is the man, not I, if all unscathed | | Such deeds of might are hers. But be she child | | Of mine own sister, nearest kin of all | | That Zeus o’erlooks within our palace court, | | She and her sister shall not ’scape their doom | | Most foul and shameful; for I charge her, too, | | With having planned this deed of sepulture. | |

***Antigone*: Translation Comparison**

**By Mrs. Nicole M. Mathias**

**JLHS Vertical Team 2010-2011**

Use the above passages (Jebb, Johnston, Storr and Plumptre) from Antigone to respond to the following tasks. The purpose of this activity is to engage in close reading of the passages in order to analyze the use of language.

1. A *choragos* is the leader of the chorus in a Greek play. None of the provided translations use this word, but each passage begins with this speaker. Read the opening lines of each passage. How does the use of either *passionate* or *stubborn* affect the tone and meaning of the line in the different passages?
2. Which of the translations’ choragus best suggests that Antigone’s actions may be a result of her cruel fate? Provide the word(s) that evidence your choice.
3. Using the assistance of all four translations’ opening of Creon’s speech, complete the following:
   1. Identify and list Jebb’s, Storr’s, and Plumptre’s equivalent to Johnston’s “Obdurate will”.
   2. Define the word *obdurate* used in the first line of Johnston’s translation of Creon’s speech.
4. Examine the reference to horses in Creon’s speech. List the phrases used in each passage.
   1. Jebb: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
   2. Johnston: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
   3. Storr: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
   4. Plumptre: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
5. The following refer to Creon’s speech in the passages provided.
   1. Write out each of the lines that refer to Antigone’s pride and enslavement.
      1. Jebb: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
      2. Johnston: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
      3. Storr: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
      4. Plumptre: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
   2. How do these lines vary from each other? Do the variations affect the meaning? Explain your answer.
6. The following refer to Creon’s speech in the passages provided.
   1. Write out each of the lines where Creon explains that Antigone’s actions must be punished is he is to be considered “the man”.
      1. Jebb: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
      2. Johnston: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
      3. Storr: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
      4. Plumptre: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
   2. How do these lines vary from each other? Do the variations affect the meaning? Explain your answer.
7. Re-read the lines beginning with Creon’s reference to Antigone as his niece and continuing through the declaration that her sister, Ismene, will also be punished.
   1. Which of the translations best identifies why Creon believes Ismene is to be equally punished? Provide text reference to support your response.
   2. Storr’s translation is the only one of the provided passages that does not include specific reference to Zeus. Compare these lines to the equivalents in the other passages in order to determine if Storr’s omission is significant to readers. Fully explain your findings and opinion.