Sophocles’
Oedipus Rex
Sophocles (495-406 B.C.)

- Born in 495 B.C. outside of Athens
- Son of an armor manufacturer
- Schooled in poetry, music, and dancing
- Won first prize at the Dionysian at age 28 years old
- Won first prize 24 times and second place 7 times
Sophocles

- Wrote over 120 plays, but only seven still exist in their entirety
- Innovator of theater: painted background scenery and 3 actors
- Concerned with the individual’s struggle with Fate
Sophocles’ Civic Leadership

- Served as a general under Pericles in the army.
- He was a key negotiator in the Peloponnesian War.
- As a priest, Sophocles was concerned with the individual’s need to find his/her own place in the moral and cosmic order of the universe.
Sophocles

- His plays contain moral lessons that usually pertain to man’s duty to the gods and avoidance of excessive pride.
- Sophocles was highly revered in his society at the time of his death in 406 B.C.
Characters in *Oedipus Rex*

- **Oedipus**- “Pierced feet”- Current King of Thebes
- **Jocasta**- Oedipus’ wife, widow of murdered King Laius
- **Polybus and Merope**- Oedipus’ adoptive parents, king and queen of Corinth
- **Creon**- Jocasta’s brother
- **Teiresias**- blind prophet/soothsayer
Read the background information about the story of *Oedipus Rex* in Perrine's - p. 1311
Oracles

- An oracle was a person considered to be a source of wise counsel or prophetic opinion, predictions, or precognition of the future, inspired by the gods.

- Oracles were thought to be portals through which the gods spoke directly to man.
The first oracle in *Oedipus Rex*

- Laius, king of Thebes, is told in an oracle that his son will kill him. This lead Laius and his wife Jocasta to have the baby's feet pinioned and given to a slave to be “exposed” on nearby Mt. Cithaeron.
The second oracle

- Oedipus goes to the pythia (Apollo’s oracle in Delphi) for confirmation about his parentage.

- However, the oracle gives Oedipus a horrible prediction instead: he will kill his father and sleep with his mother.
**The Sphinx in *Oedipus Rex***

- **A sphinx is a creature with the head of a woman, claws or a lion, tail of a serpent, and the wings of a bird.**
- **On his way back from Delphi, outside of Thebes, he encounters the Sphinx, which slays all of those who cannot answer her riddle.**
The Riddle of the Sphinx

- The riddle:
  What goes on four legs in the morning, two legs at noon, and three legs in the evening?
- Oedipus correctly answers the riddle: MAN.
- The Sphinx kills herself and Thebes is free of this monster.
The Third Oracle in Oedipus Rex

- **Years after Oedipus becomes king of Thebes and has married Jocasta, he seeks the help of the Pythia (Delphic oracle) once more.**

- **She reveals that the plague in Thebes is caused by the unpunished murder of King Laius.**
Major devices and themes in *Oedipus Rex*

1. **Dramatic Irony**—a situation of a drama and is understood by the audience but not grasped by the characters in the play.
2. **Concept of Fate vs. Free Will**
3. **Characterization of Oedipus**
4. **Blindness, knowledge, & truth**
dear dad
I am really really really really really really sorry love Oedipus.