Antigone – The Problem of Violence

Part 1 – Enemy of the State

Discussion Guide

Watch video, *Part 1 – Enemy of the State*, at the beginning of class.

**Introduce the Exercise**

Explain that the exercise explores the background that led to the civil war in Thebes and the death of the rival brothers, Eteocles and Polyneices. Divide the class into three sections, one for Eteocles, one for Polyneices and one for Creon. Explain that as Creon takes the throne at the end of the war, he must restore order and find a way to declare a winner and a loser so that the cycle of violence will end.

**Complete the “Enemy of the State” Worksheet**

Hand out the “Enemy of the State” worksheet and ask the groups to complete the worksheet together.

**Group Presentations**

After completing the worksheet, each of the groups representing the brothers make their defense of their client to Creon’s group. Creon’s group then presents their findings.

**Class Discussion**

Lead the entire class in a discussion by asking the following questions:

- How would Eteocles defend himself against the charge of being an “enemy of the state”?
- How would Polyneices defend himself against the charge of being an “enemy of the state”?
- Do you think Creon made the right decision?
- What would have happened if Creon had not asserted a difference between the brothers, declaring one the enemy and the other a friend of the state?

**Conclude:** There are good arguments in defense of each brother. But order does not depend on making the “right” decision; it does depend on a decision being made, enforced and accepted. To restore order and prevent further violence the friend/enemy difference must be restored and legitimized politically and religiously. *Antigone* is a tragedy and not a melodrama where you have good guys and bad guys; Sophocles’ play dramatizes real tragic conflict.
Enemy of the State Worksheet

Prof. McKenna: “In Antigone, there is no character who is not the enemy of some other character.”

If your group represents Eteocles or Polyneices read and answer the following questions:

Your client has pleaded not guilty to the charge of being an “enemy of the state”. As his defense team, your task is to gather evidence to defend the actions of (Eteocles/ Polyneices) and his claim to the throne of Thebes. Consider the following questions to prepare your defense:

Who was (Eteocles/ Polyneices)?

What was the basis of his claim to the throne of Thebes?

What reason did he give for going to war with his brother?

Why did he consider himself a loyal citizen of Thebes?

If your group represents Creon read and answer the following questions:

Creon’s job is to restore order at the end of a brutal civil war. Answer the following questions to explain his judgment about which brother is the enemy of the state.

What problem faces Creon as he becomes king of Thebes?

Which brother does he declare to be the enemy of the state?

What is the reason behind his decision?

How does he think this will solve his problem?