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MEDEA

GRAMMAR | Presentation

Discover essential facts, elements, and features of the play through the reading notes, defining words, and comprehension questions.

READING NOTES

1. **Argo** (17.1) – The ship that Jason sailed in his search for the Golden Fleece. (See Fagles' note on p. 200.)
2. **the grey-blue jaws of rock** (17.2) – Floating rocks near the mouth of the Bosphorus Strait. Before Jason secured safe passage through the Strait, Greek ships had been cut off from the Black Sea by these rocks, called the Symplegades or "Clashing Rocks." When Jason passed, the rocks became stationary and the Black Sea was opened.
3. **Colchis** (17.3) – A kingdom at the east end of the Black Sea where the Golden Fleece was guarded by a dragon. Located in the farthest eastern land that the Greeks knew, they associated Colchis with the Sun. When Jason accomplished his mission there, he fled with Medea, the daughter of the king of Colchis, and she became his wife.
4. **Pelion** (17.3) – A mountain situated on a peninsula in Thessaly, Greece, it is covered with forest, and would have provided ample lumber for the building of the Argos. In Greek mythology, Mount Pelion was also the home of Chiron the Centaur, who tutored many Greek heroes, including Jason.
5. **Pelias** (17.5) – King of Iolcus in Thessaly. Pelias feared Jason as a rival to his throne, for Jason was the son of Pelias' half-brother Aeson. In order to get rid of Jason, Pelias sent him to find the Golden Fleece, hoping that Jason would perish in the quest. When Jason and Medea returned to Jason's homeland in Iolcus, King Pelias refused to give up his throne to Jason. So Medea tricked Pelias' daughters into killing their father; she told them that if they killed him and cut him in pieces, she would revive him into a younger man. When Pelias was killed and the treachery revealed, the people of Iolcus drove Jason and Medea away, and they fled to Corinth.
6. **Glauce, Creon's daughter** (18.3) – Creon is the king of Corinth. He offers Jason an alliance by giving him the hand of his daughter Glauce in marriage. Of course, Medea is displeased by this arrangement.
7. **the holy fountain of Peirene** (19.17) – A fountain in Corinth that was said to have been sacred to the Muses and the favorite watering-hole of Pegasus.
8. **Mighty Themis!** (22.17) – The Greek goddess of divine law as well as social custom. Medea calls upon Themis to bring punishment on Jason for breaking his oath of marriage to her.
9. **My brother I shamefully murdered!** (22.25) – When Jason and Medea fled Colchis and her father pursued, Medea killed her brother, chopped him into pieces, and threw them into the sea. In this way they escaped her father while he retrieved the body parts.
10. **Pontic Sea** (23.33) – The Black Sea.
11. **by Queen Hecate** (29.9) – A goddess associated with witchcraft and the knowledge of poisonous plants. Medea plans to take revenge against Jason, Creon, and Glauce through the power of Hecate, whom she reveres above all deities.
12. **Sisyphus** (29.20) – A king who was punished by the gods for his constant habit of lying. He was punished with having to roll a huge boulder up a hill, watching it roll down, and continually repeating this task forever. Sisyphus was an ancestor of Creon.

13. **the fire-breathing bulls** (31.18) – For permission to seek the Golden Fleece, the king of Colchis required Jason to yoke fire-breathing bulls (or oxen in some versions) and use them to sow a furrow. Medea gave Jason a potion that protected him from the bulls' flames.
14. **a voice sweeter than Orpheus** (33.18) – When Jason went out on his voyage, he was told he would need the help of Orpheus, a musician who could charm men, beasts, and even stones with his music. When the Argonauts passed the Sirens on their way back to Greece, Orpheus played and sang so beautifully that his music drowned out the deadly calls of the Sirens.
15. **Aegeus, son of Pandion the wise** (37.16) – Aegeus was a legendary king of Athens, who took the throne after his father, Pandion, died. Aegeus was unable to produce a son, so he went to the oracle of Delphi and was told he must “not unstop the wineskin’s neck until he came home again.” Unable to interpret this himself, he went to seek the counsel of Pittheus, King of Troezen. Pittheus understood the oracle and ensured that Aegeus got drunk that night and lay with Pittheus’ daughter Aethra. Aethra subsequently lay with Poseidon, and thus she became pregnant with a son, who would grow up to become another king of Athens, Theseus. At the point in the play when Aegeus converses with Medea, he is on his way to see Pittheus.
16. **once you can get to Athens I’ll keep my promise and protect you all I can** (39.23-24) – Although it is not mentioned in the play, the story goes that Medea was indeed received by Aegeus in Athens and even became his wife. See also 41.3-5.
17. **By the Sun, my father’s father** (40.15) – Medea was a granddaughter of Helios, the god of the Sun.
18. **sons of Erechtheus** (42.22) – The legendary founder of the city of Athens was Erechtheus. All of Athens’ citizens were called his ‘sons.’
19. **golden-haired Harmony** (42.22) – The goddess of harmony and concord.
20. **Ino** (56.32) – A queen of Thebes who was transfigured into a goddess of the sea by Zeus. She jumped into the sea in order to flee her husband, Athamas, whom Hera had driven mad. She, like Medea, had killed one of her sons while fleeing her husband.

WORDS TO BE DEFINED

Definitions Bank

anything greatly disliked	exemption from punishment	not easily controlled	satisfaction for wrong or injury
to atone for	expressions of grief	one who humbly entreats	shameless boldness
to criticize harshly	a feeling of hostility	ones who offer something for consideration	a small crown
a crown	grossly offensive	persons who do a specific kind of work	soiled, tarnished
a curse	haughtily disdainful	proposals or offers	talks wildly
destined or predestined	ill-fated, unlucky	retaliation for injuries	torturing
calculated to create offense	incapable of being remedied	returning one accusation with another	to transfer to another's custody
children with no home or friends	insincerely fluent and easy		the willful giving of a false oath
decorated with needlework	longing, craving		without any punishment or harm
	loyalty, faithfulness		

1. But now her world has turned to **enmity** (17.15) _____
2. Scorned and shamed, she **raves** (18.4) _____
3. What thanks she has received for her **fidelity** (18.6) _____
4. **racking** her heart, racking her anger (20.16) _____
5. Her will fierce and **intractable** (20.21) _____
6. The dark cloud of her **lamentations** (20.24) _____
7. I would not have you **censure** me (24.1) _____
8. others are ill spoken of as **supercilious**, just because their ways are quiet (24.4) _____

9. May do my daughter some **irreparable** harm (25.33) _____
10. evil skilled **practitioners** (29.23) _____

11. An exile with no **redress** (30.15) _____
12. It is not even **audacity**; it's a disease (31.13) _____
13. **hankering** after this new marriage (31.32) _____
14. you are guilty of **perjury** to me (32.2) _____
15. How we are **besmirched** and mocked (32.4) _____
16. Alone with my forlorn **waifs** (32.21) _____
17. This hurricane of **recrimination** and abuse (32.31) _____
18. **invidious** (33.7) _____
19. your **scurrilous** taunts (33.20) _____
20. You dare outface me now with **glib** high-mindedness! (34.23) _____
21. friendly **overtures** you obstinately reject (35.34) _____
22. Childless I am; so some fate has **ordained** (37.25) _____
23. I touch your beard as a **suppliant**, embrace your knees (39.9) _____
24. a **coronet** of beaten gold (41.18) _____
25. She crowns with a **diadem** of sweet-scented roses (42.34) _____
26. unhappy Jason, **ill-starred** in marriage (47.19) _____
27. Am I to let them off **scot free**? (49.23) _____
28. she took the **embroidered** gown and put it round her (53.4) _____
29. How to evade **reprisal** (55.3) _____
30. the **propounders** of wise theories (55.6) _____
31. **consign** them to another hand (55.17) _____
32. You **abomination!** Of all women most detested (58.10) _____

33. thought he could exile me with **impunity** (59.8) _____
34. to **expiate** this impious murder (60.10) _____
35. What god will hear your **imprecation** (60.18) _____

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What news has Medea received? Describe her reaction.

2. In response to Medea's behavior, what punishment has Creon prepared for her?

3. How does Medea behave around Creon when he comes? Summarize what she says and does, and describe how her behavior contradicts what she is plotting in her heart.

4. When Jason offers to help Medea and their sons find refuge in exile, how does Medea respond? Where does she seek help instead?

5. "I admit, you have intelligence." (33.5)

Why is Medea famous for her intelligence? What clever feats had she performed in the past to help Jason? Does Jason acknowledge his indebtedness to her?

6. When Medea sends for Jason, he comes to hear her request. What is it? What is her real motive?

7. What is the only part of her plan that Medea dreads and weeps over? Why does she steel herself to do it anyway? In your answer, quote a relevant line from Medea's speech.

8. Summarize how Glauce and Creon died, according to the Messenger's report. Why does Medea ask to hear this news rather than immediately flee?

9. *"Where kindred blood pollutes the ground
A curse hangs over human lives;
And murder measures the doom that falls
By Heaven's law on the guilty house."* (56.12-15)

Explain these lines spoken by the chorus. What kindred blood has been shed? Whose house is guilty of it? By the end of the play, is the pollution of this blood cleansed?

10. How does the play end? _____
