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AGAMEMNON

Central Quote:

PRE-GRAMMAR | Preparation

*Prepare the student for understanding the Central One Idea
by drawing upon his or her prior knowledge or experience.*

1. Imagine you have been tricked and hurt by someone close to you. How might you be tempted to respond?

2. Recall a time when you have gotten even with someone who did something bad to you. What reasons did you have for paying the person back?

GRAMMAR | Presentation

The student is presented with and discovers essential facts, elements, and features of the play.

READING NOTES

1. **Atrous** (41.4) – father of Agamemnon and Menelaus; brother of Thyestes, whose children he killed and served as a meal to Thyestes.
2. **how changed this house is now** (42.6) – The house of Atrous has a sordid past. Its founder, Tantalus, was a mortal son of Zeus who often dined with the gods, but one day he decided to murder his son and guilefully serve the flesh to the gods. The gods, however, perceived what the food was before they ate, and they punished Tantalus. The gods revived his son, Pelops, who remained an honorable man for the rest of his life. Pelops' two sons, Atrous and Thyestes, followed Tantalus's example rather than Pelops'. Likewise, Atrous's son Agamemnon killed his own daughter and offered her as a sacrifice. And so the curse on this family that Tantalus began continues to haunt it.
3. **Ilion** (42.15) – the city of Troy.
4. **Hellas** (43.5) – Greece.
5. **Priam** (43.6) – King of Troy; father of Hector, Paris, and Cassandra; killed upon an altar of Zeus.
6. **Fury** (43.18) – a goddess who pursued sinners, especially those guilty of killing blood-related kin.
7. **Paris** (43.20) – son of Priam; while a guest of Menelaus in Greece, he stole Menelaus' wife, Helen, and brought her back with him to Troy, instigating the Trojan War.
8. **Zeus, witness between guest and host** (43.21) – Zeus was the patron of hospitality, and he avenged any wrong done by either host or guest. The guest-host relationship is a recurring theme.
9. **Daughter of Tyndareos** (44.20) – Tyndareos was a king of Sparta and husband to Leda, the mother of Clytemnestra and Helen. Leda bore these daughters by Zeus, who appeared to her as a swan. Helen was so beautiful that many suitors sought her, including Odysseus, Ajax, Menelaus, and Agamemnon. Helen chose Menelaus, and Agamemnon wedded Clytemnestra. While Helen is often called "daughter of Zeus" because of her goddess-like beauty, Clytemnestra is not named with reference to Zeus, but to Tyndareos, perhaps because she is more like a queen than a goddess.¹
10. **Artemis** (46.15) – goddess daughter of Leto and Zeus, and sister of Apollo; she was the patron of wild animals and avenged the death of those sacred to her, such as a pregnant hare. Since Agamemnon sought to destroy Troy, which was like a hare that had not yet birthed her litter, Artemis sent a wind that kept the Greek ships from sailing out of port. To appease her, Agamemnon sacrificed his daughter, Iphigenia.
11. **Fate** (47.14) – The idea of fate occurs often in this play. It is the idea that people's lives are ultimately predetermined. Greek mythology personified this idea in the three Fates, who were goddesses that decided every person's destiny. In *Agamemnon*, it often seems that when the characters make life-altering decisions, they are acting according to fate rather than free will.

1. See Vellacott's discussion on p. 13.