

Oedipus Rex Quotes

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Selected Quotations Oedipus Rex

1. ***"Upon the murderer I invoke this curse—whether he is one man or many, may he drag out his life in misery."***

Explanation: Oedipus says that the killer of King Laius should live a sad and painful life. But he does not know that he is the killer. So, he is cursing himself without knowing it. This is an example of dramatic irony—the people watching the play know the truth, but Oedipus does not.

2. ***"I will bring it all to light,"***

Explanation: Oedipus promises to find the truth about who killed King Laius. He wants to uncover everything, no matter how dark the secret is. This shows his strong desire for justice and truth, but it also leads to his downfall.

3. ***"You have your eyesight, and you do not see how miserable you are."***

Explanation: The blind prophet Teiresias says this to Oedipus. This means that Oedipus can physically see, but he is blind to the truth about himself. He doesn't realize the pain and sin in his life.

4. ***"I was doomed to be married to my mother and to shed my father's blood with my own hands."***

Explanation: Oedipus says this after learning the terrible truth. He realizes he killed his father and married his mother. He says it was his cruel fate from the beginning—something he could never escape.

5. ***“You have no power or truth. You are blind, your ears and mind as well as eyes.”***

Explanation: Oedipus gets angry and says Teiresias is useless because he is blind and doesn't know the truth. But the truth is, Teiresias really knows everything, and Oedipus doesn't, even though he can see. This is irony—the blind man knows the truth, and the man with eyes is blind to it.

6. ***“What walks on four legs in the morning, two legs at noon, and three legs in the evening?”***

Explanation: This is the riddle of the Sphinx, which Oedipus solved. The answer is "a human"—as a baby (four legs), an adult (two), and an old person with a cane (three). It shows Oedipus' intelligence, but also hints at the stages of his own tragic life.

7. ***“O light, let me look at you one final time, a man who stands revealed as cursed by birth.”***

Explanation: Just before he blinds himself, Oedipus says goodbye to the light. Now he knows the terrible truth—that he was cursed from birth. He feels deep shame and pain, so he doesn't want to see anything anymore. His life is full of sorrow.

8. ***“Why should I have eyes when there was nothing sweet for me to see?”***

Explanation: Oedipus explains why he blinded himself. He says there is nothing good left in his life to look at—not his parents, his wife, or his children. So, there is no reason for him to see anymore.

9. ***"You yourself are the pollution of this land."***

Explanation: Teiresias tells Oedipus that he is the reason for the plague in Thebes. Oedipus had promised to find the killer and save the city, but he is the one causing the city's pain. This is a surprising and sad truth.

10. ***"No human being has skill in prophecy."***

Explanation: Jocasta says this because she believes the old prophecy about her son killing Laius is false. She tries to comfort Oedipus by saying that prophecies cannot be trusted. But she's wrong—the prophecy is true.

11. ***"Oh god—all come true, all burst to light!"***

Explanation: Oedipus cries out when he finally realizes the truth—that he killed his father and married his mother. All the old prophecies have come true. The truth, which was hidden before, is now completely clear and impossible to ignore.

12. ***"I have sent... Creon... to inquire Of Pythian Phoebus at his Delphic shrine, / How I might save the State by act or word."***

Explanation: At the beginning of the play, Oedipus says he sent Creon to ask the Oracle how to stop the plague in Thebes. This shows he wants to be a good king and save his people, but he doesn't know that he himself is the cause of the plague.

13. ***"You are the curse, the corruption of the land!"***

Explanation:

Teiresias tells Oedipus that he is the reason Thebes is suffering. Though Oedipus wants to find and punish the killer of Laius, he is actually the guilty one. This line reveals the terrible truth Oedipus is trying to avoid.

14. ***“Blind who now has eyes, beggar who now is rich.”***

Explanation: Teiresias predicts Oedipus’ future downfall. Oedipus, who can now see and is a powerful king, will become blind and poor. This is a prophecy about the tragic changes that are coming because of his hidden sins.

15. ***“I struck him in my rage...I killed him. I killed them all.”***

Explanation: Oedipus remembers how he killed a man during an argument on the road. He now realizes that man was Laius, his real father. This moment is when Oedipus begins to accept the truth of the prophecy.

16. ***“Here I am myself.../ the world knows my fame: / I am Oedipus.”***

Explanation: Oedipus proudly introduces himself as a famous hero and king. At this point, he feels strong and admired. But the line is ironic—soon, his fame will turn into shame as the truth about his past is revealed.