

# WEINBERG, ALEXANDER

Alexander Weinberg

Age: 15, Grade: 9

School Name: Pine Crest School, Ft Lauderdale, FL

Educator: Scott Morrison

Category: Critical Essay

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## Leadership in Antigone

### Leadership in *Antigone*

The Greeks placed the ethical and moral laws outlined by the Gods above noble decrees. According to Aristotle in his literary criticism of Greek tragedy, *Poetics*, Greek tragedies contain characters with tragic flaws who try to alter the “unwritten, ever-lasting prescriptions of the Gods” (464-465), which leads to a tragic ending. In the case of *Antigone*, Creon, the King of Thebes, decrees that anyone who attempts to bury Polynices would be killed for actions amounting to collaboration with the dead traitor. The Greeks believed in an afterlife, and in order for the dead to enter the underworld, they have to be buried properly in accordance with Greek rituals. By establishing this edict, Creon defies the universal laws of the Gods’. Creon’s flaws are amplified as the audience becomes aware of his ill-doing. His failure leaves the audience with an understanding of ideal leadership. In Haemon’s persuasive speech, he uses imagery, metaphors, pathos, and logos to persuade Creon to become more flexible and open-minded.

From the beginning of Haemon’s speech, he employs logos to establish his credibility by making a statement that the audience will agree with. “Father, the gods endow human beings / with intelligence, which is the greatest / of all possessions” (694-696). Haemon then says, “...sometimes another / man's opinion is also right” (698-699). He is referring to Creon rejecting advice from his advisors and counsel to not create the edict. He then says, “You, however, / cannot watch everything that people / say or do or blame, for the common men / out of fear of your face won't say such words / as you would not rejoice to hear” (699-703). In the beginning of his oration, Haemon has established Creon is a stubborn, omniscient character who rejects advice from others because he believes he is always correct. Through logos, Haemon reasons that Creon cannot control others’ thoughts and opinions about him for only the Gods possess omniscience.

Further down in the speech, the quotation marks imply that Haemon is voicing the citizens of Thebes’ opinions. He states that the citizens say, “She didn't let her brother, / who had fallen in combat, lie unburied, / to be devoured by some ravenous / dog or bird. They ought to give her an award!” (707-710). This section of his speech is a combination of visual, auditory, and olfactory imagery. The visuals of Polynices’s unburied body combined with the olfactory imagery from the odors of the decomposing body are purposely meant to evoke disgust within Creon (pathos). Haemon is trying to make Creon feel pity for the unburied brother.

In the following sections from his speech, Haemon uses imagery and metaphors to emphasize his point. He says, “But, for a man to learn, even a wise man, / is nothing shameful, nor to learn to bend / and give way. You see how, in the winter / storms, the trees yield that save even their twigs, / but those who oppose it are destroyed root and branch” (722-725). This passage is a combination of auditory and visual imagery: the sound created in a storm of falling trees and thunder, and the sight of trees bending and breaking. This imagery also serves as a metaphor. Haemon compares flexible trees that survive in storms to good leaders and unyielding trees to bad leaders. In times of chaos, flexible leaders are willing to embrace others’ advice, which leads to success, whereas, leaders like Creon who are stubborn and self-important, typically fail.

Haemon uses another image and metaphor to further persuade Creon. Using the motif of boats and sailing, that is referenced throughout the play, he says, “Just so the captain who never slackens / his sail once he's stretched it / gets his boat turned and sails the rest with benches upside down” (726-728). This passage uses both visual and auditory imagery; Haemon describes a boat in a storm, and the sound of the waves crashing against the hull. In this metaphor, Haemon compares the captain to Creon, the boat to Thebes, and the storm to the Gods. If Creon does

not slacken his boat's sails, become more adaptable, and cede to the Gods, Thebes will capsize.

Lastly, Haemon ends his speech by employing logos, “It would be best by far / that man be born full of all the knowledge / there is, but, if it usually happens / not to turn out that way, to learn from those / who speak well is a good substitute” (731-735). Haemon makes a reasonable claim that it would be best if omniscience was innate to all humans; however, learning from others is the next best option. In an effort to humble Creon, Haemon tells him that, although he would like to have all the knowledge, he is mere mortal. *Antigone* explores flaws in leadership, and Haemon’s powerful, persuasive speech describes the traits of a successful leader. He boldly offers his father wisdom to overcome his tragic flaw. The speech marks the denouement of the play as the tragic ending begins to unfold and precedes his own suicide. Sophocles’ brilliant use of logos, metaphors, and imagery conceptualizes the philosophical statement of the play more vividly. *Antigone*’s exploration of leadership encourages the audience and future leaders “to learn to bend / and give way” (722-723).