Antigone (Edited Excerpt)
Sophocles (495—406 B.C.)

adapted for LS1a, based on the translation by Roy et al.

Characters:

Antigone (sister of Ismene)
Ismene (sister of Antigone)
2 Dead Brothers
All (the masses)
King

Scene 1:

Antigone and Ismene walk through a large gate and stand in front of the palace:

Antigone: My sister, Ismene!
Will god not spare us
From the troubles in our lives?
We have already suffered so much, every pain, every disaster,
Every shame, every dishonour.
Have you heard about the new law that the king has imposed?

Ismene: I haven't heard anything!
The last news that we both shared as sisters
are the deaths of our two brothers.
One of them fought against our own city.
The other defended it!
And they both died fighting each other.

Antigone: This is why I called you here!
Outside the gates of the palace,
So no one else can hear us.

Ismene: What is it?

Antigone: The king decided to bury only
one of our brothers—the one who defended the city!
The other brother of ours, the king said,
Should just lie there and rot until the birds eat him.
Noone, and even we as his sisters are allowed to visit his dead body
And say good bye.
Anyone who tries to visit or bury the dead body
Will be stoned to death publicly.

Ismene: Oh my sister!
If this is true, there is nothing we can do.
Why do you even call me here?

Antigone: I am here to ask:
Can you help me?

Ismene: Help you how? What are you thinking?

Antigone: Will you go with me, visit his dead body, and bury him
As he deserves. As he is our brother.

Ismene: How can you be so stupid! The king's law forbids it!

Antigone: But he has no right to keep us from our own.

Ismene: Oh Antigone! Don't forget all the troubles
We have faced.
Our father killed, and died, raging and infamous!
Sins uncovered.
Finally our two brothers died, they killed each other.

We are now alone in this world. Open your eyes and see.
If we defy the king's order and break the law,
We will die too.
And remember we are women; we aren't meant
To fight battles with men.
We are ruled by whoever is stronger.
And must obey this order and worse.

Even as I pray to the gods for mercy,
I will obey those in power; there is no point
In meddling where we don't belong.

Antigone: I will not force you. But now, even if you change your mind,
I will not accept your help anymore.
You do what you think is right.
I will bury him.
Better to become a god-fearing criminal
Rather than please the men on Earth.
You go ahead and dishonour the ways of our gods.

Ismene: I am not dishonouring anyone!
But I am just a woman.

Antigone: That is your excuse?
I will bury my brother.

Ismene: Oh my poor sister,
I am so afraid for you!

Scene 2:

All: But, behold, the king of the land—
the new ruler.
By the recent fortunes which the gods
Have sent his way—he comes!
What new law does he so hastily intend,
Since he's sent word that the elders
Are to gather and discuss a special law!

The King enters the scene.

King: Listen people!
You never know a man's true intentions
Until you see him rule!
The worst leaders
Are the ones who rule without clear intentions
And who are afraid to make even difficult decisions.
Or who put friends and family and above the law.

The two brothers, both my friends and family,
Fought each other!
One fought for this city, another against this city!
And we cannot make friends with enemies.
And so I rule that the brother who fought for this city,
Will receive a proper burial.
But the one who fought against this city, and defied the laws,
Will be left outside the city walls, until he rots.
And anyone is forbidden to take or bury him.

All: We obey your orders!

King: Make sure my orders are enforced!

All: Put that burden on the younger men and have the guards watch the dead brother!

King: I have guards already!

All: Then what are you asking?

King: Report anyone who disobeys my order!

Scene 4:

Antigone goes, secretly, to see her brother. But a guard catches her and brings her to the king.

Scene 5:

King: What did you do!
The corpse was buried!
And a guard saw you nearby!

Antigone: I did only what was right and what the gods are asking me
To do when someone dies.

King: But that is a disgrace to the other brother who defended this city!

Antigone: They are still brothers!

King: But one was a sinner before god!

Antigone: Still, it is the right thing to do!

Ismene walks up to the king.

Ismene: I did the deed! Not my sister!
Punish me, if you must.

King: Your sister is the one found guilty by law!
There is nothing, I can do!

Antigone: I accept my fate!

Class questions:

What are you seeing?
Where is the power?
Who is oppressed?