



## Exploring Junior Cycle Prescribed Fiction

### *The Burial at Thebes* by Seamus Heaney

*The Burial at Thebes* by Seamus Heaney is a drama included as part of the Prescribed Material for Junior Cycle English (For the student cohorts commencing Junior Cycle in 2021- 2027 and presenting for examination in 2024- 2030).

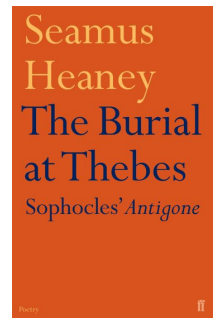


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**Easons**

#### Please note:

- The following tasks might be completed over a series of lessons.
- You may like to adapt and adjust the tasks to suit your context.
- *The Burial at Thebes* covers themes which could be considered sensitive or controversial. You may wish to consult with our READY Framework to support you in your study.



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for this Text

### Before you Read....

#### Pre-reading Activities - Discussion Starters:

##### 1. Greek Myths Speed Intro (5 minutes)

Give pairs four short myth summaries (Oedipus, Thebes, the curse, the brothers' battle).

Ask them to:

- Discuss each myth in pairs and draw similarities to films, songs, texts etc. in today's world.

##### 2. Pick a Line" Discussion

- Ask students to independently read the extract
- Guide students to choose one line from the extract that you think is important or dramatic (e.g., "Polyneices is denied any burial at all.")

##### 3. Vocabulary Hunt

Find 5 words or phrases in the extract that:

- show danger
- show fear
- show anger



## Extract

This extract is taken from the opening scenes of *The Burial of Thebes*.

*The scene is Thebes, in front of CREON's palace, just as the dawn is breaking. ANTIGONE and ISMENE enter hastily.*

**ANTIGONE:** *Ismene, quick, come here! What's to become of us? Why are we always the ones?*

*There's nothing, sister, nothing Zeus hasn't put us through Just because we are who we are The daughters of Oedipus. And because we are his daughters We took what came, Ismene, In public and in private, Hurt and humiliation. But this I cannot take.*

*No, wait.*

*Here's what has happened. There's a general order issued And again it hits us hardest. The ones we love, it says, Are enemies of the state. To be considered traitors*

**ISMENE:** *How so? What do you mean?*

**ANTIGONE:** *I mean-have you not heard?*

**ISMENE:** *What I heard was enough. Our two brothers are dead, The Argos troops withdrawn And the pair of us left to cope. But what's next, I don't know.*

**ANTIGONE:** *That's why I came outside. The walls in there have ears. This is for your ears only.*

**ISMENE:** *What is it? You have me scared.*

### ANTIGONE

*And right you are to be scared.*

*Creon has made a law.*

*Eteocles has been buried*

*As a soldier, with full honours,*

*So he's gone home to the dead.*

*But not Polyneices.*

*Polyneices is denied*

*Any burial at all.*

*Word has come down from Creon.*

*There's to be no laying to rest,*

*No mourning, and the corpse*

*Is to be publicly dishonoured.*

*His body's to be dumped,*

*Disposed of like a carcass,*

*Left out for the birds to feed on.*

*If you so much as throw him*

*The common handful of clay*

*You'll have committed a crime.*

*This is law and order*

*In the land of good King Creon.*

*This is his edict for you*

*And for me, Ismene, for me!*

*And he's coming to announce it.*

*"I'll flush 'em out," he says.*

*"Whoever isn't for us*

*Is against us in this case.*

*Whoever breaks this law,*

*I'll have them stoned to death."*

*I say,*

*He has put it to us.*

*I say,*

1-40.).

## Activities Based on Extract

The following may be completed in written or oral format,  
as individuals or as part of a group activity.

### 1. Understanding the Situation

In pairs, summarise in 3–4 simple sentences what Antigone tells Ismene. Focus on:

- what happened to their brothers
- Creon's new law
- why Antigone is upset



2. What effect does the **contrast** between Antigone's urgent, emotional language and Ismene's calmer, questioning responses have on the reader?
3. How does Heaney's choice of **vivid phrases** (such as "the walls in there have ears") create a sense of tension or secrecy in the scene?

## Reflect and Respond

The following questions may be based on the extract included or form part of your extended study of the text. Students may like to complete the activities individually or collaboratively.

### 1. Antigone's Diary Entry

Focus: Character feelings and motivation.

Guidance: Have students write Antigone's thoughts the night before the scene.

Encourage emotional language and reference to family history.

### 2. Ismene's Letter

Focus: Perspective and tone.

Guidance: Students write a letter from Ismene describing Antigone's news and her own worries. Help them to keep structure simple: what happened, how she feels, what she expects next.

### 3. Analytical Paragraph on Tension

Focus: Basic analysis

Guidance: Model how to explain how Heaney creates tension using literary techniques (e.g., repetition, contrast, imagery). Then ask pupils to work in pairs to complete a second response looking at a different technique, and finally have them work independently to create a third response on Heaney's techniques.

### 4. News Report from Thebes

Focus: Informative writing.

Guidance: Show pupils a news report template and explain the various elements.

Have students write a short report on the brothers' deaths and Creon's order. Include headline and one short quote.

### 5. Personal Response to Antigone

Focus: Opinion and justification.

Guidance: Revisit Antigone's reaction as a class. Discuss class' opinions and ideas about it. Then, ask students to create a personal response to Antigone's reaction using quotations and clear reasons.