



**Course Title:** Sophocles and the Golden Age of Greece

**Course Code:** CLA 123

**Instructor:** Barbara Clayton

**Course Summary:**

In this course we will be reading all 7 extant tragedies of Sophocles from a double perspective. First, we will approach these plays from the perspective of their historical context: 5th century Athens. This "golden age" was one of the most exciting and innovative in all of Western civilization. If the Parthenon stands as the most prominent visual emblem of the period, the plays of Sophocles are held to be the most perfect literary representation of Greek classical art, and we will work towards understanding why this is so. We will also be reading these 7 tragedies from the point of view of the present day, as works of art that stand on their own merit as literary masterpieces relevant to any age, so much so that they are still being retranslated in the 21st century.

**Grade Options and Requirements:**

*No Grade Requested:* This is the default.

*Credit/No Credit:* Students must attend at least 7 of the 8 sessions and submit a weekly short written response (one or two paragraphs; more is fine) through Canvas for each of the 7 plays. This response could be a comment, or observation, or question. What I'm interested in is a personal reaction to what you have read.

*Letter grade:* Identical to requirements for credit (attend at least 7 sessions and complete seven reader responses) *plus* a 5-7 page paper on a topic of your choosing. Here are some possible options:

1. You may do a traditional interpretive essay in which you propose a thesis, and then defend that thesis using evidence from the written text.
2. You may do a comparison and critique of several translations of a particular passage from one of the plays.
3. You may watch a dramatization of a play and submit a report on how successful you felt it was.
4. I am open to any other ideas you might have.

**Tentative Weekly Outline:** In keeping with our double vision approach, each week I will supplement our discussion and literary analysis of the individual plays with a short lecture.

Week 1 Introduction to 5th century Athens and Classical Greek tragedy

Week 2 *Antigone*

## PRELIMINARY COURSE SYLLABUS

A tragedy of conscience: city and citizen at odds  
Short lecture: the Festival of Dionysus

### Week 3 *Ajax*

A tragedy of progress: the hero left behind  
Short lecture: the tragic chorus

### Week 4 *Oedipus the King*

A tragedy of self-knowledge: the first detective story  
Short lecture: Who was Pericles?

### Week 5 *Women of Trachis*

A tragedy of love: Heracles at the intersection of human, god, and beast  
Short lecture: an overview of women's lives in ancient Greece

### Week 6 *Electra*

A tragedy of hatred: a Sophoclean conundrum  
Short lecture: comparing Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides

### Week 7 *Philoctetes*

A tragedy of paradox: the hero who yields  
Short lecture: Plato and Aristotle on tragedy

### Week 8 *Oedipus at Colonus*

A true tragedy? the last play and the last Sophoclean hero  
Short lecture: real heroes and "hero cult" in ancient Greece