

# AGATHA REX

A COMEDY IN TWO ACTS BY  
*Lindsay Price*



**CLASSROOM STUDY GUIDE**

## Introduction

*Agatha Rex* is a modern adaptation of Sophocles' *Antigone* set in a high school.

## Playwright Bio

Lindsay Price is the Vice President of Theatrefolk Inc. and the co-creator of the Drama Teacher Academy. She has been involved with theatre education for over 25 years as a playwright, adjudicator, workshop instructor, resource writer, curriculum supervisor, professional development creator and keynote speaker. Her plays have been performed in schools all over the world with over 1000 productions a year.

## Synopsis

Life at Thebes High centers around rules: students are regimented, their uniforms follow an exacting criteria, and there are no exceptions. This is how principal Dr. Creon believes students should behave. Agatha Rex is a well-liked school leader. She is top of her class, as well as student council president. When one of her brothers is suspended for getting an earring, and her other brother is let off with a slap on the wrist, she vigorously defends her unfairly punished brother. But Dr. Creon is quite clear: Model student or not, if Agatha doesn't back down, she could be expelled and lose an important scholarship. What will Agatha do? Will she stand up for her beliefs, regardless of the consequences?

## Characters

**Agatha Rex:** [W] Model student. Believes deeply in treating others fairly.

**Paul Rex:** [M] Agatha's brother. A past troublemaker who has been trying to reform.

**Elliot Rex:** [M] Agatha's brother. A basketball player and a good student, but not willing to take a risk.

**Irene Rex:** [W] Agatha's younger sister. A bit vapid, but her heart is in the right place.

**Dr. Creon:** [M] Principal of Thebes High. Proud, stubborn and a believer in the importance of rules.

**Eunice:** [W] Head Hall Monitor. Believes in the importance of rules.

**Joanne:** [W] Assistant Hall Monitor. Looks up to Eunice.

**Harry:** [M] Dr. Creon's son. Boyfriend of Agatha. Reasonable and level-headed.

**Terry Berius:** [W] Head of the PTA.

**The Chorus:** Students of Thebes High.

## Themes

Right vs wrong, obedience, personal responsibility, rules, individuality, morality, friendship, peer pressure, self-image, overcoming odds

## Pre-Read Questions

- ★ What does family mean to you? Would you ever defend a family member, even if there were consequences?
- ★ If you have siblings, what is your relationship with them like? Do you think your sibling(s) would stand up for you if you were in trouble? Why or why not?
- ★ Are there any school rules that you consider unfair?
- ★ What would you be willing to get expelled for?
- ★ Is there ever a situation where you would feel comfortable breaking a rule?
- ★ Should a person be expelled if they break a rule that you consider unfair?
- ★ Is there ever a situation where we should break the law?
- ★ Are there any laws that you consider unfair?
- ★ What should be the punishment if someone breaks a law trying to do something good?

# Pre-Read Activities

## Antigone Summary

- ★ Before you read the play, find a summary of the original source play *Antigone*. Go through the summary with students to identify the characters, the main plot points, what Antigone does, and the consequences of her actions.

## Adaptation Exercise

- ★ Divide students into groups. Give each group a short poem as their source material. The point is to have students work quickly.
- ★ Discuss the definition of adaptation, and adaptations that students may know.
  - » Adaptation: to make something suitable for a new purpose, to modify, to alter
- ★ The goal of the exercise is to have students adapt the poem into a scene. They don't have to use the words of the poem, but the scene must be connected to the poem. Remind students that they are making something suitable for a new purpose. That means the scene must have characters and a conflict, and take place in a specific location.
  - » What characters can be derived from the poem?
  - » What location can the scene take place in, as indicated by the poem?
  - » What conflict can be derived from the poem?
- ★ The scene should be less than one minute.
- ★ Groups will discuss, rehearse and present.
- ★ Afterward, discuss the similarities and differences in the scenes. Hopefully there will be differences! This will show students that there is not one way to adapt material.
- ★ Also, discuss the process. What were the challenges? How did they modify and alter for a new purpose?

## Tragedy to Comedy Original Scene

- ★ The original source material, the Ancient Greek play *Antigone*, is a tragedy. *Agatha Rex* is more lighthearted with comedic elements. Have students go through the process of turning a serious scene into a comedic one.
- ★ Divide students into groups.
- ★ Each group will create a one-minute original, serious scene.
  - » You may want to choose the topic of the scene for students so that they spend their time working on the scene, rather than trying to figure out what it will be about.
  - » You could use something similar to the plot of *Agatha Rex*. (I.e., a student risks expulsion for breaking a school rule. The student thinks they broke the rule to do something good. The administration is inflexible and the consequences are harsh.)
  - » Whatever the topic, emphasize that the scene must be completely serious from beginning to end.
- ★ Groups will discuss and rehearse. Pair up groups to share their serious scenes.
- ★ Now, students will take their serious scene and adapt it into a comedy.
- ★ Review the definition of adaptation with students.
  - » Adaptation: to make something suitable for a new purpose, to modify, to alter
- ★ Have groups first discuss how they will have to modify and alter their serious scene to make it comedic. Emphasize to students that they are not just changing their acting to make it comedic; they have to adapt the content.
- ★ Groups will discuss and rehearse. Ask each group how they intend to adapt the content to change the genre.
- ★ Pair up groups to share their comedic scenes.

- ★ Discuss the exercise afterward. What was it like to move from one genre to the other?

### **Antigone Adaptation Exercise**

- ★ As a class, read a section from the original *Antigone*. It is suggested that you read the conversation between Antigone and Creon after Antigone has broken the law. You can see a direct parallel between this conversation and the conversation that happens between Agatha and Dr. Creon.
- ★ Discuss the definition of adaptation, and adaptations that students may know.
  - » Adaptation: to make something suitable for a new purpose, to modify, to alter
- ★ Divide students into groups. Each group will have a copy of the original section. Their first task is to identify characters, locations, and possible lines of dialogue.
- ★ Next, groups are to discuss, decide, rehearse, and come up with a one-minute scene. This is an exploration, rather than an assessed assignment. Groups are picking a moment to theatricalize. How do you adapt? What are the challenges?
- ★ After groups present, discuss the similarities and differences in the scenes. Hopefully there will be differences! This will show students that there is not one way to adapt material.
- ★ Also, discuss the process. What were the challenges? How did they modify and alter for a new purpose?

### **Research Project**

- ★ Divide students into groups and give them a limited amount of time to research the author of the original play, Sophocles. Some questions to consider:
  - » Who is Sophocles and when did he live?
  - » What can you find out about his background and his place in Ancient Greek Theatre?
  - » When did he write *Antigone*? What else did he write?

- » Was Sophocles a “successful” playwright?
- ★ Decide how students will share their knowledge. Will they create a scene based on what they’ve learned? An oral presentation with a visual component? Will you create a quiz? Give students a way to demonstrate what they learned or perhaps let them choose how to demonstrate their knowledge.

### **School Rules Tableau Series**

- ★ In groups, students will create a tableaux series on school rules.
- ★ Groups will identify and discuss three school rules and then create a tableau for each of them.
  - » Emphasize to students any principles of tableau that you use in your class. Do they need to incorporate levels? Connection between individuals?
- ★ Pair up groups and have them share their tableaux. What are the similarities and differences of the rules the groups visualize?
- ★ Now, have groups choose one of their rules. This time, their tableau series will tell a story:
  - » The first picture will visualize the rule.
  - » The second picture will show students breaking the rule.
  - » The third picture will show the consequence of breaking the rule.
- ★ Pair up groups and have them share their series.
- ★ Discuss the experience: What rules did groups choose to break? What were the consequences of breaking the rule?

### **Breaking Rules Original Scene**

- ★ Discuss the purpose of school rules. Why do we have to follow rules? Are rules important? Why or why not? Is there a school rule that you consider unfair? Is there a school rule you would consider breaking? Why or why not? Would you never break a school rule? Why or why not?

- ★ Based on the discussion, divide students into groups. Each group will create a one-minute scene that includes the breaking of a rule.
- ★ Groups will discuss, rehearse and present.
- ★ Discuss the scenes afterward. How did students feel about theatricalizing breaking rules?

### **Rules Reflection**

- ★ Write a reflection about your relationship with rules. Consider the following questions:
  - » Are you a rule follower? Why or why not?
  - » What do you think about people who break the rules?
  - » Do you think rules are important? Why or why not?

### **Modern Chorus Scene**

- ★ The purpose of the chorus in an Ancient Greek play is to act as the audience's representative.
  - » They reflect on what just happened and wonder what will happen next. They question the protagonist and provide necessary background information. The chorus has moments when they speak in unison.
- ★ Divide students into groups. In each group, there should be three to five people acting as the Ancient Greek chorus.
- ★ Groups will create a scene in which the protagonist has just broken a rule or a law. The chorus will respond and wonder what will happen next. They will speak in unison.
- ★ Groups will discuss, rehearse and present
- ★ Discuss afterward what it was like to incorporate a chorus into a modern scene.



## Close Reading Analysis Questions

Close reading is an analysis tool. Students read a text multiple times for in-depth comprehension, striving to understand not only **what** is being said but **how** it's being said and **why**. Close reading takes a student from story and character to drawing conclusions on author intention. Close reading prompts students to flex their thinking skills by:

- ★ Teaching students to engage with a text.
- ★ Teaching students to be selective. We can't highlight everything in the text, only the most important elements.
- ★ Teaching students to make educated decisions. All conclusions and opinions must be backed up with a text example.

Have students analyze *Agatha Rex* individually or in groups, using the following text-dependent questions:

### Read One: What is happening?

1. What is your first impression of the play?
2. What is significant about the costumes the student characters wear?
3. What does the chorus call Dr. Creon?
4. What have Paul and Elliot done?
5. Finish this line: "I believe that rules are the \_\_\_\_\_ to healthy human beings."
6. What is Elliot's punishment?
7. What does Agatha ask Elliot to do?
8. What type of student does Dr. Creon consider Agatha?
9. What does Agatha ask Irene to do?
10. What does Agatha decide to do when she realizes she's on her own?

11. True or False: Agatha and Eunice were friends in middle school.
12. What is Agatha referring to when she says, "There's a certain power about it, you know"?
13. Who says, "If you are trying to turn yourself into a martyr, you'll fail before you succeed"?
14. What does Harry tell Dr. Creon he should do about Agatha?
15. What does the PTA want Dr. Creon to do about Agatha?
16. How does Dr. Creon react to everyone's suggestions?
17. How does Agatha react to the chorus' act of vandalism?
18. What happens at the end of the play?
19. Do you have any questions about the play?
20. What is the key idea of the play?

### **Read Two: How does it happen?**

1. Why do you think the playwright decided to change the genre with this adaptation?
2. What is the purpose of the chorus in *Agatha Rex*?
3. What are the differences between the way the chorus speaks and the way the other characters speak? What impact would that have in production?
4. Analyze the way the chorus uses language in *Agatha Rex*. What impact would it have in production?
5. Choose one of the choral speaking passages. How would you stage it? How would you block the chorus?
6. Based on Irene's language, what can you infer about her personality?
7. Based on Eunice's language, what can you infer about her personality?

8. What is the significance of the line, “It’s your fault if you don’t do anything about it”?
9. What is the significance of the line, “If you’re trying to turn yourself into a martyr, you’ll fail before you begin”?
10. What is the significance of the line, “You prove that we need rules for every single solitary thing because we can’t think on our own”?
11. Are there any words that you don’t understand? Identify and define them.
12. What is the main conflict in the play?

### **Read Three: Why does it happen?**

1. In your opinion, why is the play called *Agatha Rex*?
2. What is the playwright trying to say about rules? Cite the text to support your answer.
3. What is the playwright trying to say about personal responsibility? Cite the text to support your answer.
4. Compare and contrast your personal experience with following rules with what happens to the characters in the play.
5. How does the playwright want you to respond to this play?

### **Post-Read Questions**

- ★ What is one question that you still have about the play?
- ★ Which character resonated with you the most and why?
- ★ Do you recognize yourself in any of the characters?
- ★ Did any scene make you think about how you react to rules?
- ★ How have the main characters changed by the end of the play?

- ★ What would you have done if you were in Agatha's position? Would you have made the same choices? What would you have done differently?
- ★ What do you think about Agatha's decisions? Was she right or wrong?
- ★ What do you think about Dr. Creon's decision? Was he right or wrong?

## **Post-Read Activities**

### **Character Costume Design**

- ★ Most of the characters in the play wear a school uniform. What would they wear when they're not at school?
- ★ Choose a character and design a costume.
- ★ Based on their personality, what would they choose to wear? What pieces of clothing define them? What colours and textures would they choose?
- ★ Draw a colour costume rendering.

### **Set Design**

- ★ Students, individually or in groups, will discuss and decide how they would design the set for this play. Based on the themes in the play, what colours and textures would they choose?
- ★ Draw a colour set rendering or write a two-paragraph description of the set.

### **Staged Scenes**

- ★ Divide students into small groups and assign each group a scene from the play, or a short moment within a scene.
- ★ Give students time to rehearse.
- ★ Each group will present their moment.
- ★ Discuss the scenes afterward:

- » How did seeing the scenes acted out differ from reading them?
- » Why is it important to act a scene as well as read it?
- » Did any of the presentations offer a different interpretation of the characters than yours?

### Compare and Contrast

- ★ Now that students have read *Agatha Rex* and a summary of *Antigone*, have them compare and contrast the two stories. What did the playwright change from the original story? What elements of the original story remain in the adapted text? How have names changed? Death plays a large part in the original story; how has that changed?

### Choral Speaking Scene

- ★ Divide students into groups and assign them one of the choral speaking passages from the play to rehearse and present.
- ★ Discuss the experience afterward. What are the similarities and differences of performing a scene and performing a choral speaking scene?

### Choral Speaking

- ★ The chorus in the play has many moments where they tell a story in a choral speaking format — it's spoken in unison, it's highly stylized and imagistic, and sometimes lines of text rhyme.
- ★ Using one of the choral speaking moments as a template, have groups write their own.
- ★ Divide students into groups.
- ★ Each group will write a paragraph version of a story. It can be an original story (if time allows), a news story, or a fairy tale.
- ★ Groups will turn their paragraph into a choral speaking moment that is highly stylized and imagistic with rhyming lines.
- ★ Groups will discuss, rehearse and present.