Three thousand years ago, proud seafaring tribes of Greeks told stories about mythical heroes and gods. Besides being good entertainment, myths helped the Greeks understand themselves and their universe. One popular myth concerned the heroic adventures of Jason, a Greek prince, and the powerful witchcraft of Medea, an Asian princess. From generation to generation, Greeks passed on the story of how Medea at first fiercely loved and then fiercely hated the ambitious Greek prince who sought the Golden Fleece.

The story was told to Euripides, a poet and playwright who lived in Athens during the fifth century B.C.E. when Greek civilization was at its zenith. Euripides saw in Medea's hatred for Jason and in her desire for cruel revenge an ideal subject for tragic drama. He wrote the play Medea and presented it in 431 B.C.E. to an Athenian audience that might well have included Euripides' chief admirer, the philosopher Socrates.

Medea, like so many of Euripides' plays, was better appreciated after its creator's death. It may have been one of the tragedies studied and analyzed by Aristotle, who wished to know precisely what made a Greek tragedy truly a tragedy. Aristotle's definition of tragedy, given in his Poetics, has shaped the way later critics of Greek drama view a play like Medea.

The world that Euripides and Aristotle knew has, of course, ceased to exist. Yet the mythical characters, Jason and Medea, are still seen occasionally on the modern stage. They may speak the poetic lines that Euripides wrote for them. Or they may speak instead lines written by a modern American poet, Robinson Jeffers, in a free adaptation of Euripides' tragedy.

The play that you will be reading is Jeffers' adaptation; it is not a strict translation of the original Greek drama. Yet to understand the play, readers should know the ancient Greek myth upon which the play was based and the Greek theater for which the original play was created. It will also help to understand Aristotle's famous definition of Greek tragedy. Finally, you should know how Jeffers' version of the play differs from Euripides'.

To know a play well, whether reading it in a book or seeing it on stage, requires both imagination and analytical thought. You are urged to use both as you read this introduction and the play that follows.

Medea, the Myth

The playwrights of ancient Greece seldom invented plots and characters of their own. The artistic conventions of their day required them to draw most often upon mythology as the source for their dramatic inspirations. Euripides, therefore, fully expected his audience to be familiar with the violent story of Jason, Medea, and the Golden Fleece. For the benefit of non-Greeks, however, here briefly is the story.

Jason, a young Greek prince, is sent on a dangerous mission by his treacherous uncle, Pelias. Recruiting fifty men to go with him, including his own brother, he leads the Argonauts in search of the mysterious island inhabited by the suitors of the famous daughter of Pelias. The expedition lands on the island, and among the suitors Jason finds the beautiful woman who will be his wife. Jason only meets Medea, and to secure her beauty, his golden fleece, and his safety, he makes a secret bargain with her. But this bargain goes against the natural; it is a bargain that we would not want to make.

Once Jason and Medea are alone, Medea makes a secret bargain with him. She promises to sacrifice her first-born sons if he will marry her. After Jason's marriage to Medea, he is only the dim shadow of himself; Medea is the dominating force in his life. This marriage, however, is a marriage of convenience, and when Jason's brother (he has a brother) returns from the unknown island, Jason and Medea are separated. In the course of time, Medea falls in love with the brother and betrays her husband. When Jason discovers his wife's infidelity, he drives her from his presence. Medea, however, would not have deserted her husband if she had known that he was engaged to take a second wife. For Jason has made a second bargain with Medea, this time for the life of his new wife, and Medea is willing to help him. She finds his wife in a glass cell. Jason, as he is about to kill her, is saved by Medea's plea for mercy. In return for this mercy, Jason promises to make peace with Medea. He never keeps his promise.
Colchian king Aetes give him the golden hide of a ram—the Golden Fleece—that hangs in a magical grove guarded by an ever-wakeful dragon. Aetes agrees to give up the Fleece only if Jason can accomplish two heroic and seemingly impossible feats. Meanwhile the king’s daughter Medea has fallen in love with Jason, who vows to become her husband. Employing her skills as sorceress, Medea helps Jason to carry out both of her father’s assignments. Jason, as easily as if he were leading his pet dogs, puts yokes around the necks of two fire-breathing bulls. But the astonished Colchian king refuses to fulfill his promise about the Golden Fleece. Medea therefore must again use her magic arts to help Jason put the dragon to sleep, seize the Golden Fleece, and escape on the Argo.

A Colchian ship commanded by Aetes almost overtakes them. But Medea, as violent as she is clever, urges that her own brother, hostage on the Greek ship, be chopped into pieces and thrown into the sea. The pursuing ship stops to pick up the pieces, giving the Greeks time to get away.

Home at last with the Golden Fleece, Jason tries to claim for himself the throne that his uncle Pelias had promised him. But Pelias fails to give up his power, and Medea finds a way to kill him. Jason and Medea are then forced to flee together to the Greek city of Corinth. Here Jason, seeking to inherit the Corinthian throne, abandons Medea and marries a Corinthian princess. What happens next is the subject of Euripides’ tragedy.

Medea on the Greek Stage

As Euripides turned the conclusion of the Jason-Medea myth into a dramatic script, he was ever conscious of the special kind of theater and audience for which he was writing. He could easily imagine his Athenian audience crowding into the gigantic semi-circular structure built upon the bank of a deep hill. This was the Theater of Dionysus, the most illustrious theater in all of Greece. Here people assembled not only to enjoy dramatic entertainment but also to celebrate a religious festival in honor of Dionysus, the Greek god of the wine who taught mortals how to make wine. Part of his annual springtime festival was a three-day competition among writers of tragic drama.

Seated on blocks of stone, the Athenian audience looked down toward a platform that projected out into a semi-circular area known as the orchestra. Behind the platform was a long wall called a skene. It had three doors through which the three main actors in a play made their entrances and exits.

All members of the audience understood the conventions that governed the production of a tragic drama. They knew, for example, that men alone played both the male and female roles and that each play usually had only three actors performing all the main roles. The actors’ own faces were never seen. Instead, actors wore large painted masks that represented the characters they were portraying. The facial expressions on the masks were greatly exaggerated to reveal to spectators in the farthest tier of seats the emotions of the actors.

one actor could take the part of several minor characters. Another actor in the leading role could change masks to reveal a change in mood.

While the actors moved on and off the platform, a chorus of usually fifteen performers rhythmically moved and sang together in the orchestra. Originally, long before the Theater of Dionysus was built, the chorus alone told the story of the drama; there were then no individual actors at all. But when Euripides was writing, Athenian audiences expected a tragic drama to begin with an introduction or prologue by the chorus. They then expected dialogue by the actors, followed by a choral song, followed by more dialogue. No play could end without a final musical commentary by the chorus.

At the festival of Dionysus, when one play ended, early in the morning, the spectators did not get up to leave. There were still two plays to follow, both written by the same playwright. Taken together, the three tragic dramas performed in one day were known as a trilogy. A second trilogy by a different playwright was performed on the second day of the dramatic competition. A third trilogy was performed on the third day. A group of citizens, chosen by lot to judge the theatrical merits of the plays, awarded first, second, and third prizes to the competing playwrights.

The Athenian judges who watched the first production of Euripides’ Medea in 421 B.C.E. awarded it only a third prize.

Medea and the Meaning of Tragedy

How could one tragedy be judged better than another? What were the qualities necessary to a play like Medea if it were to receive the highest award? How was one to measure the greatness of a tragic work?
Aristotle wrote a treatise on the subject in his Poetics. He used the words mimēsis and catharsis to explain the meaning of tragedy. In simplest terms, mimēsis was what the play had to be; it concerned the formal structure and character of the play. Catharsis was what the tragedy had to do; it concerned the emotional impact of the play on an audience.

Mimēsis, which in English means imitation, was the essence of tragedy, said Aristotle. The writer of tragedies, he said, must attempt to imitate on the stage the action or plot of a story. In other words, the plot of the drama (what happens to the actors on stage) is central to the meaning of tragedy—even more important than the special personality traits of the characters.

But character too is involved in tragedy. According to Aristotle, a tragic character must have unusual stature and fame; he or she cannot be a common human being but someone with a grand and noble bearing. This larger-than-life character cannot be entirely virtuous, however. There must be a flaw in him or her, a "tragic flaw" that leads finally, inevitably to a calamity at the end of the play.

If this mimēsis or "imitation of the action" is properly developed, then a catharsis, which means purification or purging of emotion, should naturally follow. The action on stage should awaken in members of the audience such acute feelings of pity and fear that, as they leave the theater, they feel purged of these emotions.

Jeffers' Medea and Euripides' Medea.

Euripides wrote Medea for an Athenian audience whose theatrical standards and tastes were far different from our own. Jeffers' adaptation of Euripides' tragedy expresses some of these differences. The American poet assumes that both males and females will be performing and that the actors in his drama will not be wearing masks. Instead of a Greek chorus singing in unison in the orchestra, Jeffers substitutes three Greek women who interact with each other as individual characters on the stage. The lines, too, though roughly paralleling those of Euripides, are not translated word for word. For example, here is a direct translation of a line by Medea as Euripides wrote it:

Ah, me! A wretched suffering woman! O would that I could die!

The corresponding line in Jeffers' play reads:

Death. Death is my wish. For myself, my enemies, my children.

Destruction.

The American poet brings to the old Greek play his own unique poetic and dramatic sense.

At the same time, his play follows the original very closely in both spirit and form. The same scene follow each other in the same sequence. Jeffers' Medea hate Jason and acts out her revenge with the same intensity of emotion that characterises Euripides' work. Most important, the dramatic impact of Jeffers' play on an American audience is probably much like the dramatic impact Euripides' play had on an Athenian audience twenty-four.

It is hard to know what is truth and what is fiction about the life of EURIPIDES (480?–406 B.C.E.) as it has been reported by biased contemporaries, most of whom disapproved of him and his work. Did his mother peddle vegetables on Athenian streets, as one Greek writer has said? Probably not, since it is known that Euripides came of a well-to-do family. Did he isolate himself in a cave in order to study his books day and night? Some scholars today give some credence to this story because Euripides was known to have withdrawn from society and to have an unusually large private library. It is certain that Euripides wrote ninety-two plays in his lifetime and produced eighty-eight of them. But Greek judges had difficulty accepting the unusual approach that Euripides took to his art; they awarded him a first prize only four times. Competing playwrights, most notably Sophocles and Aeschylus, were more respected at that time for the grandeur and technical perfection of their tragedies. Euripides, however, even in his own lifetime, was recognized for his unequaled power to express the full depths and complexity of human psychology. He relied much less upon the chorus than any previous Greek dramatist and elevated the importance of the actors and dialogue.

Conservative Greek audiences were often shocked by Euripides' habit of criticizing the conventional tastes and morals of Athenian society. Perhaps to escape the hostility and suspicion that his plays aroused in Athens, he accepted late in life an invitation to join the court of the King of Macedon. After his death, his plays became more popular, even in Athens. They were performed even more widely than the works of his celebrated rivals, Sophocles and Aeschylus.

ROBINSON JEFFERS (1887–1962) was only five years old when his father, a minister and professor of religion, taught him to read Greek. As a teenager in 1903, he moved with his family from the industrial world of Pittsburgh to a remote wooded area outside Pasadena, California. This change from a populous city to a wilder and more natural setting had a profound impact upon Jeffers who, throughout his life, expressed a bitter dislike for industrial civilization. After studying at two California colleges and inheriting a sizable sum of money, Jeffers built for himself and his young wife, Una, a tower of stone on the California coast. Isolating himself in this unusual dwelling, he wrote poems which an appreciative critic once described as "tuggedly pagan." The publication of TAMAR AND OTHER POEMS in 1924 established his reputation as one of the finest American poets of his generation. He published several more volumes of poetry before being persuaded by a brilliant actress, Judith Anderson, to write for the stage an adaptation of Euripides' Medea. Produced on Broadway in 1947 with Judith Anderson in the role of Medea, Jeffers' play received rave notices from New York theater critics. It had a long run of 214 performances. Jeffers' last volume of poetry, published in 1954, contained a free adaptation of HIPPOLEUTUS another of Euripides' tragedies.
"Grind, crush, burn. Destruction. Ai—Ai—"

With these words, the tragic heroine Medea makes known her pain, her hatred, and her all-consuming passion for vengeance, destruction, death. From the first moment her piercing, tortured voice is heard upon the stage, the audience understands that nothing can calm the fury nor turn the vengeful purpose of this injured woman. From Medea’s first line, we know the full truth of the Nurse’s opening lament about Jason, the object of Medea’s wrath. “I know,” says Medea’s unhappy nurse, “that Jason would have been wiser to tempt a lioness, or naked-handed steal the whelps of a tiger.”

The beginning of the play announces how the play must end. It cannot end happily. The only question in Medea’s mind—and the audience’s—is the exact nature of the horror that she promises. How will Medea accomplish her revenge? The development of the plot turns on that question.

But the real interest of the play depends not on plot development but on a question of moral responsibility. Who is to blame for the tragic ending that we all expect? Is Medea herself to blame for plotting the death of those she once loved? Or is Jason more to blame for betraying Medea’s love and thereby causing her such torment that she can want only to hurt and to kill? The Nurse and the three Greek Women seem to blame Jason for his cruelty. Their comments prepare the way for the most dramatic moment in Act I—Jason’s entrance and his attempt to defend himself against Medea’s scornful accusations. Medea, with characteristic ferocity, reminds Jason of all that she has sacrificed for him. Jason, with characteristic coolness, wonders why Medea cannot behave reasonably and adjust to her new situation as a good Greek woman would do.

Of course Medea is not Greek. She is still a foreigner, a “barbarian” as the Greeks would say. She does not understand or respect the cultural values of the Greeks any more than the Greeks understand or respect non-Greek values. Throughout Act I, the playwright reminds us that the hopeless conflict between Medea and Jason is at bottom a conflict between a Colchian woman and a Greek man. The rational Greek and the passionate non-Greek are worlds apart.

But Medea has one advantage over her Greek foes. She can be Greek when she wants to be—when it serves her vengeful purpose. She can call Creon “my lord” and bend her knee to him if it will help to destroy him. She can tell the three Greek Women that she intends to be reasonable and make her peace with Jason’s “yellow-haired” bride. Of course only the Greeks, blinded by their inability to understand anything except Greek reasonableness and self-seeking ambition, can be fooled by Medea’s deception. The audience is not deceived. As the curtain falls ending Act I, some members of the audience may share briefly in Medea’s contempt for her unsuspecting Greek enemies.

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Medea

ROBINSON JEFFERS
(After Euripides)

Characters

THE NURSE
THE TUTOR
MEDEA’S TWO CHILDREN
THREE GREEK WOMEN
MEDEA
CREON, King of Corinth
JASON
ARCEUS, King of Athens
A SLAVE
ATTENDANTS
SOLDIERS

Scene: Before Medea’s house in Corinth.
Act I

[The nurse comes from the door left toward the front of the stage.]

THE NURSE: I wish the long ship Argo had never passed that perishing channel between the Symplegades. I wish the waves that made her mast and her oars still waved in the wind on Mount Pelion, and the grey Ganges. Still nested in them, the great adventurers had never voyaged into the Asian sunrise to the shores of morning for the Golden Fleece.

For then my mistress Medea would never have seen Jason, nor loved and saved him, nor cut herself off from home to come with him into this country of the smiling chattering Greeks and the roofs of Corinth; over which I see evil.

Hang like a cloud. For she is not meek but fierce, and the daughter of a king. Yet at first all went well. The folk of Corinth were kind to her, they were proud of her beauty, and Jason loved her. Happy is the house where the man and the woman love and are faithful. Now all is changed; all is black hatred. For Jason has turned from her; he calls the old bond a barbarian mating, not a Greek marriage; he has cast her off, and wedded the yellow-haired child of Creon, the ruler here. He wants worldly advantage, fine friends, and a high place in Corinth. For these he is willing to cast Medea like a harlot, and betray the children that she has borne him. He is not wise. I think

But Medea lies in the house, broken with pain and rage; she will neither eat nor drink, except her own tears, she turns her face toward the earth, remembering her father's house and her native land, which she abandoned for the love of this man: who now despises her.

And if I try to speak comfort to her she only sobs at me, great eyes like stonies.

Or a wave of the sea, and I think she hates her own children.

She is learning what it is to be a foreigner, cast out, alone and despised.

She will never learn to be humble, she will never learn to drink insult like harmless water. O I'm in terror of her: whether she'll thread a knife through her own heart, or whether she'll hunt the bridegroom and his new bride, or what more dreadful evil stalks in the forest of her dark mind. I know that Jason would have been wiser to tempt a lioness, or naked-handed, steal the wedges of a tiger. [From up right she sees MEDEA'S BOYS COMING WITH THEIR TUTOR, ELDER BOY FIRST WITH SEASHELL, YOUNGER BOY ON TUTOR'S BACK.]

Here come the happy children. Little they know of their mother's grief.

[During this speech tutor lets boy off his back, boys go up and sit up right corner of house; tutor crosses down center to left of nurse.]

THE TUTOR: Old servant of my lady, why do you stand out here, keeping watch in solitude with those grim eyes? Is it some trouble of your own that you are lamenting? I should think Medea

Would need your care.

THE NURSE: It is all to Medea, whether I am here or not. Yes, it is mine, my trouble. My lady's grief is my grief.

And it has hurt me

So that I had to come out and speak it to the world, out loud.

THE TUTOR: Is she still in that deep despair?

THE NURSE: You are lucky. O wise boy of Jason's. I envy you, you do not see. This evil is not declining; it is just at dawn. I dread the lion's glare of its noon.

THE TUTOR: Is she so wrought? Yet neither you nor Medea know the worst.

THE NURSE: [Rises from rock]; What? What? Do you, [Crouching to center]; I shouldn't have spoken.

THE NURSE: Tell me the truth, old man. You and I are two slaves, we can trust each other.

We can keep secrets.

THE TUTOR: I heard them saying—when we walked beside the holy fountain of Peltene, where the old men sit in the sun on the stone benches—they were saying that Creon, the lord of this land, intends to drive out Medea and the children, with her, these innocent boys, out of this house.

And out of Corinth, and they must wander through the wild world. Homeless and helpless.

THE NURSE: I don't believe it. Ah, no! Jason may hate the mother, but he would hardly let his sons be cast out.

THE TUTOR: Well—he has made a new alliance. He is not a friend of this house.

[Meusa. She is Asiatic and lamenting loudly.]

THE NURSE: Listen! I hear her voice.

MEDEA: Death! Death! Death is my wish. For myself, my enemies, my children, and destruction.

THE NURSE: Take the children away, keep away from them. Take them to the other door. Quickly.

[During "Deaths" younger boy rises from rock; tutor crosses; picks him up and expands his left, followed by elder boy. They go out, toward rear door of the house; the nurse looks after them, wringing her hands.

MEDEA: That's the word. Grind, crush, burn. Destruction. Ail—Ail—

THE NURSE: [Wringing her hands]: This is my terror. To hear her always harking back to the children, like a fierce hound at fault. O
They're not to blame.
[Sits step right of pillar down left.]

**Medea** [Within]: If any god hears me, let me die. Ah, rotten, rotten, rotten, death is the only answer.

Water to wash this dirt.
[First and second woman are coming in up right, but the nurse does not yet notice them. She is intent on Medea's cries and her own thoughts.]

**The Nurse**: Oh, it's a bad thing
To be born of high race, and brought up
Silent and powerful in a great house, untaught.
And ruling many: for then if misfortune
comes it is unendurable, it drives you mad.
I say that poor people
Are happier: the little cottagers and humble people, the poor in spirit: they can lie low.
Under the wind and live:
[Enter third woman; joins first and second up right]
A woman; while the tall oaks and cloud-raising mountain pines go mad in the storm,
Writhe, groan and crash.

**Medea**: Ali!

The Nurse: This is the wild and terrible
Justice of God: it brings on great persons
The great disasters.

**Medea**: Ali!

The Nurse: [Becomes aware of the women who have come in, and is startled from her reverie. First woman crosses down center]: What do you want?

**First Woman**: I hear her crying again: it is dreadful.

**Second Woman** [Crosses down to right of first woman]: Her lamentation.

She is beautiful and deep in grief: we couldn't help coming.

**Third Woman** [Crosses down to right of second woman]: We are friends of this house and its trouble hurts us.

**The Nurse**: You are right, friends; it is not a home. It is broken.

**Second Woman**: She doesn't know what she is saying.

**Medea** [Within]: Poisons. Death-magic.

**First Woman** [Crosses to nurse in front of doors]: Old and honored servant of a great house, do you think it is wise
To leave your lady alone in there, except
Perhaps a few slaves, building that terrible arbor.

Of deadly thoughts? We Greeks believe
That solitude is very dangerous, great passions grow into monsters
In the dark of the mind; but if you share
Them with loving friends they remain human, they can be endured.

**Medea** [Within]: All

**First Woman**: I think you ought to persuade Medea to come from the dark dwelling, and speak with us, before her heart breaks,
Or she does harm to herself. She has lived among us, we've learned to love her, we'd gladly tell her so.
It might soften her spirit.

**The Nurse**: Do you think so? She wouldn't listen

[Door bell is heard. Nurse rises. First woman crosses down right, joining other two women, and sits on rock.]

—Oh, oh, she is coming!

Speak carefully to her: make your words a soft music.

[Medea comes through the doorway, propping herself against one of the pillars, and stands staring.]

**The Nurse**: Oh, my dear, my poor child.

**Second Woman** [Whispering]: They say she is dangerous. Look at her eyes.

**First Woman**: She is a witch, but not evil.

**Second Woman**: She can make old men young again:
she did it for Jason's father.

**Third Woman**: She is cross to cross center.]

You know that my lord Jason

Has left me and made a second marriage, with the bright-haired child

Of wealth and power. She too was a child of power, but not in this country; and I spent my power

For love of Jason. I poured out like water.
I am mad: drink it is
Success and fame; I saved him his precious life; not once, many times. You may have heard what I did for him.
I betrayed my father for him, I killed my brother to save him; I made my own land to hate me for ever.
And I fied west with Jason in the Greek ship, under the thunder of the sail, weeping and laughing.
That huge journey through the Black Sea and the Bosphorus, where the rocks clang together, through the Sea of Marmora,
And through Hellespont,
[watched by the spearmen of wealthy Troy, and home to Greek water: his home, my exile,
My endless exile.
[Crosses to pillar left of house.]
And here I have loved him and borne him son; and this—man—
Has left me and taken Creon’s daughter, to enjoy her fortune, and put aside her soft yellow hair
And kiss her young mouth.
[Medea stands rigid, struggling for self-control.]
FIRST WOMAN: She is terrible. Stone with stone eyes.
SECOND WOMAN: Look: the foam-flake on her lip, that flickers with her breathing.
THIRD WOMAN: She is pitiable: she is under great injuries.
[Medea (Low-voiced): I do not know what other woman—I do not know how much a Greek woman Will endure. The people of my race are somewhat rash and intemperate. As for me, I want simply to die.
[She sits at pillar left.]
But Jason is not to smile at his bride over my grave, nor that great man Creon
Hang wreaths and make a feast-day in Corinth. Or let the wreaths be bright blinding fire, and the songs a high walling,
And the wine, blood.
FIRST WOMAN [Crosses to center]: Daughter of sorrow, beware.
It is dangerous to dream of wine: it is worse
To speak of wailing or blood:
For the images that the mind makes
Find a way out, they work into life.
[She chokes back her tears.]
SECOND WOMAN: There are evils that cannot be cured by evil.
Patience returns, and the gods watch all.
It is [Dully, without hope]: Let them watch my enemies go down in blood.
First trumpet off up right is heard. The three women cross up right.
SECOND WOMAN: Medea, beware!
Somed person is coming—
[Second trumpet is heard.]
It is Creon himself.
[Third trumpet.]
THIRD WOMAN: Creon is coming.
[The three women cross down stage of rock right.]
THE Nurse: He is dark with anger. O my lady—my child—bend in this wind,
And not be broken.
[Medea rises. Creon comes in up right with men attending him. The women move to one side. He speaks to Medea, with an angry gesture toward women.]
CREON: [At center.]: You have admirers, I see. Abate your pride: these people will not be with you where you are going.
[A pause. Medea does not answer.
CREON: Medea, woman of the stone forehead and hate-filled eyes: I have made my decision. I have decided
That you must leave this land at once and go into banishment.
THREE WOMEN: Oohh!
CREON: with your children.
THREE WOMEN: Oohh.
CREON: I intend to remove
A root of disturbance out of the soil of Corinth. I am here to see to it. I will not return home
Until it is done.
[The three women sit.]
[She speaks.
CREON: Exile: banishment; go where you may, Medea, but here
You abide no more.
MEDITA: —I with my children?
CREON: I will not take them away from you.
MEDITA: The children, my lord—
[Her lips move angrily, but the voice is not heard.]
CREON: What are you muttering?
MEDITA: Nothing—I am praying to my gods for wisdom,
And you for mercy. My sons are still very young, tender and helpless. You know, my lord,
What evils mean—to wander with fear and famine for guide and driver, through all the wild winter storms
And the rage of the sun, and beg a bread-crust and be deserted; pelted with stones in the villages,
Held a little lower than the scavenger dogs, kicked, scorned and slaved—the children, my lord,
Are Jason’s children. Your chosen friend, I believe, and now
Even closer bound. And as for me, your servant, O master of Corinth, what have I done? Why
Must I be cast
CREON: I will tell you frankly: because you nourish rancorous ill will toward persons
Who intend to protect me: send you out before you’re time to do harm here.
And you are notorious
For occult knowledge: sorcery, poisons, magic. Men say you can even sing down the moon from heaven,
And make the holy stars to falter and run backward, against the purpose
And current of nature. Ha! As to that I know not: I know you are dangerous. You threaten my daughter: you have to go.
MEDITA: I misspoke. I thought of old days—[She seems to weep.]
CREON: I acknowledge, Medea.
THAT you have some cause for grief. I all the more must guard against your dark wisdom and bitter heart.
MEDITA: You misjudge me cruelly. It is true
That I have some knowledge of drugs and medicines: I can sometimes cure sickness.
Is that a crime? These dark rumors, my lord,
Are only the noise of popular gratitude.
[Crosses down to step above him.]
MEDITA: You must have observed it often: if any person
Knows a little more than the common man, the people suspect him. If he brings a new talent,
How promptly the hateful whispers begin.
But you are not a common man, lord of Corinth; you Will not be the natural enemy.
CREON: No. Not change my decision. I am here to see you leave this house and the city:
And not much time. More quickly gather your things and go. I pity you, Medea, but you must go.
[He crosses off steps, back to her down right center.]
MEDITA: You pity me! You—pity me?
[She comes close to him, wild with rage.]
I will endure a dog’s pity or a wart-grown toad’s. May God who hears me—We shall see in the end
Who’s to be praised.
[She rises, crosses in to steps. MEDEA crosses down left, then up right between pillar and edge of house, then back to nurse in her arms.]
CREON: Yes, and I will keep her safe of your female hatred: therefore I send you
Out of this land.
[She resumes her sitting position dawn left.]
MEDITA: It is not true, I am not jealous, I never hated her.
Jealous for the sake of Jason? I am far past wanting Jason, my lord. You took him and gave him to her, and I will say you did well, perhaps wisely. Your daughter is loved by all: she is beautiful; if I were near her I would soon love her.

CREON: You can speak sweetly enough, you can make honey in your mouth like a brown bee. When it serves your turn.

MEDIA: Not honey: the truth.

CREON: Trust you not; you are going out of this country, Media. What I decide is fixed.

[MEDIA crosses away from him to center.]

It is like the firm rocks of Acrocorinth, which neither earthquake can move

Nor a flood of tears melt. Make ready quickly: I have a guest in my house. I should return to him.

THE NURSE: [Comes to left of MEDIA and speaks to her]:

What guest? O my lady, ask him.

Who is the guest? If powerful and friendly he might be a refuge for us—

MEDIA: [Pages no attention to her. Crosses; kneels; to CREON.]

I know that your will is granite. But even on the hard face of a granite mountain some flowers of mercy

May grow in season. Have mercy on my little sons, Creon.

Though there is none for me.

[She reaches to embrace his knees. He steps backward from her.]

CREON: How long, woman? This is decided; done; finished.

[NUKE crosses back left and sits down.]

MEDIA: [Rising from her knees, turns half away from him.]

I am not a beggar. I will not trouble you. I shall not live long. [Crosses two steps to left; turns to him again.]

Sire; grant me a few hours yet, one day to prepare in, one little day
canon: What? Not? I told you. The day is today, Media, this day.

And the hour is now:

MEDIA: There are no flowers on this mountain: not one violet, not one anemone. Your face, my lord, is like flint. —If I could find the right words, if some god would lend me a touch of eloquence, I'd show you my heart.

[Crosses to CREON.]

I'd lift it out of my breast and turn it over in my hands; you'd see how pure it is

Of any harm or malice toward you or your household.

[She holds out her hands to him.]

Look at it: not a speck: look, my lord. They call mercy

The jewel of kings. I am praying

To you as to one of the gods: destroy us not utterly. To go out with no refuge, nothing prepared,

Is plain death: I would rather kill myself quickly and here. If I had time but to ask the slaves

And strolling beggar where to go, how to live: and I must gather some means: one or two jewels

And small gold things I have,

[Crosses away from canon to left.]

to trade them for bread and goat's milk.

[Crosses up steps to center of doorway.]

Wretched, wretched, wretched am I, and I, and my boys

[She kneels again.]

I beseech you, Creon,

By the soft yellow hair and cool smooth forehead and the white knees

Of that young girl who is now Jason's bride: lend me this inch of time: one day—half a day,

For this one is now half gone—and I will go my sad course and vanish in the morning quietly as dew

That drops on the stones at dawn and is dry at sunrise. You will never again be troubled by any word

Of a fate that. And this I pray you for your dear child's sake. Oh Creon, what

In all the rich years of Corinth?

CREON: I will think of it. I am no tyrant. I have been merciful to my own hurt, many times. Even to myself: I seem to be foolish.

If I grant you this thing—No, Media, I will not grant it.

[Three women rise, cross down right of CREON, imploringly.]

Well—We shall watch you: as a hawk does a viper. What harm could she do

In the tail of one day? A ruler ought to be ruthless, but I am not. I am a fool

In my own eyes, whatever the world may think. I can be cruel to warriors; a woman weeping

[MEDIA weeps.]

Floods me off course.—Take it, then. Make your preparations.

But if tomorrow's sun shines on you here—Media, you die—

[MEDIA and women make a gesture of thanks.]

Enough words. Thank me not. I want my hands

Washed of this business.

[He departs quickly up right, followed by his men. MEDIA rises from her knees.]

MEDIA: I will thank you.

And the whole world will hear of it.

[MEDIA crosses around to right of house on top step; makes a violent gesture after him, then sits at pillar right.]

FIRST WOMAN [Crosses up center watching him out then turns to other women]:

I have seen this man's arrogance, I watched and heard him.

I am of Corinth, and I say that Corinth Is not well ruled.

SECOND WOMAN [Crosses up center. Three women join him at center on end of this speech]:

The city where even a woman, even a foreigner,

Suffers unjustly the rod of power Is not well ruled.

[Three women take a step to MEDIA.]

FIRST WOMAN: Unhappy Media, what haven, what sanctuary, where will you wander?

Which of the gods, Media, Drives you through waves of woe, the mourning broken, the howlers and the anchor-head.

Hopeless from harbor?

MEDIA: This man—that barking dog—this, galled fool—

[MEDIA rises.]

... gods of my father's country, you saw me low on my knees before the great dog of Corinth; humble, holding my heart in my hands

For a dog to bite—break this man's teeth!—[women cross down stage of rock right.]

Women: it is a bitter thing to be a woman.

A woman is weak for warfare, she must use cunning. Men boast their battles: I tell you this, and we know it:

[Starts down steps center.]

It is easier to stand in battle three times, in the front line, in the stabbing fury, than to bear one child.

And a woman, they say, can do no good but in childbirth. It may be so. She can do evil,

[women make pleading gesture to her.}

she can do evil.

[She snarls at them and they turn away.]

I went before that tall dog. I went my tears before him, I degraded my knees to him, I gulped and flattered him.

O triple fool, he has given me

[She crosses up right center. First woman sits on rock right.]

all that I needed: a little time, a space of time.

[Crosses back to left center.]

Death is dearer to me

Than what I am now; and if today by sunset the world has not turned, and turned sharp too—let your dog Creon

Send two or three slaves to kill me and a cord to strangple me: I will stretch out

My throat to it. But I have a bitter hope, women. I begin to see

Through the dark wood, between the monstrous trunks of the trees, to the end of
A pin-point of light:
I shall not die perhaps
As a pigeon dies, nor like an innocent lamb, that feels a hand on its head and looks up from the knife
To the man's face and dies—No, like some yellow-eyed beast that has killed its hunters let it lie down
On the hounds' bodies and the broken spears.—Then how to strike them? What means to use? There are so many
Doors through which painful death may glide in and catch—Which one, which one?
[She stands meditating down left. The nurse comes from behind her and speaks to the first woman.]
The Nurse: Tell me: do you know what guest
Is in Creon's house?
First Woman: What?—Oh, an Athenian ship came from the north last night: it is Aegaeus.
The lord of Athens.
The Nurse: Aegaeus! My lady knows him: I believe he will help us. Some god has brought him here,
Some savior god.
Second Woman: He is leaving, I think, today.
The nurse: [Hobbling back toward Medea.] My lady! Lord Aegaeus Is here in Corinth, Creon's guest: Aegaeus of Athens.
[Medea looks at her silently, without attention.]
If you will see him and speak him fairly,
We have a refuge.
Medea: I have things in my hand to do. Be quiet.
The Nurse: Oh, listen to me! You are driven out of Corinth; you must find shelter. Aegaeus of Athens is here.
[Medea turns from her. The nurse catches at her clothing, servile but eager, slave and mother at the same time.]
Medea [Angrily turning on her]: What's that to me?
The Nurse [Kneeling at her feet]: I lifted you in my arms when you were—this long, I gave you milk from these
I saw the little beautiful body straighten and grow tall: Oh—child—almost my child—Not try to save you? Life is better than death—
Medea: Not now.
The Nurse: Time's running out! Medea: I have time. Oh, I have time. It would be good to stand there a thousand years and think of nothing
But the death of three persons.
The Nurse: All there's no hope then. Ah, child, if you could do this red thing you dream of, all Corinth
Would pour against you.
Medea: After my enemies are punished and I have heard the last broken moan—Corinth?
What's that? I'll sleep. I'll sleep well. I am alone against all: and so weary
That it is pitiful.
[Medea sits. Nurse rises, unringing her hands. On trumpet call the three women cross up right.]
First Woman: Look: who is coming? I see the sunny glitter on lanceheads.
Second Woman: Oh, it is Jason!
Third Woman: Jason's Medea's worst enemy, who should have been Her dearest protector.
[Medea leans wearily against one of the pillars of the doorway, her back to the stage, unconscious of what they are saying. Jason enters in haste up right, followed by armed attendants and speaks angrily.]
Jason [Crossing to center of second step]: What business have you here, you women
Clustered like buzzing bees at the hive—
Where is Medea?
[They do not answer for a moment, but look involuntarily toward Medea, and Jason sees her. She jerks and stiffens at the sound of his voice, but does not turn.]
First Woman [Pointing]: There: mourning for what you have done.
[Nurse takes a step above Medea, dismissing her to Jason.]
Jason: You have done—
Not I. Not by my will she and my sons are exiled.
Medea [Slowly turns and faces him, her head high, rigid with inner violence]: Is there another dog here?
[Three women sit on steps up right center.]
Jason: So, Medea,
You have once more affronted and insulted the head of Corinth. This is not the first time.
I've seen what a fool anger is. You might have lived here happily, secure and honored—I hoped you would—
By being just a little decently respectful toward those in power. Instead you had to go mad with anger
And talk yourself into exile. To me it matters little what you say about me, but rulers are sensitive.
Time and again I've smoothed down
Jason's indignation, then you like a madwoman, like a possessed imbecile,
Wag your head and let the words flow again; you never cease
From speaking evil against him and his family. So now—Call yourself lucky, Medea,
Not to get worse than exile.
[Crosses a few steps to Medea on second step.]
In spite of all this, I have your interest at heart and am here to help you.
Exile's a bitter business. I want to make some provision for you. I wish you no harm:
At least you hate me.
[He waits for her to speak, but she is silent. He continues.]
And in particular the children, my sons, our sons—You might have been decent enough
To have thought of our sons.
Medea [Slowly]: Did you consider them
When you betrayed this house?
Jason: Certainly I considered them. It was my hope that they would grow up here,
And I, having married power, could protect and favor them. And if perhaps, after
Jason: [Steps down off steps and turns from her.]
Medea [Trembling]: Ah—it's enough.
Something might happen. It is—likely that—something might happen
To the bride and the marriage.
Jason: I'll guard against it. But evidently
Creon is right to be rid of you.
[He crosses as if to go off right. She stops him when he is up right center. He gives helmet to slave, crosses down right.]
Medea [Rises and crosses to Jason]: Have you finished now? I thought I would let you speak on and spread out your shamelessness
Before these women: the way a Tyrannic trader unrolls his rare fabriles: "Do you like it, ladies?"
It is the Dog's daughter's husband. It is a brave person: it has got up its courage—with a guard of four—
To come and look me in the face.
[Jason turns away from her. Medea makes gestures as if to take him in her arms, then steps.]
Jason: how have you pulled me down
To this heel of vile thoughts? I did not use to talk like a common woman. I loved you once:
And I am ashamed of it: [Jason sits on rock right. She crosses two steps left.]
But there are some things
That ought to be remembered by you and me. That blue day when we drove through the Hellespont
Into Greek sea, and the great-shouldered heroes were singing at the oars, and those birds flying
Through the blown foam: that day was too fine I suppose
For Creon's daughter's man to remember
—but you might remember
Whether I cheated my father for you and
tamed the fire-breathing
Brazen-hooved bulls; and whether I saved
your life in the field of the gods; and
you might remember
Whether I poisoned the great serpent and
got you the Golden Fleece; and fled
with you, and killed my brother
When he pursued us, making myself abom-
inable
In my own home; and then in yours I got
your enemy Pelias hacked to death
By his own daughter’s hands—whatever
these fine Corinthian friends of yours
May say against my rapid and tricky wis-
dom: you it has served,
You it has served well:
[JASON starts to speak.]
here are five times, if I counted
right—and all’s not counted—
That your adventure would have been dusty
dead
If I’d not saved you—but now you think
that your adventures are over; you are
safe and high placed in Corinth,
And will need me no more.
It is a bit of a dog, isn’t it,
women? It is well qualified
To sleep with the dog’s daughter.
[JASON makes a gesture of wrath.]
A little fire is a jewel against frost and
darkness.
(During these two speeches third
woman goes up right center, then returns
to woman down right.)
FIRST woman: A great love is a fire
That burns the beams of the roof.
The doorsposts are flaming and the house
falls.
[THIRD woman kneels.]
A great love is a lion in the cattle-pan,
The herd goes mad, the heifers run bawling
And the calves are in their blankets.
Too much love is an armed robber in the
treasury.
He has killed the guards and he walks in
blood.
SECOND woman: And now I see the black
end,
The end of great love, and God save me
from it:
The unbear’d horror, the unbridled hatred,
The vultures tearing a denitest
God keep me clean of those evil beaks.
THIRD woman: What is she doing, that
woman,
Standing like stone, staring?
[SECOND woman looks in
Oh, she has moved now.
MEDEA: Annihilation. The word is pure mu-
sic: annihilation. To annihilate the
past—
Is not possible: but its fruit in the presen-
t—
Can be ripped off. Am I to look in my sons’
eyes
And see Jason’s forever? How could I en-
ure the endless days of those lives
That mix Jason and me? Better to be clean
Bones on the shore. Bones have no eyes
at all, how could they weep? White bones
On the Black Sea shore.
Oh, but that’s far. Not yet.
Corinth must bow first.
FIRST woman: The holy fountains flow up
from the earth,
The smoke of sacrifice flows up from the
earth,
The eagle and the wild swan fly up from the
earth,
To the god's meaning.

**Medea**: [Wearily]: You want a child? What did Apollo
Say to you?
**Aegaeus**: What I must not unloose the hanging
foot of the wine-skin until I return
To the hearth of my fathers.
**Medea**: [Without interest, but understanding
the anatomical reference]: You have never had a child?
**Aegaeus**: No.
And it is bitterness.

*Turns away from her and takes one step down.*

**Medea**: But when misfortune comes it is bitter to have children, and watch their starlike
Faces grow dim to endure it.
**Aegaeus**: When death comes, Medea,
It is, for a childless man, utter despair, darkness,
exinction. One's children
Are the life after death.
**Medea**: [Excited]: Do you feel it so? Do you feel
It so?
Then—if you had a dog-eyed enemy and
needed absolute vengeance— you'd kill
The man's children first. Unchild him, ha,
And then unlike him.
**Aegaeus**: I do not care to think of such
horrors.
I have no enemy.

*Medea rises, making violent movement;
sits again. He stares, and slightly recoils from her. Crosses back up to her.*

What is it? What is the matter, Medea? You are trembling; wild fever
Flames in your eyes.
**Medea**: I am well enough— Fools trouble me, and dogs; but not that— Oh—
**Aegaeus**: What has happened to you?

*The Nurse [Crouches by her, trying to comfort her]*:
My dear— my love—
**Medea**: [Pushes her gently aside; looks up at Aegaeus]: I would not hurt my children.
Their father hurts them.
**Aegaeus**: What do you mean— Jason? What
Has Jason done?
**Medea**: He has betrayed and denied
Both me and them.

**Aegaeus**: Jason has done that? Why? Why?
**Medea**: He has cast me off and married
Creon's young daughter.
And Creon, this very day, is driving us
Into black exile.

**Aegaeus**: Jason consents to that?
**Medea**: He is glad of it.

**Aegaeus**: [Crossing down steps to women
down right]: Why— it's atrocious, it's
past belief.

*The Nurse [Says in Medea's ear]*: Ask him for refuge! Ask him to receive you
In Athens!

**Medea**: [Straight and rigid]: Do you think such men ought to be punish
Aegaeus?
**Aegaeus**: I think it is villainous.
They told me nothing of this.

**Medea**: Do you not think such men ought to be punished, Aegaeus?

*Crossing down steps to second step center.*

**Aegaeus**: Where will you go?

**Medea**: [Solemnly]: If there is any righteousness
On earth or in heaven, they will be
punished.

**Aegaeus**: Where will you go, Medea?

**Medea**: [Crossing left, still on second step]:
What? To death, of course.

*The Nurse [Croses to Aegaeus]*: Oh— Oh— bewilder me, sir,
In the deep storm and ocean of grief, or she
Would ask of you

Refuge in Athens.

**Medea**: [In bitter mockery, seeing Aegaeus
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Would ask of you

Refuge in Athens.
[The chorus sits on first step to right of Augeas.]

MEDEA: I could repay you for it. I know the remedies—that would make a dry stick flame into fire and fruit.

Augeas [Eagerly]: You'd cure my sterility?

MEDEA: I could do so.

Augeas: You are famous for profound knowledge

Of drugs and charms.

[Eagerly.] You’ll come to Athens?

MEDEA: If I choose. If the gods decide it so.

But, Augeas,

Would you protect me if I came? I have certain enemies. If powerful enemies came, buying for my blood,

Would you protect me?


MEDEA: I should need peace and a free mind

While I prepared the medicines to make you well.

Augeas: You'll have them, you'll have them,

Medea. You've seen the huge stones

In the old sacred war-belt of Athens. Come the four ends of the world, they will not break in: you're safe there:

I am your pledge.

[Extends arm, which she later takes.] MEDEA: Will you swear it, Augeas?


Medea [She takes his arm]: I trust you; the oath is formal: your cure Depends on it.

[She crosses below him to down right and then turns to him, raising her hand.]

You swear by the fruitful earth and high shining heaven that you will protect me in Athens Against all men. Swear it.

Augeas [Rises his hand]: I swear by the fruitful earth and high shining heaven to protect you in Athens Against all men.

Both lower their arms.

MEDEA: And if you should break this oath?

Augeas: I will not break it.

MEDEA: If you should break it, the earth Will give you no bread but death, and the sky no light

But darkness.

Augeas [Visibly perturbed]: I will not break it.

MEDEA: You must repeat the words.

Augeas: If I break it, the earth Will give me no bread but death, and the sky no light

But darkness.

MEDEA: You have sworn: the gods have heard you

[Crosses below Augeas to center. Pause.]

Augeas [Unnecessarily]: When will you come to Athens?

[Turning to her.]

MEDEA: To Athens? Oh, To Athens. Why—if I come, if I live—it will be soon. The yoke's

On the necks of the horses.

[Crosses up to top step at door of house.]

—I have some things to do

That men will talk of afterwards with hushed voices while I and my children Safe in Athens laugh. Is that it? Farewell, Augeas.

[She turns abruptly from him: goes slowly, deep in thought, into the house. The doors close.]

Augeas [Staring after her]:

May the gods comfort you, Medea—to you also farewell.

Women of Corinth.

[Three women rise.]

FIRST WOMAN: Fair be the gale behind you, sir, and the way ahead.

[Exit Augeas up right. She turns to nurse.]

What is she plotting in her deep mind? She is juggling with death and life, as a juggler With a black ball and a white ball.

[She slowly goes up to second step, looking at door of house.]

SECOND WOMAN [Crosses to left of the first woman]:

...
Not she is like some distracted city
Sharpening its weapons. Embassies visit her.
The heads of state come to her door;
She receives them dizzily.

The Nurse: I beseech you, women,
Not to speak words against my lady whom
I love. You know that wicked injustice
She has suffered.
[She prays.]
O God, protector of exiles, Lord of the holy
sky, lead us
To the high rock that Athens loves, and the olive
Garland of Athens.
[The Nurse crosses down left and sits
on steps.]

First Woman: Athens is beautiful
As a lamp on a rock.
The temples are marble-shafted; light
Shines and lingers there.
Honey-color among the carved stones
And silver-color on the leaves of the olives.
The maidens are crowned with violets:
Athens and Corinth
Are the two crowns of time.
Second Woman: [Crosses to first woman
and they join hands]-
Mycenae for spear and armor; Sparta
For the stern men and the tall blonde
women; and Thebes I remember,
Old Thebes and the seven gates in the gay
walls.
But rather I praise Athens, the ivory, the golden,
The gray-eyed Virgin, her city.
And I also praise Corinth of the beautiful
fountains.
On the fair plains between the two gulfs.

First Woman: God-favored cities of the Greek
world.
Fortunate those that dwell in them, happy
that behold them.
Second Woman: How can one wish to die?
How can that woman
Be drowned in sorrow and bewilderment with hatred?
[The bolt on door is heard opening.
Mered enters and stands in doorway.]
For only to be alive and to see the light
Is beautiful. Only to see the light;
To see a blade of young grass,
Or the gray face of a stone.
First Woman: [Pointing toward Medea]:
Hush.
Medea: [Proudly and falsely]: As you say.
What a marvelous privilege it is
Merely to be alive. And how foolish it
would be
To spend the one day of life that remains to me—at least in Corinth—this
tag
end of a day
On tears and hatred! Rather I should re-
join, and sing, and offer gifts; and as
To my enemies—
I will be reconciled with them.
First Woman: [Amazed]: Reconciled with
them?
[Three Women cross a few steps to
Medea.]
Medea: As you say. Reconciled. Why
should they hate me?
Surely I can appease those people.
They say that gold will buy anything; even
friendship, even love: at least in
Greece
Among you civilized people, you reason-
able and civilized Hellens. In fact,
We've seen it happen. They bought Jason;
Jason's love. Well—
I shall buy theirs.
I still have one or two of the treasures
That I brought from home, things of
pure precious gold, which a god
Gave to the kings of my ancestors.
[The light darkens, a cloud passing
over the sun, harp effect offstage. The
Three Women huddle together.]
Is it late? It seems
to me
That the light darkens.
[To the Nurse.]
Is it evening?

The Nurse: [Trembling]: No—No—A cloud.
Medea: I hope for thunder: let the sky
rage; my gifts
[Enter two slaves from door with gift.]
Kneel on top steps.
Will shine the brighter.—Listen, old
woman! I want you
[To Jason and tell him—tell him—
Tell him that I am sick of hating and
weary of evil.
I wish for peace.
[Medea crosses and stands between two
slaves.]
I wish to send precious gifts to that pale
girl with the yellow hair
Whom he has married: tell him to come
And take them—and to kiss his boys
Before we go into exile. Tell him to come
speedily. Now run, run, find him.
[Medea turns her head away.]
The Nurse: [Crossing to women stage
center]: Oh, I'll go. I'll run.

Vocabulary
At the end of each act in this play—and
the other plays that follow—you will find a
list of words that have appeared in the
writing. The vocabulary words which will
be your responsibility to know are italicized
and accompanied by their immediate context.
Some of the words may already be familiar
words; others will be new. Those
that are unfamiliar or puzzling you should
put in your notebook. Before going to the
dictionary though, try to guess the mean-
ing of the word from its context, or find
the word in the selection and see if you
can guess its meaning from the way it is
used in the complete sentence. The num-
bers in parentheses will help you locate
the word in the selection; they indicate
page: column, line. Thus (43:2:17) indicates
page 43, column 2, line 17. After making a
guess at the meaning of the word, check
with the dictionary.

The following words appear in the selec-
tion you have just read:
for then if misfortune comes it is unen-
durable; it drives you mad... (12:1:16).
Her lamentation. She is beautiful and deep
in grief... (12:1:14). We Greeks believe
that solitude is very dangerous, great pas-
sions grow into monsters... (13:1:17).
Consider that I believed I was alone; and
I have some provocation... (13:2:25).
whoever withholds anything is thought
sullen and proud... (13:2:31).
I wish to avoid any appearance of being
his home, my exile. My endless exile... (14:
1:17). The people of my race are some-
what rash and impetuous... (14:1:30). I
have decided that you must leave this
land at once and go into banishment... (14:
2:39); and beg a bread-crust and be
derided... (15:1:19); I will tell you
frankly: because you nourish rancors... will
(15:1:31); if some god would lend
me a touch of eloquence... (15:1:38).
you'd see how pure it is of any harm or
malice toward you or your household
(16:2:14); I have seen this man's arro-
gances; I watched as he hated him... (17:3:
37); Time and again I've soothed down
Creon's indignation... (19:2:12); What
refuge does your prudent kindness advise?
(20:1:35); Poor misused hand; poor
defeated arm... (21:1:38); Annihilation.
The word is pure music: annihilation... (21:
2:30); Help me now: to remember in
my mind the use of the venonous fire
(22:2:8); From Delphi, where I want
to consult the ancient oracle of Apollo
(22:2:39); and as to my enemies—I
will be reconciled with them (25:6:16).
Study Questions and Activities

1. What character provides the necessary exposition or background for understanding Medea's situation? What words does this character use to describe Medea's state of mind?

2. When is Medea first heard by the audience? (Give the line that is her first cue for speaking.) When is Medea first seen on stage? (Give the line that is her cue for entering on the stage.)

3. What tactics does Medea employ to make Creon delay his order of exile? What reason does Medea give for wanting more time? Why does she, in fact, want more time?

4. Whom does Medea mean when, in her scene with Jason, she speaks of "the dog's daughter's husband" (page 19)? Who is "the dog"? Who is "the dog's daughter"?

5. Aegus' meeting with Medea helps her in what ways. Aegus unwittingly gives her an idea about how to hurt Jason. What idea is this? He also makes her a promise. What promise?

6. The Nurse and Medea have opposite feelings about death. What speech by Medea most strongly expresses her feelings about death? What speech by the Nurse reveals her feelings?

7. Compare the values of Jason and Medea as revealed in their one scene together. What does Jason seem to value most? What does Medea value most? How do the differences in their values nurture their hatred and contempt for each other?

8. Creon refers to Medea as the "woman of the stone forehead" (page 14). How is this an effective metaphor for Medea? The playwright employs images of stone and rock throughout Act I. Cite at least five lines where stone is the metaphor used by Medea and other characters.

9. Do the three Greek women sympathize with Medea? How well do they understand her? Cite specific lines to support your position.

10. Creon says to Medea: "I acknowledge, Medea, that you have some cause for grief." (page 15). Does the tone of this remark show that Creon understands Medea's suffering—or that he fails to understand it?

11. Why does Creon fear Medea?

12. As Creon exits, saying, he wants no thanks for yielding a half a day of time, Medea remarks: "I will thank you. And the whole world will hear of it." What is the ironic meaning that underlies Medea's remark?

13. An actress in the role of Medea will probably change the tone of her speech as she moves from one scene to another. If you were directing this actress, what tone would you tell her to adopt in the scene with Creon? What tone should she adopt in the scene with Jason? What should be her tone in the scene with Aegus?

14. Choose a scene from Act I that involves the three Greek Women. Act out this scene in class following as closely as possible the playwright's stage directions. Then obtain from the library a copy of Euripides' Medea. Find the speech by the chorus that corresponds to the scene you have just performed. Compare the speech by Euripides' chorus with the lines by Jeffers' three Greek Women. What are the important differences between them?

Remember, in Act I, Medea's chilling comment: "It would be good to stand here a thousand years and think of nothing but the deaths of three persons." We are now ready for Medea's murderous thoughts in the first act to become murderous deeds in the second.

As Act II begins, we see Medea sitting on the same bare stage and holding in her lap a glittering golden cloak. We know that this is Medea's gift for Jason's Greek bride; we know too that it is a gift of death. To make her revenge all the sweeter, Medea uses Jason himself as her unwitting agent in carrying out her first two murders. Wanting to believe that Medea has become reasonable at last, Jason blindly walks into her trap. Medea assures him that her golden gift will help to rescue their two boys from exile. Jason believes her.

In her scene with Jason, Medea is plotting not just one murder, not just a double murder, but something even more horrible. She does not want Jason to suffer merely physical agony. That would be too kind, she thinks. Instead, she reserves for Jason the kind of suffering that she herself has known—long, bitter days of mental anguish. Throughout her meeting with Jason, Medea tests his feelings for his children. Is his attachment to them, she wonders, as strong as her own attachment had once been to Jason? If he loses them, will he suffer as much as she has? She observes the pride that he takes in his boys. Only then is she ready to endure the self-torture of the climactic moment of revenge.

Despite the cruelty of Medea's revenge, there may still be members of the audience who sympathize more with Medea than with Jason. Triumphant in her last moment, Medea delivers the last line of the play:

Now I go forth
Under the cold eyes of heaven—those weakness-despising stars—not me they scorn.

We ask ourselves, as the curtain falls, how we can still admire a woman whose deeds we loathe.
Act II

MEDIA: These are the gifts I am sending to the young bride; this golden wreath And this woven-gold veil. They are not without value; there is nothing like them in the whole world, or at least The Western world; the God of the Sun gave them to my father’s father, and I have kept them In the deepest chest for some high occasion; which has now come. I have great joy in giving these jewels to Creon’s daughter, for the glory of life consists of being generous. To one’s friends, and—mercyless to one’s enemies—you know what a friend she has been to me. All Corinth knows. The slaves talk of it. The old stones in the walls Have watched and laughed.

[MEDIA looks at the gold cloth, and strokes it cautiously with her hand. It seems to scratch her fingers. THIRD WOMAN has come nearer to look; now starts backward.]

MEDIA: She, it is almost alive. Gold is a living thing; such pure gold. [MUSE enters from up right; crosses to foot of steps. But when her body has warmed, it how it will shine!]

[To the nurse.]

Why doesn’t he come? What keeps him? [Gently terrified]: Oh, my lady: presently. I have but now returned from him. He was beyond the gate, watching the race—where a monstrous thing Had happened: a young mare broke from the chariot And tore with her teeth a stallion. MEDIA: [Stands up, shakes out the golden cloak, which again softens. She folds it cautiously, lays it in the leather case. The light has darkened again. She looks anxiously at the clouded sun.] He takes his time, eh? It is intolerable To sit and wait. [To the serving women.]

Take these into the house. Keep them at hand For when I call.

[They take them. MEDIA moves restlessly, under extreme nervous tension; speaks to the nurse. NURSE crosses below steps to stage left, then up two steps.]

You say that a mare attacked a stallion? MEDIA: She tore him cruelly. I saw him being led away; a black race: his blood ran down From the throat to the fetlocks. MEDIA: You’re sure he’s coming. You’re sure?

NURSE: He said he would. MEDIA: Let him make haste, then! SECOND WOMAN: [She crosses to left below curtain.] Enlightening irrational things Have happened lately; the face of nature is flawed with omens.

FIRST WOMAN: [Crosses to left, joining second woman.] Yesterday evening a slave Came up to the harbor-gate, carrying a basket Of new-caught fish; one of the fish took fire And burned in the wet basket with a high flame: the thing was witnessed By many persons.

THIRD WOMAN [Crosses left of other two women, joining them.]: And a black cloud was seen Gliding through the market-place—

MEDIA: [Aburstly, approaching the woman.] Have you told me yet: do you not think that Creon’s daughter Will be glad of those gifts?

FIRST WOMAN: O Media, too much wealth Is sometimes dreadful.

MEDIA: She’ll be glad, however. She’ll take them and put them on, she’ll wear them, she’ll strut in them, She’ll peacock in them—I see him coming now.—[THREE WOMEN retire to up left corner. NURSE sits below left pillar.]

whole palace will admire her.—Stand away from me, women, While I make my sick peace.

[MEDIA crosses way down right as JASON enters up right to stage center, nurse points at MEDIA when he goes across the scene to meet JASON, but more and more slowly, and stops. Her attitude indicates her aversion.]

JASON: Well, I have come. I tell you plainly, Not for your sake; the children’s. Your woman says that you have your wits again, and are willing To look beyond your own woes. [MEDIA is silent. JASON observes her and says.]

It appears doubtful. [She turns from him.]

—Where are the children? I have made inquiry; I can find fosterage for them In Epidaurus; or any other of several cities That are Creon’s friends. I’ll visit them from time to time, and watch That they’re well kept.

MEDIA: [With suppressed violence]: You mean—take them from me!

Be careful, Jason, I am not patient yet. [More quietly.]

I am the one who labored in pain to bear them, I cannot Smile while I lose them. But I am learning: I am learning.—No, Jason: I will not give up my little ones To the cold care of strangers.

Hand faces, harsh hands. It will be far bet- ter for them to share My wandering ocean of beggary and bleak exile:

I love them, Jason. Only if you would keep them and care for them here in Corinth, I might consent.

JASON: Gladly—but they are exiled.

MEDIA: —In your own house.

JASON: Gladly I’d do it—but you understand They are exiled, as you are. I asked Creon and he refused it.

MEDIA: You asked Creon to take my chil- dren from me? [She reaches her hands toward him.]

Forgive me, Jason. As I do you. [Crosses up steps to his right.]

We have had too much wrath, and our acts Are closing on us. On me, I mean. Retribu- tion is from the gods, and it breaks our hearts: but you
Feeling no guilt, you fear nothing, nothing can touch you. It is wonderful to stand serene above fate.

While earthlings wince. If it lasts. It does not always last.

—Do you love the children, Jason?


MEDEA: Oh, but that's not enough. If I am to give them up to you—be patient with me, I mean. You remember you first. And very deeply; to the quick. If anything happens to them,

Would you be grieved?

JASON: Nothing will happen to them, Medea, if in my care. Rest your mind on it.

MEDEA: [She crosses up to step in back of JASON:]

You must pardon me; it is not possible to be certain of that. If they were—killed and their blood

Ran on the floor of the house or down the deep earth—

Would you be grieved?

JASON: You have a sick mind. What a weak thing a woman is, always dreaming of evil.

MEDEA: Answer me!

JASON: Yes, after. I'd cut their killer into red bricks—I'd grieve.

MEDEA: That is true: vengeance.

Makes grief bearable. —But —Creon's daughter, your wife—no doubt will be—

Many other boys. —But, if something should happen to—Creon's daughter.

JASON: Enough, Medea. Too much. Be silent!

MEDEA: I am to conclude that you love

Creon's daughter—

More than your sons. They'll have to take the sad journey with me.

[To the nurse]

Tell the boys to come out

And bid their father farewell.

[The nurse goes into the house.]

JASON [Coming to her and taking her arm]: I could take them from you by force, Medea.

MEDEA: [Violently:]

Try it, you! [Controlling herself.]

No, Creon decided otherwise; he said

[Jason crosses down right as if to go.]

they will share my exile. —Come, Jason, let's be friends at last!

[The sons come out with their vuvus, followed by the nurse. Jason makes to clasp her arm. She pulls away to center.]

I am quite patient now; I have learned—

Come, boys; come. [Boys run straight to Medea.]

Speak to your father.

[The nurse and vuvus remain on top step at either side of door. They shrink back.]

No, no, we’re friends again. We’re not angry any more.

JASON: [Has gone eagerly to meet them on the steps. He drops to one knee to be more nearly level with them, but they are shy and reluctant]:

Big boys. Tall fellows, ha?

You've grown up since I saw you.

Give him

[She turns, and stands rigidly turned away, her face sharply with pain.]

your hands.

The nurse [To Jason]: I think he's afraid of you, sir.

JASON [To the younger boy]:

What? You'll learn, my man,

[During this speech Elder boy crosses to him. He picks him up.]

Not to fear me. You'll make your enemies run away from you

When you grow up.

[To the elder boy.]

And you, Captain,

How would you like a horn-tipped bow to hunt rabbits with? Wolves, I mean.

[ Takes elder boy by the hand and crosses with him to rock right. He sits

YOUNGER BOY ON HIS LAP. ELDER BOY SITS ON FLOOR. HE PLAYS WITH THE BOYS. THEY ARE LESS SHY OF HIM NOW.]

FIRST WOMAN [Coming close to Medea]: Don't give them to him, Medea. If you do it he will ache forever.

SECOND WOMAN: You have refuge; take them there.

ATHENS IS BEAUTIFUL—

MEDEA [Fiercely]: Be silent! Look at him: he loves them—ah? Therefore his dear children

Are not going to that city but a darker city, where no games are played, no music is heard.—Do you think

I am a cow lowing after the calf? Or a bitch with pups, licking The hand that struck her? Watch and see. Watch this man, woman: he is going to weep. I think

He is going to weep blood, and quite soon, and much more

Than I have wept. Watch and keep silence. [She goes toward the caucel on the steps.]

JASON, ARE THE BOYS DEAR TO YOU? I THINK I am satisfied that you love them.

These two young heroes.

[Jason stands up and turns to her, one of the boys clinging to each of his hands. He has made friends with them.]

MEDEA [She weeps]: Oh—Oh—Oh!

JASON: —God’s hand, Medea, what is it?

What is the matter?

MEDEA [Makes with both hands a gesture of pushing down something, flings her head back proudly]: Nothing. It is held carefully by the cases: don't touch the gold.

Or it might—tarnish.

JASON: Why? These are king's treasures. You shouldn’t, Medea. It’s too much.

CREON: Has gold enough of its own.

MEDEA: Oh—if she'll wear them. What should I want with woven gold vortices—

BLACK is my wear. The woman ought to be very happy.

[Throw wedding ring in box with cloak.]
With such jewels—and such a husband—ah? Her sun is rising.
[Medea crosses left.] 
mine going down—I hope 
To a red sunset.—The little gold wreath is 
pretty, isn't it?
[Younger boy holds it up to Jason.] 
Jason [Doubtfully]: It looks like fire—
Medea: Vine leaves; the flashing 
Arrow-sharp leaves. They have weight, though.
[Boys put down boxes.] 
Gold is too heavy a burden 
for little hands. Carry them, you, 
Until you come to the palace.
[Jason takes gold wreath; exits right, followed by tutor with cloak. Jason 
follows with boys by the hand.] 
—Farewell, sweet boys; brave 
little wandering pilgrims from the black 
ave 
To the white desert: take the stuff in, be 
sure you lay it in her own hands. 
Come back and tell me what happens.
[Crosse up to front of pillar right and 
waive goodbye to them as they leave. She 
turns abruptly away from them.] 
Tell me what happens.
[The boys go out reluctantly. Jason 
holding their hands.] 
Rejoice, women. 
The gifts are given; the bait is laid.
The gods roll their great eyes over Creon's 
house and quietly smile:
That robe of bright-flowing gold, that 
bride-veil, that fish-net 
To catch a young slender salmon—not 
mute, she'll sing; her delicate body 
writhes in the meshes, 
The golden wreath binds her bright head 
with light; she'll dance, she'll sing 
loudly:
Would I were there to hear it, that proud 
one howling.
[She crosses to center between pillars] 
—Look, the sun's out again, the clouds 
are gone, 
All's gay and clear. All I wish the deep 
earth would open and swallow us— 
Before I do what comes next. 
I wish all life would perish,
[Crosse down to third step and sits.] 
and the holy gods in high heaven die, 
before my little ones. 
Come home to my hands.
First Woman [Going to Medea]: 
It would be better for you, Medea, if the earth 
Opened her jaws and took you down into 
darkness.
But one thing you will not do, for you can't: 
You will not hurt your own children, 
though wrath like plague-bolts 
Aches, your mind in a fire-bake 
Beasts the purple apples of pain—no blood— 
Lapping 
Beast of the field, she-bear nor lioness. 
Nor the lean wolf-bitch, 
Hurls her own tender wheals, nor the 
yellow-eyed. 
Scythe-beaked and storm-shouldered 
Eagle that tears the lambs has ever made 
prey 
Of the fruit of her own tree— 
Medea: How could that girl's death slake me? 
Second Woman [Coming forward from 
the others]: I am sick with terror. 
I'll run to the palace, I'll warn them. 
Medea: Will you?—Go. Go if you will. 
God and my vengeful goddess are doing 
these things: you cannot prevent them, 
but you could easily fail 
In the same fire. 
Third Woman [Retreating]: I am afraid to go. 
Medea: You are wise. Anyone 
Running between me and my justice will 
ruin. 
What no man wants. 
First Woman: Not justice; vengeance. 
You have suffered evil, you wish to inflict 
evil. 
Medea: I do according to nature what I 
have to do. 
First Woman: I have heard evil 
Answering evil as thunder answers the 
lightning. 
A great voice in the hollow sky, 
And all that they say is death. I have heard 
vengeance 

Like an echo under a hill answering 
vengeance. 
Great hollow voices: all that they say is 
death. 
Second Woman: The sword speaks 
And the spear answers: the city is desolate. 
The nations remember old wrongs and 
destroy each other. 
And no man binds up their wounds. 
First Woman: But Justice 
Builds a firm house. 
Medea: The doors of her house are 
vengeance. 
Second Woman: I dreamed that someone 
gave gold for evil, and the world was 
amazed. 
Medea [Rises, crosses up between pillar and 
column right]: Only a coward or a madman gives good 
for evil.—Did you bear a thin music 
Like a girl screaming? Or did I perhaps 
Imagine it? Hark, it is music. 
Third Woman [Crossing towards center 
below steps]: Let me go to Medea! 
I'll be mute, I'll speak to no one. I cannot 
bear— 
Let me go to my house! 
Medea: You will stay here, 
And watch the end. 
[The women are beginning to kill like 
scared cattle, huddled and circular.] 
Now you will be quiet, you women. You 
came to see 
How the barbarian woman endures 
beatings: watch and you'll know. 
Second Woman [Kneels]: My heart is a 
shaken. 
Of terror: the thin black wine 
Spills over all my flesh down to my feet. 
First Woman: She fled from her father's 
house in a storm of blood, 
In a blood-storm she flew up from 
Thessaly, 
Now here and dark over Corinth she 
widens 
Wings to ride up the twisted whirlwind 
And talons to hold with— 
Let me flee this dark place and the pillared 
doorway. 
Second Woman: I hear the man-wolf on the 
snow hill 
Howl to the soaring moon— 
Third Woman: The demon comes in 
through the locked door 
And strangles the child— 
Second Woman: Blood is the seed of blood, 
hundredfold the harvest, 
The gleaners that follow it, their feet are 
crimson—
First Woman: I see the whirlwind hanging 
from the black sky, 
Like a twisted rope, 
Like an erect serpent, its tail tears the 
earth, 
It is braided of dust and lightning, 
Who will fly in? Let me hide myself 
From these night-shrining pillars and the 
dark door. 
Medea: Have patience, women. Be quiet. I 
Am quite sure something has happened; 
presently someone 
Will bring us news. 
Third Woman: Look! The children are 
coming— 
Second Woman [Rises]: 
They have bright things in their hands: 
their faces are clear and joyous; was all 
that fear 
A dream, a dream? 
[Medea crosses to pillar left. The tutor 
enters up right with the boys. The elder 
boy carries a decorated bow and arrows; 
the younger boy has a doll, a brightly 
painted wooden warrior, Medea, gazing at 
the boys, retreats slowly backward from 
them.] 
The tutor [Crossing up to Medea on 
top step; boys stand behind him on second 
and third steps]: Rejoice, Medea, I bring good news. The 
princess graciously 
Received your presents and smiled; it is 
peace between you. She has welcomed 
the little boys, they are safe from exile. 
They'll be kept here. Their father is joyful. 
Medea [Coldly, her hands clenched in 
the effort of self-control]: 
Yes? 
The tutor: All Creon's house is well 
pleased. When we first went in
The serving-women came and fondled the children; it was rumored through all the household that you and Jason were at peace again; like word of a victory running through a wide city, when people gather in the streets to be glad together; and we brought the boys into the hall; we put those costly gifts in their hands; then Jason led them before the Princess. At first she looked angrily at them and turned away, but Jason said, "Don't be angry at your friends. You ought to love those whom I love. Look what they've brought you, dear," and she looked and saw in the dark boxes the brilliant gold; she smiled then, and marveled at it.

[He turns to them and younger boy crosses up to him]

Afterwards she caressed the children; she even said that this little one's hair was like fine-spun gold. Then Jason gave them these two and we came away.

MEdEA: Yes—if this was all, if this were all, old man—I'd have your bony loins beaten to a blood-froth For the good news you bring.

TUTOR: My lady—

MEdEA: There's more, however It will come soon.

[The sons skilfully approach her and show their eyes. She, with violent self-constraint, looks at them; but folds her hands in her cloak; not to touch them.]

ELDER BOY [Crosses to her. Drawing the little box]: Look, Mother.

MEdEA [Suddenly weeping]: Take them away from me! I cannot bear. I cannot bear. The Tutor: Children, come quickly.

[Shepherds them up the steps, and disappears in the house.]}

FIRST WOMAN: If there is any mercy or forbearance in heaven let it reach down and touch that dark mind of—

SLAVE: A young slave dashes in up right, panting and distraught. He has run from Creon's house: Where is Medea? [Slave crosses to base of steps right, throwing himself across them.]

SECOND WOMAN: What has happened? What horror drives you?

Are spears hunting behind you?

SLAVE: He sees Medea on the steps: Flee for your life, Medea! I am Jason's man, but you were good to me. While I was here in the house, can you hear me? Escape, Medea!

MEdEA: I hear you. Draw breath; say quietly. What you have seen. It must have been something notable, the way your eyes bulge in the whites.

SLAVE: If you have horses, Medea, drive or a boat on the shore,

SAIL: [Rises and crosses down stage right.]

MEdEA: But first you must tell me about the beautiful girl who was lately married.

SLAVE: Ooh! MEdEA: your great man's daughter. SLAVE: Ooh.

MEdEA: Are they all quite well?

SLAVE: I saw no one, then they were. I saw no one, then they were.

SLAVE: My eyes ring with the crying, my eyes are ached. She put the gold garments—

Did you do it, Medea?

MEdEA: I did it.

SLAVE: Oooh!!

SLAVE: Speak quietly.

SLAVE: You are avenged. You are horribly avenged. It is too much. The gods will hate you.

[Collapses on podium.]

MEdEA [Aid, but still sitting]: That is my care. Did anyone die with her?

SLAVE: Creon! MEdEA: Third woman! Oooh!!!

MEdEA [Solemnly]: Where is pride now? Tell me all that you saw. Speak slowly.

SLAVE: He tried to save her—she died! Corinth is masterless. All's in an amased confusion, and some are looting, but they'll avenge him—[He hears someone coming behind him.]

I'm going on

Some one is going to die.

[He runs left to the far side of the scene, and exits while Medea speaks. Meanwhile the light has been changed, and soon the sun will set.]

MEdEA: Here comes a more stable witness. [The nurse enters from up right.]

The Nurse: Has the youth from up right.

Old friend: Catch your breath; take your time. I want the whole tale, every gesture and cry. I have labored for this. The Nurse: Death is turned loose! I've hobbled and run, and fallen—[Crosses to fourth step and sits.]

MEdEA: Please.

Nurse: I am very happy: go slowly.

MEdEA sits and puts her head in nurse's lap.

Tell me thou'st things in order from the beginning.

As when you used to dress me, when I was little, in my father's house: you used to say "One thing at a time; one thing and then the next."

[The light has changed to a flare of sunset.]

TWO women have assembled themselves after nurse's entrance in following fashion: first sitting first step center, second standing to left of her, third standing to left of second,]

MEdEA: My eyes are bluddled. My throat's like a dry straw—There was a long mirror on the wall, and when her eyes saw it...

After the children had gone with Jason—she put her hands in the case and took those gold things—and I watched, for I feared something might happen to her, but I never thought So horribly—she placed on her little head the bright golden wreath, she gathered the flowing gold robe Around her white shoulders, and slender flanks—

MEdEA rises; crosses to below rock down right.]

And gazed at the girl in the metal mirror, going back and forth on tiptoe almost; But suddenly horror began. I—Oh, ah—

MEdEA [Crosses up to right of nurse, shaking her by the shoulders]: You are not suffering. You saw it, you did not feel it. Speak plainly.

The Nurse: Her face went white; she staggered a few steps, bending over, and fell into the great throne-chair; then a serving woman Began to call for water thinking she had fainted, but saw the foam Started on her lips, and the eyes rolling, and screamed instead. Then some of them Ran after Jason, others ran to fetch Creon; and that doomed girl Frightfully crying started up from the chair; she can, she was like a torch, and the gold crown

MEdEA rises up to door of house writhing. Like a comet streamed fire; she tore at it but it clung to her head; the golden cloak Was white-hot, flaying the flesh from the living bones: blood mixed with fire ran down, she fell, she burned On the floor, writhing. Then Creon came and flung himself on her, hoping to choke That rage of flame, but it ran through him, his own agony Made him forget his daughter's. The fire struck to the flesh, it lingered on him; he tried to stand up. He tore her body and his own. The burnt flesh broke. In lumps from the bones.

[She covers her eyes with her hands.]

I have finished. They lie there.

Eyeless, distarced, untouchable; stilled of smoking flesh—

[Near a scream.] No!

I have no more.

MEdEA [Crossing down to nurse; takes her arms]: I want all.

Had they died when you came away?
THE NURSE: I am not able—have mercy—
No, the breathless
Still whistled in the black mouths. No one could touch them.
Jason stood in their smoke, and his hands tore
His unshaved hair.
VERONICA: You have told good news well; I'll reward you.
As for those people, they will soon die.
Their woes are over too soon.
She fastened down, then paces up
right and back down right; sees women at
end of speech and crosses to them.

Mine are not.

JASON'S ARE NOT.

[She turns abruptly from them, toward the
boys, who have been standing by the
doorway, fascinated, not comprehending
but watching.]

My little falcons!—Listen to me!
Laugh and be glad: we have accomplished it.
Our enemies were great and powerful, they
 were full of cold pride, they ruled all
this country—they are down in the ashes.

[Stirring on steps with boys.]

Crying like dogs, cowering in the ashes, in
their own ashes. They went down with the
sun, and the sun will rise.
And not see them again. He will think
"Perhaps they are sleeping, they
feasted late.
At noon they will walk in the garden." Oh,
no, oh, no.
They will not walk in the garden. No one
has ever injured me but suffered more
Then I had suffered.

Therefore this final sacrifice I intended glares in my eyes
Like a lion on a ridge.

[Turning back to the boys.]

We still hate, you know; a person nearer than these,
more vile, more contemptible.
Whom I— I cannot. If he were my own
hands I would cut him off, or my eyes,
I would gouge him out.

But not my woman.

[She turns from them.]

The Nurse: So Jason will
be able to say, "I have lost much,
But not all: I have children: My sons are
well."

[She stands staring, agonized, one hand
picking at the other.]

No! I want him crushed, boneless, crawling—
I have no choice.

[Resolutely, to the three women. She
rises and crosses down left to woman]

You there! You thought me
soft and submissive like a common
woman—who takes a blow
And cries a little, and she wipes her face
And runs about the housework, loving her
master? I am not such a woman.

First Woman: Awake, Medea! Awake
from the evil dream. Catch up your
children and flee.
Farther than Athens, farther than Thrace
Or Spata, flee to the world's end.
Fire and death have done your bidding.
Are you not fed full with evil?
Is it not enough?

MENEA: No, Loathing is endless.
Hate is a bottomless cup, I will pour and
pour.

[She turns fiercely to the boys.]

Children—
[Suddenly melting.] O my
little ones!
What was I dreaming?—My babes, my
own!
[She kneels to them, taking their
hands.]

Never, never, never,
Shall my own babes be hurt. Not if every
war-hound and spear-slave in headless
Corinth
Were on the track.

[Still kneeling; to women.]

Look, their sweet lips are trembling: look, women, the little
mouths! I frightened them
With those wild words; they stood and
faced me, they never flinched.

Look at their proud young eyes! My eagles,
my golden ones!

[She kisses them, then holds them off
and gazes at them.]

O sweet small faces—like the pale wild
roses
That blossom where the cliffs break toward the
brilliant sea: the delicate form and
color, the dear, dear fragrance
Of your sweet breath—
[She continues gazes at them; her face
changes.]

The Nurse [Sits up]: My lady, make haste,
haste!
Take them and flee. Flee away from here!
Someone will come soon.

MENEA still gazes at the boys. Oh—listen to me.

Spears will come, death will come. All
Corinth is in confusion and headless
anarchy, unkinked and amanac
Around that horror you made: therefore they linger: yet in a moment
Its avengers come!

MENEA looks up from staring at the
boys. Her face has changed; the love has
gone out of it. She speaks in a colorless,
tired voice.

MENEA: I have a sword in the house.
I can defend you.

[She stands stilly and takes the
boys by their shoulders; holds the elder
in front of her, toward women: speaks with
cold intensity.]

Would you say that this child
Has Jason's eyes?
[The women are silent, in terror gazing
at her.]

—They are his cubs. They have his
blood.
As long as they live I shall be mixed with
him.

[Crosses to pillar up right. She looks
down at the boys; speaks tenderly but
hopelessly.]

Children:

It is evening. See, evening has come. Come,
little ones.
Into the house.

[soys cross to her; arms about her
waist.]

Eveing brings all things home.

It brings the bird to the bough and the
lamb to the fold—
And the child to the mother.
[She pushes the boy gently into house.

We must think too much: people go mad.
If they think too much.
[In the doorway, behind boys, she
f lies up her hands as if to tear her hair
out by the roots; then quietly goes in. The
great door closes; the iron noise of the bell
is driven home.

The Nurse: No! [She pushes toward the door, helpless,
hers hand reaching up and beating feebly
against the foot of the door.]

First Woman: What is going to happen?

Second Woman: That crown of brotters
[They speak like somnambulists, and
stand frozen. There is a moment of sti
ence.]

Child's voice [In the house, shrill, broken
off]: Mother Ah—

The women press toward the door,
crying more or less simultaneously.

The women: Medea, no! Prevent her! Save them!
Open the door—
[They listen for an answer.]

Third Woman: A god is here, Medea, he
calls to you, he forbids you—

[Stretches, has risen, and beats feebly on
the door, slopping with the wet. Women
stand beside her, very erect, with
her back against the door, covering her
eyes with her hands. They are silent.]

Elder Boy's voice [Clear, but as if hypnotized]: Mother—Mother—all!

Medea: Aaahhhhhhh!!

[Lamentation—weeping—is heard in
the house. It rises and falls, and continues
to the end, but often needlessly. It is
ever nightfall.]

The Nurse [Limping down the steps
and says]: There is no hope in heaven or
earth. It is done. It was destined when
she was born, now it is done.

[Waiting.]

Oh, oh, oh.

Third Woman [With terror, looking into the
shadow]: Who is coming?
Well, answer!

FIRST WOMAN [Pointing toward Creon's house]: Death is there; death is here. But you are both blind and deaf; how can I tell you?

JASON: [In silent, then says slowly]: But—The—Children are well?

FIRST WOMAN: I do not know Whether Medea lives or is dead.

JASON [Flinges down the sword and sets his shoulders back; the door; pushes in vain]: Open! Open! Open! [Returns halfflying down the steps, and says pitifully.] Women, I am alone.

Help me.

JASON: Are you struck dumb? Are you shielding her? Where is Medea?

FIRST WOMAN: You caused these things. She was faithful to you and you broke her heart.

Horror is here.

JASON: Unaccompanied. There was no reason—Tell me at once—Whether she took my boys with her? Those people would kill them for what she has done: I'd rather save them Than punish her. Help me in this.

JASON: [With a queer wryness, for he is trying to cheat himself out of believing what he dreads. He glances at the door, furtively, over his shoulder.]: Is she lying in there? Honorable at least in her death.—I might have known it. [Then says silently.]

JASON: No answer.

JASON: I am more afraid of the clinging contagion of his misfortunes. A man that slips are destroying.

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JASON: You struck dumb? Are you shielding her? Where is Medea?

FIRST WOMAN: You caused these things. She was faithful to you and you broke her heart.
women propose? Whose idea is finally accepted?

3. What "good news" does the Tutor bring? What is Medea's reaction to his news? What other news does she expect "will come soon"? Who finally tells Medea the news that pleases her most?

4. Medea murders her children behind a closed door. How do you think they are killed? Which lines in the play suggest what weapon is used?

5. If Medea's prophecy is right, where and how will Jason spend the rest of his life? How will he die?

6. "Grind, crush, bum, Destruction, Al—Al—..." Each of these words, uttered by Medea early in Act I (page 11), takes on a very specific meaning in Act II. For example, how is the word "bum" used in the second act? How is the examination "al" used? What "destruction" takes place in this act? Whose unhappy fate is it to know the full meaning of the words "grind" and "crush"?

7. In the final scene, Jason cannot find his sword. Medea says: "Your sword you want there is. Not that step, the next lower. No, the next higher" (page 41). What is the significance of these lines? What is Medea attempting to do here?

8. After seeing his murdered children, Jason asks Medea, "Are you pure evil?" (page 41). How would you answer his question? Does the playwright think that Medea is "pure evil"? Is there some good in Medea, do you think, that Jason himself? Why?

9. In their last effort to prevent disaster, the three Greek Women try to explain Medea's difference to the Judge and "vengence" (pages 34-35). But Medea sees no difference. In class, read aloud this brief debate about the meaning of justice. End with Medea's line: "Only a coward or a madman gives good for evil." Who better expresses your view of justice—Medea or the three Greek Women? Why?

10. Horrified by the deaths he has seen, the Slave asks Medea: "Did you do it?" Medea answers: "I did it" (page 36). In what tone of voice would Medea make her simple confession, "I did it." Write a paragraph describing how the actress portraying Medea should deliver this line. Give reasons for your interpretation.

11. Bring to class a copy of Euripides' Medea. Read aloud Euripides' final scene between Jason and Medea. Compare it with the final scene in Robinson Jeffers' Medea. What significant differences do you find between the two versions. Does either version treat Jason as a sympathetic character? Does either version (or both) treat Medea as a sympathetic character? Give reasons for your conclusion.

Vocabulary

Synonyms

Test your understanding of the words used by Robinson Jeffers in Medea and identify for you in the vocabulary list after each act.

Exercise 1: Adjectives

A synonym is a word that is similar in meaning to another word. Find a synonym for each of the adjectives in capital letters below. Remember that only an adjective can be a synonym for another adjective. You can then automatically disqualify from the list of choices in this exercise any word that is a verb or a noun.

1. INTRANSITIVE (a) despise (b) dislike (c) 돌bearable (d) unpunishable

2. IRATIONAL (a) passion (b) anger (c) reasonable (d) unreasonable

3. IMPAVERSIVE (a) drinkness (b) wicked (c) wild (d) crying

4. PRUDENT (a) sober (b) delight (c) wisdom (d) crude

5. RECONCILED (a) peace (b) relations (c) pacified (d) proud

6. RANCOROUS (a) anger (b) bitterness (c) venomous (d) cynical

7. SULLEN (a) sadness (b) gloomy (c) inquiring (d) determined

Exercise 2: Nouns

In this exercise the words in capital letters are all nouns. No adjective or verb can be a synonym for a noun. Among the choices given, find the noun that is a synonym for the word in capital letters.

1. ANARCHY (a) confused (b) disorder (c) rule (d) provoking

2. RETRIBUTION (a) punish (b) punishment (c) recovery (d) forgiveness

3. OMEN (a) warning (b) predict (c) prize (d) critical

4. MALICE (a) illness (b) hatred (c) aggressive (d) corrupt

5. ARROGANCE (a) conceited (b) pride (c) aristocrat (d) knave

6. BANISHMENT (a) isolated (b) solitary (c) exile (d) punishment

7. ANNIHILATION (a) elevation (b) argument (c) betray (d) destruction

Compositional Reminders

Kinds of Evidence

How often have you watched a television drama set in a courtroom? Someone has been charged with a robbery or perhaps a home invasion. In the course of the trial, the prosecuting attorneys present much evidence. They offer materials of different kinds—an official document, a broken clock, an alleged murder weapon. They summon a succession of witnesses, all of whom have, in their opinion, important information to contribute to the trial. If they are successful, if the jury accepts their evidence, the defendant will be convicted.
Alfred, Lord Tennyson published Poems, Chiefly Lyrical in 1832. Medea, a play by Euripides, was adapted by Robinson Jeffers. Andrei Sakharov, the Soviet nuclear physicist, won the 1975 Nobel Peace Prize. Eastern Airlines announced profits of $46.2 million in 1976. Each of these facts can be verified. Most of them you probably would be willing to accept without checking the original source. In the first example, you might want to consult the dictionary for the definition of an ellipse or perhaps check an encyclopedia for more information about Kepler's theory. You might also be unwilling to accept Eastern Airline's claim of forty-six million dollars profit and wish to check or have an accountant check the airline's financial statement closely. Otherwise, unless you have a special reason for doubting, you would be willing in most cases to accept what you have read.

**Opinion as Evidence**

Writers sometimes confuse fact with opinion, and it is important to learn to distinguish between the two. We accept what we can see, hear, or touch. Only in an instant when we were uncertain—did the bell actually ring?—would we want to question the type of the event. Another type of fact is even more readily accepted. This is a statement that can easily be verified. Here it is in The New York Times, the Encyclopedia Britannica. While we have all been taught not to accept everything we read in print, we are often willing to accept certain sources. We have to. It would be a physical impossibility to check the original source of every fact we read. With this in mind, examining the facts from subject areas we often encounter in our studies.

In his work "The New Astronomy" in 1609, Johannes Kepler stated that the true shape of the orbit of a planet around the sun is an ellipse.

**Exercise 1**

Divide a page in your notebook into two columns, labeling one Fact and the other Opinion. Use a newspaper, a magazine, or a textbook to locate five facts and list them in the left column of your page. Skip a line or two before each fact so that you write the fact in the right column when you begin to work. Alongside each fact, in the right column, write an original sentence expressing an opinion based upon the fact in the left column. If you have difficulty in converting facts into opinion, go back and reread the examples provided in this discussion.

**Exercise 2**

Distinguish between fact and opinion. You have just completed reading Medea. Listed below are ten statements about the play. Some are facts; some are opinions. Number from 1 to 10 in your notebook. Read and consider each item. Write the word FACT or OPINION next to each number. Be prepared to justify your choice.

1. Before the play began, Medea fled west with Jason on the Argo.
2. Jason was justified in marrying Little Creusa, Creon's daughter.
3. Jason would have taken Medea back if he had not killed her son. 
4. Aegus, the king of Athens, visited Creon.
5. Medea dispatched her two sons with gifts for Creon's daughter.
6. Jason deserved the vengeance of Medea.
7. Medea did not possess the normal love of a mother for her children.
8. Aegus takes on a task that he will protect Medea in Athens.
9. Given additional time to work out her problems, Medea might have found another solution to her dilemma.
10. Medea betrayed her father and slew her brother for love of Jason.

**Expert Testimony as Evidence**

In developing an argument of some length, we try, of course, to strengthen our position with as many facts as we can muster. There is, however, another kind of evidence we use when we are unable to marshal a sufficient body of factual material, when facts alone will not suffice. In these instances we often turn to the use of expert testimony, a type of evidence that will not be disputed, a type that is given in the presence of an expert. In using expert testimony the writer must always consider the authority of the experts. What makes such testimony, what makes us believe, what makes us accept the testimony of an expert? The secret lies in the qualifications of the expert. Is he an expert in fields? Will his judgments, the testimony that he provides, be accepted by an audience? In a complex tax case, for example, the public accountant may be asked to explain intricate tax laws or to explain discrepancies in the records of a client. Because he has been trained and experienced in the necessary technical information, we accept the accountant's judgment and consider the testimony pertinent. Similarly, in a courtroom the prosecutor will often summon medical examiners to the stand. A murder trial has reached a crucial juncture, and the prosecution wants to establish the cause of the victim's death. The medical examiners, experts in forensic medicine, testify that they have performed an autopsy to determine the manner of pol- lution. Unless there is reason to doubt the examiners, the judge, jury, and the attorneys accept the medical finders. This is expert testimony and carries the weight of authority.
Remember, an expert's testimony is not fact; it is opinion. As such, the possibility of error always exists, especially if the expert is biased. If, for example, the president of an electric company were testifying on the safety of a proposed nuclear power plant, the testimony might be biased since the president has a financial interest in the proposed plant. The president's opinion, though expert, lacks credibility.

Sometimes the expert's testimony may carry more weight than his or her authority, all as when an expert's opinion on the possible mechanical causes of an airplane crash. Always suspect an expert's testimony when the expert renders a judgment in another field of expertise. Writers often incorporate expert testimony, particularly on serious forms of composition. In reporting on an exhibit of Kenneth Noland's paintings at New York's Guggenheim Museum, writer Robert Hughes of Time quoted curator Diane Waldman's essay on the artist:

Noland ranks with de Kooning and the Impressionists among the great color painters of the modern era. Unlike the others, however, he is heir to Malevich and Klee in the realm of color expression, he is to his generation what they were to their own.

Many of us may be unfamiliar with the art of Kenneth Noland, and although Hughes' article illustrated Noland's use of color by reproducing two examples of his paintings, we are not qualified to pass judgment on his work. We therefore accept the expert testimony of the museum's curator. Obviously, she has studied the subject, and as a professional background, she has experience in making valid comparisons.

Exercise 3

Search in a recent edition of your local newspaper or in a periodical for two examples of expert testimony. In preparing this assignment, identify the publication and summarize the material leading up to the examples of expert testimony. Quote the specific expert testimony exactly in your notebook and answer these questions for each example.

1. Who is the "expert" quoted in the article? Why did the writer choose to cite this expert?
2. Why is this person considered an authority?
3. What does the "expert testimony" contribute to your understanding of the article?
4. Is the expert biased? Is the expert passing judgment in his or her field of expertise?

Inference from Evidence

Writers use facts, personal opinions, and the expert testimony of others in developing arguments. They are the raw material of argument, used by writers to support a thesis or proposition. But writers must go further. Often, as they prepare to develop a point of view, writers are influenced by the material they have uncovered. After careful research, they have amassed a great deal of evidence. At this point a judgment must be made. Does the evidence add up? Have they actually found information to support their original thesis?

Exercise 4

Here is an exercise in drawing inferences. Read the evidence on the Armenian community presented in an article from The New York Times. What evidence can be drawn about the strength and vitality of this ethnic group from the evidence? Prepare a written list of your observations.

1. The American Armenian community has 40,000 members.
2. "We will not slip into the melting pot," said Bishop Torkom Manoukian, head of the Armenian church diocese for the eastern half of the United States. "There used to be a danger that the Armenian community would disappear," he said, "but the danger is over because Armenians are discovering that their culture is interesting, that the future is bright for them in this country, that they will be able to make a living and have a future here."

As matters stand today, many teachers are unable to do the best of which they are capable. For this there are a number of reasons, some more or less accidental, others more or less personal. Most teachers are overworked and are compelled to prepare students for examinations rather than to give them a liberalizing mental training.

The people who are not accustomed to teaching have no idea of the expense of spirit that it involves. Clergymen are not expected to preach sermons for several hours
every day, but the analogous effort is demanded of teachers. The result is that many of them become harried and nervous, out of touch with recent work in the subjects they teach and unable to inspire their students with a sense of the intellectual delights to be obtained from new understanding and new knowledge.

—Bertrand Russell, “The Function of a Teacher”

In this paragraph, which is only part of an argument, the writer states his topic or general idea and then develops supporting facts and other evidence. If we analyze this paragraph, we find it composed of a number of parts.

**GENERAL IDEA:** Many teachers are unable to do the best of which they are capable. Teachers are overworked. Teachers are compelled to prepare pupils for examinations. Teachers are unable to give them a liberalizing mental training.

**ANALOGY:** Clergymen are not expected to preach several hours every day.

**CONCLUSIONS:** Teachers become harassed and nervous. They are out of touch with recent work in their subjects. They are unable to inspire students intellectually.

The components of this short argument will help us develop a number of general principles. Obviously, not all arguments are organized in the same way, but we can begin to indicate some of the steps you should follow in preparing an argument.

1. **Choose a thesis limited in scope.** In the sample paragraph, Bertrand Russell selected a manageable topic to develop. He feels that there are conditions which prevent teachers from functioning at their best in the classroom, and he states this thesis at the beginning of the paragraph. Compare his thesis with this one: There are many things wrong with teachers, particularly with those who]

In another context, but Russell’s major concern is working conditions, and he develops this issue as he builds toward his conclusion. Your considerations in developing evidence are similar: Is this fact pertinent to my thesis? Will this piece of “expert testimony” lead to the conclusion I hope to establish? Regardless of how interesting your material is, it should not be used unless it can pass these tests.

2. **Draw valid conclusions based on evidence.** We will examine some of the problems in developing justified conclusions in later chapters. At this point we should keep in mind the concept of relevance. A valid conclusion from an argument follows logically from a reasonable thesis supported by evidence the reader can accept. Russell’s conclusion that, as a result of the reasons he suggests, teachers are unable to inspire students with a sense of the intellectual delights of learning seems valid upon examination. Tired, harried teachers forced to prepare students for tests probably would not be able to achieve Russell’s major aim.

The Distinction Between Argument and Persuasion

Earlier we indicated that argument appeals to reason and understanding, and we traced in a general way the steps used to convince an audience. Persuasion, on the other hand, appeals primarily to the emotions and is often used to lead the audience to the content we want to develop. People do not, as we know, always behave rationally. Although logically we can prove that A plus B equals C, it does not always follow that the audience will accept and follow the course of action required. Bertrand Russell’s concern about the function of a teacher makes sense, and he argues in a way that most reasonable, fair-minded people would accept. But take the case of someone who is anti-teacher, anti-education, or both. “Who cares about teachers anyway? They always gave me a hard time.” A person with this attitude can rarely be convinced by appealing to reason or understanding. With someone like this, with a hostile audience, another approach must be found.

Persuasion attempts to catch the attention of the audience, to use an approach that will give you an opportunity to appeal to understanding later. By appealing to emotion, you hope to disarm a hostile audience at least for the moment. How do you do this? Sometimes the writer uses an indirect approach, a device such as an anecdote to catch the attention of the audience. Other approaches include asking a probing or disturbing question, using a memorable phrase, or describing an upsetting or shocking scene. All these devices are intended to arouse interest. Assuming that one of these devices succeeds, the writer then has to sustain interest as he or she begins to develop the main points of an argument. Throughout the development of the argument, vividness of language is important. Well-phrased sentences, the use of an apt figure of speech, building toward a dramatic climax—all keep an audience alert. As they listen, they must also be aware of the steps in the argument, of the issues at stake, and of what has been accomplished so far in the presentation.

Attracting and keeping the audience’s attention is one part of persuasion. Another is to find the common ground between the writer and the audience. The writer must understand that audience and appeal to areas of mutual interest. What are these areas of common ground? They are usually areas of self-interest: health, an improved standard of living, pleasure, and the like. Through these themes, the writer can appeal to the fair-mindedness of an audience, the willingness to listen before passing judgment. By showing respect for the audience, by relying on tact and patience, the writer may persuade an audience to listen and to make judgments when an appeal to reason and understanding is not enough.

The Topic Sentence

Argument and persuasion are types of expository writing. In expository writing, the unit of organization is a paragraph. A paragraph, as you have learned before, is a group of sentences about one topic. A
well-organized paragraph has an introduction, a section of development, and often a conclusion. Usually the introduction or topic sentence states the main point or central idea of the paragraph. The rest of the sentences in the paragraph support or develop the central idea, using facts, examples, anecdotes, and sometimes a combination of two or three of them. Some paragraphs, but not all, have a "clincer" sentence that summarizes or pulls the entire paragraph together.

Most topic sentences appear at the beginning of a paragraph and clearly tell the reader what the paragraph is about. In the hands of a good writer, the topic sentence is clear, precise, and interesting. Read the paragraph below and decide whether the topic sentence meets the criteria we just described.

The most striking fact about human beings is that, in many respects, they are very unlike one another. Their bodies vary enormously in size and shape. Their modes of thought and speech and feeling are startlingly different. Startlingly different, too, are their reactions to even such basic things as food, sex, money, and power. Between the most highly gifted and those of least ability, and between persons endowed with one particular kind of talent or temperament and persons endowed with another kind, the gulf is so wide as to be bridgeable only by the most enlightened charity.

—Aldous Huxley, "Who Are You?"

This paragraph is the first in an article. Notice how the topic sentence arouses our interest at once. The author begins with a provocative statement, encouraging us to plunge right into the article to find out what he means. He supports his topic sentence with a number of interesting examples and concludes with a phrase "... the gulf is so wide as to be bridgeable only by..." that refers directly to his introduction. Many paragraphs follow this format. A topic sentence at the beginning of a paragraph calls attention to the subject and provides the reader with an immediate frame of reference for the sentences which follow. Next, look at a paragraph with the topic sentence in the middle.

Certainly science has moved forward. But when science progresses, it often opens vaster mysteries to our gaze. Moreover, science frequently discovers that it must abandon or modify what it once believed. Sometimes it ends by accepting what it has previously scorned. The simplistic idea that science marches undeviatingly down an ever-broadening highway can scarcely be sustained by the historian of ideas. As in other human affairs, there may be prejudice, rigidity, timid evasion and sometimes inability to reorient oneself rapidly to drastic changes in world view.

—Loren Eiseley, The Firmament of Time

This paragraph is more complex in organization. The main point occurs in the middle. The first few sentences lead up to the topic sentence, and the final one elaborates on the key idea—Science does not march undeviatingly forward.

The next paragraph illustrates the use of a topic sentence at the end. It describes the effect of the famous 1938 radio dramatization of The War of the Worlds and is written by the co-founder of the Mercury Theater.

He [Orson Welles] was right. His sense of tempo, that night, was infallible. When the flashed news of the cylinder’s landing finally came—almost fifteen minutes after the beginning of a fairly dull show—he was able suddenly to spiral his action to a speed as wild and reckless as its base was solid. The appearance of the Martians; their first treacherous act; the death of Carl Phillips; the arrival of the militia; the battle of the Watchung Hills; the destruction of New Jersey—all these were telescoped into a space of twelve minutes without overstretching the listeners’ emotional credulity. The broadcast, by then, had its own reality, the reality of emotionally felt time and space.

—John Houseman, "The Man from Mars"

Here the author wants to make an important point, that as the dramatization gathered momentum, it almost assumed a reality of its own. He repeats an increasingly exciting series of events and pulls the entire paragraph together with his topic sentence.

In examining three different locations of topic sentences, it should be remembered that the first, the introductory topic sentence, is by far the most common. Occasionally you will find a paragraph without a topic sentence. In such writing the author implies what the paragraph is about through the cumulative effect of the sentences.

Questions for Discussion
1. What is the importance of a topic sentence in a paragraph?
2. What is the most frequent location of the topic sentence? Why is this location particularly useful to the reader?
3. What are the other locations of the topic sentence in a paragraph? Why do authors sometimes place topic sentences in these other locations?

ASSIGNMENT 1
Early in Medea on page 13, Medea recites the dreadful acts she committed for Jason. Read this passage again, beginning with "I spent my power for love of Jason" and ending with "And I have loved him and borne him sons." List these actions in your notebook. Then prepare an appropriate topic sentence for a paragraph describing these events. Begin with the topic sentence and develop a paragraph describing Medea’s sacrifices.

ASSIGNMENT 2
Choose a controversial subject currently in the news. Decide which side of the issue you support. Develop a topic sentence expressing your point of view. Next develop a list of four or five supporting facts. You can make these up yourself or gather them from an article in a newspaper or magazine. Support your facts in a logical order. When you are satisfied that all the parts fit correctly, write a well-organized paragraph on your subject.