

Oedipus as a Tragic Hero

The Greek philosopher Aristotle's observations about tragedy appear in his work, *Poetics*, and the major points are listed below. Oedipus is considered the classic Greek tragic hero. Based on your reading of the text, please complete the following tragic hero chart.

Element of Tragedy	Examples (lines) from <i>Oedipus</i>
<p>1. The tragedy concerns a hero of noble stature. By noble, Aristotle means simply that the character is better in many ways than the rest of us. While it is not required that such a character be born into the upper class, being upper class does make it easier for the hero to reveal his greatness.</p>	
<p>Though noble, the hero is not perfect. As are all humans, the hero is flawed. The Greek word for this is <i>hamartia</i>. It has been defined in English as a fatal flaw. An analogous expression might be the "Achilles heel."</p>	
<p>The hero contributes to his own destruction or downfall. Aristotle observed that the hero is not passive. As a man of action, the hero will act in such a way as to cause his own downfall. Achilles, for example, was almost impervious to injury save for the heel of his foot. When he turned his back on his enemy, a poison arrow pierced Achilles' foot. By violating one of the basic rules of war, that being never to turn your back on your enemy, Achilles helped cause his own death.</p>	

Element of Tragedy	Examples (lines) from <i>Oedipus</i>
<p>The punishment or downfall of the hero will exceed his crime.</p>	
<p>The hero gains recognition from his experience. Recognition is a learning process a hero must go through. Recognition is the product of what happens to the hero. This point is extremely important to the meaning of tragedy. If the hero does not gain recognition, his suffering is in vain and the play is not a tragedy. This recognition occurs too late for the hero to prevent or escape reversal.</p>	
<p>The drama arouses in the audience feelings of pity and fear resulting in catharsis. The audience feels pity for the suffering hero and fear that if the hero can fall in such a way, what does that mean for the rest of us? Catharsis means cleansing or purging. By seeing the drama, the audience shares in the play's effects and is cleansed by what it experiences vicariously through the hero.</p>	