

MERCURY

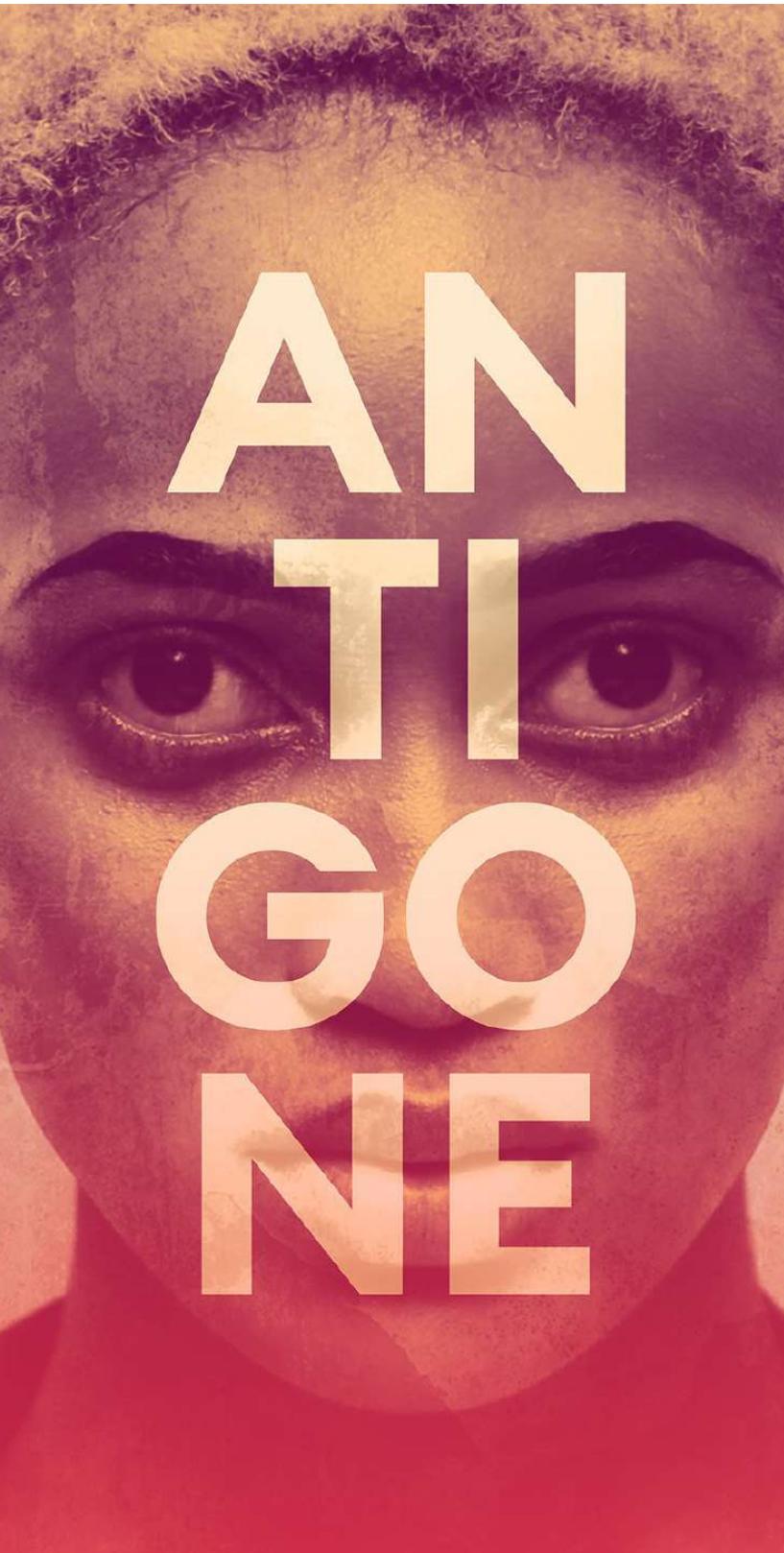


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TEACHER'S PACK

SUITABLE FOR KEY STAGE 4/5

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SYNOPSIS



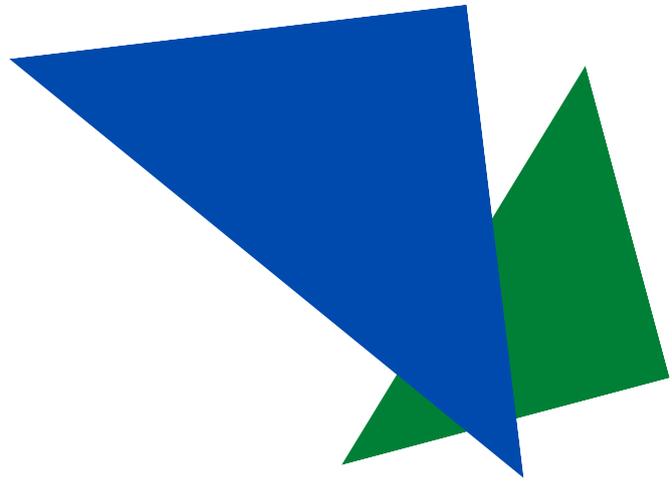
Antigone Synopsis

Antigone opens with the two sons of Oedipus - Eteocles and Polyneices - who are fighting for the throne of Thebes. Both men perish in the heat of battle. Their successor, Creon, decides that King Eteocles will be buried, but Polyneices, whom he scorns as a traitor for mobilising a foreign army against the Greeks, will be left on the field of battle, unburied and unmourned. But Antigone, his sister, defies the new King's orders and chooses to bury him anyway.

Antigone is caught in the act of burying Polyneices and is condemned to death. Her fiancé and Creon's son, Haemon, learns about this and tries to persuade Creon to change his mind and spare Antigone's life. It's only then that the seer Tiresias appears. After a long discussion, he finally persuades Creon that the gods wish for Polyneices to be buried.

However, by this point it is already too late -- Antigone has hung herself, Haemon kills himself when he finds her, and Creon's wife kills herself when she learns about her son.

KEY THEMES



Hubris and Moral Absolutism:

Despite their radically opposing beliefs, both Antigone and Creon share one fundamental characteristic in common: they both display hubris and embody the ideal of moral absolutism.

This produces the intense conflict that drives both characters onwards to their terrible fates. Hubris is defined as “excessive pride or self-confidence” and moral absolutism is defined as total faith in one’s beliefs without the willingness to compromise. It might be argued that both characters’ inability to demonstrate humility or flexibility ultimately dooms them.

Justice:

Sophocles’ dramatizes the conflict between two differing conceptions of justice - natural and legal justice. As Greece attempted to reconcile its religious traditions with its newly emergent state institutions, the questions of where true power resided and how justice should be properly administered was a pertinent topic that playwrights wrestled with.

Antigone can be said to embody natural justice, believing that despite Polynices crimes against the state, he ought to be given burial rites in line with the law of the Gods. By contrast, Creon embodies the law of the state and defies the Gods in order to maintain civic order and obedience.

Martyrdom:

At the start of the play, Antigone shows that she is willing to suffer violence and die for her convictions. Some critics have chosen to describe the character as a religious or political martyr. Martyrs are defined as people who are prepared to suffer or die in order to defend a moral truth or a set of deeply held convictions. They become symbols of resistance against authority and are often immortalised in history art as they come to embody greater moral values.

ANCIENT GREEK SOCIETY

Politics and Society

Between 5th-6th centuries BC, Greece started to transform itself into a democracy. It did this by building city-states and institutions for the purposes of upholding and encouraging civic duty amongst its freeborn citizens. This became known as the Classical Period.

- Agora (“gathering place” or “assembly”): This was a political and commercial space. A central meeting place in Athens for political debate amongst ruling Kings and councils, market trading and military duties.
- Polis (“city”): Greece in the Classical Period was divided into many city-states and urban-centres. Each was its own state, in which political, judicial, religious and social institutions were created. These city-states first gave rise to the idea of the citizen.
- Democracy (“rule by people” or “people power”): Ordinary citizens were selected to fill governmental and administrative roles. What’s more, all eligible citizens were given power to speak and vote in the assemblies which set laws for the city-states.



Festival of Dionysus

This was an annual festival that took place in both the rural and city-states of 5th- 6th Century Greece. These festivals were created in order to pay tribute to Dionysus - the God of wine, fertility and theatre. The Dionysia consisted of dramatic performances of tragedies, comedies and satyr plays.

Playwrights would compete with each other and the performances would be awarded by a panel of judges. Rites and religious rituals were also performed, including the sacrificing of bulls and goats, and the pouring of wine. The Theatre of Dionysus, situated on the Athenian Acropolis, seated 16,000 spectators at any one time.

Religion and The State

Ancient Greek tragedy often staged the conflicts between two dueling value systems: an ancient belief in a mythical world (Gods) on the one hand, and an emerging belief in the power of democratic institutions (People). In other words, fate versus free-will. In *Antigone*, the authority of the state comes into conflict with religion.

Antigone is determined to give her deceased brother – Polynices - a religious burial and consecrate his grave. However, Creon – King of Thebes – has forbidden a religious burial on account that Polynices attacked the city and betrayed the state.



MEET THE DIRECTOR

DAWN WALTON OBE

"I was first approached by the Mercury, with this translation of Antigone. I have never done a Greek tragedy before, and I don't often get calls for that. So I was immediately interested. The next thing was reading the play, and it was beautiful.

I read Merlynn Tong's, translation or adaptation of Sophocles and normally they're just full and it's just characters turning up for one scene and you never see them again. And this was clean and sleek - and I very rudely say all the guff was gone from it. And you could get straight down to the stories and the nuts and bolts of the story.

That was the first thing that grabbed me. The dialogue is beautiful. The characters are really attractive and all female, with the exception of one, the young, son Haemon.

So it was clearly interested in women and power, and how those things are negotiated thematically. You've got a young girl doing what she feels is right, up against a state and that singular act of hers ripples across the whole of, in this case Thebes, but across the world.

From start to finish, you'll be gripped, you'll be held by it. It just hits the ground. And for the minute we start telling the story you're following Antigone through this enormous story that she's carrying. It's a great story. I think it's a great night out."



MEET THE CAST



Joseph Payne as Haemon
Wendy Kweh as Creon
Adeola Yemitan as Antigone
Francesca Amewudah-Rivers as Ismene
Emma Dewhurst as Tiresias



Merlynn Tong
Writer

Creative Team

Simon Kenny – Designer
Alex Wardle – Lighting Designer
Mike Winship – Sound Designer
Blasio Kavuma – Composer
Ingrid MacKinnon – Movement Director
Helena Palmer – Casting Director

MEET THE DESIGNER

SIMON KENNY



WHAT IS THE OVERALL CONCEPT BEHIND THE DESIGN FOR ANTIGONE AND WHAT INFLUENCED YOU DURING THE PROCESS?

There are several themes in the play and threads that feed into our production, but the central theme of grief was something that Dawn (the director) and I felt was important to reflect upon. All of the characters in the play are experiencing grief in different ways and it was important the design created space to reflect and enable that. Grief is something that many of us have some experience of, particularly in recent times. For me, the experience of deep grief brought to mind being at the bottom of a well or some kind of bunker – being as far down as you can possibly go, an airless space with the light only breaking in from above, a place of retreat. This abstract feeling become important in shaping the design concept.

Although this is a recent adaptation of the story, we wanted to respect the architecture of the ancient Greek stages that these plays were originally written for – the arena or forum style space, the altar, a central doorway, a balcony above – all features of those ancient theatres. It didn't need naturalistic rooms for each scene, but the fluid storytelling would benefit from a more abstract space.

CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT THE PROCESS WORKING ALONGSIDE THE DIRECTOR, DAWN, WHO YOU'VE WORKED WITH A NUMBER OF TIMES IN THE PAST, AND ALSO THE OTHER CREATIVES, TO DEVELOP THE DESIGN?

Usually when starting a new design project, I try to spend some time deliberately not doing much visual work and really getting under the skin of the piece with the director – what does the story mean, what do we want to communicate to the audience, and why is it important to tell this story at this time. In this instance, we actually moved into visuals quite quickly. On first reading the script, I was immediately reminded of an art installation by Taryn Simon called An Occupation of Loss in which professional mourners from across the globe were gathered together in a monumental space, to sing their laments and express grief on an epic scale. This outpouring of grief is something that resonated clearly with the story of Antigone and our current situation, and while I knew our staging would be different, it felt important to evoke a similar sensation.

As we developed the visual language and staging ideas, we also began to weave in some of the references, inspirations and recent events mentioned previously and considered how to creatively collaborate with music, movement, sound and light.

MODEL BOX

SIMON KENNY



COSTUME INSPIRATION



Antigone

Creon



Tiresias

IN REHEARSALS



PHOTO CREDIT: PAMELA RAITH



Curriculum links: Drama, English Literature

Time: 20 minutes

Materials: Flipchart paper and pens

**EXERCISE #1:
REFLECTING ON
THE PLAY**

Use this exercise to get your students responding to work that they have seen onstage or read in the text.

This tool enables students to respond to multiple aspects of the play and is an ideal starting point for a more in-depth exploration of the play.

Organise the class into groups of 4 or 5 and give each group a large sheet of paper and some pens, as well as a copy of the play text if this is available. Assign each group a different topic:

- Plot - the story of the play; key events and turning points; cause and effect; narrative.
- Characters - the major characters who drive the plot forward, particularly Antigone and Creon.
- Themes - the main ideas that the play is trying to communicate and how.
- Symbolism - bold and memorable images that occur in the speech and action of the play.

If students have already seen a specific production, you can add some of the following categories depending on numbers:

- Set and Staging
- Design
- Directing
- Acting
- Music and Sound

Each group should write their chosen area of the production as a heading on their flip chart paper or in the centre if they wish to create a spider diagram

Each group then has five minutes to get down their thoughts and comments around their assigned area of the production, noting them in a spider diagram on their flip chart paper.

After five minutes each group must pass their paper onto the next group and repeat this process until every group has commented on all areas of the production listed by the class.

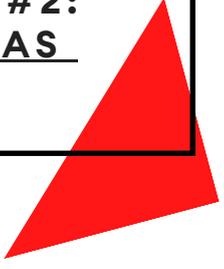
These sheets can then be put up in the classroom for inspiration when discussing the production in the subsequent exercises.

Curriculum Links: Drama, English Literature

Time: 1 hour

Resources: Flipchart, Paper and Pens

**EXERCISE #2:
TRAGEDY AS
A GENRE**



Use this exercise to get your students thinking about Tragedy and developing an understanding of theatrical conventions in Ancient Greek Theatre. These exercises enable students to engage with secondary materials and develop an understanding of the play within the context of a Tragedy as a specific genre.

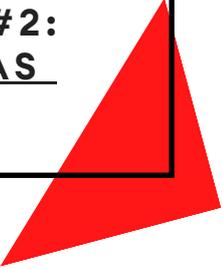
Session 1: Emotions in Tragedy (20 mins)

The Ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle wrote extensively about Tragedy in Poetics. Aristotle claims that actions and events presented in a Tragedy are meant to arouse the emotions of Pity and Fear and thereby affect the Catharsis of these emotions in its audience. Aristotle defines Catharsis as the “purging or purgation” of these intense emotions: when watching the characters in a Tragedy suffering, we as the audience feel emotionally replenished by the intensity of this experience.

Write these key terms and definitions on the Whiteboard. Organise the class into smaller groups of 4-5 students and ask each group to mindmap their thoughts and ideas on either Pity and Fear or Catharsis. Each group has five minutes and after five minutes each group must pass their paper onto the next group and repeat this process until every group has commented on each other's work.

Questions for groups:

1. When do the characters in Antigone experience Pity and Fear, and how are these emotions presented to us?
2. What is the effect of characters' suffering on the emotions of the audience?



**EXERCISE #2:
TRAGEDY AS
A GENRE**

Session 2: Reversal and Recognition in Tragedy (20 minutes)

Aristotle claims Reversal and Recognition is central to how Tragic drama unfolds. Reversal and Recognition is what happens when the characters realise they have made a terrible mistake, but are unable to go back and put things right. Aristotle defines Reversal as “a change to the opposite”: the unexpected but logical consequence of a characters’ past action. Recognition is defined as “a change from ignorance to knowledge”: the characters’ finally come to terms with the errors of their ways.

This produces Tragic Irony. Tragic Irony is when the audience know in advance that the characters’ actions will lead to disastrous outcomes before they themselves do. The plot of a Tragedy grants us more knowledge than the characters of how their fate will play out, but we are unable to intervene and change things. This is itself part of what makes Tragedy tragic.

Write these key terms and definitions on the Whiteboard. Organise the class into smaller groups of 4-5 students and ask each group to mindmap their thoughts and ideas on Reversal and Recognition and Tragic Irony. Each group has five minutes and after five minutes each group must pass their paper onto the next group and repeat this process until every group has commented on each other's work.

Questions for groups:

1. When does Creon experience Reversal and Recognition in the story, and how is this moment presented to us?
2. When does Antigone experience Reversal and Recognition in the story, and how is this moment presented to us?

**Curriculum Links: Drama, English Literature,
Critical Thinking**

Time: 1 hour

**Materials: Flipchart paper, pens, stopwatch,
tables and chairs.**

**EXERCISE #3:
JUDGE, JURY
AND
EXECUTIONER**

Use this exercise to get your students thinking about the themes of law and justice in Antigone. This exercise enables students to examine the beliefs and motivations of Antigone and Creon in detail, and debate the rights and wrongs of their actions in a courtroom setting. Organise the class into groups of 4 and assign each group a role:

- **Prosecutors**
- **Defense Council**
- **Judge**
- **Jury**

Write the name of the trial on the whiteboard. For example: Creon and The State vs. Antigone of Thebes in the case of Unlawful Burial.

Prosecutors speak on behalf of Creon and Defense Council speak on behalf of Antigone. The Judge and Jury listen closely and decide on a verdict of guilty or innocent. The trial should focus on Antigone's decision to give her brother a religious burial in defiance of Creon's commands. You can rotate the groups and switch who is Prosecutor and Defense if you have time.

First, both Prosecutors and Defense peel away and have 10 minutes to 'build their case'. They should draw upon events in the play and examples from the text to formulate arguments and collect evidence.

Prosecutors and Defense each have 3 turns to speak and the Judge keeps time by allowing 5 minutes for each intervention. The Judge can decide who opens proceedings with a flip of a coin. Finally, the Jury goes off to discuss the various arguments and come to a majority verdict of Innocent or Guilty, before presenting this to the Judge, who then gathers everyone together and passes a sentence.

Tips for students: If you're a Prosecutor or Defense Council, your primary goal is to persuade and convince the Jury - to win them over to your way of seeing things. The manner in which you choose to articulate your case is sometimes as important as the content of your words.

Curriculum Links: Drama

Time: 40 minutes

Resources: Open space, Play text, Paper and Pens

EXERCISE #4: INTERPRETING THE CHORUS

Use this exercise to get your students thinking about the role of the Chorus in Greek Tragedy and working practically as an ensemble. This exercise enables students to create their own choruses through speech and physicality, while also developing an understanding of Chorus as a collective character who can comment on and interpret events in the play.

Session 1: Function (15 mins)

Select an extract from the text of Antigone that involves the Chorus speaking. Read the extract together out loud, as a whole class, with each pupil taking it in turns to speak one or two lines until you've all finished reading.

Ask the students questions about the Chorus and discuss their role and function within the context of this extract, and the play more widely. Add their contributions to the whiteboard.

Questions:

1. Who are the Chorus?
2. What are the Chorus saying?
3. How do they use language?
4. Who are they speaking to?
5. Are they active or passive? Do they change the course of events in the play, or are they commenting on them?
6. How do they influence us? If so, how?

Session 2: Performance (15 minutes)

Organise the class into smaller groups of 4-5 students and assign each group a short section of the Chorus text.

Give each group 10 minutes to devise and rehearse a short performance inspired by their assigned text, using physical theatre, sound and speech, and drawing upon their answers to the questions above to guide their choices.

Things to consider:

- Choreography: how might the Chorus move physically?
- Tone of voice: how might the Chorus vocalise the text?
- Collaboration: how do individual performers contribute to the whole?

Have the groups present their Chorus performances to each other and ask the other groups to feedback on how their peers interpreted the Chorus in their performances.

Tips for students: When using the text to devise your own performances, consider how the Chorus functions as a collective character; you're embodying a community who participate in a shared ritual.

Curriculum Links: Drama, English Literature

Time: 1 hour

Materials: Open Space, Paper and Pens.

EXERCISE #5: CHARACTER MONTAGE



Use this exercise to get your students thinking about the dramatic structure of Antigone and Greek Tragedy, as well as the narrative journeys of specific characters. This exercise enables students to identify and present the key turning points in the narrative through the eyes of its main characters.

Organise the class into groups of 4-5 and assign each group the character of either:

- Antigone
- Creon
- Tiresias
- Haemon
- Ismene

Each group will create five tableaux scenes (“frozen pictures”) from the point-of-view of their assigned character. Other characters can be present in each scene to support the story of the assigned character.

Each of the five tableaux scenes will illustrate a different turning point in the journey of the character in the story of Antigone, using the Five Act Structure.

Write each part of the Five Act Structure on the Whiteboard and unpack what each one represents in the story of Antigone. These are:

- Act 1: EXPOSITION - establish character for the first time; who are they and what do they want?
- Act 2: RISING ACTION - Conflict is introduced and incidents occur that set the character on their journey; events that lead to Climax.
- Act 3: CLIMAX - major turning point in character’s journey; the consequences of their earlier actions take hold; there is no turning back.
- Act 4: FALLING ACTION - the darkest hour; the character makes a last ditch attempt to outrun their fate; moment of suspense.
- Act 5: DENOUEMENT - The character’s journey comes to an end; normality is restored and the conflict is resolved.

EXERCISE #5:
CHARACTER
MONTAGE
CONT'D



Give each group 10 minutes to create five tableaux scenes for their characters' journey, drawing upon their knowledge of the play and using the Five Act Structure to guide their process.

Each group should use the Character Montage scenes to tell the story of Antigone from the unique point of view of their assigned character, as if they are the main protagonist of the story.

Have the groups present their Character Montage to each other and ask the other groups to give feedback on how their peers interpreted the story of Antigone.

Tips for students: When creating your Character Montage, think about treating each tableaux as an epic painting that is illustrating a critical part of the Antigone story. Draw upon the expressive potential of your physicality to portray these characters and communicate the story.



ANTIGONE

WORKSHOP

GREEK THEATRE

1 HOUR OR A LESSON LENGTH

GROUP SIZE: 1 CLASS (UP TO 30 STUDENTS)

SUITABLE FOR: KS3/4 AND COLLEGE

LOCATION: IN SCHOOL OR AT MERCURY THEATRE

PRICE: £120 +VAT

(£85 + VAT FOR SCHOOLS WHO BOOK FOR ANTIGONE)

Western Theatre has its roots in the theatre of Ancient Greece.

In this 1-hour practical workshop students will explore the great key dramatic themes of ancient Greek drama in an informative, hands on and engaging way, with the opportunity to improvise and work with the text of Antigone.

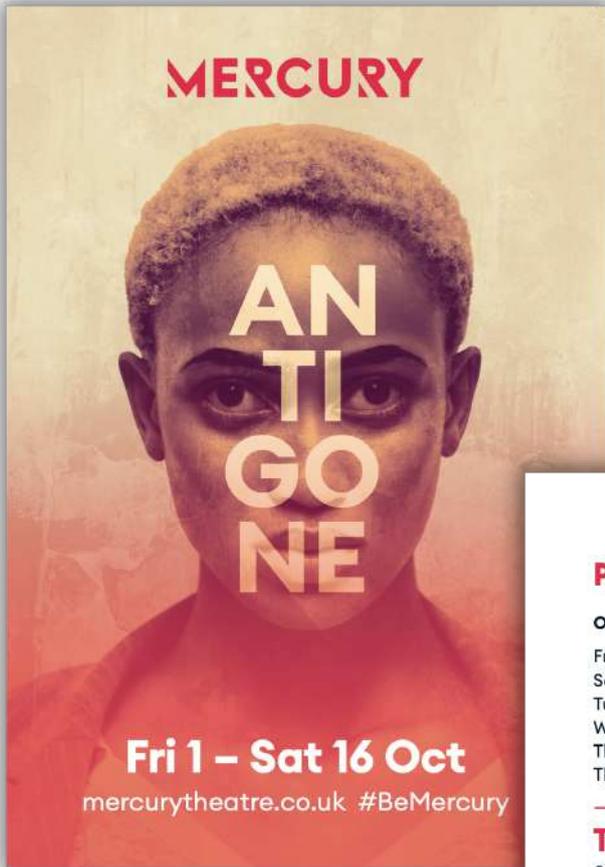
The workshop can focus on a particular area, for example the role of chorus from both an ancient and modern viewpoint.

Physical, vocal and choral exercises will provide your students with the technical tools to play with and inform the text and their understanding of Greek Theatre.

This workshop is designed to meet specific requirements such as exam specification and education syllabuses.

Why not book a workshop and bring students to watch our innovative version of Antigone.

TO BOOK CONTACT: forest.morgan@mercurytheatre.co.uk



PERFORMANCE TIMES

OCTOBER

Fri 1	19:30	Fri 8	19:30	Wed 13	19:30
Sat 2	19:30	Sat 9	14:30	Thu 14	14:30
Tue 5	19:30	Sat 9	19:30	Thu 14	19:30
Wed 6	19:30	Sun 10	15:00	Fri 15	19:30
Thu 7	14:30	Tue 12	19:30	Sat 16	14:30
Thu 7	19:30	Wed 13	14:30	Sat 16	19:30

TICKET PRICES

£15 - £30 (inc. £1.50 ticket levy)

HOW TO BOOK

www.mercurytheatre.co.uk
 tickets@mercurytheatre.co.uk
 01206 573948

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