When Duty Defies

A shared conflict across a Greek tragedy and a civil rights letter

11-12.RC.4 "Analyze and evaluate works of literary or cultural significance in history for the way in which these works have used archetypes drawn from myths, traditional stories, or religious works..."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline the higher duty each writer sets against a ruler's command. Circle the older story or religious figure each work draws on, then number one difference between the two forms of resistance.

Two Ways to Challenge an Order

1. In Sophocles' tragedy *Antigone*, written in ancient Greece, King Creon forbids the burial of Polyneices, whom he calls a traitor. Antigone buries her brother anyway, knowing she may be executed. Her choice draws on the Greek myth of the doomed family of Thebes, but it also gives a familiar figure, the loyal sister, a dangerous public role. Antigone appeals to sacred, unwritten duties to the dead rather than the king's decree. Creon calls her resistance a threat to order. By the play's end, Antigone is dead, and Creon's own family has suffered as well.

2. In 1963, Martin Luther King Jr. wrote *Letter from Birmingham Jail* after being arrested during protests against racial segregation. Responding to critics who urged patience, he argued that people have a moral duty to disobey unjust laws openly and nonviolently. King invokes Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, three figures in the biblical book of Daniel who refuse a ruler's command to worship an idol. Their defiance provides a religious model for his argument, but King does not ask protesters to act alone. He describes organized direct action meant to expose injustice and create pressure for negotiation.

3. Both works ask what someone should do when a government command clashes with a higher duty. Yet their forms change what resistance means. Sophocles stages a family and a city torn apart, leaving audiences to weigh Antigone's courage against the cost of rigid rule. King writes a public argument, using a biblical example to defend collective action and persuade readers that delay protects injustice. Today's audiences may disagree about particular laws, but the works still press a concrete question: When people challenge an authority they believe is wrong, what responsibilities do they have to others?

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How does Sophocles give the loyal sister a public role, and what conflict does that role create?

2. Why does King invoke Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in his argument?

3. Both works present resistance to an official command. How does the method of resistance differ?

4. What question in the final paragraph could matter to audiences today? Use one detail from each work to explain why it remains relevant.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine a school board bars students from speaking at its meetings. In one paragraph of 80 to 110 words, invent someone who challenges the rule, show how that person reworks the loyal dissenter, and compare the person's method or outcome with both works using one detail from each. Explain why your version matters now.

ANSWER KEY

When Duty Defies

HIGH SCHOOL · 11-12.RC.4

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline the higher duty each writer sets against a ruler's command. Circle the older story or religious figure each work draws on, then number one difference between the two forms of resistance. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How does Sophocles give the loyal sister a public role, and what conflict does that role create?	**Antigone buries her brother despite Creon's ban. Her loyalty to family and sacred duties brings her into conflict with the king's authority.**
2	Why does King invoke Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in his argument?	**Their refusal to obey a ruler's command provides a biblical model for disobeying laws that conflict with a higher moral duty.**
3	Both works present resistance to an official command. How does the method of resistance differ?	**Antigone acts as an individual by burying her brother. King defends organized, open, nonviolent action meant to expose injustice and press for negotiation.**
4	What question in the final paragraph could matter to audiences today? Use one detail from each work to explain why it remains relevant.	**The question is what people owe others when challenging authority. Antigone risks her life to honor her brother, while King urges collective, nonviolent action, so both works raise questions about the effects of resistance on others.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

When the school board bars students from speaking at its meetings, Mara reads anonymous classmates' statements outside the building. Like Antigone, she risks punishment because loyalty to others matters more to her than an official order. Unlike Antigone, whose burial of her brother ends in death, Mara gathers a group and keeps their names safe. Like King, who defended organized, nonviolent action after his arrest, she invites families to join a peaceful public reading. The board does not change its rule that night, but it schedules a hearing. Her unfinished victory asks today's students how to challenge power without abandoning their neighbors.

Accept different judgments about the works' relevance when supported by details in the passage. For the original paragraph, look for a clear reworking of the loyal dissenter, accurate comparisons with both works, and a reason the new conflict matters today.