

# Depiction of mothers essay



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The Depiction of Controversial Mothers in History When describing the qualities of motherhood, one might say that a good mother is a woman who looks out for the well being of her children both mentally and physically. Mothers give their children the freedom to mature in their own way, so that they learn how to live and work out any problems they might have, their own way. They love their children unconditionally and try their best to spend time with them as much as possible. In the two plays, Medea and Oedipus the King, motherhood plays a central theme throughout the story. In both plays, both Medea and Jocasta appear to defy or violate themselves by challenging the traditional ideas and behaviors related to motherhood. Although they do more to violate the qualities of motherhood, both characters try to establish the importance of motherhood by justifying their acts as ways of loving their children.

Medea is a sorceress in her home of Colchis, which is a territory for barbarians. She uses her influence and a power to help a man named Jason secure the Golden Fleece and later develops feelings for him. After falling in love with Jason, she decides to leave her home in order to escape with him to Iolcus, his homeland. In order to assure her escape Medea murders her brother, Absyrtus, and later tricks King Pelias' daughters into killing their father to insure, Jason would become the King of Iolcus. They are instead cast out as murderers and settle to live in Corinth. In Corinth, they have two children and achieve a good reputation.

Problems occur when Jason decides to divorce Medea in order to marry the princess of Corinth, Glauke, so that he would have better life and image for himself. This causes a series of events that leads Medea to getting revenge

on Jason by killing their children. The obvious reason why Medea wants to kill her children is to torment Jason. Throughout the Ancient Greek times, the children were the father's possession and only belonged to him. By killing his children, Medea has taken away some of the most important things in his life, his legacy and someone to take care of him during his old age. Another not so clear reason is that she could not have left her children with a stepmother. According to Lillian Corti's book, *The Myth of Medea and the Murder of Children*, there was a "distrust of stepparents," (Corti 36) during this point in time. Stepmothers would want to "assure the inheritance of their own children" (Corti 36) and probably kill the children of her husband's prior marriage.

She also believes that they will be killed anyway due to their involvement in killing Glauke, even though it was Medea that put them in danger. No matter what reason, the problem comes down to the morality of having reasons to killing your children and actually killing them. Although she kills many people throughout the play such as her brother and King Pelias, she shows a fine amount of love for her children. She says things like "O babes my, babes, let your mother kiss your hands.

" (Euripides 20) She wrestles with herself because she loves and wants to stay with her children but also wants vengeance on what Jason did. Some readers may claim that she killed her children because she hated them but it can be argued that Medea was the parent that truly loved her children and not Jason. She tells this to Jason very clearly in the quote: Jason: "O my dear, dear children! Medea: "Dear to their mother, not to thee" (Euripides 25) Clauss states that "no one suffers the loss of a child more than that

child's mother" (Claus 304) so, by killing her children with her own hands, she is demonstrating an even stronger love for her children by saving them from a more gruesome death. Jocasta is the Queen of Thebes and seems like she is in a happy marriage with King Laius, but this all changes when they receive a prophecy. The prophecy states that their son, Oedipus, will be destined to kill his father and marry his mother. To avoid this misfortune Jocasta and Laius decide to pierce and bind Oedipus's ankles and send him off to a mountainside to die.

Jocasta would later realize that Oedipus is her son, and that they have committed incest, which would later become public. This would cause Jocasta to kill herself by hanging herself with sheets. This act brings up the question if Jocasta is willing to live with an incestuous relationship with Oedipus if the public had not known, or not. Some readers may agree that Jocasta would not be willing to live with this guilt because she did not know that Oedipus was her son.

Jocasta did not know that the prophecy came true, but believes that her son is dead and that her husband was murdered by a band of thieves. She would have still killed herself because of the shame she felt for what she did and wishes that she would know what she did sooner. Other readers might argue against her by saying that she was already aware of the situation before the events of the story occurred. Although she was not aware of the true identity of her son, it should not have taken her long to see the swollen ankles of Oedipus. She may have said nothing because it would be her only way to stay with her son again, or that she wanted to continue being queen.

Her suicide may have been committed because she would not be able to show her face to people.

When Jocasta tries to stop Oedipus from asking questions about the truth she starts to become irritated and frustrated, which shows that she truly does not want Oedipus to know about the truth because she fears that it would go public. In the end, it seems that Jocasta might have been willing to live in incest with Oedipus as long as the public did not know. Although her motives are debatable it is clear that she shows some form of motherly love to her son.

A mother is a woman who shelters, guides, and most of all love their children no matter what happens to them. In the two plays, Medea and Oedipus the King, Medea and Jocasta display actions and behaviors that challenge or violate the significance of being a good mother. Medea does this by committing the unmotherly act of killing her children. Some of her reasons for killing her children are understandable, as killing them herself would save them from a more horrific death. Although the act of killing her children may make her a deadly murder, it does not necessarily make her a bad one. She has reasons why she is not a bad mother, why she has to kill her children, her uncertainties when doing it, and what leads her to her ultimate decision to do it.

Jocasta challenges the significance of being a mother by marrying and having sex with her son Oedipus. Because of this act of incest, Jocasta decides to kill herself because of the shame and humiliation she feels from the public. Questions would as to rather if Jacosta would have still committed

the act of incest if the public would not have known or not. Some argue that Jacosta would have killed herself, because she did not know that Oedipus was her son until the act was done, and the shame she would have had for herself. Others may argue that she would have not killed herself because she mostly cares about her pride. She chooses to ignore Oedipus's plea for the truth but they were set aside. She could no longer endure the pain she kept to herself, or the judgment that would come from her city.

She puts herself before her son, and chooses death as an escape from her crime. Although both characters are portrayed as vicious or terrible mothers, they show that they truly love their children in their own way, but choose to show it in immoral or controversial decisions. Work Cited Clauss, James J. and Sarah Iles Johnston. *Medea*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997. Corti, Lillian.

*The Myth of Medea and the Murder of Children*. Westport, Connecticut and London: Greenwood Press, 1998. Euripides. *Medea*. Trans.

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Available: <http://classics.mit.edu/Euripides/medea.html>.