Medea Class/Group Discussion Questions

“In short, it appears there is a good deal of evidence to support the view that Euripides’ desire was not only to portray Medea as a beleaguered woman desperate to overcome adversity, but also to illustrate how grievously women in his society are injured by an oppressive patriarchy.

Unfortunately, all the various excerpts, speeches, or scenes which critics have leapt upon as evidence that Euripides was sympathetic to women’s oppression in his society rely on misconstruing the author’s intent, misinterpreting his meaning, and tearing various lines free of the overall narrative of the play. Once all of these excerpts touted as evidence of the proto-feminist nature of Euripides are reinserted into the play’s overall narrative, Euripides’ actual intent may be understood.”

-Protofeminist or Misogynist? Medea as a case study of gendered discourse in Euripidean drama. Reexamine Medea’s “Plight of Women” speech on page 218-219. Discuss amongst your groups evidence to show both a feminist and misogynist reading. Make a final decision as a group which interpretation you feel most valid.

Examine Medea’s interactions with Creon, the Nurse and Chorus, and Jason. How does Euripides use Medea to address the issues of xenophobia in Greece? How does Medea committing regicide and infanticide help illuminate this conflict? Find textual evidence to support your ideas.

Reread Medea’s interaction with Aegeus, starting on page 229. Consider Aegeus’s position as King of Athens and his current personal struggles. How does his conversation and vow to Medea relate to both the male/female and citizen/foreigner conflicts within the play? Consider what the irony in what Medea promises to Aegeus.

Deux ex machina: meaning ‘god from the machine’. The term has evolved to mean a plot device whereby a seemingly unsolvable problem is suddenly and abruptly resolved by the inspired and unexpected intervention of some new event, character, ability or object.

How does this term apply to the ending of Medea? How might this lead us to seeing how Medea is not considered a perfect example of tragedy? How could this ending indicate that Jason is the tragic hero instead of Medea?
Medea Additional Study Questions

1. Medea’s nurse serves as her chief servant, governess of the children, and confidante; therefore, she knows Medea well.
   a. How does she describe Medea’s reaction to Jason’s abandonment?
   b. What does she say about Medea’s personality and temperament?

2. The chorus consists of Corinthian women.
   a. When Medea addresses the chorus, how does she gain their sympathy?
   b. What does Medea ask of them?

3. When Creon goes to Medea to order her and her children out of Corinth, why does he particularly fear her?

4. Does Medea truly mean to be reconciled with Creon or does she have ulterior motives in mind?
   a. Why does Creon finally agree to allow Medea to remain in Corinth for twenty-four hours?
   b. How does his submission to her plea make him a more human character?
   c. After Creon leaves, Medea discusses her plans. What do they reveal about her character?

5. When Jason offers Medea some provision for her and her children, does he really have their welfare in mind? Explain.
   a. What is Medea’s response to his offer?
   b. How does Jason accept Medea’s reply?

6. In her encounter with Aegeus, why is Medea especially sensitive regarding the oath she asks him to take?

7. In the bargain, Aegeus agrees to, why is he so insistent that Medea escape from Corinth by her own means before he will offer her sanctuary in Athens?

8. Medea dramatically changes her attitude toward Jason when she begs his forgiveness. Why do you think Jason believes her? Cite passages to support your opinion.

9. How does Euripides introduce suspense in the scene in which Medea sends the children off to the royal palace with their father?

10. When the tutor reports the success of the children at the royal palace, why does Medea exhibit such anguish?

11. What does her statement to the tutor foreshadow in the following exchange? (p. 238)
    TUTOR: Have courage. Some day your children will bring you too back home
    MEDEA: Ah me! Before that day I shall bring others to another home.

12. After the news from the tutor, Medea’s resolve to continue with her murderous plans momentarily weaken. What powerful aspect in Medea’s character restrains her from abandoning her plans?