Cruelty can be described as deriving pleasure from deliberately inflicting suffering on others. In the play, *Oedipus Rex* by Sophocles, the theme of cruelty is portrayed through the antagonistic intentions of the gods upon the people of Thebes, including the tragic hero, Oedipus, his parents: Jocasta and Laios, and other innocent citizens unaware of any wrongdoings that proved to be valuable of the amount of misfortune they were forced to endure.

A parent losing their child is one thing, but being forced to try and kill him or her purposefully is on a completely new level of tragedy. Oedipus's parents, Jocasta and Laios, are faced with the decision to either abandon their son and... attempt to end his life, or face harm upon themselves: They didn't desire to have to make this choice, and for no reason at all they become a victim of cruelty; a victim of the Gods. In this play, the lives of the characters are represented by a game, such as Chess. The players are the Gods, and the pawns are the people of Thebes. No matter how much the pawns want to escape their tragic fate, or live a good life, the players control their destiny and their fate. By the Gods pushing Jocasta and Laios to try and kill their son, it reveals how much they simply enjoy wrecking people's lives and causing misfortune. The parents, in this case the victims, are simply vulnerable, and did not plan on sending their son to the mountains with picked ankles to die. Overall, the Gods are not only intending to cause cruelty but they are allowing it to occur to good people. The fate is already decided, and bad things happen to good people who are not in control.

Throughout the play, the endurement of cruelty strikes down to Jocasta's and Laios's son, Oedipus. He ended up surviving from his abandonment, and grew up not only unaware of who his real parents were, but unaware of the cruelty that was bound to wreak his good intentions and ignorance about the truth of his life. In the meantime, fate was determined, and the Gods simply waited for Oedipus to fulfill the diabolic prophecy they had planned. Oedipus
eventually found out about his fate, and tried to escape. In his attempt to escape and avoid killing his parents, the Gods place Calos, his Father, as the person for him to murder. As a pion, Oedipus was truly not in control. He tried to give his free will and selflessness by avoiding the prophecy, but the deed was already done.

Once again the players of the game moved the pion where they wanted it to go. They moved it in a negative direction, causing an even further extent of destruction and tragedy. The last thing Oedipus ever wanted to do was kill his Father, and his Father did the desire to die. Both characters only desired for themselves and their families to be at peace, and in return they suffered through cruelty having no mercy upon their ignorance and naivety. As a whole, the Gods causing detrimental occurrences with the entire family only further revealed their cold hearted minds that is fueled by the idea of power. In addition, after allowing Oedipus to kill his Father, they simply set him up on a quick to fail, since he was the murderer himself. Oedipus was one trying to save Thebes, and track down the man that sparked the plague, but above and beyond his good intentions lay a cruel room pwn full of players, causing the pion, Oedipus, to run in circles, only to later finding out he is the start of the misfortune of Thebes.

Lastly, the town of Thebes was a victim of circumstance, and proved to be innocent victims of the cruelty placed upon their lives and town as well. The Gods not only found pleasure in causing cruelty in Oedipus’s family’s life, but an entire town. Each citizen was innocent, and unaware of why they must endure famine and suffering. Each cruel act they went through reveals how even bad things occur to them with sincere intentions, or even a lack of involvement as a whole. They were not attempting to be a hero like Oedipus, but they were not causing trouble either.

The town of Thebes was simply a victim of the God’s own cruel mindsets, and thus vulnerability was enough for the Gods to act upon and control with the small movements of a pion.
On the road to redemption, purging impurities is often a painful process. In Sophocles' play *Oedipus Rex*, cruelty is an act of cleansing. The cruel acts the play's characters inflict upon themselves depict their overwhelming guilt and their worthiness of compassion. Moreover, the use of cruelty as a means of atonement attests to the play's most poignant message: one must reap the repercussions of wrongdoing to restore righteousness.

Due to dramatic irony, the audience is aware of the hideous acts of patricide and incest before the titular character experiences the horrid revelation of the truth, so the repulsive reality of Oedipus's circumstances is no surprise. Yet, Sophocles manages to shock the reader with Oedipus's violently graphic response to the news. What is most striking about Oedipus's act of cruelty is how he reacts to the news of his transgressions and the death of his wife and mother Jocaste with self-inflicted trauma. Cruelty toward the self goes against every basic human instinct, so Oedipus's decision to take black night across his own eyes becomes the most revealing aspect of his character development. By blinding himself, Oedipus establishes that he is conscience-shaken by his reprehensible behavior. The fact that he would endure excruciating pain to avoid physically seeing the wreckage that has become his life elicits intense feelings of sympathy.

In committing such a vicious act, Oedipus has physically reflected his emotional torment with the agony of his gouged-out sockets. Though the immediate effect of the cruelty is the establishment that Oedipus is contrite and so overwhelmed with guilt that even his strongest heart feels the tug of sympathy, Oedipus's blinding himself makes a second revelation: it shows he is cleansed. As blood pours from his sockets like red hair, Oedipus is baptized in his own blood. After blindly ignoring his crimes for much of the play, Oedipus has finally come to terms with what he's done, and in cruelty punishing himself, purges his stamp and soul.
The fact that Oedipus is now forgiven is evidenced by the sensitivity with which he is treated after blinding himself. Neither choragous nor the messengers are repulsed by him; they pay his tragic circumstances. Even Creon, whom Oedipus accused of plotting against him, shows compassion by bringing him Oedipus's daughters for a final farewell.

Similarly, Jocaste's self-directed cruelty reveals that she is born overwrought with guilt and punished at her depravity. The mournful wife mother returns to the scene of her crime, the bedroom where she conceived children by her child, making a father of her son. Jocaste revives the double knot of her marriage before strangling herself up by a noose. In hanging herself, Jocaste finds forgiveness and peace. The guards speak of how her tragic story is moving even to those with hearts of stone. The significance of her cruelty as a means of redress is shown as Oedipus's shift from raging resentment to wounded sorrow. After demanding a weapon from Jocaste's guards to attack the woman who blotted his children and himself, Oedipus sees Jocaste hanging and immediately extinguishes his flaming vehemence to mourn her, lowering her subtly to the ground. This, sharp and rude shift and respectful treatment of her corpse shows Jocaste has been forgiven for the poisonous fruit she bore.

In Oedipus Rex, the heart-wrenching acts of cruelty that the royal couple of Thebes commit against themselves reveals that they are truly regretful and contrite about their wrongdoing and that the King and Queen have earned compassion from others through cruelty in themselves. Thus, the tragic cruelty assesses the deadly theme of Oedipus: the most fierce of the fall of one's transgressions to achieve peace and atonement.