

Barbara W. Tuchman, in her book *A Distant Mirror*, wrote, “More than a code of manners in war and love, Chivalry was a moral system, governing the whole of noble life.” The code of chivalry that Tuchman refers to required the knights of the Middle Ages to live an honorable existence. They were diligent about upholding the values of honesty and bravery, and they were expected to be loyal, kind, and generous to all. Long before the time of the knights and code of chivalry, Sophocles wrote *Antigone*, a play that exhibits many of those same desirable traits. Sophocles’ main character, Antigone exemplifies the Knight’s code of chivalry when she decides she must bury her brother. This decision to bury her brother demonstrates several of the character traits deemed crucial to the Knight’s code of chivalry. Antigone’s determination to stand up for what she believes is right shows her unwavering courage and profound loyalty to her Gods and her family.

Throughout the play, Antigone shows continuous and unparalleled courage. She knew that the penalty for burying Polyneices was death, yet she chose to bury him anyway. She was a young, smart, and beautiful woman with a long life of love and satisfaction ahead of her. Yet, she had the courage to choose the less self-satisfying option, and willfully disobeyed Creon’s orders to leave her brother’s body to “lie on the plain, unburied” (Sophocles 1074). Antigone demonstrates that she recognizes the severity of the punishment before she commits the crime. At one point, she stands up to Creon and proclaims, “I knew I must die,” (Sophocles 1082) making it clear that she knows her actions will result in her death. She later adds, “I beg you: kill me,” (Sophocles 1083) encouraging Creon to stop delaying and inflict the punishment of his decree. Not even Antigone’s sister, Ismene, is able to dissuade Antigone from disobeying Creon’s rules. Antigone also shows courage at the very end of the play when she chooses to take her own life. When she is buried alive in the stone tomb, she has to decide if she will end her life, or do nothing and starve to death. Even when faced with this difficult and heartbreaking decision, Antigone does not waver. She takes her life without hesitation, showing that she has the courage to do the unthinkable, for the right purpose.

In addition to proving she is courageous, Antigone also shows that she is extremely loyal. When her uncle, Creon, refuses to bury her brother, she decides that her loyalty to her Gods and her family is far

more important to her than Creon's edict and punishment. She believes that "all [Creon's] strength is weakness itself against the immortal unrecorded laws of God" (Sophocles 1082). She believes that her Gods will be angry at her if she does not properly bury Polyneices. She explains, "if I left my brother lying in death unburied, I should have suffered" (Sophocles 1083). Antigone means that if she had not buried her brother, then her punishment from the Gods would have been far worse than Creon's punishment. She is content with her decision because she knows that she has shown true fidelity to her Gods. She also can die with a clear conscience because she knows that the Gods will not retaliate against her for not providing her brother with a proper burial. Making the decision to cover her brother with dirt, all while knowing the severity of the consequences, demonstrates not only her honor and respect for her gods, but also shows that she is loyal to her family, even in the most difficult times.

Antigone's actions consistently illustrate how she is a loyal and courageous woman. These traits lead her to make good, difficult decisions. She proves that she is willing to stand up for what she believes to be right, even when she knows that she will be punished for doing so. She takes a stand against Creon, willfully accepting her fate of death. Antigone makes a good decision and her actions exemplify profound nobility. If she had lived during the medieval time period, then she definitely would have been worthy of knighthood. So, Barbara Tuchman could not have said it better when she recognized the impact of these conduct values on the ethical well-being of society.