

Philoctetes

By Sophocles

The Legend of Philoctetes Bow

Heracles

When Heracles lay dying, he commanded his son, Hyllus, to carry him to the funeral pyre. Hyllus could not bear to set fire to the pyre and Philoctetes, who was present, did so. As a reward, Philoctetes was rewarded the bow and arrows of Heracles which are guaranteed not to miss their target. Other versions of the legend state that Poeas, Philoctetes father, set fire to the pyre and then later gave his son the bow and arrows. According to the Sophocles version of the legend, Philoctetes helped Heracles fall into the volcano on the island Lemnos.

Abandoned

Philoctetes was later sailing to Troy when he was bitten by a water snake at the port of Chryse. This happened at a sacrifice and he cried out so loud it interfered with the ritual. Afraid of divine displeasure, the Greeks abandoned him on Lemnos with his bow and arrows. Lemnos was associated with Hephaestus the lame blacksmith god because of the volcano.

Prophecy.

After 10 years of the Trojan war, the Achaeans are told they can't win without Philoctetes and his bow. Most usually, legends state that Odysseus and Diomedes return for him, but Sophocles combines this prophecy with another – that Troy won't fall until the son of Achilles, Neoptolemus, is at Troy. According to Sophocles version of the legend, Odysseus has picked up Neoptolemus first and then sailed to pick up Philoctetes. The problem here is that, having been abandoned by the Greeks, he does not want to go to Troy and help them. Should Philoctetes be tricked into going to Troy (is a "noble lie" justified?) Should Philoctetes be persuaded to go to Troy? In this case, where an individual cripple refuses to bow to the greater good and help save the Greek army from further bloodshed, is might right and should he be forced?

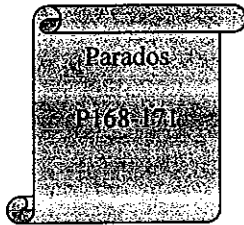
The Life of Sophocles

- His first victory at the dramatic festivals of Athens came in 468B.C.
- We have names of 100 tragedies that Sophocles wrote. Only 7 of his tragedies survive.
- According to the literary critic, Aristotle, his contribution to theatre was to add the third actor and introduce painted scenery.
- He was involved in the political and religious life of Athens in 5 C5 B.C., serving as a state treasurer, general and at the time of the Sicilian expedition was a select committeeman.
- He was a priest associated with the reception into Athens of a cult of Asclepius, the healer god. He died in 436B.C.

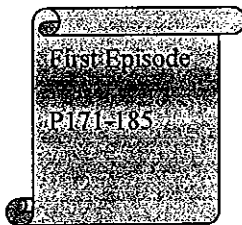


- Odysseus introduces us to the island of Lemnos , an island of desolation.
- He tells Neoptolemus, son of Achilles, that this is where he left Philoctetes. Immediately Philoctetes is associated with the isolated and barren island. Philoctetes has not just been physically isolated but socially isolated too. This tragedy is about his reintegration into society.
- Philoctetes was abandoned because his colleagues couldn't bear his wound. He becomes a social outcast too.
- His howls once interrupted a sacrifice and the Greeks are afraid that this would upset the gods and curse them. The Greeks sacrificed in silence.
- We hear that Philoctetes doesn't like Odysseus. Odysseus once abandoned his colleague and thus made an enemy of Philoctetes . There is an old Greek saying "help friends and harm enemies" Odysseus has made himself Philoctetes enemy.
- Neoptolemus is to be part of Odysseus' scheme to retrieve the bow. The name Neoptolemus means "new to the war" and at first he looks to Odysseus for direction . Another theme of this tragedy will be whether Neoptolemus is able to learn to discern the difference between right and wrong.
- There are things found in the cave that are associated with Philoctetes – he has leaves to sleep on (he's wild) and a wooden cup (he has to improvise to survive) There are also rags with blood on to symbolise his disability. The original audience would immediately have associated the cave in which Philoctetes lives and the leaves on which he sleeps with Homers description of the Cyclops in "The Odyssey", thus Philoctetes lives like a monster!
- Odysseus mustn't be seen by Philoctetes. He is hated and resented. Philoctetes has Heracles bow which cannot miss – Odysseus must hide.
- Neoptolemus is addressed as "son of Achilles" The tragedy is about whether Neoptolemus can live up to his fathers reputation.
- Odysseus claims Neoptolemus must trick Philoctetes. Odysseus tells Neoptolemus to say to Philoctetes that he's Achilles' son and that he's sailing home from Troy because he has a grudge against the Greeks . He is told to tell Philoctetes that Odysseus tricked him out of the armour of his father after Achilles' death (a corruption of the legend that Ajax was tricked out of the armour, Odysseus tells Neoptolemus to give Philoctetes half truths to get their way)
- The tragedy is also to be about friendship. The lies that Odysseus gets Neoptolemus to tell Philoctetes are an attempt to ally Neoptolemus to Philoctetes. Only part of these lies are true - Philoctetes has no grudge against Achilles so it's Ok for Neoptolemus to say that he's his son. Neoptolemus is sailing, but not home as he tells Philoctetes ,he is sailing to Troy. Odysseus did get Achilles' armour after his death, but Ajax lost it, not Neoptolemus as is claimed here. Odysseus can be seen to be corrupting the innocent Neoptolemus here since he willingly tells the lies. There is something else going on here too - Odysseus knew that if he asked Philoctetes himself, he would be shot and if Neoptolemus asks on his or the Greeks behalf, he would be refused. Sophocles seems to be asking the age old question – is it Ok to tell half truths (these aren't lies) in order to save lives (since if Philoctetes doesn't go to Troy then it will not be taken and many more Greeks will die)
- Odysseus claims that he must get the bow from Philoctetes or Troy will not be captured.
- Odysseus persuades Neoptolemus to lie, which Neoptolemus says is against his nature. Odysseus is afraid that Neoptolemus' honest nature will foil the plans from the start. Odysseus reassures him that it's Ok to tell the lie since the greater good of the Greek army is more important.
- Neoptolemus is not convinced. He is afraid his father wouldn't deceive and Neoptolemus claims that he certainly wouldn't deceive a cripple. Neoptolemus claims that he'd rather use persuasion than deception.
- Odysseus is afraid that if they tell the real story he'll use his weapons against those Greeks who proved themselves to be his enemies.

- Odysseus seems to think that it's Ok to lie if success and safety are at stake!
- We hear both Neoptolemus and Philoctetes arrows must be present for Greek victory at Troy. Neoptolemus is persuaded but the audience are left wondering whether Neoptolemus will really go through with the deception.
- Odysseus says that he'll send the sailor (that's been silently waiting since the beginning of the prologue) back later disguised as a merchant. He prays to Athena Polias - the goddess of the city who physically overlooked the audience in the theatre!
- At the end of the prologue, the audience are waiting to meet Philoctetes, waiting for the return of the sailor disguised as a merchant. They are also wondering whether Neoptolemus can keep up the charade and lie to Philoctetes.

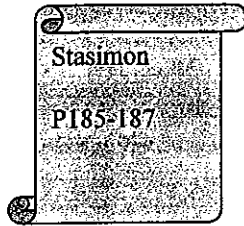


- The chorus are Neoptolemus' ship mates and act a bit like a conscience. Immediately they ask whether they should tell Philoctetes everything.
- Neoptolemus instructs them to watch for his signals and be ready to give assistance.
- There are more descriptions of his isolated home. The chorus are afraid that Philoctetes will jump out on them!
- Both the chorus and Neoptolemus express pity for Philoctetes as he is lonely and unsupported. They believe that Philoctetes is cursed.
- We hear Philoctetes moan off stage before we meet him -- this is significant as it makes us feel pity for him.

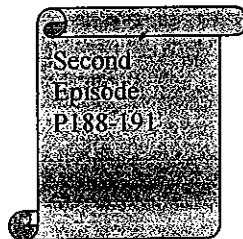


- Philoctetes enters. He has his bow and his foot is bandaged. These are his symbols. Anybody that was physically disabled in the ancient world was associated with moral and social disability. Philoctetes is socially disabled because of his isolation on Lemnos and morally disabled because of his resentment of the Greek leaders Odysseus, Agamemnon and Menelaus. There is dramatic tension at the end of the Parados -- how will Philoctetes greet a Greek?
- He is glad to hear a Greek voice as he's been isolated from his own people.
- Philoctetes trusts Neoptolemus instantly because he is the child of Achilles. His trust is child like.
- Neoptolemus is good at the deception at first -- he pretends he's never heard of Philoctetes.
- In a long speech he tells his side of the story and how he was left by Agamemnon and Menelaus -- note he won't even mention them by name! Isolated and surviving only because of his bow, disabled and in pain, he asks for passage home and curses the sons of Atreus!
- Neoptolemus claims that he too has suffered at their hands. He tells Philoctetes of Achilles death and the lie of how Agamemnon and Menelaus dishonoured him by giving Odysseus Achilles' arms. The chorus of seamen confirm his story.
- Immediately Philoctetes asks about Ajax -- this is ironic as of course, Ajax was the one who was really dishonoured over the armour of Achilles.
- Philoctetes claims that Odysseus (son of Laertes) and Diomedes (son of Tydaeus) should not live since they imprisoned him on the island. The original legend had it that it was Diomedes and Odysseus that came looking for Philoctetes and Sophocles changed it to Neoptolemus and Odysseus.

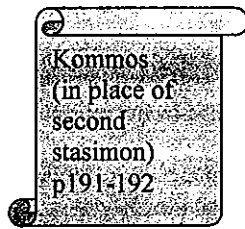
- Philoctetes learns of the death of the son of Nestor , Antilochus, and of the death of Patroclus. He hears that Odysseus is still alive (Odysseus is in hiding behind a rock on satge we are to imagine) Neoptolemus says that Odysseus will one day meet his match – ironically, in this tragedy, Neoptolemus' honesty is his match!
- Neoptolemus says that he's returning home and that he'll leave Philoctetes on the island of Lemnos.
- Philoctetes begs Neoptolemus, for the sake of his father Achilles, not to leave him on the island. Philoctetes talks of Neoptolemus' noble nature. Philoctetes goes as a suppliant to Neoptolemus, physically kneeling before him. He begs Neoptolemus to take him with him.
- Neoptolemus feels it necessary to say that once Philoctetes gets to know him better, he might change his mind about closer acquaintance!
- Philoctetes is about to leave for the ship with Neoptolemus when the merchant that Odysseus promised to send comes in. This tragedy is full of false starts -- clearly Sophocles couldn't allow Philoctetes to leave the island now, Odysseus would have won and it would be a short tragedy.
- Sophocles introduces the merchant , not just because it would be a short tragedy but because he can tell Philoctetes of the prophecy that states that Philoctetes must be at Troy or it won't fall (previously the emphasis has been on just the bow of Heracles being at Troy)Neoptolemus can't tell Philoctetes of the prophecy or that would make him suspicious. The effect of this piece of information is to make Philoctetes even firmer friends with Neoptolemus who he believes is a fellow enemy of Odysseus.
- The character of the merchant could have been played by the same actor that played Odysseus but with a different mask!
- The merchant leads Philoctetes to believe that Odysseus and Diomedes are coming to pick Philoctetes up. This was the version of the legend that was thought to be true by Sophocles audience. We know that because we are watching a tragedy where it's Neoptolemus and Odysseus that really come to pick Philoctetes up, that the original legend was a lie spread by Odysseus to trick Philoctetes! The audience had been deceived by Odysseus for years!
- The merchant tells us only what Odysseus wants us to hear . he says here that Helenus' prophecy states that it's Philoctetes Odysseus is after (not the bow as Odysseus previously told Neoptolemus) This is to make the story more plausible to Philoctetes who believes that Odysseus hates him anyway- he doesn't realise that the bow is significant too.
- Neoptolemus stalls. He claims that the wind isn't right. He seems to think that he might be a pawn in Odysseus' game to harm Philoctetes. He asks what Philoctetes wants to take on board the ship and Philoctetes replies that he wants to take on board herbs to soothe his wound and Heracles' arrows (which are poisoned)
- Like the herb, Neoptolemus' friendship can only bring temporary relief for Philoctetes. At this point the friendship is based on half truths.
- The bow is allowed to be touched by Neoptolemus who regards it as a holy object.
- Philoctetes regards Neoptolemus as a saviour figure at this point.
- By physically handing the bow to Neoptolemus , Philoctetes signifies he trusts him and regards him as a friend. Neoptolemus regards Philoctetes as a friend. Neoptolemus is transfixed because he is allowed to touch the bow.
- Neoptolemus regards friendship as reciprocal – kindness for kindness . Neoptolemus is not being kind. His friendship is based on a lie.
- Neoptolemus could escape with the bow at this point but we hear later that both Philoctetes and the bow are needed at Troy - just the bow would be useless.
- Neoptolemus helps Philoctetes tend his wound.



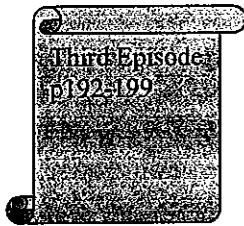
- This is a choral song about Ixion. This is the only choral lyric in this tragedy not shared with an individual actor.
- Ixion killed his father in law and when no one else would purify him, Zeus himself accepted him as a suppliant. Ixion then attempted to rape Hera and for this offence, he was bound to a wheel of fire for all eternity.
- Like Ixion – Philoctetes suffers eternally.
- Sophocles uses Ixion because either :
 - a) Ixion's suffering was deserved and Philoctetes isn't
 - b) Neoptolemus and Odysseus offer a way out for Philoctetes - he'll be healed when he gets to Troy. Philoctetes will refuse to go and will want to kill the one who offers help. Ixion accepted help from Zeus and then betrayed him.
- Is the sympathy of the audience hypocritical? They too have convinced Philoctetes that what Neoptolemus has said is true - they are equally to blame.
- The chorus says that Philoctetes will be carried home to "Oetas height where the Lord of the bronze shield reigns in the splendour of heavenly light" This refers to Heracles burned on Mt. Oeta.



- Philoctetes and Neoptolemus emerge from the cave together. Prior to this, the cave has been a symbol of Philoctetes' isolation, now it becomes a symbol of friendship as they emerge together.
- Philoctetes is seized by a spasm of pain and asks Neoptolemus to look after the bow, a symbol of trust and friendship. The bow is handed to Neoptolemus and he swears not to allow another to touch it while Philoctetes is in pain.
- There is dramatic irony since in his pain, Philoctetes hopes that Odysseus will feel pain and Odysseus is hiding somewhere on stage in earshot of this remark.
- Philoctetes tells how he helped to throw Heracles who was in pain into the volcano on the island of Lemnos. Sophocles changes part of the legend slightly – usually Philoctetes' father Poeas helps Heracles to kill himself by throwing him onto a funeral pyre on Mt. Oeta or lighting the pyre. By changing the legend (or using a less well known version) he blends two legends concerned with Philoctetes into one. It's important that the Philoctetes legends are situated on the island of Lemnos since it's associated with the forge of Hephaestus, the lame blacksmith god (because of the volcano)
- Philoctetes probably turns away from Neoptolemus or Neoptolemus turns away in shame, unable to face him since Philoctetes claims that he can't see him. Again, this is a symbolic gesture as Neoptolemus is hiding his real purpose in helping him from Philoctetes. Ashamed, Neoptolemus will confess the truth.



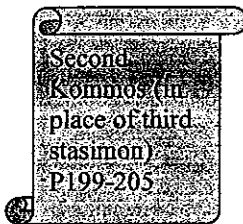
- Philoctetes seems to think Neoptolemus doesn't have the courage to stand by him in his pain. The audience is left wondering whether Neoptolemus will run away with the bow. The chorus suggest he could!
- At this point we learn from Neoptolemus that both the bow and man have to be at Troy for the city to fall. Odysseus originally said that the bow was important. The merchant (Odysseus' man) reported that Philoctetes was important. Neoptolemus believes that both must be at Troy. He didn't hear Helenus' prophecy first hand and only has Odysseus' accounts of the prophecy to go on.
- Neoptolemus may say that both the bow and man are needed because he would feel bad about stealing the bow from a suffering man who trusted him and this justifies his actions in not running off. It would also be a short tragedy if just the bow were needed! Odysseus later physically threatens to carry him and the bow on board the ship. The man is probably needed at Troy since his presence at Troy will mean compensation for his suffering (as he gets heroic status)
- The chorus say that Neoptolemus should take Philoctetes while he's asleep and then Philoctetes wakes up and we are left wondering if he would have taken him if he'd stayed asleep!



- There is irony as Philoctetes wakes and thinks that Neoptolemus has had pity on him when he was really wondering whether to take him on board the ship!
- At first Neoptolemus is happy to continue the charade of friendship and even offers to get the chorus to carry him off to his ship (Philoctetes believes he'll go back to Greece with him)
- Neoptolemus offers to physically support him to the ship - again a sign of friendship.
- Philoctetes is concerned that his wounds might be putting Neoptolemus off.
- At this point, Neoptolemus realises that he is going against his nature and not living up to his father's reputation by deceiving a cripple.
- If Neoptolemus says nothing about going to Troy then he's deceiving Philoctetes but if he says something he's also deceiving him. He's "twice false"
- Odysseus reappears, now Philoctetes does not have the bow he can't be killed Neoptolemus restrains him and Odysseus escapes.
- Philoctetes claims that Neoptolemus is now like Achilles' son - not like the son of Sisyphus (Odysseus was often thought to be the deceiver Sisyphus' son)
- Neoptolemus accuses Philoctetes of clinging to suffering. If he goes to Troy he promises healing but this is the first time this part of the prophecy is announced! Up to now, there's been nothing in it for Philoctetes but personal honour, not healing!
- He refuses to help Odysseus and the sons of Atreus, that's why he won't go. Now it's not a physical wound that's preventing him from going to Troy but an emotional wound.
- Once Neoptolemus confesses his duplicity, Philoctetes asks for his bow back, that is a symbol of friendship.
- Neoptolemus confesses that he is working for another.
- Philoctetes speech implies that Neoptolemus turns away in shame as he confesses.
- The things that Philoctetes uses to shame Neoptolemus are: he's not Achilles' real son since he doesn't act like his father, he's robbing a cripple and he's gone against his true nature. These

words are designed to wound Neoptolemus and shame him into giving back the bow (since shame is being afraid of what others say about you)

- Philoctetes says that he must return to his cave – a symbol of isolation and loneliness. Without his bow and arrows (certain to hit what they're aimed at) he'll starve.
- Philoctetes turns like a suppliant on his knees to Neoptolemus.
- The chorus remind Neoptolemus that he has a choice – to return the bow to Philoctetes and allow him to survive or take it from him and sail to Troy. It never seems to cross Philoctetes mind that he must go to Troy for the greater good of the Greek army – his motives are personal and selfish.
- He asks the audience what he should do – is one mans personal objection to override the greater good?
- Odysseus reappears, he's been hiding but isn't afraid to jump out here because Philoctetes doesn't have the bow, he'd kill him straight away if he did.
- Odysseus calls Neoptolemus a traitor since he didn't seize the opportunity to take advantage of Philoctetes.
- Both Odysseus and Philoctetes demand the bow. Odysseus and Philoctetes both see the bow as their salvation ,for the Greek army and their own life.
- Odysseus threatens to force Philoctetes to go. Odysseus' excuse is that force is necessary when the greater good is at stake.Odysseus seems to believe it is right to force the "will of Zeus"
- Philoctetes threatens to commit suicide by "jumping from the cliffs" Odysseus knows that this must be stopped since both the bow and man are needed at Troy.
- Philoctetes is prevented from jumping by force and calls for his bow to be returned.
- Philoctetes knows that Odysseus is behind Neoptolemus' deception.
- Odysseus orders his release and says he'll use the bow and leave Philoctetes on the island. He's probably bluffing since he know he needs the person of Philoctetes present to win the war at Troy.
- Since revealing his deception, Neoptolemus has been unable to look at Philoctetes.
- Odysseus advises Neoptolemus not to look in case his "noble nature betrays him".



- Philoctetes bewails his fate , left on a deserted island to fend for himself.
- The chorus remind him that he can escape to Troy.
- If Philoctetes could swallow his resentment of Odysseus, he'd go to Try. This resentment is an emotional wound. If he goes to Troy he'll be reintegrated into society but he can't be re integrated if he can't swallow his pride.
- On one occasion he almost goes with the chorus but claims that the pain of his wound prevents him and asks to die, believing that by his death he will punish his enemies.
- Philoctetes has two wounds – an emotional one and a physical one. When he thinks about going with the Greeks his physical wound plays up because his emotional wound is unhealed.



- The chorus are about to leave when Neoptolemus returns with Philoctetes bow. Odysseus is not far behind.
- Neoptolemus' intention is to give the bow back and Odysseus threatens him with the Greek army who claims will be betrayed by this action. Odysseus draws his sword physically threatening Neoptolemus.
- If Odysseus really believed that what he was doing was for the greater good of the Greek army then strictly speaking he should kill Neoptolemus with the sword and force Philoctetes onto his ship but he can't and leaves.
- Philoctetes comes out of the cave to the sound of Neoptolemus' voice, the cave is a symbol of desolation
- Philoctetes is able to forgive but as soon as Neoptolemus sides with his enemies, the sons of Atreus and Odysseus, he finds he can't forgive and refuses to go to Troy.
- True friendship to Philoctetes is shown when Neoptolemus agrees to take him home.
- Heracles appears to end the dilemma of what Philoctetes should do - deus ex machina (a crane would lift a divinity to the top of the skene building) He tells Philoctetes he must go to Troy. Philoctetes obeys.
- This is the only existing Sophocles play where he uses deus ex machina to avert a course of action.
- The audience knew Philoctetes went to Troy. Sophocles' characters are at loggerheads. There must be a way he gets to Troy and Sophocles claims it's only Heracles' intervention that gets him there.
- The audience has been wondering all tragedy how Sophocles will get Philoctetes to Troy. We discover Philoctetes is too stubborn in the play and Neoptolemus too honourable to take him by force.
- Apart from the obvious reason (Philoctetes has Heracles' bow) it's good that Heracles appears - he suffered like Philoctetes and eventually became a god because of his suffering. Heracles went to Hades and returned. Philoctetes goes from social death to life by going to Troy.

Staging the Philoctetes

- The play is set on an island with a cave. Sophocles is said to have invented stage scenery according to Aristotle. The cave could be painted scenery with two openings to the cave. The actors could also have used the stage building and the only visible entrance to the cave could have been the door to the skene unless we envisage two doors in the skene building.
- The Cave has two mouths, one northward and a seaward entrance. The north entrance was probably the door to the skene and the audience would imagine the seaward entrance. The Orchestra was the beach.
- The suicide scene where Philoctetes threatens to throw himself off the cliff has caused problems. The actor may have climbed on the skene building and threatened to throw himself off or a level platform may have been built outside the front of the cave on which Philoctetes stood (but this was difficult as there would have been more than one play per day and the scenery would have to be removed quickly for the next one) The eccyclema might have been used, this was a platform on wheels usually used to display dead bodies but might have been used as a platform.
- The deus ex Machina – the only Sophocles play to use this device. The god Heracles is lifted into the air on a crane and appears over the scenic building.

Character Studies
The Tragedy that ends happily

The Isolation of Philoctetes

- The wound of Philoctetes is a social nuisance and because his Greek colleagues can't bear the unpleasant effects of the wound, he's left on Lemnos.
- The cave and its location are high up on a cliff and symbolise desolation. Philoctetes sleeps on leaves, eats from a wooden cup and hunts for food like an animal. Neoptolemus refers to him as a "monster" and the location of the cliff on the mountain is to remind us of the description of Cyclops cave in Homers "Odyssey".
- The chorus pities Philoctetes and think he's "out of his mind". They refer to his cave as a lair as if it's the home of an animal. Later they believe that he's good and innocent and "a lover of truth and gentleness"
- Neoptolemus believes that Philoctetes is "wild" with no true knowledge of laws or good customs. Therefore he lacks civilised behaviour.
- Odysseus fears that Philoctetes may hunt him with his bow and arrows as if Odysseus is an animal.
- Philoctetes believes he endures a living death. He believes the Greeks have forgotten about him.
- To Philoctetes the cave is a grave.
- He and his wound are in constant conflict.
- He calls for death on a daily basis.
- His bow is his life - he claims that he can't live without it.
- He refers to himself as a ghost without his bow – he's a deadman without because he wouldn't survive.
- He tells Odysseus he's long been dead – murdered by the sons of Atreus.

Reintegration of Philoctetes into Society

- When Philoctetes appears he is eager to speak Greek, a sign of civilisation. He holds conversation with Neoptolemus about mutual friends (and enemies) in the Greek army. A first sign of his reintegration is mutual sharing.
- Neoptolemus is new to the scene. Philoctetes has nothing against the next generation of Greek warriors.
- Neoptolemus and Philoctetes seem to be allied against mutual enemies too. Philoctetes learns to trust again but this makes it more devastating when he finds out Neoptolemus is in league against him with Odysseus.
- Although Philoctetes hands over the bow, it doesn't make much difference. He refuses to go to Troy, only there can he be healed spiritually, physically and socially. By choosing not to go, he chooses death.

Heracles and the Bow

- Heracles became a god through suffering which was both voluntary and involuntary. The 12 labours helped to make the world a better place.
- The bow is a symbol of salvation both for the Greek army, without the bow they will keep dying at Troy. It is a symbol of salvation for Philoctetes too since without it he'll starve.
- The bow is a symbol of friendship. Philoctetes allows Neoptolemus to hold it while he suffers. He demands it back when he realises that he's in league with Odysseus.
- Heracles sets a pattern of glory through suffering. This releases Philoctetes to healing and achievement which at the end of the tragedy he is told will be his.
- At the close of the tragedy, both Neoptolemus and Philoctetes are told by Heracles that they need each other in order to win at Troy. Philoctetes is fully integrated into society.

The Maturing of Neoptolemus

- The first time we meet Neoptolemus he's dependent on Odysseus to show him the way. He calls him "sir" and takes orders from him.
- He's instructed in everything by Odysseus, he tells him to lie and he does so.
- Odysseus is aware of Neoptolemus' noble nature and believes that this will cause problems. He convinces him to lie by playing on his weaknesses, promising Neoptolemus prizes and glory if he acts for the greater good of the Greek army.
- Neoptolemus is only prepared to tell half truths to Philoctetes. He wins his trust and is allowed to hold the sacred bow.
- He goes into the cave with Philoctetes and they come out together.
- He is witness to Philoctetes pain and guards the bow as a sacred trust, watching over and protecting Philoctetes.
- Ironically, all these chances that he's offered for success undermine his resolve until he confesses he's a man "betraying himself"
- He still hopes Philoctetes will come freely to Troy.
- Neoptolemus is torn between duty to Odysseus and friendship to Philoctetes.
- Odysseus takes charge and ushers Neoptolemus away.
- After exiting with Odysseus, Neoptolemus returns firmly in control. He must win back the trust of Philoctetes however.
- He returns and prophetically tells Philoctetes that not only does the Greek army need him but he needs the Greek army, he'll only be healed if he goes to Troy to help them.
- Neoptolemus is prepared to make the supreme sacrifice - prepared to give up all hope of glory at Troy and becoming like his father, by returning with Philoctetes back to Greece.
- Neoptolemus grows up. He is now his own man and has achieved a new kind of heroism, different from his fathers, he will sacrifice what he wants for others. It is only when Neoptolemus is prepared to make this decision that Heracles steps in.

Odysseus- Do the Ends justify the Means?

- Odysseus is in charge of Neoptolemus and is prepared to get him to lie for a greater good –the Greek army can only win at Troy if both Philoctetes and his bow is present.
- Odysseus is the only one able to remember the real reason for the expedition – to win at Troy. He sees the “bigger picture” not just Philoctetes suffering.
- As Neoptolemus seems to be abandoning his plan he returns.
- He has no hostility to Philoctetes and claims that he’s the “equal of the bravest with whom you are to conquer Troy”
- Odysseus is accused of doing “wrong” by Neoptolemus - he claims that he’s simply doing his duty.
- The outcome of the tragedy demonstrates that the ends don’t justify the means . Philoctetes is offered victory at Troy by Odysseus but can’t be tricked into it. At the end of the tragedy we learn that Philoctetes must willingly co operate and go to Troy.
- The “wisdom” of Odysseus is insufficient. The day is won by the true “justice” of Neoptolemus and underwritten by a voice from heaven.