

# ISMENE'S PRESS CONFERENCE

By Judy Klass

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# ISMENE'S PRESS CONFERENCE

*A One Act Drama*

**By Judy Klass**

**SYNOPSIS:** Ismene Kadmos comes from a family that's famous for the wrong reasons – her father was Oedipus Rex! She has tried to re-define herself as a reporter on Thebes TV. But her radical sister Antigone wants Ismene to help stand up to their Uncle Kreon, who is stealing elections, Antigone says. Bob, Ismene's boss, tells her that good reporters cooperate with people in power, to get access. Ismene has always been quieter than her sister, but maybe Antigone is right; maybe everyone sees them as celebrity freaks anyhow, and a good journalist should make trouble . . . Antigone gets radical, and Ismene doesn't join her. Bob arranges a press conference for Ismene to talk about a new way to "adjust" the exit polls – and Ismene has a big choice to make, when it comes to what she'll say.

## CAST OF CHARACTERS

*(2 females, 1 male)*

- ISMENE KADMOS (f) ..... 20's; A sleek, beautiful, well-groomed newscaster. Polite, cheerful and usually not loud or forceful in her manner.  
*(85 lines)*
- BOB (m) ..... 30's; Ismene's boss. The anchor/producer of the Thebes TV News. More confident and assertive, but equally mediagenic.  
*(58 lines)*
- ANTIGONE KADMOS (f)..... 20's; Ismene's fiery, radical sister. Is not concerned with fashion or with pleasing others. She has an in-your-face, uncompromising attitude.  
*(29 lines)*

FEMALE VOICE (f) ..... Offstage speaker, can be played by Antigone or pre-recorded.  
(2 lines)

**DURATION:** 30 minutes.

**SETTING:** The news-floor of Thebes TV.

**TIME:** Somewhere between several thousand years ago and the not-so-distant future.

### COSTUMES

BOB and ISMENE – Wear sleek, designer suits, as befits TV news personalities. Ismene may wear a silk scarf and/or tasteful jewelry as well. Bob will also wear a wrist watch.

ANTIGONE – May go in for more of a punk, counter-culture look or just jeans and a sweatshirt.

### SET

Part of the stage represents the newsroom, with a desk and a chair for Bob, as anchor. Part of the stage represents Ismene's dressing room with, again, a desk and a chair. Her laptop should be on her desk.

### PROPS

- Thumb Drive
- 2 Cell Phones
- Prompter
- Camera
- Laptop/Computer
- Vote Box (Can be a medium sized cardboard box painted black, treated as if it were heavier than it is.)

### SOUND EFFECTS

- Cell Phone Rings
- Staticky White Noise
- News Theme Music
- Beeps and Boops (Computer Noise)

### DIRECTOR'S NOTE

Even though this play involves characters from an ancient tragedy called *Antigone*, by Sophocles, and some of the references are to beliefs and practices in ancient Greece (*worshiping gods like Zeus, Apollo, etc.*) it is best to play this play as completely contemporary. The characters should talk, dress and act like modern people. Also – the ancient Greeks did not believe in mixing comedy and tragedy – but modern playwrights (*this one, anyhow*) do. So, there are serious moments in this play, moments of tension and drama – but if the play gets some laughs, that's fine also.

### AUTHOR'S NOTE

There are some hard-to-pronounce, ancient Greek names in this play. Here's a guide:

ISMENE – Is-MAY-knee.

ANTIGONE – Ant-TIG- (*rhymes with twig*)-gun-knee.

OEDIPUS – Brits say EED-eh-puss. Americans say ED-eh-puss.

JOCASTA – Joe-CAHST-uh. (*Rhymes with Joe-pasta.*)

ETEOCLES – Ee-TEE-o-cles (*rhymes with seize*).

POLYNICES – Polly-NI- (*rhymes with "buy"*) –seize.

KREON – Brits say Crayon, Americans say KREE-on.

TEIRESIUS – Tee-uh-REE-see-us.

KADMOS – CAD-mos (*rhymes with dose*).

**AT RISE:** *BOB sits behind a desk, reading from a prompter, smiling into the camera in his perfect suit and tie. ISMENE stands to the side in a tailored, sexy suit, camera-ready. Newsroom SFX: THEME MUSIC plays.*

**BOB:** Hi, folks, is this a beautiful election day, or what? It's almost like the gods smiled down on Thebes and wanted to give people a break, as they wait in line at their polling stations. Now, the polls have closed already at Gates One through Four, but voting is on-going at Gates Five, Six and Seven. For those who haven't cast a vote yet, here are some Election Day tips from our own Ismene Kadmos!

*LIGHTS UP on ISMENE. She looks into the camera with a radiant smile.*

**ISMENE:** Thanks, Bob. Though I think most people know the drill. But for first-time voters, make sure you've got your iPod full of songs, and some good games on your handheld. The waiting in line can get kind of tedious. But don't give up – your vote is too important for that! Once you get inside the polling station, a volunteer will lead you to your touch-screen machine and show you how to use it. Don't be afraid to ask for advice if you need it. Remember: one of the best ways to show your loyalty to Thebes is to get on out there and vote!

*The LIGHT is off of ISMENE, and back on BOB.*

**BOB:** Ismene, you are so right. Folks, we're taking a break, but then Brad is gonna be back with sports news. And remember – the Olympics are not that far away! This could be the year when our Theban athletes break all records, and leave Athens and Sparta in the dust! So, for the latest, from the mountains of Kithairon, to the Kadmeian Citadel, keep it tuned here, to Thebes TV.

*The newsroom SFX: THEME MUSIC plays again for a moment. He sees the signal, and says to ISMENE.*

Okay, we're off. Ismene, hold up a second – I know you're due for a break . . .

**ISMENE:** Sure, Bob, what is it?

**BOB:** *(Reaching behind his desk.)* I've got something I need to talk to you about. *(With difficulty, lifts a heavy black box into the air.)* Could we maybe step into your dressing room?

**ISMENE:** That's fine.

*They move to the part of the stage that represents her dressing room.*

Are you okay with that thing?

**BOB:** Yeah, I've got it.

**ISMENE:** What is it?

**BOB:** *(Setting it down in her dressing room.)* It's a vote box. From the First Gate of Thebes.

**ISMENE:** A vote box?

**BOB:** It contains the hard drive, which contains all the votes. It lifts right out. You can access it on your computer, using this new program – here's the thumb drive. *(Shows her the thumb drive.)* Your computer will pick up the signal from the vote box itself.

**ISMENE:** *(Taking thumb drive.)* Should – should we have this here in the studio?

**BOB:** Well, we've got a little bit of a crisis on our hands right now, Ismene. To be perfectly frank – you could get us out of a hole – not just Thebes TV, but all the networks.

**ISMENE:** Me? How?

**BOB:** You're just about the prettiest computer geek I know. Geekette, whatever. If anyone at the station can figure out this new software, it's you. *(Points.)* That thumb drive contains a new system for adjusting our exit polls. The exit polls at the First Gate of the city were off again – way off. This time they showed your Uncle Kreon losing by something like seven percent of the vote. But as you'll see when you look at the figures in that box, he actually won at the First Gate by five percent!

**ISMENE:** Did we adjust for –

**BOB:** For everything! We changed how we sampled, the demographics of who we asked . . . It didn't compensate this time. And other networks are having the same problem. This program should be able to pinpoint what's wrong, and correct it. As soon as you get the thing running, let me know.

**ISMENE:** Well, I'll – I'll certainly try, Bob.

**BOB:** Great. And, you know, you are going to get credit for this. We'd like you to hold a press conference later today, to announce the results of the election, and let the world know that Thebes TV has the most accurate exit polls of any network around. We'll get this program to the others eventually – but let them sweat it out with their erratic numbers a little longer.

**ISMENE:** Sure, I hear you.

**BOB:** Atta girl, talk to you later.

*BOB gives her a last warm smile and leaves. ISMENE sits at her own small desk, and opens her laptop. She inserts the drive. Her fingers fly over her keyboard. ANTIGONE enters. She looks disheveled, wild-eyed, determined.*

**ANTIGONE:** *(Calls in a loud whisper.)* Ismene!

**ISMENE:** *(Looks up, stands and calls out to her with a smile.)*  
Antigone!

**ANTIGONE:** Sssshh! I slipped past security to get in here. I'm not sure they'd want me in the building.

**ISMENE:** Oh, if you're with me it's all right. It's good to see you! Did you vote yet today?

**ANTIGONE:** No, I'm – I'm actually going to perform my civic duty right about now. I was wondering . . . if you would come with me.

**ISMENE:** Oh, I already voted. At the Third Gate, on my way to work this morning.

**ANTIGONE:** That's – not what I had in mind.

**ISMENE:** What, then?

**ANTIGONE:** I'm asking you to join with me. That's what I came here for. Come with me to the Seventh Gate. And when we get inside – we'll lift a vote box out of a voting machine – (*Points to the box on the floor.*) – one that looks like that – and in front of the security cameras, we'll hold it up in the air, and then smash it to pieces on the floor! Now that will make for some hot footage for the evening news broadcast!

**ISMENE:** (*Horrified.*) You're asking me to be a terrorist? To sabotage the elections?

**ANTIGONE:** I'm asking you to acknowledge with me, before all of Thebes, that an election without a paper trail is a joke and a farce and a parody of real elections! (*Stares pointedly at the box.*) What is that, anyway? It looks like the real thing.

**ISMENE:** It's – it's only a dummy. With made-up results inside.

**ANTIGONE:** (*Scornful.*) And how is that any different from the real thing? They call it a vote box, or a black box – why don't they just call it a black hole? Votes get lost inside of it, irretrievable, unverifiable, never to be seen again –

**ISMENE:** Look, I'm still learning about it. I'm going to use that dummy to – we've got to adjust the exit polls, and –

**ANTIGONE:** “Adjust” the exit polls. With every election, now, it seems, you media talking heads do that. Exit polls could be the one control group, the one fail-safe system, the one thing their computers didn't touch. Ismene, don't you understand that exit polls don't lie, they can't lie, until they are “adjusted”?

**ISMENE:** A lot of things can go wrong with the sampling, reporters can show a bias in who they stop and ask without realizing it –

**ANTIGONE:** No. Uh-uh. When you have that many people who are asked, at random, or every third person who comes out, whatever it is, you get accurate results. Plus or minus one percentage point, that's as far off as they can be. How much are your exit polls off by this time?

**ISMENE:** (*Looking away.*) More than that.

**ANTIGONE:** And how are you going to “adjust” them?

**ISMENE:** I don't know. I'm not sure yet. I'll learn by – by trying things out with this dummy vote box.

**ANTIGONE:** Well, it looks pretty authentic to me. But I'm not going to try anything here, don't worry. I'm not going to bully you, or wreck your career. I want you to choose to wreck it. I want you to join me of your own free will, Ismene.

**ISMENE:** I can't join you.

**ANTIGONE:** You're a princess. You're the daughter of a king who loved this city of Thebes more than –

**ISMENE:** I know who and what our father was.

**ANTIGONE:** Never be ashamed to be the daughter of Oedipus and Jocasta. Look people in the eye, and represent the House of Kadmos with pride.

**ISMENE:** I do look people in the eye, now. I've gotten away from all that sordid business. With Mom and Dad. With our brothers.

**ANTIGONE:** Yes, you're quite the famous girl reporter. You always liked bringing news – prophecies from the Oracle at Delphi.

**ISMENE:** Go ahead and laugh at me if you want to, but I've won two awards for journalism this year alone. I've worked hard to earn the respect of my colleagues.

**ANTIGONE:** (*Scornful.*) Colleagues! You're a freak to them. A freak, whose father killed his own father and married his mother. That's what you symbolize, on the air, when you walk down the street, to everyone who sees you. Patricide, regicide, incest, abomination –

**ISMENE:** Antigone, don't –

**ANTIGONE:** Every day of your life, so don't try to pass, don't try to get along with them, don't you ever forget it. You're a freak, like me! But you're a tame, convenient freak, who knows how to dress.

**ISMENE:** You're wrong.

**ANTIGONE:** I'm not wrong about you knowing how to dress. That's an amazing suit. And your hair – you look great.

**ISMENE:** Well, thanks, and you can mock me and spit on all I've accomplished till you're out of breath, I just don't care. I love my job and I'm good at it, and I feel accepted by my peers. I take a lot of pride in what I do.

**ANTIGONE:** And you think that what goes on here – that this is real journalism? That there's a difference between you people and the PR men, the Spin Doctors who put out the official story?

**ISMENE:** I know exactly how real this is. They used to give me fluff pieces on the morning show – birthdays of baby animals in the zoo! Celebrity gossip. Now they're letting me take on some real news, the more substantial stories. Yes, I think I have every right, at this stage of my career, to call myself a journalist.

**ANTIGONE:** And right about now you think your crazy sister Antigone is going to ruin all of that for you, is that it? Out of spite, or jealousy, or recklessness?

**ISMENE:** Look, I've – I've got a new program to learn, Antigone. I'm sorry, but I don't have time for your political rants and your conspiracy theories –

**ANTIGONE:** Uncle Kreon has been stealing election after election, and that's no conspiracy theory –

**ISMENE:** Uncle Kreon is popular with many people, just not with you and your radical friends.

**ANTIGONE:** Yes, the elections used to be closer, almost a tie, easier to steal without people taking notice. Now he's less popular, but the precedent has been established, hasn't it. He knows what he can expect when he cheats. You media cowards go along with it, the public accepts it, and so the man is willing to take any desperate chance –

**ISMENE:** This is all conjecture –

**ANTIGONE:** Everything is all conjecture without a paper trail! Now, will you come with me?

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