"Oedipus complex" is the emotional, unconscious mindset for a young boy that desires to sexually possess his mother and kill his father in the process due to jealousy. The idea was discovered by the father of psychoanalysis, Sigmund Freud, in the late 19th century. Freud, however, didn’t publish his finding until 1910. He first started developing theories in the 1890s when hearing stories about early childhood abuse, and ultimately linked them to early childhood sexual fantasies. Freud would later go on to prove that this occurred during one of the childhood stages of psychosexual development, usually between the ages of three and six. He believed every young boy experienced this phenomenon and the passing of the phase was a sign of maturity within males. Freud coined the phrase “Oedipus Complex” due to the events that play out in Sophocles’ play “Oedipus Rex.”
Freud argues that the Oedipus Complex is the framework for the human psyche. With the formation of this theory, Freud for the first time acknowledged the idea of sexual thoughts within children prior to puberty. He argued that the Oedipus complex was universal and that it defined the human race. He uses the model to explain how the mature human mind is formed. During this phase, the boy wants to be his father, thus, have sexual relations with his mother, then the boy matures, and he wishes to be similar to his father, to develop a relationship with a woman and build a relationship similar to his father’s. Freud believed the desire for one’s mother often ended around age five or six. Freud stressed that this was a phase of early child development, and that failure to progress psychosexually has negative effects, often including neurosis, pedophilia, and incest. In most cases, this is communicated non-verbally and is just a strong feeling a boy has subconsciously for a few years. Thus, a boy rarely openly communicates his feelings for his mother or his jealousy of his father.

Freud’s ideas during his time were very controversial and still are today. Although he was a pioneer in the field of psychoanalysis, many of his ideas and theories have been debunked. Nevertheless, his ideas remain a part of culture, and are sometimes cited in literature, poetry, and popular culture.

Skim the next reading. What do you think is the author’s purpose of the text: to inform, entertain, or to persuade? How will that affect the way you take notes on the reading?

**Vocabulary in Context**

- **Guess the vocabulary in bold using the context.**

1. In classic Freudian psychology, the Oedipus complex **rears itself** between the ages of 3 and 6.
2. With my first son, I was one of those mothers who was **all-in**, and my son knew it.
3. I’m going to **bring this up** when you bring a girlfriend home at 16.
4. Before long, my son had moved from swift **pecks** on my cheek to tongue flying at my face from the other side of the couch.
5. Say what you will about **debunked** Freudian hypotheses. You’ve never lived in a house where your infant scratched your husband’s eyes out, resulting in $4,000 cornea resurfacing surgery.
6. But the **railing against** his father was getting worse every day.
7. But sometimes a kid just has to do what dad says, so Adam took to **combating** the tiny tyrannical outbursts by **enveloping** our son in love.
8. “Nooooo!” our son **retorted**.
9. Tension every time my husband walked in the room. My husband **took it in stride**, but I saw it on his face – deep sadness and the feeling that he was unwelcome in his own home.
10. He had never given up trying **to forge** a relationship with his son.
11. Do you try to love less? Make yourself less lovable? Do you **scale back** how much time you spend with your children?

Go to the following link for the reading: [https://www.salon.com/2014/05/12/my_sons_oedipus_complex/](https://www.salon.com/2014/05/12/my_sons_oedipus_complex/)
• Answer the following questions according to the article.

1. The story of Oedipus Rex is read in almost all middle or high schools in the US. A famous idea in child psychology created by Sigmund Freud in the early 1900s is the idea of “Oedipus Complex”. According to this article, what is “Oedipus Complex”?

2. There are 3 references to the Oedipus story in this article. What are they?
   1. 
   2. 
   3. 

3. Who does the author seem to blame for her son’s “phase”?

4. How does she know her son’s “Oedipus phase” is over?

Critical Thinking Questions

• Answer the following questions. Compare your answers with a partner.

1. The famous psychologist Freud said this about Oedipus: “His destiny moves us only because it might have been ours—because the Oracle laid the same curse upon us before our birth as upon him. It is the fate of all of us, perhaps, to direct our first sexual impulse towards our mother and our first hatred and our first murderous wish against our father. Our dreams convince us that this is so.” Do you agree with Freud that many young boys go through an Oedipal stage?

2. Do you think that people grow up to marry someone similar to their opposite-sex parent?

3. What does the author mean by “I was loved beyond measure. The kind of love that sometimes sends you to the bathtub with your headphones on”?

4. The author mentions that she “let him play out his mythical tragedy”. What are two meanings of the word “tragedy”?

5. If you were the parent of this boy, how would you handle the situation—the same or differently from the author?

CEFR Level: CEF Level B2