Study questions for Medea by Euripides
These are not for points.
Use these as you conduct your first reading to help you navigate the plot. You can read it and answer these questions collaboratively.

Prologue (1-130): Nurse, Tutor, Medea
1. What is the dramatic purpose of the Nurse's speech (1-48)?

2. The Nurse begins by referring to Jason's ship Argo that brought Medea to Greece from her home in Colchis (Black Sea area). According to the Nurse, why did Medea sail with Jason? What does this say about Medea’s character before the audience has even met her?

3. What did Medea do upon arriving in Greece at Iolcus? What does this say about Medea’s character?

4. What is the present situation in Corinth?

5. What is Medea's attitude toward her children and what does the Nurse fear she might do? How do you feel about this?

6. What rumor has the Tutor heard? Do you think this is a good or bad thing for Medea? Why?

7. What is the Nurse's view of Jason's behavior? the Tutor's? How do these views set up a traditional conflict?
8. What feelings does Medea herself express?

9. What moral does the Nurse draw from the situation? Do you agree or disagree? Why?

10. The audience first meets Medea while she is off stage lamenting (loudly) her situation. Why does Euripides have her introduced this way? How does this help or hinder the viewer/reader in defining her character?

Parados (136-212): Chorus, Medea and Nurse
Includes Strophe 1 (154-77); Antistrophe 1 (178-189); Epode (211-19)
11. The parados is chanted by the Chorus along with the Nurse and Medea. How does the Chorus of Corinthian women feel toward Medea?

12. What gods does Medea call upon and why does she call to these?

First Episode (220-439): Medea, Chorus, Creon
13. How does Medea view her situation in Corinth?

14. How does Medea view her situation as a married woman and mother?

15. How does Medea view herself as a foreigner?

16. What request does Medea make of the Chorus? Do you agree that the Chorus should act this way? Would you promise your friend the same thing? At what point would you go back on your promise (if you did)?
17. Medea's great first speech is stunningly modern in its account of the injustices done to women in patriarchal societies. Medea may seem at times a frightening character, but compare her real ethical concerns with the rather shallow and scheming motivations of Creon and Jason.

18. What is significant in namelessness of her rival?

19. Creon orders Medea out of the city. What are his reasons and how do they illuminate not only Medea’s character but also the Corinthian view of her?

20. Medea makes what request of Creon and what rhetorical appeal does she use in this request? (ethos, pathos, logos)

21. What does Creon's reaction to her request tell us about his character? Why do you think Euripides had him respond this way?

22. Medea's reference to her planning and contriving would remind the audience of the meaning of the name Medea “the cunning contriver.” After Creon's departure the audience gets an interesting view into Medea’s character. What does she plan to do? Why does Euripides place her plan here, directly after Creon’s speech?
23. Her mention of her grandfather Helius, the sun god, calls attention to her divine ancestry. Again, why is this significant here? What were the gods like? How might Medea be like them?

24. What is Medea's view of the female gender?

First Stasimon (440-70)
Includes Strophe 1 (440-47); Antistrophe 1 (447-55); Strophe 2 (456-63); Antistrophe 2 (464-70)

25. What is the Chorus's reaction to the last two lines of Medea's speech? And what answer does the Chorus give to the ancient poets' depiction of female faithlessness?

26. What is their view of Medea's situation?

27. To what is the Chorus referring when they mention the lack of respect for oaths and of shame in Greece? Do you believe the situation has changed in our time? How or how not?

Second Episode (471-661): Jason, Chorus, Medea
28. What criticism does Jason make of Medea? What other characters have you encountered in literature or theater/film (specifically Greek) that have exhibited this tendency? What became of their actions?

29. How does Jason refer to the children? Why is this significant (or ironic)? What does he intend to do for Medea and his children? Is this fair and right?
30. Medea responds with an answer to his offer, an explanation of what she has done for him, an accusation against Jason, and her current predicament. What rhetorical strategies is she implementing? Are they successful? (logos, ethos, pathos)

31. What is Jason's response, and what does this say about his view of why Medea had helped him?

32. According to Jason, what advantages did Medea derive from coming to Greece with him? Do you agree that these are advantages?

33. What are the reasons that Jason gives for marrying the Corinthian princess? Do you agree that they are sound?

34. Do you think Jason believes his reasons? Do you think Euripides believes them?

35. What criticism does Jason make of women in general?

36. What criticism does Medea make of Jason's arguments? Do you agree?

37. What help does Jason offer Medea? What is Medea's reaction to this offer? Are either of them acting sensibly? Who is more logical? More passionate? Who do you sympathize most with at this point?

Second Stasimon (662-)
Strophe 1 (662-68); Antistrophe 1 (669-75); Strophe 2 (676-83); Antistrophe 2
(684-691)

38. What view of love (Aphrodite) does the Chorus present in the first stanza?

39. What prayer does the Chorus make in reference to Cypris (Aprodite) in the second stanza?

40. To whom is the Chorus referring in the third and fourth stanzas? Why does it move from a song of love to a song of patriotism and loss? What’s the dramatic purpose of this?

Third Episode (692-844): Aegeus, Medea, Chorus

41. What is an Oracle? Do we have any such things in our culture?

42. What is the Oracle telling Aegeus in answer to his question?

43. What request does Medea make of Aegeus, and why does she put it the way she does?

44. Why won’t Aegeus help Medea get away from Corinth?

45. Why is the oath so important? What does this say about Medea’s character?

46. What is Aegeus's reaction to this requirement? What does this say about his character?

47. By whom does Medea make Aegeus swear? Why these things/gods?
48. Do you know who is born from Medea's promise to Aegeus? What might Euripides be implying about Medea?

49. After Aegeus's departure why does Medea rejoice?

50. What is Medea’s plan?

51. What will she achieve through this action?

52. What is her motivation in this action?

53. Why at this point in the play has Medea decided on this form of revenge?

Third Stasimon (845-78)
Strophe 1 (845-51); Antistrophe 1 (852-58); Strophe 2 (859-68); Antistrophe 2 (869-78)
54. This play is about Corinth, so what has occasioned this choral ode in praise of Athens ("descendants of Erechtheus" = Athenians)?

55. What does the Chorus ask Medea in the second half of the ode? Do you think the Chorus is acting like Medea’s friend?

Fourth Episode (879-995): Jason, Medea, Chorus
56. What is the dramatic irony in this episode?
57. Jason is totally hoodwinked by Medea’s “change of heart.” What does this say about him other than the fact that he might not be too bright? Does his response endear or repel the audience to his character?

58. What ironies are there in this episode?
59. What does Medea want Jason to do?

60. How does Medea trick Jason into setting his wife up for her eminent death?

61. What does Jason think of this help, and what does this say about his character?

Fourth Stasimon (996-1021)
Strophe 1 (996-1002), Antistrophe 1 (1003-1009), Strophe 2 (1010-1015), Antistrophe 2 (1016-1021)

62. What is the purpose of the Chorus spoiling the ending? Why does Euripides present this interlude?

Fifth Episode (1021-1276)

63. The tutor comes with good news. What is Medea's reaction to this news? Does her reaction help you sympathize with her? Why or why not?

64. Explain how Medea is ambivalent with regard to what she is considering.

65. What is the Chorus's view of the parent-child relationship?

66. The Messenger (a slave of Jason) tells Medea to flee. Why should a slave of Jason help Medea? What might the people of Corinth feel for Jason? For Medea?
67. How is the nameless Corinthian princess presented to the audience through the words of the messenger? Before her death, do you like her? Why or why not?

68. How do you feel about the death of the princess? How do you feel about the way she died?

**Fifth Stasimon (1278-1324)**

Strophe 1 (1278-1286); Antistrophe 1 (1287-1301); Strophe 2 (1302-1310); Antistrophe 2 (1311-1322)

69. What prayer does the Chorus make to the Earth and the Sun? Why do these elements keep coming up in this play?

70. What warning does the Chorus give to Medea?

**Exodos (1325-end): Jason, Chorus, Medea**

71. What concern does Jason express upon hearing of his children's deaths? How does this make you feel about Jason? Now think about his position as a man in ancient Greece. Does your opinion or sympathy change? Why? Why not?

72. What assumption does Jason make about the attitude of the Sun (Helios) toward Medea's action? Why might this be significant?

73. According to Jason, why did Medea kill her children? Is he right?

74. What plans does Medea have for her children? For herself? Why is this important?
75. What does she predict for Jason?

76. What reason does Medea give for having killed her children? Do you believe her?

77. What comment does the Chorus make on the events of the play?

78. Who is in control at the beginning of the play? Who is in control at the end?

79. Jason is considered one of the great Greek heroes. How do you feel about him at the end of the play? Do you still consider him a hero?

80. This is still one of the most controversial plays ever written, with its powerful evocations of women's rights and Medea's choice of infanticide. What you think of its heroine?

81. Does Medea remind you of other women in myth? The audience would expect her to be a witch; does Euripides fulfill those expectations, or does he present a more "normal" woman?

82. What do you think about Euripides’ view of women?

83. Euripides, as Sophocles once said, drew men (and women?) as they are, not as they ought to be. Do you agree? In what ways are his characters, plots and actions realistic?