

The Odyssey

Before Reading

Before reading Homer's *The Odyssey*, you should understand the concept of an epic poem. An epic poem is a long narrative poem. Epic dramas frequently are broadcast on television, usually shown for several hours each night for a week (e.g.: *North and South* and *Roots*). Examples of epics in film include *Star Wars*, the entire movie series, *Harry Potter*, and *Lord of the Rings*.

When each individual movie in the series is put together one very long story is told. An epic is not something that can be told in one sitting. These tales are complex, revolving around several main characters and spanning many years. Homer's epics tell of the adventures of heroes. Some translations retain the format of a poem, while some are in prose story form.

An epic hero is a man who seems able to conquer most problems he encounters, although he does not possess any "super" powers. He is faithful to his family, his country, and his god. He is brave; although he often feels fear, he overcomes his fears because he knows he has responsibilities, which are mainly to defeat evil and allow goodness to prevail. The epic hero is intelligent. Because he has no special powers, he must rely on his brain to get him out of difficult situations. Sometimes, however, a higher force or being will help guide him on his quest. This greater force does not do things for him, rather the force helps him do things for himself.

In Homer's *The Iliad*, Odysseus participated in the Trojan War. The most famous story from this epic is that of the Trojan horse. Odysseus and his men built a giant wooden horse and left it outside the gates of Troy as a peace offering. The Trojans accepted it and rolled it into the city. However, the Greeks had hidden inside the horse, and that night, they sneaked out of the horse and opened the city gates to the entire Greek army. Because of this trick, the Greeks won the Trojan War.

You should also know that when soldiers came to recruit Odysseus to go to war, he tried to escape enlistment by pretending to be mad. However, they proved his sanity by throwing his infant son, Telemachos, in the way of his plow. Odysseus swerved to miss the child, thereby proving his mental stability.

Another key detail of this story is that it begins *en medias res*, this means that the story starts in the middle. When we finally catch up to our hero in the very first book nearly 17 years has passed, the Trojan War has been fought and won, and the hero has come to believe that he may never return home to his beloved wife and child.

Most historians believe that Homer was a blind minstrel who lived about 3000 years ago. He was considered by the Greeks as their greatest and finest poet, traveling around the land singing stories to people for their entertainment and enlightenment. Students will recognize Demodocus as Homer's "cameo appearance" in this story.

***The Odyssey*, Reading Comprehension Questions**

Directions: On a separate piece of paper, write the answers to the following questions. Each answer must be written in a complete sentence!

This assignment will be collected during the first week of school.

Book I:

1. Where is Odysseus? What evidence from the text supports your conclusion?
2. What or whom is Athena disguised as? On what lines did you find a description of her disguise?
3. What lines of the text seem to suggest that Telemachos and his mother need Odysseus?
4. Why does Odysseus's wife have suitors? What lines from the text support your conclusion?
5. What does Athena advise Telemachos to do?

Book II:

6. Describe the trick that Penelopeia plays on her suitors.
7. What specifically does Athena do to help Telemachos in this book?

Book III:

8. What is Nestor's opinion of Odysseus?
9. Describe Nestor's reaction when he realizes that Telemachos's companion is Athena.

Book IV:

10. What clues cue Menelaos and Helen that Telemachos is Odysseus's son?
11. What is Menelaos' opinion of Odysseus?
12. Describe Antinoos' plan to destroy Telemachos.

Book V:

13. Who is Hermes, and what is his mission?
14. What can Hermes do with his wand?
15. How is the Island of Calypso described in the text? What does this description suggest about the alluring nature of Calypso?
16. What clues are you provided in the text that provide a reason for Calypso wanting to hold Odysseus captive.
17. Does Calypso's truly love Odysseus why or why not?
18. What is Calypso's reaction to having to let Odysseus go?
19. What is the main problem Odysseus faces while traveling by sea?
20. What happens to Odysseus at the end of Book 5?

Book VI:

20. What "subliminal" message does Athena give to Nausicaa while she lies sleeping?
21. Who is the only person who doesn't run away from the terrifying Odysseus? Why doesn't she run away?
22. Is it pure luck that Nausicaa helps Odysseus? Explain.
23. What does the fact that Odysseus won't bathe in front of the girls tell us about the kind of person he is?
24. Does Nausicaa believe her parents will help Odysseus?
25. Why won't Nausicaa let Odysseus ride in her cart?
26. What instructions does she give Odysseus?

Book VII:

27. What craft are the Phaiacians best known for?
28. How is Odysseus treated as a guest?

Book VIII:

29. Describe the activities that King Alcinoos arranges to entertain Odysseus.
30. Who is Demodocos?
31. How is King Alcinoos helping Odysseus to get home?
32. What is Odysseus's reaction whenever Demodocos sings about the Trojan War?

Book IX:

33. What lines in the text suggest the effects of the Lotus Plant?
34. What does the story of the Lotus plant suggest about man and the nature or dangers of addiction?
34. What evidence in the text indicates how heavy the door is to the Cyclop's cave?
34. What is the first villainous thing the Cyclops does?
35. Why doesn't Odysseus kill the Cyclops when he has the chance?
36. What does Odysseus give the Cyclops as a gift?
37. What gift does the Cyclops give in return?
38. What does Odysseus tell the Cyclops that his name is?
39. How do Odysseus and his men sneak out of the Cyclops' cave?
40. How does Odysseus trick the Cyclop and how does this show his cleverness?
41. What foolish thing does Odysseus do?
42. What did a soothsayer once predict would happen to the Cyclops?
43. What does the Cyclops ask his father Poseidon to do for him?
44. The dangers of not providing Xenia, the Greek word for hospitality to a guest is revealed in book IX. What do we learn about xenia and the dangers that can occur when one does not behave hospitably, use evidence from the text to support your answer.

Book X:

45. Who is the god of wind?
46. What favor does he do for Odysseus and his men?
47. What reason might Odysseus have had for keeping such important information from his men, use examples from other parts of the story.
47. What stupid mistake do some of the men make on the ship and why do the men make this mistake?
48. How do even more men die after the bag accident?
49. What does Circe do to some of Odysseus's men?
50. How does Odysseus get her to release his men?
51. What instructions does Circe give Odysseus?

Book XI:

51. Quote the lines of the text that explain how Odysseus is able to attract dead souls?
52. Who is Teiresias and what does Odysseus want from him?
53. What does Teiresias predict for Odysseus?
54. What does Teiresias say Odysseus should do to the suitors at his house?
55. What does Teiresias say Odysseus should do after dealing with the suitors?
56. What is the name of Odysseus's mother and how did she die?
57. Why can't Odysseus hug his dead mother?
58. It is at this point in the story that Odysseus has learned an important lesson about himself. What does he learn that helps him to realize it is mostly his fault that he has been unable to return home?

Book XII:

58. What warning does Circe give to Odysseus about the Sirens?
59. For what reason does Circe desire Odysseus to hear the music of the Sirens?

60. What should he and his men do to keep safe from the Sirens?
61. Describe Scylla.
62. What will Charybdis do if Odysseus's ship gets too close?
63. What does Odysseus keep secret from his men?
64. Describe the circumstances of Odysseus's shipmates' deaths. Is it Odysseus's fault?

Book XIII:

65. Describe Odysseus's journey home from Scheria.
66. What does Poseidon initially want to do to the Phaeacian ship?
67. What decision does Alcinovs make because of the wrath of Poseidon?
68. Why and for how long does Athena want Odysseus to be in disguise?
69. What does Athena instruct Odysseus to do now that he has returned to Ithaca?
70. Whom does Athena instruct Odysseus to visit first?

Book XIV:

71. What is the name of the swineherd?
72. What does Odysseus tell the swineherd about himself?
73. Describe Odysseus's disguise.

Book XV:

74. How has Eumaios proven his faithfulness in this and previous books?
75. Who do you think will be the first person to know Odysseus for who he really is?

Book XVI:

76. What does Telemachos call Eumaios? Why?
77. Describe Athena's changes to Odysseus's appearance.
78. Who does Telemachos think Odysseus is when Athena removes his disguise?
79. What do Odysseus and Telemachos plan to do?
80. Describe Penelopeia's confrontation with Antinoos.

Book XVII:

81. What does Theoclymenos prophesy to Penelopeia?
82. How does Odysseus test the suitors?
83. Who recognizes Odysseus right away? How does he recognize him?
84. Describe Melanthis.
85. Who makes Odysseus extremely angry?
86. Why does Odysseus want to test his servants and his wife before revealing his identity?

Book XVIII:

87. Why does Odysseus get in a fight with Iros? Who wins?
88. What trick does Penelopeia play on the suitors in this book?
89. Which three characters anger Odysseus in this book?

Book XIX:

90. What does Odysseus the beggar tell Penelopeia about Odysseus?
91. How does Eurycleia recognize Odysseus?
92. How did Odysseus get the scar on his leg?
93. Describe Penelopeia's challenge for the suitors.

Book XX:

94. Name two people who are cruel to Odysseus the beggar.
95. Who proves himself to be a kind and faithful servant?
96. What do you think Odysseus is going to do to the suitors?

Book XXI:

96. Whom does Odysseus trust to help him defeat the suitors?
97. Why don't the men want Odysseus to try to string the bow?
98. How does Odysseus prove his true identity?

Book XXII:

99. What did Odysseus prove about his abilities when he shot the arrow through the twelve axes?
100. Whom does Odysseus kill first and why?
101. How does Eurymachos plead his case with Odysseus?
102. Whom does Telemachos catch raiding the storeroom of weapons and what do they do with him?
103. Which two servants who spared?
104. How does Odysseus identify the unfaithful maids?
105. What does Odysseus do to the unfaithful maids?
106. What is done to Melanthios?

Book XXIII:

107. How does Penelopeia test Odysseus?
108. Why does she test him?
109. Describe the one last task that Tiresias told Odysseus to complete. What will be his reward for this task?
110. After Odysseus tells Penelopeia about all his adventures, he sets off again. What does he go to do? What does he tell Penelopeia to do?

Book XXIV:

111. How does Odysseus prove that he is really Laertes' son?
112. What is Laertes afraid of?
113. Who comes to battle Odysseus? Whom are they led by?
114. Whom does Odysseus kill?
115. Who stops the battle?