



The Odyssey

by Homer, translation by Robert Fagles

Teacher's Guide

Written By Mary Ellen Snodgrass

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Synopsis

Book One

Opening with an invocation to the muse and starting *in medias res*, the traditional epic style of starting in the middle, Homer's story of Odysseus, King of Ithaca and clever general of the Trojan War, opens on the Calypso's isle, where the Greek leader languishes in the powers of a radiant goddess-nymph who wants to marry him. At a council of Olympian gods, sparked by Athena, goddess of wisdom, she favors Odysseus for his lively mind and claims that he is unfairly tormented. Zeus countermands the spite of Poseidon, god of the sea, way-lays the wandering sailor and detains him from home and family in Ithaca, his kingdom on Greece's northwestern shore. Zeus explains Poseidon's hatred: Odysseus blinded the sea god's son Polyphemus, the greatest of the Cyclopes.

Disguised as Mentos, Athena travels to Ithaca and finds Odysseus' palace beset by greedy suitors, who waste household stores while they court Penelope, his wife. Left husbandless in a male-controlled world, she may not rule Ithaca alone once she is widowed. She advises their only son and heir, Telemachus, who was an infant twenty years earlier when his father left for the Trojan War on what is now the Asian shore of Turkey. Mentos urges him to sail to Pylos and Sparta to gain information about Odysseus from King Nestor and from King Menelaus.

Book Two

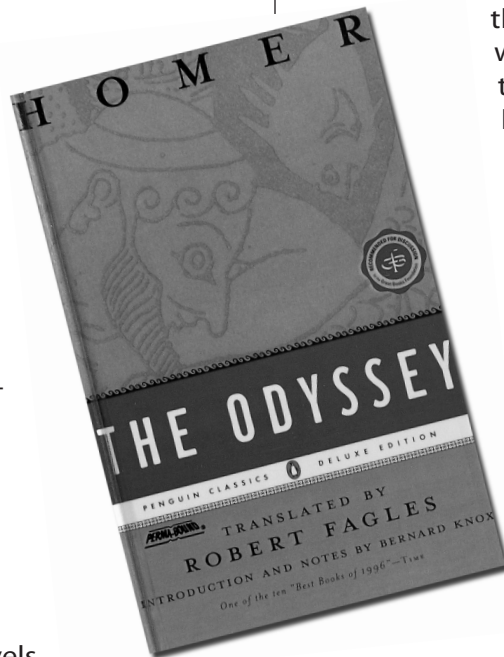
Euryclia, Telemachus' nanny, keeps secret his departure until he can establish some distance between himself and his fretful mother.

Book Three

On his fact-finding journey, Telemachus receives courteous treatment at the home of Nestor, talkative king of Pylos.

Book Four

Nestor sends his visitor to Sparta on the Peloponnesus to learn more about Odysseus from Queen Helen and King Menelaus, brother of Agamemnon, commander-in-chief of Greek allied forces. Meanwhile, Penelope learns that her son has set out from home without her knowledge. She fears that the conniving suitors will kill him before he can return to Ithaca.



Book Five

On a distant isle, Hermes delivers Zeus' command to Calypso: help Odysseus depart for home. Freed from a beguiling lover, he builds a boat, stocks it with supplies, and sets sail, but his boat sinks in a storm. Exhausted and naked, he struggles ashore at Phaeacia.

Book Six

At Athena's suggestion, Princess Nausicaa happens to be washing clothes. She locates the bedraggled stranger, welcomes

him, and leads him toward the palace of her father, King Alcinous.

Book Seven

Odysseus makes his way to the castle of Alcinous where he feasts and is promised assistance to return to his home.

Book Eight

Alcinous hosts Odysseus, whose fame draws a crowd. While a harper entertains the company, Odysseus covers his head and weeps. He thanks Nausicaa for saving his life. Demodocus performs a narrative of the Trojan War.

Book Nine

After proper amenities, Odysseus tells an enthralled audience of Phaeacians of his adventures with the Lotus-Eaters and Polyphemus, the Cyclops whom Odysseus blinds in order to make his escape from a sealed cave.

Book Ten

Odysseus' wanderings take him to the island of Aeolus, King of the winds, who gives Odysseus a bag wrapped tightly around adverse gales. At last within sight of Ithaca, Odysseus' greedy sailors believe the bag holds a secret treasure. They untie the strings and free the winds, which blow their ship back to Aeolus' shores. Because Aeolus rejects further pleas for aid, Odysseus and his men sail on to the island of the Laestrygonians, fierce cannibals who attack and sink all but one of his fleet of ships.

The survivors press on to Aeaëa, where an enchantress, Circe, changes a party of Odysseus' sailors into swine. With moly, a magic black-rooted plant, Odysseus overcomes Circe's magic and rescues his men. Circe and Odysseus live together as lovers for a year. Eventually, she agrees to help him return home.

Book Eleven

At Circe's instruction, Odysseus descends into the Underworld to learn the future from Tiresias, the famed blind seer. The journey is fraught with danger and requires a blood offering to ghosts who press around for the life-giving fluid. Odysseus meets his mother Anticleia, who died after he left for war. He also encounters his fallen comrades, including Achilles and Ajax, who snubs him. Odysseus confers with Agamemnon, who warns him of spiteful wives. Tiresias predicts Odysseus' future, including his peaceful death near the sea. With tearful farewell, Odysseus returns to the world of the living.

Book Twelve

Forewarned of the dangers of the Sirens, the sea monsters, Scylla and Charybdis, and the cattle sacred to Helios, the sun god, Odysseus avoids death. Nonetheless, his ship capsizes near Ogygia, home of Calypso, which he reaches after drifting for ten days. He ends his lengthy narrative at this point.

Book Thirteen

The hospitable Phaeacians, completely taken with the brave, winsome hero, entertain him with athletic games and songs, heap him with gifts, and send him on his way aboard their ships the short distance to Ithaca. Back on home shore, Odysseus encounters Athena, who disguises him as an aged beggar.

Book Fourteen

Athena sends Odysseus to the farm of Eumaeus, his faithful swineherd.

Book Fifteen

Odysseus joins forces with Eumaeus.

Book Sixteen

Newly arrived from his quest, Telemachus eludes the suitors' sentinels and shares a tender meeting with his father.

Book Seventeen

Telemachus returns to the palace and keeps secret the arrival of Ithaca's rightful king. Without calling attention to himself unduly, Odysseus enters the palace, where rough, loud-mouthed suitors jostle him and dishonor his lowly status as a beggar.

Book Eighteen

An obnoxious fellow beggar named Arnaeus resents the intruder as unfair competition at the rowdy gathering. Telemachus scolds the suitors for their discourtesy.

Book Nineteen

Odysseus tells a fictitious story to Penelope, who fails to recognize him as her husband. That night, she weeps at the stranger's eyewitness account of Odysseus on the island of Crete.

Book Twenty

Tension grows as the suitors infringe on Penelope's home. Telemachus upbraids them for hurling insults and promises to hasten Penelope's wedding to any man of her choice.

Book Twenty-One

Odysseus takes part in a challenge match against younger men, successfully strings Odysseus' bow, and shoots an arrow through twelve aligned axe heads before turning his anger against Penelope's loutish, drunken suitors.

Book Twenty-Two

With the help of Eumaeus, Telemachus, and Eurycleia, Odysseus' old nurse, the rightful king traps the suitors in the hall and slays them one by one, leaving alive the poet and Telemachus' companion Medon. Odysseus, revealed at last to the joyous household, commands his staff to cleanse and purify the hall of blood and corpses. He weeps at a warm welcome from the staff.

Book Twenty-Three

Odysseus rewards his good servants and executes those who conspired with the suitors. By describing their bed, which he carved out of a single olive tree, he identifies himself to a skeptical Penelope. They spend a long night making love and relating their adventures during their twenty-year separation.

Book Twenty-Four

The next day, Odysseus visits Laertes, his aged father, and counters a revolt led by the suitors' relatives. Zeus and Athena help Odysseus establish peace and a just rule in Ithaca once more.

Author Sketch

Although few facts about Homer can be stated with certainty, the author of Greece's ancient epics was a real person whose language and subject matter can be identified by time and place. A study of his blended dialect—Ionic and Aeolic—proves that Homer, whose name translates as *hostage*, was born in the ninth century B. C. on the island of Chios or in Ionia, which is now the western coast of Turkey. Legend maintains that he was a blind *rhapsode* or bard who made his living by traveling about singing the traditional lore of his homeland, collecting along the way local variations which communities made up to include the name of their town or favorite hero or royal family. A more recent query arises about the authorship of the *Odyssey*, which some critics believe may have been composed by a woman, perhaps Nausicaa herself, who reputedly fell in love with the handsome visitor and refused all other suitors after he departed her homeland.

The style Homer uses in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* suggests that he was a learned poet who steeped himself in the oral tradition of the Mediterranean

world and composed long poems based on well-known folk tales, legends, genealogies, and history. The event that forms the nucleus of the epics was probably a dispute over routes for the grain trade. As deduced by 19th- and 20th-century archeologists, the war took place between 1193 and 1184 B. C. By infusing a mundane trade war with the trappings of epic poetry, Homer gave the world a glimpse of a civilization later unearthed at Hissarlik, Turkey, until the arrival of the German archeologist Heinrich Schliemann.

Homer and the Critics

The Odyssey, one of the world's great adventure stories, has influenced a host of tellers of tales. The list of Homer's proteges rings with names of illustrious writers—Sappho, Plato, Aeschylus, Virgil, Milton, Dante, Chaucer, Boccaccio, Tasso, Petrarch, Pope, Goethe, Tennyson, Joyce, Kafka, Charles Fraser, and Derek Walcott, Caribbean poet and 1992 Nobel Prize-winning author of *Omeros*, the Greek spelling of Homer. From the *Odyssey* have come characters, themes, motifs, and style that can truly be termed classic. The creation of the international hero Odysseus—or Ulysses in Latin—parallels the Norse Sigurd, Babylonian Marduk, Arabian Sinbad, biblical Jonah, the wandering Jew, Rama of India, the Celtic voyager Saint Brendan, Nikos Kazantzakis' Odysseus, American Paul Bunyan, and William Shakespeare's Prospero, protagonist of *The Tempest*.

Odysseus, the consummate strategist and ideal hero, faces a challenge for wife and kingdom late in life. At his side stands Telemachus, who comes of age during the long wait for his father's return. The cataclysmic scene in which the great doors of the palace are shut and the suitors meet their doom is the culmination of years of wandering and bloodshed and the preface to the wanderer's reward, a reunion with patient, wily Penelope, the perfect mate for cunning, outspoken Odysseus. Additional stories of his clever engineering skills occur in Aeschylus' *Philoctetes*, Dictys Cretensis' *Trojan War Diary*, Euripides' *Cyclopes*, *Hecuba*, and *Trojan Women*, Hyginus' *Fables*, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Plato's *Poetry of Homer*, Sophocles' *Ajax*, *Odysseus*, and *Philoctetes*, and Virgil's *Aeneid*, which fills in the gaps of the Trojan saga.

Contributing to the Odysseus legend is a mid-20th-century adventurer, writer Ernie Bradford, who served in the British navy during World War II. While monitoring Nazi ship movements, he filled restless nights by reading the ancient Greek text of Odysseus' voyage. Bradford matched poetic details to Mediterranean landmarks and contended that Odysseus' itinerary is real. He estimated sailing speed from Hissarlik, Turkey, north to Ismarus, southwest through the Cyclades, around Cape Malea, Greece, and west to Jerba, an island off Tunisia in northern Africa. Following northern sea lanes, Odysseus probably touched the island of Favignana (Goat Island) and observed Mount Eryx in Sicily. He made landfall at the island of Ustica north of Sicily, then sailed to southern Corsica or Sardinia. Traveling southeast to Terracina, Italy, he made a side venture to Gibraltar—the mythical voyage to hell—then passed through the Strait of Messina that divided Sicily and Italy. Arriving at Taormina on Sicily's eastern coast, he paused before journeying to Malta and to Corfu, Nausicaa's home. He ended his journey at Ithaca, now called Vathi, Greece.

The Translator

Dr. Robert Fagles labored to render Homer's *Odyssey* for 21st-century readers.

Educated at Amherst in pre-med courses and Greek, he shifted majors and completed a Ph. D. at Yale in English and Greek, taught by classics scholar Bernard Knox, Fagles' friend and mentor. Fagles taught literature at Princeton University from 1962 to 2002. At home, he surrounded himself with the classics, commentaries, and modern poetry to help him comprehend the post-war elements of Odysseus' readjustment to normal life. Central to the text is the domesticity of the Greek lady of the house, who parents a son during her husband's long absence.

Basing his translation on the current idiom, Fagles produced a worthy version that won him the 1997 PEN/Ralph Manheim Medal for lifetime achievement in the field of translation. To interviewers, the scholar expressed his purpose: "[Homer's] always being transformed by subsequent ages that absorb him and revise him and see him according to their own lights." Fagles cited as an example



Armand Assante and Greta Scacchi's film version of Odysseus' quest, a two-night Hallmark Entertainment presentation on NBC-TV on May 18 and 19, 1997.

Homer's Works

Iliad
Odyssey
Hymn to Aphrodite
Hymn to Apollo
Hymn to Dionysus
The Battle of the Frogs and Mice
Margites
Kerkopes (?)

Bibliography

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- Brann, Eva. *Homeric Moments*. Philadelphia: Paul Dry, 2002.
- Casson, Lionel. *The Ancient Mariners*. Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1990.
- Dalby, Andrew. *Rediscovering Homer: Inside the Origins of the Epic*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2006.
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- Hedges, Chris. "A Bridge Between the Classics and the Masses," *New York Times* (13 April 2004): B2.
- Heitman, Richard. *Taking Her Seriously: Penelope and the Plot of Homer's Odyssey*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005.
- Morrison, James V. *A Companion to Homer's Odyssey*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2003.
- Snodgrass, Mary Ellen. *Greek Classics*. Lincoln, Neb.: Cliffs Notes, 1988.
- _____. *Voyages in Classical Mythology*. Denver, Colo.: ABC-Clio, 1994.
- Wood, Michael. *In Search of the Trojan War*. London: British Broadcasting Corp., 1985.
- Young, Philip H. *The Pithed Homer*. Jefferson, N. C.: McFarland, 2003.

Media Versions

Audiocassette (unabridged)

The Odyssey, read by Ian McKellen, Penguin Audio, 1996

Audio CD (unabridged)

The Aeneid, read by Charlton Griffin, Penguin Audio, 2006

The Iliad, read by Derek Jacobi, Penguin Audio, 2006

Digital download

The Odyssey, Penguin, 2001

Video

The Odyssey, Hallmark, 1997

General Objectives

1. To comprehend standard aspects of epic, particularly the intervention of anthropomorphic gods in human activities
2. To isolate elements of magic and other supernatural influences
3. To enumerate incidents of dehumanization, menace, torment, and savagery
4. To compare types of danger and the degree of harm that comes to ships and sailors
5. To contrast details of light and dark, pain and comfort, sorrow and joy
6. To analyze the symbolism of the journey as the wandering of everyman
7. To characterize the Mediterranean microcosm of Homer's day
8. To isolate moral and psychological themes and motifs
9. To locate examples of compassion and hospitality
10. To connect the date of Homer's life with important events in world history, such as the use of iron for tools and weapons and the invention of harness and armor

Specific Objectives

1. To place Odysseus' adventures in time order
2. To explain why Telemachus leaves home without his mother's permission
3. To note the importance of Eumaeus' loyalty
4. To account for Athena's preference for Odysseus over other heroes

5. To recount Odysseus' role in the Greek victory over Troy
6. To illuminate the role of Alcinoos in Odysseus' return to Ithaca
7. To enumerate calamities that keep Odysseus at sea for nine years
8. To describe elements of suspense that highlight the final meeting between Penelope and her husband
9. To predict the future of Odysseus' reign in Ithaca
10. To justify the cruel deaths of Odysseus' mockers and the desecration of Melanthius' corpse

Related Reading

Apollonius, *Jason and the Argonauts*

Ernie Bradford, *Ulysses Found*

Bernard Evslin, *The Adventures of Ulysses*

Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths*

Moses Hadas, *Jason and the Argonauts*

Homer, *The Odyssey*

James Goldman, *The Lion in Winter*

Ibn Battuta, *Travels in Asia and Africa*

Lerner and Loewe, *Camelot*

Marco Polo, *The Travels of Marco Polo*

Tim Severin, *The Sinbad Voyage, In Search of Robinson Crusoe, The*

Voyage of Jason, and The Brendan Voyage

Alfred, Lord Tennyson, "Ulysses"

Virgil, *The Aeneid*

The Voyage of Bran

Derek Walcott, *Omeros*

The Importance of Setting

The milieu of Homer's *Odyssey* outshines other world literature for scope. As Odysseus makes his way home from Troy, the ancient battlefield of northwestern Turkey, he caroms about the Mediterranean from east to west and back before returning to his home in Ithaca on the northwestern coast of Greece. For atmosphere, the poet relates the sound of waves and the smack of oars as mariners combat storms and sea monsters. He stresses the intervention of deities who both support and hinder the post-war voyage.

For contrast, the separate books intersperse land with sea adventures. Odysseus mopes about Calypso's isle while Athena surveys his Ithacan palace, where Penelope stalls invasive suitors eager

to seize her valuable property. The hero's son Telemachus journeys to Pylos and the Peloponnesian kingdom of Sparta to inquire about his absent father from King Nestor, Queen Helen, and King Menelaus. After Odysseus departs from Calypso, his boat capsizes in a storm, leaving him exhausted on Phaeacia's shore and no nearer home.

Extending contrast, Homer moves from the horrific sinking of Odysseus' ship to the intervention of Princess Nausicaa, who joins her maids in washing clothes and playing ball on the beach. After she leads the salt-crusted sailor to her father, King Alcinous, Odysseus enjoys inland the hospitality of a resting place, feast, and harper. Storytelling informs the Phaeacians of Odysseus' adventures with the Lotus-Eaters, Polyphemus, and the island of Aeolus, king of the winds, who dispatches the Greeks within sight of Ithaca. The unforeseen return of their ship to Aeolus' shores heightens suspense and enhances pathos.

Odysseus' further adventures begin on the island of the man-eating Laestrygonians, who reduce his fleet to a single ship. At Aeaea, a magical milieu pits the mariners against Circe, a man-destroyer. The nightmarish voyage requires a descent into the Underworld, where Odysseus confers with

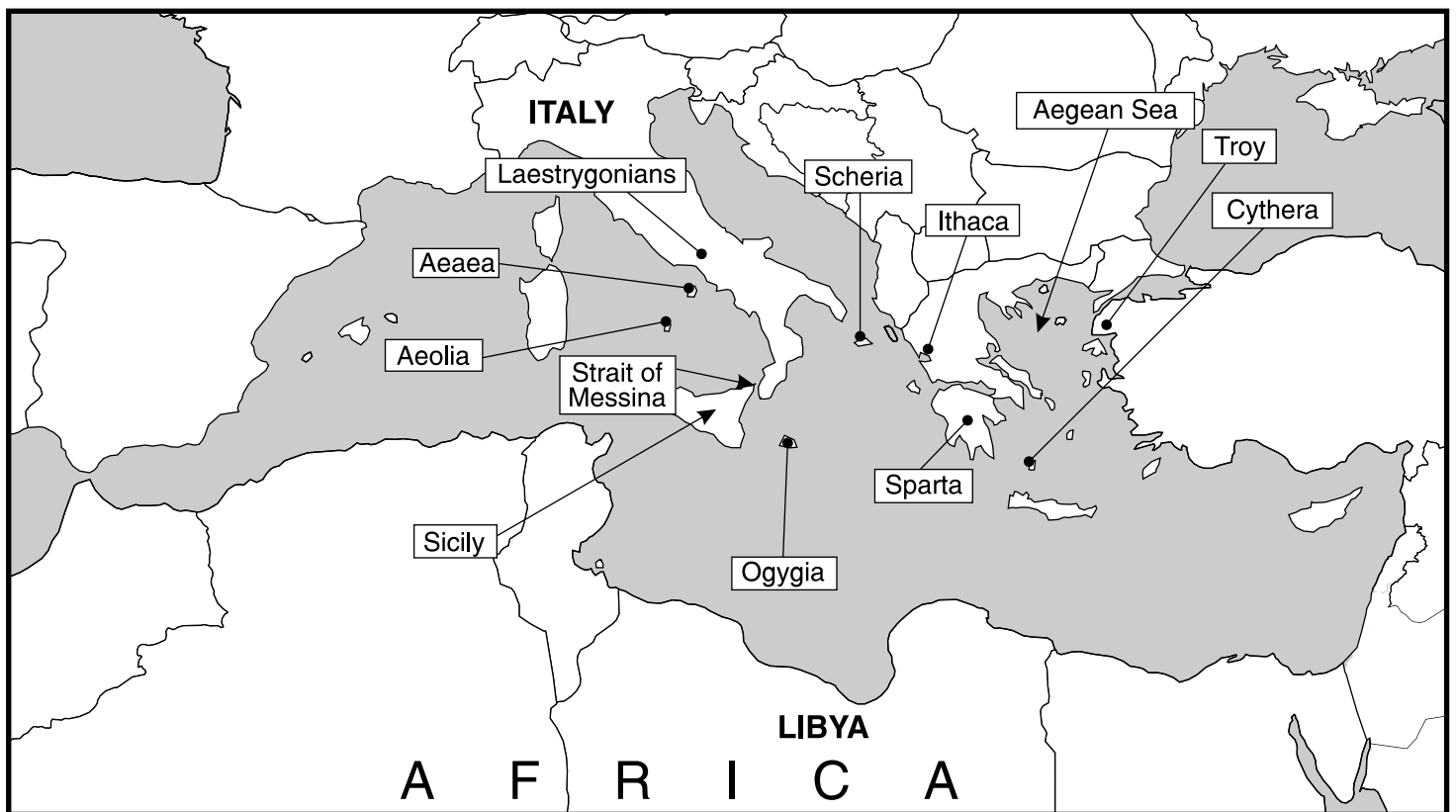
wraiths. The list of obstacles—the Sirens, sea monsters, Scylla and Charybdis, and the cattle of Helios—concludes with a drift to Ogygia, Calypso's island home. From the hospitable Phaeacians, Odysseus returns once more to Ithaca.

Homer extends Odysseus' perils with a homeland confrontation with usurpers. Dressed in beggar's rags, he approaches the farm of Eumaeus, his faithful swineherd, and reunites with Telemachus. At the palace, Odysseus tolerates discourtesy and, in the privacy of the queen's boudoir, recounts to her his landfall on the island of Crete. From a challenge match in the palace hall, the setting morphs into a grim battleground behind locked doors that leaves the suitors and disloyal servants in a heap of slaughtered corpses. Safe in his own bed once more, Odysseus charms Penelope with his charisma.

Literary Terms and Applications

For a better understanding of the epic's style, present the following terms and applications:

Folk Epic: a long formal poem narrating the story of a race or nation facing a threat to its existence or value system. The written composition of Homer's *Odyssey* follows centuries of oral or folk tra-



dition derived from the repeated and varied performances of wandering harpers, storytellers, and gleemen. The epic achieves a metrical cadence and idealized characterization suited to Greek myth and follows traditional traits and stylistic devices that set the telling apart from history, chronicle, verse narrative, legend, episode, and saga. The hero is dashing, crafty, and invincible, yet he faces a series of misadventures plotted by angry gods. He possesses superhuman strength, vision, and perception and applies his cunning to overcoming supernatural terrors that include spirits in the underworld. The text is dotted with lofty speeches, boasting, physical challenges, and oration to restore flagging spirits and to laud the actions of a great warrior-king.

Literary Foil: a character who serves as an opposite or as a standard by which another character is measured, as with Eumaeus and Telemachus. The collaboration of Odysseus with his loyal swineherd and with Telemachus, whom the father last saw in infancy, unites men of unlike traits in a confrontation that requires cunning and dangerous combat. Odysseus supersedes both men in strength and majesty as he ascends once more to the throne of Ithaca.

Coordinated Classroom Aids

For related reading and more information about power, heroism, kingship, epic, Greece, Odysseus, and voyages, consult these sources:

Articles

- D'Evelyn, Thomas. "War Heroes Cast in the Modern Idiom," *Christian Science Monitor* (4 January 1991): 10.
- Espey, John. "Homer, Sweet Homer," *Los Angeles Times* (9 December 1990): 3.
- Severin, Tim. "Marooned: The Metamorphosis of Alexander Selkirk," *American Scholar* (22 June 2002): 73-82.

Audiocassette

"The Great Auk," Jay O'Callahan

Books

Iliad, Homer
Jason and the Argonauts, Apollonius

Internet

"The Voyage of Bran,"
celt.net/Celtic/Myths/bran.html

"The Voyage of Bran,"
www.as.wvu.edu/engl01/www/clc/vob/bran-eng.html.

Maps

Atlas of World History, Social Studies School Service
Voyages in Classical Mythology, ABC-CLIO

Poem

"Ulysses," by Alfred, Lord Tennyson
The Voyage of Bran

Reference

The Ancient Mariners, Colin Thubron
The Dictionary of Imaginary Places, Alberto Manguel & Gianni Guadalupi
The Greek Myths, Robert Graves
A History of the Ancient World, Chester G. Starr
The World Atlas of Archeology, Nick Constable
The World of Odysseus, M. I. Finley

Videos/Films

Erik the Viking
Odysseus
O, Brother, Where Art Thou?
Sinbad the Sailor
The Voyage of the Ra

Themes and Motifs

A study of the central issues and situations in *The Odyssey* should include these aspects:

Themes

- motivation
- daring
- danger
- royalty
- mission
- disrespect
- conflict
- loss
- pathos
- reward
- honor

Motifs

- facing imminent death
- experiencing failure and success
- making a reputation from overcoming perils
- atoning for irreverence to the gods

Meaning Study

Below are words, phrases, sentences, or thought units that have a particular meaning. Explain each. Book and page numbers pinpoint the context in which each item appears.

1. "This is no way, Alcinous. How indecent, look, our guest on the ground, in the ashes by the fire! Your people are holding back, waiting for your signal. Come raise him up and seat the stranger now, in a silver-studded chair, and tell the heralds to mix more wine for all so we can pour out cups to Zeus who loves the lightning, champion of suppliants—suppliants' rights are sacred. And let the house-keeper give our guest his supper, unstinting with her stores." (Book Seven, pp. 184-185)
(Book Seven is a tribute to the status of civilization in Homer's day. Echeneus, a Phaeacian elder, puts into words the duties of the host and hostess in the ancient world, where guests were accorded honor. Upon arrival, they received welcome, shelter, and lodging without requirement that they identify themselves by name or nationality. As Echeneus indicates, wine is drink mixed rather than served full strength. Also, he calls for propitiation of Zeus, whose power is symbolized by thunder and who watches over seekers of aid and mercy. The concluding phrase indicates that it is the woman's job to feed the stranger.)
2. "Now, our feast finished, home you go to sleep. But at dawn we call the elders in to full assembly, host our guest in the palace, sacrifice to the gods and then we turn our minds to his passage home, so under our convoy our new friend can travel back to his own land—no toil, no troubles—soon, rejoicing, even if his home's a world away. And on the way no pain or hardship suffered, not til he sets foot on native ground again. There in the future he must suffer all that Fate and the overbearing Spinners spun out on his life line the very day his mother gave him birth." (Book Seven, pp. 185-186)
(The conclusion of the guest welcome requires that local people protect the visitor from harm. Alcinous intends that Odysseus meet with the destiny that the Fates or Parcae intended. Also known as Moirae or "allotted portions," the Fates are metaphorically pictured as spinners of thread. Clotho, the spinner, is the principal fate, who winds out the will of the gods. Her sister, Lachesis, determines the length of the thread, i. e., the length of an individual life. Atropos, the arbitrary bringer of death, cuts the thread without warning and with no opposition. Ironically, this myth accords the power of life and death to three females.)
3. And once they'd poured libations out and drunk to their hearts' content, each one made his way to rest in his own house. (Book Seven, p. 186)
(The Greeks are careful to appease their gods by leaving token drops of wine on the hearth or altar or at tombs of deceased family members. The major reason for Odysseus' ten years of wandering as well as the sufferings of the other members of the Greek high command is the dreaded delusion of self-importance that lures human beings to think of themselves as godlike. Swelled with the fatal sin of pride after tricking the Trojans with Odysseus' ingenious wooden horse, the victorious Greeks departed from Troy without showing proper respect to the gods.)
4. "Stranger, I'll be the first to question you—myself. Who are you? Where are you from? Who gave you the clothes you're wearing now? Didn't you say you reached us roving on the sea?" (Book Seven, p. 187)
(According to the guest code that governed relationships between hosts and strangers, a new arrival was entitled to courtesy, food, shelter, and other amenities before hosts could question identity or destination. Clothing, the job of the female, was an important item because each garment was formed of fibers gathered from sheep or thistle or flax seed, then spun into thread, woven into cloth, shaped, and dyed or decorated with embroidery, beading, or metallic thread. The storage place was called a "guard-robe" because clothing was of great worth in terms of hours of labor and was thus a target of thieves. Nausicaa made a noble gesture of trust and welcome by awarding Odysseus garments from the royal chest.)
5. "Many pains the god of earthquakes piled upon me, loosing the winds against me, blocking passage, through, heaving up a terrific sea, beyond belief—nor did the white-caps let me cling to my craft, for all my desperate groaning." (Book Seven, p. 188)
(Odysseus angers Poseidon, one of the almighty triad of Olympian gods, by blinding his one-eyed son, the Cyclops Polyphemus, with a sharpened stake. Because Odysseus boldly brags of his deed and reveals his name, Polyphemus places a curse on the hapless sailor which follows Odysseus about the Mediterranean—that he come home late and wretched, in another man's ship, without his companions, and filled with troubles at home. Eventually, the other gods counter Polyphemus' enmity and enable Odysseus to return to Ithaca, but not before he loses his ships and sailors and treasure in a series of harrowing misadventures. Just as Polyphemus had described, arrival home does not free Odysseus from the daunting task of ridding his palace of a pack of suitors.)

6. And now as the two men exchanged their hopes, the white-armed queen instructed her palace maids to make a bed in the porch's shelter, lay down some heavy purple throws for the bed itself, and over it spread some blankets, thick wooly robes, a warm covering laid on top. (Book Seven, p. 190)

(In the ancient world, most clothing was either natural color or bleached white from soaking in seawater and drying in the sun. Purple dye, made from shellfish, was a rare and costly commodity and a valuable trade item. For this reason, purple was the color of royalty and of the rich and privileged. Arete's choice of purple rugs to adorn Odysseus' bed is a special touch, denoting honor and perhaps suggesting that she recognizes kingly behavior and royal demeanor in the ravaged mariner.)

7. "Call in the inspired bard Demodocus. God has given the man the gift of song, to him beyond all others, the power to please, however the spirit stirs him on to sing." (Book Eight, pp. 192-193)

(Homer pays tribute to the singer of songs, who was more than an entertainer or harper in the ancient world. Because of contact with wandering poets, isolated communities learned the legends, myths, hymns, and tales that formed their common Greek heritage. After communal meals, the audience listened to the singer's song, which he chanted to the strum of a lyre or harp. The listeners memorized verses to acquaint themselves with the glories of the past in the form of extensive genealogies of heroes and tales of noble courtships, battles, adventures, journeys, prophecy, and deeds.)

The tradition of blindness in poets occurs in the Odyssey with Demodocus: "In came the herald now, leading along the faithful bard the Muse adored above all others, true, but her gifts were mixed with good and evil both: she stripped him of sight but gave the man the power of stirring, rapturous song." Some critics interpret this line as a thumb-nail self-portrait of Homer himself. It is more likely that blindness is a metaphor for a different kind of sight—one that looks inward at the soul. Whatever its meaning, Homer does not dwell on the subject of blindness. Note that the Muse favors Demodocus and is responsible for offsetting his blindness with his talent for music.)

8. For this was the victory sign that Apollo prophesied at his shrine in Pytho when Agamemnon strode across the rocky threshold, asking the oracle for advice—the start of the tidal waves of ruin tumbling down on Troy's and Achaea's forces, both at once, thanks to the will of Zeus who rules the world. (Book Eight, p. 194)

(One of the conventions of ancient lore is the misinterpretation of or disobedience to prophecy. Phoebus Apollo, the chief source of future knowledge in ancient Greece, resided in Delphi, where supplicants came to learn of the future and to beg for Apollo's healing intercession against pain and disease. Apollo's spokeswoman, the Pythia, was one of a series of priestesses who stood over a fissure in the earth and, overwhelmed by the natural vapors that arose, babbled equivocal messages that foretold the future.)

Agamemnon, eager to capture Troy, naively thinks the undertaking will be brief because Odysseus and Achilles had satisfied one condition of Apollo—that there be a quarrel between warriors. The real quarrel that portends the end of the war occurs in the tenth year of the conflict and becomes the focus of the Iliad. The first line of Homer's masterpiece begins: "Sing goddess the wrath of Achilles." Ironically, the pivotal argument focuses on the taking of a woman, Briseis, just as the Trojan War itself had begun over the theft of Queen Helen, wife of Menelaus and sister-in-law to Agamemnon.)

9. 'Famous Astrides, lord of men Agamemnon! What fatal stroke of destiny brought you down? Wrecked in the ships when lord Poseidon roused some punishing blast of stormwinds, gust on gust?' (Book Eleven, p. 262)

(Upon his arrival in the underworld, Odysseus learns of events that have occurred since his departure from home and his separation from his comrades on their way from Troy. Agamemnon, who had sacrificed his daughter Iphigenia to obtain favorable winds for the Greek fleet, returned to an angry wife. Clytemnestra and her lover Aegisthus murdered the returning king and his Trojan concubine, Cassandra, a royal princess and prophet of Apollo. In his grief over the double murder, Agamemnon warns Odysseus, "So even your own wife—never indulge her too far. Never reveal the whole truth, whatever you may know, just tell her a part of it, be sure to hide the rest." Agamemnon compares Clytemnestra to Penelope and admits that Odysseus is blessed with a better spouse, "She's much too steady, her feelings run too deep, Icarus' daughter Penelope, that wise woman.")

10. "He and Odysseus' father go way back, he says, sword friends, and the stranger hails from Crete where the stock of old King Minos still lives on, and from Crete he made his way, racked by hardship, tumbling on like a rolling stone until he turned up here." (Book Seventeen, p. 371)

(One of Odysseus' special talents is lying, which the Greeks valued as a survival method. In the touching scene with Penelope in Book 19, Odysseus tells of meeting the wanderer twenty years

earlier, when he wore “a heavy woolen cape, sea-purple in double folds, with a golden brooch to clasp it, twin sheaths for the pins, on the face a work of art: a hound clenching a dappled fawn in its front paws, slashing it as it writhed.” For good measure, Odysseus describes his swathy squire Eurybates as additional proof that the stranger has seen Penelope’s husband. As she weeps with at the detailed description, Odysseus comforts her by weaving in the truth—that the king approaches Ithaca after leaving Thrinacia, washing up on Phaeacian soil, and finding favor with the Thesprotian king. To seal the telling of this subterfuge, Odysseus calls on Zeus and swears an oath on Odysseus’ hearth that the king will return within the month.)

Comprehension Study

Answer the following questions in your own words. There is not always a right answer. Your judgment is important and you should be ready to defend your answers by referring to passages in the epic.

Suspense

1. Describe Odysseus’ labors as he prepares to leave Calypso’s Island.
(Homer reduces suspense by indicating that Odysseus will eventually return to his kingdom. After the gods take pity on the voyager, Zeus determines that the famed Greek warrior has suffered enough. Hermes carries to Calypso a stern message that she offends Athena by imprisoning Odysseus. Previously, his noble companions drowned at sea, but he was swept to shore by the wind and surf.)

In response to the divine decree, Calypso urges her guest to stop lamenting. She instructs him to cut trees, shape them into planks, and stock the hull with bread, water, red wine, and clothing. The nymph provides a bronze axe, boring tools, and sail cloth, which he uses on fallen trees to make ribs for the hull, decking, half-deck, and rudder. He fences the sides with willow twigs and brushwood to protect against heavy seas. After lashing the rigging in place, he drags the ship over rollers to the sea.)

Details

2. How does Alcinous entertain Odysseus during his visit to Phaeacia?
(King Alcinous provides a banquet and wine and furnishes Odysseus and guests polished marble seats. A silver-studded chair in the center of the room awaits Demodocus, the blind minstrel, to occupy while he entertains the group with a song accompanied on the lyre. He chooses a popular lay about Odysseus’ quarrel with Achilles. Odysseus weeps and conceals his sorrow in his cloak. Alcinous, realizing the pain that Demodocus’ song gives his guest, calls for a change of pace—

outdoor games, including boxing, wrestling, jumping, and running. Odysseus declines to participate because of heavy despair.

The group’s courteous reception ends after Euryalus insults Odysseus’ prowess. The challenger calls the valiant sailor the captain of a sea-going merchantman bent on making a profit. Leaping to his feet, Odysseus calls his detractor witless and hurls a discus farther than any man in the group can outdistance. Alcinous, who is nettled by Euryalus’ poor manners, sends for Demodocus’ instrument and calls for dancers. To the delight of the audience, the blind bard sings about Aphrodite’s adultery with Ares and about Hephaestus’ capture of the couple in an invisible net.

At the king’s order, two men dance solo and demonstrate their skill with a purple ball in a virtuoso gymnastic performance. Alcinous demands parting gifts for Odysseus from the chiefs and princes in the audience. Euryalus apologizes for his rudeness and presents his gift—a bronze sword with silver hilt and carved ivory sheath. Returning to the palace, Alcinous calls for a coffer, cloak, tunic, a golden chalice, and warm bath and massage for Odysseus. The preparation precedes dinner and more of Demodocus’ music, which includes details about the wooden horse. The servants pack more treasures; Nausicaa wishes Odysseus luck and hopes that he remembers her.)

Action

3. Describe Odysseus’ first post-war meeting with Penelope upon his return to Ithaca.
(Seated by the fire at the end of the evening meal, the radiant Penelope overhears an argument between the newly arrived beggar and Antinous, who commands that Odysseus eat quietly or leave the room. The continual undercurrent of discourtesy and jealousy gnaws at Odysseus, but he bides his time. Hearing of the outrage, Penelope sends for the swineherd to invite the stranger to her room.)

In private, Penelope presses the beggar for news of Odysseus. She asks him to sit by her and tell his story of a meeting in Crete. The details cause her to weep tears like melting snow. He gives details of his dress and his herald. She recognizes from the data that the stranger does know the facts and proclaims him a friend and honored guest. She summons Eurycleia to tend the stranger. Encouraged to confide in the stranger, Penelope asks his opinion of the suitors, of her maturing son, and of a troublesome dream in which twenty geese died from the attack of one great eagle. Odysseus predicts that Penelope’s husband will return and kill the wooers down to the last man.)

Prophecy

4. Explain the advice that Tiresias gives Odysseus about returning to Ithaca.
(After drinking from the pit of blood, Tiresias, the Theban seer, warns that Odysseus’ return home will be difficult. With no

other survivors, the Greek mariner will arrive, ragged and exhausted, on a foreign vessel. At the palace, he will find free-loaders reducing the larders and demanding that Penelope remarry. Tiresias predicts that Odysseus must take an oar and journey to a land where people know neither sea nor use salt on their food. On return from this pilgrimage, Odysseus is to honor the gods with ceremonial sacrifice. The final prophecy is soothing: Odysseus will meet his will die peacefully in old age with a healthy race surrounding him.)

Motivation

5. How does Zeus account for Poseidon's hatred of Odysseus?

(To Athena's charge that Zeus bears an untenable grudge against Odysseus, Zeus retorts that he admires the wise sailor and adds that Odysseus is generous in his ceremonial gifts. The god explains that Poseidon hates Odysseus for blinding Polyphemus, Poseidon's son, the strongest of the one-eyed Cyclopes. In place of Athena's faulty reasoning, Zeus calls the Olympian gods to discuss how to persuade Poseidon to relent and let Odysseus return to Ithaca. Zeus concludes that the mariner alone cannot summon the strength to overcome the gods.)

Character

6. Explain why Odysseus is Athena's favorite.
(Athena, Zeus' daughter and the goddess of war and wisdom, holds Odysseus in great esteem because he is a strong warrior and because he is cleverer than the other Greeks. Odysseus saves himself from difficult situations by his glib tongue, quick deceptions, and ingenious strategies. A chief example, his escape from the cave of Polyphemus, illustrates how he fools the Cyclops, blinds him, and exits the cave under the very nose of the raging giant. However, the incident also illustrates Odysseus' great weakness, the vaunting pride that inspires him to admit his real name is Odysseus, not Nobody.)

Motif

7. Explain why the guest code is so important in the ancient world.

(Because wanderers and hosts were mutually bound to honor each other, people were able to find safe lodging for the night, food and water, medical care, sanctuary from brigands, and a degree of companionship during long journeys. The guest code bound both host and guest: the host had to provide sleeping quarters and food for travelers; the guest, receiving the courtesy of a stranger, was expected to do no harm to his host or to the host's home or family during the stay.

The guest code is a boon to both Odysseus and Telemachus during their sojourns from Ithaca. As Telemachus comes in contact with the courtesies of Nestor's and Menelaus' courts, he learns important examples of deportment, generosity, and trust. Odysseus, too, learns that strength alone is not enough to get

him through the ordeal of his wanderings. Without courtesy and mutual respect, he would never have charmed Calypso or Alcinous and Arete, their subjects, and their daughter, who rescued him from the lowest point on his journey.)

Theme

8. How does divine interference in human life both aid and hinder the Greeks?
(Odysseus is a prime example of a mortal whose life is altered by divine intervention. Because he kills the one-eyed giant Polyphemus, Odysseus is hounded by storms and sea monsters at the will of Poseidon, Polyphemus' father, who hears his son's prayer and answers it with the powers of the second most powerful Olympian god. Odysseus' savior is Athena, the goddess of wisdom and Zeus' daughter. She transforms the sailor into a beggar when he returns to Ithaca. She then intervenes in a minor incident to lead him home safely and to rescue Telemachus from harm.)

Universality

9. Explain how Odysseus' journey represents the wanderings of all seekers.
(According to some anthropologists, historians, and critics, Odysseus' voyage symbolizes all people's search for fulfillment. He accepts the challenge of society by accompanying the Greek fleet to Troy and fighting a common enemy. When divine opposition separates him from his family, he uses his intelligence and strength to combat dangers, both natural and supernatural. Upon his return, he reestablishes his relationship with son and wife before regaining control of his kingdom.)

Like Odysseus, all human beings face challenges to life, family, livelihood, religious ideals, and personal achievement. Much of Odysseus' struggle involves self-control, particularly over an excess of pride. So too do ordinary people learn that without mastery of self, life becomes more complicated, more unpleasant and onerous. Also, like Odysseus, most people discover their most challenging enemies close to home, whether in the form of external dangers or the more common threats—boredom, unrest, dissatisfaction, or domestic strife.)

Epic Style

10. Explain why this epic is a world classic.
(For human beings in general, the challenges of war, religion, love, and maturity form life's struggles. Homer deals with these universal themes in the longing for home, coming to maturity, confronting temptations, searching for a personal relationship with the gods, internal and external stresses on the family, concern over death and the afterlife, and the aftermath of political upheaval. Because of his skill with universal motifs and beliefs, he creates a world classic that is applicable to all people in all times and places. The influence of Homer upon later classic authors, particularly Dante, Virgil, Horace, and Tennyson, illustrates the impact of his ageless epic.)

How Language Works

Homer creates dialogue that reveals character faults as well as their strengths:

1. A blustering suitor, Eurymachus defies the prophet Halitherses: "Go home and babble your omens to your children—save them from some catastrophe coming soon. I'm a better hand than you at reading portents."
2. Penelope's kindness and her loyalty to Odysseus shines through her sorrow: "If only, my friend, you were willing to sit beside me in the house, indulging me with the comfort of your presence."
3. Elpenor exhibits the suffering of the suppliant: "I beg you. Don't sail off and desert me, left behind unwept, unburied, don't, or my curse may draw god's fury on your head."
4. Telemachus reveals savvy about the condition of his patrimony: "What's the talk of the town? Are the swaggering suitors back from ambush yet—or still waiting to catch me coming home?"
5. Odysseus, the consummate guest, parts with his rescuer, the king of Phaeacia: "Alcinous, majesty, shining among your island people, make your libations, launch me safely on my way—to one and all, farewell!"

Across the Curriculum

Composition

1. Write a few unrhymed lines about a hero or heroine in which you demonstrate dactylic hexameter, the metric style used by Homer and his imitators. Place stresses to show where emphasis falls in each line. Use as a model the first line of the *Iliad*:
Menin aeide thea Peleiadeo Achileos (Sing, Goddess, the wrath of Achilles).
2. Explain how Homer's works influenced Virgil when he composed the *Aeneid*, the Latin literary epic commissioned by Augustus Caesar, Rome's first emperor. Note the difference between a folk epic and a literary epic.

Discuss how Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's *Hiawatha*, the biblical Exodus, and Derek Walcott's *Omeros* fit the definition of epic.

3. Write a summary of Alfred Tennyson's poem "Ulysses." Contrast information you find in the poem with facts given by Homer. Quote lines to support your analysis.

Art and Music

1. Sketch a frieze depicting a Greek sailor's life aboard an ancient vessel: loading a ship with stores, launching it, setting sails, securing the tiller, steering by constellations, sleeping, cooking, making landfall, trading with natives, battling a storm, refitting damaged rigging, arriving home, beaching the ship, and removing the steering oar and mast.
2. Sketch a series of coins, seals, or good luck charms featuring contrasting females in Odysseus' life: Circe, Calypso, Penelope, Nausicaa, Helen of Troy, Queen Arete, Athena, Anticleia, and Eurycleia.
3. Sketch costumes for the major characters—royalty, servants, swinherd, nursemaid, harpers, islanders, warriors, and sailors. Show each figure engaged in a normal activity, such as cooking, sacrificing to the gods, playing, weaving, swimming, or sitting at the table and enjoying the tale of a wandering minstrel.
4. Compose a song honoring Demodocus. Add lines that compare his skill and taste with Homer's. Comment on earthly honors that the minstrel deserves.

Geography

1. Indicate on a wall map the Mediterranean world featured in Greek mythology. Include the major cities of Athens, Alexandria, Corinth, Sparta, Thebes, Troy, and Delphi. Add important islands: Crete, Cyprus, the Cyclades, Sicily, Sardinia, Corsica, Mytilene, and Gibraltar. Using an atlas of the ancient world, label areas that now have modern names: the Peloponnesus, Macedonia, Cephallenia, Thrace, Troy, Pontus, Cnossos, Thesprotia, and Magna Graecia.

2. Draw a map depicting Ernie Bradford's proposed route for Odysseus. Note the number of times the route crosses and recrosses the same points.
3. Discuss the role of archeologist Heinrich Schliemann in turning the study of mythology into a useful science of lands, people, language, and history.
4. Draw a map of the Mediterranean Sea and mark the places where archeologists have uncovered evidence of ancient settlements, temples, battlegrounds, sunken cities and fleets, and seaports. Locate Ithaca and suggest routes by which Odysseus might have returned home safely after the Trojan War without venturing to Tunisia, Corsica, Sicily, the Strait of Messina, or Gibraltar.

Social Studies

1. Discuss the position of a widowed queen in the ancient world. Determine why Penelope cannot eject the suitors. Explain why the guest code requires her patience with their bad manners, arguments, drunkenness, plotting, and freeloading until Odysseus returns.
2. Make a wall chart of social status in Odysseus' time. Create levels that feature the swineherd, nurse, servants, slaves, sailors, soldiers, citizens, royalty, visitors, widows, daughters, harpers, and beggars. Add a separate list that orders major and minor gods, goddesses, sea nymphs, and such monsters as the Cyclopes, Scylla, Charybdis, and the Laestrygonians according to their power and importance.
3. Explain in a paragraph the moral debt that Odysseus owes Elpenor, the dead sailor.

Mathematics, Computers, and Logic

1. Explain why the size and type of ship and the number of passengers determines how often the captain must land to take on water and stores. Discuss why seaside communities prospered from the size and depth of their harbors, the availability of pitch and wood, markets, and the number of dock workers who could expedite the process of loading and unloading.

2. Search the text for clues to the amount of time Odysseus spends at each spot. Chart his adventures in time order, filling in lengths of stays and time spent at sea. Explain why his total journey is given as twenty years away from Ithaca.
3. Sketch maps of constellations. Explain where they got their names—Ursa Major, Ursa Minor, Sagittarius, Cassiopeia, Cancer, Orion—and how ancient mariners like Odysseus used the sky as a chart to steer by. Discuss why this style of navigation is no longer adequate for precise measurement of land, sea, and space objectives.
4. Make a computer-generated genealogy of the Greek Titan and Olympian gods and goddesses. Show the connecting link between the two charts. Include data about the powers of each deity. For example, Apollo was god of the sun, light, healing, prophecy, and creativity.

Science and Health

1. Explain why Odysseus arrives at Phaeacia with salt crusting his body. What dangers does this pose to the human body?
2. Research the development of the sailing ship from Homer's time to present day sailboats.
3. Explain how an understanding of plate tectonics aids the researcher who seeks information about the sunken city of Atlantis, Odysseus' Ithaca, Troy, Cleopatra's Alexandria, and other ancient Mediterranean sites.
4. Discuss why the Pythia and Delphi were vital to healers and to the sick, who often slept in the temple in hopes of gaining a dream message from Apollo.

Language

1. Contrast several translations of Polyphemus' prayer to Poseidon in the last four paragraphs of Book 9. Discuss why this prayer is a pivotal part of the story.
2. Compile a database of nicknames, patronyms, and designations for characters in the Odyssey. For example, show Dawn as the

“fresh and rosy-fingered” and “gold-throned,” Athena as “Pallas,” Hermes as “Cyllenian,” and Zeus “the Cloud-gatherer” and “the Thunder-lover.”

History

1. Make a time line of the most famous works in early literature: Jason’s voyage on the Argo, Beatitudes, Sequoia’s syllabary, Hippocratic oath, David’s psalms, *Ramayana*, Virgil’s *Aeneid*, Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex*, Walum Olum, Sermon on the Mount, Omar Khayyam’s *Rubaiyat*, Hammurabi’s laws, *Book of the Dead*, Plato’s *Republic*, Josephus’ *History of the Jewish War*, *Qu’ran*, Lakota winter counts, Confucius’ *Analects*, *I Ching*, *Edda*, *Black Elk Speaks*, *Gilgamesh*, *Tao Te Ching*, and Ten Commandments. Add other works that flesh out a variety of poems, description, laws, speeches, adventures, prophecy, and scripture.
2. Give an oral presentation explaining why history in the time of Thucydides and Herodotus was filled with exaggeration, myth, legend, and outrageous tales.

Literature

1. Compare the heroic image of Odysseus with that of Jason, Medea, Agamemnon, Helen of Troy, Atalanta, Aeneas, Penthesilea, Ajax, Cassandra, Achilles, and Theseus and with the American legendary and historical figures Paul Bunyan, Calamity Jane, John Henry, Crispus Attucks, Annie Oakley, High John the Conqueror, Sarah Winnemucca, Davie Crockett, Pocahontas, Deganawidah, Hiawatha, Lewis and Clark, Squanto, Sacajawea, Molly Pitcher, Paul Revere, Belle Starr, Pecos Bill, and Daniel Boone.
2. Read aloud from stories of Cuchulainn, Cleopatra, Brendan, the Queen of Sheba, Roland, El Cid, Queen Boudicca, Beowulf, Parsifal, Lancelot, Elaine, Galahad, Tristan, Isolde, King Arthur, Shaka, Saladin, Queen Guinevere, Merlin, Alexander the Great, Morgan le Fay, and Joan of Arc. Compare leadership qualities of these characters with those of Odysseus, Penelope, and Telemachus.

Drama and Speech

1. Act out episodes from the story that demonstrate a blend of character traits of the hero, including courtesy, hostility, curiosity, piety, respect, craftiness, loyalty, pride, anger, foolhardiness, tenderness, intelligence, apprehension, craftsmanship, vulnerability, self-control, and courage.
2. Give an oral presentation on the courtship of Helen of Troy. Explain the roles of Leda, the swan, Castor, Pollux, Clytemnestra, Odysseus, Menelaus, Ajax, Agamemnon, and Achilles.

Journalism

1. Compose a news story for a local newspaper and telecast in which you describe Odysseus’ homecoming, Telemachus’ journey to Sparta, and the battle with the suitors. Explain how peace comes to Ithaca.

Alternate Assessment

1. List examples of Odysseus’ love, competitiveness, courage, skill, grace, athletic ability, composure under pressure, anger, friendship, reverence, loyalty to his men, sex appeal, and courtesy.
2. Compile lines that express Homer’s ability to flesh out an ordinary scene with specific details.
3. Compose a scene in which Laertes or Eurycleia dies. Carry the ritual into the underworld.
4. Make a character list and explain the relationship of each to Odysseus. Include Ajax, Circe, Hermes, Athena, Eumaeus, Anticleia, Elpenor, Calypso, Hyperion, Telemachus, Argos, Agamemnon, Zeus, Nausicaa, Nestor, Alcinous, Arete, Menelaus, Irus, the Ismarians, Melanthius, Demodocus, and Poseidon.

Vocabulary

Select a synonym from the following list to replace each underlined term:

astern, awry, bantered, blanching, bole, brazier, chafing, embarked, esteemed, exile, heady, impetuous, jaunt, lapis, pelt, prows, rapt, ravishing, recoil, reined, retinue, rout, salvos, scythe, straits, strove, sipped, thunder-head, thwart, zest

1. There was a branching olive-tree inside our court, grown to its full prime, the trunk _____ like a column, thickset.
2. If he sets foot in King Odysseus' royal palace, volleys _____ of footstools flung at his head by all the lords will crack his ribs as he runs the line of fire through the house!
3. Now fed to their hearts' content, the princess and her company _____ threw their veils to the wind, struck up a game of ball.
4. Fear the gods' wrath—before they wheel in outrage and make this crime rebound _____ on your heads.
5. Telemachus—what insolence—and we thought his little trip _____ would come to grief!
6. Prayers said, the scattering of barley strewn, suddenly Nestor's son hasty _____ Thrasymedes strode up close and struck—the ax chopped the neck tendons through—and the blow stunned the heifer's strength.
7. He could almost see his magnificent father, here . . . in the mind's eye—if only he might drop from the clouds and drive these suitors all in a retreat _____ through the halls and regain his pride of place and rule his own domains!
8. You should have offered Zeus and the other gods a handsome sacrifice, then left _____, if you ever hope for a rapid journey home across the wine-dark sea.
9. But he could not save them from disaster, hard as he tried _____—the recklessness of their own ways destroyed them all, the blind fools, they devoured the cattle of the Sun and the Sungod wiped from sight the day of their return.
10. So they sent their alluring _____ voices out across the air and the heart inside me throbbed to listen longer.
11. Someone might spot you here outside, knock you down or strike _____ you.
12. Slaves, with their lords no longer there to crack the whip, lost all urge _____ to perform their duties well.
13. Now wailing in fear, we rowed on up those narrows _____ Scylla to starboard, dreaded Charybdis off to port, her horrible whirlpool gulping the sea-surge down, down.
14. But now the goddess Athena with her glinting eyes inspired Penelope, Icarus' daughter, wary, poised, to display herself to her suitors, fan their hearts, inflame them more, and make her even more valued _____ by her husband and her son than she had been before.
15. Odysseus kissed his son and the tears streamed down his cheeks and wet the ground, though before he'd always held _____ his emotions back.

Comprehension Test A

Part I: Character Identification (30 points)

Name the characters described below:

1. _____ queen who gives guests a soothing drug
2. _____ goddess who changes Odysseus into a beggar
3. _____ falls dead at Odysseus' approach
4. _____ spies a scar on Odysseus' leg
5. _____ helps Odysseus from the shore to the Phaeacian palace
6. _____ changes men into swine
7. _____ answers the blinded Cyclops' prayer
8. _____ is the blind poet who sings of the adultery of Ares and Aphrodite
9. _____ deceives suitors by pulling out woven strands from handwork
10. _____ tells Telemachus a long story about Troy
11. _____ is the blind seer living in the Underworld
12. _____ arrives from Olympus with a command to Calypso to let Odysseus go
13. _____ lures sailors to their death on rocks
14. _____ tells Odysseus the status of his parents
15. _____ is mutilated and his feet and hands fed to the dogs

Part II: Fact/Opinion (30 points)

Mark each of the following statements either F for fact if the text justifies it or O for opinion.

- _____ 1. Odysseus' son must make his own way in the world if he is to succeed his father on the throne of Ithaca.
- _____ 2. False slave women are executed because they consorted with the fortune-hunting suitors.
- _____ 3. Escape from the Cyclops' cave is possible because Athena gives Odysseus the idea of hiding under sheep.
- _____ 4. Zeus takes pity on Odysseus because he has suffered enough and allows him to return home.
- _____ 5. Penelope is courteous to the beggar because she fears the gods' punishment if she is unkind.
- _____ 6. Nausicaa chooses to help Odysseus because he suits her better than the young men who court her.
- _____ 7. Argos tries to survive to welcome his master home one more time.
- _____ 8. Elpenor has reason to petition Odysseus to bury his remains.
- _____ 9. Odysseus deliberately seeks a turn at the bow to prepare for the slaughter of the suitors.
- _____ 10. Penelope takes her time before accepting the stranger as Odysseus because she wants to be sure of his identity.

Comprehension Test A (Page 2)

Part III: Matching (10 points)

Match the following statements with a place name.

- | | |
|------------|---------------|
| A. Troy | F. Phaeacia |
| B. Aeaea | G. Pylos |
| C. Crete | H. Lacedaemon |
| D. Ithaca | I. Ocean |
| E. Olympus | J. Aeolia |

- _____ 1. place Odysseus falsely claims to have met the great Ithacan warrior
- _____ 2. home of Helen and Menelaus
- _____ 3. court where Odysseus tells of his wanderings
- _____ 4. location of Mount Neriton
- _____ 5. city Odysseus leaves before killing the men of Ismarus
- _____ 6. island where Odysseus acquires the winds in an oxhide bag
- _____ 7. island where wolves and lions surround the home of a sorceress
- _____ 8. the stream that forms the world's boundary
- _____ 9. home of the gods
- _____ 10. court of Nestor

Part IV: Essay Questions (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Explain how and why Odysseus makes peace with angry relatives in the final chapter.
2. Enumerate Penelope's qualities as queen, hostess, wife, and mother.
3. Describe the destructive power of Scylla and Charybdis.
4. Discuss how Odysseus' foolish boasting costs him more years of loss and loneliness.
5. Account for the suitors' many years in Penelope's home.

Comprehension Test B

Part I: Identification (30 points)

Identify the objects that fit the following descriptions. Choose from the list below:

Achilles' armor, anvil, armory, bag, ball, barrow, bed, brazier, brooch, cattle, cauldron, distaff, double fold, drug, dung heap, hearth, footstool, gorgon, hawser, invisible net, laundry, lotus, lyre, moly, Odysseus' bow, olive tree, oracle, osier, pit, purple, roof, rudder, rug, scar, sheaths, sirens, strongbox, sulphur, swine, tongues, tripod, tusk, twelve axes, wax, weaving, wooden horse

- _____ 1. equipment that Odysseus carves for his boat
- _____ 2. object hurled at an aged beggar
- _____ 3. object that a helper hangs near Demodocus' fingertips
- _____ 4. load that Nausicaa takes by mule-cart to the shore
- _____ 5. three-legged object given as an award
- _____ 6. excavation that Odysseus makes in the Underworld
- _____ 7. prize for which Ajax challenges Odysseus
- _____ 8. place from which Elpenor falls
- _____ 9. object the king of the winds makes out of oxhide
- _____ 10. mark that helps Eurycleia identify Odysseus
- _____ 11. Penelope's craft
- _____ 12. target for Odysseus' bow
- _____ 13. symbol of Hephaestus' power
- _____ 14. Helios' prized possessions
- _____ 15. object that Eurymachus fails to bend

Part II: Fill-in (20 points)

Fill in the following lines with names, places, or objects.

- 1. Odysseus proves his identity by explaining how he made his _____ from a living tree.
- 2. _____ warns Odysseus that some wives are not to be trusted.
- 3. _____ sucks up the ocean all the way to the sandy bottom.
- 4. From _____, Zeus rules the world with his loud thunder.
- 5. By burning _____, servants cleanse the hall of bodies and gore.
- 6. _____ meets Odysseus on the shore of Ithaca and changes him into an old man.
- 7. With great formality, Odysseus greets _____, his aged father.
- 8. The _____ marks Elpenor's grave.
- 9. _____ lives with the gods rather than with the mortal dead.
- 10. _____ gives her company a potion that relieves sadness.

Comprehension Test B (Page 2)

Part III: Multiple Choice (20 points)

Select the letter of an answer for each question below.

- _____ 1. Telemachus conceals his departure from
A. Eurycleia.
B. Odysseus.
C. Penelope.
D. Nestor.
- _____ 2. Odysseus requires advice from
A. Tiresias.
B. the spirit of his dead mother.
C. Agamemnon.
D. Ajax.
- _____ 3. Arete makes Odysseus welcome by offering him
A. cloth of purple.
B. a discus to hurl.
C. a cauldron and tripod.
D. a chest of healing drugs from Egypt.
- _____ 4. Odysseus claims to have seen the great Ithacan in
A. the Underworld.
B. Ismarus.
C. Crete.
D. Scheria.
- _____ 5. The greatest insult to a corpse goes to that of
A. Alcinous.
B. Elpenor.
C. Argos.
D. Melanthius.
- _____ 6. Penelope's hesitation to welcome her husband causes
A. Telemachus to command her to stop stalling.
B. Eurycleia to chuckle.
C. Laertes to mourn.
D. Odysseus to smile.
- _____ 7. Telemachus insists on sparing the life of
A. Melanthius.
B. Medon.
C. Demodocus.
D. the swineherd.

- _____ 8. The "Earthshaker" is the special name of
A. the king of winds.
B. Poseidon.
C. Hermes.
D. Heracles.
- _____ 9. Irus is unwilling to share the hall with
A. another beggar.
B. a blind minstrel.
C. Antilochus.
D. women who consort with the suitors.
- _____ 10. Alcinous himself packs
A. Odysseus' ship.
B. purple robes in the chest.
C. Calypso's woodworking tools.
D. the altar with meat for Zeus and Poseidon.

Part IV: Essay Questions (40 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Discuss how Penelope suits Odysseus as the appropriate wife for a wily, clever sailor.
2. Project the kind of king that Telemachus will make.
3. Summarize the types of loss that Odysseus must suffer before returning home.
4. Contrast the Sirens, Laestrygonians, and Lotus-Eaters as hindrances to Odysseus' return.
5. Describe a day in Ithaca while Odysseus and Telemachus are away from the court.

Answer Key

VOCABULARY

- | | | |
|------------|---------------|--------------|
| 1. bole | 6. impetuous | 11. pelt |
| 2. salvos | 7. rout | 12. zest |
| 3. retinue | 8. embarked | 13. straits |
| 4. recoil | 9. strove | 14. esteemed |
| 5. jaunt | 10. ravishing | 15. reined |

COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Character Identification (30 points)

- | | | |
|--------------|--------------|----------------|
| 1. Helen | 6. Circe | 11. Tiresias |
| 2. Athena | 7. Poseidon | 12. Hermes |
| 3. Argos | 8. Demodocus | 13. Sirens |
| 4. Eurycleia | 9. Penelope | 14. Eumaeus |
| 5. Nausicaa | 10. Nestor | 15. Melanthius |

Part II: Fact/Opinion (30 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. O | 6. O |
| 2. F | 7. O |
| 3. O | 8. F |
| 4. F | 9. F |
| 5. O | 10. F |

Part III: Matching (10 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. C | 6. J |
| 2. H | 7. B |
| 3. F | 8. I |
| 4. D | 9. E |
| 5. A | 10. G |

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Identification (30 points)

- | | | |
|--------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| 1. rudder | 6. pit | 11. weaving |
| 2. footstool | 7. Achilles' armor | 12. 12 axes |
| 3. lyre | 8. roof | 13. anvil |
| 4. laundry | 9. bag | 14. cattle |
| 5. tripod | 10. scar | 15. Odysseus' bow |

Part II: Fill-in (20 points)

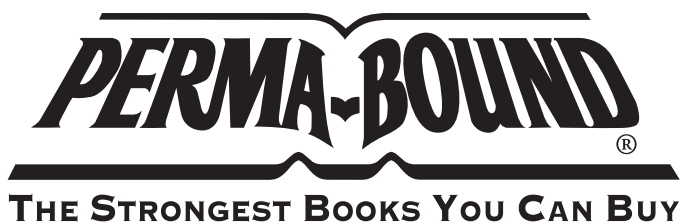
- | | |
|--------------|-------------|
| 1. bed | 6. Athena |
| 2. Agamemnon | 7. Laertes |
| 3. Charybdis | 8. oar |
| 4. Olympus | 9. Heracles |
| 5. sulphur | 10. Helen |

Part III: Multiple Choice (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. C | 6. D |
| 2. A | 7. B |
| 3. A | 8. B |
| 4. C | 9. A |
| 5. D | 10. A |

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.



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