



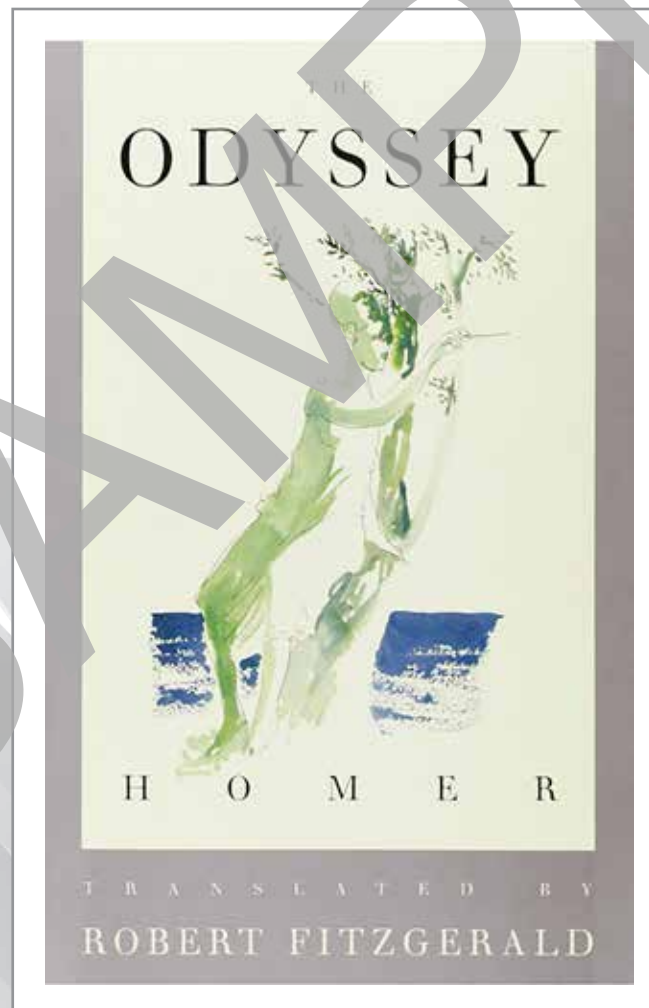
TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 9-12

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

The Odyssey

Homer



READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

The Odyssey

Homer

TEACHER GUIDE

NOTE:

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

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Overview of the *Odyssey*

The *Odyssey* is considered one of the Western World's fountainheads of literature and culture. The *Odyssey* and its lengthier "prequel," the *Iliad*, are the oldest epic poems in Western literature. Like the Bible, the *Odyssey* is valued for both form and content—for its powerful language and its compelling story. In fact, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were considered sacred by the Greeks—much as the Bible is a piece of literature to which many people today look for information about morality. While the *Iliad* focuses on a few days toward the end of the ten-year Trojan War between the Greeks and the Trojans, the *Odyssey* is about one soldier's homecoming, nineteen years after the end of that war. Whereas the *Iliad* consists of a series of loosely-related incidents based on historical fact, the *Odyssey* pursues a unified plotline with many supernatural elements—and is considered by many to be the first "novel."

It is crucial for readers to remember that the *Odyssey* was originally intended to be heard, not read. Whether or not Homer was a real man is up for debate—although most people believe that he was a real, possibly blind bard who lived around the 8th century B.C. We do know that the *Odyssey* was originally recited orally—by Homer or by a legendary figure or group of people. We aren't sure when it was first written down. Not many people in Homer's time were literate, but it is possible that Homer may have written out the poem himself or had a scribe do it—or it may have been written down only after many years of oral transmission.

We do know that some of what is depicted in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* really happened. Archeologists have discovered that ancient Troy did exist (in modern-day Turkey) and that a Trojan War did take place sometime in the early 1100's BC. (The *Odyssey*, like Arthurian legend, tells of a much earlier age—a few hundred years before Homer's lifetime.) Homer took a lot of traditional material—developed by bards over many centuries—and cast it in a unique form. He used a great deal of repetition and formulaic phrasing—largely as a memory aid in the telling of this lengthy poem.

Students today—over 2,000 years after Homer's time—can still find this story an exciting—and sometimes funny—one that is relevant to their lives. This guide is intended to help you to help them find common threads between their world—with its global and ethnic conflicts, gender issues, TV soap operas, and action adventure heroes—and the one that Homer describes.

Plot Summary

Book I: In his invocation, Homer asks the Muse to help him tell the story of Odysseus, who has wandered for many years after the Greeks sacked Troy. The god Poseidon was enraged when Odysseus blinded his son, the Cyclops Polyphémus, and has punished the mortal by preventing him from returning to his beloved home and wife in Ithaca. The goddess Athena has guided Odysseus on his homeward journey and intercedes with Zeus on his behalf at a gathering of the gods held while Poseidon is away.

Discussion Questions • Vocabulary

Writing Ideas • Activities

Book I, Pages 1-19

Vocabulary

muse 3	wiles 3	citadel 3	transgression 3
grottoes 3	versatile 4	depravity 4	emissary 4
malevolent 4	unstinting 5	decree 6	denounce 6
morose 7	brouhaha 7	steward 8	vexed 8
recompensed 8	obstruct 10	obscurity 11	gluttony 12
incensed 12	marauding 12	pensive 14	astute 15
distaff 15	clamor 16	revels 16	seer 18

A **recommended strategy** for introducing these and other vocabulary words in the *Odyssey*: Before students have read Book I—

- 1) List the words and page numbers on the board. (Present the words in isolation.)
- 2) Have students predict what the words mean.
- 3) Have student volunteers read aloud the passages in which the words appear. (Present the words in context.)
- 4) Again have students predict what the words mean—and justify their guesses.
- 5) Have student volunteers consult a dictionary and read the definitions aloud. (In other words—use a dictionary for verification. Students may need to do additional research to learn the definitions of certain terms.)

Discussion Questions

1. Why wasn't Odysseus able to return home after the end of the Trojan war? (The gods presented him with many trials and made him wander.) Why was Poseidon so angry? (Odysseus had blinded his son.) Who tried to help Odysseus get home? (Athena) What did she do to help? (talked to Zeus about ordering Calypso to free Odysseus)
2. Why did Hermes go to Calypso? (to bear Zeus's message that it was time to let Odysseus go) What was her reaction? (resignation) Would you categorize Calypso as basically a "good" character or an "evil" character?
3. What problem did Telémachus and his mother face in Ithaca? (Suitors were pressuring Penelope to marry them, consuming Odysseus' goods.)
4. Why did Athena—disguised as Méntès—remind Telémachus of "what fame Oréstes gained when he avenged the murder of his father" (page 13)? (Athena was trying to get Telémachus to avenge his father by reminding him of how Oréstes killed his mother's lover, Aegísthús, who had murdered his father, Agamemnon.) Why do you suppose Telémachus hasn't tried to stand up to the suitors so far? (He felt that they would overpower him.) Why did he decide to leave Ithaca? (Athena advised him to search for his father, beginning with a visit to Nestor.)

Research

1. On page 5, Athena mentions that Calypso is Atlas' daughter. What role does Atlas play in myth? (He is the titanic being who was condemned to support the sky forever after the Titans were defeated by the Olympians.)
2. On page 16 Antínoüs snidely hopes aloud that Telémachus never becomes king of Ithaca. What can you learn from this about the political system of Greek city-states at the time of the poem's action? (Rulership was not automatically passed from father to son.)

Literary Analysis: *In Media Res*

Explain that the phrase *in media res* means "in the middle of things" and describes how the *Odyssey*—and most epics—begin. An **epic** is a long narrative poem in elevated style that presents a series of episodes important to the history of a nation or race. The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are two of the most important folk epics. Ask students to put the opening lines ("Muse...One man alone was left...") in their own words and to describe the action in the middle of which the poem opens.

Writing Activity

Your job at a city newspaper is to write soap opera summaries for a particular program. Summarize the episode in which Agamemnon is murdered. Write a paragraph of four or five sentences. Don't forget to include the name of the program (one you make up).

Book II, Pages 21-38

Vocabulary

clarion 23	presage 24	scepter 24	pestilence 25
greaves 25	guile 26	hoodwinked 26	dowry 27
avengers 27	requital 28	raucous 28	augur 28
neophyte 29	beguile 29	harangues 30	prudent 30
tidings 30	divulges 30	benign 31	squalid 31
marrow 33	craft 33	squandered 33	fleered 34
plunderers 36	thongs 37	keel 37	libations 38