Advanced Placement in
English Literature and Composition

Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

The Odyssey

by Homer

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The Odyssey

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. discuss the epic in relation to historical and literary-historical contexts.

2. identify, examine, and discuss the use of imagery and figurative language (simile, metaphor, and symbolism).

3. discuss how the main male and female characters reflect the expectations of their society.

4. trace the development of the main character, noting his/her traits, emotions, motivations, and how and why he/she changes.

5. analyze the importance of literary elements like theme, dramatic irony, and foreshadowing on the development of the story.

6. analyze the author's use of language (diction and imagery) and its importance in setting mood and establishing character.

7. identify, analyze, and apply knowledge of the characteristics, themes, structure, and elements of the epic.

8. identify and analyze how the author's diction appeals to the senses, creates imagery, suggests mood, and sets tone.

9. examine the rhetorical and organizational structures and use of arguments within the text.

10. identify and analyze the point(s) of view in a literary work and analyze how varying points of view affect the literary work.

11. analyze patterns of imagery or symbolism and connect them to themes and/or tone and mood.

12. examine how the themes presented in the text represent a view or comment on societal expectations from the author's society.

13. respond to multiple-choice questions similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition Exam.

14. respond to writing prompts similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition Exam.

Introductory Lecture

I. Genre Characteristics and Conventions of the Epic Poem

An epic poem is a lengthy narrative work that focuses on the deeds of a heroic figure. Epic poems are massive in scope; the action of an epic often takes place over a large geographical region, and the hero's exploits are extremely important in some way, often to his or her society. The ramifications of these exploits are important enough that, in many epics, gods and other supernatural beings also take part in the action, helping or hindering the hero and his or her enemies. Some epics, such as the *Iliad*, are primarily about a war and the particular heroes engaging in that war; others, such as the *Odyssey*, are about a particular hero's journey and the tribulations the hero endures during the course of that adventure.

Epic Conventions

Epic poems typically include the following conventions:

A. Invocation to the Muse

Epic poems typically include, at or near the beginning, an invocation to the Muse. The invocation is a short request in which the author asks one of the Muses to inspire him or her in the creation and development of a text. The invocation usually also informs the audience of the poem's subject matter.

In Greek mythology, the Muses are the goddesses of knowledge; they are the sources from which artistic and scientific knowledge and ability flow. There are nine Muses, each responsible for a particular artistic or scientific discipline. Calliope is the Muse of epic poetry.

B. Beginning In Medias Res

The beginning of an epic poem often does not correspond with the beginning of the story it tells; instead, an epic poem usually opens with its narrative already in progress. Beginning a story in the middle of its narrative arc is also called beginning *in medias res*: "in the middle of things." While many traditional narratives begin with exposition about the characters and setting, texts that begin *in medias res* eschew this preliminary exposition, deferring the presentation of background material until a later point in the text. Texts structured in this fashion begin at a point in the narrative arc where the primary conflict has already been developed, and the author later relates the backstory of this conflict to the audience in one or more expository segments.

Because texts that begin *in medias res* do not require an expository setup, the text may begin with a scene of intense action, a scene that may occur at a point of heightened tension. Skillful use of this technique can inspire in the reader an instant interest in the text's characters and conflicts.

The Odyssey

Book I

1. How does Homer maintain the audience's interest in the story, knowing that the audience is aware of the outcome from the very beginning?
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2. What does the invocation of the Muse in the opening lines clarify about Odysseus' culpability during his voyage home?
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3. What role do the gods play in the *Odyssey* and how does their involvement illuminate expectations from Greek society?
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4. How does Homer use Telemachus as a plot device?
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5. How does Homer use dramatic irony in Book I both as a plot device and as a means to foreshadow Odysseus' return?
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6. How does the author establish a negative tone towards the suitors?
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<u>Book V</u>

1. How does Zeus' order for Calypso to set Odysseus free function not only as a plot device but also as the entry point for a discussion on gender bias?

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2. How does Odysseus' rejection of Calypso reflect ideals from Greek society?

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5. In what way does Book V demonstrate an example of "Deus ex machina"?

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<u>Book X</u>

1. How do this book's conflicts serve a thematic purpose, especially regarding the pitfalls of temptation and excess?

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2. How does the author use Eurylochus as both a plot device and as a tool to reflect upon Odysseus' character?

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Book XIV

1.   How does Eumaeus serve both thematic and structural functions in Book 14?

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Book XV

1.   How does the author use symbolism both to reinforce Telemachus' characterization and as a plot device?

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Book XX

1. How does Homer foreshadow the death of the suitors?

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2. Athena inspires the suitors to behave even more inappropriately than usual. How might her interference complicate Odysseus' justifications for revenge?

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3. How does Homer use repetition to demonstrate how Odysseus' and Telemachus' reactions to the suitors' behavior have changed?

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