

Reflections:

A Student Response Journal for...

The Odyssey

by Homer

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The Odyssey

I

1. Athene, daughter of Zeus, shows compassion to Odysseus and pleads with her father to send Hermes to set him free. In the meantime, she goes to speak with Telemachus, son of Odysseus, to convince him that Odysseus may still be alive and that he should get rid of the men who are wooing his mother. How do you think Telemachus feels in the midst of all of this, knowing his father may still be alive? How would you feel in a similar situation?
2. Although the goddess, Athene, disguised herself as the man Mentos as she departed from Telemachus, “he knew a god was with him.” Have you ever felt the presence of a supernatural being such as an angel or spirit? Were you comforted or frightened by their presence? When did this occur? Answer these questions as an entry in your diary.

II

3. When Telemachus brings to the attention of his mother’s suitors that he is unhappy with the way they have ravaged his home and his family’s livestock, one of them responds, “I tell you the Achaean suitors are not at all to blame; your mother is to blame, whose craft exceeds all women’s.” Has anyone ever blamed you for something you didn’t do? How did it make you feel? Have you ever blamed someone for something you did? How did that make you feel?
4. As Telemachus rushes to leave on his journey to seek knowledge of his father, he orders Eurycleia, who guards his father’s chamber and its contents from the suitors, to gather supplies for himself and the ship’s crew. Make a list of at least ten things you would pack for such a trip.

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5. The purpose of the journey of Telemachus and his crew is to find out whether his father Odysseus, who has been away for twenty years, is alive or dead. Imagine you are Telemachus, and write your long-absent father a letter explaining what has been going on in your life, how your mother is doing, and how you wish he were home.

6. As Telemachus and his companions approach Nestor and those present with him, they are welcomed, seated, and fed before anyone even asks who they are or for what purpose they are there. The same thing happens in Book I when Athene, disguised as Mentor, enters the home of Odysseus. Why do you suppose such hospitable customs are not common in our society today? What effect do you think the practicing of these customs would have on the world?

7. The last paragraph of Book III begins with the rising of the sun and ends with the setting of the sun: "Then as the early rosy-fingered dawn appeared...Then the sun sank and all the ways grew dark." These two phrases are used often in this poem to characterize sunrise and sunset. Write a descriptive paragraph depicting the most beautiful sunrise or sunset you have ever seen. Try to write it without the words "I" or "me."

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IV

8. Menelaus recalls an incident in which he questions Proteus, the old man of the sea, about the fate of those who fought with him in Troy. At this time, that Telemachus is given hope that his father may still be alive. Has there ever been a time in your life when you thought someone or something you loved was gone forever, but then you learned there was a chance the person or thing would return or be returned? Write a diary entry describing how your hopelessness was then transformed into eager anticipation.

9. The obnoxious suitors of helpless Penelope, upon hearing of the departure of Telemachus, are bewildered: “the others were amazed. They did not think Telemachus was gone to Pylos, to the land of Neleus; they thought he was still somewhere at the farm, among the flocks, or with the swineherd.” They immediately plan to kill him before he can return, fearing he will bring back news that Odysseus is still alive, thus ending their plundering of his property. Compose a Letter to the Editor of your local newspaper, *The Grecian Times*, from the point of view of one of Penelope’s suitors and explain your actions.

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V

10. Hermes now tells Calypso she must free Odysseus so he may return home: “This is the man whom Zeus now bids your send away, and quickly too, for it is not ordained that he shall perish far from friends.” Was there ever a time when you had to stay somewhere you didn’t want to stay? How did you feel when you were finally able to leave?

11. Odysseus must build the raft he uses to sail home. Have you ever built anything? Describe in detail what it looks like and how you went about building it. Do you still have it? Why or why not?

12. Nausicaa, when she first sees Odysseus, finds him unattractive; however, after he bathes in the river, and the goddess Athene adds to his stature and looks, her opinion changes, “A while ago, he really seemed to me ill-looking, but now he is like the gods who hold the open sky.” Describe a negative opinion that you had about someone or something that changed to a positive one? What made you change your opinion? Why did it change?

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VII

13. As Odysseus enters the city of Phaeacia, he approaches Athene, who has disguised herself as a young girl, to ask for directions: “My child, could you not guide me to the house of one Alcinous, who is ruler of this people? For I am a toil-worn stranger come from far, out of a distant land.” Describe a time you were lost and had to ask someone for directions. Were you embarrassed? Were you able to find your way after having gotten directions?

14. Odysseus stands outside of the house of King Alcinous a while before entering, taking in all of the beauty of the dwelling and its surroundings. Describe in detail the most beautiful home you have ever seen, or the home you imagine yourself someday having.

VIII

15. After the feast at the home of Alcinous, Demodocus, the sacred bard, sings a song about Odysseus and many of the trials he has had. Odysseus, hiding his face, begins to cry. No one knows that he, in fact, is Odysseus. How do you suppose he feels, having to hear this account of his past? Why do you suppose he doesn't tell them who he is?