

Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

The Odyssey

by Homer (Trans. by W.H.D Rouse)

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The Odyssey

Notes

The Odyssey is a story of homecoming and welcome for Odysseus, a hero of the Trojan War. Aided by the goddess Athena, we see his long, adventure-filled trek home, where he is awaited by his faithful wife Penelopeia and son Telemachos. The adventures, rich in details about life in ancient times, relate to us how visitors are treated, the importance of marriages, the role of women, the power of the gods, and differences in class. As we learn how they do battle and why, it is also interesting to observe that the things Odysseus prizes most are his gods, country, home, respect, and family.

All references come from the Mentor Book edition of *The Odyssey* translated by W.H.D. Rouse, copyright 1937. Minor differences may occur among the many translations, especially regarding the spelling of names.

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Background Information

HOMER

The epic poems the *Iliad* and *The Odyssey* are thought to be based on the stories of Homer, a blind poet and wandering performer. It is generally thought that these poems were written down by someone else around 700 B.C. The stories, which contain material passed down through an unknown number of generations were already known but still relished by his audience.

TROJAN WAR

The Trojan War, which lasted for ten years, is said to have been caused by Helen of Troy, the daughter of Zeus and Leda. Helen, the most beautiful woman in the world, was married to Menelaos, ruler of Lacedaimon. Because of Aphrodite, however, she fell madly in love and leaves her husband to be with Paris in Troy. As a result, the Greek Kings made war on Troy to recover her. In the War, Troy is defeated, Paris is killed and Helen's captured; Helen then returns to Troy with her husband. In the period after the War, many of the Greek heroes made their way home, to a variety of fates. Odysseus, however, because he had angered a god, does not see his home for many years after all the others have returned.

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List of Gods and Goddesses, Places, Terms, and People

* Names that are in bold letters are important to the story.

Actoris – Penelopeia’s maid

Agamemnon – one of the men who goes with Odysseus to fight the Trojan war; killed by **Aigisthos** so he can marry his wife; father of Orestes

Agelaos Damastorides – the suitor who accuses Telemachos of delaying his mother’s marriage

Aigisthos – kills **Agamemnon** when he returns from the war

Aiolos Hippotades – god of the winds

Alcinoös – king of Scheria and father of Nausicaä, the princess who finds Odysseus on the beach

Alpheios – the river god

Amphinomos – one of the suitors who is a good man but is fated to die

Anticleia – Odysseus’ mother’s soul

Antinoös – one of the men trying to marry Penelopeia, leader of the pretenders

Arete – wife of the King Alcinoös, mother of Princess Nausicaä, who meets Odysseus on the beach

Argos – Odysseus’ hound

Athena – also known as “Brighteyes;” goddess of arts and wisdom; sometimes called “**Pallas Athena**”

Autoloycos – Odysseus’ grandfather who is with him when Odysseus gets the scar from the boar

Broadsea – a wrestling champion who tries to make Odysseus participate in the sport

Calypso – mischievous daughter of Atlas who holds Odysseus captive on her island

Circe – goddess with lovely hair who turns men into pigs

Ctesippos – a suitor who throws a cow’s foot at Odysseus

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Objectives

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

1. define an epic poem and point out how these three features are used in the epic:
 - an invocation of the gods;
 - the use of epithets;
 - reciting of lineage.
2. state the practical importance of an epic simile to the ancient storytellers and point out examples of epic similes in *The Odyssey*.
3. find examples of epithets in the stories and discuss how they help the reader follow who the character is.
4. recognize “dramatic irony” and point out examples of it.
5. define “oral tradition” and state how *The Odyssey* serves as an example.
6. recognize the following literary elements found in the story:
 - parable,
 - symbol.
7. comment on the presence of omens in the story and state the significance of omens in the lives of ancient Greeks.
8. identify these major gods in the story and describe their roles in Greek Mythology:
 - Athena,
 - Helios,
 - Zeus,
 - Poseidon.
9. define and give an example of a digression from the main plot line; comment on the importance of a digression as a way of building suspense in *The Odyssey*.
10. be able to cite incidents from the text to support these themes:
 - Loyalty is one of the most important and necessary qualities;
 - Revenge is necessary in order to preserve order and, therefore, has a moral justification;
 - It is important to show proper respect to the gods.

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Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Present a brief biography of Homer, specifically the belief that he was a poet and minstrel. How are the minstrels treated by their hosts in the story?
2. Define “Oral Tradition.” Why are stories repeated? What is the importance of epithets and reciting of lineage?
3. Show that Homer was a master of suspense and knew how to keep his listeners’ interest. In this regard, what is “*in medias res*,” and what does it have to do with the way the story is told?
4. Review the roles of the major Greek gods: Zeus, Athena, Poseidon, Helios.
5. Discuss the importance of prophets and omens in ancient times. Why are birds frequently part of omens and dreams?
6. What is the role of women in this ancient society? Do they have any power? Is there a difference between the power of male and female gods?
7. Discuss the importance of marriage in this story. Is the relationship between Odysseus and Penelopeia equal?
8. Define “fate.” How does Homer use the souls in Hades to define death, the ultimate fate of all men?
9. Discuss the qualities of an Epic Hero.
10. What are the qualities of a good host in Homer’s time? Why is that quality important?
11. If Athena is on Odysseus’ side, why does she subject him to so many hardships?
12. Define “epic simile” and discuss the practical reasons for using them.
13. Discuss the use of dramatic irony and humor in these stories.
14. What is Homer saying about the differences/similarities between the master and the slave when he tells the story about the swineherd’s life?
15. Discuss the Trojan War, and note the role that Helen plays in this war.

2. Why is Zeus frustrated with Aigisthos (he kills Agamemnon after he returns from the war)?

3. What qualities does Odysseus possess that endear him to Zeus and make the hero worthy of Zeus' help?

4. Why do you think Athena decides it is a good time to solicit Zeus' help in freeing Odysseus from the island?

5. What two actions do the gods decide to take on Odysseus' behalf?

6. Describe Telemachos' conduct toward the visitor Mentos (Athena in disguise). What does he hope to learn from Mentos? Why is Athena pleased with Telemachos' action?

7. Read the definition of epithet. List two epithets used in this book to describe Odysseus. Why are epithets used so often?

Book V – Hermes is Sent to Calypso’s Island; Odysseus Makes a Raft and is Carried to the Coast of Scheria

1. Why does Calypso, mischievous daughter of Atlas, accuse the other gods of being hard-hearted?

2. What fate does Zeus describe for Odysseus after Calypso tells him he can leave?

3. Support the following statement: Odysseus does not trust Calypso.

4. Support the following statement: Odysseus is a wonderful diplomat and is able to get what he wants with little effort.
