



### **Form III (Grade 9) Summer Reading Assignment:**

The required summer reading for all incoming ninth-graders is Books 1-12 of *The Odyssey* by Homer (Robert Fagles' translation). In order to enhance your understanding of the text, we are also requiring all incoming ninth-graders to complete the following study guide on Books 1-12. Your response to each question should be approximately 3-5 sentences and should be typed. We have provided a sample response below (to question #1) so that you have a clear idea of the expectations. You are required to bring your completed study guide to English class on the first day of school, and it will be counted as the equivalent of three homework assignments. The study guide provides important notes, summaries, concepts, and focus questions which are intended to help you know what to look for in the text and to aid your understanding of important themes and passages. Please note that your reading begins with Book 1 on p. 77 (you are not responsible for reading Fagles' Introduction) and ends on p. 285 at the completion of Book 12. The rest of the text (Books 13-24) will be covered in class at the start of the school year. Finally, we ask that you do not use SparkNotes or other study aids as you complete your reading and your study guide. We are interested in your ideas and your insights, and teachers will go over Books 1-12 in class to make sure that you have a strong and clear understanding of the text before moving onto Books 13-24. If you have any questions regarding the summer reading or study guide, please contact English Department Chair Vicki Grant ([vgrant@pingry.org](mailto:vgrant@pingry.org)) or your individual English teacher.

### **INTRODUCTION:**

As the epic opens, Odysseus has been gone from his home in Ithaca for twenty years. For the first ten years, he was fighting in the Trojan War, a conflict between the Greeks and the Trojans that began when Helen, a Spartan queen married to King Menelaus, was kidnapped by a young Trojan prince named Paris. The Greeks set sail for Troy in an effort to bring Helen back, and a ten-year war ensued. Odysseus is credited with ending the war by coming up with a plan to build a giant wooden horse which was brought to the gates of Troy as a peace offering. The Trojans brought the horse into their city and, at night, while the Trojans slept, Greek soldiers, hidden in the hollow belly of the horse, emerged and sacked the city, securing victory for the Greeks. After the war, Odysseus's homecoming was fraught with difficulty because he foolishly insulted the god of the sea, Poseidon. For three years, Odysseus struggled to overcome the obstacles Poseidon put in his path and tried to make it back to Ithaca, and finally he washes up on the island of Ogygia where the goddess Calypso has held him captive for the past seven years. This is where our epic begins.

### **BOOK 1: ATHENA INSPIRES THE PRINCE**

**\*\*\*NOTE:** Look at the first three lines of the epic on p. 77. The Bard, or story-teller, is asking the Muse (one of the goddesses of the creative arts) to fill him with inspiration so he can tell Odysseus's story to the audience that is now listening. Before Homer recorded *The Odyssey* in written form, around 700 BC,

these stories were passed down orally from generation to generation through skilled story-tellers. We refer to this as **THE ORAL TRADITION**.

1. Why has Odysseus's homecoming been delayed so long, and what is Athena now asking of her father, Zeus? What does this opening scene reveal about the relationship between the gods and men? What do you notice about the behavior of the gods?

**SAMPLE RESPONSE** (we are doing the first response for you so that you know what is expected on the remainder of the study guide): Odysseus's homecoming from the Trojan War has been delayed because he angered Poseidon, god of the sea, when he blinded the Cyclops, Poseidon's son. As a result, Odysseus's journey home has been fraught with difficulty. As the epic opens, Athena, who favors Odysseus, is asking her father, Zeus, for help in bringing Odysseus home, especially now that Poseidon is preoccupied with other matters. The opening scene suggests that the gods control the fates of men and, above all, that men are subject to the gods' whims and emotions.

2. What is the situation that Penelope and Telemachus face at the palace? Why do you think it has gotten so out of hand?
3. Look at lines 138-146 on p. 81. What do you notice about the way Telemachus greets his guest? Who is his guest, and why has he (she) come? Throughout the epic, pay close attention to the way guests are treated by their hosts. What distinguishes a good host from a bad one?

\*\*\*\***NOTE:** The Greeks showed great respect for *Xenia* (a Greek term referring to a stranger and the Code of Hospitality that a civilized host extends to that stranger).

4. The first four books of The Odyssey are collectively called **THE TELEMACHY** because they focus on Odysseus's son, Telemachus, and his journey, which is a clear parallel to his father's larger journey. What is the nature of Telemachus' journey (pay close attention to lines 341-342 on p. 87)? What is Athena's role in this journey?

## **BOOK 2: TELEMACHUS SETS SAIL**

1. What is the relationship like between Telemachus and the suitors? Does Telemachus have control of the situation? Why or why not? Find a moment in the chapter that shows this well. Is there a certain suitor who seems to have emerged as a leader (look closely at p. 96)?
2. How has Penelope attempted to keep the suitors at bay over the years? Does she want to remarry?
3. What does Athena (disguised as Mentor) urge Telemachus to do? Why do you think she wants him to do this? Why do you think she maintains her disguise?

\*\*\***NOTE:** Pay close attention to the use of **DISGUISES AND TRICKS** throughout the epic, especially as a means of hiding one's strengths or weaknesses and as a means of testing the loyalty of others. This is an important theme.

### **BOOK 3: KING NESTOR REMEMBERS**

\*\*\***NOTE:** It is very important to show thanks and respect to the gods in all aspects of Greek life. Notice the animal sacrifices that are made at the beginning of Book 3 to thank the gods for safe passage.

**NOTE:** On p. 108, how Telemachus' lack of confidence shown.

1. How does Nestor greet his guest? What does this tell us about him? When and how does Nestor recognize Telemachus? What qualities does Nestor see in him, and what impact do you think this has on Telemachus? Is Athena's plan working?
2. Is Nestor able to give Telemachus any information about his father? What is he able to tell Telemachus about the homecomings of other Greek heroes from Troy, most notably Agamemnon? Agamemnon's story is told again and again throughout the epic. Why do you think there is so much emphasis on this story?

### **BOOK 4: THE KING AND QUEEN OF SPARTA**

**SUMMARY:** In Sparta, Telemachus is welcomed by King Menelaus and Queen Helen who show their royal, civilized, and refined nature in the way that they abide by Xenia, the Code of Hospitality. Note that they welcome, feed, and take care of their guests BEFORE asking their names or asking any questions about the purpose of their journey. Menelaus and Helen recognize Telemachus at once, since the resemblance to his father is clear, but through their respect for Telemachus and for xenia, they wait for him to reveal his identity when ready. Certainly, Helen chooses to tell the story of Odysseus and the Trojan Horse in order to test Telemachus' reaction and confirm her suspicion that this is Odysseus's son.

**NOTE:** Notice how often both Odysseus and Telemachus hide their identity until the proper time, as they believed that one's identity is one's power. Furthermore, Menelaus and Helen display another important Greek quality: humility. When Telemachus compares King Menelaus' palace to Zeus' court, Menelaus immediately replies, "No man alive could rival Zeus..." showing his immense respect for the gods. From Menelaus, Telemachus learns about Menelaus' own challenging homecoming, about the drowning of the Greek hero Ajax, about the deadly homecoming of Agamemnon, and finally about his father who was once, years ago, seen being held by force on Calypso's island but Menelaus is not able to offer any more help than that regarding Odysseus's fate or whereabouts. Telemachus, with the help of Athena, has certainly gained confidence from his journey, as both Nestor and Menelaus recognize in him elements of Odysseus's greatness. As the suitors back in Ithaca learn about Telemachus' journey, they are shocked and nervous and plan to ambush and kill him on his way home and kill him so that he doesn't continue to get in their way. Meanwhile, Athena brings sleep to Penelope to soothe her in her time of sadness, worry, and grief.

## **BOOK 5: ODYSSEUS -- NYMPH AND SHIPWRECK**

1. The first image we have of Odysseus in Book 5 is him weeping for home as he is held captive on the island of Ogygia. What is particularly surprising about our first glimpse of Odysseus? Is this what you expected, based on all we have heard about him in Books 1-4?
2. Why is the goddess Calypso holding Odysseus captive on her island? What has she promised him if he will stay? Ultimately, why must she let him go?
3. What does Poseidon do when he learns of Athena, Zeus, and Hermes' plan to bring Odysseus home?
4. How and by whom is Odysseus saved at the end of the chapter?

\*\*\*\* **NOTE:** Notice throughout the epic that each character often has a certain descriptive phrase attached to his or her name: Calypso = the lustrous goddess OR the nymph with lovely braids; Menelaus = the red-haired king; Nestor = the old charioteer; Odysseus = Raider of cities; Athena = the grey-eyed goddess, etc. These descriptive phrases are called **EPITHETS**. Not only do these epithets highlight certain characteristics that the Greeks valued, but they also preserve a certain meter in each line of verse, which was important to the **BARD** (or story-teller) who would be singing, from memory, the epic poem to his audience.

## **BOOK 6: THE PRINCESS AND THE STRANGER**

\*\*\*\***NOTE:** Since the Ancient Greeks believed that the gods controlled man/woman's lives and destiny, it is quite natural that the gods act as puppeteers in *The Odyssey*. This launches the theme of predestination vs. free will. Notice throughout the epic whether the gods are always "pulling all the strings" or does man/woman have some wiggle room for his/her own self-determination (choices).

1. When Nausicaa, the Phaeacian princess, is manipulated by Athena to go down to the beach to wash clothes, what women's role is portrayed here? Consider the Queen Arete's activity that is occurring simultaneously at the palace (lines 57-58). What clear difference seems to exist between a modern-day princess/queen's role and that of the royal women of Ancient Greece?

\*\*\***NOTE:** In Ancient Greece, women had few rights and were pretty much tied to their households. Even trips to the agora (market) were made by male servants/slaves only. Thus, only men were allowed to walk and roam about "the great wide world."

2. What advice does Nausicaa offer Odysseus in terms of his entering the city and who should be his advocate once he reaches the palace? Remember, that when Odysseus first speaks to the princess, he considers what would be the most beneficial way to address, and talk to, her (lines 156-162). Thus, do Odysseus and Nausicaa seem more similar or different to you? Explain why and how.

\*\*\***NOTE:** As depicted in *The Illiad*, Homer's epic about the Trojan War, which is a prequel to *The Odyssey*, Odysseus is counted on by the Greeks always to make the wisest judgments and to take them down the most constructive paths.

## **BOOK 7: PHAEACIA'S HALLS AND GARDENS**

\*\*\***NOTE:** In Ancient Greek times, voyages were fraught with danger. Thus, to come to port meant to come safely to a place that would offer a traveler its protection and security.

**SUMMARY:** King Alcinous and Queen Arete welcome their guest in accordance with *xenia*. Odysseus heeds Nausicaa's advice to appeal to her mother for help getting home (NOTE: In Greek, Arete means virtue, excellence, greatness, and Queen Arete certainly reflects those qualities). Again, notice how long Odysseus withholds his identity, waiting for the proper time to reveal himself. Above all, notice Odysseus's response when Alcinous compares him to a god on p. 186. Odysseus says, "Alcinous!...cross that thought from your mind. I'm nothing like the immortal gods who rule the skies, either in build or breeding. I'm just a mortal man." At this point in his journey, Odysseus has clearly learned the importance of humility and respect to the gods. Even before confirming Odysseus's identity, Alcinous recognizes greatness in Odysseus and offers him Nausicaa's hand in marriage. Note that Nausicaa's coming-of-age story parallels Telemachus' coming-of-age story.

\*\*\***NOTE:** The Ancient Greek hearer – just as the modern reader – would have already heard this story, along with Calypso's freeing of Odysseus and the latter's voyage to the Phaeacians. Was this an error on Homer's part, or do you see some reason why parts of the story might be repeated, e.g., Agamemnon's homecoming and murder? Think in terms of practical considerations, but also think of which **PARALLELS** Homer might be drawing.

## **BOOK 8: A DAY FOR SONGS AND CONTESTS**

1. Give more proof of Alcinous's benevolence as a host in terms of his actions towards, and words to, Odysseus. Consider his speech contained in lines 269-272.
2. What other side to Odysseus do we observe when he lets the young athlete bait him into participating in the games?

\*\*\***NOTE:** **HUBRIS**, or excessive (negative) pride, figures prominently in Greek literature and, especially, it is the primary flaw that causes a main character's (protagonist's) decline and fall (reverse of fortune) in Greek tragedies.

3. Consider that the Phaeacians also display hubris when they characterize themselves as “favored of the gods.” Is there a clue in this chapter about what might happen to them?
4. When the Bard sings his two songs of the Trojan War that involve Odysseus, the latter cries. How can one reconcile (make consistent or compatible) Odysseus’s sensitive side wherein he weeps over his hard days at Troy and his “alpha male” side wherein he’s got to put Broadsea in his place?

**\*\*\*NOTE: DUALITY** is a literary and psychological concept whereby contradictory traits co-exist in one person.

## **BOOK 9: IN THE ONE-EYED GIANT’S CAVE**

**\*\*\*NOTE: Narrative Voice** means that the author selects the voice from whose point of view he/she wants to tell his/her tale, e.g., first person, third person, etc. The selection of the voice is crucial for the most effective narration of the story.

1. The poet switches narrative voice at the beginning of the chapter so that Odysseus can tell his own tale. It is a tale whereby he fills in his own backstory (exposition). What are the advantages and/or disadvantages of Odysseus’s telling his own story?

**\*\*\*NOTE: Exposition** refers to what happened before the story starts. Thus, the reader is filled in with the events that transpired involving the protagonist and/or other characters.

2. What is your favorite part of the Polyphemus (Cyclops) sequence? Explain why? Also, what motif (running theme) is continued here when Odysseus shouts out his name defiantly when escaping from Polyphemus? (Remember that Odysseus, very wisely, had kept himself anonymous before that: “I am Nobody.”)
3. This chapter is one of the most exciting in the epic poem. However, it is riddled with contradictions. For example, the usually rational Odysseus, who cautiously warns his men not to embark on risky adventure, plunges headlong into the Cyclops’ cave. Find another contradiction in this or previous chapters. Try to explain your choice. Can you reconcile the contradiction?

## **BOOK 10: THE BEWITCHING QUEEN OF AEAEA**

**SUMMARY:** As Odysseus continues his story, he tells about reaching the Island of Aeolus, god of the wind, who hosted Odysseus and his crew for a month. Odysseus asks Aeolus for help in getting home, and Aeolus provides Odysseus with a magic sack of “winds that howl from every quarter” and then blew them on their way. On the tenth day of smooth sailing, Odysseus and his crew could see their native land of Ithaca in the distance, but the crew begins to suspect that the sack from Aeolus was filled with gold and silver that Odysseus was hiding for himself. As a result, the crew secretly opens the bag of

wind, which sweeps them back out to sea and back to Aeolus' island. Once again, Odysseus asks for Aeolus' help, but Aeolus angrily sends him away, convinced that "the immortals hate [Odysseus]." After six days of rowing with no wind at all, the crew finally came to the land of the Laestrygonians, giant cannibals who eat several of Odysseus's men before they could escape back to the ship. Finally, the crew arrived at the island of Aeaea, home to the goddess Circe who drugs men and turns them into animals. Odysseus's men, under her spell, are turned into swine. Odysseus is given a protective herb by the god Hermes so that he is immune to Circe's powers. When Circe's spell doesn't work on Odysseus, she realizes that he is no ordinary man and that he must have the favor of the gods. Odysseus convinces Circe to change the swine back into his men. He then stays with Circe, as her lover, for a full year before his men urge him that it is time to get back home. Circe consents to let them go but urges Odysseus that he first must make a trip into the Underworld to see the prophet Tiresias, who will give advice about Odysseus's homecoming. The chapter ends with one of Odysseus's drunken men, Elpenor, falling to his death from Circe's roof. With no time to give him proper burial, Odysseus and his crew set off to the Underworld to see Tiresias, as Circe instructed them to do.

## **BOOK 11: THE KINGDOM OF THE DEAD**

In Book 11, Odysseus continues to tell the story of his travels after leaving Troy. In this book, Circe has told Odysseus that he must visit the underworld. Only the greatest heroes have visited the Underworld and returned, so this is a significant achievement for Odysseus. While in the Underworld, he visits with many of the fallen heroes of the Trojan War and he learns what has been happening in Ithaca in his absence.

- 1) In lines 111-169, Odysseus hears a prophecy from Teresias. What does Teresias advise Odysseus to do? How does this prophecy set up the second half of the epic?
- 2) Who else does Odysseus see in the Underworld, and what does he learn from each?

## **BOOK 12: THE CATTLE OF THE SUN**

Book 12 is the final 'chapter' in Odysseus's narration of his adventures. This book begins with Odysseus and his crew returning to Aeaea to bury the body of Elpenor. Burial rites were extremely important to the Greeks, as it was believed that a soul could not rest without proper burial. As Circe prepares to send Odysseus and his crew on their way, she warns Odysseus about several obstacles that he will encounter and advises him how to handle each. As Circe warned, he first encounters the Sirens, "bird women" who, with their beautiful singing, lure sailors off-course to their death. Following Circe's instructions, Odysseus has his men plug their ears with wax to avoid being trapped by the Sirens' song, and he orders his men to tie him to the mast of the ship so that he can hear the song but not be taken in. Odysseus then has to navigate his ship safely through the Clashing Rocks, while avoiding coming too close to the cave of Scylla, a twelve-legged monster with six hideous, spiked heads, who shoots out of her cave to grab and devour passing sailors. Yet, he must also avoid getting sucked down into the whirlpool of Charybdis who gulps down unsuspecting ships. Odysseus loses many men as he makes his way through these obstacles, and he and his remaining crew are tired and hungry as they wash up on the Island of

the Sun where Helios keeps his sacred cattle. Circe had warned that under no circumstances should Odysseus and his men harm or touch the cattle, and Odysseus passes those stern warnings onto his crew. The crew, angry at Odysseus for their hardships, ignores his warnings, and while Odysseus is sleeping, slaughter the cattle and eat them. Odysseus awakens in a panic, aware that they are doomed. As they set sail once again, Zeus, having been urged by Helios, punishes the crew by sending lightning bolts, crashing waves, and destruction down on their ships. All of Odysseus's men perish. Odysseus, holding onto pieces of the shipwreck for his life, washes up on the Island of Ogygia, where the goddess Calypso has held him captive for the past seven years. Here ends Odysseus's narrative to the Phaeacians.