

STUDY GUIDE FOR *THE ODYSSEY*

VOCABULARY

antediluvian: “before the flood”; old
mentor: special teacher or leader
nectar and ambrosia: food and drink of the gods (wine and fruit)
nymph: beautiful immortal maidens who lived in mountains, forests, and water
cuckold: a man whose wife is unfaithful
cudgel: a short, heavy club
hind: a farm assistant; female of the red deer
lacrimation: excessive crying
minx: an ill-behaved, provocative woman
cajole: to persuade with flattery
gaffer: old man; employer or overseer

LIST OF CHARACTERS

SEE THE “PRONOUNCING INDEX” (PP. 300-304) FOR HELP WITH THE PRONUNCIATION OF NAMES

Alcinoos: King of the Phaiacians
Anticleia: Odysseus’s mother who died while he was away from Ithaca
Antinoos: “Ringleader” of Penelopeia’s suitors
Arete: King Alcinoos’ wife, known for her kindness and beauty
Argos: Odysseus’s old hunting dog
Athena: Goddess of wisdom; Odysseus’s helper
Calypso: Witch/nymph who wanted Odysseus as her husband
Circe: “Terrible goddess with lovely hair, who spoke in the language of men” (115); daughter of Helios
Demodocos: Blind minstrel
Eumaios: Swineherd; a faithful servant of Odysseus
Eupeithes: Father of Antinoos
Eurycleia: Faithful old servant of Odysseus and his family; “she loved him [Telemachos] more than any other of the household, and she had been his nurse when he was a little tot.” (21)
Eurymachos: One of Penelopeia’s cruelest suitors
Hyperion: Sun-god
Iros: Beggar at Odysseus’s home
Laertes: Odysseus’s father; lives in seclusion in the country
Odysseus: Protagonist unable to reach home after the Trojan War; “wise beyond all mortal men” (12)
Melanthios: One of Penelopeia’s cruelest suitors; a goatherd
Nausicaa: Daughter of King Alcinoos; “tall and divinely beautiful” (73)
Penelopeia: Odysseus’s faithful wife
Philoitios: Faithful cattle drover
Poseidon: God of the sea; bore a lasting grudge against Odysseus; often called “Earthshaker”
Polyphemus: “Most powerful of all the Cyclopians” (12); son of Poseidon
Telemachos: Odysseus’s son; “a fine-looking boy” (13); approximately twenty years old
Theoclymenos: Prophet who returns to Ithaca with Telemachos
Teiresias: Blind Theban prophet

PLOT SUMMARIES AND STUDY QUESTIONS

TYPE OR HANDWRITE YOUR ANSWERS TO STUDY QUESTIONS ON A SEPARATE SHEET OF PAPER.

BOOK I: WHAT WENT ON IN THE HOUSE OF ODYSSEUS

Athena appeals to Zeus for permission to help Odysseus reach home. Odysseus’s home in Ithaca is overrun with suitors who are trying to win Penelopeia’s hand. With the help of Athena disguised as Mentos, Telemachos finds the courage to confront the suitors.

1. Where is Odysseus?
2. What or whom is Athena disguised as?
3. Why do Telemachos and his mother need Odysseus?
4. Why does Odysseus's wife have suitors?
5. What does Athena advise Telemachos to do?

BOOK II: HOW THE COUNCIL MET IN THE MARKET-PLACE OF ITHACA; AND WHAT CAME OF IT
In a town meeting, Telemachos announces his intentions to locate his father and rid his house of the suitors. He is met with ridicule and doubt, especially from Antinoos who confronts Telemachos twice. Athena helps Telemachos prepare for his journey, and he sets sail in secret that night.

1. Describe the trick that Penelopeia plays on her suitors.
2. What specifically does Athena do to help Telemachos in this book?

BOOK III: WHAT HAPPENED IN SANDY PYLOS

Following Athena's advice, Telemachos visits King Nestor of Pylos to get information about his father. Athena accompanies him disguised as an old family friend, Mentor. Nestor tells Telemachos stories about Odysseus.

1. What is Nestor's opinion of Odysseus?
2. Describe Nestor's reaction when he realizes that Telemachos's companion is Athena.

BOOK IV: WHAT HAPPENED IN LACEDAEMON

Telemachos and Nestor's son Peisistratos Nestorides arrive at and are welcomed into the home of Menelaos and Helen. Menelaos tells Telemachos of his travels with Odysseus and that Odysseus is trapped on an island by Calypso. Meanwhile, Antinoos has learned that Telemachos has embarked on his journey and plots with the other suitors to kill him upon his return to Ithaca. Penelopeia learns of Telemachos's leaving and is upset.

1. What clues cue Menelaos and Helen that Telemachos is Odysseus's son?
2. What is Menelaos' opinion of Odysseus?
3. Describe Antinoos' plan to destroy Telemachos.

BOOK V: HERMES IS SENT TO CALYPSO'S ISLAND; ODYSSEUS MAKES A RAFT AND IS CARRIED TO THE COAST OF SCHERIA

Athena again pleads to Zeus for Odysseus's release. Zeus sends Hermes to Calypso with orders that she release Odysseus. Calypso grudgingly complies. Odysseus is given much trouble by Poseidon, but with the help of Leucothea and Athena, he finally reaches the land of the Phaiacians, where he collapses, exhausted.

1. Who is Hermes, and what is his mission?
2. What can Hermes do with his wand?
3. Who is holding Odysseus captive?
4. What is Calypso's reaction to having to let Odysseus go?
5. What is the main problem Odysseus faces while traveling by sea?
6. What happens to Odysseus at the end of Book 5?

BOOK VI: HOW ODYSSEUS APPEALED TO NAUSICAA, AND SHE BROUGHT HIM TO HER FATHER'S HOUSE

Athena appears in Nausicaa's dream, telling her to go to the river and wash clothes. Nausicaa and her maids meet Odysseus at the river, and all but Nausicaa are frightened of him because of his appearance. He begs her to help him and she agrees. He bathes and follows Nausicaa's instructions for asking her parents for assistance.

1. What "subliminal" message does Athena give to Nausicaa while she lies sleeping?
2. Who is the only person who doesn't run away from the terrifying Odysseus? Why doesn't she run away?
3. Is it pure luck that Nausicaa helps Odysseus? Explain.
4. What does the fact that Odysseus won't bathe in front of the girls tell us about the kind of person he is?
5. Does Nausicaa believe her parents will help Odysseus?
6. Why won't Nausicaa let Odysseus ride in her cart?
7. What instructions does she give Odysseus?

BOOK VII: WHAT HAPPENED TO ODYSSEUS IN THE PALACE OF ALCINOOS

Odysseus arrives at the palace of Alcinooos and Arete and begs for their help in getting him home. They feed him, ask about his situation, and agree to give him the help he needs.

1. What craft are the Phaiacians best known for?
2. How is Odysseus treated as a guest?

BOOK VIII: HOW THEY HELD GAMES AND SPORTS IN PHAIACIA

The next day Alcinooos sends the boys of the town to construct a ship for Odysseus's voyage and gathers the men for a day of entertainment for Odysseus. Demodocos sings of famous men, including Odysseus. When Alcinooos sees Odysseus crying during the minstrel's story, he commences the games and dancing to keep his guest happy. At dinner, Odysseus again weeps when Demodocos sings about the Trojan War. At this point, Alcinooos finally demands to know who Odysseus is.

1. Describe the activities that King Alcinooos arranges to entertain Odysseus.
2. Who is Demodocos?
3. How is King Alcinooos helping Odysseus to get home?
4. What is Odysseus's reaction whenever Demodocos sings about the Trojan War?

BOOK IX: HOW ODYSSEUS VISITED THE LOTUS-EATERS AND THE CYCLOPS

Odysseus tells Alcinooos who he is and what things have happened to him since he left Troy. He tells of his adventures in Ismaros, in the land of the Lotus-Eaters, and in the land of the Cyclopians. He describes the Cyclopians as "violent and lawless" (102), and he and his men run into trouble with one of the Cyclopians. Men are killed and Poseidon's vendetta against Odysseus begins.

1. What was the effect of the Lotus plant?
2. How heavy is the door of the Cyclops' cave?
3. What is the first villainous thing the Cyclops does?
4. Why doesn't Odysseus kill the Cyclops when he has the chance?
5. What does Odysseus give the Cyclops as a gift?
6. What gift does the Cyclops give in return?
7. What does Odysseus tell the Cyclops that his name is?
8. How do Odysseus and his men sneak out of the Cyclops' cave?
9. What foolish thing does Odysseus do?
10. What did a soothsayer once predict would happen to the Cyclops?
11. What does the Cyclops ask his father Poseidon to do for him?

BOOK X: THE ISLAND OF THE WINDS; THE LAND OF THE MIDNIGHT SUN; CIRCE

Odysseus tells of his visit to Aiolia, where Aiolos Hipponotes, manager of the winds, helps Odysseus and his crew get home. He puts wind in a bag, which Odysseus carries on board the ship. Unfortunately, his curious crew decides to open the bag, and the released winds drive them away from home. They arrive at the land of the Laestrygonians, who eat most of Odysseus's crew before his ship escapes. Then they land on the island of Aiaia, the home of Circe. She traps some of the men and turns them into pigs. Odysseus, with the help of Hermes, gets her to release his men and help him reach home. She instructs him to visit Hades, where he will meet Tiresias, who will tell him how to get home.

1. Who is the god of wind?
2. What favor does he do for Odysseus and his men?
3. What stupid mistake do some of the men make on the ship?
4. How do even more men die after the bag accident?
5. What does Circe do to some of Odysseus's men?
6. How does Odysseus get her to release his men?
7. What instructions does Circe give Odysseus?

BOOK XI: HOW ODYSSEUS VISITED THE KINGDOM OF THE DEAD

Odysseus follows Circe's instructions. In Hades, he first sees a dead shipmate, Elpenor, then his mother, Anticleia, then Tiresias. Tiresias tells him what will happen to him next, including a warning about the cattle of Helios and how to reconcile with Poseidon. He then gets to talk with his mother, and she answers many questions for him. At this point, Odysseus tries to conclude his storytelling, but Alcinooos begs him to continue.

Odysseus says only that he met the souls of many who passed away, then he left Hades.

1. What does Odysseus do to call the souls of the dead to him?
2. Who is Teiresias and what does Odysseus want from him?
3. What does Teiresias predict for Odysseus?
4. What should Odysseus do to the suitors at his house?
5. What does Teiresias say Odysseus should do after dealing with the suitors?
6. What is the name of Odysseus's mother and how did she die?
7. Why can't Odysseus hug his dead mother?

BOOK XII: THE SINGING SIRENS, AND THE TERRORS OF SCYLLA AND CHARYBDIS

Odysseus tells of their return to Aiaia to bury Elpenor and of Circe's warning of the dangers to come: the Sirens, Scylla, Charybdis, and Helios's cattle. The men make it through the perils of the sea, as predicted. On land, when they run out of provisions, they eat Helios's cattle even though Odysseus made them promise not to. At sea, all except Odysseus are killed as punishment. Odysseus is adrift for nine days before landing on the island of Ogygia, Calypso's home. Alcinoos and the other listeners are now up-to-date on the travels of Odysseus.

1. Why should Odysseus be wary of the Sirens?
2. What should he and his men do to keep safe from the Sirens?
3. Describe Scylla.
4. What will Charybdis do if Odysseus's ship gets too close?
5. What does Odysseus keep secret from his men?
6. Describe the circumstances of Odysseus's shipmates' deaths. Is it Odysseus's fault?

BOOK XIII: HOW ODYSSEUS CAME TO ITHACA

Odysseus is done telling his story. King Alcinoos gives Odysseus a ship with a crew and supplies, and the townspeople all give him gifts. The crew delivers Odysseus to Ithaca and returns home. Poseidon, who is mad that anyone would make Odysseus's travels by sea so easy, turns the ship and crew into stone as they return to their harbor. Odysseus does not believe he is home until Athena convinces him. She disguises him as an old beggar and sends to him to his faithful pigkeeper.

1. Describe Odysseus's journey home from Scheria.
2. What does Poseidon initially want to do to the Phaeacian ship?
3. What decision does Alcinoos make because of the wrath of Poseidon?
4. Why and for how long does Athena want Odysseus to be in disguise?
5. What does Athena instruct Odysseus to do now that he has returned to Ithaca?
6. Whom does Athena instruct Odysseus to visit first?

BOOK XIV: ODYSSEUS AND THE SWINEHERD

Athena goes to Lacedaimon to bring Telemachos home. Odysseus goes to the swineherd Eumaios' house. Odysseus is made welcome and is pleased to see how faithful Eumaios has been during his absence.

1. What is the name of the swineherd?
2. What does Odysseus tell the swineherd about himself?
3. Describe Odysseus's disguise.

BOOK XV: HOW TELEMACHOS SAILED BACK TO ITHACA

Athena finds Telemachos at the mansion of Menelaos and instructs him to return home. Odysseus learns from Eumaios about his (Odysseus's) parents and how Eumaios was bought by Laertes when he was a child. Telemachos lands safely back in Ithaca and, by Athena's instructions, goes straight to Eumaios.

1. How has Eumaios proven his faithfulness in this and previous books?
2. Who do you think will be the first person to know Odysseus for who he really is?

BOOK XVI: HOW TELEMACHOS MET HIS FATHER

Athena instructs Odysseus to reveal his identity to Telemachos and to plan their revenge on the suitors. Eumaios tells Penelopeia that Telemachos has returned safely to Ithaca. When the suitors, led by Antinoos, learn that their plan to kill Telemachos has failed, they plot to kill him another way.

1. What does Telemachos call Eumaios? Why?
2. Describe Athena's changes to Odysseus's appearance.
3. Who does Telemachos think Odysseus is when Athena removes his disguise?
4. What do Odysseus and Telemachos plan to do?
5. Describe Penelopeia's confrontation with Antinoos.

BOOK XVII: HOW ODYSSEUS RETURNED TO HIS OWN HOME

Telemachos returns home, accompanied by Theoclymenos. Eumaios brings the disguised Odysseus to his home where the suitors are entertaining themselves as usual. Odysseus is recognized only by Argos, his old hunting dog, who dies after hearing his master's voice one last time. Odysseus tests the suitors by begging for food from each one. Penelopeia tells

Eumaios to bring the beggar to her; she wants to know if he has any news about Odysseus.

1. What does Theoclymenos prophesy to Penelopeia?
2. How does Odysseus test the suitors?
3. Who recognizes Odysseus right away? How does he recognize him?
4. Describe Melanthios.
5. Who makes Odysseus extremely angry?
6. Why does Odysseus want to test his servants and his wife before revealing his identity?

BOOK XVIII: HOW ODYSSEUS FOUGHT THE STURDY BEGGAR

Odysseus fights with another beggar, Iros, who is used to being the only beggar at the castle. Penelopeia decides to address the suitors, saying she will choose a husband according to who brings her the best gift. Odysseus recognizes this as a trick on the suitors. Odysseus is further antagonized by Melantho, a maid, and Eurymachos.

1. Why does Odysseus get in a fight with Iros? Who wins?
2. What trick does Penelopeia play on the suitors in this book?
3. Which three characters anger Odysseus in this book?

BOOK XIX: HOW THE OLD NURSE KNEW HER MASTER

The women are shut up in their rooms, and Odysseus and Telemachos hide all the weapons in a storeroom. Odysseus, still disguised as a beggar, goes to see Penelopeia. He convinces her that he did meet Odysseus and that he has heard also that Odysseus is on his way home. Penelopeia is grateful and orders Eurycleia to bathe and clothe the beggar. Eurycleia recognizes Odysseus by a scar on his leg, but he swears her to secrecy. Penelopeia, discouraged, decides to go ahead and marry whomever can meet the challenge that she will put forth to the suitors: to string Odysseus's bow and shoot an arrow through twelve axe-heads in a row. (See page 235, footnote 2 for explanation.)

1. What does Odysseus the beggar tell Penelopeia about Odysseus?
2. How does Eurycleia recognize Odysseus?
3. How did Odysseus get the scar on his leg?
4. Describe Penelopeia's challenge for the suitors.

BOOK XX: HOW GOD SENT OMENS OF THE WRATH TO COME

It is a new day and Telemachos receives the beggar (Odysseus) into his house. The beggar is ridiculed by many, but he remains calm. Philoitios proves himself a faithful and kind servant.

1. Name two people who are cruel to Odysseus the beggar.
2. Who proves himself to be a kind and faithful servant?
3. What do you think Odysseus is going to do to the suitors?

BOOK XXI: THE CONTEST WITH THE GREAT BOW

Penelopeia issues her challenge to the suitors, but none of the men can bend the bow to string it. Odysseus finds a chance to confide in Philoitios and Eumaios and to include them in his plans for revenge. Odysseus easily strings the bow and shoots an arrow through the twelve axe-heads. Eumaios tells the women to lock themselves in the bedrooms, and Telemachos and Odysseus arm themselves against the suitors.

1. Whom does Odysseus trust to help him defeat the suitors?
2. Why don't the men want Odysseus to try to string the bow?

3. How does Odysseus prove his true identity?

BOOK XXII: THE BATTLE IN THE HALL

Immediately Odysseus reveals himself and kills Antinoos with an arrow. Eurymachos tries to convince Odysseus that

Antinoos is to blame for everything and that he shouldn't kill the other suitors. Odysseus gives them a chance to run away, but they choose to fight, led by Eurymachos. Odysseus, Telemachos, and the two servants kill everyone except Phemios and Medon. Odysseus asks Eurycleia to identify the maids who have been unfaithful and bring them to him. He makes them clean up the blood and dead bodies in the hall and then Telemachos hangs them. Melanthios is cut up and fed to the dogs. The maids and servants come and celebrate the return of Odysseus.

1. What did Odysseus prove about his abilities when he shot the arrow through the twelve axes? Why is that important now?
2. Whom does Odysseus kill first and why?
3. How does Eurymachos plead his case with Odysseus?
4. Whom does Telemachos catch raiding the storeroom of weapons and what do they do with him?
6. Which two servants who spared?
7. How does Odysseus identify the unfaithful maids?
8. What does Odysseus do to the unfaithful maids?
9. What is done to Melanthios?

BOOK XXIII: HOW ODYSSEUS FOUND HIS WIFE AGAIN

Odysseus reveals his identity to Penelopeia, but she is skeptical. She tests Odysseus by having Eurycleia provide Odysseus a place to sleep by moving a bed into the hallway. Odysseus becomes angry because he built this bed out of a tree trunk so that it could not be moved. Penelopeia then knows that he is truly her husband. He tells her that, according to Tiresias, he must carry an oar inland and make sacrifices to Poseidon. He also feels he must regain all the livestock and goods that he lost because of the suitors. He sets out to see his father and tells Penelopeia to stay locked in her room with her maids until he returns.

1. How does Penelopeia test Odysseus?
2. Why does she test him?
3. Describe the one last task that Tiresias told Odysseus to complete. What will be his reward for this task?
4. After Odysseus tells Penelopeia about all his adventures, he sets off again. What does he go to do? What does he tell Penelopeia to do?

BOOK XXIV: HOW ODYSSEUS FOUND HIS OLD FATHER AND HOW THE STORY ENDED

The souls of the dead men pass to Hades, led by Hermes. Odysseus goes to see Laertes, pretending to be someone else at first, but then he reveals his identity. Laertes asks for proof that he is Odysseus. He tells about the scar on his leg and spending time in his father's orchard. Relatives of the suitors, led by Eupheithes, Antinoos' father, come to battle Odysseus.

Odysseus kills Eupheithes, then Athena stops the battle and makes peace between the two sides.

1. How does Odysseus prove that he is really Laertes' son?
2. What is Laertes afraid of?
3. Who comes to battle Odysseus? Whom are they led by?
4. Whom does Odysseus kill?
5. Who stops the battle?