

The Odyssey

Homer

Supplementary Reading Packet

Name: _____ Period: _____

English 9H

Overview of the Epic

The Odyssey is an epic poem that was composed sometime between 800 B.C.E and 600 B.C.E. by a Greek poet known as Homer. *The Odyssey* originated as oral poetry, not something to be read silently; it used repetition of words and phrases both for emphasis and for ease in memorization and retention. It was also memorable because it painted vivid word pictures and was filled with action. Because of its length, *The Odyssey* could not be presented all at one time. For that reason, Homer used techniques, such as the start of a new trial for the hero, which would bring the audience back to hear more. At that time the Greeks believed in the influence of the gods and goddesses; therefore, one could expect that the hero would receive the help or the wrath of a god/goddess during his exploits (adventures).

Year Written:

Author:

Genre:

The **epic** is generally defined as a **long narrative poem** on a great and serious subject, related in an **elevated style**, and **centered on a heroic or quasi-divine figure on whose actions depends the fate of a tribe, a nation, or the human race**. The traditional epics were shaped by a literary artist from historical and legendary materials which had developed in the **oral traditions** of his nation during a period of expansion and warfare (*Beowulf*, *The Odyssey*, *The Iliad*).

Note: An epic is different from a novel. It is an older form of literature dating back to Homer. The novel didn't originate until the early 18th century.

Novel vs. Epic

Novel: Prose (The ordinary form of written or spoken language.)

- There is a plot that follows a linear progression.
- Progression of the narrative (A story is unfolding.)
- Written/Read (a more intimate experience)

Epic: Poetry (rhyme and meter)

- Not a linear progression
- Presents structural parallels to stimulate thinking
- Oral/Listen

Characteristics of the Epic

1. Usually contains 24 books or parts	
2. Has a hero who is a figure of national importance and of noble birth	<p>Epic Hero (n) – A larger than life figure, usually male, who embodies the ideals of a nation or race. Epic heroes take part in long, dangerous adventures and accomplish great deeds that require courage and super human strength. Odysseus, the hero in the <i>Odyssey</i>, displays some of the qualities that were honored in Greek society. However, because he is human, he also displays some human faults (epic flaw). The actions of a true epic hero will often change the fate of a nation or a people.</p>
3. Involves a long, dangerous journey	<p>Odyssey (n) – A long series of wanderings or adventures, esp. when filled with notable experiences, hardships, etc.</p> <p>*In Greek the verb “To odysseus” (<i>odyssasthai</i>) is usually said to mean “be wroth against,” “hate.” In the <i>Odyssey</i> it essentially means “to cause pain, and to be willing to do so.”</p>
4. Has a setting that is large in scale	<p><i>The Odyssey</i> is centered on a journey that involves a large number of places and nations.</p>
5. Involves supernatural beings and events	<p>Many of the gods are involved in Odysseus’ wanderings: Poseidon keeps Odysseus from returning home for several years, Zeus and Hermes at points come to Odysseus’ rescue, and Athena involves herself in every stage of Odysseus’ journey.</p>
6. Has a style that is formal	<p><i>The Odyssey</i> is written in verse (dactylic hexameter). The style of writing is elevated, even ceremonial. Read the initial conversation between Zeus and Athena in Book I. The conversation has a high tone and depth of detail that give it gravity even when involving petty matters.</p>
7. Begins “in medias res” (in the middle) rather than at the beginning	<p>“in medias res” – (<i>into the middle of things</i>) is a Latin phrase denoting the literary and artistic narrative technique wherein the relation of a story begins either at the mid-point or at the conclusion, rather than at the beginning, establishing setting, character, and conflict via flashback and expository conversations relating the pertinent past.</p> <p>The main advantage of <i>in medias res</i> is to open the story with dramatic action rather than exposition which sets up the characters and situation. It can be employed in any narrative genre, epic poetry, novels, plays, or film. <i>The Odyssey</i> begins near the end of Odysseus’ journey, which began with his ships’ flight from the shores of Troy. The events that set his wanderings in motion become clear as the story progresses.</p>
8. Uses epithets	<p>Epithet (n) – A descriptive word or phrase accompanying or occurring in place of the name of a person or thing, which has become a fixed formula.</p> <p>The epithet is one of the most noticeable features of <i>The Odyssey</i>. Epithet comes from the Greek ‘for putting (something) on (something).’ It is a tag or nickname that can be used on its own or together with the real name, depending on other features of the Greek language. Epithets add a bit of color and also fill out the meter when the name on its own doesn’t quite fit. In addition, the epithet serves as a mnemonic device reminding listeners that they have, indeed, already heard mention of the character. The epithet generally compounds adjectives and is picturesque, which certainly helps make the character memorable. Most of the important people in the <i>Odyssey</i> have a special epithet that serves as an extra name. For instance, Athena is the only one described as <i>glaukopis</i> ‘grey-eyed.’ She is called <i>thea glaukopis Athene</i> ‘goddess grey-eyed Athena’ and also <i>Pallas Athene</i> ‘Pallas Athena’.</p> <p>Note: You may notice that Homer never calls the Greeks ‘Greeks.’ Sometimes they are ‘Achaean.’ As Achaeans they receive the epithets ‘well-greaved’ or ‘brazen-clad Achaeans.’</p>

The following are often (but not always) present:

9. An invocation to the muse for inspiration in the telling of the story.	Muse (n) – In Greek mythology, poetry, and literature, are the goddesses who inspire the creation of literature and the arts. They were considered the source of the knowledge, related orally for centuries in the ancient culture that was contained in poetic lyrics and myths. The compliment to a real woman who inspires creative endeavor is a later idea.
10. Epic catalogues list warriors, armies, etc.	Read the conversation Nestor has with Telemachus in Book III in which he catalogues the fate of the various warriors after the Trojan War.
11. Dialogues tend to be extended, formal speeches.	As seen throughout the entire epic.
12. Epic Similes	Epic Simile (n) – Also called Homeric simile is a detailed comparison in the form of a simile (explicit comparison, often using “like” or “as.”) that is many lines in length. The word "Homeric" is based on the Greek author, Homer, who composed the two famous Greek epics, the <i>Iliad</i> and the <i>Odyssey</i> .



THE START OF THE TROJAN WAR

Some three thousand or so years ago, the lives of the Ancient Greek citizens and the fate of the very world in which they lived, rested in the hands of the many gods who reigned atop Mount Olympus. Happiness, hardship, love, war, calamity and catastrophe were cast about by the carefree immortals like dice on a board game. To the gods, the human race was theirs to manipulate as little or as often as they desired. One such example of the disregard immortals showed to their human counterparts is the story of the Trojan War.

According to the myth, When the Olympian gods attended the wedding of the mortal hero Peleus to the sea goddess Thetis, one name had intentionally been left off the guest list; that of Eris, the goddess of Discord. In keeping with her name, Eris later crashed the party and threw a golden apple upon the table where the Olympians sat. Inscribed on the apple was the simple phrase, "For the Fairest." Harmless enough it seemed, but clever enough to do the trick.

Immediately, Athena, Aphrodite, and Hera claimed the prize for themselves. Zeus, who was after all, a very wise ruler, refused to judge between his daughters and his queen. Instead, he appointed Paris, reputed (believed; supposed; presumed) to be the most handsome mortal on earth, to judge in his place.

In an effort to win the favor of the handsome judge, the three goddesses each offered Paris a gift in exchange for being chosen most beautiful. Hera, Zeus' wife, offered him royal power over all man. Athena, favored daughter to Zeus, promised Paris glorious victory in battle. Finally, Aphrodite, the Goddess of love, promised him the hand of the most beautiful mortal woman as his wife. In the end, Paris gave the apple to Aphrodite.

1. **Think Aloud: What qualities of the gods and goddesses are highlighted in this section of the text? (Consider their relationship with the mortals.) Use specific details from the text to support your answer.**

In winning the Golden Apple, the goddess Aphrodite had promised the hand of the most beautiful mortal woman to Paris. Unfortunately, this woman happened to be Helen, the wife of King Menelaus of Sparta. Even so, Aphrodite promised to make Helen fall in love with Paris, so Paris prepared to set off for Sparta to capture Helen. Twin prophets Cassandra and Helenus tried to persuade him against such action, as did his mother, Hecuba, but Paris did not heed (pay attention to) their unsolicited (not requested; not wanted) advice and set off for Sparta.

In Sparta, Menelaus, husband of Helen, treated Paris as a royal guest according to the rules of xenia (hospitality; guest-host relationship). However, when Menelaus departed from Sparta to go to a funeral, Paris did not return the hospitality (welcome) and abducted (kidnap) Helen (who perhaps went willingly) and also carried off much of Menelaus' wealth. In Troy, Paris' homeland, Helen and Paris were married.



Menelaus was livid (furious; angry) . Calling upon an old oath, Menelaus sought help from the many suitors who had once contested (challenged) with him for Helen's hand in marriage, but many of the suitors did not wish to go to war. Odysseus, King of Ithaca, once a suitor, pretended to be insane, but this trick was uncovered. One of the most interesting stories is of Cinyras, King of Paphos in Cyprus, who had also been a suitor of Helen. He did not wish to go to war, but promised Agamemnon fifty ships for the Greek fleet. True to his word, Cinyras did send fifty ships. The first ship was commanded by his son. The other forty-nine, however, were toy clay ships, with tiny clay sailors. They dissembled (take apart) soon after being placed in the ocean. Despite the opposition, in the end, Odysseus and others loyal to Menelaus vowed (pledge; promise) to travel to Troy to return his beautiful bride.

Note: Christopher Marlowe (1564-93), an English play write and poet alluded to Helen of Troy, in a poem: "[Helen] Was this the face that launch'd a thousand ships / And burnt the topless towers of Ilium? / Sweet Helen, make me immortal with a kiss."

King Agamemnon, the brother of Menelaus, prepared a fleet of ships to carry the Greeks to Troy. Just before the ships were ready to sail, however, he insulted the goddess Artemis by boasting (showing off) that he was a better hunter than she and by killing a sacred stag (male deer). Agamemnon displayed hubris (excessive pride) As punishment, Artemis caused the seas to become tumultuous so that the fleet could not take off.

The seer Calchas proclaimed that Iphigenia, daughter of Agamemnon, must be sacrificed before the fleet could set sail. This was done, and the Greek ships set off in search of Troy.

2. Think Aloud: A) Explain the relationship between the immortals and mortals as illustrated in this section of the text. B) How does the myth of Agamemnon serve a social/moral purpose? Use specific details from the text to support your answer.

Odysseus, known for his eloquence (fluent speech, articulate), and Menelaus were sent as ambassadors (representative) to King Priam, of Troy. They demanded Helen be returned. King Priam refused, and Odysseus and Menelaus returned to the Greek ships with the announcement that war was inevitable (unavoidable).

After ten years of fighting with no end to the war in sight, Odysseus ordered the construction of an enormous wooden horse. When the soldiers of Troy saw the magnificent structure, they took it as a sign that the Greek army had given up their futile siege.

But, while dragging the wooden gift into the city, they failed to realize that the belly of the horse was hollow (empty; not filled) and that hidden inside were Odysseus and several of his men. When night came and the celebrating Trojans had fallen asleep, Odysseus's men snuck out and unlocked the city gates, letting in the rest of the Greek army. The Trojan men were slaughtered and the women were divided among the Greek men along with the other plunder (stolen good). The Greeks were victorious and the war was over. Odysseus became a hero of the Trojan War and gained kleos ("fame on the lips of men;" glory).

3. **Think Aloud:** Today, the Trojan Horse is often alluded to as shown in the following sentence. Read the sentence and explain the purpose of the allusion. *"The National Organization of Women has been quoted as saying that the all-male religious group, The Promise Keepers, is a Trojan horse for ultra-conservative antifeminists."*

With the fighting over, the armies of Greece left for home, the city of Troy burning behind them. Somewhere along the way, however, Odysseus' journey took a turn for the worse, and so begins the Odyssey of Odysseus, as written by Homer. So, too begins your journey, as you travel back in history to gain an understanding of the world of Ancient Greece and *The Odyssey*.

4. **Think Aloud:** Who do you think is responsible for starting the war? Use specific details from the text to support your answer.
5. **Think Aloud:** Based on this myth, what does the audience learn about Odysseus. Use specific details from the text to support your answer.





THE STORY OF ORESTES

In Greek mythology, Orestes was the prince who avenged the murder of his father, King Agamemnon of Mycenae, by killing his own mother, Clytemnestra. Orestes' sisters Iphigenia and Electra play important roles in his story. A number of ancient writers and artists, including Greek playwrights Aeschylus and Euripides, have been inspired by the myth of Orestes.

Orestes was still a child when Agamemnon sailed off to fight in the Trojan War. While the king was away, Clytemnestra took a lover, Aegisthus. She may have been driven to infidelity (unfaithfulness) by a desire for revenge. To obtain favorable winds to carry his ships to Troy, Agamemnon had sacrificed their young daughter Iphigenia to the goddess Artemis.

When Agamemnon returned to Mycenae at the end of the war, he was murdered by his wife and her lover. Aegisthus seized the throne. Electra feared that her young brother Orestes, the true heir to the throne, might be in danger, and she took him to stay with their father's old friend King Strophius of Phocis. Strophius raised Orestes with his own son Pylades, and the two boys became close friends.

When he grew up, Orestes visited Delphi and asked the oracle* of Apollo what he should do to avenge his father's murder. The oracle replied that Orestes must kill his mother and her lover. So Orestes and his friend Pylades went to Mycenae disguised as messengers, and they met secretly with Electra to plan the murders. Then with the help of Electra and Pylades, Orestes killed Aegisthus and Clytemnestra, despite her pleas that a son should not kill his own mother.

There are various versions of what happened next. In some accounts, Orestes received praise for avenging his father's murder. In others, the crime of matricide—the murder of one's mother—was seen as a great sin that deserved great punishment. In these stories, Orestes was pursued relentlessly by the Furies, female spirits of justice and vengeance who drove men mad.

In the version of the story told by Aeschylus, Orestes sought refuge from the Furies at Delphi, home of the oracle that had ordered him to avenge his father's death. Through the oracle, Apollo instructed Orestes to go to Athens and present his case to the Areopagus, an ancient court of elders. During the trial that followed, Orestes received the support of Apollo as well as that of the goddess Athena*, who cast the deciding vote in his favor. The angry Furies were eventually calmed, and they stopped pursuing Orestes.

In another version of Orestes' story, told by the Greek playwright Euripides, the verdict of the Areopagus did not soothe the Furies. Apollo told Orestes that he could put an end to their torment if he went to Tauris, a land of dangerous barbarians, and recovered a sacred statue of Artemis. Orestes and Pylades journeyed to Tauris but were captured by the barbarians. They were brought before the head priestess, who happened to be Orestes' sister Iphigenia. Iphigenia had been rescued from the sacrifice at Aulis before the Trojan War. She helped Orestes and Pylades escape with the statue, and she returned with them to Greece.

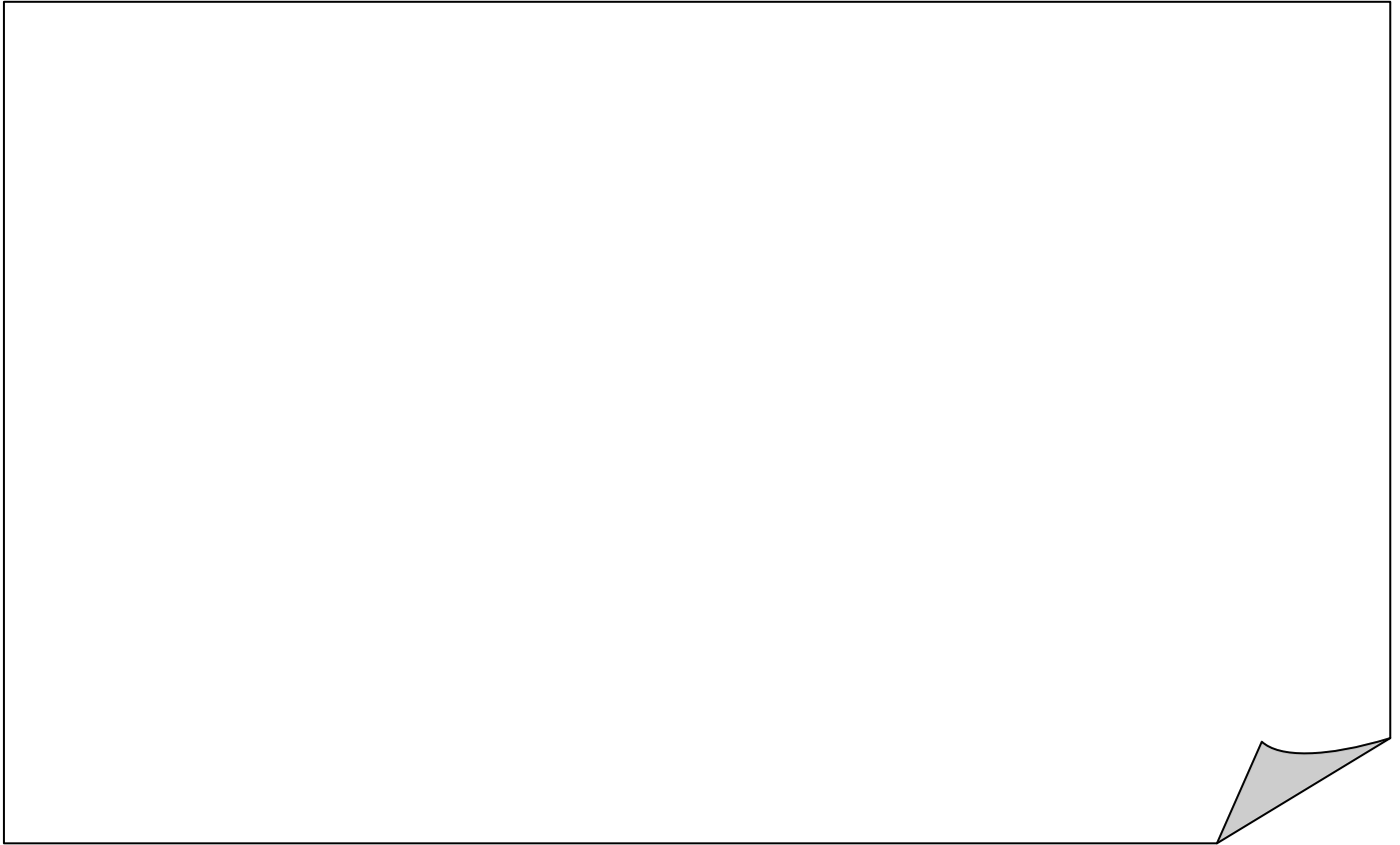
Upon returning to Greece, Orestes became ruler of Mycenae and Argos. Eventually he married Hermione, the daughter of Menelaus and Helen of Sparta.

Oracle - priest or priestess or other creature through whom a god is believed to speak; also the location (such as a shrine) where such words are spoken

Source: <http://www.mythencyclopedia.com/Ni-Pa/Orestes.html>

THE STORY OF ORESTES

Activity: Create a family tree including all of the characters in this myth to help visualize the relationships among them.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, designed for a student to draw a family tree. The bottom-right corner of the box is folded over, creating a shaded triangular area that mimics a page corner.

Think Aloud: The story of Orestes is repeated several times throughout *The Odyssey*. To help you better understand the epic, consider the social/moral purpose(s) of this myth.

THE FURIES

In Greek and Roman mythology, the Furies were female spirits of justice and vengeance. They were also called the Erinyes (angry ones). Known especially for pursuing people who had murdered family members, the Furies punished their victims by driving them mad. When not punishing wrongdoers on earth, they lived in the **underworld** and tortured the damned.

According to some stories, the Furies were sisters born from the blood of Uranus, the **primeval** god of the sky, when he was wounded by his son Cronus. In other stories, they were the children of Nyx (night). In either case, their primeval origin set them apart from the other **deities** of the Greek and Roman **pantheons**.

Most tales mention three Furies: Allecto (endless), Tisiphone (punishment), and Megaera (jealous rage). Usually imagined as monstrous, foul-smelling hags, the sisters had bats' wings, coal-black skin, and hair entwined with serpents. They carried torches, whips, and cups of venom with which to torment wrongdoers. The Furies could also appear as storm clouds or swarms of insects.

underworld land of the dead

deity god or goddess

pantheon the gods of a particular mythology considered collectively

Citation:

<http://www.mythencyclopedia.com/Fi-Go/Furies.html>



The Art of Storytelling in *The Odyssey*

In Book VIII, the audience/reader is introduced to Demodokos, the bard/storyteller. He sings about the Trojan War and the Achaean heroes. He highlights the heroic actions of Odysseus. Consider the significant role the bard/storyteller plays in the ancient Greek society. Now consider the role of Homer. He too is a bard/storyteller. In the following excerpt, one critic states why the art of storytelling was so important to the Ancient Greeks.

"It is important to understand that it is the poet's art that gives lasting glory [kleos], because it ensures the memory of the past is saved: without the poet, there would be no heroic glory because no-one would know what the heroes had achieved. So Demodokos's function in Book 8 is vital. His songs are not merely entertainment (though they are obviously that): they are the objective ratification of the heroic stature of Odysseus" (Jones 69).

Works Cited: Jones, Peter V. *Homer's Odyssey*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois Press, 1988.

Directions: The Proem is the introduction of *The Odyssey*. Because it is the first twelve lines of the epic, it is important to read them closely. As you read, conduct steps 3-7 of explication as applicable to poetry. You will need to read the Proem several times.

Step #3: Get an Overall First Impression.

Step #4: Examine the Structure.

Step #5: Examine the Words.

Look up words you do not know and/or words that may have multiple meanings (possible symbolism). Consider words that may possibly have any connotative meanings. (Connotation - undertone/feeling, association, implication) Examine the manipulation of words: imagery, language techniques/figurative language (simile, metaphor, hyperbole, personification, oxymoron & allusion), repetition of words, phrases, images, and ideas. How do these items convey meaning?

Step #6: Translate the Text on a Literal Level.

Step #7: Translate the Text on an Abstract/Symbolic Level.

Proem

Proem (n) – Introduction

Sing to me of the man, Muse, the man of twists and turns
driven time and again off course, once he had plundered
the hallowed heights of Troy.

Many cities of men he saw and learned their minds,
many pains he suffered, heartsick on the open sea, 5
fighting to save his life and bring his comrades home.

But he could not save them from disaster, hard as he strove-
the recklessness of their own ways destroyed them all,
the blind fools, they devoured the cattle of the Sun
and the Sun god wiped from sight the day of their return. 10

Launch out on his story, Muse, daughter of Zeus,
start from where you will—sing for our time too.

Think Aloud: The Proem has three functions. Provide evidence from the text to support the following functions.

1. **Provides background information and foreshadows events to come/brief summary.**
2. **Introduces the subject of the epic and characterizes Odysseus.**
3. **Serves a moral function/explicitly states a major theme.**

We will read Book I as a whole class and in small reading groups in order to model how to annotate this specific text and new concepts.

