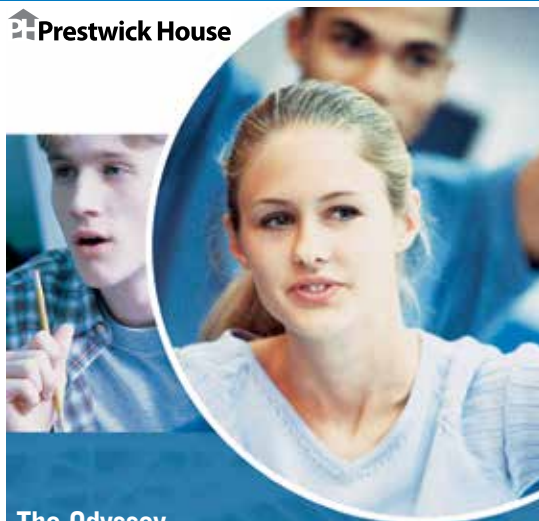




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The Odyssey

HOMER (TRANS. BY W.H.D. ROUSE)

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**The Odyssey**

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

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# The Odyssey

## 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.

# The Odyssey

## 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.

# The Odyssey

## Vocabulary

**ambrosia** – food or drink of the gods  
**antediluvian** – very old fashioned or primitive  
**baldric** – a belt worn over one shoulder to support a sword  
**barrow** – a heap of earth or rocks marking a grave  
**brazier** – a metal pan to hold burning coals to warm a room  
**cap-a-pie** – from head to foot, entirely  
**car** – a chariot; any vehicle that moves on wheels  
**cauldron** – a kettle or large boiler  
**coppice** – a small group of trees  
**cuckold** – a man whose wife has committed adultery  
**distaff** – a staff on which flax and wool is wound for spinning  
**duffer** – an incompetent or stupid person  
**ignominious** – shameful, dishonorable, disgraceful  
**invocation** – the act of calling on a god for inspiration or help  
**lamentations** – crying  
**libation** – drink  
**machination** – a plan or plot  
**marshal** – a high official in a royal household  
**Muse** – any of the nine goddesses who preside over literature or the arts  
**phantom** – something that appears to be visible but really has no physical existence  
**portent** – an omen or a warning of something bad that is about to occur  
**precipitous** – almost vertical; high and steep  
**prognosticate** – to foretell or predict from indications or signs  
**prophet** – a person who predicts future events or who speaks for a god  
**prudence** – sound judgment; discretion; caution  
**quant** – a pole  
**suppliant** – one who asks humbly or entreatingly  
**tripod** – three-legged stand for a cauldron  
**winnowing shovel** – a way of separating chaff from grain

### Book I – What Went On in the House of Odysseus

1. Where is Odysseus at the beginning of the story? What has happened to the men who helped him sack Troy?

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**Book III – What Happened in Sandy Pylos**

1. What indication is there to the reader that the people of Pylos will be favored by the gods?

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2. One of the conventions of an epic is a listing of numerous heroes and soldiers. Find a quotation in this section to show that *The Odyssey* is an epic.

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3. List the qualities of an epic hero that Nestor, King of Pylos, attributes to Odysseus.

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4. State a theme for this story based on the following quotation:

“Again, when we had sacked the tall city of Troy, and embarked, and God scattered the fleet, ah, then Zeus ordained a lamentable home-coming for us; for not all were sensible and fair-minded, and so a great many of them drew upon themselves an evil fate.”

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5. Why is the story of Aigisthos, who killed Agamemnon, and his death repeated in this book?

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**Book VIII – How They Held Games and Sports in Phaiacia**

1. What does Odysseus do when the minstrel Demodocos begins to sing about the quarrel between Odysseus and Achilles, a famous warrior who died in the Trojan War? Do you think King Alcinoös knows the stranger is Odysseus?

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2. List five of the games the men play. In which one does Odysseus demonstrate his skill? Why?

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3. What element of a parable is present in the song the minstrel Demodocos sings about Ares, Aphrodite, and Hephaistos?

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4. List the three ways the Trojans planned to deal with the Trojan horse. According to the minstrel's song, they wanted to:

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5. What prophecy does King Alcinoös hear from his father about Poseidon?

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