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Sample

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Literature Teaching Unit

Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



The Odyssey

by Homer (Butler Trans.)

- Learning objectives
- Study Guide with short-answer questions
- Background information
- Vocabulary in context
- Multiple-choice test
- Essay questions
- Literary terms



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P.O. Box 658, Clayton, DE 19938
www.prestwickhouse.com
800.932.4593

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Objectives

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

1. show how the *Odyssey* fits the defined characteristics of the epic poem and discuss how elements of the *Odyssey* are remnants of its oral tradition, such as:
 - the use of epithets
 - recitation of lineage
 - the use of *in medias res*

2. define and cite instances of the following literary terms:
 - allusion
 - anthropomorphism
 - black humor
 - conflict
 - *deus ex machina*
 - digression
 - epic simile
 - epithet
 - flat or static character
 - foreshadowing
 - *in medias res*
 - irony
 - omen
 - parable
 - paradox
 - round or dynamic character
 - symbol

3. discuss the omniscient narrator and how it works in the *Odyssey*.

4. recognize and point out instances of dramatic irony in the *Odyssey*.

5. discuss the ancient Greek notions of fate and omens.

6. identify the following gods, and discuss their roles in the *Odyssey*:
 - Zeus
 - Athena
 - Poseidon
 - Hermes
 - Apollo

Questions for Discussion and Essay

1. Discuss the literary techniques of *in medias res* and *digression* as they apply to the *Odyssey*. Why are these methods of narration effective in the *Odyssey*? What is added to the story by the use of these techniques?
2. What characteristics define epic and modern heroes? How are they different? How does Odysseus display the characteristics of an epic hero?
3. There are repeated references to the fate of Agamemnon in the story. What significance does the prevalence of Agamemnon's tale have to the story of Odysseus?
4. Discuss the character of Penelope. Is she always loyal to Odysseus? What circumstances of ancient Greek society make it difficult for her to be completely loyal?
5. Discuss the ethics of the *Odyssey* and how they differ from ethics typically accepted in modern society. How are cunning and deception looked at in the *Odyssey*? How are stealing and using one's power to take advantage of others looked upon in the *Odyssey*?
6. Discuss both the positive and negative attributes of the Greek gods. How does the ancient Greek concept of godliness differ from the modern one? What differences exist between the powers of male and female gods?
7. Discuss Odysseus' values. How do they differ from modern values? Is Odysseus a loyal husband to Penelope? Is Odysseus a faithful commander to his crew? What choices does Odysseus make that seem to inhibit or contradict his stated priority of making it home?
8. Characters are described as static (flat) or dynamic (round). Identify the major characters in the *Odyssey* according to these characterizations and justify your distinctions.
9. Present a brief biography of Homer, and discuss his treatment of minstrels in *The Odyssey*.
10. Discuss the roles of women in ancient Greek society. How are women portrayed in the story?
11. Using the Phaeacians and the Cyclopes as examples, discuss the ancient Greek notion of hospitality. Discuss some possible reasons for this elevated notion of hospitality as it applied to ancient Greek society at large.
12. Define oral tradition. Why were stories repeated in ancient societies? What are the practical values of this tradition? How do epithets, recitation of lineage, and repetition become important within the oral tradition? What is the importance of dramatic irony and humor?

1. Where is Odysseus at the beginning of the story? What has become of his men?

2. When the gods adjourn for council, what is preoccupying Zeus?

3. Why does Poseidon hold a grudge against Odysseus even though the other gods favor him?

4. Where is Poseidon when the gods at council decide to help Odysseus to return home?

5. Why does Zeus reason that Poseidon will be pacified that the gods have decided to help Odysseus reach his home?

6. What two actions does Athena deem should be taken on Odysseus' behalf?

7. Why does Athena want Telemachus to go out in search of news of his father?

2. At the assembly, the elder, Aegyptius, reminds the crowd that not a single assembly has been called since before Odysseus left for Troy, which was almost twenty years ago. For what reasons does Telemachus justify his calling for an assembly of the councilors?

3. When Telemachus is making his pleas to the council for help in ridding him of the suitors, to what social customs does he appeal?

4. Antinous, speaking on behalf of the suitors, makes a case for their innocence and says that Telemachus' mother, Penelope, is to blame for her son's misfortunes. How does Antinous make his case against Penelope?

5. Antinous offers Telemachus a solution to his problem by suggesting that he send his mother away to her father's house, and let her father choose the man she will marry. Why does Telemachus say he cannot do this?

6. How does the prophet Halitherses interpret the omen of the eagles that fly over the assembly?

Book V

VOCABULARY

adze – a tool used to cut wood
astride – sitting atop
augers – drills
bliss – joy
bounteous – generous, fruitful
calamities – disasters
cormorant – a predatory bird found near the sea
deemed – thought
dismay – sorrow
harbinger – an omen, sign
keel – the bottom of a boat
raiment – clothing
reek – odor
reeled – turned violently
squally – stormy, rainy
transgress – to disobey
trident – a long, three-pronged fork (symbol of Poseidon)

1. In making her case for the gods to help Odysseus return home to avenge his house, what literary device does Athena make use of? Cite the example from the text and explain the literal meaning.

2. What human emotion does Calypso accuse the gods of for making her free Odysseus? What ancient Greek notion about the gods does this accusation illustrate? Is this an example of anthropomorphism? Why or why not?

3. Why does Calypso agree to free Odysseus, despite her objections?
