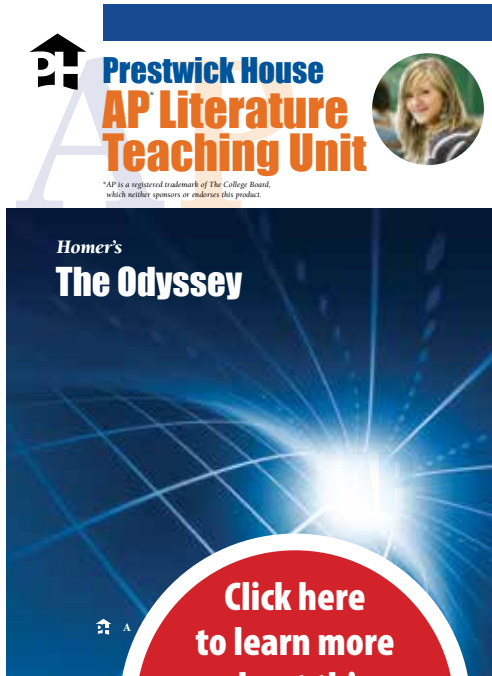




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Teaching Unit

The Odyssey

by Homer

written by Diana DePaolis



Prestwick House

Item No. 309134

The Odyssey

Objectives

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

1. discuss the epic in relation to historical and literary-historical contexts.
2. identify, examine, and discuss the use of imagery and figurative language (simile, metaphor, and symbolism).
3. discuss how the main male and female characters reflect the expectations of their society
4. trace the development of the main character, noting his/her traits, emotions, motivations, and how and why he/she changes.
5. analyze the importance of literary elements like theme, dramatic irony and foreshadowing on the development of the story
6. analyze the author's use of language (diction and imagery) and its importance in setting mood and establishing character.
7. identify, analyze, and apply knowledge of the characteristics, themes, structure, and elements of the epic.
8. identify and analyze how the author's diction appeals to the senses, creates imagery, suggests mood, and sets tone.
9. examine the rhetorical and organizational structures and use of arguments within the text.
10. identify and analyze the point(s) of view in a literary work and analyze how varying points of view affect the literary work.
11. analyze patterns of imagery or symbolism and connect them to themes and/or tone and mood.
12. examine how the themes presented in the text represent a view or comment on societal expectations from the author's society
13. respond to multiple-choice questions similar to those that will appear on the Advanced-Placement in English Literature and Composition Exam.
14. respond to writing prompts similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition Exam.

Introductory Lecture

I. GENRE CHARACTERISTICS AND CONVENTIONS OF THE EPIC POEM

An epic poem is a lengthy narrative work that focuses on the deeds of a heroic figure. Epic poems are massive in scope; the action of an epic often takes place over a large geographical region, and the hero's exploits are extremely important in some way often to his or her society. The ramifications of these exploits are important enough that, in many epics, gods and other supernatural beings also take part in the action, helping or hindering the hero and his or her enemies. Some epics, such as the *Iliad*, are primarily about a war and the particular heroes engaging in that war; others, such as the *Odyssey*, are about a particular hero's journey and the tribulations the hero endures during the course of that adventure.

EPIC CONVENTIONS

Epic poems typically include the following conventions:

A. Invocation to the Muse

Epic poems typically include, at or near the beginning, an invocation to the Muse. The invocation is a short request in which the author asks one of the Muses to inspire him or her in the creation and development of a text. The invocation usually also informs the audience of the poem's subject matter.

In Greek mythology the Muses are the goddesses of knowledge; they are the sources from which artistic and scientific knowledge and ability flow. There are nine Muses, each responsible for a particular artistic or scientific discipline. Calliope is the Muse of epic poetry.

B. Beginning In Medias Res

The beginning of an epic poem often does not correspond with the beginning of the story it tells; instead, an epic poem usually opens with its narrative already in progress. Beginning a story in the middle of its narrative arc is also called beginning *in medias res*: "in the middle of things." While many traditional narratives begin with exposition about the characters and setting, texts that begin *in medias res* eschew this preliminary exposition, deferring the presentation of background material until a later point in the text. Texts structured in this fashion begin at a point in the narrative arc where the primary conflict has already been developed, and the author later relates the backstory of this conflict to the audience in one or more expository segments.

Because texts that begin *in medias res* do not require an expository setup, the text may begin with a scene of intense action, a scene that may occur at a point of heightened tension. Skillful use of this technique can inspire in the reader an instant interest in the text's characters and conflicts.

The Odyssey

Book I

1. How does Homer maintain the audience's interest in the story, knowing that the audience is aware of the outcome from the very beginning?

2. What does the invocation of the Muse in the opening lines clarify about Odysseus' culpability during his voyage home?

3. What role do the gods play in the *Odyssey* and how does their involvement illuminate expectations from Greek society?

4. How does Homer use Telemachus as a plot device?

5. How does Homer use dramatic irony in Book I both as a plot device and as a means to foreshadow Odysseus' return?

6. How does the author establish a negative tone towards the suitors?

Book V

1. How does Zeus' order for Calypso to set Odysseus free function not only as a plot device but also as the entry point for a discussion on gender bias?

2. How does Odysseus' rejection of Calypso reflect ideals from Greek society?

3. In what way does Book V demonstrate an example of "Deus ex machina"?

Book XII

1. Throughout the narrative, Odysseus struggles with resisting temptation. How do the events of this book compare with Odysseus' previous failures at resisting temptation and excess?

2. In what way does Book 12 demonstrate examples of both skilled and faultless leadership on the part of Odysseus?

Book XIII

1. How is Book 13 essential to both the structure of the narrative and in the progression of the narrative's many conflicts?

2. What does the punishment of the Phaeacians for following the guest-host relationship reveal about the gods?

Book XVIII

- 1. How do Odysseus' final words to Irus after the fight reflect upon Odysseus' positive characterization?

- 2. How does Odysseus' fight with Irus function as foreshadowing?

- 3. How does Irus function as a foil to Odysseus?

- 4. What are the effects of the literary devices and diction used to describe Odysseus' encounter with Irus?

Book XXIII

1. How does Penelope's decision to test Odysseus reinforce her characterization?

2. How does Penelope and Odysseus' wedding bed function as a metaphor?

Book XXIV

1. How does Homer reinforce the negative tone towards the suitors?

2. Why was it essential that the story did not end with Penelope's and Odysseus' reunion but with his journey to visit his father?
