

The Odyssey by Homer – Summaries and Study Questions

Name _____

Block: _____

Note: You must fill in the answers as you read. Some answers may only be a few words in length.

PLOT SUMMARY

A Greek hero returns to his home and family after 20 years of imprisonment and wandering.

BACKGROUND Odysseus, King of Ithaca, has been away from home for 20 years-10 years fighting in the Trojan War and 10 years wandering. For the last seven years, he has been held captive by the goddess Calypso on her island. In Ithaca, his wife, Penelope, remains faithful and clings to her belief that he is still alive, but she is being courted by a group of men-the suitors-who have forced their attentions on her and are living on Odysseus's wealth. Each of them wants to marry her, but she refuses to make a choice, confident that Odysseus will soon return. She and her son Telemachus are powerless to get rid of them.

Tell the Story – invocation (890)

1. Who are the muses?
2. Who is the “man skilled in all ways of contending” – the protagonist of the story we are about to read?
3. What happened to Odysseus’ men on the way home? (lines 10-15)
4. Which god does not pity Odysseus?
5. What is he/she the god of?
6. Why do you think this might be a problem for Odysseus?

BOOKS 1-4 Athena, goddess of wisdom, asks her father, Zeus, king of the gods, to allow Odysseus to return home, despite the sea god Poseidon’s grudge against Odysseus for having blinded his son.

Important information not included in your Book 1 excerpt:

In the hall of **Zeus** on **Mount Olympus**, all the gods but Poseidon gather and listen as Zeus reflects upon the moral failings of mortal men. He brings up the example of **Aegisthus**, who killed **Agamemnon** and stole his wife **Clytemnestra**, though the gods warned him that **Agamemnon’s son, Orestes**, would someday retaliate - which he justly did. *As you read, think about how Telemachus, Odysseus’s son, is placed in a position similar to that of Orestes. Will Telemachus react in the same manner as Orestes? Will Odysseus’s wife Penelope betray her husband?*

When Zeus agrees, Athena disguises herself as a mortal stranger and visits Telemachus. He receives her kindly despite the suitors’ rudeness. On her advice, he protests the suitors’ behavior, but the suitors refuse to leave Odysseus’s house. Now disguised as Mentor, an old friend of Odysseus, Athena urges Telemachus to visit the neighboring kingdoms in search of news of Odysseus.

Important information not included in your Book 2 excerpt:

During the assembly, **Zeus** sends two eagles—omens of death—to fly over the suitors. **Halitherses**, a prophet, interprets the eagles that fly over the assembly by saying Odysseus is coming home and

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