An Introduction to the Odyssey

Feature Menu

An Introduction to the Odyssey
The War-Story Background
Odysseus: A Hero in Trouble
The Wooden-Horse Trick
The Ancient World and Ours
A Search for Their Places in Life
Relationships with Gods

Epic and Values
The Telling of Epics

Homer

(Note: This PowerPoint was created by Danielle Luongo from the Advanced Math & Science Academy)
An Introduction to the *Odyssey*

“Sing in me, Muse, and through me tell the story of that man skilled in all ways of contending, . . .”
An Introduction to the *Odyssey*

The *Odyssey* is a tale of a hero’s long and perilous journey home. But, it is also the story of a son in need of his father and of a faithful wife waiting for her husband’s return.

[End of Section]
The *Iliad* provides the background for Odysseus’s story and tells the tale of a ten-year war fought outside the walls of *Troy*. In Homer’s *Iliad*

- the Trojan War is in its tenth and final year
- the people of Troy are fighting an alliance of Greek kings because the world’s most beautiful woman, Helen, abandoned her husband, Menelaus (a Greek king) and ran off with Paris, a prince of Troy
The Iliad provides the background for Odysseus’s story and tells the tale of a ten-year war fought outside the walls of Troy. In Homer’s Iliad

- the Greeks won the war, reduced the city of Troy to smoldering ruins, and butchered all the inhabitants, except for those they took as slaves back to Greece

[End of Section]
Odysseus: A Hero in Trouble

Odysseus is not a typical epic hero. He is faced with:

- difficult choices
- post-war disillusionment
- disrespect from the people of his homeland
Before the Trojan War, Odysseus

- married the beautiful and faithful Penelope
- had one son, Telemachus
Odysseus: A Hero in Trouble

When called to serve in the Trojan War, Odysseus

• pretended to be insane so he wouldn’t have to go (he dressed as a peasant, plowed his field, and sowed it with salt)

• revealed his sanity to save his son’s life (who was placed in front of the plow)

[End of Section]
The Wooden-Horse Trick

During the Trojan War, Odysseus

- performed extremely well as a soldier and commander
- thought of the famous wooden-horse trick that lead to the defeat of Troy
The Wooden-Horse Trick

- Odysseus’s plan was to build an enormous wooden horse and hide Greek soldiers inside.
- The horse was left outside the gates of Troy, and the Greeks “abandoned” their camp.
The Wooden-Horse Trick

- The Trojans thought the horse was a peace offering and brought it into the walled city.

- At night, the men hidden in the horse came out and opened the gates to the entire Greek army.
The Ancient World and Ours

• Odysseus’s world is harsh, violent, and primitive. ▼

• The “palaces” that he and his men raid might have been nothing more than mud and stone farmhouses. ▼

• The “worldly goods” they carry off from town might have been only pots and pans, cattle and sheep.
A Search for Their Places in Life

The Theme of the *Odyssey*

Odysseus and his family are searching for:

- the right relationships with one another and the people around them
- their proper places in life
A Search for Their Places in Life

The Structure of the *Odyssey*

The story begins with Telemachus, Odysseus’s son. Telemachus is searching for his father because he:

- is being threatened by rude, powerful men who want to marry his mother and rob Telemachus of his inheritance;
- needs his father to return home and restore order.
A Search for Their Places in Life

The Structure of the *Odyssey*

Readers learn that Odysseus:

- is stranded on an island, longing to get home.
- has been gone for twenty years—he has spent ten years at war and ten years trying to get home.
- is in the middle of a midlife crisis and searching for inner peace.
Relationships with Gods

In Homer’s stories, a god can be an alter ego—a reflection of a hero’s best or worst qualities.

- Odysseus is known for his mental abilities, so he receives aid from Athena, the goddess of wisdom.
- Odysseus can also be cruel and violent. Odysseus’s nemesis is Poseidon, the god of the sea, who is known for arrogance and brutishness.
Relationships with Gods

Myths in the *Odyssey*

Greek myths plays an important role in the *Odyssey.*

- Homer is concerned with the relationship between human and gods.
- For Homer, the gods control all things, including Odysseus’s fate.
Epics and Values

Epics are long narrative poems that tell of the adventures of heroes who in some way embody the values of their civilization.

- The Greeks used Homer’s epics, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, to teach Greek virtues.

More about Epics
Epics and Values

The Epic Tradition

All epic poems in the western world owe something to the basic patterns established in Homer’s epics.

• The *Iliad* is the primary model for an epic of war (*kleos*).

• The *Odyssey* is the model for an epic of the long journey home (*nostos*).
Epics and other tales were probably told by wandering bards or minstrels called **rhapsodes**. Rhapsodes were

- the historians, entertainers, and mythmakers of their time

- responsible for spreading news about recent events or the doings of heroes, gods, and goddesses
Epics such as the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were probably told over a period of several days. 

- Singers might have summarized part of the tales, depending on how long they stayed in one community.
No one knows for sure who Homer was.

- Later Greeks believed he was a blind bard, or singer, from the island of Chios.
- One scholar suggests Homer was a woman because home and hearth played such an important role in his stories.
- Some scholars think there were two Homers. Some think he was just a legend.
- This is called the **Homeric Question**
Writing Prompt

On the back of your paper, answer the following question:

What most surprised you about the information you just learned? Have your expectations of *The Odyssey* changed?
Learning Cool Greek Terms

Using context clues, what do you think the following term means?: **Hubris**

“Despite Penelope’s pleas, the obnoxious suitors wouldn’t leave Odysseus’s kingdom. They continued to party and drink wine. Plus, they exhibited *hubris* and were rude to the old man.

To gain a deeper appreciation of the ancient Greek culture and Homer’s epic poem, The Odyssey, it’s now your turn to create flash cards of a list of cool Greek terms.