

The Odyssey

Book 1 ~ Study Guide

from John McIlvain

[An Overview for the Student](#)

[Book-by-Book Study Guide](#)

[Literary Responses to the Odyssey](#)



Image source: http://www.beloit.edu/~classics/main/courses/classics100/museum2/art_museum2.html

Note: This site is designed to be used with Robert Fagles' translation of the *Odyssey*, published by Penguin USA. It was prepared for a 9th grade English class.

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ATHENA INSPIRES THE PRINCE

SCENE: Calypso's island (briefly), Olympus (briefly), Ithaca, (mainly)

IMPORTANT CHARACTERS:

Gods: Poseidon, Hermes, Athena/Mentes, Zeus

Mortals: Telemachus, Mentes (Athena): King of the Taphians, friend of Odysseus, Penelope, Euryycleia (nurse) Phemias (the singer), the "suitors," especially Antinous and Eurymachus.

The Book begins with the invocation to the Muse followed by Athena's plea to Zeus to allow her favorite mortal Odysseus to travel home from Ogygia, where he has been held captive for seven years by the nymph Calypso. Zeus agrees but not without insisting the trip be arduous. He does not want to enrage the absent Poseidon, who is angry at Odysseus for having blinded his son, the Cyclops Polyphemus. Athena goes to Ithaca to spur Telemachus, Odysseus' son, into action and start him toward manhood. There we met the suitors of Odysseus wife, Penelope, who are abusing the rules of hospitality. We also learn that Penelope has done whatever she could to keep them from taking her hand in marriage. Almost everyone on Ithaca believes Odysseus to be dead.

PAY ATTENTION TO:

- Invocation
- Story of Orestes (including Zeus' attitude toward of Aegisthus).
- The Gods' discussion of Odysseus. Who is on his side? Who is not? Why?
- What Zeus "rules."
- Problems of Odysseus: Where is he? Why? How long has he been away?
- Athena's disguise.
- Youth of Telemachus.
- The violation of hospitality
- Penelope's situation.
- Penelope's actions.

EPITHETS: Who is...

- "The bewitching nymph"
- "Son of Cronos"
- "Who marshals the thunderheads"
- "The clear eyed goddess"
- "Cool headed"

QUESTIONS:

1. What do you see as the attitude of the Gods' towards men?
2. What do you see as the attitude of the Greeks towards hospitality?
3. How would you characterize Telemachus at this point? What are his strengths?
4. What are his weaknesses?
5. How does Athena plan to affect Telemachus?
6. What tragic homecoming story do we hear of? How does it relate to the situation in Ithaca?
7. Who is Phemius?
8. How does Telemachus show strength with Penelope?
9. How does this relate to the visit of Athena?

QUOTES TO REMEMBER:

Sing to me of the man, Muse, the man (1)
of twists and turns
driven time and again off course, once
he had plundered
the hallowed heights of Troy.

But one man alone... (15)
his heart set on his wife and his return
– Calypso
the bewitching nymph, the lustrous
goddess, held him back.

Recalling Aegisthus, Zeus harangued (36)
the immortal powers:
"Ah how shameless – the way these
mortals blame the gods.
From us alone, they say, come all
their miseries..."

"Why, Zeus, why so dead set against (76)
Odysseus?
"My child, what nonsense you let slip
through your teeth. Now,

how on earth could I forget
Odysseus? Great Odysseus
who excels all men in wisdom, excels
in offerings, too..."

First by far to see her was Prince (132)
Telemachus,
sitting among the suitors, heart
obsessed with grief.

And young Telemachus cautiously (249)
replied,
"...Mother has always told me I'm his
son, it's true,
But I am not so certain."

"If only that Odysseus sported with (307)
these suitors,
a blood wedding, a quick death,
would take the lot."

"So Mother, (409)
go back to your quarters, tend to your
own tasks,
the distaff and the loom, and keep the
women
working hard as well. As for the bow
now,
men will see to that, but i most of all,
I hold the reign of power in this
house"
Astonished,
she took to her own room. She took to
heart
the clear good sense of what her son
had said.
Climbing up to the lofty chamber with
her women
she fell to weeping for Odysseus, her
beloved husband
till watchful Athena sealed her eyes
with welcome sleep.
(see [Book 21](#), 389-399)

Now the suitors turned to dance and (480)
song,
In the lovely beat and sway, waiting
for dusk to come upon them there...
and the dark night came upon them
lost in pleasure.

