

The Odyssey

Book 2 ~ 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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TELEMACHUS SETS SAIL

SCENE: Ithaca

CHARACTERS: Eurycleia, Mentos/Mentor/Athena, Telemachus, Antinous, Halitherses, Eurymachus.

In Book 2, Athena, disguised as Mentor, arranges for Telemachus to take a trip to find out from Nestor, one of the Greek Captains in the Trojan War, ostensibly to find out if Odysseus is still alive. In the Book Telemachus surprises both Penelope and the suitors by his newly decisive behavior. He does not, however, tell his mother of his plans, knowing she would try to stop him.

PAY ATTENTION TO:

- Athena, goddess of the household who looks over the family.
- The economic importance of the household.
- The bird omen and the reactions to it.
- Assembly and debate.
- The "new" Telemachus.
- The abuse of and departure of Telemachus.

EPITHETS: Who is...

- "self possessed?"

- "Daughter of Zeus?"
- What has "rose red fingers?"

QUESTIONS:

1. What is the suitor's attitude towards Penelope's reluctance to choose one of them?
2. Why do they think it is their right to "demand" that she choose?
3. What are the two different interpretations of the omen?
4. How does Telemachus respond to the position put forward by Antinous?

QUOTES TO REMEMBER:

"You should be ashamed yourselves, (69)
mortified in the face of neighbors living
round about!
Fear the god's wrath – before they wheel in
outrage
make these crimes of yours recoil on your
heads."

"So by day she'd weave at her great and (114)
growing web –
by night, by the light of torches placed
beside her,
she would unravel all she's done. Three
whole years
she deceived us, seduced us with this
scheme."

"Not one could equal Penelope for intrigue (134)
but in this case she intrigues beyond all
limits."

And to seal his prayer, farseeing Zeus sent (164)
down a sign.
He launched two eagles soaring high from a
mountain ridge
and down they glided, borne on the wings
draft a moment,
wing to wingtip, pinions straining taut till
just
above the assembly's throbbing hum they
whirled,
suddenly, wings thrashing, wild onslaught
of wings
and banking down at the crowd's heads - a
glaring, fatal sign –
talons slashing each other, tearing cheeks
and throats
they swooped away on the right through
homes and city.

"Telemachus, (302)
you'll lack neither courage nor sense from
this day on,
not if your father's spirit courses through

your veins. "

"But now that I'm full grown (348)
and can hear the truth from others, absorb it,
too –
now, yes, that anger seethes inside me...
I'll stop at nothing to hurl destruction at you
heads,
whether I go to Pylos or sit right here at
home."

A wail of grief, (399)
and his fond old nurse (Eurykleia) burst out
in sobbing.

▲ [Odyssey Guide](#)



[Least Tern](#) - John McIlvain - February 29, 2004