

The Odyssey

Book 6 ~ Study Guide

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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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THE PRINCESS AND THE STRANGER

SCENE: The island of Scheria, land of the Phaeacians.

IMPORTANT CHARACTERS: Odysseus, Athena, Nausicaa, Alcinous.

Athena come to Nausicaa, the daughter of the King of the Phaeacians, in a dream which leads her to ask her father to let her go with her friends to wash clothes by the river. There the games they play awaken Odysseus who greets the brave young princess with great diplomacy. She can tell he is a worthy strange and greets him with great hospitality. When he is bathed, Odysseus emerges thanks to Athena "taller . . . his build more massive . . .

his curls like hyacinth clusters full of bloom." At the end of the book, Nausicaa leads Odysseus toward town and gives him directions to the palace.

PAY ATTENTION TO:

- How the Phaeacians are protected by the gods.
- The idealized household of the Royal Family.
- How Athena visits Nausicaa in her dreams.
- How the king cannot say no to his daughter.
- How beautiful, wise, and young Nausicaa is.
- The references to her being "marriageable."
- The innocent scene of washing the clothes.
- How the playful girls awake Odysseus.
- The differing reaction of the girls and Nausicaa to Odysseus' appearance.
- Odysseus' tact and Nausicaa's hospitality.
- The importance of bathing and anointing with oil.
- Odysseus' changed appearance.
- Nausicaa's hospitality and her caution at leading Odysseus to the palace.
- The presence of Athena.

EPITHET: Who is "the white armed princess?"

QUESTIONS:

1. Why does Nausicaa go to the river to wash clothes?
2. What is the explanation she offers her father?
3. What does Odysseus choose not to do when he sees Nausicaa?
4. What does he choose to do instead?
5. What do you think Odysseus' speech to Nausicaa tells us about him?
6. Why does Nausicaa not want to escort Odysseus to the palace?

QUOTATIONS TO REMEMBER:

But the goddess drifted through like a breath of fresh air,
rushed to the girl's bed and hovering close she spoke,
in face and form like the shipman Dymas' daughter,
a girl the princess' age, and dearest to her heart. (23)

"I won't deny you the mules,
my darling girl . . . I won't deny you anything.
Off you go, and the men will harness a wagon,
the tall one with the good smooth wheels,
fitted out with a cradle on the top." (76)

The ball - (126)
the princess suddenly tossed it to a maid
but it missed the girl, splashed in a deep swirling pool
and they all shouted out -
and that woke great Odysseus.

So Odysseus moved out . . . (148)
about to mingle with all those lovely girls,
naked now as he was, for the need drove him on,
a terrible sight, all crusted, caked with brine-
they scattered in panic down the jutting beaches.
Only Alcinous' daughter held fast, for Athena planted
courage within her heart, dissolved the trembling in her limbs,
and she firmly stood her ground and faced Odysseus, torn now -
Should he fling his arms around her knees, the young beauty,
plead for help, or stand back, plead with a winning word,
beg her to lead him to the town and lend him clothing?
This was the better way, he thought. Plead now
with a subtle, winning word and stand well back,
don't clasp her knees, the girl might bridle, yes.
He launched in at once, endearing, sly and suave:
"Here I am at your mercy, princess-
are you a goddess or a mortal? If one of the gods
who rule the skies up there, you're Artemis to the life,
the daughter of mighty Zeus--I see her now--just look
at your build, your bearing, your lithe flowing grace . . .
But if you're one of the mortals living here on earth,
three times blest are your father, your queenly mother,
three times over your brothers too. How often their hearts
must warm with joy to see you striding into the dances-
such a bloom of beauty. True, but he is the one
more blest than all other men alive, that man
who sways you with gifts and leads you home, his bride!
I have never laid eyes on anyone like you,
neither man nor woman . . .
I look at you and a sense of wonder takes me.
Wait,
once I saw the like--in Delos, beside Apollo's altar-
the young slip of a palm tree springing into the light.

There I'd sailed, you see, with a great army in my wake, (180)
out on the long campaign that doomed my life to hardship.

That vision! Just as I stood there gazing, rapt, for hours . . .
no shaft like that had ever risen up from the earth-
so now I marvel at you, my lady: rapt, enthralled,
too struck with awe to grasp you by the knees
though pain has ground me down.

Then thoughtful Odysseus reassured the handmaids, (240)
"Stand where you are, dear girls, a good way off, "
so I can rinse the brine from my shoulders now
and rub myself with oil . . .
how long it's been since oil touched my skim
But I won't bathe in front of you. I would be embarrassed-
stark naked before young girls with lovely braids."

Zeus's daughter Athena made him taller to all eyes, (254)
his build more massive now, and down from his brow
she ran his curls like thick hyacinth clusters
As a master craftsman washes
gold over beaten silver--a man the god of fire
and Queen Athena trained in every fine technique-
and finishes off his latest effort, handsome work,
so she lavished splendor over his head and shoulders now.

But I shrink from all our sea dogs' nasty gossip. (299)
Some old salt might mock us behind our backs-
we have our share of insolent types in town
and one of the coarser sort, spying us, might say,
'Now who's that tall, handsome stranger Nausicaa has in tow?
Where'd she light on him? Her husband to be, just wait!'

