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The Odyssey

Book 9 ~ Study Guide

from John McIlvain

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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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IN THE ONE-EYED GIANT'S CAVE

SCENE: In the palace of Alcinous in the land of the Phaeacians where Odysseus tells of the Lands of the Cocones and the Lotus Eaters as well as of the Island of the Cyclops.

IMPORTANT CHARACTERS: Odysseus and Polyphemus: a son of Poseidon and a Cyclops.

Odysseus identifies himself to his hosts and agrees to tell the take of his adventures. He describes his pillage of the Cicones where his men become greedy, and the "honey sweet fruit" of the Lotus Eaters that entrances his men. He then tells the story of his experience with Polyphemus, the Cyclops who traps him and his men and whom he escapes through guile. The exhilaration of his triumph leads him to committing the biggest error of his life – boasting who he is to his victim – a creature who just happens to be a son of Poseidon.

PAY ATTENTION TO:

- Odysseus' failure to control his men in the land of the Cicones.
- His rescuing them in the land of the Lotus-eaters, and saving them in the land of the Cyclops.

So off they went and soon (102)
enough
they mingled among the natives,
Lotus Eaters, Lotus Eaters
who had no notion of killing my
companions, not at all,
they simply gave them the lotus to
taste instead...
Any crewmen who ate the lotus, the
honey sweet fruit,
lost all desire to send a message
back, much less return...
grazing on lotus, all memory of the
journey home
dissolved forever. But I brought
them back, back
to the hollow ships, and streaming
tears – I forced them.

"The rest of you stay her, (192)
my friends-in-arms.
I'll go across with my own ship and
crew
and probe the natives living over
there."

A grim loner, dead set in his own (210)
lawless ways.
Here was a piece of work, by god, a
monster...
a man mountain
rearing head and shoulders over the
world.

I told most of my good trusty crew (215)
to wait,
to sit tight by the ship and guard her
well
while I picked out my dozen finest
fighters
and off I went.

But since we've chanced on you, (300)
we're at your knees
in hopes of a warm welcome, even a
guest gift,
the sort that hosts give strangers.
That's the custom.
Respect the gods, my friend. We're
suppliants, at your mercy!
Zeus of the Strangers guards all
guests and suppliants:
strangers are sacred – Zeus will
avenge their rights!
"Stranger," he grumbled back from
his brutal heart,
"you must be a fool, stranger, or
come from nowhere,

telling me to fear the gods or avoid
their wrath!"

So he laid his trap (316)
but he never caught me, no, not me,
wise to the world
I shot back in my crafty way, "My
ship?
Poseidon, God of the earthquake,
sunk my ship."

... he left me there, the heart inside (355)
me brooding on revenge,
how could I pay him back, would
Athena give me glory?

..."Nobody, that's my (410)
name. Nobody –"

I drove my weight on it from above (419)
and bored it home
like a shipwright bores his beam
with a shipwright's drill
that men below, whipping the strap
back and forth, whirl
and the drill keeps twisting, never
stopping –
So we seized our stake with it fiery
tip
and bored it round and round in the
giant's eye...
its crackling roots blazed
and hissed –
as a blacksmith plunges a
glowing ax or adze
in an ice-cold bath and the metal
screeches steam
and its temper hardens – that's the
iron's strength –
so the eye of Cyclops sizzled round
that stake.

"Nobody's killing me now by fraud (455)
and not by force."
There was one bellwether ram, the
prize of all the flock
and clutching him by the back,
tucked up under
his shaggy belly, there I hung, face
upward
both hands locked in his marvelous
deep fleece,
clinging for dear life, my spirit
steeled, enduring. . .
So well we held on, waiting Dawn's
first light.

"Cyclops – (558)
if any man on the face of the earth
should ask you
who blinded you, shamed you so –
say Odysseus,
raider of cities, he gouged out your
eye,
Laertes son, who makes his home in
Ithaca!"

Hear me – (584)
Poseidon , god of the sea blue mane
who rocks the earth,
If I really am your son and you
claim to be my father –
come, grant that Odysseus, raider of
cities . . .
Laertes son, who makes his home in
Ithaca . . .
never reaches home . . . or if he's
fated to see
his people once again . . . let him
come home late
and come a broken man – all
shipmates lost,
alone in a stranger's ship –
and let him find a world of pain at
home."

▲ [Odyssey Guide](#)



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