

[Least Tern](#) > [English Classroom](#) > [Odyssey Guide](#)

# The Odyssey

## Book 10 ~ 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](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.

Books:

[1](#) [2](#) [3](#) [4](#) [5](#) [6](#) [7](#) [8](#) [9](#) [10](#) [11](#) [12](#) [13](#) [14](#) [15](#) [16](#) [17](#) [18](#) [19](#) [20](#) [21](#) [22](#) [23](#) [24](#)

---

### THE BEWITCHING QUEEN OF AEAEA

SCENE: In the palace of Alcinous in the land of the Phaeacians where Odysseus tells of the Aeolia land of the Laestrygonians, and of Aeaea, the island of Circe

IMPORTANT CHARACTERS: Odysseus, Aeolus, King of Aeolia and master of the winds, Antiphates, King of the Laestrygonians, Eurylochus, Circe, Hermes, and Elpenor.

Odysseus and his crew are treated hospitably by Aeolus, King of Aeolia, who sends off the Ithacans with a gift of wind in a bag which is to ensure a swift voyage. Just before the Ithacans reach home, Odysseus' crew, thinking their captain had been rewarded by Aeolus with riches, open the "gift" while Odysseus sleeps. The escaping wind blows the ships back to Aeolus where an irritated King refuses to help the ill-favored Greeks. They then make a disastrous journey to the land of the Laestrygonians, a race of giants who destroy all of Odysseus' ships but his which he had had cautiously anchored outside the small harbor. The despondent survivors travels to Aeaea where only one of an exploratory "platoon" escapes the bewitching Circe and returns to Odysseus to describe how the men he had led had all been turned into swine. Odysseus goes to attempt to deal with this situation. On the way to Circe's palace he is visited by Hermes who tells

him what he needs to do to resist the beautiful witch's spells. Forewarned, Odysseus succeeds in winning his men's freedom and the bed of "the nymph with the lovely braids." All spend a relaxing and somewhat licentious year before Odysseus is told by Circe that he will need to go to the land of the dead to learn his fate.

#### PAY ATTENTION TO:

- King Aeolus' gift to Odysseus
- Odysseus's letting his guard down
- Aeolus' belief that Odysseus is not favored by the Gods,
- Aeolus' attitude toward second chances
- Odysseus' caution when he reaches the land of the Laestrygonians,
- Odysseus' caution when he reaches Aeaea,
- Circe's initial reception of Odysseus' men, her witchcraft.
- The role of Hermes
- Odysseus as seducer and seduced.
- The importance of Circe's "word",
- the luxury of the palace, good times,
- Circe's ultimate support and hospitality,
- the need to visit Hades and hear from Tiresias.

EPITHETS: Who is...the nymph with the lovely braids

#### QUESTIONS:

1. After the attack from the Laestrygonians, how many ships are left out of the original twelve?
2. What sort of character is Circe? What craft does she practice that Penelope also practices?
3. Why (aside from her magic) is she able to turn Odysseus' men into swine? How do they offend her?
4. Into what does Circe transform Odysseus' crew?
5. What does Hermes give to Odysseus?
6. What makes Odysseus give in to Circe's enticements? Is this typical of him?
7. How long does Odysseus stay in Circe's palace?
8. Why does he want to leave?
9. Where must Odysseus go to learn his way home?

#### QUOTATIONS TO REMEMBER:

They loosed the sack and all the winds burst (52)  
out  
and a sudden squall struck up and swept us  
back to sea,  
wailing in tears, far from our own native land,

"Crawling back like this – (82)  
It proves the immortals hate you. Out! Get  
out!"

The [the Laestrygonians] speared the crews (135)  
like fish  
and whisked them home to make a grisly  
meal.  
But while they killed them off in the harbor  
depths  
I pulled the sword from beside my hip and

hacked away  
at the ropes that moored the blue-prowed ship  
of war  
and shout rapid orders at my shipmates:  
"Put your backs to the oars – now row or die!"  
In terror of death they ripped the swells – all  
as one –  
and what a joy as we darted out toward open  
sea,  
clear of those beetling cliffs. . . my ship alone.

I was well on my way down, nearing our ship (171)  
when a god took pity on me wandering all  
alone;  
he sent me a big stag with high branching  
antlers,  
right across my path – the sun's heat forced  
him down  
from the forest range to drink at the river's  
banks –  
just bounding out of the timber when I hit him  
square in the backbone, halfway down the  
spine  
and my bronze spear went punching clean  
through –  
he dropped in the dust, groaning, gasping his  
last breath.

Deep in the wooded glens they came to (229)  
Circe's palace  
built of dressed stone on a cleared rise of land.  
Mountain wolves and lions were roaming  
round the grounds -  
she'd [Circe] bewitched them herself, she  
gave them magic drugs.  
But they wouldn't attack my men; they just  
came pawing  
up around them, pawing, swishing their long  
tails –  
. . . they [the men] paused at her door, the  
nymph with lovely braids,  
Circe – and deep inside they heard her  
singing, lifting  
her spell-binding voice as she glided back and  
forth  
on her great immortal loom, her enchanting  
web  
a shimmering glory only goddesses can  
weave.

Only Eurylochus stayed behind – he sensed a (256)  
trap. . .

Once they'd drained the bowls she'd filled, (261)  
suddenly



she struck with her wand, drove them into her  
pigsties,  
all of them bristling into wine – with grunts  
snouts, even their bodies, yes, and only  
the men's minds stayed steadfast as before.  
So off they went to their pens, sobbing,  
squealing. . .

"Eurylochus, stay right here, (299)  
eating, drinking, safe by the black ship.  
I must be off. Necessity drives me on."

Hermes god of the golden wand (305)  
crossed my path. . .

"have you come to set them free?  
Well I warn you. You won't get home  
yourself. . .  
But wait, I can save you, free you from that  
great danger.  
Look here is a potent drug. . .  
Now here is your plan of action, step by step.  
The moment Circe strikes with her long thin  
wand  
you draw your sharp sword sheathed at your  
hip  
and rush her fact as thought to run the  
through!  
She'll cower in fear and coax you toward her  
bed –  
but don't refuse the goddess' bed, not then. . .  
But have her swear the binding oath of the  
blessed gods  
she'll never plot some new intrigue to harm  
you  
once you lay there naked –  
never unman you, strip away your courage!"

"Mount your bed? Not for all (380)  
the world. Not  
until you consent to swear, goddess, a binding  
oath  
you'll never plot some new intrigue to harm  
me!"

Straightaway  
she began to swear the oath. . .  
and when she's finished  
then at last, I mounted Circe's gorgeous bed."

"If you, you really want me to (426)  
eat and drink  
set them free – all my comrades –  
let me feast my eyes."

So she enticed (513)  
and won our battle hardened spirits over.  
And there we sat, at ease,  
day in, day out, till a year had run its course,  
feasting on sides of meat and drafts of heady  
wine. . .  
But then, when the year was through. . .

my loyal comrades took me aside and  
prodded,  
"Captain, this is madness!  
High time you thought of your own home at  
last. . ."  
That urging brought my stubborn spirit round.

"Royal son of Laertes, old (537)  
campaigner,  
stay on no more in my house against your  
will.  
But first another journey calls. You must  
travel down  
to the House of Death and the awesome one,  
Persephone,  
there to consult the ghost of Tiresias, seer of  
Thebes,  
the great blind prophet whose mind remains  
unshaken  
Even in death – Persephone has given him  
wisdom . . .  
the rest of the dead are empty, flitting shades."

He [Tiresias] will tell you the (541)  
way to go, the stages of your voyage,  
how you can cross the swarming sea and  
reach home at last."

There was a man, Elpenor, the (608)  
youngest in our ranks,  
none too brave in battle, none too sound in  
mind. . .  
    keen for the cool night air,  
sodden with wine he'd bedded down on her  
roofs . . .  
he forgot to climb back down again by the  
long ladder –  
headfirst from the roof he plunged, his neck  
snapped  
from the backbone, his soul flew down to  
death.

