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# The Odyssey

## Book 15 ~ Study Guide

from John McIlvain

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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.

Books:

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### THE PRINCE SETS SAIL FOR HOME

SCENE: Sparta, Ithaca

IMPORTANT CHARACTERS: Athena, Telemachus, Pisistratus, Menelaus, Helen, Theoclymenus, Odysseus, Eumaeus.

Athena comes to Telemachus to urge him to return to Ithaca. He quickly responds. Menelaus and Helen shower Telemachus and Pisistratus with gifts. Interestingly, it is Helen who interprets "an eagle clutching a huge white goose in its talons" as a signal of Odysseus' return to Ithaca. When they arrive near Pylos, Pisistratus agrees that it best that Telemachus not stop for Nestor's sense of hospitality would waylay him. Just before departing on his ship (that conveniently seems to await him) Telemachus agrees to take aboard the exiled prophet Theoclymenus. The book then returns to Eumaeus and Ithaca. This time Odysseus asks Eumaeus to tell his story. Like Odysseus' invented history, Eumaeus actual history is one of many twists and turns, including a kidnapping by his "nurse" who had been seduced by a Phoenician sailor. After she is ultimately punished by Artemis, Eumaeus lands on Ithaca where Odysseus' father Laertes buys him. Odysseus is as moved by the swineherd's tale as the swineherd was by Odysseus'. As they turn in for sleep, Telemachus lands in Ithaca successfully, but secretly. He will not return to his home, but has been directed

be Athena to go to the swineherd's farm.

PAY ATTENTION TO:

- return (of Telemachus),
- exile (note: all of the mortals listed above as an "important character" except for Pisistratus have experienced or are experiencing some form of exile);
- hospitality (of Menelaus, Nestor, the swineherd);
- bird signs from above; the new sophistication of Telemachus and Pisistratus;
- Odysseus' continued testing of Eumaeus;
- Eumaeus' story of his "Phoenician nurse."

QUESTIONS:

1. Why is Telemachus awake when Athena comes upon him?
2. How does the beginning of this book compare to the ending of Book 14?
3. How does Telemachus' departure from Sparta parallel Odysseus' departure from Phaacia?
4. Who gives going away presents to Telemachus? What does this signify?
5. What is the portent which precedes Telemachus' departure?
6. Who is unsure of how to interpret it? Who knows how to interpret it? How does the portent resemble the earlier portent in Book 2 that is interpreted by Halitherses?
7. Why does Telemachus not want to revisit Nestor? How does Pisistratus react to this?
8. Who is Theoclymenus? What portent does he interpret?
9. How does Odysseus test Eumaeus?
10. What aspect of Eumaeus' story causes Odysseus to say, "You've moved my heart deeply."
11. How does Telemachus distinguish Eurymachus among the suitors? Who suggested he do this?

QUOTATIONS TO REMEMBER:

"I'd find fault with another host, I'm sure,  
too warm to his guests, too pressing or too cold. (74)

Balance is best in all things . . . ." (Pisistratus) With that man's (Nestor's) overbearing spirit . . . (234)  
he'll never let you go,  
he'll come down here and summon you himself . . . ."

"Just like you, I have left my land - (303)  
I because I killed a man of my own tribe . . . .  
I am a fugitive now . . . ."

"They're a far cry from you, (367)  
the men who do their bidding. Young bucks  
all rigged out in their fine robes and shirts,  
hair sleeked down with oil, faces always beaming,  
the ones who slave for them. . . . No, stay here.  
No one finds you a burden."

(Eumaeus) "Hunger never attacks that land (Syrie), no sickness either, (457)  
that always stalks the lives of us poor men.  
No, as each generation grows old on the island,  
down Apollo come with his silver bow, and Artemis  
and shoot them all to death with gentle arrows."

(Eumaeus) " . . . . a long, deep embrace, (472)

that can break a woman's will,  
even the best alive . . . .  
'I'll bring you all the gold I can lay my hands on . . . .  
I'm a nurse for my master's son in the palace now . . .  
he'll fetch you quite a price' !"

(Eumaeus) " . . . and then, when god brought on the seventh day, (534)  
Artemis showering arrows came and shot the woman."

The prince strode out briskly, (618)  
legs speeding him on until he reached the farm . . . .

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