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The Odyssey

Book 16 ~ 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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FATHER AND SON

SCENE: Ithaca

IMPORTANT CHARACTERS: Odysseus, Eumaeus, Telemachus, Athena, Antinous, Amphinomus, Medon, Eurymachus, Penelope.

Telemachus is greeted by Eumaeus with much emotion; he is introduced to the stranger who does not reveal himself. Telemachus sends Eumaeus to tell Penelope of his return. Then Odysseus is signaled by an Athena Telemachus cannot see, and he slips outside the lodge whereupon the goddess instructs Odysseus to reveal himself to his son; she proceeds to transform make him appear "taller, supple, young." Telemachus reacts as if the stranger were a god, and after Odysseus reveals his identity refuses at first to believe that this is indeed his father. Odysseus explains his transformation is Athena's work, the first of a number of times that Odysseus explains the ways of the gods to his son. Convinced, the son embraces his father. After tears and "shrilling cries," Odysseus explains how the Phaeacian's helped him, and Telemachus details the powerful position of the suitors. Odysseus explains that with the help of Athena and Zeus, the suitors will ultimately be defeated. Telemachus promises his father he is not a "flighty weak-willed boy," and together they plot out a plan to overthrow their enemies. Meanwhile Eumaeus tells Penelope of the return of her on, and the

suitors spot Telemachus' ship in the harbor. They are dissuaded from following the advice of Antinous to kill Telemachus by Amphinomus. An inspired Penelope, informed of the plot, attacks Antinous upon his return to palace with a mother's fury. Eumaeus returns to his home, his mission filled, and Odysseus transformed back into an ancient beggar.

PAY ATTENTION TO:

- Reunions (first of Eumaeus and Telemachus, then of Telemachus and Odysseus);
- the irony in several situations; Eumaeus' emotions;
- Telemachus' self-control,
- Odysseus' discipline ("or are your brothers at fault?");
- Athena's role;
- Penelope's position and response;
- the importance of loyalty (Eumaeus, Penelope)

QUESTIONS:

1. How does Eumaeus greet Telemachus?
2. What errand is Eumaeus sent on?
3. Why does Odysseus reveal his identity to Telemachus?
4. How does Odysseus' look when he reveals himself to his son?
5. How does Telemachus react when Odysseus identifies himself?
6. What are the three major points of strategy in the plan which Odysseus tells to Telemachus?
7. How does Odysseus' look when he reveals himself to his son?
8. What does Antinous try to get the suitors to do?
9. Who offers a different perspective?
10. How does Penelope learn of what the suitors are thinking?
11. How does Penelope react to this information?
12. Which of the suitors attempts to reassure her?

QUOTATIONS TO REMEMBER:

"You're home, Telemachus, (26)
sweet light of my eyes. I never thought I'd see you again . . .
under my roof, the rover home at last."

As he [Telemachus] approached, his father, Odysseus, rose (49)
to yield his seat, but the son, on his part
waved him back: "Stay where you are, stranger,
I know we can find another seat somewhere."

"It's hard for a man to win his way against a mob, (98)
even a man of iron. They are much too strong."
"Friend," the long enduring Odysseus stepped in –
"surely it's right for me to say a word at this point.
My heart, by god, is torn to pieces hearing this,
both of you telling how these reckless suitors . . .
plot your ruin

I'd rather die, cut down in my own house (118)
than have to look on at their outrage day by day."

"Royal son of Laertes, Odysseus, old campaigner, (188)
now is the time, now tell your son the truth.

Hold nothing back, so the two of you can plot
the suitors doom"

"No I am not a god (209)
Why confuse me with one who never dies?
No, I am your father –
the Odysseus you wept for all your days,
you bore a world of pain, the cruel abuse of men."

And with those words Odysseus kissed his son (215)
and the tears streamed down his cheeks and wet the ground

"It's light work for a god who rules the skies (241)
to exalt a mortal man or bring him low."

"Think: can you come up with a friend-in-arms? (287)
Some man to fight beside us, some brave heart?"
"Let me tell you," the old soldier said,
"bear in mind now, listen to me closely.
Think: will Athena flanked by Zeus
do for the two of us?"

"Soon enough, father . . . (342)
you'll sense the courage inside me, that I know –
I'm hardly a flighty, weak-willed boy these days.
But I think your plan would gain us nothing.
Reconsider, I urge you."

But now an inspiration took the discreet Penelope (453)
to face her suitors, brutal, reckless, men
rounding on Antinous, [she] cried out against him,
"You, Antinous! Violent, vicious, scheming –
Madman, why do you weave destruction for Telemachus?
It's wrong, unholy, yes . . .
Stop I tell you,
stop all this, and make the rest stop, too!"

And now, (529)
with the roasting done, the meal set out
and no one's hunger lacked a proper share of supper.
When they'd put aside desire for food and drink,
they remembered bed and took the gift of sleep.

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