

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

# The Odyssey

## Book 22 ~ Study Guide

from John McIlvain

[An Overview for the Student](#)

[Book-by-Book Study Guide](#)

[Literary Responses to the Odyssey](#)



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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:

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

### SLAUGHTER IN THE HALL

SCENE: Ithaca

Important Characters: Odysseus, Antinous, Eurymachus, Telemachus, Eumaeus, Melanthius, Athena, Phemius, Medon, Eurycleia.

Odysseus commences his revenge by slaying Antinous, despite the pleading of Eurymachus, who says they will make everything up to him and places the blame for their bad behavior on Antinous. He quickly discovers that Odysseus is not in a negotiating mood. The sheer number of the suitors (over 100) ensures that Odysseus and his three cohorts, Telemachus, Eumaeus, and Philoetius, will be kept busy. Their situation is not improved when the place they had stored the weapons was unlocked by the traitorous Melanthius. For a moment Odysseus is unsure of himself, but he is mocked by Athena (disguised as Mentor) and responds vigorously. Although Telemachus intercedes on behalf of two loyal men, the sense of the book is the ruthlessness of Odysseus' delivering of justice. This is accentuated by the "execution" of the faithless maids.

EPITHETS: Who is... "the master of longhorn cattle?"

## PAY ATTENTION TO:

- the violence of this book and the totality of Odysseus' revenge;
- Initial reaction of the suitors;
- Athena's aid as Mentor;
- the sparing of Phemias and Medon, Melanthius' betrayal and subsequent end;
- the hanging of the servant girls who have slept with the suitors;
- the purification of the palace.

## QUESTIONS:

1. What is Antinous doing when Odysseus shoots him? Why is he the first victim?
2. How do the other suitors appeal to Odysseus?
3. How does Eurymachus react to Mentor?
4. How much does Athena help Odysseus, and how much is the victory his?
5. Who tests the strength and courage of Odysseus and Telemachus?
6. The dead suitors are compared to what kind of creatures?
7. Which appendages does Melanthius lose? Where do they end up? (*Remember Antinous' threats to send Irus to Echetus in the beginning of Book 18; and a similar threat to Odysseus in Book 21*)

## QUOTATIONS TO REMEMBER

" . . . Apollo give me glory!" (7)

With that he trained a stabbing arrow on Antinous . . .  
just lifting a gorgeous golden loving-cup in his hands,  
just tilting the two handed goblet to his lips,  
about to drain his wine, slaughter the last thing  
on the suitor's mind . . .

But Odysseus aimed and shot Antinous square in the throat  
and the point went stabbing clean through the neck and out -  
and off to the side he pitched, the cup dropped from his grasp  
as the shaft sank home, and he man's life blood came spurting  
from his nostrils . . .

No Eurymachus, not if you paid me all your father's wealth . . . (78)  
no, not even then would I stay my hands from slaughter.

"You two wrench Melanthius' arms and legs behind him . . . (181)  
and strap a twisted cable fast to the scoundrel's body,  
hoist him up a column until he hits the rafters -  
let him dangle in agony still alive  
for a good long time!"

[Athena] lashed out now with blazing accusations: (235)  
"Where is it gone, Odysseus -your power, your fighting heart?  
The great soldier who fought for the white armed Helen,  
battling Trojans none long years . . . How can you . . .  
bewail the loss of your combat strength in a war with suitors?"

Rousing words -  
but she gave no all out turning of the tide, not yet  
she kept on testing Odysseus and his gallant son,  
putting their force and fighting heart to proof.  
For all the world like a swallow in their sight  
she flew on high to perch

on the great hall's central roof beam black with smoke.

The attackers struck like eagles, crook-clawed, hook-beaked, (316)  
swooping down from a mountain ridge to harry smaller birds  
that skim across the flatland, cringing under the clouds  
but the eagles plunge in fury, rip their lives out -hopeless,  
never a chance of flight or rescue - and people love the sport -  
so the attackers routed the suitors headlong down the hall,  
wheeling into the slaughter, slashing left and right  
and grisly screams broke from skulls cracked open -  
the whole floor awash with blood.

[Odysseus] found them all in blood and dust . . . (408)  
great hauls of them down and out like fish that fishermen  
drag from the churning gray surf in looped and coiling nets  
a fling ashore on a sweeping hook of beach -some noble catch  
heaped on the sand, twitching, lusting for fresh salt sea  
but the Sungod hammers down and burns their lives out . . .  
so the suitors lay in heaps, corpse covering corpse.

Then, as doves or thrushes beating their spread wings (494)  
against some snare rigged up in thickets -flying in  
for a cozy nest but a grisly bed receives them -  
so the women's head were trapped in a line,  
nooses yanking their necks up, one by one,  
so all might die a pitiful death . . .  
they kicked their heels for a little -not for long.

The devoted nurse snapped to his command, (520)  
brought her master fire and brimstone. Odysseus  
purged his palace, halls and court, with cleansing fumes.

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