

# The Wanderings of Odysseus

## from the *Odyssey*

Epic Poem by Homer

Translated by Robert Fitzgerald



**READING 2B** Analyze the influence of mythic and traditional literature on 20th and 21st century literature. **2C** Relate the figurative language of a literary work to its historical and cultural setting. **5A** Analyze non-linear plot development (foreshadowing). **5B** Analyze how authors develop characters. **5D** Demonstrate familiarity with works by authors from non-English-speaking literary traditions, with emphasis on classical literature.

VIDEO TRAILER



KEYWORD: HML9-1202

# What is a HERO?

When you hear the word *hero*, who comes to mind? Do you think of someone with unusual physical strength? great courage? a rare talent? In Homer's *Odyssey*, you'll meet one of the classic heroes of Western literature—Odysseus, a man with many heroic traits as well as human faults.

**DISCUSS** Work with a small group to make a list of people—male and female—who are generally considered heroes. Discuss the heroic qualities of each person. Which qualities seem essential to every hero?



## LITERARY ANALYSIS: EPIC HERO

Common to myths, the **epic hero** is a larger-than-life character, traditionally a man, who pursues long and dangerous adventures. Alternately aided and blocked by the gods, he carries the fate of his people on his shoulders. The epic hero is an **archetypal** character—one found in works across time and cultures. Odysseus, one of the most famous heroes in Western culture, has shaped our ideas about the traits that a hero should have.

- extraordinary strength and courage
- cleverness and deceit, also known as guile
- extreme confidence and a tendency to dismiss warnings

Every epic hero embodies the values of his culture. As you read the *Odyssey*, consider how Odysseus faces various conflicts. What does this tell you about his character? What do his character traits tell you about what the ancient Greeks found admirable?

## READING STRATEGY: READING AN EPIC POEM

The strategies for reading an epic are very similar to those for reading any narrative poem.

- Keep track of the events.
- Visualize the **imagery**.
- Notice how **figurative language**, including **epic similes**, makes the story vivid and interesting.
- Read difficult passages more than once. Use the side notes for help in comprehension.
- Read the poem aloud, as it was originally conveyed.

## VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT

Place each of the following words in the appropriate column.

<b>WORD LIST</b>	abominably	assuage	meditation
	adversary	beguiling	ponderous
	appalled	foreboding	profusion
	ardor	harried	travail

<i>Know Well</i>	<i>Think I Know</i>	<i>Don't Know</i>

### Book 1: A Goddess Intervenes

The poet introduces Odysseus, a successful warrior who, after conquering the city of Troy, has wandered the seas for many years. Now he wants only to return safely to his home and family.

### Book 5: Calypso, the Sweet Nymph

Odysseus has been held captive for many years by the goddess Calypso on her island. Zeus sends the god Hermes to order her to release Odysseus; she offers her advice and helps him build a raft on which he can sail to Scheria, his next destination.

### Book 9: New Coasts and Poseidon's Son

Odysseus has met King Alcinoos and begins telling him of his adventures since leaving Troy. He relates the tale of the Lotus Eaters and his encounter with the brutal Cyclops, a son of the sea-god Poseidon. Odysseus continues his tales in Books 10–12.

### Book 10: Circe, the Grace of the Witch

Eventually, Odysseus and his men arrive at the island home of Circe, a goddess and enchantress. She detains the men for a year, allowing them to go home only if they will visit the land of the dead and hear a prophecy from the ghost of Tiresias.

### Book 11: The Land of the Dead

Odysseus and his crew travel to the underworld, where Tiresias warns Odysseus against stealing the cattle of Helios, god of the sun. According to the prophecy, if Odysseus raids the cattle, he will lose his ship and crew and return home only after many years alone at sea.

### Book 12: The Sirens; Scylla and Charybdis

Odysseus and his men return to Circe's island, where she advises him on how to get past the bewitching Sirens and the horrible sea monsters Scylla and Charybdis. He successfully evades the Sirens but does not escape the monsters without losing some of his men.



Complete the activities in your **Reader/Writer Notebook**.

## PART ONE: THE WANDERINGS OF ODYSSEUS

# BOOK 1:

## *A Goddess Intervenes*

Sing in me, Muse, and through me tell the story  
of that man skilled in all ways of contending,  
the wanderer, **harried** for years on end,  
after he plundered the stronghold  
5 on the proud height of Troy.

He saw the townlands  
and learned the minds of many distant men,  
and weathered many bitter nights and days  
in his deep heart at sea, while he fought only  
to save his life, to bring his shipmates home.  
10 But not by will nor valor could he save them,  
for their own recklessness destroyed them all—  
children and fools, they killed and feasted on  
the cattle of Lord Helios, the Sun,  
and he who moves all day through heaven  
15 took from their eyes the dawn of their return. **A**

Of these adventures, Muse, daughter of Zeus,  
tell us in our time, lift the great song again. . . .

*The story of Odysseus begins with the goddess Athena's appealing to Zeus to help Odysseus, who has been wandering for ten years on the seas, to find his way home to his family on Ithaca. While Odysseus has been gone, his son, Telemachus, has grown to manhood and his wife, Penelope, has been besieged by suitors wishing to marry her and gain Odysseus' wealth. The suitors have taken up residence in her home and are constantly feasting on the family's cattle, sheep, and goats. They dishonor Odysseus and his family. Taking Athena's advice, Telemachus travels to Pylos for word of his father. Meanwhile, on Ithaca, the evil suitors plot to kill Telemachus when he returns.*

**1 Muse:** a daughter of Zeus, credited with divine inspiration.

**harried** (hă'r'ēd) *adj.* tormented;  
harassed **harry** *v.*

**11–13 their own recklessness . . . the Sun:**  
a reference to an event occurring later  
in the poem—an event that causes the  
death of Odysseus' entire crew.

### **A** EPIC HERO

This invocation (lines 1–15)  
introduces us to Odysseus,  
“that man skilled in all ways of  
contending.” What **traits** is he  
shown to have?

### Analyze Visuals ▶

This 1930s print, *The Ship of Odysseus*, is part of an *Odyssey* series by Francois-Louis Schmied. What qualities of this ship has Schmied emphasized with his use of color and shape? Explain.



# BOOK 5:

## *Calypso, the Sweet Nymph*

*For seven of the ten years Odysseus has spent wandering the Mediterranean Sea, he has been held captive by the goddess Calypso on her island. As Book 5 begins, Zeus sends the god Hermes to tell Calypso to release Odysseus. However, she is only to help him build a raft. He must sail for 20 days before landing on the island of Scheria, where he will be helped in his effort to return home.*

No words were lost on Hermes the Wayfinder,  
who bent to tie his beautiful sandals on,  
ambrosial, golden, that carry him over water  
or over endless land in a swish of the wind,  
5 and took the wand with which he charms asleep—  
or when he wills, awake—the eyes of men.  
So wand in hand he paced into the air,  
shot from Pieria down, down to sea level,  
and veered to skim the swell. A gull patrolling  
10 between the wave crests of the desolate sea  
will dip to catch a fish, and douse his wings;  
no higher above the whitecaps Hermes flew **B**  
until the distant island lay ahead,  
then rising shoreward from the violet ocean  
15 he stepped up to the cave. Divine Calypso,  
the mistress of the isle, was now at home.  
Upon her hearthstone a great fire blazing  
scented the farthest shores with cedar smoke  
and smoke of thyme, and singing high and low  
20 in her sweet voice, before her loom a-weaving,  
she passed her golden shuttle to and fro.  
A deep wood grew outside, with summer leaves  
of alder and black poplar, pungent cypress.  
Ornate birds here rested their stretched wings—  
25 horned owls, falcons, cormorants—long-tongued  
beachcombing birds, and followers of the sea.  
Around the smoothwalled cave a crooking vine  
held purple clusters under ply of green;  
and four springs, bubbling up near one another  
30 shallow and clear, took channels here and there  
through beds of violets and tender parsley.

**1–6 Hermes** (hûr'mēz): the messenger of the gods, also known for his cleverness and trickery.

**8 Pieria** (pî-îr'ē-ə): an area next to Mount Olympus, home of the gods.

### **B EPIC SIMILE**

Identify the epic simile in lines 9–12. What does this comparison tell you about Hermes?

### Analyze Visuals ▶

How has the painter characterized Calypso in this 1906 portrait? Consider any relationship between her white dress and the white clouds.

**28 purple clusters:** grapes.



Even a god who found this place  
would gaze, and feel his heart beat with delight:  
so Hermes did; but when he had gazed his fill  
35 he entered the wide cave. Now face to face  
the magical Calypso recognized him,  
as all immortal gods know one another  
on sight—though seeming strangers, far from home.  
But he saw nothing of the great Odysseus,  
40 who sat apart, as a thousand times before,  
and racked his own heart groaning, with eyes wet  
scanning the bare horizon of the sea. . . .

*Calypso invites Hermes to her table for food and drink, asking why he has come. Hermes explains that he has brought with an order from Zeus that Calypso must not detain Odysseus any longer but send him on his way home. She reluctantly obeys, agreeing to offer Odysseus her advice about how to get home.*

The strong god glittering left her as he spoke,  
and now her ladyship, having given heed  
45 to Zeus's mandate, went to find Odysseus  
in his stone seat to seaward—tear on tear  
brimming in his eyes. The sweet days of his life time  
were running out in anguish over his exile,  
for long ago the nymph had ceased to please.  
50 Though he fought shy of her and her desire,  
he lay with her each night, for she compelled him.  
But when day came he sat on the rocky shore  
and broke his own heart groaning, with eyes wet  
scanning the bare horizon of the sea. ©  
55 Now she stood near him in her beauty, saying:

“O forlorn man, be still.  
Here you need grieve no more; you need not feel  
your life consumed here; I have pondered it,  
and I shall help you go. . . .”

60 Swiftly she turned and led him to her cave,  
and they went in, the mortal and immortal.  
He took the chair left empty now by Hermes,  
where the divine Calypso placed before him  
victuals and drink of men; then she sat down  
65 facing Odysseus, while her serving maids  
brought nectar and ambrosia to her side.  
Then each one's hands went out on each one's feast  
until they had their pleasure; and she said:

© **EPIC HERO**

Reread lines 43–54. Which of Odysseus' qualities is emphasized here?

“Son of Laertes, versatile Odysseus,  
70 after these years with me, you still desire  
your old home? Even so, I wish you well.  
If you could see it all, before you go—  
all the adversity you face at sea—  
you would stay here, and guard this house, and be  
75 immortal—though you wanted her forever,  
that bride for whom you pine each day.  
Can I be less desirable than she is?  
Less interesting? Less beautiful? Can mortals  
compare with goddesses in grace and form?”

80 To this the strategist Odysseus answered:

“My lady goddess, here is no cause for anger.  
My quiet Penelope—how well I know—  
would seem a shade before your majesty,  
death and old age being unknown to you,  
85 while she must die. Yet, it is true, each day  
I long for home, long for the sight of home. . . .”

*With Calypso's help, Odysseus builds a raft and sets out to sea. For 17 days he sails until he is in sight of Scheria. For 3 more days he is pummeled by storms and finally swims for the island. He makes it safely ashore and crawls to rest under some bushes.*

A man in a distant field, no hearthfires near,  
will hide a fresh brand in his bed of embers  
to keep a spark alive for the next day;  
90 so in the leaves Odysseus hid himself,  
while over him Athena showered sleep  
that his distress should end, and soon, soon.  
In quiet sleep she sealed his cherished eyes.

## Language Coach

**Roots and Affixes** A word's root often suggests the word's meaning. The Latin root *versare*, from which *versatile* (line 69) is derived, means “to turn often.” What do you think *versatile* means?

### D EPITHET

Reread Odysseus' answer to Calypso in lines 81–86. Why do you think he is referred to in line 80 as “the strategist Odysseus”? Explain.

# BOOK 9:

## *New Coasts and Poseidon's Son*

*In Books 6–8, Odysseus is welcomed by King Alcinous, who gives a banquet in his honor. That night the king begs Odysseus to tell who he is and what has happened to him. In Books 9–12, Odysseus relates to the king his adventures.*

### “I AM LAERTES’ SON”

“What shall I  
say first? What shall I keep until the end?  
The gods have tried me in a thousand ways.  
But first my name: let that be known to you,  
5 and if I pull away from pitiless death,  
friendship will bind us, though my land lies far.

I am Laertes’ son, Odysseus.

Men hold me  
formidable for guile in peace and war:  
this fame has gone abroad to the sky’s rim.  
10 My home is on the peaked sea-mark of Ithaca  
under Mount Neion’s wind-blown robe of leaves,  
in sight of other islands—Dulichium,  
Same, wooded Zacynthus—Ithaca  
being most lofty in that coastal sea,  
15 and northwest, while the rest lie east and south.  
A rocky isle, but good for a boy’s training;  
I shall not see on earth a place more dear,  
though I have been detained long by Calypso,  
loveliest among goddesses, who held me  
20 in her smooth caves, to be her heart’s delight,  
as Circe of Aeaëa, the enchantress,  
desired me, and detained me in her hall.  
But in my heart I never gave consent.  
Where shall a man find sweetness to surpass  
25 his own home and his parents? In far lands  
he shall not, though he find a house of gold. **E**

### Analyze Visuals ▶

How would you describe the expression on Odysseus’ face in this sculpture?

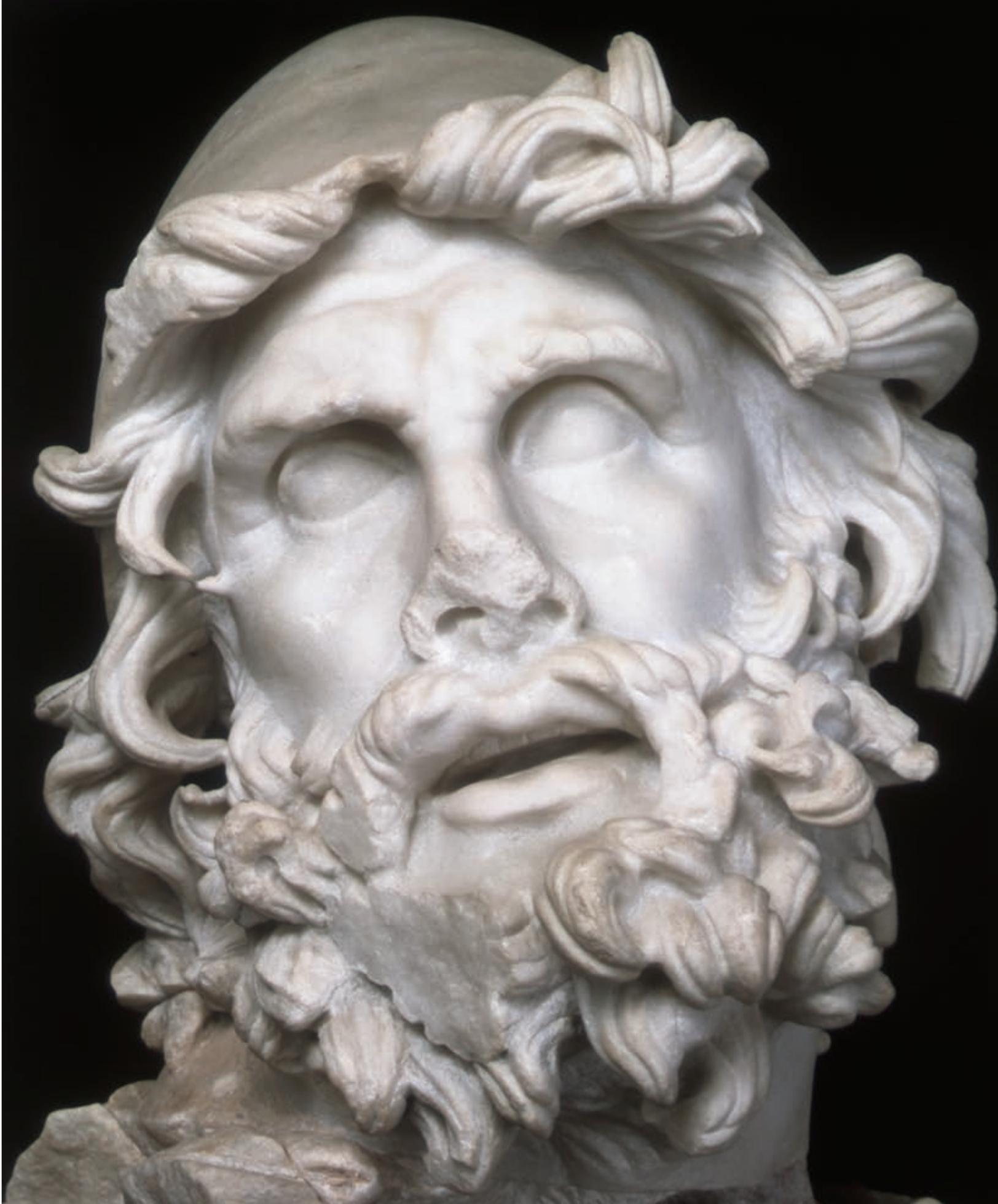
**7–8 hold me formidable for guile:** consider me impressive for my cunning and craftiness.

**11–13 Mount Neion’s** (nē’ōnz’); **Dulichium** (dōō-līk’ē-əm); **Same** (sā’mē); **Zacynthus** (zē-sīn’tēs).

**18–26** Odysseus refers to two beautiful goddesses, Calypso and Circe, who have delayed him on their islands. (Details about Circe appear in Book 10.) At the same time, he seems nostalgic for his family and homeland, from which he has been separated for 18 years—10 of them spent fighting in Troy.

### **E** EPIC HERO

Reread lines 24–26. What does Odysseus value most highly?



What of my sailing, then, from Troy?  
What of those years  
of rough adventure, weathered under Zeus? . . .”

*Odysseus explains that soon after leaving Troy, he and his crew land near Ismarus, the city of the Cicones. The Cicones are allies of the Trojans and therefore enemies of Odysseus. Odysseus and his crew raid the Cicones, robbing and killing them, until the Ciconian army kills 72 of Odysseus’ men and drives the rest out to sea. Delayed by a storm for two days, Odysseus and his remaining companions then continued their journey.*

## THE LOTUS EATERS

“I might have made it safely home, that time,  
30 but as I came round Malea the current  
took me out to sea, and from the north  
a fresh gale drove me on, past Cythera.  
Nine days I drifted on the teeming sea  
before dangerous high winds. Upon the tenth  
35 we came to the coastline of the Lotus Eaters,  
who live upon that flower. We landed there  
to take on water. All ships’ companies  
mustered alongside for the mid-day meal.  
Then I sent out two picked men and a runner  
40 to learn what race of men that land sustained.  
They fell in, soon enough, with Lotus Eaters,  
who showed no will to do us harm, only  
offering the sweet Lotus to our friends—  
but those who ate this honeyed plant, the Lotus,  
45 never cared to report, nor to return:  
they longed to stay forever, browsing on  
that native bloom, forgetful of their homeland.  
I drove them, all three wailing, to the ships,  
tied them down under their rowing benches,  
50 and called the rest: ‘All hands aboard;  
come, clear the beach and no one taste  
the Lotus, or you lose your hope of home.’  
Filing in to their places by the rowlocks  
my oarsmen dipped their long oars in the surf,  
55 and we moved out again on our sea faring.

## THE CYCLOPS

In the next land we found were Cyclopes,  
giants, louts, without a law to bless them.  
In ignorance leaving the fruitage of the earth in mystery  
to the immortal gods, they neither plow

**30 Malea** (mä-lē’ä).

**32 Cythera** (sĭ-thĭr’ə).

**38 muster:** assembled; gathered.

### Language Coach

**Synonyms** Words with the same meaning are called **synonyms**. Reread line 40. Another way to say this line is “to learn what race of people lived there.” What synonym could you substitute for *sustained* in line 40? Refer to a thesaurus if you need help.

**44–52 those who ate . . . hope of home.**  
*How do the Lotus Eaters pose a threat to Odysseus and his men?*

**56 Cyclopes** (sĭ-klō’pēz): refers to the creatures in plural; *Cyclops* is singular.

60 nor sow by hand, nor till the ground, though grain—  
wild wheat and barley—grows untended, and  
wine-grapes, in clusters, ripen in heaven's rain.  
Cyclopes have no muster and no meeting,  
no consultation or old tribal ways,  
65 but each one dwells in his own mountain cave  
dealing out rough justice to wife and child,  
indifferent to what the others do. . . .”

58–67 *Why doesn't Odysseus respect the Cyclopes?*

*Across the bay from the land of the Cyclopes was a lush, deserted island. Odysseus and his crew landed on the island in a dense fog and spent days feasting on wine and wild goats and observing the mainland, where the Cyclopes lived. On the third day, Odysseus and his company of men set out to learn if the Cyclopes were friends or foes.*

“When the young Dawn with finger tips of rose **F**  
came in the east, I called my men together  
70 and made a speech to them:

**F EPITHET**  
Notice the descriptive phrase used to characterize the dawn in line 68. What does this description tell you about the dawn?

‘Old shipmates, friends,  
the rest of you stand by; I’ll make the crossing  
in my own ship, with my own company,  
and find out what the mainland natives are—  
for they may be wild savages, and lawless,  
75 or hospitable and god fearing men.’

At this I went aboard, and gave the word  
to cast off by the stern. My oarsmen followed,  
filing in to their benches by the rowlocks,  
and all in line dipped oars in the gray sea.

77 **stern:** the rear end of a ship.

80 As we rowed on, and nearer to the mainland,  
at one end of the bay, we saw a cavern  
yawning above the water, screened with laurel,  
and many rams and goats about the place  
inside a sheepfold—made from slabs of stone  
85 earthfast between tall trunks of pine and rugged  
towering oak trees.

82 **screened with laurel:** partially hidden by laurel trees.

A prodigious man  
slept in this cave alone, and took his flocks  
to graze afield—remote from all companions,  
knowing none but savage ways, a brute  
90 so huge, he seemed no man at all of those  
who eat good wheaten bread; but he seemed rather  
a shaggy mountain reared in solitude.  
We beached there, and I told the crew

91–92 *What does Odysseus' metaphor imply about the Cyclops?*

to stand by and keep watch over the ship;  
95 as for myself I took my twelve best fighters  
and went ahead. I had a goatskin full  
of that sweet liquor that Euanthes' son,  
Maron, had given me. He kept Apollo's  
holy grove at Ismarus; for kindness  
100 we showed him there, and showed his wife and child,  
he gave me seven shining golden talents  
perfectly formed, a solid silver winebowl,  
and then this liquor—twelve two-handed jars  
of brandy, pure and fiery. Not a slave  
105 in Maron's household knew this drink; only  
he, his wife and the storeroom mistress knew;  
and they would put one cupful—ruby-colored,  
honey-smooth—in twenty more of water,  
but still the sweet scent hovered like a fume  
110 over the winebowl. No man turned away  
when cups of this came round.

A wineskin full

I brought along, and victuals in a bag,  
for in my bones I knew some towering brute  
would be upon us soon—all outward power,  
115 a wild man, ignorant of civility.

We climbed, then, briskly to the cave. But Cyclops  
had gone afield, to pasture his fat sheep,  
so we looked round at everything inside:  
a drying rack that sagged with cheeses, pens  
120 crowded with lambs and kids, each in its class:  
firstlings apart from middlings, and the 'dewdrops,'  
or newborn lambkins, penned apart from both.  
And vessels full of whey were brimming there—  
bowls of earthenware and pails for milking.  
125 My men came pressing round me, pleading:

'Why not

take these cheeses, get them stowed, come back,  
throw open all the pens, and make a run for it?  
We'll drive the kids and lambs aboard. We say  
put out again on good salt water!'

Ah,

130 how sound that was! Yet I refused. I wished  
to see the caveman, what he had to offer—  
no pretty sight, it turned out, for my friends.

**97–98 Euanthes** (yōō-ăn'thêz); **Maron** (mâr'ôn').

**101 talents:** bars of gold or silver of a specified weight, used as money in ancient Greece.

**112 victuals** (vīt'lz): food.

**121–122** The Cyclops has separated his lambs into three age groups.

**123 whey:** the watery part of milk, which separates from the curds, or solid part, during the making of cheese.

**129 good salt water:** the open sea.

**130–132** *Why does Odysseus refuse his men's "sound" request?*

We lit a fire, burnt an offering,  
and took some cheese to eat; then sat in silence  
135 around the embers, waiting. When he came  
he had a load of dry boughs on his shoulder  
to stoke his fire at suppertime. He dumped it  
with a great crash into that hollow cave,  
and we all scattered fast to the far wall.  
140 Then over the broad cavern floor he ushered  
the ewes he meant to milk. He left his rams  
and he-goats in the yard outside, and swung  
high overhead a slab of solid rock  
to close the cave. Two dozen four-wheeled wagons,  
145 with heaving wagon teams, could not have stirred  
the tonnage of that rock from where he wedged it  
over the doorsill. Next he took his seat  
and milked his bleating ewes. A practiced job  
he made of it, giving each ewe her suckling;  
150 thickened his milk, then, into curds and whey,  
sieved out the curds to drip in withy baskets,  
and poured the whey to stand in bowls  
cooling until he drank it for his supper.  
When all these chores were done, he poked the fire,  
155 heaping on brushwood. In the glare he saw us.

‘Strangers,’ he said, ‘who are you? And where from?  
What brings you here by sea ways—a fair traffic?  
Or are you wandering rogues, who cast your lives  
like dice, and ravage other folk by sea?’

160 We felt a pressure on our hearts, in dread  
of that deep rumble and that mighty man.  
But all the same I spoke up in reply:

‘We are from Troy, Achaeans, blown off course  
by shifting gales on the Great South Sea;  
165 homeward bound, but taking routes and ways  
uncommon; so the will of Zeus would have it.  
We served under Agamemnon, son of Atreus—  
the whole world knows what city  
he laid waste, what armies he destroyed. **G**  
170 It was our luck to come here; here we stand,  
beholden for your help, or any gifts  
you give—as custom is to honor strangers.  
We would entreat you, great Sir, have a care  
for the gods’ courtesy; Zeus will avenge  
175 the unoffending guest.’

**133 burnt an offering:** burned a portion of the food as an offering to secure the gods’ goodwill. (Such offerings were frequently performed by Greek sailors during difficult journeys.)

**151 withy baskets:** baskets made from twigs.

**157 fair traffic:** honest trading.

**G ALLUSION**

Reread lines 163–169. Agamemnon was the Greek king who led the war against the Trojans. Consider what Odysseus says about Agamemnon; what point is he making about himself by claiming this association?

**172–175** It was a sacred Greek custom to honor strangers with food and gifts. Odysseus is reminding the Cyclops that Zeus will punish anyone who mistreats a guest.

He answered this  
from his brute chest, unmoved:

‘You are a ninny,  
or else you come from the other end of nowhere,  
telling me, mind the gods! We Cyclopes  
care not a whistle for your thundering Zeus  
180 or all the gods in bliss; we have more force by far.  
I would not let you go for fear of Zeus—  
you or your friends—unless I had a whim to.  
Tell me, where was it, now, you left your ship—  
around the point, or down the shore, I wonder?’

185 He thought he’d find out, but I saw through this,  
and answered with a ready lie:

‘My ship?’

Poseidon Lord, who sets the earth a-tremble,  
broke it up on the rocks at your land’s end.  
A wind from seaward served him, drove us there.  
190 We are survivors, these good men and I.’ **H**

Neither reply nor pity came from him,  
but in one stride he clutched at my companions  
and caught two in his hands like squirming puppies  
to beat their brains out, spattering the floor.  
195 Then he dismembered them and made his meal,  
gaping and crunching like a mountain lion—  
everything: innards, flesh, and marrow bones.  
We cried aloud, lifting our hands to Zeus,  
powerless, looking on at this, **appalled**;  
200 but Cyclops went on filling up his belly  
with manflesh and great gulps of whey,  
then lay down like a mast among his sheep.  
My heart beat high now at the chance of action,  
and drawing the sharp sword from my hip I went  
205 along his flank to stab him where the midriff  
holds the liver. I had touched the spot  
when sudden fear stayed me: if I killed him  
we perished there as well, for we could never  
move his **ponderous** doorway slab aside.  
210 So we were left to groan and wait for morning.

When the young Dawn with fingertips of rose  
lit up the world, the Cyclops built a fire **I**  
and milked his handsome ewes, all in due order,



*The Cyclops* (c. 1914), Odilon Redon. Oil on canvas.  
Kroller-Muller Museum, Otterlo, Netherlands.  
© Peter Will/SuperStock.

**178–182** *What is the Cyclopes' attitude toward the gods?*

#### **H** EPIC HERO

Reread lines 185–190. Why does Odysseus lie to the Cyclops about his ship?

**appalled** (ə-pôld') *adj.* filled with dismay; horrified **appall** *v.*

**ponderous** (pŏn'dər-əs) *adj.* heavy in a clumsy way; bulky

**207–210** *Why doesn't Odysseus kill the Cyclops right now?*

#### **I** EPITHET

What **epithet** is repeated in lines 211–212? Look for more repetitions like this one.

putting the sucklings to the mothers. Then,  
215 his chores being all dispatched, he caught  
another brace of men to make his breakfast,  
and whisked away his great door slab  
to let his sheep go through—but he, behind,  
reset the stone as one would cap a quiver.  
220 There was a din of whistling as the Cyclops  
rounded his flock to higher ground, then stillness.  
And now I pondered how to hurt him worst,  
if but Athena granted what I prayed for.  
Here are the means I thought would serve my turn:

225 a club, or staff, lay there along the fold—  
an olive tree, felled green and left to season  
for Cyclops' hand. And it was like a mast  
a lugger of twenty oars, broad in the beam—  
a deep-sea-going craft—might carry:  
230 so long, so big around, it seemed. Now I  
chopped out a six foot section of this pole  
and set it down before my men, who scraped it;  
and when they had it smooth, I hewed again  
to make a stake with pointed end. I held this  
235 in the fire's heart and turned it, toughening it,  
then hid it, well back in the cavern, under  
one of the dung piles in **profusion** there.  
Now came the time to toss for it: who ventured  
along with me? whose hand could bear to thrust  
240 and grind that spike in Cyclops' eye, when mild  
sleep had mastered him? As luck would have it,  
the men I would have chosen won the toss—  
four strong men, and I made five as captain.

At evening came the shepherd with his flock,  
245 his woolly flock. The rams as well, this time,  
entered the cave: by some sheep-herding whim—  
or a god's bidding—none were left outside.  
He hefted his great boulder into place  
and sat him down to milk the bleating ewes  
250 in proper order, put the lambs to suck,  
and swiftly ran through all his evening chores.  
Then he caught two more men and feasted on them.  
My moment was at hand, and I went forward  
holding an ivy bowl of my dark drink,  
255 looking up, saying:

216 **brace:** pair.

218–219 The Cyclops reseals the cave with the massive rock as easily as an ordinary human places the cap on a container of arrows.

226 **left to season:** left to dry out and harden.

228 **lugger:** a small, wide sailing ship.

**profusion** (prə-fyōō'zhən)  
n. abundance

238–243 *What does Odysseus plan to do to the Cyclops?*

### Language Coach

**Word Definitions** The use of words whose sounds echo their meanings, such as *buzz* and *croak*, is called **onomatopoeia**. What word in line 249 is an example of onomatopoeia?

‘Cyclops, try some wine.

Here’s liquor to wash down your scraps of men.  
Taste it, and see the kind of drink we carried  
under our planks. I meant it for an offering  
if you would help us home. But you are mad,  
260 unbearable, a bloody monster! After this,  
will any other traveller come to see you?’

He seized and drained the bowl, and it went down  
so fiery and smooth he called for more:

‘Give me another, thank you kindly. Tell me,  
265 how are you called? I’ll make a gift will please you.  
Even Cyclopes know the wine-grapes grow  
out of grassland and loam in heaven’s rain,  
but here’s a bit of nectar and ambrosia!’

Three bowls I brought him, and he poured them down.  
270 I saw the fuddle and flush come over him,  
then I sang out in cordial tones:

‘Cyclops,

you ask my honorable name? Remember  
the gift you promised me, and I shall tell you.  
My name is Nohbdy: mother, father, and friends,  
275 everyone calls me Nohbdy.’

And he said:

‘Nohbdy’s my meat, then, after I eat his friends.  
Others come first. There’s a noble gift, now.’ ❶

Even as he spoke, he reeled and tumbled backward,  
his great head lolling to one side: and sleep  
280 took him like any creature. Drunk, hiccupping,  
he dribbled streams of liquor and bits of men.

Now, by the gods, I drove my big hand spike  
deep in the embers, charring it again,  
and cheered my men along with battle talk  
285 to keep their courage up: no quitting now.  
The pike of olive, green though it had been,  
reddened and glowed as if about to catch.  
I drew it from the coals and my four fellows  
gave me a hand, lugging it near the Cyclops  
290 as more than natural force nerved them; straight  
forward they sprinted, lifted it, and rammed it

**255–261** *Why does Odysseus offer the Cyclops the liquor he brought from the ship?*

**268 nectar** (nĕk’tĕr) **and ambrosia** (ăm-brō’zĕ): the drink and food of the gods.

**270 fuddle and flush:** the state of confusion and redness of the face caused by drinking alcohol.

❶ **EPIC HERO**

Say the name *Nohbdy* out loud and listen to what it sounds like. What might Odysseus be planning? Consider what this tells you about his **character**.

**286 the pike:** the pointed stake.

deep in his crater eye, and I leaned on it  
turning it as a shipwright turns a drill  
in planking, having men below to swing  
295 the two-handed strap that spins it in the groove.  
So with our brand we bored that great eye socket  
while blood ran out around the red hot bar.  
Eyelid and lash were seared; the pierced ball  
hissed broiling, and the roots popped.

In a smithy

300 one sees a white-hot axehead or an adze  
plunged and wrung in a cold tub, screeching steam—  
the way they make soft iron hale and hard—:  
just so that eyeball hissed around the spike. **K**  
The Cyclops bellowed and the rock roared round him,  
305 and we fell back in fear. Clawing his face  
he tugged the bloody spike out of his eye,  
threw it away, and his wild hands went groping;  
then he set up a howl for Cyclopes  
who lived in caves on windy peaks nearby.  
310 Some heard him; and they came by divers ways  
to clump around outside and call:

‘What ails you,

Polyphemus? Why do you cry so sore  
in the starry night? You will not let us sleep.  
Sure no man’s driving off your flock? No man  
315 has tricked you, ruined you?’

Out of the cave

the mammoth Polyphemus roared in answer:

‘Nohbdy, Nohbdy’s tricked me, Nohbdy’s ruined me!’

To this rough shout they made a sage reply:

‘Ah well, if nobody has played you foul  
320 there in your lonely bed, we are no use in pain  
given by great Zeus. Let it be your father,  
Poseidon Lord, to whom you pray.’ **L**

So saying

they trailed away. And I was filled with laughter  
to see how like a charm the name deceived them.  
325 Now Cyclops, wheezing as the pain came on him,  
fumbled to wrench away the great doorstone

**299 smithy:** blacksmith’s shop.

**300 adze** (ădz): an axlike tool with  
a curved blade.

**K EPIC SIMILE**

Find the epic similes in lines 292–297  
and lines 299–303. What two  
things are being compared in each  
case? What are the effects of this  
**figurative language?**

**310 divers:** various.

**312 Polyphemus** (pŏl’ə-fē’məs):  
the name of the Cyclops.

**318 sage:** wise.

**319–322** Odysseus’ lie about his  
name has paid off. *What do the other  
Cyclopes assume to be the source of  
Polyphemus’ pain?*

**L ALLUSION**

What do you learn about  
Polyphemus from the allusion  
in lines 321–322?

and squatted in the breach with arms thrown wide  
for any silly beast or man who bolted—  
hoping somehow I might be such a fool.  
330 But I kept thinking how to win the game:  
death sat there huge; how could we slip away?  
I drew on all my wits, and ran through tactics,  
reasoning as a man will for dear life,  
until a trick came—and it pleased me well.  
335 The Cyclops' rams were handsome, fat, with heavy  
fleeces, a dark violet. **M**

Three abreast

I tied them silently together, twining  
cords of willow from the ogre's bed;  
then slung a man under each middle one  
340 to ride there safely, shielded left and right.  
So three sheep could convey each man. I took  
the woolliest ram, the choicest of the flock,  
and hung myself under his kinky belly,  
pulled up tight, with fingers twisted deep  
345 in sheepskin ringlets for an iron grip.  
So, breathing hard, we waited until morning.

When Dawn spread out her finger tips of rose  
the rams began to stir, moving for pasture,  
and peals of bleating echoed round the pens  
350 where dams with udders full called for a milking.  
Blinded, and sick with pain from his head wound,  
the master stroked each ram, then let it pass,  
but my men riding on the pectoral fleece  
the giant's blind hands blundering never found.  
355 Last of them all my ram, the leader, came,  
weighted by wool and me with my **meditations**.  
The Cyclops patted him, and then he said:

'Sweet cousin ram, why lag behind the rest  
in the night cave? You never linger so,  
360 but graze before them all, and go afar  
to crop sweet grass, and take your stately way  
leading along the streams, until at evening  
you run to be the first one in the fold.  
Why, now, so far behind? Can you be grieving  
365 over your Master's eye? That carrion rogue  
and his accurst companions burnt it out  
when he had conquered all my wits with wine.  
Nohbdy will not get out alive, I swear.

327 **breach**: opening.

**M** **EPIC HERO**

Notice Odysseus' great mental struggle in lines 330–336. As you read on, note the clever plan he has managed to come up with on the spot.

353 **pectoral fleece**: the wool covering a sheep's chest.

**meditation** (mĕd'ĭ-tā'shən)  
*n.* the act of being in serious, reflective thought

This 1910 color print depicts Odysseus taunting Polyphemus as he and his men make their escape.



Detail of *Odysseus and Polyphemus* (1910), after L. du Bois-Reymond. Color print. From *Sagen des klassischen Altertums* by Karl Becker, Berlin. © akg-images.

Oh, had you brain and voice to tell  
370 where he may be now, dodging all my fury!  
Bashed by this hand and bashed on this rock wall  
his brains would strew the floor, and I should have  
rest from the outrage Nohbdy worked upon me.’

He sent us into the open, then. Close by,  
375 I dropped and rolled clear of the ram’s belly,  
going this way and that to untie the men.  
With many glances back, we rounded up  
his fat, stiff-legged sheep to take aboard,  
and drove them down to where the good ship lay. **N**  
380 We saw, as we came near, our fellows’ faces  
shining; then we saw them turn to grief  
tallying those who had not fled from death.  
I hushed them, jerking head and eyebrows up,  
and in a low voice told them: ‘Load this herd;  
385 move fast, and put the ship’s head toward the breakers.’  
They all pitched in at loading, then embarked  
and struck their oars into the sea. Far out,  
as far off shore as shouted words would carry,  
I sent a few back to the **adversary**:

390 ‘O Cyclops! Would you feast on my companions?  
Puny, am I, in a Caveman’s hands?  
How do you like the beating that we gave you,  
you damned cannibal? Eater of guests  
under your roof! Zeus and the gods have paid you!’

395 The blind thing in his doubled fury broke  
a hilltop in his hands and heaved it after us.  
Ahead of our black prow it struck and sank  
whelmed in a spuming geyser, a giant wave  
that washed the ship stern foremost back to shore.

400 I got the longest boathook out and stood  
fending us off, with furious nods to all  
to put their backs into a racing stroke—  
row, row, or perish. So the long oars bent  
kicking the foam sternward, making head  
405 until we drew away, and twice as far.  
Now when I cupped my hands I heard the crew  
in low voices protesting:

‘Godsake, Captain!  
Why bait the beast again? Let him alone!’

### **N** EPIC HERO

What **character traits** has Odysseus demonstrated in his dealings with Polyphemus?

**385 put . . . the breakers:** turn the ship around so that it is heading toward the open sea.

**adversary** (ăd’vər-sĕr’ĕ)  
*n.* an opponent; enemy

**390–394** Odysseus assumes that the gods are on his side.

**395–403** The hilltop thrown by Polyphemus lands in front of the ship, causing a huge wave that carries the ship back to the shore. Odysseus uses a long pole to push the boat away from the land.

**406 cupped my hands:** put his hands on either side of his mouth in order to magnify his voice.

‘That tidal wave he made on the first throw  
410 all but beached us.’

‘All but stove us in!’

‘Give him our bearing with your trumpeting,  
he’ll get the range and lob a boulder.’

‘Aye

He’ll smash our timbers and our heads together!’

I would not heed them in my glorying spirit,  
415 but let my anger flare and yelled:

‘Cyclops,

if ever mortal man inquire  
how you were put to shame and blinded, tell him  
Odysseus, raider of cities, took your eye:  
Laertes’ son, whose home’s on Ithaca!’

420 At this he gave a mighty sob and rumbled:

‘Now comes the weird upon me, spoken of old.  
A wizard, grand and wondrous, lived here—Telemus,  
a son of Eurymus; great length of days  
he had in wizardry among the Cyclopes,  
425 and these things he foretold for time to come:  
my great eye lost, and at Odysseus’ hands.  
Always I had in mind some giant, armed  
in giant force, would come against me here.  
But this, but you—small, pitiful and twiggy—  
430 you put me down with wine, you blinded me.  
Come back, Odysseus, and I’ll treat you well,  
praying the god of earthquake to befriend you—  
his son I am, for he by his avowal  
fathered me, and, if he will, he may  
435 heal me of this black wound—he and no other  
of all the happy gods or mortal men.’

Few words I shouted in reply to him:  
‘If I could take your life I would and take  
your time away, and hurl you down to hell!  
440 The god of earthquake could not heal you there!’

At this he stretched his hands out in his darkness  
toward the sky of stars, and prayed Poseidon:

## Language Coach

**Multiple Meanings** The word *stove* has multiple meanings. It can mean “a mechanism used for heating or cooking,” or it can mean “smashed” (as the past tense of *stave*). Which meaning applies in line 410? How can you tell?

### EPITHET

Notice that Odysseus uses the warlike **epithet** “raider of cities” in his second boast to the Cyclops. What **trait** does he display in revealing so much about himself?

**421 Now comes . . . of old:** Now I recall the destiny predicted long ago.

**421–430 Now comes . . . you blinded me:** Polyphemus tells of a prophecy made long ago by Telemus, a prophet who predicted that Polyphemus would lose his eye at the hands of Odysseus. *How have the actual events turned out differently from what Polyphemus expected?*

**432 the god of earthquake:** Poseidon.

**433 avowal:** honest admission.

'O hear me, lord, blue girdler of the islands,  
if I am thine indeed, and thou art father:  
445 grant that Odysseus, raider of cities, never  
see his home: Laertes' son, I mean,  
who kept his hall on Ithaca. Should destiny  
intend that he shall see his roof again  
among his family in his father land,  
450 far be that day, and dark the years between.  
Let him lose all companions, and return  
under strange sail to bitter days at home.' P

In these words he prayed, and the god heard him.  
Now he laid hands upon a bigger stone  
455 and wheeled around, titanic for the cast,  
to let it fly in the black-prowed vessel's track.  
But it fell short, just aft the steering oar,  
and whelming seas rose giant above the stone  
to bear us onward toward the island.

460 as we ran in we saw the squadron waiting,  
the trim ships drawn up side by side, and all  
our troubled friends who waited, looking seaward.  
We beached her, grinding keel in the soft sand,  
and waded in, ourselves, on the sandy beach.  
465 Then we unloaded all the Cyclops' flock  
to make division, share and share alike,  
only my fighters voted that my ram,  
the prize of all, should go to me. I slew him  
by the sea side and burnt his long thighbones  
470 to Zeus beyond the stormcloud, Cronus' son,  
who rules the world. But Zeus disdained my offering;  
destruction for my ships he had in store  
and death for those who sailed them, my companions.

Now all day long until the sun went down  
475 we made our feast on mutton and sweet wine,  
till after sunset in the gathering dark  
we went to sleep above the wash of ripples.

When the young Dawn with finger tips of rose  
touched the world, I roused the men, gave orders  
480 to man the ships, cast off the mooring lines;  
and filing in to sit beside the rowlocks  
oarsmen in line dipped oars in the gray sea.  
So we moved out, sad in the vast offing,  
having our precious lives, but not our friends."

**P EPIC HERO**

Reread lines 437–452. Paraphrase Polyphemus' curse. How has Odysseus brought this curse upon himself?

**455 titanic for the cast:** drawing on all his enormous strength in preparing to throw.

**457 aft:** behind.

**459 the island:** the deserted island where most of Odysseus' men had stayed behind.

There

**470 Cronus' son:** Zeus' father, Cronus, was a Titan, one of an earlier race of gods.

**483 offing:** the part of the deep sea visible from the shore.

# BOOK 10:

## *Circe, the Grace of the Witch*



Detail of *Tilla Durieux as Circe* (c. 1912–1913), Franz von Struck. Oil on paper, 53.5 cm × 46.5 cm. Private collection. © akg-images.

*Odysseus and his men next land on the island of Aeolus, the wind king, and stay with him a month. To extend his hospitality, Aeolus gives Odysseus two parting gifts: a fair west wind that will blow the fleet of ships toward Ithaca, and a great bag holding all the unfavorable, stormy winds. Within sight of home, and while Odysseus is sleeping, the men open the bag, thinking it contains gold and silver. The bad winds thus escape and blow the ships back to Aeolus' island. The king refuses to help them again, believing now that their voyage has been cursed by the gods.*

*The discouraged mariners next stop briefly in the land of the Laestrygones, fierce cannibals who bombard the fleet of ships with boulders. Only Odysseus, his ship, and its crew of 45 survive the shower of boulders. The lone ship then sails to Aeaea, home of the goddess Circe, who is considered by many to be a witch. There, Odysseus divides his men into two groups. Eurylochus leads one platoon to explore the island, while Odysseus stays behind on the ship with the remaining crew.*

“In the wild wood they found an open glade,  
around a smooth stone house—the hall of Circe—  
and wolves and mountain lions lay there, mild  
in her soft spell, fed on her drug of evil.

- 5 None would attack—oh, it was strange, I tell you—  
but switching their long tails they faced our men  
like hounds, who look up when their master comes  
with tidbits for them—as he will—from table.  
Humbly those wolves and lions with mighty paws  
10 fawned on our men—who met their yellow eyes  
and feared them. **ⓐ**

In the entrance way they stayed  
to listen there: inside her quiet house  
they heard the goddess Circe.

- in her **beguiling** voice, while on her loom  
15 she wove ambrosial fabric sheer and bright,

Low she sang

**10 fawned on:** showed affection for.

### **ⓐ EPIC SIMILE**

In lines 6–11, notice the simile involving Circe's wolves and mountain lions. What is the point of this comparison? How does it affect your impression of Circe's hall?

**beguiling** (bĕ-gĭ-lĭng) *adj.* charming; pleasing **beguile** *v.*

**15 ambrosial:** fit for the gods.

by that craft known to the goddesses of heaven.  
No one would speak, until Polites—most  
faithful and likable of my officers, said:

17 Polites (pə-lī'tēz).

'Dear friends, no need for stealth: here's a young weaver  
20 singing a pretty song to set the air  
a-tingle on these lawns and paven courts.  
Goddess she is, or lady. Shall we greet her?'

So reassured, they all cried out together,  
and she came swiftly to the shining doors  
25 to call them in. All but Eurylochus—  
who feared a snare—the innocents went after her.  
On thrones she seated them, and lounging chairs,  
while she prepared a meal of cheese and barley  
and amber honey mixed with Pramnian wine,  
30 adding her own vile pinch, to make them lose  
desire or thought of our dear father land.

23–26 *If you were among this group, whom would you follow—Polites or Eurylochus? Why?*

Scarce had they drunk when she flew after them  
with her long stick and shut them in a pigsty—  
bodies, voices, heads, and bristles, all  
35 swinish now, though minds were still unchanged.  
So, squealing, in they went. And Circe tossed them  
acorns, mast, and cornel berries—fodder  
for hogs who rut and slumber on the earth.

27–36 *What happens to the men after they drink Circe's magic potion?*

Down to the ship Eurylochus came running  
40 to cry alarm, foul magic doomed his men!  
But working with dry lips to speak a word  
he could not, being so shaken; blinding tears  
welled in his eyes; **foreboding** filled his heart.  
When we were frantic questioning him, at last  
45 we heard the tale: our friends were gone. . . ."

**foreboding** (fôr-bō'dīng) *n.* a sense of approaching evil

*Eurylochus tells Odysseus what has happened and begs him to sail away from Circe's island. Against this advice, however, Odysseus rushes to save his men from the enchantress. On the way, he meets the god Hermes, who gives him a magical plant called moly to protect him from Circe's power. Still, Hermes warns Odysseus that he must make the goddess swear she will play no "witches' tricks." Armed with the moly and Hermes' warning, Odysseus arrives at Circe's palace.*

*Circe gives Odysseus a magic drink, but it does not affect him and he threatens to kill her with his sword. Circe turns the pigs back into men but puts them all into a trance. They stay for one year, until Odysseus finally begs her to let them go home. She replies that they must first visit the land of the dead and hear a prophecy from the ghost of Tiresias.*

# BOOK 11:

## *The Land of the Dead*

*Odysseus and his crew set out for the land of the dead. They arrive and find the place to which Circe has directed them.*

“Then I addressed the blurred and breathless dead,  
vowing to slaughter my best heifer for them  
before she calved, at home in Ithaca,  
and burn the choice bits on the altar fire;  
5 as for Tiresias, I swore to sacrifice  
a black lamb, handsomest of all our flock.  
Thus to **assuage** the nations of the dead  
I pledged these rites, then slashed the lamb and ewe,  
letting their black blood stream into the wellpit.  
10 Now the souls gathered, stirring out of Erebus,  
brides and young men, and men grown old in pain,  
and tender girls whose hearts were new to grief;  
many were there, too, torn by brazen lanceheads,  
battle-slain, bearing still their bloody gear.  
15 From every side they came and sought the pit  
with rustling cries; and I grew sick with fear.  
But presently I gave command to my officers  
to flay those sheep the bronze cut down, and make  
burnt offerings of flesh to the gods below—  
20 to sovereign Death, to pale Persephone. **R**  
Meanwhile I crouched with my drawn sword to keep  
the surging phantoms from the bloody pit  
till I should know the presence of Tiresias.

One shade came first—Elpenor, of our company,  
25 who lay unburied still on the wide earth  
as we had left him—dead in Circe’s hall,  
untouched, unmourned, when other cares compelled us.  
Now when I saw him there I wept for pity  
and called out to him:

**assuage** (ə-swāj’)  
v. to calm or pacify

**10 Erebus** (ēr’ə-bəs): a region of the land of the dead, also known as the underworld or Hades. Hades is also the name of the god of the underworld.

**18 flay**: to strip off the outer skin of.

### **R ALLUSION**

In lines 17–20, Odysseus makes a sacrifice to “sovereign Death,” or Hades, and “pale Persephone” (pər-sĕf’ə-nē), his bride, who was kidnapped and forced to live with him for six months of every year. Her mother, goddess of the harvest, grieves during that time, causing winter to fall. What does this background information tell you about Hades? Consider how this information affects your impression of the underworld.



*Ulysses Descending into the Underworld* (16th century), Giovanni Stradano. Fresco. Palazzo Vecchio, Florence.  
Photo © Scala/Art Resource, New York.

‘How is this, Elpenor,  
30 how could you journey to the western gloom  
swifter afoot than I in the black lugger?’

He sighed, and answered:

‘Son of great Laertes,  
Odysseus, master mariner and soldier,  
bad luck shadowed me, and no kindly power;  
35 ignoble death I drank with so much wine.  
I slept on Circe’s roof, then could not see  
the long steep backward ladder, coming down,  
and fell that height. My neck bone, buckled under,  
snapped, and my spirit found this well of dark.  
40 Now hear the grace I pray for, in the name  
of those back in the world, not here—your wife  
and father, he who gave you bread in childhood,  
and your own child, your only son, Telemachus,  
long ago left at home.

### ▲ Analyze Visuals

This 16th-century painting illustrates the descent of Ulysses (Odysseus) into the underworld. How has the artist distinguished between Ulysses and the dead, also known as shades?

### Language Coach

**Roots and Affixes** The prefix *in-* (“not”) changes form depending on the first letter of the word to which it affixes. (That is, the letter *n* changes to a different letter.) What word in line 35 contains a form of the prefix *in-*? What does the word mean?

When you make sail

45 and put these lodgings of dim Death behind,  
you will moor ship, I know, upon Aeaëa Island;  
there, O my lord, remember me, I pray,  
do not abandon me unwept, unburied,  
to tempt the gods' wrath, while you sail for home;  
50 but fire my corpse, and all the gear I had,  
and build a cairn for me above the breakers—  
an unknown sailor's mark for men to come.  
Heap up the mound there, and implant upon it  
the oar I pulled in life with my companions.'

**50–51 fire my corpse . . . cairn:** Elpenor wants Odysseus to hold a funeral for him.

55 He ceased, and I replied:

'Unhappy spirit,

I promise you the barrow and the burial.'

So we conversed, and grimly, at a distance,  
with my long sword between, guarding the blood,  
while the faint image of the lad spoke on.  
60 Now came the soul of Anticlea, dead,  
my mother, daughter of Autolycus,  
dead now, though living still when I took ship  
for holy Troy. Seeing this ghost I grieved,  
but held her off, through pang on pang of tears,  
65 till I should know the presence of Tiresias.  
Soon from the dark that prince of Thebes came forward  
bearing a golden staff; and he addressed me:

**58 with my long sword . . . blood:** the ghosts are attracted to the blood of the sacrifice; Odysseus must hold them at bay with his sword.

'Son of Laertes and the gods of old,  
Odysseus, master of land ways and sea ways,  
70 why leave the blazing sun, O man of woe,  
to see the cold dead and the joyless region?  
Stand clear, put up your sword;  
let me but taste of blood, I shall speak true.'

**66 prince of Thebes:** Tiresias, the blind seer, comes from the city of Thebes (thēbz).

At this I stepped aside, and in the scabbard  
75 let my long sword ring home to the pommel silver,  
as he bent down to the sombre blood. Then spoke  
the prince of those with gift of speech:

'Great captain,

a fair wind and the honey lights of home  
are all you seek. But anguish lies ahead;  
80 the god who thunders on the land prepares it,  
not to be shaken from your track, implacable,

in rancor for the son whose eye you blinded.  
One narrow strait may take you through his blows:  
denial of yourself, restraint of shipmates.  
85 When you make landfall on Thrinacia first  
and quit the violet sea, dark on the land  
you'll find the grazing herds of Helios  
by whom all things are seen, all speech is known.  
Avoid those kine, hold fast to your intent,  
90 and hard seafaring brings you all to Ithaca.  
But if you raid the beeves, I see destruction  
for ship and crew. Though you survive alone,  
bereft of all companions, lost for years,  
under strange sail shall you come home, to find  
95 your own house filled with trouble: insolent men  
eating your livestock as they court your lady.  
Aye, you shall make those men atone in blood!  
But after you have dealt out death—in open  
combat or by stealth—to all the suitors,  
100 go overland on foot, and take an oar,  
until one day you come where men have lived  
with meat unsalted, never known the sea,  
nor seen seagoing ships, with crimson bows  
and oars that fledge light hulls for dipping flight.  
105 The spot will soon be plain to you, and I  
can tell you how: some passerby will say,  
“What winnowing fan is that upon your shoulder?”  
Halt, and implant your smooth oar in the turf  
and make fair sacrifice to Lord Poseidon:  
110 a ram, a bull, a great buck boar; turn back,  
and carry out pure hekatombs at home  
to all wide heaven's lords, the undying gods,  
to each in order. Then a seaborne death  
soft as this hand of mist will come upon you  
115 when you are wearied out with rich old age,  
your country folk in blessed peace around you.  
And all this shall be just as I foretell.' . . .” 

*Odysseus speaks to the shade of his mother. She tells him that Penelope and Telemachus are still grieving for him and that his father, Laertes, has moved to the country, where he, too, mourns his son. Odysseus' mother explains that she died from a broken heart. Odysseus also speaks with the spirits of many great ladies and men who died, as well as those who were being punished for their earthly sins. Filled with horror, Odysseus and his crew set sail.*

89–91 **kine; beeves:** two words for cattle.

101–102 **where men have lived with meat unsalted:** refers to an inland location where men do not eat salted (preserved) meat as sailors do aboard a ship.



TEKS 5A

### EPIC HERO

An epic hero's fate is often a matter of great importance to the gods and to the hero's homeland. In lines 77–117, Odysseus' fate is the subject of a prophecy by Tiresias, a blind seer who now dwells among the dead. A prophecy such as this can serve as **foreshadowing**, a type of non-linear plot development in an epic or other story. Do you think that Odysseus' fate will unfold exactly as Tiresias foretells it? Explain why you think as you do.

# BOOK 12:

## *The Sirens; Scylla and Charybdis*

*Odysseus and his men return to Circe's island. While the men sleep, Circe takes Odysseus aside to hear about the underworld and to offer advice.*

“Then said the Lady Circe:

‘So: all those trials are over.

Listen with care

to this, now, and a god will arm your mind.  
Square in your ship's path are Sirens, crying  
5 beauty to bewitch men coasting by;  
woe to the innocent who hears that sound!  
He will not see his lady nor his children  
in joy, crowding about him, home from sea;  
the Sirens will sing his mind away  
10 on their sweet meadow lolling. There are bones  
of dead men rotting in a pile beside them  
and flayed skins shrivel around the spot.

Steer wide;

keep well to seaward; plug your oarsmen's ears  
with beeswax kneaded soft; none of the rest  
15 should hear that song.

But if you wish to listen,

let the men tie you in the lugger, hand  
and foot, back to the mast, lashed to the mast,  
so you may hear those harpies' thrilling voices;  
shout as you will, begging to be untied,  
20 your crew must only twist more line around you  
and keep their stroke up, till the singers fade.  
What then? One of two courses you may take,  
and you yourself must weigh them. I shall not  
plan the whole action for you now, but only  
25 tell you of both.

### Analyze Visuals ▶

This detail from a 19th-century painting shows Odysseus tied to the mast of his ship to protect him from the Sirens' tempting song. Notice that his men have all covered their ears. How does the artist's depiction of the Sirens affect your understanding of the story? Explain.

**2–3** In Circe, Odysseus has found a valuable ally. In the next hundred lines, she describes in detail each danger that he and his men will meet on their way home.

**14 kneaded** (nē'dīd): squeezed and pressed.

**18 those harpies' thrilling voices:** the delightful voices of those horrible female creatures.

Detail of *Ulysses and the Sirens* (1891), John William Waterhouse. Oil on canvas, 100 cm × 201.7 cm. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia. Photo © Bridgeman Art Library.



Ahead are beetling rocks  
and dark blue glancing Amphitrite, surging,  
roars around them. Prowling Rocks, or Drifters,  
the gods in bliss have named them—named them well.  
Not even birds can pass them by. . . .

30 A second course

lies between headlands. One is a sharp mountain  
piercing the sky, with stormcloud round the peak  
dissolving never, not in the brightest summer,  
to show heaven's azure there, nor in the fall.  
35 No mortal man could scale it, nor so much  
as land there, not with twenty hands and feet,  
so sheer the cliffs are—as of polished stone.  
Midway that height, a cavern full of mist  
opens toward Erebus and evening. Skirting  
40 this in the lugger, great Odysseus,  
your master Bowman, shooting from the deck,  
would come short of the cavemouth with his shaft;  
but that is the den of Scylla, where she yaps  
**abominably**, a newborn whelp's cry,  
45 though she is huge and monstrous. God or man,  
no one could look on her in joy. Her legs—  
and there are twelve—are like great tentacles,  
unjointed, and upon her serpent necks  
are borne six heads like nightmares of ferocity,  
50 with triple serried rows of fangs and deep  
gullets of black death. Half her length, she sways  
her heads in air, outside her horrid cleft,  
hunting the sea around that promontory  
for dolphins, dogfish, or what bigger game  
55 thundering Amphitrite feeds in thousands.  
And no ship's company can claim  
to have passed her without loss and grief; she takes,  
from every ship, one man for every gullet.

The opposite point seems more a tongue of land  
60 you'd touch with a good bowshot, at the narrows.  
A great wild fig, a shaggy mass of leaves,  
grows on it, and Charybdis lurks below  
to swallow down the dark sea tide. Three times  
from dawn to dusk she spews it up  
65 and sucks it down again three times, a whirling  
maelstrom; if you come upon her then  
the god who makes earth tremble could not save you.

**25 beetling:** jutting or overhanging.

**26 glancing Amphitrite** (ăm'fī-trī'tē): sparkling seawater. (Amphitrite is the goddess of the sea and the wife of Poseidon. Here, Circe uses the name to refer to the sea itself.)

**31 headlands:** points of land jutting out into the sea; promontories.

**34 heaven's azure** (ăzh'ər): the blue sky.

**abominably** (ə-bŏm'ə-nə-blē) *adv.* in a hateful way; horribly

### Language Coach

**Homophones** Words that sound alike but have different meanings, and often different spellings, are called **homophones**. What verb in line 49 is a homophone of *born*? What is the present tense form of this verb? Refer to a dictionary if you need help.

**43–55** Circe presents a very unpleasant image of Scylla. *To get a better idea of what Odysseus and his crew will be up against, try using this detailed description to either visualize or draw a picture of Scylla.*

**66 maelstrom** (māl'strəm): a large, violent whirlpool.

No, hug the cliff of Scylla, take your ship  
through on a racing stroke. Better to mourn  
70 six men than lose them all, and the ship, too.’

So her advice ran; but I faced her, saying:

‘Only instruct me, goddess, if you will,  
how, if possible, can I pass Charybdis,  
or fight off Scylla when she raids my crew?’

75 Swiftly that loveliest goddess answered me:

‘Must you have battle in your heart forever?  
The bloody toil of combat? Old contender,  
will you not yield to the immortal gods?  
That nightmare cannot die, being eternal  
80 evil itself—horror, and pain, and chaos;  
there is no fighting her, no power can fight her,  
all that avails is flight.

Lose headway there

along that rockface while you break out arms,  
and she’ll swoop over you, I fear, once more,  
85 taking one man again for every gullet. **T**  
No, no, put all your backs into it, row on;  
invoke Blind Force, that bore this scourge of men,  
to keep her from a second strike against you.

Then you will coast Thrinacia, the island  
90 where Helios’ cattle graze, fine herds, and flocks  
of goodly sheep. The herds and flocks are seven,  
with fifty beasts in each.

No lambs are dropped,

or calves, and these fat cattle never die.  
Immortal, too, their cowherds are—their shepherds—  
95 Phaethusa and Lampetia, sweetly braided  
nymphs that divine Neaera bore  
to the overlord of high noon, Helios.  
These nymphs their gentle mother bred and placed  
upon Thrinacia, the distant land,  
100 in care of flocks and cattle for their father.

Now give those kine a wide berth, keep your thoughts  
intent upon your course for home,  
and hard seafaring brings you all to Ithaca.  
But if you raid the beeves, I see destruction  
105 for ship and crew.

**82 all . . . flight:** all you can do is flee.

### **T** EPIC HERO

Summarize the exchange between Odysseus and Circe in lines 68–85. What is Circe’s advice to Odysseus? Do you think he will follow her advice? Explain.

**87 invoke . . . men:** pray to the goddess Blind Force, who gave birth to Scylla.

**89 coast:** sail along the coast of.

**95–96 Phaethusa** (fā’ē-thōō’sə);  
**Lampetia** (läm-pē’sə); **Neaera** (nē-ē’rə).

**101–105** Circe warns Odysseus not to steal Helios’ fine cattle because Helios will take revenge.

Rough years then lie between  
you and your homecoming, alone and old,  
the one survivor, all companions lost.’ . . .” **U**

*At dawn, Odysseus and his men continue their journey. Odysseus decides to tell the men only of Circe’s warnings about the Sirens, whom they will soon encounter. He is fairly sure that they can survive this peril if he keeps their spirits up. Suddenly, the wind stops.*

“The crew were on their feet  
briskly, to furl the sail, and stow it; then,  
110 each in place, they poised the smooth oar blades  
and sent the white foam scudding by. I carved  
a massive cake of beeswax into bits  
and rolled them in my hands until they softened—  
no long task, for a burning heat came down  
115 from Helios, lord of high noon. Going forward  
I carried wax along the line, and laid it  
thick on their ears. They tied me up, then, plumb  
amidships, back to the mast, lashed to the mast,  
and took themselves again to rowing. Soon,  
120 as we came smartly within hailing distance,  
the two Sirens, noting our fast ship  
off their point, made ready, and they sang. . . .

The lovely voices in **ardor** appealing over the water  
made me crave to listen, and I tried to say  
125 ‘Untie me!’ to the crew, jerking my brows;  
but they bent steady to the oars. Then Perimedes  
got to his feet, he and Eurylochus,  
and passed more line about, to hold me still.  
So all rowed on, until the Sirens  
130 dropped under the sea rim, and their singing  
dwindled away.

My faithful company  
rested on their oars now, peeling off  
the wax that I had laid thick on their ears;  
then set me free.

But scarcely had that island  
135 faded in blue air than I saw smoke  
and white water, with sound of waves in tumult—  
a sound the men heard, and it terrified them.  
Oars flew from their hands; the blades went knocking  
wild alongside till the ship lost way,  
140 with no oarblades to drive her through the water.

## **U** EPIC HERO

Reread lines 104–107, and reconsider your thoughts about Tiresias’ prophecy. Do you think Odysseus has the power to steer his fate? Explain.

**117–118 plumb amidships:** exactly in the center of the ship.

**ardor** (är’dər) *n.* passion

**126 Perimedes** (pĕr’ĭ-mĕ’dĕz).

**134–139** The men panic when they hear the thundering surf.

Well, I walked up and down from bow to stern,  
trying to put heart into them, standing over  
every oarsman, saying gently,

‘Friends,

have we never been in danger before this?

145 More fearsome, is it now, than when the Cyclops  
penned us in his cave? What power he had!  
Did I not keep my nerve, and use my wits  
to find a way out for us?

Now I say

by hook or crook this peril too shall be  
150 something that we remember.

Heads up, lads!

We must obey the orders as I give them.  
Get the oarshafts in your hands, and lay back  
hard on your benches; hit these breaking seas.  
Zeus help us pull away before we founder.

155 You at the tiller, listen, and take in  
all that I say—the rudders are your duty;  
keep her out of the combers and the smoke;  
steer for that headland; watch the drift, or we  
fetch up in the smother, and you drown us.’

160 That was all, and it brought them round to action.  
But as I sent them on toward Scylla, I  
told them nothing, as they could do nothing.  
They would have dropped their oars again, in panic,  
to roll for cover under the decking. Circe’s  
165 bidding against arms had slipped my mind,  
so I tied on my cuirass and took up  
two heavy spears, then made my way along  
to the foredeck—thinking to see her first from there,  
the monster of the gray rock, harboring  
170 torment for my friends. I strained my eyes  
upon that cliffside veiled in cloud, but nowhere  
could I catch sight of her.

And all this time,

in **travail**, sobbing, gaining on the current,  
we rowed into the strait—Scylla to port  
175 and on our starboard beam Charybdis, dire  
gorge of the salt sea tide. By heaven! when she  
vomited, all the sea was like a cauldron  
seething over intense fire, when the mixture  
suddenly heaves and rises. **v**

### Language Coach

**Idioms** The **idiom**, or stock phrase, “by hook or by crook” may have originally referred to the practice of gathering firewood from dead tree branches using hooks or crooks (shepherd’s sticks). What does it seem to mean in line 149?

**154 founder:** sink.

**157 combers:** breaking waves.

**158–159 watch . . . smother:** keep the ship on course, or it will be crushed in the rough water.

**travail** (trə-vāl’) *n.* painful effort

**176 gorge:** throat; gullet.

### **v** EPIC HERO

Consider Odysseus’ behavior in lines 108–179. Do you think he is a good leader? Explain your opinion.

The shot spume  
180 soared to the landside heights, and fell like rain.

But when she swallowed the sea water down  
we saw the funnel of the maelstrom, heard  
the rock bellowing all around, and dark  
sand raged on the bottom far below.

185 My men all blanched against the gloom, our eyes  
were fixed upon that yawning mouth in fear  
of being devoured.

Then Scylla made her strike,  
whisking six of my best men from the ship.  
I happened to glance aft at ship and oarsmen  
190 and caught sight of their arms and legs, dangling  
high overhead. Voices came down to me  
in anguish, calling my name for the last time.

A man surfcasting on a point of rock  
for bass or mackerel, whipping his long rod  
195 to drop the sinker and the bait far out,  
will hook a fish and rip it from the surface  
to dangle wriggling through the air:

were borne aloft in spasms toward the cliff.

so these

She ate them as they shrieked there, in her den,  
200 in the dire grapple, reaching still for me—  
and deathly pity ran me through  
at that sight—far the worst I ever suffered,  
questing the passes of the strange sea.

We rowed on.

The Rocks were now behind; Charybdis, too,  
205 and Scylla dropped astern. . . .”

*Odysseus tries to persuade his men to bypass Thrinacia, the island of the sun god, Helios, but they insist on landing. Driven by hunger, they ignore Odysseus' warning not to feast on Helios' cattle. This disobedience angers the sun god, who threatens to stop shining if payment is not made for the loss of his cattle. To appease Helios, Zeus sends down a thunderbolt to sink Odysseus' ship. Odysseus alone survives. He eventually drifts to Ogygia, the home of Calypso, who keeps him on her island for seven years. With this episode, Odysseus ends the telling of his tale to King Alcinous.*

179 **shot spume:** flying foam.

185 **blanched:** became pale.

189 **aft:** toward the rear of the ship.

198 **borne aloft in spasms:** lifted high while struggling violently.

200 **grapple:** grasp.

### Analyze Visuals ▶

Apart from depicting a different narrative moment, how does this 16th-century painting differ from the one on page 1231? Be specific in describing the differences in style and mood.



*Scylla and Charybdis* from the *Ulysses Cycle* (1580), Alessandro Allori. Fresco. Banca Toscana (Palazzo Salviati), Florence. Photo © Erich Lessing/Art Resource, New York.

## Comprehension

- Recall** Why does Odysseus want to leave Calypso and her island?
- Recall** How does Odysseus escape from Polyphemus?
- Recall** What happens to Eurylochus' men after they drink Circe's wine?
- Recall** What does Tiresias predict will happen if Odysseus raids the herds of Helios?
- Summarize** How does Odysseus survive the dangers posed by the Sirens, Scylla, and Charybdis?



**READING 2B** Analyze the influence of mythic and traditional literature on 20th and 21st century literature.

**5B** Analyze how authors develop characters.

**5D** Demonstrate familiarity with works by authors from non-English-speaking literary traditions, with emphasis on classical literature.

## Literary Analysis

- Analyze Epic Hero** Create a two-column chart to analyze Odysseus' strengths and weaknesses. To what extent do the traits in each column seem fitting for an epic hero? Explain.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<i>shows loyalty in his desire to reach home</i>	<i>pride</i>

- Analyze Epithets** Identify at least five epithets used to describe Odysseus in Part 1. For each epithet, explain what it tells you about his **character**.
- Understand Character Motivation** After Odysseus escapes from Polyphemus, he makes sure that Polyphemus knows who outwitted him. Why does he care? What are the consequences of Odysseus' behavior?
- Interpret Epic Simile** Reread the **epic simile** on page 1236, lines 193–198, which describes the men being caught by Scylla. Explain what two items are being compared. What does the comparison help to emphasize?
- Interpret Allusions** In the opening lines of Book 1, the poet calls upon Muse, a daughter of Zeus often credited with inspiration. Why would he open the epic in this way? What does this allusion tell you about him as a poet?
- Examine Theme** One theme in Part 1 is that a hero must rely on clever deceit, or guile, to survive. Explain how this theme is conveyed.

## Literary Criticism

- Critical Interpretations** In discussing Homer's use of epic similes, the critic Eva Brann contends that "similes do much the same work in Homeric epic as do the gods, who also beautify and magnify human existence." Think about how the gods interact with humans in the *Odyssey*. Do you agree that they "beautify and magnify" human existence? Then consider the epic similes you have encountered so far; how might they be seen to do the same? Explain.

### What is a HERO?

What heroes like Odysseus have you encountered in modern literature?

# Vocabulary in Context

## ▲ VOCABULARY PRACTICE

Decide whether the words in each pair are synonyms or antonyms.

- |                       |                              |
|-----------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. harried/calmed     | 7. ponderous/awkward         |
| 2. appalled/dismayed  | 8. travail/relaxation        |
| 3. profusion/shortage | 9. beguiling/entrancing      |
| 4. ardor/indifference | 10. foreboding/prediction    |
| 5. assuage/soothe     | 11. abominably/atrociously   |
| 6. adversary/friend   | 12. meditation/contemplation |

## ACADEMIC VOCABULARY IN WRITING

- demonstrate
- emphasis
- ideology
- monitor
- undertake

Why is it taking Odysseus so long to get back to Ithaca? **Demonstrate** your understanding by writing a short description of Odysseus' journey so far. Explain Homer's **emphasis** on the trials Odysseus faces. Use at least one Academic Vocabulary word in your response.

## VOCABULARY STRATEGY: WORDS WITH THE PREFIX *fore-*

Recognizing prefixes can help you determine the meanings of unfamiliar words, whether in literature or nonfiction readings in other disciplines. The prefix *fore-*, which comes from Old English and means "earlier," "in front of," or "beforehand," is used in forming numerous English words. In *foreboding*, it is combined with the verb *bode*, "to give signs of something." *Fore-* is also combined with many common words, as in *forehead* and *foretell*.

**PRACTICE** Choose a word from the box to complete each sentence. Refer to a dictionary if you need help.

1. Our \_\_\_\_\_ came to this land looking for freedom.
2. Diandra tried to \_\_\_\_\_ Jack before he walked right into the trap.
3. In the \_\_\_\_\_ of the painting was a large house; behind the house was a barn.
4. Casual comments early in a story often \_\_\_\_\_ coming events.
5. The tennis star's strong \_\_\_\_\_ made her a formidable opponent.
6. To \_\_\_\_\_ a quick vote on the issue, the committee voted to study it further.
7. In what way was the horse and buggy the \_\_\_\_\_ of the automobile?

### WORDS WITH *fore-*

- forefathers
- foreground
- forehand
- forerunner
- foreshadow
- forestall
- forewarn

### WORD LIST

- abominably
- adversary
- appalled
- ardor
- assuage
- beguiling
- foreboding
- harried
- meditation
- ponderous
- profusion
- travail



**READING 1A** Determine the meaning of grade-level academic English words in multiple content areas derived from other linguistic affixes.

Interactive Vocabulary **THINK** central  
Go to [thinkcentral.com](http://thinkcentral.com).  
KEYWORD: HML9-1239