

# "THE ODYSSEY" BACKGROUND INFORMATION

We are about to start our voyage amongst the homeric ship! We are traveling all over in the Mediterranean during our epic quest to get home! Before we are able to make it home safely, we have to make several stops along the way. During those stops, we will gain the background information necessary to understand the odyssey, and make it back alive.



## Stop 1: Epic Poetry. (Place to go: 1040F in the textbook)

1. What is an epic?

A long narrative poem that relates important events in the history or folklore of the culture that produced it.

2. List **four** literary devices and/or characteristics of an epic poem. Explain.

a. opening invocation to the muse

i. Explanation: speaker asks muse for inspiration

b. starting "in media res"

i. Explanation: look at definition later in packet

c. lofty style

i. Explanation: elegant language

d. objective tone

i. Explanation: keeping an emotional distance

3. List three other Epic Poems influenced "The Odyssey" and its author Homer.

a. Beowulf

b. Divine Comedy

c. Aeneid

Got it? Good! Now, for the next stop, we have to stay in the book. While there is a lot we do not know, everyone knows that there's no place like Home(r). You can also use 1040E in the textbook.

1. Was there really a Homer? When was he born? (No, not Homer Simpson.)

a) no one can prove his existence

b) 850 - 750 B.C.

2. What epic poem has similar traits to "The Odyssey"? What are those similarities?

a) Gilgamesh

b) • both heroes enter the underworld • both have good friends die

\* 3. What group of people greatly respected "The Odyssey"? What things did they do with it?

The Greek → recited poems @ religious ceremonies

Even though we know that there's no place like Home(r), we are about to learn what it will take to get back! First, we have to understand why Odysseus left in the first place! While it might seem like quite a bore, Odysseus left to fight in the Trojan War. (Go to page 1043 for the answer).



Guided notes on "The Odyssey" terms

Directions: Complete the chart when viewing the related PowerPoint presentation and reading "The Odyssey."

Term	Definition	Example pertaining to "The Odyssey"
epic poem	long narrative poem that relates to important events in the history or folklore of the culture	
epithet	characterizing phrase for a person, place, or thing	
epic simile	a long comparison over many lines	
epic hero	central character in an epic who is a larger-than-life figure, embodying traits that the culture values	(traits on the next page)
hero's journey	1) the ordinary world 2) call to adventure 3) refusal 4) mentor 5) crossing the threshold 6) test/allies/enemies 7) approach	
↓	8) ordeal 9) reward 10) the road back 11) atonement 12) return	
flashback	a scene that interrupts a narrative to relate earlier events	
en medias res	"in the middle of things" beginning w/ action instead of background information	
meter	fixed rhythmic pattern	

# CHARACTERISTICS OF EPIC HEROES

Most epic heroes possess most or all of 7 general characteristics you can use to help you decide if a character is, indeed, an epic hero or heroine.

## Trait 1: A Noble Birth

- Most epic heroes will have an above average station in life.
- They will be kings, princes, or nobles of some sort.
- Commoners usually do not become epic heroes.

## Trait 2: Capable of deeds of great strength and courage

- Basically, this means the hero has the potential for great deeds.
- The magnitude of these actions are well above and beyond what the commoner does.
- While most epic heroes are good, not all are.

## Trait 3: Great Warrior

- Before the hero of an epic does his business in the epic, he has usually established himself in combat during a war.
- Sometimes, as in The Iliad, we see the hero at war.
- In most, like Beowulf and The Odyssey, the hero has spent much time in battle.

## Trait 4: Travels Over a Vast Setting

- Simply put, you cannot be an epic hero if you stay in your village your whole life.
- The more countries or areas traveled to, the better.
- The farther away from your own country, the better.
- Distance makes the hero's actions greater because they aren't selfish; they are for another country or people.

## Trait 5: National Heroism

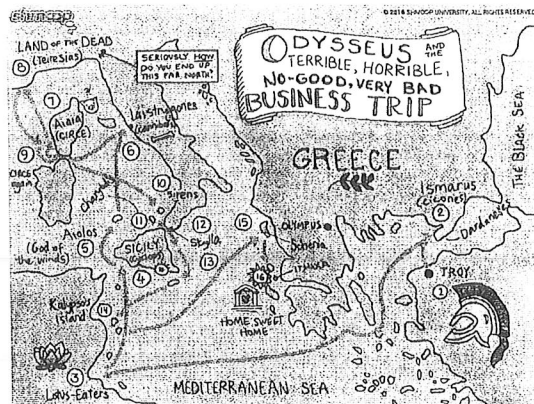
- Before a hero can be celebrated by countries the world over, he must first be recognized in his home country as a great and heroic person.

## Trait 6: Humility

- Even as the rest of the world recognizes the great deeds of the hero, he is never a braggart or even willing to take applause.
- He commits his deeds because he knows they need doing, and the fame and rewards that he receives are only a matter of course, not the reason for completing his quests.

## Trait 7: Faces Supernatural Foes and/or Receives Supernatural Help

- Most epic heroes either receive aid from a god or goddess or battle some superhuman enemy.
- This is what makes a hero's action epic: they fight something mere mortals cannot battle. Beowulf has his Grendel; Odysseus his Cyclops.
- For each hero, the enemy is unique. You won't see two heroes battling the same foe.



Guided Reading Questions of *The Odyssey*

Section 1: "Sailing from Troy"

Part of Hero's Journey: \_\_\_\_\_

Plot Summary: What happened?

• left Calypso • landed at Cicones • fought Achaeans • left for sea again • many men died in battle

Section 2: "The Lotus Eaters"

Part of Hero's Journey: \_\_\_\_\_

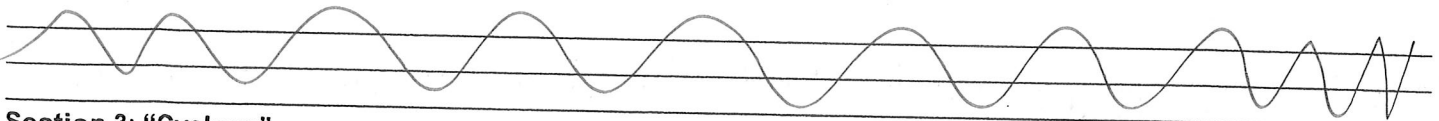
Plot Summary: What happened?

• landed @ coastline of Lotus Eaters • send 3 men to see what the people were like  
• men eat lotus flowers • never want to leave the island  
• Odysseus drags them out to the ship anyway

Character Summary: What did Odysseus and his crew do? Did anyone die or get left behind? What actions were taken during this section?

• no men die • 3 eat lotus • don't want to leave

The Prophecy: How does this part of the journey relate to Teiresias' prophecy? Is Odysseus trying to fight fate? Is the prophecy coming true?



Section 3: "Cyclops"

Part of Hero's Journey: \_\_\_\_\_

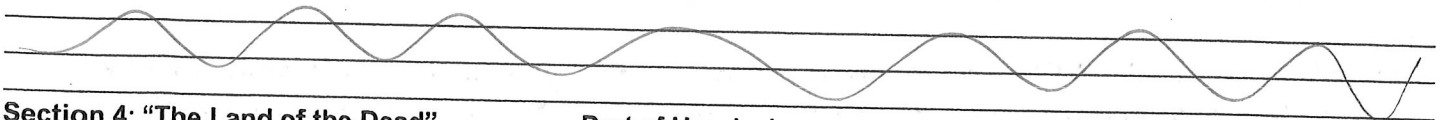
Plot Summary: What happened?

• go into cave • get cyclops drunk • tell cyclops his name is Nobody • stab cyclops' eye • escape using the goats • cyclops prays to Poseidon to have Odysseus' trip home here • long

Character Summary: What did Odysseus and his crew do? Did anyone die or get left behind? What actions were taken during this section?

• 12 men enter • 2 eaten for dinner • some eaten for breakfast • 5 stab cyclops' eye  
• 5 men leave

The Prophecy: How does this part of the journey relate to Teiresias' prophecy? Is Odysseus trying to fight fate? Is the prophecy coming true?



Section 4: "The Land of the Dead"

Part of Hero's Journey: \_\_\_\_\_

Plot Summary: What happened?

• land at Land of the Dead • give offering of blood & sheep • sees dead crewmen  
• sees dead man • gets Teiresias' prophecy

Character Summary: What did Odysseus and his crew do? Did anyone die or get left behind? What actions were taken during this section?

• finds out about 2 deaths • no one dies @ L. of. D

The Prophecy: How does this part of the journey relate to Teiresias' prophecy? Is Odysseus trying to fight fate?  
Is the prophecy coming true?

- Poseidon curses Odysseus
- O needs to restrain himself & shipmates
- don't eat Helios' cows
- eat cows everyone but O dies
- when you get home, men want your wife
- you will kill everyone
- make an offering to gods in L2

Section 5: "The Sirens"

Part of Hero's Journey: \_\_\_\_\_

Plot Summary: What happened?

- puts wax in crew's ears
- crew ties him to the mast
- the sirens sing
- O tries to escape
- they make it through the Sirens

Character Summary: What did Odysseus and his crew do? Did anyone die or get left behind? What actions were taken during this section?

- No one dies

The Prophecy: How does this part of the journey relate to Teiresias' prophecy? Is Odysseus trying to fight fate?  
Is the prophecy coming true?

yes - coming true

Section 6: "Scylla and Charybdis"

Part of Hero's Journey: \_\_\_\_\_

Plot Summary: What happened?

- sailing towards Scylla & Charybdis
- pass Charybdis
- Scylla eats 6 men
- escape Scylla & Charybdis

Character Summary: What did Odysseus and his crew do? Did anyone die or get left behind? What actions were taken during this section?

• 6 men die

The Prophecy: How does this part of the journey relate to Teiresias' prophecy? Is Odysseus trying to fight fate?  
Is the prophecy coming true?

yes - coming true

Section 7: "The Cattle of the Sun God"

Part of Hero's Journey: \_\_\_\_\_

Plot Summary: What happened?

- land at Helios' island
- run out of food & water
- O goes to pray but falls asleep
- men kill cows
- Helios is mad
- men leave island
- Zeus causes a shipwreck
- all men die
- O ends up at Calypso's island

Character Summary: What did Odysseus and his crew do? Did anyone die or get left behind? What actions were taken during this section?

• men eat cows = they all die

The Prophecy: How does this part of the journey relate to Teiresias' prophecy? Is Odysseus trying to fight fate?  
Is the prophecy coming true?

yes - coming true

\* Odysseus is gone for a total of 20 yrs before getting home \*