

Reading Help for *The Ramayana* Both Odysseus and Rama represent cultural ideals (they are favored by the gods). They are tested by having to spend years in the wilderness away from home. They are both saviors of their cultures. Looking at their likenesses and differences (at what is emphasized about them and at what is emphasized about the nature of their "tests" and their worlds) will tell us something about how Western perspectives differ from other perspectives. Odysseus is the "master of land ways and sea ways" (Odysseus Polytropos- many forms, versatile); Rama is the "Champion of Righteousness" (Dharma)

Dharma (literally, "that which holds"): the guiding principle of human conduct and the underlying principle of social, moral, and cosmic order. (An oath, someone's word, is imp. to dharma)

Karma (literally, "the deed that is done"): the principle that all creatures are responsible for their own existential condition- all deeds have results and affect the do-er. We become what we do.

Maya: illusion, self-delusion. The world is maya.

Important Characters: (List the characters' names with spaces under each name. Then read for answers to the questions below, making notes beside each name as it comes up in the reading.)
Rama, Sita (also called Janaki), Lakshmana, Bharata, Dasarutha, (Kausalya is Rama's mother), Kaikeyi, Hanuman (also called Anjaneya), Ravana, Soorpanakha, Mareecha, Jatayu, Vali, (Angada is Vali's mighty son), Sugreeva, (Tara is the monkey wife), Sampathi, Vibishana (Ravana's brother).

Reading Questions: Quizzes will pertain to what a character represents, why the character chooses to do something, to what happens to the character, and to why/how others react to that. Descriptions of characters indicate what the character represents and the meaning of what has occurred.

1. Who is the character related to and what does the character look like (physical description)?
2. What arguments are used to persuade a character to do or not do something?
3. What does the character choose to do and why (choices)? What are the reactions of others to the choice made?
4. What point is being made about the values and ways of seeing of this character?

At what point might Rama be tempted to lose self-control? To not have compassion?

What shows the value of "service" in this work?

What examples are there of the "relatedness" of all things?

How do people relate to nature and animals?

Plot Events: (characters in parentheses have central roles in that plot section)

Which plot events show examples of "service"? Of compassion?

Which plot events show undesirable or desirable characteristics and why?

1. King's barrenness and the incarnation of Vishnu- why? (Dasarutha and the sage Viswamithra)
2. Rama's trip and the winning of Sita
3. Going into exile- why? (Kooni, Kaikeyi, Dasarutha, Bharata)
4. The episode with Soorpanakha
5. The abduction of Sita (Mareecha, Ravana, Jatayu)
6. The Vali and Sugreeva story (Tara)
7. Alliance with the monkey kingdom to get her back (Hanuman, Sampathi, Sugreeva)
8. The battle (Ravana, Vibhishana, Angada)
9. Sita's "proof" and the end of the story

Places: Ayodhya is the city of Rama; Mithila is the city of Sita. An "asura" is a demon.

On Hinduism:

Brahman is the single essence pervading the universe (the human soul is a manifestation of Brahman). There is a confusingly similar word-- *brahman* without a capital (sometimes spelled *brahmin*) that means a person in the highest caste of the society, the priest class.

The Triad of great deities are Brahma (the creator); Vishnu (the preserver); Shiva (the destroyer).
Rama is an incarnation of Vishnu

Notes

1. The idea of "service" (sometimes called "duty") comes up frequently. Underline the word every time you see it and notice how various actions and episodes dramatize what is meant by the term. "Service" in this work does not have the same meaning that "duty" does in the *Odyssey* (obligation to the Law of Hospitality-- which means helping those who have been buffeted by circumstance and come in peace-- or obligations owing between master and servant).

2. The "bad" characters are often symbolically represented as "bad" by their "disproportionate" shapes-- because "harmony" (physical and spiritual, "natural" and human) is seen as so important. How do the thinking, motives, and actions of the "bad" characters indicate lack of harmony and what should be in "harmony" that isn't?

3. Illusion (people not seeing the "truth") is important in both works, but why people do not see the truth is differently explained. Odysseus thinks in terms of past evidence concerning this situation or person and future consequences. He does not give way to impulses without thinking of consequences and choices. That kind of thinking is not emphasized in this work. Find examples of illusions in this work and see why they are illusions and what is emphasized about those who cope successfully.

4. Humans seem to relate differently to "nature" and animals than they do in *The Odyssey*. These differences are reflected in plot events and in descriptions of nature. Find examples (events, description) that would help you figure out the difference.

Extra Credit: See the movie *Monsoon Wedding* (on DVD) and answer the following questions (1 to 2 pages, typed, double-spaced). (This will count 10 points and replace a quiz grade).

1. Discuss how "modern" India is represented visually in the movie and how traditional India is represented visually in the movie. (Also, how is this movie visually different from movies you are used to?)
2. What are some of the "traditions" and traditional relationships represented in the movie and how do these seem important in the lives of these people?
3. What connections to the *Ramayana* can you see?
4. What did you find most interesting and/or significant?

Due date: Monday, Nov. 6