

REVISED STUDY QUESTIONS on *THE ODYSSEY*: Read the questions before doing the reading, so that you can mark passages that provide answers. Most quiz and test questions will concern these study questions. These 4 big questions are explored throughout the work:

1. What is the nature of life and what kinds of dangers or challenges does it confront us with?
2. What character qualities enable someone to survive these challenges and yet still be a hero (a role-model)?
3. What characteristics distinguish civilized people (individuals and groups) from uncivilized? What kinds of behavior endanger civilization?
4. What does “home” represent to a human being?

Book I

1. What does the Aigisthos story show about human beings?
2. What 2 decisions are made at the council of gods?
3. What is Telemakhos’ state before Athena’s visit? How his perception of who she is relate to her effect on him? [How is Athena different from and like your concept of God?]
4. What does Telemakhos tell suitors about his visitor and why? (How are the suitors characterized?)

Book II (and part of IV)

1. How do the suitors think and act and why? On what basis do they make their decisions?
2. What seems different about this culture? What similar?
3. What is Telemakhos “learning” on his trip to prepare him for being an adult?

Book V (1-2 page paper, typed & double-spaced with margins): What characteristic distinguishes Odysseus from most other heroes, helping to make him a survivor? (not “wise”-- too broad) Provide

1. Definition (appropriate to your purpose here) of one focused characteristic.
2. Evidence from this book only (at least two pieces of evidence, preferably three, supporting the definition).
3. Explanation of why the evidence supports the definition.
4. Contrasting evidence showing that the typical hero does not have this characteristic.

Books VI-VII: In his dealings with Nausikaa, what skills does Odysseus show in predicting her concerns and responding to them? (Look closely at the kinds of things he works into his first speech.)

Book VIII: Why are Odysseus’ actions in connection with Seareach a risk to his survival? Why does he take this risk? (In other words, what does he value even over survival?)

Book IX

1. What would be a modern equivalent of the lotos? (Look at its effects to decide)
2. What are 3 characteristics (besides his eating people) that make kyklops uncivilized?
3. What characteristic makes kyklops likely to be a “non-survivor”? (evidence that shows how he thinks, the basis on which he decides whether or not something is dangerous)
4. What shows Odysseus’ forethought in the kyklops episode?

Book X-XI

1. How does the distrust of the crew (concerning Aiolas’ bag) differ from Odysseus’ distrust of Kalypso? (Put in a form that will be applicable to other circumstances.)
2. Compare the description of Kirke’s house with that of Kalypso’s in order to see the kind of danger each represents (with regard to getting home). Each represents something associated with “the feminine.”
3. Why is Elpenor in this work? (To demonstrate what point about the nature of life?)
4. What kind of threat does Kirke represent in the modern world? (Look at the characteristic that gets the men in trouble and the effect she has on them.)

Book XII

1. What would be a modern equivalent of a choice between Skylla and Kharybdis and why would one choose the equivalent of Skylla?
2. If the crew were on trial for the crime of eating the cows and you were acting as their defense attorney, on what principle would you base your defense of their actions? What characteristic distinguishes Odysseus from them?
3. Being a survivor and being a hero are sometimes at odds with each other. How does Odysseus negotiate between the two, judging by the sirens episode? What other episode demonstrates the same combination of attitudes and actions?

Books XIII-XIV

1. How does Homer make the psychological feelings of returning “home” after a long absence “visual”?
2. Athena tells Odysseus that they are “two of a kind.” What qualities does she see that they share?
3. Possible quote test over the following: kyklops (Polyphemos), Penelope, Kirke, Telemakhos, Akhilleus, Agamemnon, Aias, Odysseus, Nausikaa, Athena, Kalypso, a suitor [Antinoos, Eurymakhos], a crew member, Eumaios, Melanthios, [Eurykleia]. Find a quote that indicates what each character stands for.)

Books XVI-XVII

1. What’s interesting about the interaction between Odysseus and his son?
2. Compare Melanthios to Eumaios: what does each represent?
3. What does the section on Argos the dog contribute to what this book says about values and about the nature of life?

Book XVIII: What characteristics(s) does Iros, the beggar, have in common with kyklops? What would be an analogy in our society to Zeus’ law about treatment of beggars?

Book XIX

1. Does Penelope know who Odysseus is? (any evidence either way?)
2. Why is it appropriate that Odysseus be identified by a scar? (Incidentally, his name—in Greek—is associated with “pain.” Reading the section about Argos, p. 319, ll. 375+, provides further information.)
3. How does Penelope help Odysseus accomplish his revenge? (2 things, one from Book XXI)

Books XX-XXI: How does the stuff connected with the bow typify Odysseus and influence our attitude toward the suitors?

Books XXII-XXIII

1. Athena’s help in the fight against the suitors is typical of the kind of help she gives through the whole journey; what kind of help does she give and what kind does she not give?
2. What happens to Melanthios and why is his punishment different from that of the suitors?
3. How does the secret of their bed characterize (stand for) the marriage of Penelope and Odysseus?
4. What characteristics does Penelope have in common with Odysseus?

Book XXIV: Why have Odysseus’ reunion with his father take place in an orchard?

Closing (General) Questions

1. Poseidon is Odysseus’ worst enemy because Odysseus represents civilization and the sea is associated with qualities that seem threats to civilization: what qualities are these ?
2. How does the first section of *The Odyssey* relate to the last section? (What do the first 4 books concern?)
3. Find examples that illustrate what eating represents in *The Odyssey*.