

## 'The Odyssey' Key Information Sheets



### 1. Context

- The story was written in Ancient Greece around 700BC
- The story is set back in the Bronze Age, around 500 years previously (a time of myths and Gods in the view of the Ancient Greeks)
- The stories are all metaphors and suggest the ways that ancient societies understood the natural world around them.
- The text is a sequel to Homer's "The Iliad", which describes the battles of the Trojan war.
- The original story was written in Ancient Greek – this is a **translation** and it has been abridged (shortened from 24 books).
- The Ancient Greeks believed that **hospitality** was a core value.
- Many of the places mentioned in the text are real and can be found in and around the Mediterranean.



### 2. Themes

<u>Key Themes:</u>	<u>Examples:</u>
Perseverance	Penelope patiently waits for her husband, using everything at her disposal to delay marrying anyone else. She persevered for twenty years, never giving up on Odysseus, even after hearing of his death. The same could be said of his loyal servants and his faithful son Telemachus.
Vengeance/justice of the Gods	The Gods, in particular Zeus, give out harsh punishments for any actions against them, sending storms and killing people for any insults.
Hospitality	Calypso's imprisonment of Odysseus is contrasted with Circe's offering of hospitality and love. The Phaeacians help by trying to get Odysseus home vs. Poseidon's shipwreck and finally Penelope's hospital reception of Odysseus disguised as beggar vs. the suitor's bad treatment/mocking of him.
Fate and destiny	The Ancient Greeks believed that the gods and goddesses decided their fate and that they were not in control of their own destiny.
Intelligence and cunning	Odysseus uses his cunning to outwit much larger foes, e.g. Polyphemus and the suitors back at his home.
Temptation	Odysseus' soldiers fall foul of a series of temptations: eating the lotus flowers, the Sun God's cattle, being lured by sirens, etc.
Homecoming	As Calypso's husband, Odysseus could live forever in divine luxury. As Nausicaa's husband, Odysseus would be a prince in the richest, most untroubled country he has visited. Without hesitation he rejects both these offers. He prefers Penelope and Ithaca, not necessarily because they are better, but because they are his.

### 3. Key events

- The war: Odysseus and his fellow warriors complete the Trojan war, which lasted ten years, and begin to set off back home again.
- Beginning the journey home: 12 ships set off, but with not enough supplies. They attack the Cicones and steal cattle, but end up being defeated.
- They find an idyllic island and eat lotus fruit, which makes them forget their families.
- They meet and defeat Polyphemus, a Cyclops by tricking him and using his sheep to escape.
- They reach a floating island and are given the gift of fair winds. The sailors open the bag and release a huge storm.
- They come across an island of giants – the Laestrygonians, who attack them.
- Circe tricks them and turns Odysseus' men into pigs. Hermes helps them escape.
- They set off for the Land of the Dead to seek advice from Tiresias, a prophet.
- Odysseus escapes the Sirens' lure by getting his men to tie him to the boat.
- They have to travel through the "wandering rocks" – Scylla and Charybdis (a monster and a whirlpool).
- They land on the Sun God's island and are warned not to eat his cattle. The sailors do and are punished by Zeus with a terrible storm.
- Odysseus escapes on a raft and ends up on Calypso's island. She falls in love with him and keeps him captive. Hermes persuades Calypso to let him go.
- A goddess keeps him safe and he lands on the Phaeacian coast. He is helped by Nausicaa, a princess, and her parents: Alcinous and Arete.
- Athene helps him when he arrives back on Ithaca and he is able to return to his home.
- He disguises himself as a beggar and tricks his way back into his house. Penelope tests him as she doesn't believe it's him. The suitors are killed and Odysseus' journey is complete.

### 4. Key characters

Odysseus	The protagonist of the text. He is a warrior and married to Penelope. His son is Telemachus.
Telemachus	Odysseus' son. Defends his mother against the suitors.
Penelope	Odysseus' wife. She's waited for him for twenty years.
Athena	Daughter of Zeus and goddess of wisdom, purposeful battle, and the womanly arts. Athena assists Odysseus and Telemachus with divine powers throughout the epic
Calypso	The beautiful nymph who falls in love with Odysseus when he lands on her island-home of Ogygia. Calypso holds him prisoner there for seven years
Circe	The beautiful witch-goddess who transforms Odysseus's crew into swine when he lands on her island. With the help of Hermes, Odysseus resists Circe's powers and then becomes her lover, living in luxury at her side for a year.
Poseidon	God of the sea. As the suitors are Odysseus's mortal antagonists, Poseidon is his divine antagonist. He despises Odysseus for blinding his son, the Cyclops Polyphemus
Zeus	King of the gods.
Suitors	The men who want to marry Penelope.
Polyphemus	The Cyclops who is blinded by Odysseus.
Nausicaa	The beautiful daughter of King Alcinous and Queen Arete of the Phaeacians. Nausicaa discovers Odysseus on the beach at

	Scheria and, out of budding affection for him, ensures his warm reception at her parents' palace.
King Alcinous and Queen Arete	The Phaeacians, who offers Odysseus hospitality in his island kingdom of Scheria. Alcinous hears the story of Odysseus's wanderings and provides him with safe passage back to Ithaca.

#### 5. Literary features (AO2)

Epic poem	One long tale describing a hero's quest
Similes (and extended similes)	Where two things are compared to enhance our understanding of something.
Metaphors	To describe one thing by comparing it to something else.
Epithet	An adjective or phrase expressing a quality or attribute regarded as characteristic of the person or thing mentioned.
Repetition	Some information repeated to emphasize its importance.
Motif	An image or idea that is repeated in a text – it is usually symbolic.
Symbolism	The use of images to reflect ideas or qualities, e.g. the sea, the shroud, the bow and the bed.
Dramatic irony	Where the reader knows more than the characters in the story.
Allusion, particularly to Greek mythology	A reference to other literary ideas.

#### 6. Key vocabulary

<u>Word:</u>	<u>Class:</u>	<u>Definition:</u>	<u>Example</u>
Addicted	Adjective	Not able to stop taking a drug.	The sailors had become <b>addicted</b> to the lotus fruit.
Leadership	Noun	The job of being in control of a job, group or country.	Odysseus shows good <b>leadership</b> when he tells his men not to taste the lotus fruit.
Heroic	Adjective	A person who is admired for doing something very brave or for achieving something great.	When Odysseus saves his men from Polyphemus' cave his actions are <b>heroic</b> .
Vain	Adjective	Too interested in your own appearance or achievements.	Odysseus is presented as <b>vain</b> and foolish when he boasts about tricking Polyphemus.
Gullible	Adjective	A person who is gullible is easily tricked because they are too trusting.	Odysseus' men are presented as <b>gullible</b> when they eat the food that Circe prepares for them.
Lamentation	Noun	Sadness and feeling sorry, or something which expresses these feelings.	"... the place where the River of Flaming Fire joined the River of <b>Lamentation</b> ."
Flotsam	Noun	Pieces of broken wood, found on the beach or floating on the sea.	"... he was washed up, like a piece of <b>flotsam</b> , on the shore of a lonely island."
Fickle	Adjective	Likely to change your opinion or your feelings suddenly and without good reason.	The Ancient Greeks believed that the gods were <b>fickle</b> and that it was dangerous to anger them.