***The Odyssey* Reading Guide**

Part I: Invocation; Calypso, The Sweet Nymph; The Lotus Eaters \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Book 1:**

1. *The Odyssey* begins with the invocation to the Muse. What is the purpose of this section?
2. According to this invocation, what traits does the epic hero, Odysseus, have?

**Book 5:**

1. Identify the epic simile in lines 9-12. What does this comparison tell you about Hermes?
2. In line 22-31, what imagery do you see in this famous description of Calypso’s home? How does this imagery of the island reflect character traits of Calypso?
3. What is Odysseus doing when we first meet him? Why?
4. Why has Hermes arrived on Calypso’s island?
5. Why does Calypso claim freeing Odysseus is her idea (lines 55-59)?
6. What has Calypso promised Odysseus if he stays with her? How does Odysseus’ reply tell you about his feelings for his wife? How does Odysseus manage to stay “no” to Calypso without offending her?
7. What is being compared in lines 87-93?

**Book 9:**

1. What is the epithet used to characterize Odysseus at the beginning of Book 9?
2. What does Odysseus value most highly? (See lines 24-26).
3. Why does the army of the Cicones attack Odysseus and his men? (See italics pg. 1212)
4. When they escape from the land of the Cicones, why are six benches empty in each of Odysseus’ ships? (See italics pg. 1212)
5. According to Odysseus, who caused the great storm in line 28?
6. Odysseus and his men land on the coastline of the Lotus Eaters. Why does he send only three men ashore? (See page 1212)
7. What is a Lotus?
8. What is the danger to Odysseus and his men in the land of the Lotus Eaters? (See page 1212)
9. How does Odysseus rescue his men for this danger? (See page 1212)

The Cyclops and Lotus Eaters

1. Notice the epithet used to characterize the dawn in line 68. What does the description tell you about dawn?
2. Ddysseus has been referred to as “the Strategist.” Based on lines 95-115, how does he reveal that trait?
3. Why does Odysseus refuse his men’s “sound” request? (See lines 130-132).
4. One of the laws of ancient Greek society is courtesy to strangers (hospitality). What does Polyphemus (the Cyclops) do to defy this law? (See lines 156-159)
5. Reread lines 163-169. Agamemnon was a 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?
6. Why does Odysseus not kill the Cyclops when he is asleep? (See line 207-210)
7. What three things happened that showed luck was on Odysseus’ side? (See lines 225-247)
8. What does “god’s bidding” in lines 244-247 mean? What does it suggest about the role that the rams will play in the future?
9. In lines 256-269, what do Odysseus and his men do to Polyphemus?
10. Why don’t the other Cyclopes help Polyphemus? (See lines 310-324)
11. What trick does Odysseus use to free his men and himself from the cave? (See lines 335-345)
12. What character traits has Odysseus demonstrated in his dealings with Polyphemus?
13. Odysseus was a great hero. Based on lines 437-440, are his faults of heroic proportions? Or are they failings that you would expect most people to share?
14. When he is safely at sea, Odysseus boasts of his true identity. In lines 441-452, what does Polyphemus ask Poseidon, the god of the sea, to do?
15. Reread lines 437-452. Paraphrase Pilyphemus’ curse. How has Odysseus brought this curse upon himself?
16. 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?
17. From the episode of the Cyclops, give two examples of Odysseus’ famous cleverness.

The Witch Circe; The Land of the Dead;

The Sirens, Scylla and Charybdis; The Cattle of the Sun God

**Book 10:**

1. What two gifts does the wind king, Aeolus, give Odysseus?
2. There is a saying that sates, “curiosity kills the cat.” How does the curiosity of Odysseus’ men prove this statement to be true?
3. What unfavorable trait do Odysseus’ men possess that causes them to loose sight of Ithaca only days away from being home?
4. Identify the Homeric Simile in lines 6-11. What’s the point of this comparison? How does it affect your impression of Circe’s hall?
5. What has happened to Odysseus’ men? Eurylochus?
6. How has Circe violated the laws of hospitality?
7. What does Hermes give to Odysseus to be able to resist Circe’s magic?
8. What other role has Hermes played in *The Odyssey* thus far?

**Book 11:**

1. Who is Teiresias?
2. Who is Elpenor? What does Odysseus’ response to seeing him in the Land of the Dead tell you about his character?
3. Which family member does Odysseus see in the Land of the Dead?
4. Tieresias tells Odysseus of his fate. Book 1 briefly foreshadows what will happen if Odysseus and his men eat Helios’ kine or beeves (cattle).

**Book 12:**

1. The Siren’s songs cannot be resisted by men. What does Circe tell Odysseus and his men to do if they want to make it past the Sirens?
2. What do we know about our epic hero that suggests he will listen to the Sirens’ song?
3. What plan does Odysseus devise that will enable him to listen to the song of the Sirens yet remain unharmed by them?
4. How does Odysseus protect his men from the danger of the Sirens’ song?
5. When he hears the Sirens’ song, what does Odysseus tell his crew to do?
6. How do his men respond to this command?
7. Circe has warned Odysseus about Scylla and Charybdis. What are they and what is the likely outcome if faced with the challenge of meeting each one?
8. As they pass Scylla and Charybdis, Odysseus follows Circe’s advice in order to lose the fewest men. What is his plan final plan?
9. Consider Odysseus’ behavior in lines 108-179. Do you think he is a good leader? Explain your opinion.
10. What does Homer compare the men to hanging in the air once they have been snatched up by Scylla?
11. On the island of Thrinakia, what crime to Odysseus’ men commit while Odysseus is praying?
12. How does Zeus punish Odysseus’ men for what they did?

Part II: Coming Home – the Meeting of Father and Son;

The Beggar and the Faithful Dog, The Test of the Great Bow

**Book 16:**

1. What is the situation in Ithaca when Odysseus first returns?
2. What is important about Eumaeus’ reaction to the beggar (what theme does this support)?
3. Which theme does the Homeric Simile on page 1244 lines 19-23 develop?
4. How is Odysseus disguised when Telemachus first sees him?
5. Why does Telemachus think that Odysseus must be a god?
6. Which of the gods has helped Odysseus and advised him about his homecoming?
7. What is the Homeric Simile in lines 101-107 on page 1247? What character trait does this help emphasize in both Odysseus and Telemachus?

**Book 17:**

1. In Book 17 (all of it), what important theme is revealed through Argos and what do the lines 1-27 show about Odysseus’ character?
2. Why are lines 29-60 ironic?

**Book 21:**

1. What qualities does Penelope reveal about herself through her actions on page 1250?
2. When Penelope talks to the beggar, she tells him about the trick she used to postpone choosing one of the suitors as a husband. What is the trick?
3. Why does Penelope take Odyssues’ hunting how to the hall where the suitors are?
4. What is Penelope’s attitude towards the suitors? Why is she having this contest?
5. Do you think Penelope’s contest is a good way to resolve her situation?
6. In lines 105-114, to what does Homer compare Odysseus’ string of the bow?
7. After stringing the bow, which none of the suitors could do, what other extraordinary feat does the old beggar accomplish?

Death at the Great Hall; The Trunk of the Olive Tree

**Book 22:**

1. Antinous is one of the suitors. What does he do that reveals his bad character?
2. Which of the suitors does Odysseus kill first?
3. In lines 34-40, Odysseus gives his reasons for killing the suitors. List the reasons:
4. What argument does Eurymachus use in lines 45-59 to try to save his own life and the lives of the other suitors?
5. Summarize Odysseus’ reply to Eurymachus in lines 61-67.
6. Who helps Odysseus fight against the suitors?
7. What is the outcome of the battle between Odysseus and the suitors?

**Book 23:**

1. In lines 22-26, Penelope tests Odysseus to see if he is really her husband. What is the test?
2. In lines 58-80, what reason does Penelope give Odysseus for having tested him in this way?
3. Reread lines 81-91. To what does Homer compare the way Odysseus has longed for his wife?