

## The Odyssey

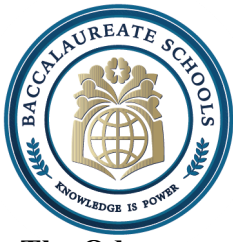
### Six Elements Of The Epic:

- 1) Plot centers around a Hero of Unbelievable Stature. The epic hero completes what everyone only attempts. In ancient epics, the hero often is either partially divine or at least protected by a god or God.
- 2) Involves deeds of superhuman strength. Accomplish feats no real human could.
- 3) Vast Setting. The action spans not only geographical but also often cosmological space: across land, sea, into the underworld, or through space or time etc.
- 4) Involves supernatural and-or otherworldly forces. Gods, demons, angels, time/space travel, cheating death etc.
- 5) Sustained elevation of style. Overwritten. Overly formal, highly stylized (poetry, lyricism (singing), exaggeration)
- 6) Poet remains objective and omniscient. The narrator sees and knows all and presents all perspectives.

### Epic Origins:

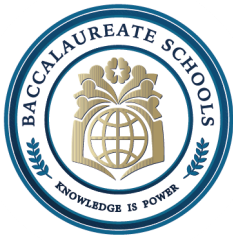
Generally, epics are also mythologized histories.

- 1) A combination of pre-existing stories and characters.
- 2) Often of oral origin.
- 3) At least loosely based around historical characters, events or characters.
- 4) Set in a mythologized distant time, traditionally in the past.



### The Odyssey

- The poet, Homer, begins his epic by asking a Muse to help him tell the story of Odysseus. Odysseus, Homer says, is famous for fighting in the Trojan War and for surviving a difficult journey home from Troy.
- Odysseus saw many places and met many people in his travels. He tried to return his shipmates safely to their families, but they made the mistake of killing the cattle of Helios, for which they paid with their lives. Homer once again asks the Muse to help him tell the tale.
- The next section of the poem takes place 10 years after the Trojan War. Odysseus arrives in an island kingdom called Phaeacia, which is ruled by Alcinous. Alcinous asks Odysseus to tell him the story of his travels.
- Odysseus continues the story of his return from Troy. After the Trojan War, winds blow his ships to the island of Ismarus. Odysseus and his men attack and defeat the villagers. Odysseus wants to leave quickly, but his men disobey his orders. They stay to drink the villagers' wine and eat their livestock. Meanwhile, the survivors of the first attack run to ask for help from the other towns on the island. Soon, Odysseus' men are far outnumbered. After a long and bloody fight, the men retreat to their ships. But they grieve the loss of the many shipmates who have died in the battle. Back at sea, Odysseus' fleet is pushed off-course by a storm. After days of fighting the wind and strong currents, the ships arrive at another island. This time, they find that the island's inhabitants are peaceful people called the Lotus-Eaters. These people survive by eating only lotus flowers. Three of Odysseus' men accept lotus flowers from the LotusEaters, and the sweet flower makes them feel dreamy and happy. They want to stay on the island forever and forget their mission to return home. Fearing more of his crew will be affected, Odysseus orders everyone back to the boats. He ties down the men affected by the lotus, and the ships set sail. They soon come upon another island.



**Who is the speaker in this selection?**

The speaker is the poet Homer, invoking the Muse to aid in telling the story of Odysseus.

**Whom is he addressing?**

Homer is addressing the Muse, specifically asking for inspiration to recount the tale of Odysseus.

**Give the direct quote which describes Odysseus.**

A direct quote from the Invocation is:

“Tell me, O Muse, of that ingenious hero who traveled far and wide after he had sacked the famous town of Troy.”

**How were Odysseus' men (his soldiers/crew) destroyed?**

Odysseus' men were destroyed due to their own recklessness and disobedience. After sacking the city of Ismarus, they ignored Odysseus' orders to leave immediately, leading to a counterattack by the Cicones, which resulted in the loss of many men.

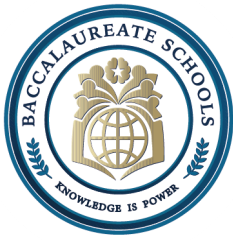
**Sailing From Troy**

**How long after the Trojan War do we first meet Odysseus?**

Odysseus is encountered ten years after the fall of Troy.

**Where is Odysseus when we meet him in this selection?**

He is on the island of Ogygia, held captive by the nymph Calypso.



**Who tells the story for Part I of The Odyssey? (Who is the narrator)?**

The narrator is Odysseus himself, recounting his adventures to King Alcinous.

**Who is Odysseus' father?**

His father is Laertes.

**Describe Odysseus' reputation in peace and in war.**

In war, Odysseus is renowned for his cunning and bravery, particularly noted for his role in devising the Trojan Horse. In peace, he is respected as a wise and fair ruler of Ithaca.

**Where is Odysseus' home?**

His home is Ithaca, an island in the Ionian Sea.

**What feelings does Odysseus have for Ithaca?**

Odysseus expresses a deep longing and affection for Ithaca, describing it as the sweetest place on earth, despite its modesty.

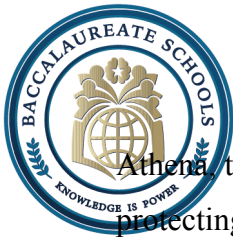
**Why is he not home?**

He is not home due to the prolonged journey caused by divine interventions and various misadventures, including the wrath of Poseidon and the temptations of nymphs.

**What is sweeter than a house of gold?**

Odysseus declares that his home in Ithaca is sweeter than a house of gold, emphasizing the value of returning to his homeland over material wealth.

**Now Odysseus tells of his sailing from Troy in chronological order. Who watched over him during these years of rough adventure?**



Athena, the goddess of wisdom and war, watched over Odysseus, guiding and protecting him throughout his journey.

**What happened at Ismarus?**

At Ismarus, Odysseus and his men sacked the city of the Cicones, killing many of its inhabitants and taking women and treasure. However, they stayed too long, and the Cicones' reinforcements attacked, leading to the loss of several men.

**Describe the actions of the men at the land of the Cicones.**

The men plundered the city, killed many of the Cicones, and took women and treasure. They ignored Odysseus' orders to leave promptly, leading to their downfall.

**Who calls the main force of the Cicones' army?**

The main force of the Cicones' army is called by the survivors of the initial attack, who seek reinforcements from inland.

**How many men did Odysseus lose during this battle?**

Odysseus lost six men from each ship during the battle with the Cicones.

**The Lotus Eaters**

**Who roused a storm against Odysseus' ships?**

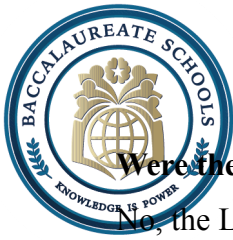
Zeus, the king of the gods, sent a storm against Odysseus' ships as punishment for their actions.

**How many men did Odysseus send out to explore?**

Odysseus sent three men to explore the land of the Lotus-eaters.

**What does this tell you about Odysseus as a leader?**

This suggests that Odysseus is cautious and strategic, preferring to send a small group to gather information before acting.



Were the lotus-eaters of this land dangerous?

No, the Lotus-eaters were not

## **The Cyclops**

### **Who is the Cyclops' father?**

The Cyclops' father is Poseidon, the god of the sea.

### **What animal did the Cyclops bring into the cave with him? Why?**

The Cyclops, Polyphemus, brought in his sheep. He did this to keep them safe from thieves and to milk them, as they were his primary source of food and livelihood.

### **When the Cyclops eventually sees the men, what does he ask them?**

Polyphemus asks the men:

“Who are you? Where do you come from? What is your business here?”

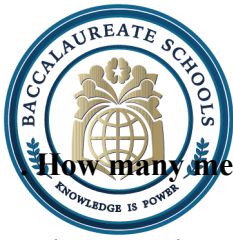
This inquiry is part of the customary Greek practice of *xenia*, or hospitality, where strangers are expected to introduce themselves and explain their purpose.

### **What does Odysseus ask of the Cyclops? What hidden threat does he give if the Cyclops refuses?**

Odysseus requests that Polyphemus provide hospitality, as is customary in Greek culture. He also hints at a hidden threat by saying that if Polyphemus harms them, he will call upon the gods to avenge them. This subtle warning implies that the Cyclops' actions will have divine consequences.

### **How does the Cyclops react to Odysseus' threat? What is his opinion of the gods?**

Polyphemus dismisses Odysseus' threat, stating that he does not fear the gods. He believes that he is stronger than any deity and that the Cyclopes are superior to the gods. This arrogance leads him to violate the sacred laws of hospitality.



**How many men are to help Odysseus with the plan?**

Odysseus takes twelve men with him to the Cyclops' cave. These men assist in the plan to blind Polyphemus and help the group escape.

**When Cyclops brings all of the animals inside, why do you think Odysseus says “by some shepherding whim – or god’s bidding – none were left outside”? What does this mean?**

Odysseus' statement reflects his uncertainty about the Cyclops' actions. He wonders whether Polyphemus' decision to bring all the animals inside was due to a random impulse or if it was influenced by divine intervention. This ambiguity adds to the tension and unpredictability of the encounter.

## **The Land of the Dead**

**Why must Odysseus journey to Hades, the land of the dead?**

Odysseus must journey to Hades to seek the prophet Tiresias, who will give him crucial information about how to return home to Ithaca and how to appease the gods, especially Poseidon.

**How does Odysseus summon the spirit of Tiresias?**

Odysseus performs a ritual by digging a trench, pouring libations of milk, honey, wine, and water, and sprinkling barley meal. He then sacrifices a black ram, allowing the blood to flow into the trench to attract and summon the spirits of the dead, including Tiresias.

**What advice does Tiresias give Odysseus regarding the island of Thrinakia?**

Tiresias warns Odysseus to avoid harming the sacred cattle of the sun god Helios on the island of Thrinakia. He tells him that if he and his men leave the cattle unharmed, they may all return home safely.

**If Odysseus doesn't follow Tiresias's advice at Thrinakia, what does the spirit foretell?**

Tiresias foretells that if the cattle are harmed, Odysseus's crew will be destroyed, and



Although Odysseus might survive, he will return home alone, after much suffering, and find trouble awaiting him there.

### **The Sirens; Scylla and Charybdis**

40. What advice does Circe give Odysseus when he returns from the underworld?

Circe advises Odysseus on how to safely navigate the dangers ahead, including avoiding the Sirens' song, choosing the path past Scylla rather than Charybdis, and warning him about the cattle of Helios on Thrinakia.

#### **Describe the Sirens. What danger do they pose?**

The Sirens are creatures with beautiful voices who lure sailors to their deaths by singing irresistible songs that cause ships to crash on the rocks.

#### **How did Odysseus keep himself and his men safe when going past the Sirens?**

Odysseus plugged his men's ears with beeswax and had them tie him tightly to the mast of the ship so he could hear the song without steering the ship toward danger.

#### **Describe Scylla and Charybdis.**

- Scylla is a six-headed monster who lives in a cliffside cave and snatches sailors from ships, eating one man per head.
- Charybdis is a massive, deadly whirlpool that swallows the sea and anything in it three times a day.

Which of the two, Scylla or Charybdis, was the lesser of two evils? Why?

Scylla was the lesser evil because although she would take six men, Charybdis could destroy the entire ship and crew, leading to total loss.

### **The Cattle of the Sun God**

#### **Who owns the cattle on the island of Thrinakia?**

The sun god Helios (also called Hyperion) owns the sacred cattle.





**Of what consequence does Odysseus warn his men?**

Odysseus warns his men that if they harm or kill the sacred cattle, they will bring destruction upon themselves.

**When and why did Odysseus' men decide to kill the cattle?**

They killed the cattle while Odysseus was asleep, stranded on the island by bad weather. Driven by hunger and desperation, they disobeyed his orders and slaughtered the cattle.

**What threat did Helios make in response to the death of his cattle?**

Helios threatened to stop shining the sun on the world and go to the Underworld if Zeus didn't punish Odysseus's crew.

**Who punished Odysseus' men? How?**

Zeus punished them by sending a storm and lightning bolt that destroyed the ship, killing all the men.

**Who survives the punishment?**

Only Odysseus survives the punishment and continues his journey alone.