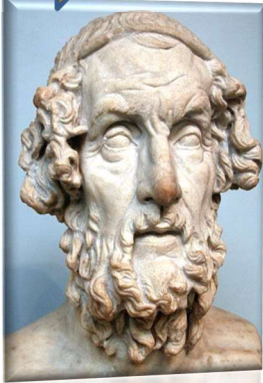


MYTHOLOGY & LITERATURE:

SUMMARY

The *Odyssey* is an Epic poem, which means it is a long story written in a poetic form, celebrating the feats of a God or Hero.



The Poet, Homer

The *Odyssey* was written by the ancient Greek Poet, Homer. Homer was the author of the first two pieces of literature in the Western World, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. Although it can't be proved exactly when *The Odyssey* was written, most researchers agree it was written between the 7th and 9th centuries BC. That's almost 3,000 years ago!

It was primarily passed down in a story telling tradition, but the first written account of Homer's story appeared in the 6th century BC. Not very much is known about the author himself, other than he was generally believed to be born in Ionia, a coastal area of Ancient Greece (which is now Turkey) and said to have died on the island of Chios, a Greek Island in the Aegean Sea.

BOOKS I-IV: EXPOSITION

Ten years after the end of the Trojan War, the war hero and King of Ithaca, **Odysseus** has not yet returned home. He first left for the war twenty years previously. His son, **Telemachus** and his wife, **Penelope** have assumed he must be dead. They live on the Greek Island of Ithaca and over one hundred men have come to Penelope's home, hoping to win her hand in marriage. These men are referred to as "the suitors". Penelope is hesitant to marry any of them and tries to put it off as long as possible. Meanwhile, the goddess **Athena** disguises herself as the King of the Taphos Islands, Mentos, and tells Telemachus he must search for news of his father. Athena then disguises herself as Telemachus and prepares a ship for him to sail to Sparta. The next morning, the real Telemachus and Athena, disguised as Mentos, travel to visit another war hero, Menelaus and his wife, Helen of Troy. Once they reach Sparta, Menelaus tells Telemachus that he has heard his father was taken captive by **Calypso**, a sea-nymph who fell in love with Odysseus.

BOOK V: ODYSSEUS LEAVES CALYPSO

Meanwhile, on Calypso's island, Odysseus has been held captive for the last seven years. On Mount Olympus, the Gods Athena and Zeus meet to discuss Odysseus' fate. They decide he must be released from Calypso and be allowed to finally return home to Ithaca. Calypso is saddened by this news but follows Zeus' orders and assists Odysseus in leaving her island. By the time Odysseus had reached Calypso's island, all of his men had died and so he sets off alone on a raft Calypso helped him build. After eighteen days at sea, Odysseus sees the island of Scherie and attempts to sail closer. At this time, Poseidon, who had cursed Odysseus nearly ten years earlier, is angered to find out Zeus has released him from Calypso. Poseidon causes a storm to wreck Odysseus' raft but the Goddess, Ino protects him. He is washed safely ashore to the island.

BOOKS VI-VIII: ODYSSEUS' MEETS THE PHEACIANS

On the island of Scherie, the home of the Pheacians, Athena appeared to a young princess there in a dream and told her to go to the seashore. When the princess, Nausicaa, is at the seashore, she discovers a shipwrecked man in need of shelter, food and clothing. She leads the man back to her home and takes him in. After a few days of living among the Pheacian people, the man reveals his true identity as the long-lost King of Ithaca, Odysseus. He begins to tell them the story of his perilous, ten-year journey attempting to find his way home after the Trojan War. The next several books are told as flashbacks as Odysseus tells his tale .



Odysseus removing his men from the land of the Lotus-eaters.

MYTHOLOGY & LITERATURE:

SUMMARY

Did you know that there is no concrete proof that Homer alone wrote *The Odyssey*? Some people think others may have added to the story.

BOOK IX: THE LOTUS-EATERS & THE CYCLOPS

After the Trojan War ends, Odysseus tells the Pheacians how he and his men began their journey home. They stopped at the island of Ismoras, where the soldiers raided the island, and some were killed by the island's people. They departed quickly back to the seas and encountered storms which drove Odysseus' twelve ships off course. They landed on an island north of Africa where Odysseus refers to the people they met there as Lotus-Eaters because that's what they ate the most of. "I was driven thence by foul winds for a space of nine days upon the sea, but on the tenth day we reached the land of the Lotus-eaters, who live on food that comes from a kind of flower. Here we landed to take in fresh water, and our crews got their mid-day meal on the shore near the ships. When they had eaten and drunk I sent two of my company to see what manner of men the people of the place might be, and they had a third man under them. They started at once, and went about among the Lotus-eaters, who did them no hurt, but gave them to eat of the lotus, which was so delicious that those who ate of it left off caring about home, and did not even want to go back and say what had happened to them, but were for staying and munching lotus with the Lotus-eaters without thinking further of their return; nevertheless, though they wept bitterly I forced them back to the ships and made them fast under the benches. Then I told the rest to go on board at once, lest any of them should taste of the lotus and leave off wanting to get home, so they took their places and smote the grey sea with their oars."

After leaving the land of the Lotus-eaters, Odysseus and his men come upon the islands of Cyclopes. Odysseus takes his best twelve men to explore one of the islands. The island is full of sheep and goats and the men search for the inhabitants of a cave they come across. While inside the cave, **Polyphemus**, a giant one-eyed Cyclops who lives there, returns home with his flock and discovers the men. He captures them and eats some of Odysseus' soldiers. The giant creature asks Odysseus what his name is and Odysseus tells Polyphemus that his name is "No one". The next day, while Polyphemus takes his flock out of the cave to graze, Odysseus creates a plan for himself and the remaining men to escape from the cave. They sharpen a stick and hide it in the cave. When Polyphemus returns, Odysseus stabs Polyphemus in the eye with the stake, blinding him. Polyphemus yells out for help saying that "No one has hurt him". The other Cyclops believe Polyphemus is playing a joke on them and ignore him. After blinding the giant, Odysseus and his men hide on the underside of Polyphemus' flock of sheep and goats. Polyphemus feels the tops of his flock before letting them out of the cave to graze to ensure the men do not escape but does not notice them hiding underneath. After Odysseus and his remaining men escape from the island, Odysseus yells out to Polyphemus "I am not no one; I am Odysseus, Son of Laertes, King of Ithaca." This infuriates Polyphemus, who tells his father, the God of the Seas, **Poseidon**, of what has happened. Poseidon now becomes angry with Odysseus and curses him to wander the sea for ten years.



Left: Art depicting Odysseus blinding Polyphemus.



Right: Polyphemus feeling his flock for Odysseus' men.

BOOK X: AEOLUS & CIRCE

Next, Odysseus' men encounter **Aeolus**, the God of Wind. The God gives Odysseus a bag of wind to help him on his journey home. Aeolus instructs Odysseus, however, that he must not open the bag until the tenth day of their journey, but on the ninth day, while Odysseus is sleeping, one of his sailors opens the bag of wind convinced that it is really treasure. While they are almost home to Ithaca, the wind escapes from the bag and blows Odysseus' ships back the way they came. They return to the island of Aeolia, where Odysseus asks Aeolus for another bag of wind, but Aeolus refuses.

MYTHOLOGY & LITERATURE:

SUMMARY

The *Odyssey* takes place in Ancient Greece and is set in the Bronze Age, about 1300 BC! It is the sequel to *The Iliad*.

Without any wind to help them, Odysseus and his ships row to the nearby island of the Laestrygonians, a race of powerful giants whose king and queen turn Odysseus's scouts into dinner. Odysseus and his remaining men quickly return to their ships, but the Laestrygonians throw rocks and sink eleven of the ships. The only ship to escape is Odysseus'.

So, with only one ship left, Odysseus and his men sail off to Aeaëa, the Island of the beautiful witch-goddess, **Circe**. While they are on the island, Odysseus is approached by Hermes, the God messenger. Hermes tells Odysseus that Circe will attempt to poison them and turn them all into pigs. He also tells Odysseus of an herb that will protect him from her evil spell. Although Circe turns the other sailors into pigs, Odysseus follows Hermes' instructions and overpowers Circe. He agrees to live with Circe on her island for a year and in return, she will transform his men back into humans. After a year, she keeps her promise, and Odysseus asks Circe what he must do in order to complete his journey home. She tells him they must take a trip to the underworld, Hades, and speak to the spirit of the blind prophet, **Tiresias**.



Far Left: Aeolus giving Odysseus the bag of wind.

Direct Left: A Painting of Circe and Odysseus.

BOOK XI: HADES

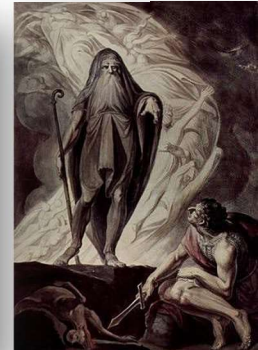
Odysseus follows Circe's instructions about calling the spirits. The first spirit to appear is Elpenor, one of Odysseus' soldiers who died on the island of Aeaëa just before Odysseus and his men left by breaking his neck when he fell off of a roof. Odysseus promises to return to the island and give Elpenor's body a proper burial. The next spirit he meets is the blind prophet, Tiresias. Tiresias tells Odysseus of his wife's battle with the suitors and also about Poseidon's curse on him. He foretells Odysseus' future about returning to Ithaca and reclaiming Penelope, his wife. He also warns Odysseus not to touch the cattle of the Sun when they reach the island of Thrinacia. If they do, they will meet with more hardship and all of Odysseus' men will perish. Next, Odysseus encounters the spirit of his own mother, **Anticlea**, who has died from heartache relating to missing Odysseus. She updates him on the events of Ithaca in the years that have passed. Finally, Odysseus is visited by various spirits who tell them their tales, including war heroes such as Agamemnon, Ajax, Achilles and Heracles before leaving for the next leg of his journey.

From Left to Right:

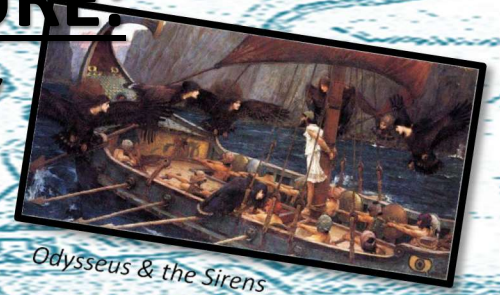
A drawing of Hades, the underworld.

An ancient Greek depiction of Hermes, the messenger God.

A painting of Tiresias, the prophet and Odysseus in Hades.



MYTHOLOGY & LITERATURE: SUMMARY



BOOK XII: SIRENS, SCYLLA & CHARYBDIS

After leaving the underworld, Odysseus returns to the island of Aeaea to bury Elpenor as he promised. He spends one last night there with Circe, who gives him advice on how to avoid the dangers of his journey home. Odysseus and his men set out early the next morning. They first encounter **The Sirens**, a group of sea monsters whose songs are so beautiful, they entice sailors to come near them where their ships are destroyed onto the rocks. Odysseus and his crew do as Circe told them. The men fill their ears with beeswax and tie Odysseus to the mast of the ship. This way they cannot fall under the temptation of The Sirens' songs.

The men next come to the pass between **Scylla**, the 6-headed monster and **Charybdis**, the whirlpool. The men again follow Circe's instructions to sail close to the cliffs of Scylla and although 6 men are killed by the monster, the ship and remaining crew are spared from Charybdis. They finally reach the island of Thrinacia, as predicted by the prophet, Tiresias, who told them not to touch the cattle of the Sun. However, while Odysseus is sleeping, one of his sailors, **Eurylochus**, convinces the other men to slaughter the cattle. The Sun God, Helios, is outraged and pleads to Zeus to punish the men. Zeus agrees and sends a storm to break apart their ship. As predicted, all of the men are killed except Odysseus. Odysseus is washed back to Charybdis, which he narrowly escapes and lands on Ogygia, the island of Calypso.

Here, Odysseus ends his tale to the Pheacians, as they know how he travelled from Calypso's island of Ogygia to their island of Scherie. Now the story changes again from flashbacks to present day.

BOOKS XIII-XVI: TELEMACHUS & ODYSSEUS REUNITE

Telemachus returns home to Ithaca from Sparta and, with Athena's help is able to avoid a trap set by the suitors to murder him. Meanwhile, Odysseus returns home to Ithaca from Scherie where he is met by Athena in disguise as a shepherd. They decide to use Odysseus' intelligence to trick the suitors by disguising him as a beggar to test their hospitality. Athena reunites Telemachus and Odysseus in a hut before returning to their home. They decide the suitors must be killed.

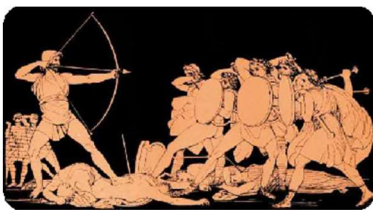
Back at Penelope's home, the suitors have learned that their attempt to kill Telemachus has failed. Penelope has also learned of the attempted plot to kill her son and is outraged at what the suitors had planned without her knowledge. **Eurymachus**, one of the suitors, lies to Penelope to calm her down and pretends he is concerned with Telemachus' safety.

BOOKS XVII-XXIV: ODYSSEUS RETURNS HOME

Odysseus and Telemachus return to their home. Odysseus, still disguised as a beggar, is greeted with scorn from the suitors, particularly by **Antinous**. Penelope is guided by Athena to challenge the suitors to an archery test in order to choose a new husband. It is decided they must shoot an arrow through the hole of 12 axes, a very difficult task. Whoever succeeds shall win Penelope's hand in marriage. Odysseus takes place in the competition himself and wins! Afterwards, he turns the bow towards the suitors. With the help of Telemachus and two shepherds, all the suitors are slain.



*The Reunion of
Telemachus and
Odysseus*



*The
Slaying
of the
Suitors.*

Odysseus reveals his true identity to Penelope, and all is mended. However, when the citizens of Ithaca hear about the killing of the suitors, they want revenge and begin to come after Odysseus and Telemachus. Athena intervenes and restores peace once again to Ithaca.