What is a **HERO**?

**KEY IDEA** When you hear the word *hero*, who comes to mind? Do you think of someone with unusual physical strength? great courage? a rare talent? In Homer’s *Odyssey*, you’ll meet one of the classic heroes of Western literature—Odysseus, a man with many heroic traits as well as human faults.

**DISCUSS** Work with a small group to make a list of people who are generally considered heroes. Discuss the heroic qualities of each. Which qualities seem essential to every hero?
LITERARY ANALYSIS: EPIC HERO

The epic hero is a larger-than-life character, traditionally a man, who pursues long and dangerous adventures. Alternately aided and blocked by the gods, he carries the fate of his people on his shoulders. The epic hero is an archetypal character—one found in works across time and cultures. Odysseus, one of the most famous heroes in Western culture, has shaped our ideas about the traits that a hero should have.

- extraordinary strength and courage
- cleverness and deceit, also known as guile
- extreme confidence and a tendency to dismiss warnings

Every epic hero embodies the values of his culture. As you read the Odyssey, consider how Odysseus faces various conflicts. What does this tell you about his character? What do his character traits tell you about what the ancient Greeks found admirable?

READING STRATEGY: READING AN EPIC POEM

The strategies for reading an epic are very similar to those for reading any narrative poem.

- Keep track of the events.
- Visualize the imagery.
- Notice how the figurative language, including epic similes, can make the story more vivid and interesting.
- Read difficult passages more than once. Use the side notes for help in comprehension.
- Read the poem aloud, as it was originally conveyed.

As you read, keep a list of major events and consider whether they lead Odysseus any closer to home.

VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT

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Know Well | Think I Know | Don’t Know
Sing in me, Muse, and through me tell the story of that man skilled in all ways of contending, the wanderer, harried for years on end, after he plundered the stronghold on the proud height of Troy.

He saw the townlands and learned the minds of many distant men, and weathered many bitter nights and days in his deep heart at sea, while he fought only to save his life, to bring his shipmates home. But not by will nor valor could he save them, for their own recklessness destroyed them all—children and fools, they killed and feasted on the cattle of Lord Helios, the Sun, and he who moves all day through heaven took from their eyes the dawn of their return.

Of these adventures, Muse, daughter of Zeus, tell us in our time, lift the great song again.

The story of Odysseus begins with the goddess Athena’s appealing to Zeus to help Odysseus, who has been wandering for ten years on the seas, to find his way home to his family on Ithaca. While Odysseus has gone, his son, Telemachus, has grown to manhood and his wife, Penelope, has been besieged by suitors wishing to marry her and gain Odysseus’ wealth. The suitors have taken up residence in her home and are constantly feasting on the family’s cattle, sheep, and goats. They dishonor Odysseus and his family. Taking Athena’s advice, Telemachus travels to Pylos for word of his father. Meanwhile, on Ithaca, the evil suitors plot to kill Telemachus when he returns.
BOOK 5:  
Calypso, the Sweet Nymph

For seven of the ten years Odysseus has spent wandering the Mediterranean Sea, he has been held captive by the goddess Calypso on her island. As Book 5 begins, Zeus sends the god Hermes to tell Calypso to release Odysseus. However, she is only to help him build a raft. He must sail for 20 days before landing on the island of Scheria, where he will be helped in his effort to return home.

No words were lost on Hermes the Wayfinder, who bent to tie his beautiful sandals on, ambrosial, golden, that carry him over water or over endless land in a swish of the wind, and took the wand with which he charms asleep—or when he wills, awake—the eyes of men. So wand in hand he paced into the air, shot from Pieria down, down to sea level, and veered to skim the swell. A gull patrolling between the wave crests of the desolate sea will dip to catch a fish, and douse his wings; no higher above the whitecaps Hermes flew until the distant island lay ahead, then rising shoreward from the violet ocean he stepped up to the cave. Divine Calypso, the mistress of the isle, was now at home. Upon her hearthstone a great fire blazing scented the farthest shores with cedar smoke and smoke of thyme, and singing high and low in her sweet voice, before her loom a-weaving, she passed her golden shuttle to and fro.

A deep wood grew outside, with summer leaves of alder and black poplar, pungent cypress. Ornate birds here rested their stretched wings—horned owls, falcons, cormorants—long-tongued beachcombing birds, and followers of the sea. Around the smoothwalled cave a crooking vine held purple clusters under ply of green; and four springs, bubbling up near one another shallow and clear, took channels here and there through beds of violets and tender parsley.

1–6 Hermes (hûr’mèz): the messenger of the gods, also known for his cleverness and trickery.

8 Pieria (pi-îr’e-a): an area next to Mount Olympus, home of the gods.

EPIC SIMILE
Identify the epic simile in lines 9–12. What does this comparison tell you about Hermes?

ANALYZE VISUALS
How has the painter characterized Calypso in this 1906 portrait? Consider any relationship between her white dress and the white clouds.

28 purple clusters: grapes.
Even a god who found this place
would gaze, and feel his heart beat with delight:
so Hermes did; but when he had gazed his fill
he entered the wide cave. Now face to face
the magical Calypso recognized him,
as all immortal gods know one another
on sight—though seeming strangers, far from home.
But he saw nothing of the great Odysseus,
who sat apart, as a thousand times before,
and racked his own heart groaning, with eyes wet
scanning the bare horizon of the sea. . . .

Calypso invites Hermes to her table for food and drink, asking why he has come. Hermes explains that he has brought with an order from Zeus that Calypso must not detain Odysseus any longer but send him on his way home. She reluctantly obeys, agreeing to offer Odysseus her advice about how to get home.

The strong god glittering left her as he spoke,
and now her ladyship, having given heed
to Zeus’s mandate, went to find Odysseus
in his stone seat to seaward—tear on tear
brimming in his eyes. The sweet days of his life time
were running out in anguish over his exile,
for long ago the nymph had ceased to please.

Though he fought shy of her and her desire,
he lay with her each night, for she compelled him.
But when day came he sat on the rocky shore
and broke his own heart groaning, with eyes wet
scanning the bare horizon of the sea.

Now she stood near him in her beauty, saying:

“O forlorn man, be still.
Here you need grieve no more; you need not feel
your life consumed here; I have pondered it,
and I shall help you go. . . .”

Swiftly she turned and led him to her cave,
and they went in, the mortal and immortal.
He took the chair left empty now by Hermes,
where the divine Calypso placed before him
victuals and drink of men; then she sat down
facing Odysseus, while her serving maids
brought nectar and ambrosia to her side.
Then each one’s hands went out on each one’s feast
until they had their pleasure; and she said:
“Son of Laertes, versatile Odysseus,
after these years with me, you still desire
your old home? Even so, I wish you well.
If you could see it all, before you go—
all the adversity you face at sea—
you would stay here, and guard this house, and be
immortal—though you wanted her forever,
that bride for whom you pine each day.
Can I be less desirable than she is?
Less interesting? Less beautiful? Can mortals
compare with goddesses in grace and form?”

To this the strategist Odysseus answered:

“My lady goddess, here is no cause for anger.
My quiet Penelope—how well I know—
would seem a shade before your majesty,
death and old age being unknown to you,
while she must die. Yet, it is true, each day
I long for home, long for the sight of home. . . .”

With Calypso’s help, Odysseus builds a raft and sets out to sea. For 17 days he sails
until he is in sight of Scheria. For 3 more days he is pummeled by storms and finally
swims for the island. He makes it safely ashore and crawls to rest under some bushes.

A man in a distant field, no hearthfires near,
will hide a fresh brand in his bed of embers
to keep a spark alive for the next day;
so in the leaves Odysseus hid himself,
while over him Athena showered sleep
that his distress should end, and soon, soon.
In quiet sleep she sealed his cherished eyes.
In Books 6–8, Odysseus is welcomed by King Alcinous, who gives a banquet in his honor. That night the king begs Odysseus to tell who he is and what has happened to him. In Books 9–12, Odysseus relates to the king his adventures.

“I AM LAERTES’ SON”

say first? What shall I keep until the end?
The gods have tried me in a thousand ways.
But first my name: let that be known to you,
and if I pull away from pitiless death,
friendship will bind us, though my land lies far.

I am Laertes’ son, Odysseus.

formidable for guile in peace and war:
this fame has gone abroad to the sky’s rim.

My home is on the peaked sea-mark of Ithaca
under Mount Neion’s wind-blown robe of leaves,
in sight of other islands—Dulichium,
Same, wooded Zacynthus—Ithaca
being most lofty in that coastal sea,
and northwest, while the rest lie east and south.
A rocky isle, but good for a boy’s training;
I shall not see on earth a place more dear,
though I have been detained long by Calypso,
loveliest among goddesses, who held me
in her smooth caves, to be her heart’s delight,
as Circe of Aeaea, the enchantress,
desired me, and detained me in her hall.
But in my heart I never gave consent.
Where shall a man find sweetness to surpass
his own home and his parents? In far lands
he shall not, though he find a house of gold.

“WHAT SHALL I

ANALYZE VISUALS

This sculpture of Odysseus was produced in Rome sometime between A.D. 4 and 26. How would you describe the expression on his face?

7–8 hold me formidable for guile:
consider me impressive for my cunning
and craftiness.

11–13 Mount Neion’s (nē’önz’); Dulichium
(dūl-i-kī’ē-ām’); Same (sā’mē’); Zacynthus
(zā-sîn’thas).

18–26 Odysseus refers to two beautiful
goddesses, Calypso and Circe, who have
delayed him on their islands. (Details about Circe appear in Book 10.) At the same time, he seems nostalgic for his
family and homeland, from which he has
been separated for 18 years—10 of them
spent fighting in Troy.

EPIC HERO

Reread lines 24–26. What does
Odysseus value most highly?
What of my sailing, then, from Troy? What of those years of rough adventure, weathered under Zeus? . . ."

Odysseus explains that soon after leaving Troy, he and his crew land near Ismarus, the city of the Cicones. The Cicones are allies of the Trojans and therefore enemies of Odysseus. Odysseus and his crew raid the Cicones, robbing and killing them, until the Ciconian army kills 72 of Odysseus’ men and drives the rest out to sea. Delayed by a storm for two days, Odysseus and his remaining companions then continued their journey.

**THE LOTUS EATERS**

“I might have made it safely home, that time, but as I came round Malea the current took me out to sea, and from the north a fresh gale drove me on, past Cythera. Nine days I drifted on the teeming sea before dangerous high winds. Upon the tenth we came to the coastline of the Lotus Eaters, who live upon that flower. We landed there to take on water. All ships’ companies mustered alongside for the mid-day meal. Then I sent out two picked men and a runner to learn what race of men that land sustained. They fell in, soon enough, with Lotus Eaters, who showed no will to do us harm, only offering the sweet Lotus to our friends—but those who ate this honeyed plant, the Lotus, never cared to report, nor to return: they longed to stay forever, browsing on that native bloom, forgetful of their homeland. I drove them, all three wailing, to the ships, tied them down under their rowing benches, and called the rest: ‘All hands aboard; come, clear the beach and no one taste the Lotus, or you lose your hope of home.’ Filing in to their places by the rowlocks my oarsmen dipped their long oars in the surf, and we moved out again on our sea faring.

**THE CYCLOPS**

In the next land we found were Cyclopes, giants, louts, without a law to bless them. In ignorance leaving the fruitage of the earth in mystery to the immortal gods, they neither plow
nor sow by hand, nor till the ground, though grain—
wild wheat and barley—grows untended, and
wine-grapes, in clusters, ripen in heaven’s rain.
Cyclopes have no muster and no meeting,
no consultation or old tribal ways,
but each one dwells in his own mountain cave
dealing out rough justice to wife and child,
indifferent to what the others do. . . ."

Across the bay from the land of the Cyclopes was a lush, deserted island. Odysseus and
his crew landed on the island in a dense fog and spent days feasting on wine and wild
goats and observing the mainland, where the Cyclopes lived. On the third day,
Odysseus and his company of men set out to learn if the Cyclopes were friends or foes.

“When the young Dawn with finger tips of rose
came in the east, I called my men together
and made a speech to them:

‘Old shipmates, friends,
the rest of you stand by; I’ll make the crossing
in my own ship, with my own company,
and find out what the mainland natives are—
for they may be wild savages, and lawless,
or hospitable and god fearing men.’

At this I went aboard, and gave the word
to cast off by the stern. My oarsmen followed,
filling in to their benches by the rowlocks,
and all in line dipped oars in the gray sea.

As we rowed on, and nearer to the mainland,
at one end of the bay, we saw a cavern
yawning above the water, screened with laurel,
and many rams and goats about the place
inside a sheepfold—made from slabs of stone
earthfast between tall trunks of pine and rugged
towering oak trees.

A prodigious man
slept in this cave alone, and took his flocks
to graze afield—remote from all companions,
knowing none but savage ways, a brute
so huge, he seemed no man at all of those
who eat good wheaten bread; but he seemed rather
a shaggy mountain reared in solitude.
We beached there, and I told the crew
to stand by and keep watch over the ship; as for myself I took my twelve best fighters and went ahead. I had a goatskin full of that sweet liquor that Euanthes’ son, Maron, had given me. He kept Apollo’s holy grove at Ismarus; for kindness we showed him there, and showed his wife and child, he gave me seven shining golden talents perfectly formed, a solid silver winebowl, and then this liquor—twelve two-handled jars of brandy, pure and fiery. Not a slave in Maron’s household knew this drink; only he, his wife and the storeroom mistress knew; and they would put one cupful—ruby-colored, honey-smooth—in twenty more of water, but still the sweet scent hovered like a fume over the winebowl. No man turned away when cups of this came round.

A wineskin full I brought along, and victuals in a bag, for in my bones I knew some towering brute would be upon us soon—all outward power, a wild man, ignorant of civility.

We climbed, then, briskly to the cave. But Cyclops had gone afield, to pasture his fat sheep, so we looked round at everything inside: a drying rack that sagged with cheeses, pens crowded with lambs and kids, each in its class: firstlings apart from middlings, and the ‘dewdrops,’ or newborn lambkins, penned apart from both. And vessels full of whey were brimming there—bowls of earthenware and pails for milking.

My men came pressing round me, pleading:

‘Why not take these cheeses, get them stowed, come back, throw open all the pens, and make a run for it? We’ll drive the kids and lambs aboard. We say put out again on good salt water!’

Ah, how sound that was! Yet I refused. I wished to see the caveman, what he had to offer—no pretty sight, it turned out, for my friends.
We lit a fire, burnt an offering, and took some cheese to eat; then sat in silence around the embers, waiting. When he came he had a load of dry boughs on his shoulder to stoke his fire at suppertime. He dumped it with a great crash into that hollow cave, and we all scattered fast to the far wall.

Then over the broad cavern floor he ushered the ewes he meant to milk. He left his rams and he-goats in the yard outside, and swung high overhead a slab of solid rock to close the cave. Two dozen four-wheeled wagons, with heaving wagon teams, could not have stirred the tonnage of that rock from where he wedged it over the doorsill. Next he took his seat and milked his bleating ewes. A practiced job he made of it, giving each ewe her suckling; thickened his milk, then, into curds and whey, sieved out the curds to drip in withy baskets, and poured the whey to stand in bowls cooling until he drank it for his supper. When all these chores were done, he poked the fire, heaping on brushwood. In the glare he saw us.

‘Strangers,’ he said, ‘who are you? And where from? What brings you here by sea ways—a fair traffic? Or are you wandering rogues, who cast your lives like dice, and ravage other folk by sea?’

We felt a pressure on our hearts, in dread of that deep rumble and that mighty man. But all the same I spoke up in reply:

‘We are from Troy, Achaeans, blown off course by shifting gales on the Great South Sea; homeward bound, but taking routes and ways uncommon; so the will of Zeus would have it. We served under Agamemnon, son of Atreus—the whole world knows what city he laid waste, what armies he destroyed. It was our luck to come here; here we stand, beholden for your help, or any gifts you give—as custom is to honor strangers. We would entreat you, great Sir, have a care for the gods’ courtesy; Zeus will avenge the unoffending guest.’

133 burnt an offering: burned a portion of the food as an offering to secure the gods’ goodwill. (Such offerings were frequently performed by Greek sailors during difficult journeys.)

151 withy baskets: baskets made from twigs.

157 fair traffic: honest trading.

ALLUSION
Reread lines 163–169. Agamemnon was the 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?

172–175 It was a sacred Greek custom to honor strangers with food and gifts. Odysseus is warning the Cyclops that Zeus will punish anyone who mistreats a guest.
He answered this from his brute chest, unmoved:

‘You are a ninny, or else you come from the other end of nowhere, telling me, mind the gods! We Cyclopes care not a whistle for your thundering Zeus or all the gods in bliss; we have more force by far. I would not let you go for fear of Zeus— you or your friends—unless I had a whim to. Tell me, where was it, now, you left your ship— around the point, or down the shore, I wonder?’

He thought he’d find out, but I saw through this, and answered with a ready lie:

‘My ship? Poseidon Lord, who sets the earth a-tremble, broke it up on the rocks at your land’s end. A wind from seaward served him, drove us there. We are survivors, these good men and I.’

Neither reply nor pity came from him, but in one stride he clutched at my companions and caught two in his hands like squirming puppies to beat their brains out, spattering the floor. Then he dismembered them and made his meal, gaping and crunching like a mountain lion— everything: innards, flesh, and marrow bones. We cried aloud, lifting our hands to Zeus, powerless, looking on at this, appalled; but Cyclops went on filling up his belly with manflesh and great gulps of whey, then lay down like a mast among his sheep. My heart beat high now at the chance of action, and drawing the sharp sword from my hip I went along his flank to stab him where the midriff holds the liver. I had touched the spot when sudden fear stayed me: if I killed him we perished there as well, for we could never move his ponderous doorway slab aside.

So we were left to groan and wait for morning.

When the young Dawn with fingertips of rose lit up the world, the Cyclops built a fire and milked his handsome ewes, all in due order,
putting the sucklings to the mothers. Then, his chores being all dispatched, he caught another brace of men to make his breakfast, and whisked away his great door slab to let his sheep go through—but he, behind, reset the stone as one would cap a quiver. There was a din of whistling as the Cyclops rounded his flock to higher ground, then stillness. And now I pondered how to hurt him worst, if but Athena granted what I prayed for. Here are the means I thought would serve my turn:

a club, or staff, lay there along the fold—an olive tree, felled green and left to season for Cyclops’ hand. And it was like a mast a lugger of twenty oars, broad in the beam—a deep-sea-going craft—might carry: so long, so big around, it seemed. Now I chopped out a six foot section of this pole and set it down before my men, who scraped it; and when they had it smooth, I hewed again to make a stake with pointed end. I held this in the fire’s heart and turned it, toughening it, then hid it, well back in the cavern, under one of the dung piles in profusion there. Now came the time to toss for it: who ventured along with me? whose hand could bear to thrust and grind that spike in Cyclops’ eye, when mild sleep had mastered him? As luck would have it, the men I would have chosen won the toss—four strong men, and I made five as captain.

At evening came the shepherd with his flock, his woolly flock. The rams as well, this time, entered the cave: by some sheep-herding whim—or a god’s bidding—none were left outside. He hefted his great boulder into place and sat him down to milk the bleating ewes in proper order, put the lambs to suck, and swiftly ran through all his evening chores. Then he caught two more men and feasted on them. My moment was at hand, and I went forward holding an ivy bowl of my dark drink, looking up, saying:

215 brace: pair.

218–219 The Cyclops reseals the cave with the massive rock as easily as an ordinary human places the cap on a container of arrows.

226 left to season: left to dry out and harden.

228 lugger: a small, wide sailing ship.

profusion (prə-fyō′zhan) n. abundance

238–243 What does Odysseus plan to do to the Cyclops?
‘Cyclops, try some wine.

Here’s liquor to wash down your scraps of men.
Taste it, and see the kind of drink we carried
under our planks. I meant it for an offering
if you would help us home. But you are mad,
unbearable, a bloody monster! After this,
will any other traveller come to see you?’

He seized and drained the bowl, and it went down
so fiery and smooth he called for more:

‘Give me another, thank you kindly. Tell me,
how are you called? I’ll make a gift will please you.
Even Cyclopes know the wine-grapes grow
out of grassland and loam in heaven’s rain,
but here’s a bit of nectar and ambrosia!’

Three bowls I brought him, and he poured them down.
I saw the fuddle and flush come over him,
then I sang out in cordial tones:

‘Cyclops,

you ask my honorable name? Remember
the gift you promised me, and I shall tell you.
My name is Nohbdy: mother, father, and friends,
everyone calls me Nohbdy.’

And he said:

‘Nohbdy’s my meat, then, after I eat his friends.
Others come first. There’s a noble gift, now.’

Even as he spoke, he reeled and tumbled backward,
his great head lolling to one side: and sleep
took him like any creature. Drunk, hiccupping,
he dribbled streams of liquor and bits of men.

Now, by the gods, I drove my big hand spike
deep in the embers, charring it again,
and cheered my men along with battle talk
to keep their courage up: no quitting now.
The pike of olive, green though it had been,
reddened and glowed as if about to catch.
I drew it from the coals and my four fellows
gave me a hand, lugging it near the Cyclops
as more than natural force nerved them; straight
forward they sprinted, lifted it, and rammed it
deep in his crater eye, and I leaned on it
turning it as a shipwright turns a drill
in planking, having men below to swing
the two-handled strap that spins it in the groove.

So with our brand we bored that great eye socket
while blood ran out around the red hot bar.
Eyelid and lash were seared; the pierced ball
hissed broiling, and the roots popped.

In a smithy

one sees a white-hot axehead or an adze
plunged and wrung in a cold tub, screeching steam—
the way they make soft iron hale and hard—:
just so that eyeball hissed around the spike. k

The Cyclops bellowed and the rock roared round him,
and we fell back in fear. Clawing his face
he tugged the bloody spike out of his eye,
threw it away, and his wild hands went groping;
then he set up a howl for Cyclopes
who lived in caves on windy peaks nearby.

Some heard him; and they came by divers ways
to clump around outside and call:

‘What ails you,
Polyphemus? Why do you cry so sore
in the starry night? You will not let us sleep.
Sure no man’s driving off your flock? No man
has tricked you, ruined you?’

Out of the cave

the mammoth Polyphemus roared in answer:

‘Nohbdy, Nohbdy’s tricked me, Nohbdy’s ruined me!’

To this rough shout they made a sage reply:

‘Ah well, if nobody has played you foul
there in your lonely bed, we are no use in pain
given by great Zeus. Let it be your father,
Poseidon Lord, to whom you pray.’ l

they trailed away. And I was filled with laughter
to see how like a charm the name deceived them.

Now Cyclops, wheezing as the pain came on him,
fumbled to wrench away the great doorstone

299 smithy: blacksmith’s shop.
300 adze (āzd): an axlike tool with a curved blade.

k EPIC SIMILE
Find the epic similes in lines 292–297 and lines 299–303. What two things are being compared in each case? What are the effects of this figurative language?

l ALLUSION
What do you learn about Polyphemus from the allusion in lines 321–322?

318 sage: wise.

319–322 Odysseus’ lie about his name has paid off. What do the other Cyclopes assume to be the source of Polyphemus’ pain?

l ALLUSION
What do you learn about Polyphemus from the allusion in lines 321–322?
and squatted in the breach with arms thrown wide
for any silly beast or man who bolted—
hoping somehow I might be such a fool.

But I kept thinking how to win the game:
death sat there huge; how could we slip away?
I drew on all my wits, and ran through tactics,
reasoning as a man will for dear life,
until a trick came—and it pleased me well.

The Cyclops’ rams were handsome, fat, with heavy
fleeces, a dark violet.  

I tied them silently together, twining
cords of willow from the ogre’s bed;
then slung a man under each middle one
to ride there safely, shielded left and right.

So three sheep could convey each man. I took
the woolliest ram, the choicest of the flock,
and hung myself under his kinky belly,
pulled up tight, with fingers twisted deep
in sheepskin ringlets for an iron grip.

So, breathing hard, we waited until morning.

When Dawn spread out her finger tips of rose
the rams began to stir, moving for pasture,
and peals of bleating echoed round the pens
where dams with udders full called for a milking.

Blinded, and sick with pain from his head wound,
the master stroked each ram, then let it pass,
but my men riding on the pectoral fleece
the giant’s blind hands blundering never found.

Last of them all my ram, the leader, came,
weighted by wool and me with my meditations.
The Cyclops patted him, and then he said:

‘Sweet cousin ram, why lag behind the rest
in the night cave? You never linger so,
but graze before them all, and go afar
to crop sweet grass, and take your stately way
leading along the streams, until at evening
you run to be the first one in the fold.
Why, now, so far behind? Can you be grieving
over your Master’s eye? That carrion rogue
and his accurst companions burnt it out
when he had conquered all my wits with wine.
Nohbdy will not get out alive, I swear.
Oh, had you brain and voice to tell
where he may be now, dodging all my fury!
Bashed by this hand and bashed on this rock wall
his brains would strew the floor, and I should have
rest from the outrage Nohbdy worked upon me.’

He sent us into the open, then. Close by,
I dropped and rolled clear of the ram’s belly,
going this way and that to untie the men.
With many glances back, we rounded up
his fat, stiff-legged sheep to take aboard,
and drove them down to where the good ship lay.

We saw, as we came near, our fellows’ faces
shining; then we saw them turn to grief
tallying those who had not fled from death.
I hushed them, jerking head and eyebrows up,
and in a low voice told them: ‘Load this herd;
move fast, and put the ship’s head toward the breakers.’
They all pitched in at loading, then embarked
and struck their oars into the sea. Far out,
as far off shore as shouted words would carry,
I sent a few back to the adversary:

‘O Cyclops! Would you feast on my companions?
Puny, am I, in a Caveman’s hands?
How do you like the beating that we gave you,
you damned cannibal? Eater of guests
under your roof! Zeus and the gods have paid you!’

The blind thing in his doubled fury broke
a hilltop in his hands and heaved it after us.
Ahead of our black prow it struck and sank
whelmed in a spuming geyser, a giant wave
that washed the ship stern foremost back to shore.

I got the longest boathook out and stood
fending us off, with furious nods to all
to put their backs into a racing stroke—
row, row, or perish. So the long oars bent
kicking the foam sternward, making head
until we drew away, and twice as far.
Now when I cupped my hands I heard the crew
in low voices protesting:

‘Godsake, Captain!
Why bait the beast again? Let him alone!’
‘That tidal wave he made on the first throw
all but beached us.’

‘All but stove us in!’

‘Give him our bearing with your trumpeting,
he’ll get the range and lob a boulder.’

Aye

He’ll smash our timbers and our heads together!’

I would not heed them in my glorying spirit,
but let my anger flare and yelled:

‘Cyclops,
if ever mortal man inquire
how you were put to shame and blinded, tell him
Odysseus, raider of cities, took your eye:
Laertes’ son, whose home’s on Ithaca!’

At this he gave a mighty sob and rumbled:

‘Now comes the weird upon me, spoken of old.
A wizard, grand and wondrous, lived here—Telemus,
a son of Eurymus; great length of days
he had in wizardry among the Cyclopes,
and these things he foretold for time to come:
my great eye lost, and at Odysseus’ hands.
Always I had in mind some giant, armed
in giant force, would come against me here.
But this, but you—small, pitiful and twiggy—
you put me down with wine, you blinded me.
Come back, Odysseus, and I’ll treat you well,
praying the god of earthquake to befriend you—
his son I am, for he by his avowal
fathered me, and, if he will, he may
heal me of this black wound—he and no other
of all the happy gods or mortal men.’

Few words I shouted in reply to him:
‘If I could take your life I would and take
your time away, and hurl you down to hell!
The god of earthquake could not heal you there!’

At this he stretched his hands out in his darkness
toward the sky of stars, and prayed Poseidon:
‘O hear me, lord, blue girdler of the islands, if I am thine indeed, and thou art father: grant that Odysseus, raider of cities, never see his home: Laertes’ son, I mean, who kept his hall on Ithaca. Should destiny intend that he shall see his roof again among his family in his father land, far be that day, and dark the years between. Let him lose all companions, and return under strange sail to bitter days at home.’

In these words he prayed, and the god heard him. Now he laid hands upon a bigger stone and wheeled around, titanic for the cast, to let it fly in the black-prowed vessel’s track. But it fell short, just aft the steering oar, and whelming seas rose giant above the stone to bear us onward toward the island.

There as we ran in we saw the squadron waiting, the trim ships drawn up side by side, and all our troubled friends who waited, looking seaward. We beached her, grinding keel in the soft sand, and waded in, ourselves, on the sandy beach. Then we unloaded all the Cyclops’ flock to make division, share and share alike, only my fighters voted that my ram, the prize of all, should go to me. I slew him by the sea side and burnt his long thighbones to Zeus beyond the stormcloud, Cronus’ son, who rules the world. But Zeus disdained my offering; destruction for my ships he had in store and death for those who sailed them, my companions.

Now all day long until the sun went down we made our feast on mutton and sweet wine, till after sunset in the gathering dark we went to sleep above the wash of ripples.

When the young Dawn with finger tips of rose touched the world, I roused the men, gave orders to man the ships, cast off the mooring lines; and filing in to sit beside the rowlocks oarsmen in line dipped oars in the gray sea. So we moved out, sad in the vast offing, having our precious lives, but not our friends.”
Odysseus and his men next land on the island of Aeolus, the wind king, and stay with him a month. To extend his hospitality, Aeolus gives Odysseus two parting gifts: a fair west wind that will blow the fleet of ships toward Ithaca, and a great bag holding all the unfavorable, stormy winds. Within sight of home, and while Odysseus is sleeping, the men open the bag, thinking it contains gold and silver. The bad winds thus escape and blow the ships back to Aeolus’ island. The king refuses to help them again, believing now that their voyage has been cursed by the gods.

The discouraged mariners next stop briefly in the land of the Laestrygones, fierce cannibals who bombard the fleet of ships with boulders. Only Odysseus, his ship, and its crew of 45 survive the shower of boulders. The lone ship then sails to Aeaea, home of the goddess Circe, who is considered by many to be a witch. There, Odysseus divides his men into two groups. Eurylochus leads one platoon to explore the island, while Odysseus stays behind on the ship with the remaining crew.

“In the wild wood they found an open glade, around a smooth stone house—the hall of Circe—and wolves and mountain lions lay there, mild in her soft spell, fed on her drug of evil. None would attack—oh, it was strange, I tell you—but switching their long tails they faced our men like hounds, who look up when their master comes with tidbits for them—as he will—from table. Humbly those wolves and lions with mighty paws fawned on our men—who met their yellow eyes and feared them.

In the entrance way they stayed to listen there: inside her quiet house they heard the goddess Circe.

in her beguiling voice, while on her loom she wove ambrosial fabric sheer and bright,

Low she sang

10 fawned on: showed affection for.

EPIC SIMILE
In lines 6–11, notice the simile involving Circe’s wolves and mountain lions. What is the point of this comparison? How does it affect your impression of Circe’s hall?

beguiling (bē’gō’ling) adj. charming; pleasing beguile v.

15 ambrosial: fit for the gods.
by that craft known to the goddesses of heaven. No one would speak, until Polites—most faithful and likable of my officers, said:

‘Dear friends, no need for stealth: here’s a young weaver singing a pretty song to set the air a-tingle on these lawns and paven courts. Goddess she is, or lady. Shall we greet her?’

So reassured, they all cried out together, and she came swiftly to the shining doors to call them in. All but Eurylochus—who feared a snare—the innocents went after her. On thrones she seated them, and lounging chairs, while she prepared a meal of cheese and barley and amber honey mixed with Pramnian wine, adding her own vile pinch, to make them lose desire or thought of our dear father land. Scarce had they drunk when she flew after them with her long stick and shut them in a pigsty—bodies, voices, heads, and bristles, all swinish now, though minds were still unchanged. So, squealing, in they went. And Circe tossed them acorns, mast, and cornel berries—fodder for hogs who rut and slumber on the earth.

Down to the ship Eurylochus came running to cry alarm, foul magic doomed his men! But working with dry lips to speak a word he could not, being so shaken; blinding tears welled in his eyes; **foreboding** filled his heart. When we were frantic questioning him, at last we heard the tale: our friends were gone. . . .”

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Eurylochus tells Odysseus what has happened and begs him to sail away from Circe’s island. Against this advice, however, Odysseus rushes to save his men from the enchantress. On the way, he meets the god Hermes, who gives him a magical plant called moly to protect him from Circe’s power. Still, Hermes warns Odysseus that he must make the goddess swear she will play no “witches’ tricks.” Armed with the moly and Hermes’ warning, Odysseus arrives at Circe’s palace.

Circe gives Odysseus a magic drink, but it does not affect him and he threatens to kill her with his sword. Circe turns the pigs back into men but puts them all into a trance. They stay for one year, until Odysseus finally begs her to let them go home. She replies that they must first visit the land of the dead and hear a prophecy from the ghost of Tiresias.
Odysseus and his crew set out for the land of the dead. They arrive and find the place to which Circe has directed them.

“Then I addressed the blurred and breathless dead, vowing to slaughter my best heifer for them before she calved, at home in Ithaca, and burn the choice bits on the altar fire; as for Tiresias, I swore to sacrifice a black lamb, handsomest of all our flock. Thus to assuage the nations of the dead I pledged these rites, then slashed the lamb and ewe, letting their black blood stream into the wellpit. Now the souls gathered, stirring out of Erebus, brides and young men, and men grown old in pain, and tender girls whose hearts were new to grief; many were there, too, torn by brazen lanceheads, battle-slain, bearing still their bloody gear. From every side they came and sought the pit with rustling cries; and I grew sick with fear. But presently I gave command to my officers to flay those sheep the bronze cut down, and make burnt offerings of flesh to the gods below—to sovereign Death, to pale Persephone. Meanwhile I crouched with my drawn sword to keep the surging phantoms from the bloody pit till I should know the presence of Tiresias.

One shade came first—Elpenor, of our company, who lay unburied still on the wide earth as we had left him—dead in Circe’s hall, untouched, unmourned, when other cares compelled us. Now when I saw him there I wept for pity and called out to him:

assuage (ə-swāj’) v. to calm or pacify

Erebus (ér’ə-bas): a region of the land of the dead, also known as the underworld or Hades. Hades is also the name of the god of the underworld.

flay: to strip off the outer skin of.

ALLUSION
In lines 17–20, Odysseus makes a sacrifice to “sovereign Death,” or Hades, and “pale Persephone” (pār-sēf’ə-nē), his bride, who was kidnapped and forced to live with him for six months of every year. Her mother, goddess of the harvest, grieves during that time, causing winter to fall. What does this background information tell you about Hades? Consider how this information affects your impression of the underworld.
'How is this, Elpenor,
how could you journey to the western gloom
swifter afoot than I in the black lugger?'

He sighed, and answered:

'Son of great Laertes,
Odysseus, master mariner and soldier,
bad luck shadowed me, and no kindly power;
ignoble death I drank with so much wine.
I slept on Circe’s roof, then could not see
the long steep backward ladder, coming down,
and fell that height. My neck bone, buckled under,
snapped, and my spirit found this well of dark.
Now hear the grace I pray for, in the name
of those back in the world, not here—your wife
and father, he who gave you bread in childhood,
and your own child, your only son, Telemachus,
long ago left at home.
When you make sail
and put these lodgings of dim Death behind,
you will moor ship, I know, upon Aeaea Island;
there, O my lord, remember me, I pray,
do not abandon me unwept, unburied,
to tempt the gods’ wrath, while you sail for home;
but fire my corpse, and all the gear I had,
and build a cairn for me above the breakers—
an unknown sailor’s mark for men to come.
Heap up the mound there, and implant upon it
the oar I pulled in life with my companions.’

He ceased, and I replied:

‘Unhappy spirit,
I promise you the barrow and the burial.’

So we conversed, and grimly, at a distance,
with my long sword between, guarding the blood,
while the faint image of the lad spoke on.

Now came the soul of Anticlea, dead,
my mother, daughter of Autolycus,
dead now, though living still when I took ship
for holy Troy. Seeing this ghost I grieved,
but held her off, through pang on pang of tears,
till I should know the presence of Tiresias.
Soon from the dark that prince of Thebes came forward
bearing a golden staff; and he addressed me:

‘Son of Laertes and the gods of old,
Odysseus, master of land ways and sea ways,
why leave the blazing sun, O man of woe,
to see the cold dead and the joyless region?
Stand clear, put up your sword;
let me but taste of blood, I shall speak true.’

At this I stepped aside, and in the scabbard
let my long sword ring home to the pommel silver,
as he bent down to the sombre blood. Then spoke
the prince of those with gift of speech:

‘Great captain,
a fair wind and the honey lights of home
are all you seek. But anguish lies ahead;
the god who thunders on the land prepares it,
not to be shaken from your track, implacable,
in rancor for the son whose eye you blinded.
One narrow strait may take you through his blows:
denial of yourself, restraint of shipmates.

When you make landfall on Thrinacia first
and quit the violet sea, dark on the land
you’ll find the grazing herds of Helios
by whom all things are seen, all speech is known.
Avoid those kine, hold fast to your intent,
and hard seafaring brings you all to Ithaca.
But if you raid the beeves, I see destruction
for ship and crew. Though you survive alone,
bered of all companions, lost for years,
under strange sail shall you come home, to find
your own house filled with trouble: insolent men
eating your livestock as they court your lady.
Aye, you shall make those men atone in blood!
But after you have dealt out death—in open
combat or by stealth—to all the suitors,
go overland on foot, and take an oar,
until one day you come where men have lived
with meat unsalted, never known the sea,
nor seen seagoing ships, with crimson bows
and oars that fledge light hulls for dipping flight.
The spot will soon be plain to you, and I
can tell you how: some passerby will say,
“What winnowing fan is that upon your shoulder?”
Halt, and implant your smooth oar in the turf
and make fair sacrifice to Lord Poseidon:
a ram, a bull, a great buck boar; turn back,
and carry out pure hekatombs at home
to all wide heaven’s lords, the undying gods,
to each in order. Then a seaborne death
soft as this hand of mist will come upon you
when you are wearied out with rich old age,
your country folk in blessed peace around you.
And all this shall be just as I foretell.’ . . .”

89–91 kine; beeves: two words for cattle.

101–102 where men have lived with meat unsalted: refers to an inland location where men do not eat salted (preserved) meat as sailors do aboard a ship.

3 EPIC HERO
An epic hero’s fate is often a matter
of great importance to the gods
and to the hero’s homeland. In lines
77–117, Odysseus’ fate is the subject
of a prophecy by Tiresias, a blind
seer who now dwells among the
dead. A prophecy such as this can
serve as foreshadowing in an epic
or other story. Do you think that
Odysseus’ fate will unfold exactly as
Tiresias foretells it? Explain why you
think as you do.

Odysseus speaks to the shade of his mother. She tells him that Penelope and Telemachus are still grieving for him and that his father, Laertes, has moved to the country, where he, too, mourns his son. Odysseus’ mother explains that she died from a broken heart. Odysseus also speaks with the spirits of many great ladies and men who died, as well as those who were being punished for their earthly sins. Filled with horror, Odysseus and his crew set sail.
Odysseus and his men return to Circe’s island. While the men sleep, Circe takes Odysseus aside to hear about the underworld and to offer advice.

“Then said the Lady Circe:

‘So: all those trials are over.
Listen with care

to this, now, and a god will arm your mind.
Square in your ship’s path are Sirens, crying
beauty to bewitch men coasting by;
woe to the innocent who hears that sound!
He will not see his lady nor his children
in joy, crowding about him, home from sea;
the Sirens will sing his mind away
on their sweet meadow lolling. There are bones
of dead men rotting in a pile beside them
and flayed skins shrivel around the spot.

Steer wide;

keep well to seaward; plug your oarsmen’s ears
with beeswax kneaded soft; none of the rest
should hear that song.

But if you wish to listen,

let the men tie you in the lugger, hand
and foot, back to the mast, lashed to the mast,
so you may hear those harpies’ thrilling voices;
shout as you will, begging to be untied,
your crew must only twist more line around you
and keep their stroke up, till the singers fade.
What then? One of two courses you may take,
and you yourself must weigh them. I shall not
plan the whole action for you now, but only
tell you of both.

ANALYZE VISUALS
This detail from a 19th-century painting shows Odysseus tied to the mast of his ship to protect him from the Sirens’ tempting song. Notice that his men have all covered their ears. How does the artist’s depiction of the Sirens affect your understanding of the story? Explain.

2–3 In Circe, Odysseus has found a valuable ally. In the next hundred lines, she describes in detail each danger that he and his men will meet on their way home.

14 kneaded (nē’dād): squeezed and pressed.

18 those harpies’ thrilling voices: the delightful voices of those horrible female creatures.
Ahead are beetling rocks
and dark blue glancing Amphitrite, surging,
roars around them. Prowling Rocks, or Drifters,
the gods in bliss have named them—named them well.
Not even birds can pass them by. . . .

A second course
lies between headlands. One is a sharp mountain
piercing the sky, with stormcloud round the peak
dissolving never, not in the brightest summer,
to show heaven’s azure there, nor in the fall.
No mortal man could scale it, nor so much
as land there, not with twenty hands and feet,
so sheer the cliffs are—as of polished stone.
Midway that height, a cavern full of mist
opens toward Erebus and evening. Skirting
this in the lugger, great Odysseus,
your master bowman, shooting from the deck,
would come short of the cavemouth with his shaft;
but that is the den of Scylla, where she yaps
abominably, a newborn whelp’s cry,
though she is huge and monstrous. God or man,
no one could look on her in joy. Her legs—and there are twelve—are like great tentacles,
unjointed, and upon her serpent necks
are borne six heads like nightmares of ferocity,
with triple serried rows of fangs and deep
gullets of black death. Half her length, she sways
her heads in air, outside her horrid cleft,
hunting the sea around that promontory
for dolphins, dogfish, or what bigger game
thundering Amphitrite feeds in thousands.
And no ship’s company can claim
to have passed her without loss and grief; she takes,
from every ship, one man for every gullet.

The opposite point seems more a tongue of land
you’d touch with a good bowshot, at the narrows.
A great wild fig, a shaggy mass of leaves,
grows on it, and Charybdis lurks below
to swallow down the dark sea tide. Three times
from dawn to dusk she spews it up
and sucks it down again three times, a whirling
maelstrom; if you come upon her then
the god who makes earth tremble could not save you.

25 beetling: jutting or overhanging.
26 glancing Amphitrite (ām’fī-trī’tē): sparkling seawater. (Amphitrite is the
goddess of the sea and the wife of Poseidon. Here, Circe uses the name
to refer to the sea itself.)
30 headlands: points of land jutting out into the sea; promontories.
34 heaven’s azure (āzh’ār): the blue sky.

abominably (ə-bōm’ə-nō-blē) adv.
in a hateful way; horribly

43–55 Circe presents a very unpleasant image of Scylla. To get a better idea of what Odysseus and his crew will be up against, try using this detailed description to either visualize or draw a picture of Scylla.

66 maelstrom (māl’strām): a large, violent whirlpool.
No, hug the cliff of Scylla, take your ship through on a racing stroke. Better to mourn six men than lose them all, and the ship, too.’

So her advice ran; but I faced her, saying:

‘Only instruct me, goddess, if you will, how, if possible, can I pass Charybdis, or fight off Scylla when she raids my crew?’

Swiftly that loveliest goddess answered me:

‘Must you have battle in your heart forever? The bloody toil of combat? Old contender, will you not yield to the immortal gods? That nightmare cannot die, being eternal
evil itself—horror, and pain, and chaos; there is no fighting her, no power can fight her, all that avails is flight.

Lose headway there along that rockface while you break out arms, and she’ll swoop over you, I fear, once more, taking one man again for every gullet.

No, no, put all your backs into it, row on; invoke Blind Force, that bore this scourge of men, to keep her from a second strike against you.

Then you will coast Thrinacia, the island where Helios’ cattle graze, fine herds, and flocks of goodly sheep. The herds and flocks are seven, with fifty beasts in each.

No lambs are dropped, or calves, and these fat cattle never die. Immortal, too, their cowherds are—their shepherds—Phaethusa and Lampetia, sweetly braided nymphs that divine Neaera bore to the overlord of high noon, Helios. These nymphs their gentle mother bred and placed upon Thrinacia, the distant land, in care of flocks and cattle for their father.

Now give those kine a wide berth, keep your thoughts intent upon your course for home, and hard seafaring brings you all to Ithaca. But if you raid the beeves, I see destruction for ship and crew.

82 all . . . flight: all you can do is flee.

EPIC HERO
Summarize the exchange between Odysseus and Circe in lines 68–85. What is Circe’s advice to Odysseus? Do you think he will follow her advice? Explain.

87 invoke . . . men: pray to the goddess Blind Force, who gave birth to Scylla.

89 coast: sail along the coast of.

95–96 Phaethusa (fā’a-thō’sa); Lampetia (lām-pē’sha); Neaera (nē-ē’ra).

101–105 Circe warns Odysseus not to steal Helios’ fine cattle because Helios will take revenge.
Rough years then lie between you and your homecoming, alone and old, the one survivor, all companions lost.’ . . .”

At dawn, Odysseus and his men continue their journey. Odysseus decides to tell the men only of Circe’s warnings about the Sirens, whom they will soon encounter. He is fairly sure that they can survive this peril if he keeps their spirits up. Suddenly, the wind stops.

“The crew were on their feet briskly, to furl the sail, and stow it; then, each in place, they poised the smooth oar blades and sent the white foam scudding by. I carved a massive cake of beeswax into bits and rolled them in my hands until they softened—no long task, for a burning heat came down from Helios, lord of high noon. Going forward I carried wax along the line, and laid it thick on their ears. They tied me up, then, plumb amidships, back to the mast, lashed to the mast, and took themselves again to rowing. Soon, as we came smartly within hailing distance, the two Sirens, noting our fast ship off their point, made ready, and they sang. . . .

The lovely voices in ardor appealing over the water made me crave to listen, and I tried to say ‘Untie me!’ to the crew, jerking my brows; but they bent steady to the oars. Then Perimedes got to his feet, he and Eurylochus, and passed more line about, to hold me still. So all rowed on, until the Sirens dropped under the sea rim, and their singing dwindled away.

My faithful company rested on their oars now, peeling off the wax that I had laid thick on their ears; then set me free.

But scarcely had that island faded in blue air than I saw smoke and white water, with sound of waves in tumult—a sound the men heard, and it terrified them. Oars flew from their hands; the blades went knocking wild alongside till the ship lost way,
Well, I walked up and down from bow to stern, trying to put heart into them, standing over every oarsman, saying gently,

‘Friends, have we never been in danger before this?

More fearsome, is it now, than when the Cyclops penned us in his cave? What power he had!
Did I not keep my nerve, and use my wits to find a way out for us?

Now I say by hook or crook this peril too shall be something that we remember.

Heads up, lads!

We must obey the orders as I give them. Get the oarshafts in your hands, and lay back hard on your benches; hit these breaking seas. Zeus help us pull away before we founder.

You at the tiller, listen, and take in all that I say—the rudders are your duty; keep her out of the combers and the smoke; steer for that headland; watch the drift, or we fetch up in the smother, and you drown us.’

That was all, and it brought them round to action. But as I sent them on toward Scylla, I told them nothing, as they could do nothing. They would have dropped their oars again, in panic, to roll for cover under the decking. Circe’s bidding against arms had slipped my mind, so I tied on my cuirass and took up two heavy spears, then made my way along to the foredeck—thinking to see her first from there, the monster of the gray rock, harboring torment for my friends. I strained my eyes upon that cliffside veiled in cloud, but nowhere could I catch sight of her.

And all this time, in travail, sobbing, gaining on the current, we rowed into the strait—Scylla to port and on our starboard beam Charybdis, dire gorge of the salt sea tide. By heaven! when she vomited, all the sea was like a cauldron seething over intense fire, when the mixture suddenly heaves and rises.

154 
founder: sink.

157 
combers: breaking waves.

158–159 
watch ... smother: keep the ship on course, or it will be crushed in the rough water.

160–165
travail (trə-väl”) n. painful effort

176 
gorge: throat; gullet.

EPIC HERO
Consider Odysseus’ behavior in lines 108–179. Do you think he is a good leader? Explain your opinion.
The shot spume soared to the landside heights, and fell like rain.

But when she swallowed the sea water down we saw the funnel of the maelstrom, heard the rock bellowing all around, and dark sand raged on the bottom far below.

My men all blanched against the gloom, our eyes were fixed upon that yawning mouth in fear of being devoured.

Then Scylla made her strike, whisking six of my best men from the ship. I happened to glance aft at ship and oarsmen and caught sight of their arms and legs, dangling high overhead. Voices came down to me in anguish, calling my name for the last time.

A man surfcasting on a point of rock for bass or mackerel, whipping his long rod to drop the sinker and the bait far out, will hook a fish and rip it from the surface to dangle wriggling through the air:

so these

were borne aloft in spasms toward the cliff.

She ate them as they shrieked there, in her den, in the dire grapple, reaching still for me—and deathly pity ran me through at that sight—far the worst I ever suffered, questing the passes of the strange sea.

We rowed on.

The Rocks were now behind; Charybdis, too, and Scylla dropped astern. . . .”

Odysseus tries to persuade his men to bypass Thrinacia, the island of the sun god, Helios, but they insist on landing. Driven by hunger, they ignore Odysseus’ warning not to feast on Helios’ cattle. This disobedience angers the sun god, who threatens to stop shining if payment is not made for the loss of his cattle. To appease Helios, Zeus sends down a thunderbolt to sink Odysseus’ ship. Odysseus alone survives. He eventually drifts to Ogygia, the home of Calypso, who keeps him on her island for seven years. With this episode, Odysseus ends the telling of his tale to King Alcinous.
Comprehension

1. Recall Why does Odysseus want to leave Calypso and her island?

2. Recall How does Odysseus escape from Polyphemus?

3. Recall What happens to Eurylochus’ men after they drink Circe’s wine?

4. Recall What does Tiresias predict will happen if Odysseus raids the herds of Helios?

5. Summarize How does Odysseus survive the dangers posed by the Sirens, Scylla, and Charybdis?

Literary Analysis

6. Analyze Epic Hero Create a two-column chart to analyze Odysseus’ strengths and weaknesses. To what extent do the traits in each column seem fitting for an epic hero? Explain.

7. Analyze Epithets Identify at least five epithets used to describe Odysseus in Part 1. For each epithet, explain what it tells you about his character.

8. Understand Character Motivation After Odysseus escapes from Polyphemus, he makes sure that Polyphemus knows who outwitted him. Why does he care? What are the consequences of Odysseus’ behavior?

9. Interpret Epic Simile Reread the epic simile on page 1136, lines 193–198, which describes the men being caught by Scylla. Explain what two items are being compared. What does the comparison help to emphasize?

10. Interpret Allusions In the opening lines of Book 1, the poet calls upon Muse, a daughter of Zeus often credited with inspiration. Why would he open the epic in this way? What does this allusion tell you about him as a poet?

11. Examine Theme One theme of the adventures described in Part 1 is that a hero must rely on clever deceit, or guile, to survive. Explain how this theme is conveyed. Can you identify any other themes in Part 1?

Literary Criticism

12. Critical Interpretations In discussing Homer’s use of epic similes, the critic Eva Brann contends that “similes do much the same work in Homeric epic as do the gods, who also beautify and magnify human existence.” Think about how the gods interact with humans in the Odyssey. Do you agree that they “beautify and magnify” human existence? Then consider the epic similes you have encountered so far; how might they be seen to do the same? Explain whether or not you think Brann is making a worthwhile comparison.