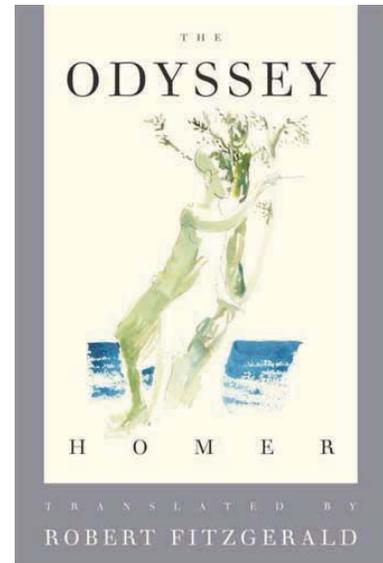




# Reading Group Gold

## The Odyssey

by Homer; Translated by Robert Fitzgerald;  
Introduction by D.S. Carne-Ross



ISBN: 0-374-52574-9 | 528 pages

### To the Teacher

This teacher's guide is keyed to the Robert Fitzgerald translation of *The Odyssey*. By universal consensus, Fitzgerald's *Odyssey* is acknowledged to have an openness and immediacy unsurpassed by any other English translation.

Little is certain when it comes to the origins of *The Odyssey* or its partner epic, *The Iliad*. *The Iliad* is the prequel, as we would now call it, to *The Odyssey* in the legendary story of the Greek expedition to reclaim Helen from the city of Troy. Both epics circulated from the dawn of literacy under the name of Homer, but who this fabled poet was, and when and where he lived, remain riddles. Already some ancient critics doubted a single poet wrote both epics, and most modern scholars prefer to ascribe the creation and shaping of both stories to a tradition rather than to one or even two authors. Legends about the gods, and about a variety of heroes and their exploits, were in constant circulation and development, handed down from generation to generation. Over many centuries, bards developed highly formalized language to chant the stories in public performances. As the scenes of performances in *The Odyssey* suggest, these singers had a large repertoire of tales from which they chose when aiming to satisfy a particular audience's demand, or more likely the request of the local lord. The material was familiar, and the language traditional, indeed formulaic, so that a good singer could always improvise, in proper style and meter, a song that suited the performance situation in theme, episodes, details, scope, and tone. All the songs, as far as we can tell, gave audiences a vision of their ancestors, people more glorious and admirable than the singer's contemporaries, whether in victory or in defeat. In their greatness, in their heroic pursuit of glory and undying fame, the epic characters defined the heroic code the listeners, at least initially members of a warrior class, were to follow. What conferred undying fame was epic song itself: listeners of epic would have aspired to become the subject of song for subsequent generations.

There must have been many signal events, many great moments in the history of epic before *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* achieved the forms in which we know them, but two appear, in retrospect, to have been supremely significant. Many towns and settlements were sacked as peoples jockeyed for land and power in what is now Greece and Turkey, but it seems that a city known as Troy, or Ilium, on the northwest coast of Asia Minor, near the strait known as the Dardanelles, and for that strategic reason a significant power, was the frequent target of marauding attacks and sieges. One of the most devastating destructions it suffered fell shortly before or after 1200 B.C.E., some 3,200 years before our time. Around this destruction there seem to have coalesced stories of a Greek army on a mammoth campaign to sack the fortified city which sat astride sea and land lanes to the richer east. What was the reason for the expedition? Not greed and power politics—so legend has it—but the drive to recover something yet more precious: Greek honor in the shape of Helen, the beautiful wife of Meneláos, King of Sparta. Helen, the story goes, had been abducted by Paris, the handsome Trojan prince. And so the tale was spun backward.



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## To the Teacher

The legendary campaign against Troy took ten years. *The Iliad*, long though it is, narrates a crucial patch of the tenth year only, when Akhilleus, the greatest hero of the Greeks, fell out with the Greek commander in chief, Agamémnon, Meneláos' brother. By the end of *The Iliad*, Akhilleus has lost his companion, Patróklos, but has killed the great Trojan hero, Hektor. Troy was doomed, though its fall occurred in the cycle of stories, now mere fragments, that follow *The Iliad*, but not before Akhilleus himself met his death. The storytelling cycle continued with stories of the homecomings of the various Greek heroes, and it is the homecoming of the craftiest of those heroes, Odysseus, deviser of the Trojan horse itself, that is told in *The Odyssey*. Odysseus' journey is the longest of all the heroes'—up to another ten years, given the wanderings and delays—and he faces almost fatal odds when he returns home, but his is the only truly successful homecoming. But no more of that now, since it is *The Odyssey* you are about to read.

The other signal moment in the development of the two Homeric poems seems to have fallen in the eighth century B.C.E., for reasons that are hard to pin down. Whether by destiny or by luck, there was a happy conjunction of, on the one hand, one or two singers who had so mastered the traditional material and style that they could spin out monumental versions of these two episodes of the Trojan cycle, extraordinary in size, subtlety, and complexity of design, and, on the other hand, the introduction of writing from the Near East. Whether our great singer or singers—we might as well let him (or them) bear the name “Homer”—were literate or not, within one or two generations these two poems were beginning their own odyssey as texts, written in an alphabet adapted from Phoenician letters first on scraps of hide, then on papyrus rolls, centuries later in vellum codices or books, and finally printed on paper, whether in scholarly editions of the Greek original or in translations in many languages like the one you have before you.

To say that this journey of Homer's poem rivals Odysseus' own journey is to say a great deal, for not unjustly have Odysseus' long and perilous travels given the name to all wanderings of epic proportions. It takes him ten years to travel from Troy, on the northwest coast of Asia Minor, to his island kingdom of Ithaka, off the west coast of mainland Greece. The distance in miles is not the point. He travels far beyond the “real” world, visiting the fierce Laistrygonês and monstrous Kyklopês, Aiolos, King of the Winds, the dreamy land of Lotos Eaters, and passing Skylla and Kharybdis, rarely without losing some of his companions. He spends longer periods of time with the enchantress Kirkê and, after all his crew have perished, with the nymph Kalypso. But always he presses homeward. When, with the aid of Athena and the Phaiákians, he reaches Ithaka, the homecoming, and the poem, are but half accomplished. He must disguise himself and marshal a few allies before he can win back his very hearth and hall from the small army of suitors who have lain siege to his wife, Penélopê. She is a crafty and cunning force to be reckoned with, more than a match in wits for her suitors, and even at times for Odysseus himself. The second half of the poem is a story of disguise, misleading tales, and recognitions, of reunion not only of a husband and a wife, but of two father-son pairs. At the end, generations are reconciled, and civic strife averted.

For how long, no one can say. Cycles continue, legends go on and on, because Homeric poems end “in the middle of things,” as they begin. What has continued without end is the reading of *The Odyssey*. At the beginning of the poem, Homer asks the Muse, guarantor of epic memory, to sing through him. The Muse still sings in the pages of your book, and she is eager to begin. Attend her, and wonder.



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## Preparing to Read

The questions, exercises, and assignments that follow are designed not only to guide your students through *The Odyssey* and to help them approach it primarily as a compelling narrative that speaks to us directly today, but also to unlock an artifact from another time and place and culture that challenges us to consider what is human and universal, what is culture-bound and relative. *The Odyssey* is at once an archaeological treasure and a great read, an adventure story and a time machine. As a compelling narrative, questions will spring to mind, for *The Odyssey* is the story of a family reunited against all odds. The saga of Odysseus, Penélopê, and Telémakhos is a recognizable family drama, and many other figures are recognizable today. Can't you imagine Telémakhos and Nausikaa among your students? Or Odysseus and Penélopê, or Helen and Meneláos, among others, as their parents?

To prepare your students to appreciate the second aspect, you may want to show them images from Greece and other Eastern Mediterranean cultures from ca. 2000 B.C.E. to 500 B.C.E. to help them visualize the world in which the Homeric heroes and Homeric audiences lived. If you can arrange a field trip to a local museum which has a collection of Greek antiquities, so much the better. You may also want to have them develop a time line from the Bronze and Iron Ages to the present on which you can help them plot the fall of Troy and the final phase of the development of the Homeric poems (as above) against the events of other cultures. Independent of such specifics, one should ask what it means for readers today to overhear the voices of so fundamentally "other a culture." To what extent should we be prepared to suspend our own deeply ingrained moral expectations and accept the fact that Odysseus and his family, for example, own slaves? Is studying a culture from the past essentially different from studying a foreign culture contemporary to ours? How does *The Odyssey* itself present the reader with questions about cultural difference?

As an epic which is meant to memorialize a culture's heroes, *The Odyssey* is dense with names and details. Encourage your students to keep a journal of their reading and to bring to class any and all questions that occur to them as they read. Finally, don't forget that *The Odyssey* was, and in your translation is, poetry. Have each student select and prepare one or more passages he or she finds particularly significant or intriguing and then read it aloud to the class with feeling and dramatic gesture. You could also have pairs or small groups of students do a concerted reading or even perform certain key scenes from the text: for example, the recognitions of Odysseus by Telémakhos, Eur'ykleia, Penélopê, and Laërtês.

## Questions for Class Discussion

### BOOK I:

What is the basic situation of each of the main characters—Odysseus, Telémakhos, Penélopê—at the opening of *The Odyssey*, and how does Homer present it to us? How long has Odysseus been absent from Ithaka? Who is Athena? Why does she appear disguised? What song does the minstrel Phêmos sing, and why does Penélopê object to his song? What do the suitors seek? How does Telémakhos react?

### BOOK II:

What is the function of the public assembly with which the book begins, and who called it? Summarize the arguments of the principal suitors and of Telémakhos. Describe Athena's role.

### BOOK III:

Who is Nestor and how does he know Odysseus? Does Nestor know significant information about Odysseus that can help Telémakhos find the answer to his quest for his father? What other stories does Nestor tell? Describe the details of Agamémnon's homecoming. Who is Orestês? What is Athena's role? Who is Peisístratos?



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## Questions for Class Discussion

### BOOK IV:

Who is Meneláos? How does the court at Sparta compare with Telémakhos' home in Ithaka? Who is Helen? What indications does Homer give of her extraordinary nature? What information does Meneláos give Telémakhos about Odysseus? How does Meneláos know the various details about Odysseus' wanderings and present whereabouts? What plot do we learn threatens Telémakhos? What are Penélopê's concerns, and how are they allayed?

### BOOK V:

What new gods do we meet in Book V and what are their roles in the course of this book? Who, and what, is Kalypso? Why is she angry at the gods? Why does Odysseus reject Kalypso's offer of immortality and wish to leave? Why does Poseidon wish to destroy Odysseus? How long does Odysseus remain adrift in the sea? To what extent does Odysseus rely on the help of gods? To what extent is he self-reliant?

### BOOK VI:

How does Athena manage to get a sympathetic native to the seashore to receive Odysseus? Describe the interchange between Nausikaa and her father. How are the clothes washed? What precautions does Odysseus take to gain as friendly a reception as possible from Nausikaa and her companions? What does Odysseus ask of Nausikaa? What does she provide, and why? What are her concerns and interests? What restrains Athena from appearing openly to reassure Odysseus?

### BOOK VII:

How does Athena continue to help Odysseus? What kind of lifestyle do the Phaiákians have? Why does Odysseus first approach Queen Arêêtê? How is he received? What questions do the Phaiákians ask of him, and when? How much of his identity and story is Odysseus willing to reveal at this point?

### BOOK VIII:

What is the purpose of the athletic games Alkínoös orders? How is Odysseus treated? With what terms does Seareach inflict his deepest insult and provocation of Odysseus? What songs does the bard Demódokos sing, and why? (Imagine both Demódokos' reasons, and Homer's.) What effects do the individual songs have on various members of the audience? Describe the meeting of Nausikaa and Odysseus.

### BOOK IX:

Why does Odysseus begin to tell of his travels? Where does he begin his story? What are the attractions of the land of the Lotos Eaters? Why does Odysseus wish to explore the cave of the Kyklops Polyphêmos? What is human and what is inhuman about Polyphêmos? Describe the multiple ways Odysseus tricks Polyphêmos. Why does Odysseus eventually tell Polyphêmos his name, and what immediate consequences does this have?

### BOOK X:

Who is Aiolos? Why do Odysseus' companions disobey their captain and open the bag given him by the god of the winds? What results? Contrast the episode of the Laistrygonês with that of the Kyklopês. Who is Kirkê? What happens to the first expeditionary force to explore Aiaia? Why does Odysseus have trouble convincing his men to help him rescue their captive comrades? How does Odysseus master Kirkê? What information or advice does Kirkê provide Odysseus?



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## Questions for Class Discussion

### BOOK XI:

How does Odysseus summon the souls or shades of the dead to speak to him? What does Odysseus learn from the prophet Teirêsiás? What does he learn from his mother? Describe the exchanges Odysseus has with his former comrades-inarms at Troy. What is the particular message to be drawn from the speech of Agamémnon's shade? From Akhilleus'? How does Aías' ghost respond to Odysseus' appeal for reconciliation?

### BOOK XII:

How does Odysseus manage to hear the song of the Seirênês without risking shipwreck? What does the proverbial expression "choose between Skylla and Kharybdis" mean, and how is this meaning brought about in *The Odyssey*? How does Odysseus handle the choice? What risk does Odysseus see even before he and his men land on the island of Hêlios' cattle? How does he seek to prevent catastrophe, and why and how is he foiled? How does Odysseus end his narrative?

### BOOK XIII:

How do the Phaiákians transport Odysseus to Ithaka? What marks their aid as something more than human? What does Odysseus think when he awakes? Is he correct? How does Athena appear to Odysseus in Book XIII? What story does Odysseus tell the disguised Athena? Why? What further assistance does Athena offer Odysseus?

### BOOK XIV:

What qualities mark Eumaios as an admirable figure? How do Eumaios' words give Odysseus intelligence of the situation in his hall and a sense of Eumaios' own sympathies? Why is Eumaios not inclined to believe that Odysseus is still alive? Why does Odysseus lie about his identity and story? What image of this "Kretan" emerges from Odysseus' narrative? How does the "Kretan" hear tell of Odysseus? What bargain does Odysseus strike with Eumaios? How does Odysseus manage to get Eumaios to lend him a cloak for the night?

### BOOK XV:

What motivates Telémakhos' decision to return home? From whom does he part? Who joins him on his way? What new information does the disguised Odysseus learn from Eumaios in this book? What do we learn of Eumaios' own past? List the visions and omens (with their interpretations) that are so prominent in this book.

### BOOK XVI:

What are Odysseus' first words to Telémakhos, and what is their purpose? What special part does Athena play in the recognition of Odysseus by Telémakhos? Does Telémakhos recognize Odysseus at once? Why, or why not? What finally convinces Telémakhos that his father has returned and stands before him? How do the suitors react to the news of Telémakhos' return to Ithaka?

### BOOK XVII:

What information about Odysseus' whereabouts does Telémakhos choose to tell Penélopê, and what does he conceal? Why? What does Theokl'ymenos contribute to the interview with Penélopê? Whom does Odysseus meet as he allows Eumaios to guide him to town? What emerges from this meeting? Describe Odysseus' recognition by Argos, and Odysseus' reactions. How is Odysseus in beggar's disguise received by the suitors? Why does Penélopê ask to speak with the "beggar"?



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## Questions for Class Discussion

### COMPREHENSION

#### BOOK XVIII:

Who is Iros, and what transpires between him and Odysseus? What actions are attributed to Athena? What does Penélopê say Odysseus' parting instructions to her were? Is Amphinomos significantly better than the other suitors?

#### BOOK XIX:

How does Odysseus clear the hall of spears and other weapons? Who is Melántho, and what does she say or do? How has Penélopê used her loom to put off the suitors, and why can she no longer rely on this famous ruse? What "news" of Odysseus does the "Kretan" have for Penélopê? What special place in the story does a certain tunic have? Why might it be particularly appropriate for Penélopê to ask about Odysseus' clothing? Identify details in this version of the "Kretan's" travels that diverge from details in the stories he told earlier. How does Eur'ykleia recognize Odysseus' true identity? When and how did Odysseus receive his scar? Who gave Odysseus his name? How does the poet link these events from three distinct periods in Odysseus' life? How does Odysseus prevent Eur'ykleia from revealing his identity to Penélopê? Describe Penélopê's dream, its interpretation, and the ensuing plan of action she announces to her visitor.

#### BOOK XX:

Compare Odysseus' interaction with Athena and Penélopê's with Artemis. What sign does Zeus send? Who is Philóitios? Contrast his character with that of Melánthios. What is particularly appropriate or prophetic about Apollo that the poet would mention that the Ithakans were leading sacrifices to him? In what further ways does Athena provoke bad or strange behavior on the part of the suitors? What is the reaction of Theoklymenos to the suitors' crazed hilarity?

#### BOOK XXI:

What is special about the bow Penélopê brings out for the contest? What must a contestant do to win the contest? Who first tries to string the bow, and nearly succeeds? How do the suitors try to make the task of stringing the bow easier? To whom does Odysseus now reveal his identity, and why? How do the suitors react to the "beggar's" proposal that he try the bow after all the others have failed? Who insists that he be given a chance, and why? Why does Telémakhos so firmly order his mother out of the hall? Describe the swift series of events with which this book ends.

#### BOOK XXII:

What is Odysseus' first target in this book, and why? What is the suitors' reaction? When does Odysseus explicitly reveal his true identity? What ensues? Who are Odysseus' assistants? What unexpected development nearly upsets Odysseus' careful strategy? What role does Athena play? Who begs for mercy and is denied? Who begs for mercy and has it granted? What does Odysseus tell Telémakhos to do with the serving girls? What is in fact the fate of the serving girls?

#### BOOK XXIII:

What is Penélopê's initial reaction to the nurse's news of Odysseus' return? What other explanation does Penélopê have for the massacre of the suitors? What other concerns does Odysseus still have? What so angers Odysseus about Penélopê's suggestion that his bed be moved outside the bedchamber for him to sleep on? Why must Odysseus travel yet again? How will Odysseus regain the wealth consumed by the suitors?



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## Questions for Class Discussion

### BOOK XXIV:

How does Homer round out his account of the suitors' fate? What is the theme of the interchange between Akhilleus and Agamémnon, and why might it be fitting for the final book of the epic? How accurate is Amphímedon's account of the causes of his and the other suitors' deaths? What is the situation of Laërtês, Odysseus' father, when Odysseus comes upon him? What is the subject of the assembly called hastily in Ithaka, and what is its outcome? What roles does Athena play in effecting the final resolution of the book? What does Zeus decree, and how does it come about?

## For Further Study

### BOOK I:

What are the signs of Telémakhos' immaturity? Why and how does Telémakhos begin to change? How do Penélopê and various suitors note this, and how do they react?

### BOOK II:

What indicates that Telémakhos still has some maturing to do? How does Homer help us distinguish between some of the most important suitors?

### BOOK III:

Are there lessons for Telémakhos personally in Nestor's stories about the homecomings of other Greeks? Some readers have been troubled by the intimacies of Telémakhos bunking with Peisístratos and being bathed by Polykástê. How are the attitudes of Homer's world different from our own?

### BOOK IV:

Is the presentation of Helen entirely positive? Are there any signs of tension between Helen and Meneláos? (Pay particular attention to the stories each tells about episodes from the Trojan War.)

### BOOK V:

Kalypso accuses the gods of "double standards," as the idea is often called. What does this mean? It could have been risky for Odysseus to reject Kalypso's offer. How does he do so diplomatically?

### BOOK VI:

Consider Athena's interventions in Books I–VI. Why is she so concerned with Odysseus' fate? What are the limits on her contacts with humans?

### BOOK VII:

Based on the behavior of all the characters, describe the etiquette of guestfriendship (Greek *xenia*). Are the Phaiákians perfect hosts in every respect?

### BOOK VIII:

Demódokos sings one song exclusively about the gods. Do the gods appear admirable? If not, why do the Greeks worship them? How might this story be related to the larger theme of *The Odyssey*?



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## For Further Study

### BOOK IX:

What strengths and what weaknesses emerge from Odysseus' account of the first stages of his travels? Is Odysseus in some way responsible for the trouble he gets into during the episode of the Kyklopês? Are there any parallels between his predicament when Ployphêmos confronts him and the one he's in as he tells his story?

### BOOK X:

Characterize Odysseus' comrades, including some of the individuals among them. (You may want to consider Book XII as well for this question.) Is Odysseus necessarily the best witness for the reasons all his comrades have perished?

### BOOK XI:

A descent to the underworld (Greek *nekuia*) is a standard feature of virtually all epics. Why might that be? Does Odysseus actually descend to the underworld? What are the most important things he learns from the ghosts? What do we learn?

### BOOK XII:

With what other episodes and characters are the Seirênês and their temptations linked? What does Odysseus' solution reveal about his character?

### BOOK XIII:

Consider the fate of the Phaiákians. Shouldn't they have known to expect this? In what ways does this event mark the end of the magical portion of *The Odyssey*?

### BOOK XIV:

How well does Eumaios fulfill the required duty of a host, despite his straitened circumstances? Describe the many ways in which the disguised Odysseus presents himself in Books XIII and XIV?

### BOOK XV:

Discuss the structure of Book XV. Why are omens and prophecy so prominent in this book? What can we learn, on various levels, from Eumaios' autobiographical narrative? What might explain the similarities between portions of Eumaios' story and portions of the "Kretan's" story in Book XIV?

### BOOK XVI:

What emerges about both Odysseus' and Telémakhos' characters in the course of the recognition scene? Imagine meeting your father for the first time after twenty years. In what ways does Odysseus start to act as Telémakhos' father?

### BOOK XVII:

In what way is it a challenge for Odysseus to put up with the abuse, verbal and physical, inflicted on the "beggar" and not show his true feelings? Is "turning the other cheek" an ideal Odysseus would have held? Is this trial of self-control as great as those he passed on his travels?

### BOOK XVIII:

What is the function of Penélopê's appearance in the hall? Is it well motivated?



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## For Further Study

### BOOK XIX:

Why doesn't Odysseus let Penélopê learn his true identity yet? Doesn't he trust her? Explain their relationship at this point.

### BOOK XX:

In what ways does the poet play at foreshadowing the destruction of the suitors? Why? In other words, what pleasure do we get from dramatic irony, from knowing more than the characters? How does the poet underscore the blindness of the suitors?

### BOOK XXI:

Why does Penélopê now want to stage the test of the bow? What role have the appearance, and the stories of, the stranger played in her decision? Do you think Penélopê might suspect the stranger is Odysseus? What arguments could be mounted in support of such an opinion? What arguments tell against it?

### BOOK XXII:

How does the poet manage to make Odysseus' victory over so many enemies seem believable, or if it is not, does it matter? What is the point of the horrible carnage of Book XXII? How would you compare the violence of *The Odyssey* with action films and television programs today? Even in the most violent film, would you be likely to find the mass execution of a group of women? What might this tell us about differences between Homeric society and our own? Do you think the first audiences of *The Odyssey* would have found Book XXII too violent? Explain why, or why not.

### BOOK XXIII:

Is Penélopê excessively suspicious or reluctant to believe that Odysseus has returned? How does she finally satisfy herself that the stranger really is her husband? Does she prove herself Odysseus' match in craftiness? How?

### BOOK XXIV:

Why does Odysseus "test" Laërtês and not reveal his identity at once? Many scholars feel that all the episodes of this book are add-ons to *The Odyssey*. Do you? Why, or why not? Can you make a case that the so-called second *nekuia*, in other words, the underworld scene, belongs to a unified *Odyssey*? What about the reunion of Laërtês and Odysseus, and the final skirmishes? Do you find the poem's conclusion satisfactory?



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## Expanding Your Knowledge

On a map, locate the following places and describe the role they play in *The Odyssey*: Troy, Ithaka, Sparta, Pylos, Krete, Sidon, and Egypt.

Consider the situations of *The Odyssey* from Telémakhos' point of view. Describe what you think growing up in Ithaka without Odysseus would have been like. Was Telémakhos right in going off against his mother's wishes? What are the stages in his development both before and after Odysseus' return to Ithaka?

The “real world” societies described in *The Odyssey*—Ithaka, Sparta, Pylos, wartime Troy in flashback—are vastly different from modern societies. Try to describe and discuss some of these differences. Among the differences you might consider are political systems, slaves and servants, marriage and the role of women, and religion. Try to imagine what it would have been like to be a king or prince; a slave or serving girl in Odysseus' household during his absence and immediately after his return; a priest or prophet; or a worker of the land or tender of flocks. How difficult would it really have been for a prince to put up patiently with the abuse meted out to a beggar?

Compare Penélopê with the other female figures presented or described in *The Odyssey*. How is she contrasted with Helen and Klytaimnéstra? With Kirkê and Kalypso? What characteristics does she share with her “like-minded” husband Odysseus?

Discuss the gods in *The Odyssey*. What are the particular roles of Zeus, Athena, Poseidon, and Hermês? Why and in what ways do humans honor the gods? If you had lived in the time of the Homeric heroes, would you have worshipped the gods?

*The Odyssey* is a poem about the return of a war hero to civilian life, the reintegration of the extraordinary into the everyday. Discuss this with reference to events of our own century and your own lifetime.

Do we have any heroes or story cycles comparable to the tales told about Odysseus and the Trojan War? If so, what are they? If not, why do you think that is? As far as we can tell, *The Odyssey* was immensely popular in ancient Greece. How does it differ from popular entertainment today? Are there any ways in which it is similar?

Compare *The Odyssey* with science fiction, whether in books or films or on television. Why is it, do you think, that while epic poetry turns to a heroic past, our most compelling legends imagine a future?

## About the Translator

Apart from *The Odyssey*, Robert Fitzgerald's versions of *The Iliad*, *The Aeneid*, and the Oedipus plays of Sophocles (with Dudley Fitts) are also classics. An admired poet and teacher of writing, he died in 1985.

This teacher's guide was written by Ralph Hexter, who has degrees in English, Classics, and Comparative Literature from Harvard, Oxford, and Yale Universities. The author of several studies of ancient and medieval literature, including *A Guide to the Odyssey* (Vintage Books, New York, 1993), he is Professor of Classics and Comparative Literature, Dean of Arts and Humanities, and Executive Dean of the College of Letters and Science at the University of California, Berkeley.



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*The Odyssey* is a poem about the return of a war hero to civilian life, the reintegration of the extraordinary into the everyday. Discuss this with reference to events of our own century and your own lifetime.

Do we have any heroes or story cycles comparable to the tales told about Odysseus and the Trojan War? If so, what are they? If not, why do you think that is? As far as we can tell, *The Odyssey* was immensely popular in ancient Greece. How does it differ from popular entertainment today? Are there any ways in which it is similar?

Compare *The Odyssey* with science fiction, whether in books or films or on television. Why is it, do you think, that while epic poetry turns to a heroic past, our most compelling legends imagine a future?

## About the Translator

Apart from *The Odyssey*, Robert Fitzgerald's versions of *The Iliad*, *The Aeneid*, and the Oedipus plays of Sophocles (with Dudley Fitts) are also classics. An admired poet and teacher of writing, he died in 1985.

This teacher's guide was written by Ralph Hexter, who has degrees in English, Classics, and Comparative Literature from Harvard, Oxford, and Yale Universities. The author of several studies of ancient and medieval literature, including *A Guide to the Odyssey* (Vintage Books, New York, 1993), he is Professor of Classics and Comparative Literature, Dean of Arts and Humanities, and Executive Dean of the College of Letters and Science at the University of California, Berkeley.