

The Odyssey Summary Study Guide

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The Odyssey. Homer's 8th century BCE oral narrative of a warrior's decades-long quest to return home defines epic poetry. Together with its companion poem The Iliad, The Odyssey describes the action and aftermath of the Trojan Wars, and is the model for the heroic quest. Read a character analysis of Odysseus, plot summary, and important quotes.

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Ten years after the fall of Troy, the victorious Greek hero Odysseus has still not returned to his native Ithaca. A band of rowdy suitors, believing Odysseus to be dead, has overrun his palace, courting his faithful -- though weakening -- wife, Penelope, and going through his stock of food. With permission from Zeus, the goddess Athena, Odysseus' greatest immortal ally, appears in disguise and urges Odysseus' son Telemachus to seek news of his father at Pylos and Sparta.

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Plot Summary. At the start of the poem, Odysseus has been away from Ithaca for 20 years—10 fighting at Troy and 10 attempting to return home—but his fate is to return. At the start of the poem, the goddess Athena prompts Zeus to set Odysseus's return in motion, but the gods must do so against the wishes of Poseidon.

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The Odyssey Study Guide Most likely written between 750 and 650 B.C., The Odyssey is an epic poem about the wanderings of the Greek hero Odysseus following his victory in the Trojan War (which, if it did indeed take place, occurred in the 12th-century B.C. in Mycenaean Greece).

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Historical Context of The Odyssey. Most ancient Greeks believed that the Trojan War took place in the 11th or 12th century BC, but on a slightly smaller scale than what was depicted in stories and legends. During the Middle Ages and the Renaissance scholars believed that the Trojan War was pure invention, but in the past century archeologists and geologists have excavated sites that correspond topographically to the geography of Troy and surrounding sites, as they were described in The Iliad.

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Ten years have passed since the fall of Troy, and the Greek hero Odysseus still has not returned to his kingdom in Ithaca. A large and rowdy mob of suitors who have overrun Odysseus's palace and pillaged his land continue to court his wife, Penelope. She has remained faithful to Odysseus. Prince Telemachus, Odysseus's son, wants desperately to throw them out but does not have the confidence or experience to fight them.

~~The Odyssey: Plot Overview | SparkNotes~~

Summary and Analysis. Book 1 - Athena Inspires the Prince. Summary. Homer opens The Odyssey with an invocation to the Muse of epic poetry and asks for her guidance in telling the story of a man who has experienced many twists and turns of fate and has suffered many hardships. Odysseus, the reader is told, is the only Greek survivor of the Trojan War who has not yet returned home or died trying.

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Book I Summary: The narrator calls upon the Muse to help him tell the story of Odysseus. We pick up ten years after the fall of Troy in the Trojan War (the subject of The Iliad). In trying to return home, Odysseus and his shipmates had numerous adventures, but now Odysseus has been left alone on the island of Ogygia for the last eight years, captive of the beautiful goddess Calypso.

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Summary: Book 1. Sing to me of the man, Muse, the man of twists and turns. driven time and again off course, once he had plundered the hallowed heights of Troy. See Important Quotations Explained. The narrator of the Odyssey invokes the Muse, asking for inspiration as he prepares to tell the story of Odysseus.

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~~The Odyssey: Books 1–2 | SparkNotes~~

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Book V Summary: Athena pleads to the gods and Zeus at Mount Olympus on behalf of the imprisoned Odysseus and Telemachus, who is in danger of being ambushed.

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The Odyssey Summary. Years after the end of the Trojan War, the Greek hero Odysseus still hasn't come home to Ithaca. Most people figure he's dead. But we don't: Homer lets us know right away that Odysseus is being held as a (willing) sex captive on the island of the goddess Kalypso. Oh, and sea god Poseidon is ticked off at Odysseus, and sees no reason to let him get home.

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Summary: Book 12 Odysseus returns to Aea, where he buries Elpenor and spends one last night with Circe. She describes the obstacles that he will face on his voyage home and tells him how to negotiate them. As he sets sail, Odysseus passes Circe's counsel on to his men.

~~The Odyssey: Books 12–14 | SparkNotes~~

Odysseus travels to the Underworld and makes the offerings according to Circe's instructions. The shades of the dead (shades = ghosts) gather to drink the blood (gross) and then talk to Odysseus. The first shade is Elpenor, freshly fallen from Circe's roof. Odysseus' eyes bug out when he sees one of his crew members—he weeps and listens to the man's story.

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