

THE ODYSSEY // BOOKS 1-3

STUDENT-FRIENDLY READING + 20 COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

BOOK 1 // A HOUSE WITHOUT ITS KING

Years after the Trojan War, Odysseus still has not returned to Ithaca. He is alive, but the sea god Poseidon remains angry with him. At home, his wife Penelope and son Telemachus are surrounded by arrogant suitors who eat Odysseus's food, waste his wealth, and pressure Penelope to choose a new husband.

The goddess Athena believes Odysseus deserves to return home. While Poseidon is away, she asks Zeus to allow the journey to move forward. Zeus agrees that Odysseus has suffered long enough.

Athena travels to Ithaca disguised as a visitor named Mentos. Telemachus welcomes the stranger properly, offering food before asking questions. This immediately contrasts his behavior with the suitors' abuse of xenia.

Athena encourages Telemachus to stop waiting passively. She tells him to call an assembly, confront the suitors, and travel to Pylos and Sparta for news about his father. The advice begins Telemachus's movement from an uncertain son into someone willing to act.

Later, the bard Phemius sings about the Greek warriors' difficult returns from Troy. Penelope asks him to stop because the song reminds her of Odysseus. Telemachus surprises her by speaking with new authority. He tells her that the bard may sing what he chooses and then turns his attention toward the suitors.

BOOK 2 // TELEMACHUS SPEAKS

Telemachus calls Ithaca's first public assembly in years. He explains that the suitors are destroying his household and demands that they leave. Although he is still young and inexperienced, speaking publicly is an important step in claiming responsibility.

The suitors blame Penelope. Antinous tells the story of her weaving trick: Penelope promised to choose a husband after finishing a burial shroud for Odysseus's father, Laertes, but for years she secretly unraveled at night what she had woven during the day.

Telemachus asks the gods for help. Two eagles appear overhead and are interpreted as an omen that Odysseus may return and punish the suitors. The suitors dismiss the warning.

Telemachus announces that he will travel for information about his father. Athena, now disguised as Mentor, helps him secure a ship and crew. She also helps him leave without allowing the suitors to stop the journey.

At the end of the book, Telemachus sails away from Ithaca. He still does not know whether Odysseus will return, but he has begun doing something that seemed

impossible at the start of Book 1: acting independently.

BOOK 3 // LEARNING FROM NESTOR

Telemachus arrives at Pylos, where King Nestor and his people are making sacrifices to Poseidon. Athena encourages Telemachus to approach the king confidently. Nestor welcomes the visitors with food and hospitality before questioning them, another strong example of *xenia*.

Telemachus asks for news of Odysseus. Nestor cannot tell him exactly where Odysseus is, but he explains that the Greek leaders had difficult and divided journeys home after Troy. Their choices, conflicts, and relationships with the gods shaped what happened next.

Nestor tells Telemachus about Agamemnon, who returned home only to be murdered by Aegisthus. Agamemnon's son Orestes later avenged his father's death. The story matters to Telemachus because Orestes becomes an example of a son who acts when his father's household has been threatened.

Nestor praises Telemachus and notices Athena's support. When Athena reveals her divine nature before leaving, Nestor realizes that Telemachus has a powerful ally.

Nestor cannot provide the answer Telemachus wants, so he sends him onward to Sparta to speak with Menelaus. Telemachus leaves Pylos with more experience, more confidence, and a clearer understanding that a son's choices can affect his family's future.

THE ODYSSEY // BOOKS 1-3 // COMPREHENSION

Name: _____ Period: _____ Date: _____

1. What problem has taken over Odysseus's household at the beginning of Book 1?
2. Why is Poseidon important to Odysseus's situation?
3. How does Telemachus demonstrate xenia when Athena arrives disguised as Mentos?
4. What three actions does Athena encourage Telemachus to take?
5. What change in Telemachus becomes visible by the end of Book 1?
6. Why does Telemachus call an assembly in Book 2?
7. Explain Penelope's weaving trick and what it reveals about her.
8. What warning is connected to the appearance of the two eagles?
9. How does Athena help Telemachus begin his journey?
10. Why is Telemachus's departure from Ithaca an important character moment?
11. How does Nestor demonstrate xenia in Book 3?
12. Why can't Nestor simply tell Telemachus where Odysseus is?
13. What happened to Agamemnon after the Trojan War?
14. Why is the story of Orestes especially meaningful for Telemachus?
15. What does Nestor realize when Athena reveals herself?
16. Why does Nestor send Telemachus to Sparta?

17. Across Books 1-3, how does Athena influence Telemachus without simply solving every problem for him?
18. Give one example of good xenia and one example of bad xenia from Books 1-3.
19. How is Telemachus different at the end of Book 3 than he was at the beginning of Book 1?
20. Which matters more to Telemachus's growth so far: information about Odysseus or the experience of searching for it? Explain with two details.