

THE ODYSSEY // BOOKS 4-6

STUDENT-FRIENDLY READING + 20 COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

BOOK 4 // SPARTA AND NEW INFORMATION

Telemachus and Nestor's son Peisistratus arrive in Sparta, where Menelaus and Helen are celebrating family weddings. Menelaus welcomes the travelers before fully knowing who they are. The wealth of his palace amazes Telemachus, but Menelaus explains that wealth cannot erase the suffering and losses caused by the Trojan War.

Menelaus eventually realizes that the young visitor is Odysseus's son. Helen also recognizes the resemblance. The conversation turns toward Odysseus, and both Helen and Menelaus tell stories that emphasize his intelligence, endurance, and skill with disguise.

Menelaus then tells Telemachus about his own difficult return from Troy. He explains how he captured the shape-shifting sea god Proteus and forced him to reveal information. Proteus told him that Odysseus was still alive but trapped on Calypso's island.

This is the clearest information Telemachus has received: his father is not confirmed dead. The search has finally produced real hope.

Back in Ithaca, the suitors learn that Telemachus has left. Angry that he acted without them, they plan an ambush to kill him when he returns. Penelope discovers the plan and becomes terrified for her son. Athena sends reassurance through a dream.

BOOK 5 // ODYSSEUS LEAVES CALYPSO

The story finally shifts directly to Odysseus. He has spent years on the island of the nymph Calypso. She offers comfort, beauty, and even immortality, but Odysseus still longs for Ithaca. His desire for nostos is stronger than the promise of an endless life away from home.

The gods decide that Odysseus must be released. Hermes carries Zeus's command to Calypso. She is angry about the gods' double standards but agrees to let Odysseus leave.

Odysseus builds a raft and sails away. For a time, the journey goes well. Then Poseidon sees him and creates a violent storm. Odysseus is nearly destroyed at sea.

The sea goddess Ino gives Odysseus a protective veil and tells him to abandon the damaged raft. Athena also helps calm the winds. Odysseus struggles through the water until he reaches the land of the Phaeacians.

Exhausted and alone, he hides beneath leaves and falls asleep. His survival depends on perseverance, divine assistance, and his willingness to keep moving toward home even after another disaster.

BOOK 6 // NAUSICAA AND THE STRANGER

Athena appears in a dream to Nausicaa, daughter of the Phaeacian king and queen, and encourages her to go wash clothing near the river. The suggestion places Nausicaa exactly where she needs to be when Odysseus wakes nearby.

After washing the clothes, Nausicaa and her attendants play with a ball. Their voices wake Odysseus. He emerges dirty, exhausted, and nearly naked after his ordeal at sea. The attendants run away in fear, but Athena gives Nausicaa courage to remain.

Odysseus must decide how to approach her without frightening her. Instead of grabbing her knees as a traditional suppliant might, he stays at a respectful distance and uses careful, flattering speech. His survival now depends on social intelligence rather than physical strength.

Nausicaa responds with compassion. She provides clothing, food, oil, and instructions for reaching the palace. She explains that Odysseus should appeal especially to her mother, Queen Arete.

Odysseus follows the plan. Book 6 ends with him closer to transportation home than he has been in years. The episode also shows another form of heroism: knowing when strength will not solve the problem.

THE ODYSSEY // BOOKS 4-6 // COMPREHENSION

Name: _____ Period: _____ Date: _____

1. How does Menelaus demonstrate xenia when Telemachus arrives in Sparta?
2. Why does Menelaus say his wealth does not make his life completely happy?
3. What qualities of Odysseus are emphasized by Helen and Menelaus?
4. Who is Proteus, and why does Menelaus need him?
5. What important information does Proteus provide about Odysseus?
6. Why do the suitors plan to ambush Telemachus?
7. How does Athena help Penelope after she learns of the plot?
8. What does Calypso offer Odysseus that he still rejects?
9. How does Odysseus's decision to leave Calypso demonstrate nostos?
10. Why does Hermes visit Calypso?
11. What new obstacle does Poseidon create for Odysseus?
12. Name two forms of divine intervention that help Odysseus survive the storm.
13. In what condition does Odysseus reach the Phaeacian land?
14. Why is Nausicaa near the river when Odysseus wakes?
15. How do Nausicaa's attendants react when Odysseus appears?

16. Why does Odysseus choose to speak from a distance rather than physically approach Nausicaa?
17. What does Nausicaa provide for Odysseus?
18. Why does Nausicaa tell Odysseus to appeal to Queen Arete?
19. How do Books 4-6 show that hospitality can determine whether a traveler survives?
20. Compare Telemachus and Odysseus in Books 4-6. How is each character moving toward home or family even though their journeys look different?