

THE ODYSSEY // BOOKS 7-9

STUDENT-FRIENDLY READING + 20 COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

BOOK 7 // THE PHAEACIANS

Odysseus wakes on the island of the Phaeacians after Nausicaa has helped him. She has already explained how he can reach the palace, but she does not want the townspeople to see them entering together and start gossiping. Odysseus follows her directions and approaches the city carefully.

Athena protects him by surrounding him with a mist so that people will not stop or question him. Disguised as a young girl, Athena guides him toward the palace of King Alcinous and Queen Arete. She tells Odysseus that Arete is especially respected and that winning her sympathy could help him finally get home.

The palace amazes Odysseus. It is wealthy, beautiful, and almost supernatural in appearance. He enters, goes directly to Arete, and begs for help. The mist disappears, and everyone is shocked to see a stranger suddenly kneeling before the queen.

Alcinous welcomes Odysseus according to the rules of *xenia*. He gives the stranger food, a seat, and protection before demanding a full explanation. Alcinous even suggests that a man like Odysseus could remain among the Phaeacians and marry Nausicaa, but he promises not to force him. If Odysseus wants to return home, Alcinous says the Phaeacians will provide transportation.

Arete notices that Odysseus is wearing clothing that came from her household. She asks how he received it. Odysseus explains his journey from Calypso's island, the storm that destroyed his raft, his arrival on the Phaeacian shore, and Nausicaa's kindness. He is careful not to embarrass Nausicaa. Alcinous is impressed and again promises that Odysseus will be taken home.

BOOK 8 // SONGS, GAMES, AND MEMORY

The next day, Alcinous calls an assembly and announces that the Phaeacians will help the stranger return home. A ship and crew are prepared. Before Odysseus leaves, however, the king holds a feast and celebration in his honor.

The blind bard Demodocus sings about events from the Trojan War. Hearing the song causes Odysseus to hide his face and cry. Alcinous notices his reaction, although the other guests do not fully understand why the story affects the stranger so strongly.

Later, the Phaeacians hold athletic games. A young man named Euryalus insults Odysseus and suggests that he does not look like a true athlete. Odysseus becomes angry. He takes up a discus and throws it farther than the other competitors. He then declares that he can compete in nearly any event. The moment reveals both his

extraordinary ability and his sensitivity about his reputation.

Alcinous calms the situation and shifts the celebration toward dancing and entertainment. Euryalus apologizes and gives Odysseus a gift. The Phaeacians prepare valuable presents for their guest, continuing to demonstrate generous hospitality.

Demodocus later sings about the Trojan Horse and the fall of Troy. Once again, Odysseus weeps. This time Alcinous stops the song. He realizes that the stranger's grief is connected personally to Troy. The king finally asks the question that has been delayed by hospitality: Who are you? He asks Odysseus to reveal his name, homeland, travels, and the reason the songs of Troy cause him so much pain.

BOOK 9 // ODYSSEUS TELLS HIS STORY

Odysseus finally reveals his identity: he is Odysseus, son of Laertes, king of Ithaca. He begins telling the Phaeacians the story of the long journey that brought him to their island.

After leaving Troy, Odysseus and his men attack the city of the Cicones at Ismarus. They win at first, but Odysseus's crew refuses to leave quickly. They stay to eat, drink, and enjoy the victory. The Cicones gather reinforcements and counterattack. Odysseus escapes, but many of his men are killed. The episode establishes an important pattern: warnings and good judgment can be defeated by poor choices.

Storms then drive the ships off course. Eventually the crew reaches the land of the Lotus-Eaters. The people there are not violent. Their danger is the lotus plant. Men who eat it lose their desire to return home and want only to remain there. Odysseus physically forces his affected men back to the ships and orders everyone to leave immediately. Nostos - the desire for homecoming - is threatened not by a monster but by comfort and forgetfulness.

Next the crew reaches the land of the Cyclopes. Odysseus takes twelve men to investigate a cave belonging to Polyphemus, a giant Cyclops and son of Poseidon. The men want to steal food and escape, but Odysseus decides to wait for the owner because he hopes to receive a guest-gift. His expectation of xenia proves dangerously wrong.

Polyphemus returns, seals the cave with an enormous stone, and discovers the strangers. He rejects the laws of hospitality and says he does not fear Zeus. He kills and eats members of Odysseus's crew. Odysseus considers killing him while he sleeps but realizes that no one else could move the stone blocking the exit.

Odysseus creates a plan. He gives Polyphemus strong wine and tells him that his name is "Nobody." When the Cyclops becomes drunk and falls asleep, Odysseus and his men drive a sharpened wooden stake into his single eye. Polyphemus screams for help. When the other Cyclopes ask who is attacking him, he answers that "Nobody" is hurting him, so they leave.

The blinded Cyclops removes the stone in the morning and feels the backs of his sheep as they leave the cave. Odysseus ties his men beneath the animals so they can escape without being detected. The plan works.

Once safely aboard the ship, however, Odysseus cannot resist boasting. He reveals his real name to Polyphemus. The Cyclops prays to his father, Poseidon, asking that Odysseus either never reach home or return only after suffering greatly and losing his companions. Odysseus's cleverness saves the crew, but his hubris creates a new and much larger danger.

BOOKS 7-9 // COMPREHENSION

Name: _____ Period: _____ Date: _____

1. Why does Nausicaa avoid entering the city beside Odysseus?
2. How does Athena protect and assist Odysseus as he approaches the Phaeacian palace?
3. Why is Queen Arete especially important to Odysseus's chances of returning home?
4. Give two examples of xenia shown by Alcinous in Book 7.
5. Why does Arete become curious about Odysseus's clothing?
6. What does Alcinous promise Odysseus at the end of Book 7?
7. Why does the first song by Demodocus affect Odysseus so strongly?
8. What causes Odysseus to participate in the athletic games?
9. What does Odysseus's discus throw reveal about him?
10. Why does Alcinous finally ask Odysseus to reveal his identity?
11. What mistake do Odysseus's men make after attacking the Cicones?
12. Why are the Lotus-Eaters dangerous even though they are not violent?
13. How does the Lotus-Eater episode connect to the idea of nostos?
14. Why does Odysseus choose to remain in Polyphemus's cave instead of leaving immediately?

15. How does Polyphemus violate xenia?
16. Why can't Odysseus simply kill Polyphemus while the Cyclops is asleep?
17. Explain how the name 'Nobody' becomes part of Odysseus's escape plan.
18. How do Odysseus and his surviving men escape from the cave?
19. What act of hubris does Odysseus commit after escaping?
20. How does Odysseus show both heroic intelligence and a serious flaw in Book 9?
Use at least two specific details.