

The Odyssey

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Why read *The Odyssey*?

- ▶ Experience the oldest literary form
- ▶ Study and analyze the genre of epic
- ▶ Study and analyze other elements of literature (character, theme, etc.)
- ▶ Launch reading and writing activities
- ▶ Enjoy a fascinating adventure tale

Some Background Info.



- ▶ Composed circa (around) 750 BC, by "Homer"
- ▶ The *Odyssey* is both an epic poem and a form of Greek Mythology
- ▶ Homer may have been blind, a group of poets, or even a woman

Who was Homer?

- ▶ No one really knows
- ▶ Believed to be a blind minstrel from Chios
- ▶ Probably just a legend
- ▶ **Rhapsodies**: singer of tales—historians
- ▶ **Rhapsody**: Exalted or excessively enthusiastic expression of feeling in speech or writing. A literary work written in an impassioned or exalted style.

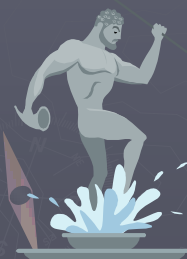


What is Mythology?

- ▶ The root of all story-telling and the foundation of modern literature
- ▶ **MYTHOS** = narrative
- ▶ **LOGOS** = speech
- ▶ Stories that a particular culture believes that explain natural events, the supernatural, the universe, and humanity



Myth in *The Odyssey*



- ▶ **GODS** = all powerful, all knowing
- ▶ **GODS CAN HAVE AN alter ego**
 - Reflection of god's best and worst qualities
- ▶ **ATHENA** = goddess of wisdom
 - Reflects Odysseus' wisdom
- ▶ **POSEIDON** = god of the sea
 - Reflects Odysseus' arrogance, greed

What is an EPIC?

- ▶ Long, narrative poem about the adventures of a hero
- ▶ **THE HERO IS...**
 - larger than life
 - historically significant
 - (mostly) favored by the gods
 - Mortal
 - on a journey or quest
 - exceptional morals
- ▶ Shows values & beliefs of a culture
- ▶ **THE SETTING...**
 - Is vast, encompassing many lands, nations, worlds, universes, etc. Involves supernatural forces

More Qualities of an Epic

- ▶ **THE ACTION...**
 - deeds of great valor
 - superhuman courage and feats
 - show values & beliefs of a culture
 - Hero's actions determine nation's fate
- ▶ **SUPERNATURAL FORCES...**
 - gods, goddesses, monsters, mythical creatures
 - work for and against hero
- ▶ **THE WRITING...**
 - uses repetition
 - several moments of suspense and climax

Early Epic Poems

oral narrative
poems

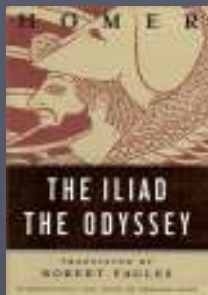
told in
pre-literate
societies

used to
pass on
morals/values
of a culture

The Trojan War and The Iliad

In Media Res

- ▶ *The Odyssey* begins "in media res," or, "in the middle of things".
- ▶ *The Iliad* is the epic poem Homer composed **BEFORE** writing *The Odyssey*.
- ▶ To understand *The Odyssey*, you must understand what happens in *The Iliad*, first.



The Trojan War

- ▶ The background of *The Iliad* is the Trojan War.
- ▶ The Trojan War was fought between the residents of the city of Troy, the Trojans, and the residents of Mycenaea, the Achaeans.
- ▶ According to legend, the Trojan War was fought because of a woman, the beautiful Helen of Troy.
- ▶ King Menelaus, husband to Helen, and his brother, King Agamemnon round up warriors from around Greece, one of which was Odysseus.
- ▶ Why did they (the warriors) fight? According to legend, Odysseus and kings were all suitors (potential husbands for Helen). Menelaus won her hand and the other suitors, so not to start a war, swore to uphold the oath and Helen's chosen husband.



Paris: A Greedy Suitor

- ▶ Helen of Troy was given to Prince Paris, son of the King of Troy, as a prize for him naming Aphrodite the most beautiful woman in the world.
- ▶ Problem: Helen was already married to King Menelaus, the leader of the Achaeans.
- ▶ Prince Paris did not mind. His solution: he abducted Helen and brought her home with him to Troy.



As a result...

- ▶ King Menelaus, and his brother, King Agamemnon, sail to Troy with thousands of ships and soldiers to reclaim Helen.
- ▶ The troops besieged the city of Troy for 10 years.
- ▶ The war, if it took place, took place circa (around) 1200 BC, 450 year before the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were written.



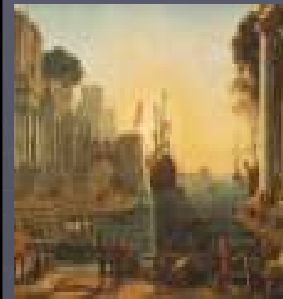
The Trojan Horse and The Fall of Troy

- ▶ In the plan that finally led to the burning of Troy, the wise and brave King of Ithaca, Odysseus, devised a plan to enter the gates of Troy.
- ▶ Soldiers hid in a hollow, man-made Trojan Horse and disguised it as a gift for the Trojans, who believe the horse was sacred.
- ▶ Once inside, the soldiers pillaged the city and burnt Troy to the ground. The city never recovered.



And this relates to The Odyssey how???

- ▶ Odysseus (called Ulysses in Latin) was the ruler of the island kingdom of Ithaca.
- ▶ He is of the most prominent Greek leaders in the Trojan War known for his cleverness and cunning, and for his eloquence as a speaker.
- ▶ He is the main character in *The Odyssey*.
- ▶ *The Odyssey* begins as Odysseus attempts to journey home.



A Summary of The Odyssey

- ▶ Takes 10 years – gone from Ithaca for 20
- ▶ Poseidon – God of the Seas – works against Odysseus
- ▶ Athena – Goddess of Wisdom – works for Odysseus



Penelope: She's No Desperate Housewife

- ▶ Ever faithful and beautiful Penelope waits for Odysseus.
- ▶ Evil suitors plunder, steal, and manipulate.



Telemachus: The Faithful Son

- ▶ *Telemachus was an infant when his father left for war.*
- ▶ *Determined to find his father, avenge the treatment of his mother, and help reclaim the throne*



Themes of The Odyssey

<i>Fate vs. Free-Will</i>	<i>Male and female roles in literature</i>
<i>The importance of life's journey / quest</i>	<i>The power of nature</i>
<i>Moral choices / sacrifices / trade-offs</i>	<i>The importance of home and family</i>