

# Classical Civilisation

## Topic: The Odyssey: Books 19, 21 and 22

This topic covers the following:

- 1 Book 19: Plot Analysis
- 2 Book 21: Plot Analysis
- 3 Book 22: Plot Analysis
- 4 Books 19-22: Character Analyses
- 5 Literary techniques used in Books 19, 21 and 22
- 6 Themes in The Odyssey (Books 19, 21 and 22)

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# 5 Knowledge Map: The Odyssey (Book 19)

This component is called the 'Literature Study' and will form 50% of the Homeric World paper. It is focused entirely on Homer's epic poem, *The Odyssey*. This topic focuses on the plot of the Odyssey, with a particular focus on Books 9, 10, 19, 21, and 22. It also analyses the literary techniques employed by its author, Homer. Certain characters need to be analysed, particularly Odysseus, the main protagonist. The key themes that are threaded through the book, such as the concept of xenia (guest friendship and hospitality), must be examined.

## Summary of Book 19

1	Book 19	Odysseus and Telemachus remove the weapons from the hall. Odysseus tells Penelope about his travels. His tale is a mixture of truth and lies. Penelope asks Eurycleia to wash the beggar's feet, and the nurse sees the scar. Odysseus warns her to say nothing. Penelope tests the beggar to find out if he really did meet Odysseus, as he claims.
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## Breakdown of Book 19 (Line-by-Line)

2	Lines 1–52	<b>Odysseus and Telemachus Hide the Weapons</b> Odysseus has made his way to his home with Telemachus disguised as a beggar. With Telemachus and Athena they plot on how to kill the suitors. Their first action is to hide the weapons in the main hall away. We are also introduced to Eurycleia, a loyal maid.
3	Lines 53–99	<b>Penelope Prepares to Question the Stranger</b> Disguised Odysseus sees Penelope for the first time in 20 years. Whilst looking at his wife, he is abused by one of the disloyal maids, and Odysseus reacts angrily to her lack of hospitality. Penelope then interjects to speak to the 'stranger' that is Odysseus as he has apparently met him.
4	Lines 100–163	<b>Penelope and Odysseus Converse</b> Penelope and Odysseus sit down and talk, with Penelope unaware it is Odysseus. They talk of her troubled situation and Telemachus maturing into a man. She asks the stranger of his past.
5	Lines 164–219	<b>Odysseus Tells a False Tale</b> In this conversation, Odysseus tells his wife a false story of who he is as he does not want to place his wife in danger yet until his plan is fully prepared. She then tests this stranger to see if he has really ever met Odysseus.
6	Lines 220–307	<b>Odysseus Prophesies his Own Return</b> Odysseus invents a story of him meeting her husband and is able to describe obvious details to her convincing her of his 'truth'. He reveals to Penelope that Odysseus is alive and will return this very month to avenge her.
7	Lines 308–360	<b>Penelope Offers Hospitality</b> On hearing of Odysseus' impending return, Penelope offers the stranger xenia for as long as he wishes. She asks Eurycleia to wash Odysseus' feet.
8	Lines 361–475	<b>Eurycleia Recognises Odysseus</b> As she is washing Odysseus' feet, she notices a scar on his leg and knows it is Odysseus. We then hear the famous boar hunt story from <i>The Odyssey</i> and how Odysseus got the scar. At the end she tells Odysseus she knows who he is.
9	Lines 476–507	<b>Odysseus Tells Eurycleia to Conceal his Identity</b> Odysseus, worried that Eurycleia will reveal his true identity too soon, threatens Eurycleia and insists on her secrecy. She shows her loyalty and support for Odysseus by promising to keep his identity secret.
10	Lines 508–553	<b>Penelope's Dream</b> Penelope meets with Odysseus again and reveals to him her dilemma of refusing all proposals of marriage or should she accept one of the suitors. She then reveals a dream to Odysseus about the killing of the suitors and that Odysseus had done this.
11	Lines 554–604	<b>Penelope Proposes a Challenge for the Suitors</b> Odysseus confirms that the dream will likely come true. Penelope makes a decision to hold a contest for the suitors to win her hand in marriage – a contest of stringing Odysseus' great bow and firing an arrow through 12 axe handles. Odysseus encourages this contest.

## Themes in Book 19

12	Fate	Book 19 explores the concept of fate, but this time from the point of view of the suitors. It is their fate that lies in the balance due to Odysseus' actions which are arguably fated as well from Athena.
13	Xenia	Book 19 has xenia at the heart of it as Odysseus, disguised as a beggar, is offered perfect hospitality by Penelope.
14	Deceit and Trickery	Book 19 explores the theme of deceit and trickery as Odysseus disguises himself as a beggar to all but his son and loyal servants. He spends the whole chapter deceiving his wife but for good intentions. He wants to keep her safe but also enable her to create a situation in which he can reveal himself to all when ready.

## Key Characters in Book 19 (Mortals and Gods)

15	Odysseus	The main protagonist of the story. He is King of Ithaca, a Greek island, and he wants to return home after having been away for ten-years fighting in the Trojan War. He employs guile as well as courage to return to Ithaca, defeat the suitors, and resume his proper place as king.
16	Penelope	Wife of Odysseus. Whilst Odysseus was away, she had to fight off over a hundred suitors who wanted to marry her thinking that Odysseus was dead. She is depicted as shrewd, resourceful, and faithful.
17	Telemachus	The son of Odysseus. He would spend the first part of the story trying to find his father. Telemachus was born just when Odysseus left for the Trojan War, so is about twenty-years old at the point of his return.
18	Eurycleia	A maid in Odysseus' palace, she is loyal to Odysseus and Penelope and helps in Odysseus' pursuit of the suitors. She would recognise him when he is disguised.
19	Antinous	One of the main suitors in the story. A violent and over-confident character who strives hard to take Odysseus' throne.
20	Eurymachus	Another of the suitors. He is sly and manipulative, at one point fooling Penelope that he has no ill-intent. He arranges for the death of Telemachus, only to be outwitted by him.
21	Athena	Athena plays a vital role in the book as Odysseus' protector. It is she who secures the release of Odysseus from Calypso, and supports Odysseus in his plans to defeat the suitors.

## Key Literary Techniques and Examples:

22	Epithet	Lines 1–2	"So, <b>noble</b> Odysseus remained in the hall, planning with Athena's aid how to kill the Suitors."
23	Epithet	Lines 22–23	"The Stranger, here, will do it,' <b>wise</b> Telemachus replied, 'since I'll not have a man idle who eats from my table, no matter how far he's travelled."
24	Epithet	Lines 45–46	" <b>Resourceful</b> Odysseus, answered him: 'Silence, and let such thoughts go by without question: this is the way of the gods who rule Olympus."
25	Epithet	Lines 101–103	' <b>Noble long-suffering</b> Odysseus sat there, and listened as <b>wise</b> Penelope spoke..."
26	Simile	Lines 53–56	'Now wise Penelope came down from her chamber, <b>looking like Artemis or golden Aphrodite</b> , and they placed a chair by the fire for her in her usual place..."
27	Simile	Lines 208–212	'As the snow that the West Wind pours on the high mountains melts when the East Wind thaws it, and fills the streams with its water till the rivers overflow, so her lovely cheeks were drenched as she sorrowed and wept for her husband, who was even then sitting by her side."

# 6 Knowledge Map: The Odyssey (Book 21)

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## Summary of Book 21

1	Book 19	Penelope brings a bow to the suitors and issues a challenge. Telemachus attempts to string it and almost succeeds. The suitors all fail. Odysseus reveals himself to Eumaeus and Philoetius. Eurycleia bars the doors, and Odysseus strings the bow.
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## Breakdown of Book 21 (Line-by-Line)

2	Lines 1-79	<b>Penelope Declares the Contest</b> Encouraged by Athena, Penelope unlocks the storeroom that contains Odysseus' great bow ready for the contest. We learn here how Odysseus gained the bow in the first place. She brings the great bow to the Suitors in the main hall and declares the contest with her as the prize.
3	Lines 80-135	<b>Telemachus Sets Up the Axes</b> Eumaeus is instructed to set up the axe handles ready for the contest and becomes emotional and Antinous reacts with anger to him. Telemachus reacts to this and sets up the axes himself before failing to string the bow himself.
4	Lines 136-185	<b>The Suitors Try the Bow</b> Various suitors come forward to try and string the bow. A suitor called Leodes fails, and criticises the contest, to which, again, Antinous reacts angrily. He then calls on Melantheus to light a fire and watches suitor after suitor fail to string the bow.
5	Lines 186-244	<b>Odysseus Reveals Himself to Eumaeus</b> Whilst the contest continues, Eumaeus and Philoetius leave the hall and Odysseus follows them. After testing their loyalty, he reveals his identity and prepares the plan to have one of them pass the bow to him in the contest and for others to lock the doors to the hall at the same time.
6	Lines 245-310	<b>Odysseus Seeks to Try the Bow</b> After Eurymachus fails to string the bow, Antinous suggests they pause the contest and eat. Odysseus asks to test his strength and string the bow and Antinous angrily refuses.
7	Lines 311-358	<b>Telemachus Asserts his Authority</b> Penelope intervenes and insists that the stranger (Odysseus) has his turn. After trying to placate Antinous and Eurymachus, Penelope eventually concedes her position to Telemachus who insists he will decide and asks Penelope to retire to her room.
8	Lines 359-403	<b>Odysseus Receives the Bow</b> Eumaeus eventually gets the bow to Odysseus and instructs Eurycleia to lock the hall doors, which she does. Odysseus strings the bow easily to the horror of the Suitors. Telemachus then draws his sword and stands next to his father ready to battle.

## Key Characters in Book 21 (Mortals and Gods)

14	Odysseus	The main protagonist of the story. He is King of Ithaca, a Greek island, and he wants to return home after having been away for ten-years fighting in the Trojan War. He employs guile as well as courage to return to Ithaca, defeat the suitors, and resume his proper place as king.
15	Penelope	Wife of Odysseus. Whilst Odysseus was away, she had to fight off over a hundred suitors who wanted to marry her thinking that Odysseus was dead. She is depicted as shrewd, resourceful, and faithful.
16	Telemachus	The son of Odysseus. He would spend the first part of the story trying to find his father. Telemachus was born just when Odysseus left for the Trojan War, so is about twenty-years old at the point of his return.
17	Eurycleia	A maid in Odysseus' palace, she is loyal to Odysseus and Penelope and helps in Odysseus' pursuit of the suitors. She would recognise him when he is disguised.
18	Antinous	One of the main suitors in the story. A violent and over-confident character who strives hard to take Odysseus' throne.
19	Eurymachus	Another of the suitors. He is sly and manipulative, at one point fooling Penelope that he has no ill-intent. He arranges for the death of Telemachus, only to be outwitted by him.
20	Eumaeus	Odysseus' loyal swineherd, who grew up on Ithaca with Odysseus. He would be a loyal friend to both Odysseus and Telemachus and help them return to the palace to rid it of the suitors.
21	Philoetius	Odysseus' loyal cowherd. He would be a loyal friend to both Odysseus and Telemachus and help them return to the palace to rid it of the suitors.
22	Athena	Athena plays a vital role in the book as Odysseus' protector. It is she who secures the release of Odysseus from Calypso, and supports Odysseus in his plans to defeat the suitors.

## Themes in Book 21

9	Fate	Fate continues to be a major theme as all characters seem to be at the will of the Gods, in particular, Athene. An example would be Penelope who sets up contest for the Suitors knowing she will be the prize, but doing so in the vain hope that Odysseus will somehow return.
10	Nostos	Nostos continues to be a them that runs through Book 21, as Odysseus, despite being on Ithaca and in his own palace, still is not quite 'home' in the emotional sense. The Suitors that dominate his palace and disrespect his hospitality prevent this at this time.
11	Deceit and Trickery	Deceit and trickery continue to be a them of how Odysseus will exact his revenge on the Suitors. He maintains the pretence of being someone else - the Stranger - even to his own wife. However, he does it all for the right reasons - to protect his family.
12	Revenge and Justice	Revenge is becoming the predominant theme of the book as Odysseus, along with Telemachus, plot the massacre of the Suitors.
13	Xenia	This is a major theme in The Odyssey, but particularly in Book 21, as the Suitors continue to be disrespectful to Penelope and Telemachus and their hospitality - this would put them at odds with the Gods for these actions.

## Key Literary Techniques and Examples:

23	Epithet	Lines 1-4	"Now the goddess, <b>bright-eyed Athene</b> , prompted <b>wise Penelope</b> , Icarus' daughter to confront the Suitors in Odysseus' palace with his bow and the grey axes, as a challenge and a means to their destruction."
24	Epithet	Lines 75-76	" <b>Godlike Odysseus</b> ' mighty bow is the test."
25	Epithet	Lines 96-97 Lines 117-118	"Then <b>royal Telemachus</b> intervened: 'Zeus must have added my wits, indeed!'" "Alas <b>royal Telemachus</b> exclaimed, 'it seems I shall always be a coward and a weakling.'"
26	Simile	Lines 372-374	"Then grasping the bow in his right hand, he plucked the string that <b>sang sweetly to his touch with the sound of a swallow's note.</b> "

# 7 Knowledge Map: The Odyssey (Book 22)

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## Summary of Book 22

1	Book 22	Odysseus begins to shoot the suitors. Telemachus goes to the storeroom to fetch more weapons. He realises that he has left the door open and catches Melanthius taking weapons. Athena, disguised as Mentor, helps Odysseus, and eventually all the suitors are killed. The house is cleansed and the treacherous servants killed.
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## Breakdown of Book 22 (Line-by-Line)

2	Lines 1-67	<b>The Death of Antinous</b> Incredibly, the book opens with Odysseus firing an arrow through the throat of the main suitor, Antinous. Uproar follows as the Suitors react in fear of the Stranger. Once Odysseus reveals who he is, Eurymachus tries to blame everything on the now dead Antinous.
3	Lines 68-115	<b>The Battle Begins</b> The battle begins with Odysseus declaring no one will be spared. Eurymachus attacks Odysseus, but he is also killed. Telemachus runs to the storeroom to get armour and weapons for him, Odysseus, Eumaeus, and Philoetius.
4	Lines 116-159	<b>Melanthius Raids the Storeroom</b> As Odysseus fires arrows to keep the Suitors at bay, Melanthius, Odysseus' disloyal goatherd, ran to the storeroom before Telemachus and claimed armour and weapons for the Suitors. Odysseus commands Telemachus to find out who betrayed them: Melanthius on his own, or one of his other servants.
5	Lines 160-199	<b>Melanthius is Captured</b> As Melanthius returns to the storeroom, Eumaeus spots him and with the help of Philoetius, they capture him and bind his legs and arms, before hoisting up to the ceiling.
6	Lines 200-240	<b>Athene Intervenes</b> Eumaeus and Philoetius put on armour and return to Odysseus. Athene now intervenes and appears before Odysseus as Mentor, whom Odysseus left in charge before going to the Trojan War. He knows it s Athene though, and she speaks angrily to Odysseus not to lose courage now.
7	Lines 241-309	<b>The Fighting Continues</b> Sensing Odysseus' wavering, the Suitors attack in a more coordinated way, but Athene protects Odysseus as much as she can. Odysseus and his men attack the Suitors, killing lots. As the Suitors try to flee, Odysseus and his men massacre them.
8	Lines 310-377	<b>Leoides and Phemius</b> One of the Suitors, Leoides, a priest, begs Odysseus for forgiveness, but Odysseus does not give it, killing him. Phemius, the minstrel who was forced to play for the Suitors, is spared by Odysseus after Telemachus speaks on his behalf.
9	Lines 378-432	<b>Eurycleia Denounces the Disloyal Women</b> After the bloodshed, Odysseus asks Eurycleia which servants were loyal to him in his absence. She declares that of the fifty serving women in the palace, twelve were disloyal to Odysseus. Odysseus asks they be brought to him.
10	Lines 433-501	<b>Telemachus Executes the Serving Women</b> Odysseus commands Telemachus to execute the disloyal servants to Odysseus, including the disloyal goatherd, Melanthius, who dies a brutal and painful death. Odysseus cleanses the main hall before he weeps at the joy of being finally home.

## Key Characters in Book 22 (Mortals and Gods)

14	Odysseus	The main protagonist of the story. He is King of Ithaca, a Greek island, and he wants to return home after having been away for ten-years fighting in the Trojan War. He employs guile as well as courage to return to Ithaca, defeat the suitors, and resume his proper place as king.
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22	Athene	Athene plays a vital role in the book as Odysseus' protector. It is she who secures the release of Odysseus from Calypso, and supports Odysseus in his plans to defeat the suitors.
23	Melanthius	Odysseus' disloyal goatherd who sided with the suitors in Odysseus' absence. He faces a brutal death at the hands of Telemachus.
24	Melantho	One of Odysseus' disloyal maids, who, after siding with the Suitors, dies a brutal and painful death.

## Key Literary Techniques and Examples:

11	Epithet	Lines 1-4 Lines 22-26	"Throwing off his rags, <b>resourceful Odysseus</b> sprang to the wide threshold with the bow and the full quiver..."  "Resourceful Odysseus, glowered at them, and answered: 'You dogs! You thought I'd never return from the land of Troy...'"
12	Epithet	Lines 77-79	"But at that very moment <b>noble Odysseus</b> let fly an arrow that struck him in the chest..."  "Amphinomus, now, rushed at <b>glorious Odysseus</b> , attacking him with drawn sword..."
13	Simile	Lines 304-306	"Odysseus and the others, set upon them, <b>like vultures from the mountains</b> , with crooked talons and curving beaks, swooping on smaller birds that skim the plain beneath the clouds."

## Themes in Book 22

25	Revenge	This is the predominant theme of Book 22, where Odysseus and Telemachus, aided by Eumaeus and Philoetius, exact revenge on the Suitors for their disrespect of Odysseus, his wife Penelope, and for the hosts' <i>Xenia</i> . The revenge on the Suitors is bloody and brutal.  Perhaps though, the biggest example of revenge is when Telemachus executes the disloyal servants and goatherd in the most brutal fashion.
26	Justice	However, whilst revenge is definitely taken by Odysseus, both he, Telemachus, and the gods, in particular Athene, view this also as justice. It is not always about cold-blooded revenge as both Odysseus and Telemachus show mercy at times.  Perhaps the best example of 'justice' is when both Leodes and Phemius beg for their lives. Odysseus' executes Leodes for his disloyalty, but spares Phemius who was forced to betray him.

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## Odysseus' Journey Influences His Character

		The Telemachy (1-4)	The Homecoming of Odysseus (5-8)	The Wanderings of Odysseus (9-12)	Odysseus in Ithaca (13-24)
1	Changing Odysseus	Odysseus is not directly in this section, only referred to	Odysseus is with the Phaeacians disguised as a traveller. He is humble, but reacts when challenged to prove himself. It could be that he is does not reveal his identity until he is sure the Phaeacians will give him passage back to Ithaca.	Odysseus recounts his stories where he is at times reckless, lacking in judgement, is egotistical, and a lot of decisions sees his crew die. Yet, he equally shows real leadership, resourcefulness, cunning and strength. It is like he has to go through all this to be the hero ready for the final stages of The Odyssey.	Odysseus is almost now the complete Greek hero. Careful in his planning, controlled in his behaviour, trusting in his allies, and brutal on his enemies. He has perfected the art of manipulation and disguise to support his mission to win back Penelope and his kingdom.

## Odysseus Journey

2	Summary	Odysseus takes ten years to return to home to Ithaca from the Trojan War. He visits various places and people and faces struggle after struggle. The key events for the exam are: (1) The Battle with Cicones, (2) The Land of the Lotus-Eaters; (3) Polyphemus the Cyclops, (4) The Land of the Laestrygonians, (5) Circe the Enchantress, (6) Odysseus' return to Ithaca and the killing of the Suitors.
3	Struggles	Whilst journeying home from Troy, Odysseus experiences much struggle and heartache, and as a direct result of this, his character changes. He is a complex character that demonstrates many different qualities, not always good or heroic, which makes him a fascinating hero to study.
4	Epithets	Listed are the epithets Homer uses to describe Odysseus: Resourceful, great, wise, godlike, long-enduring, favourite of Zeus, long-suffering, patient, noble, shrewd, sacker of cities, nimble-witted, the master-schemer, illustrious.  All of these epithets show the complexity of his character.

## Book 9: Leaving Troy

5	Intelligence and Resourceful	Odysseus demonstrates his undoubted intelligence and initiative by providing the Greeks with the opportunity to defeat Troy through his creation of the Trojan Horse. In order to bring about a stalemate, Odysseus devises a plot to infiltrate Troy. Interestingly, it would be Odysseus who leads the small Greek army inside the horse when it enters Troy.
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## Book 9: Battle of Cicones

6	Sacker of Cities	Odysseus' demonstrates his power as a warrior and a leader of men when he and his men travel to Ismarus and sack the city. They attack the city, defeat the Cicones, and rob it of its wealth. It shows his skills as a warrior and as a leader of an army.
7	Complacent	Despite their initial success, the Ithacans are unprepared for a counter-attack by the Cicones. They complacently stay by their boats revelling in the glory of their previous victory rather than leaving immediately. This demonstrates Odysseus' poor leadership skills here as he should have left and results in the death of some of his men.

## Book 9: Land of the Lotus-Eaters

8	Strong Leader	Odysseus learns from the previous battle against the Cicones, when he drags his men from the Lotus-Eaters. He physically shows his strength by forcing them back onto the ships, and then leaving immediately. It is a sign that Odysseus is willing to learn from his previous mistakes.
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## Book 9: Polyphemus the Cyclops

9	Curious	Odysseus does not listen to his crew when they express their desire to leave the island of the Cyclops. Odysseus wants to stay and test the Cyclops' hospitality. This curiosity would see his men become trapped in Polyphemus' cave and see a number of his men eaten by Polyphemus.
10	Clever	Odysseus demonstrates his resourcefulness and cunning to be able to get out of Polyphemus' cave. His idea to pretend to be 'Nobody' has huge outcomes as it convinces Polyphemus it is his name and no threat, but also the other Cyclops who run to Polyphemus' cries of anguish when he is blinded. Equally, his escape using the sheep and rams is incredibly clever.
11	Arrogant and Egotistical	Odysseus flees the island with his men to, what should be, safety but his arrogance and ego places him and his men in immediate and long-term danger. His desire to let Polyphemus know his real name means the Cyclops can locate roughly where they are and launch rocks at the escaping ship, but also sees Poseidon now seek revenge on Odysseus and his crew. Polyphemus' prophecy of only Odysseus returning to Ithaca after struggling comes true.

## Book 10: The Laestrygonians

12	Reckless	Odysseus had seen the potential danger in the Laestrygonians' harbour, but rather than warning the rest of his fleet and men, he chose to moor only his ship outside of it. As they flee the island, his men are trapped in the harbour, something Odysseus foresaw, and this sees all but his ship sunk and all but his crew killed.
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## Book 10: Circe's Island

13	Crew's Lack of Respect	Clearly, Odysseus' crew lack respect for him. When he is travelling to Circe's island, they open the bag of wind given to him by Aelous, the Wind God, and thus the fleet are blown away from Ithaca. This would not have happened if the crew respected him and they followed him with discipline.
14	Responsible	Once Odysseus' crew are captured by Circe and turned into pigs, it is Odysseus who sets out to free them himself.
15	Faithful	In freeing his men, Odysseus must listen to the advice given to him by Hermes who is disguised. Odysseus trusts his faith in the Gods and destiny when accepting that advice and actioning it.
16	Unfaithful	Despite his faithfulness to the Gods, it appears that Odysseus is openly unfaithful to his wife, Penelope, when he sleeps with Circe. Whilst in modern terms, this would simply be adultery to the Ancient Greeks, it may not be so. It would have enhanced Odysseus' reputation to have slept with a Goddess, and it could be argued, he was 'forced' to when he was instructed to by Hermes.
17	Homesick and Vulnerable	There are moments in Book 10, when a more vulnerable Odysseus is exposed. He contemplates death on a number of occasions but is this through defeat and lack of hope or from the thought of dying unnoticed by people and the Gods? In Circe's home we see him visibly moved to want to return home (nostos) after one year on her island.
18	Unforgiving	We see Odysseus change in Book 10 from someone who would not listen to his men in Book 9 to someone who does in Book 10, when he spares Eurylochus' life. He feels completely disrespected by Eurylochus and thinks he is a terrible leader. His first instinct is to kill him, but his men persuade him not to.

## Books 19, 21 and 22: Ithaca

19	Deceitful	Odysseus' return to Ithaca is shrouded in secrecy and he keeps his identity secret from all but a couple of close allies. His ability to disguise himself is something that would have been celebrated and applauded in Ancient Greece as it symbolises the Greek's superior intellect to other nationalities.
20	Planner	Odysseus plots an intricate route to killing the Suitors. He takes on a hidden identity, he tests the loyalty of his servants, he manipulates people into carrying out his plan in which he ends up in a locked room with the Suitors armed with his Great Bow.
21	Trusting	Odysseus is trusting of only but a few people in his plot to win back his home and kill the Suitors: Telemachus, Eumaeus, Philoetius, and reluctantly, Eurycleia. With each of these he tests their loyalty to him before trusting them.
22	Manipulative	Odysseus shows his ability to manipulate people throughout his return to Ithaca. This is perhaps best demonstrated in his concealment of his identity to his wife, Penelope. He uses false stories to manipulate her into doing what he needs to defeat the Suitors, with the Archery Contest being the most obvious.
23	Fatherly	Odysseus portrays all the values needed in a father from Ancient Greek times, and he seems to revel in it despite not being a father to Telemachus for 20 years. He provides him with instruction and inspiration which Telemachus happily accepts. This is perhaps best exemplified with his simple shake of the head to stop Telemachus trying to string the bow one more time.
24	Inspiring	Odysseus is an inspiration to three key members of the Odysseus household: Telemachus, Eumaeus and Philoetius, all of whom weep at his return. Equally, Eurycleia responds to his return with pure emotion.
25	Vengeful	Odysseus takes his vengeance out on the Suitors in dramatic and brutal fashion. He exacts swift vengeance on two Suitors in particular: Antinous and Eurymachus.
26	Judgemental	Odysseus carries out his own form of justice, even if in modern times it would be seen as being a vigilante. The manner in which he deals with the disloyal servants is brutal but Odysseus feels this is justice for their betrayal.

## 9 Knowledge Map: The Odyssey (Characters)

This component is called the 'Literature World paper'. It is focused entirely on Homer's epic poem, *The Odyssey*. This topic focuses on the plot of the *Odyssey*, with a particular focus on Books 9, 10, 19, 21, and 22. It also analyses the literary techniques employed by its author, Homer. Certain characters need to be analysed, particularly Odysseus, the main protagonist. The key themes that are threaded through the book, such as the concept of *xenia* (friendship and hospitality), must be examined.

Telemachus		Penelope		The Suitors		Polyphemus		Circe	
1 Books	8 Books	15 Books	16 Books	22 Books	29 Books	23 Books	24 Books	30 Books	31 Books
Telemachus can be found in Books 1, 2, and 21. He can also be found in early books, most notably Books 1 to 4.		Penelope can be found in Books 19, 20, and 21.		The Suitors can be found in books 19, 20, and 21.		Polyphemus can be found in Book 9.		Circe can be found in Book 10.	
Summary of Telemachus' Character		Summary of Penelope's Character		Summary of The Suitors' Characters		Summary of Polyphemus' Character		Summary of Circe's Character	
2 Coming of Age	9 Devoted	16 Represented by Antinous and Eurymachus	17 Aggressive	23 Uncivilised	30 Magical	23 Represented by Antinous and Eurymachus	24 Barbaric	31 Merciless	31 Merciless
The Odyssey's secondary plot is the coming of age of Telemachus. Throughout the book, Telemachus grows to become a stronger, determined and courageous man. This is best symbolised by his	Penelope is a devoted wife and mother. Despite not knowing if Odysseus is dead or alive, and despite having 180 suitors wanting to marry her, she maintains faithful to her husband.	The Suitors are a group of 100 men from all of Ithaca who wish to marry Penelope following Odysseus' failure to return from Ithaca. They are best represented by two key Suitors: Antinous and Eurymachus.	Antinous and Eurymachus are incredibly aggressive towards most key characters. Their treatment of Odysseus when he presents as the 'Stranger', even throwing objects at him. They are also incredibly aggressive towards the other Suitors, even threatening them.	Polyphemus represents the concept of the uncivilised in the <i>Odyssey</i> . The Cyclopes have no laws, no councils (democracy) or hospitality. They are the contrast to the humans who have all these things.	The way Circe simply turns Odysseus' crew into pigs without a second thought demonstrates her mercilessness. She doesn't even think for a moment if her crew even try to understand why they are and why they are there.	Antinous and Eurymachus are the most aggressive and ambitious of the Suitors. They are also incredibly aggressive towards the other Suitors, even threatening them.	Both Antinous and Eurymachus lead the plot to murder Telemachus upon his return from his travels to Pylos and Sparta. They fail due to the intervention of the Gods, but their intention was to kill him off.	Both Antinous and Eurymachus lead the plot to murder Telemachus upon his return from his travels to Pylos and Sparta. They fail due to the intervention of the Gods, but their intention was to kill him off.	Both Antinous and Eurymachus lead the plot to murder Telemachus upon his return from his travels to Pylos and Sparta. They fail due to the intervention of the Gods, but their intention was to kill him off.
3 Faithful	10 Devious	17 Aggressive	18 Murderous	24 Barbaric	31 Merciless	24 Barbaric	25 Strong	32 Vulnerable	32 Vulnerable
Telemachus is faithful to both his family (mother and father) and to the Gods. His faith in the Gods and destiny is unwavering, especially in Athena's. Throughout the whole story, Telemachus seems to be motivated by a faith.	Like her husband, Penelope is cunning and devious when she has to be. This is best symbolised with the story of the loom. She promised the suitors that once she completed her shroud for the cremial death of her father-in-law, she would choose a husband. Little did they know that each night she undid all her work.	Both Antinous and Eurymachus lead the plot to murder Telemachus upon his return from his travels to Pylos and Sparta. They fail due to the intervention of the Gods, but their intention was to kill him off.	Both Antinous and Eurymachus lead the plot to murder Telemachus upon his return from his travels to Pylos and Sparta. They fail due to the intervention of the Gods, but their intention was to kill him off.	Polyphemus is incredibly strong and shows this in Book 9 when he easily moves a boulder that acts as a door to his cave. It would have taken 22 carts to have pulled the rock into place had humans had to do it.	When Odysseus confronts Circe, her reaction is pure fear. She clings to his knees and begs for mercy showing that her goddess-like appearance hides a more vulnerable character.	Both Antinous and Eurymachus lead the plot to murder Telemachus upon his return from his travels to Pylos and Sparta. They fail due to the intervention of the Gods, but their intention was to kill him off.	Both Antinous and Eurymachus lead the plot to murder Telemachus upon his return from his travels to Pylos and Sparta. They fail due to the intervention of the Gods, but their intention was to kill him off.	Both Antinous and Eurymachus lead the plot to murder Telemachus upon his return from his travels to Pylos and Sparta. They fail due to the intervention of the Gods, but their intention was to kill him off.	Both Antinous and Eurymachus lead the plot to murder Telemachus upon his return from his travels to Pylos and Sparta. They fail due to the intervention of the Gods, but their intention was to kill him off.
4 Assertive	11 Accepting of Destiny	17 Aggressive	18 Murderous	25 Strong	32 Vulnerable	25 Strong	26 Lacks Intelligence	33 Faithful	33 Faithful
During the first books, Telemachus tries to assert his authority on the Suitors, but it does not quite work as the Suitors just disrespect him. Yet by Books 19, 21 and 22 he establishes an authority amongst the Suitors, best displayed with his handling of the Suitors' treatment of the 'Stranger' (Odysseus).	Penelope seems quite accepting of her destiny. This is best symbolised with the contest. She tells the Stranger that she will hold a contest amongst the suitors that <i>only</i> Odysseus could ever win. This is no coincidence. It seems Penelope trusts in fate that the Stranger may be Odysseus, hence her choice of contest.	Both Antinous and Eurymachus lead the plot to murder Telemachus upon his return from his travels to Pylos and Sparta. They fail due to the intervention of the Gods, but their intention was to kill him off.	Both Antinous and Eurymachus lead the plot to murder Telemachus upon his return from his travels to Pylos and Sparta. They fail due to the intervention of the Gods, but their intention was to kill him off.	Polyphemus demonstrates a lack of intelligence as Odysseus is easily able to fool him when he tells him his name is 'Nobody'. Polyphemus completely believes him without question.	Circe, despite being an enchantress and goddess herself, fears and obeys the 'greater' gods. This is best exemplified when she realises Hermes' messages have all come true when she meets Odysseus.	Both Antinous and Eurymachus lead the plot to murder Telemachus upon his return from his travels to Pylos and Sparta. They fail due to the intervention of the Gods, but their intention was to kill him off.	Both Antinous and Eurymachus lead the plot to murder Telemachus upon his return from his travels to Pylos and Sparta. They fail due to the intervention of the Gods, but their intention was to kill him off.	Both Antinous and Eurymachus lead the plot to murder Telemachus upon his return from his travels to Pylos and Sparta. They fail due to the intervention of the Gods, but their intention was to kill him off.	Both Antinous and Eurymachus lead the plot to murder Telemachus upon his return from his travels to Pylos and Sparta. They fail due to the intervention of the Gods, but their intention was to kill him off.
5 Loyal	12 Hospitable	19 Disrespectful	19 Disrespectful	26 Lacks Intelligence	33 Faithful	26 Lacks Intelligence	27 Godless	34 Hospitable	34 Hospitable
Telemachus is taught the importance of loyalty by Nestor and Menelaos and demonstrates this with his loyalty to the father he hardly knows, after only just meeting his father, he plans the killing of Suitors, and then never wavers in his actions.	Penelope is the most gracious host despite the suitors abusing her hospitality. By offering <i>xenia</i> to the Suitors for over four years, she is the embodiment of virtuousness.	The Suitors' behaviour to their host, Penelope, is incredibly disrespectful. They abuse her hospitality, taking of Odysseus' wealth and food for many years as they try to force Penelope to choose a husband.	The Suitors' behaviour to their host, Penelope, is incredibly disrespectful. They abuse her hospitality, taking of Odysseus' wealth and food for many years as they try to force Penelope to choose a husband.	Polyphemus demonstrates a lack of intelligence as Odysseus is easily able to fool him when he tells him his name is 'Nobody'. Polyphemus completely believes him without question.	Circe, despite being an enchantress and goddess herself, fears and obeys the 'greater' gods. This is best exemplified when she realises Hermes' messages have all come true when she meets Odysseus.	The Suitors' behaviour to their host, Penelope, is incredibly disrespectful. They abuse her hospitality, taking of Odysseus' wealth and food for many years as they try to force Penelope to choose a husband.	Despite being the son of Poseidon, Polyphemus, along with all the other Cyclopes, are godless and have no faith in the Greek Gods. In Book 9, Polyphemus is completely dismissive of Zeus when talking to Odysseus claiming he cares nothing for him and claims he is greater than he.	Circe exemplifies what it means to be a hospitable host. Granted it is after she has turned the crew to pigs, but she shows impeccable hospitality to Odysseus and his crew. So good in fact, that Odysseus has to be reminded by the crew to continue his journey back to Ithaca after a whole year.	Circe exemplifies what it means to be a hospitable host. Granted it is after she has turned the crew to pigs, but she shows impeccable hospitality to Odysseus and his crew. So good in fact, that Odysseus has to be reminded by the crew to continue his journey back to Ithaca after a whole year.
6 Vengeful	13 Stole	20 Deceitful	20 Deceitful	27 Godless	34 Hospitable	27 Godless	28 Civilised	35 Loving	35 Loving
Telemachus displays his vengeance when the Suitors are all dead when punishing the disloyal maids and servants in Odysseus' house. He executes a number of them in a brutal fashion.	Penelope remains stoic throughout the ten years her husband has been missing. Stoic means to endure hardship without showing signs of it. Throughout the <i>Odyssey</i> , she presents an image in public of someone in control, but in private, she grieves for her husband.	The best example of their deceitfulness is Eurymachus. Upon Odysseus revealing his identity to the Suitors and killing Antinous, Eurymachus attempts to convince Odysseus that it was all the now-dead Antinous' fault and he was the source of the abuse of his home.	The best example of their deceitfulness is Eurymachus. Upon Odysseus revealing his identity to the Suitors and killing Antinous, Eurymachus attempts to convince Odysseus that it was all the now-dead Antinous' fault and he was the source of the abuse of his home.	Despite being the son of Poseidon, Polyphemus, along with all the other Cyclopes, are godless and have no faith in the Greek Gods. In Book 9, Polyphemus is completely dismissive of Zeus when talking to Odysseus claiming he cares nothing for him and claims he is greater than he.	Circe exemplifies what it means to be a hospitable host. Granted it is after she has turned the crew to pigs, but she shows impeccable hospitality to Odysseus and his crew. So good in fact, that Odysseus has to be reminded by the crew to continue his journey back to Ithaca after a whole year.	Despite being the son of Poseidon, Polyphemus, along with all the other Cyclopes, are godless and have no faith in the Greek Gods. In Book 9, Polyphemus is completely dismissive of Zeus when talking to Odysseus claiming he cares nothing for him and claims he is greater than he.	Despite his brutality and godlessness, Polyphemus displays a caring and delicate nature in the way he looks after his flock of sheep. He carefully and sensitively nurtures and cares for them showing a side that Odysseus did not want to readily reveal.	Circe is in love with Odysseus and yet does not deny him his return home. When he approaches her to leave, she encourages it and helps him prepare to visit the land of the dead, despite it breaking her heart.	Circe is in love with Odysseus and yet does not deny him his return home. When he approaches her to leave, she encourages it and helps him prepare to visit the land of the dead, despite it breaking her heart.
7 Merciful	14 Indecisive	21 Ambitious	21 Ambitious	28 Civilised	35 Loving	28 Civilised	28 Civilised	35 Loving	35 Loving
In Book 22, when hearing out punishments to the disloyal servants, he spares the life of Phenois, the minstrel. He was forced to sing for the Suitors each night against his will, and Telemachus tells his father to spare his life.	Throughout the <i>Odyssey</i> , Penelope is a woman who does not want to remain loyal to her husband or marry another. She never quite decides and leads the Suitors on, much to their anger, but this may be the reason. She may just be buying time for either her husband to return or for her son to grow and take control.	All the Suitors are ambitious, but Antinous and Eurymachus, more than anyone. They both display little feelings towards Penelope and are more interested in what marrying her brings: to become King of Ithaca.	All the Suitors are ambitious, but Antinous and Eurymachus, more than anyone. They both display little feelings towards Penelope and are more interested in what marrying her brings: to become King of Ithaca.	Despite his brutality and godlessness, Polyphemus displays a caring and delicate nature in the way he looks after his flock of sheep. He carefully and sensitively nurtures and cares for them showing a side that Odysseus did not want to readily reveal.	Circe is in love with Odysseus and yet does not deny him his return home. When he approaches her to leave, she encourages it and helps him prepare to visit the land of the dead, despite it breaking her heart.	Despite his brutality and godlessness, Polyphemus displays a caring and delicate nature in the way he looks after his flock of sheep. He carefully and sensitively nurtures and cares for them showing a side that Odysseus did not want to readily reveal.	Circe is in love with Odysseus and yet does not deny him his return home. When he approaches her to leave, she encourages it and helps him prepare to visit the land of the dead, despite it breaking her heart.	Circe is in love with Odysseus and yet does not deny him his return home. When he approaches her to leave, she encourages it and helps him prepare to visit the land of the dead, despite it breaking her heart.	Circe is in love with Odysseus and yet does not deny him his return home. When he approaches her to leave, she encourages it and helps him prepare to visit the land of the dead, despite it breaking her heart.

This component is called the 'Literature Study' and will form 50% of the Homeric World paper. It is focused entirely on Homer's epic poem, *The Odyssey*. This topic focuses on the plot of the Odyssey, with a particular focus on Books 9, 10, 19, 21, and 22. It also analyses the literary techniques employed by its author, Homer. Certain characters need to be analysed, particularly Odysseus, the main protagonist. The key themes that are threaded through the book, such as the concept of *xenia* (guest friendship and hospitality), must be examined.

Themes in The Odyssey			Examples of Themes in Book 19		
1	Fate	It might be presumed that Odysseus was always 'fated' to return to Ithaca and reclaim his throne, but the Greeks believed differently in the concept of fate. This is more about how the gods determined, even pre-determined, the fate of humans through their actions; Odysseus is a key example.	17	Fate	Fate is clearly evident in Book 19 as Odysseus has returned to Ithaca alone, on someone else's ship, and his house is full of Suitors. The curse from Polyphemus has come true.
2	Xenia: Hospitality and Friendship	In his journey, Odysseus is often dependent on the hospitality of strangers. The Greeks believed in a custom called Xenia where travellers would be given food, shelter, and protection. This theme is played out throughout the poem.	18	Xenia: Hospitality and Friendship	Xenia is definitely evident in Book 19 as Penelope acts as an impeccable host to the Suitors, some 100 of them. She allows them to return to her house each day and live off her wealth. Contrasting that is the attitude of the Suitors who abuse the hospitality of their host, something the Ancient Greeks would have hated.
3	Deceit and Trickery	Despite seemingly negative characteristics of someone, the Greeks admired Odysseus' trickery and lies. The Odyssey is full of examples of his lies. Indeed Books 9 and 10 could be entirely fabricated as they are all told from the viewpoint of Odysseus who is prone to lying.	19	Deceit and Trickery	This is perhaps the strongest theme in Book 19. Odysseus arrives at his home but does not reveal his identity to his wife, Penelope. He is disguised as a beggar and through all his conversations he tells false truths to continue his deception.
4	Civilisation and Barbarism	Throughout the book there is an examination of what it is to be civilised and uncivilised. It is often the monsters that are viewed as barbarous through their behaviour and failure to offer Xenia.	20	Deceit and Trickery	Another clear example of deceit and trickery is how Penelope has put off marrying one of the Suitors for four years. The story of her promising the Suitors she will only marry once she has completed the funeral shroud for her father-in-law, and her weaving the funeral shroud by day and undoing it by night is worthy of Odysseus himself.
5	Revenge and Justice	This theme is examined throughout and, as readers, we are asked to question what is justice and what is revenge and can the two be linked. An examination of Odysseus' actions to the suitors asks whether he carried out justice or revenge.	<b>Examples of Themes in Book 21</b>		
6	Nostos	Nostos is the name given to the desire to return home, and is the root of the word nostalgia. It is essential for Odysseus to have this focus permanently in his mind to keep him focused on his journey home.	21	Fate	When Penelope announces the Archery Contest, it is though she is committing her future to whatever destiny has decided for her. Her thinking is that her fate is either to marry another or Odysseus will appear and win the contest. Arguably, this decision is affected by her previous conversations with Odysseus and a growing belief that the Stranger may well be her husband.
<b>Examples of Themes in Book 9</b>			22	Xenia: Hospitality and Friendship	The Suitors in Book 21 continue to abuse Penelope and Telemachus' hospitality. They abuse Telemachus, the servants, and Odysseus himself although they only know him as a beggar.
8	Fate	Perhaps the greatest example of fate and destiny and that Odysseus' fate is in the hands of the gods, occurs in Book 9 when Polyphemus brings down a curse on Odysseus after he reveals his name. He says, "If he is destined to see his friends and his fine house in his own country, may he come there late and in sore distress, in another ship, losing all comrades, and let him find great trouble in his house."	23	Deceit and Trickery	Again, a prominent theme running through Book 21 is deceit and trickery. The whole book is about getting Odysseus' and Telemachus' plan to kill the Suitors into effect. As part of this plan, Odysseus will bring two loyal servants into his plan, but only after he has tested their loyalty.
9	Xenia: Hospitality and Friendship	A major theme of Book 9 is Xenia and how Polyphemus does not offer Odysseus' men hospitality and shelter. Indeed, part of offering Xenia correctly is never to ask who someone might be before you decide if you would offer them Xenia. Polyphemus asks Odysseus who they are and never offers them hospitality.	24	Deceit and Trickery	As part of the plan, Penelope needs to be removed from the main hall so she will not be harmed later. Odysseus and Telemachus engineer a situation in which Telemachus asserts his authority and tells Penelope to retire to her room.
10	Civilisation and Barbarism	Polyphemus in Book 9 represents barbarism and Odysseus and his crew represent civilised society. Again, this is best depicted in how Xenia is not offered by a monster like Polyphemus, but expected by Odysseus. Equally, Odysseus describes the Cyclops as having no laws or community.	25	Deceit and Trickery	Odysseus remains disguised throughout the whole book and only until he has his bow in his hand. It is only then that he reveals who he is to the Suitors.
11	Revenge and Justice	When Odysseus blinds Polyphemus it is out of revenge, and this is further added to with the revealing of his name. He wants Polyphemus to suffer physically and mentally by knowing who blinded him. Polyphemus exacts revenge on Odysseus by bringing his curse upon him. Remember at the point in the story this is happening, the Suitors are not yet in Odysseus' palace.	<b>Examples of Themes in Book 22</b>		
12	Deceit and Trickery	Deceit and trickery play a major role in how Odysseus and his crew escape Polyphemus. Odysseus convinces Polyphemus he is 'Nobody' and manages to escape the cave by hiding under the sheep and rams.	26	Fate	It is worth distinguishing here what is fate and what is not. We are told in Book 21 that Antinous would be the first to die by Odysseus but that is not the same as being fated to die by the gods. The Suitors fate is not predetermined, it is a consequence of their behaviour.
<b>Examples of Themes in Book 10</b>			27	Revenge and Justice	Revenge and justice is the most prominent theme of Book 22 as Odysseus kills the Suitors. He tells Eurymachus that all the Suitors will die either fighting or running.
13	Fate	The concept of fate is evident in Book 10 as Circe reveals a prophesy given to her by Hermes that Odysseus would visit her one day and be immune to her magic. Indeed, Hermes intervenes directly with Odysseus by telling him how to avoid Circe's magic.	28	Revenge and Justice	Odysseus killing the Suitors could be seen as revenge but for Odysseus it is about justice. When Eurycleia felt like crying out in triumph at the death of the Suitors, Odysseus stops her saying it is wicked to gloat. To him the Suitors deserved to die, but it is not a cause for celebration.
14	Xenia: Hospitality and Friendship	Both good and bad Xenia is displayed in Book 10. At first Circe is a poor host by turning Odysseus' crew to pigs without even a second's thought. Yet, once Circe frees the men, she becomes the perfect host and Odysseus and his crew stay with Circe for a whole year.	29	Revenge and Justice	In modern times, Odysseus' and Telemachus' punishments of the maids and suitors might be seen as vengeful, but not to Ancient Greeks. The severity of the punishments reflect the severity of the wrong-doings, and being disloyal was a serious wrong in the eyes of the Greeks.
15	Deceit and Trickery	Here is an element of deceit and trickery played by Odysseus in his plan to free his men. He avoids revealing who he is to Circe – a common theme for Odysseus – and pretends to accept her potion knowing that it will not affect him.	30	Revenge and Justice	Odysseus' treatment of Melanthius, the goatherd, could be argued goes beyond justice as his death is brutal. He has his nose and ears cut off, and his genitals are ripped away to be fed to the dogs. It appears the motivation here is suffering not justice.
16	Nostos	Nostos is definitely a theme running through Book 10. Odysseus contemplates dying after his ship is blown off-course when he is so close to home. Yet, his nostos could be questioned in Book 10 as he has to be reminded by his crew of returning to Ithaca after a year on Circe's island.			

# Glossary: The Odyssey

	Keyword	Definition
1	<b>Odyssey</b>	A long and eventful, or adventurous journey.
2	<b>Epithet</b>	An adjectival word or phrase regularly added to a name to denote a personal or physical quality.
3	<b>Simile</b>	A comparison made using 'like' or 'as' to create a vivid, and relatable, image.
4	<b>Anthropomorphism</b>	A type of imagery in which non-human objects or animals are given <i>literal</i> human characteristics; this is similar to personification but different in that personification is not meant literally.
5	<b>Dramatic Irony</b>	A technique where the reader knows something that the character does not, creating tension, suspense, or a sense of tragedy.
6	<b>Direct Speech</b>	A technique used to provide an insight into a character's thoughts or inner voice. It can also help reveal plot or create tension.
7	<b>Pathos</b>	A technique that evokes an emotional response in the reader, usually pity or empathy, towards a character.
8	<b>Pace</b>	The technique of controlling the speed at which a story unfolds; manipulating the pace is a powerful technique to build tension.
9	<b>Graphic Description or Imagery</b>	This technique is used to create vivid mental pictures for the reader, often appealing to one or more of the senses. This makes the story more immersive.
10	<b>Foreshadowing</b>	A technique where an author plants hints or clues in a story to suggest future events, plot twists, or character developments.
11	<b>Xenia</b>	Hospitality given unconditionally to a traveller, involving the giving of any help needed; known as 'guest-friendship'.
12	<b>Nostos</b>	The desire to return to your homeland.
13	<b>Fate</b>	The development of events outside a person's control, regarded as predetermined by a supernatural power.
14	<b>Civilised</b>	To bring (a place or people) to a stage of social and cultural development considered to be more advanced.
15	<b>Barbarism</b>	The absence of culture and civilisation; extreme cruelty or brutality.
16	<b>Kleos</b>	The glorious reputation a Homeric warrior hopes to win.
17		
18		
19		
20		
21		
22		

# A SUMMARY of EVENTS

**1**

**Odysseus finishes his tale and the Phaeacians return him to Ithaca. He returns to Ithaca and Athena helps disguise him as a beggar and then she sets off to get Telemachus from Sparta.**

**2**

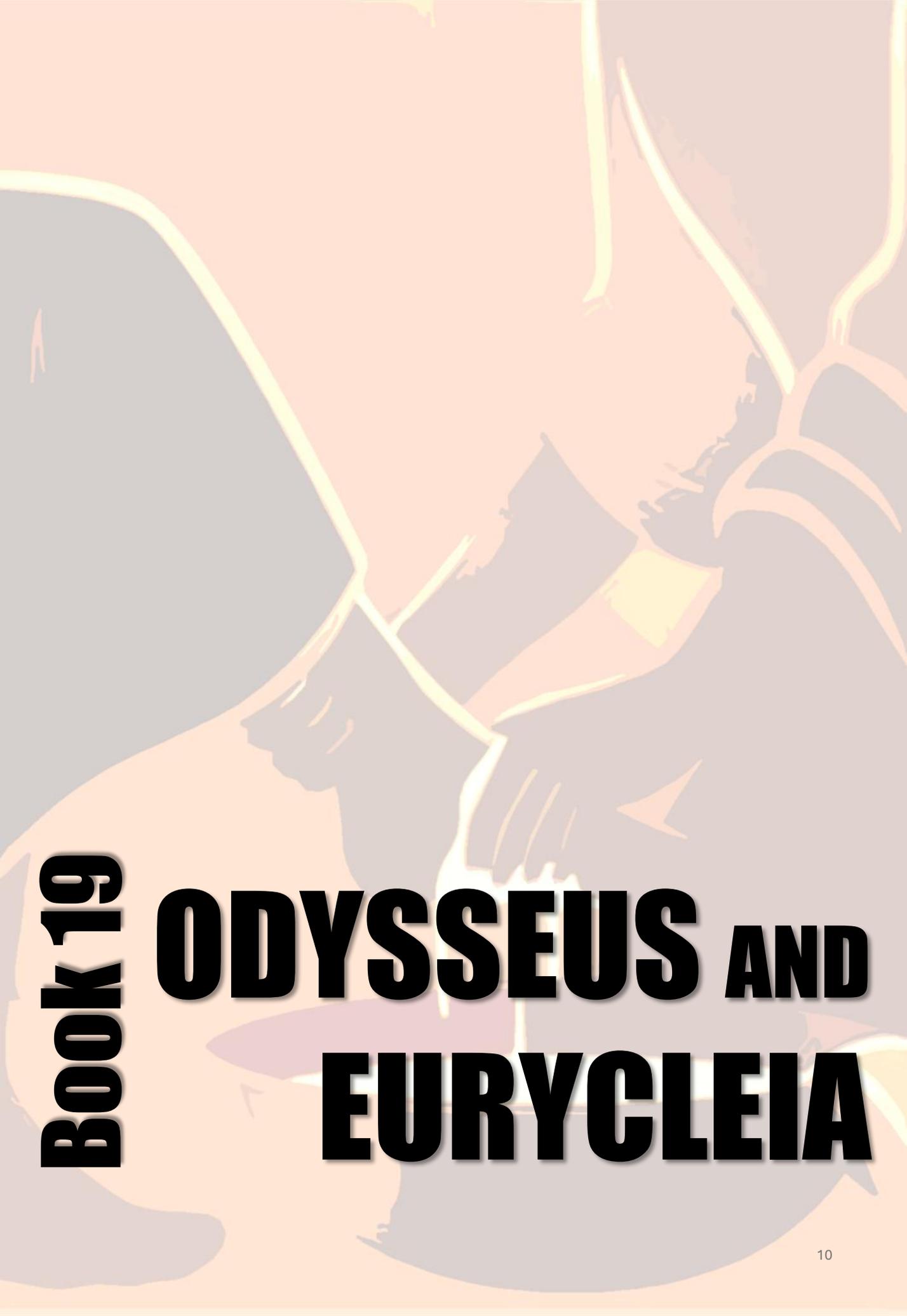
**Odysseus seeks out Eumaeus, a loyal swineherd, and Eumaeus shows exemplar xenia by offering the stranger hospitality. Eumaeus laments the loss of Odysseus, yet still Odysseus does not reveal himself.**

**3**

**Telemachus returns in secret with the help of Athena and evades the murderous suitors who are furious he has escaped. Telemachus visits Eumaeus and meets the stranger. When Telemachus sends Eumaeus to the palace, Odysseus reveals his true identity to his son, and they are united for the first time in twenty years.**

**4**

**Telemachus returns to the palace with the 'stranger' and offers him hospitality. He is abused verbally and physically by both Antinous and Eurymachus. Despite this provocation, Odysseus remains loyal to his plan and does not reveal his true identity to anyone but Telemachus.**



**BOOK 19**

**ODYSSEUS AND  
EURYCLEIA**

Book 19 finds Odysseus in Ithaca, having been returned there by the Phaeacians. In Books 13 to 18, he has enlisted the help of his loyal son, Telemachus. Ithaca is very much different to when he left it. Many think he is dead and, as such, his wife, Penelope, is much wanted by a number of Ithaca's elite men as a bride. They have in fact ensconced themselves in Odysseus' palace as are abusing their hosts hospitality. Odysseus has made his way to his palace and disguised as a stranger he has gained entry to the house under the custom of xenia, which Penelope is more than happy to give unaware that it is indeed her husband. Odysseus must bide his time if he wants to kill all the suitors, but also to find loyal allies among his servants.

### Key Characters:

Odysseus



The main protagonist of The Odyssey. A hero in the Trojan War who saw about the destruction of Troy with his Trojan Horse. He leaves Troy at the end of the war with his crew to return to Ithaca, but his journey is fraught with problems, and it takes him ten years to get home.

Penelope



The wife of Odysseus who longs for him to return but is unsure if he is alive or dead. She faces the problem that if Odysseus is dead she will be forced to marry one of the suitors who currently abuses her hospitality.

Telemachus



The son of Odysseus who has never really met his father. He is a young man and not quite up to the task of defending his mother on his own. He longs for his father's return.

Eurycleia



Odysseus' nurse from when he was a baby – she has been with the household for a long time and is a loyal servant to the Odysseus family and name.

Eumaeus



Odysseus' loyal swineherd. He will display his loyalty to the Odysseus household throughout Books 19, 21, and 22. He will fight in the battle against the Suitors.

Philoetius



Odysseus' loyal cowherd. He will display his loyalty to the Odysseus household throughout Books 19, 21, and 22. He will fight in the battle against the Suitors.

Antinous



The main antagonist of the story in Ithaca. He is the 'leader' of the Suitors who wishes to marry Penelope, not out of love, but of what it will do for him. He is an aggressive, nasty man who exhibits all the opposite characteristics to Odysseus.

Eurymachus



The second of the Suitors to take prominence in the books. He is equally as despicable as Antinous but not so aggressive, he is more sly and cunning. He too wishes to marry Penelope and is hoping to be chosen over Antinous.

Melanthius



Odysseus' disloyal goatherd and would come to symbolise disloyalty in the books. He would even side against Odysseus in the battle and with the Suitors.

Melantho



A disloyal servant who abuses the 'stranger' in Odysseus' home. Sides with the suitors over Penelope and Telemachus.

Leodes



Another Suitor who is used in the book to symbolise disloyalty and betrayal and that justice and revenge are one and the same thing for Odysseus.

Pheonius



Another Suitor who is used in the book to symbolise fairness and mercy and that justice and revenge can be separated by Odysseus.

## Lines 1 – 52: Odysseus and Eurycleia

### Odysseus and Telemachus hide the weapons

So, noble Odysseus remained in the hall, planning with Athena's aid how to kill the Suitors. At once he spoke to Telemachus winged words: **"We must hide the weapons away, all of them, Telemachus. If the Suitors miss them and question you, deceive them with placatory words,** and say: "I've moved them out of the smoke from the fire, since they no longer look as they did when Odysseus left them behind and sailed for Troy, but are all grimy where the draught from the hearth has reached them. Zeus, son of Cronos, has filled my heart with an even greater fear, that you might start a quarrel amongst yourselves, and wound each other, and so bring shame on the feast and your cause. Iron itself draws a man towards it."

Telemachus responded to his brave father's words, and called for Eurycleia, the nurse, saying: "Nurse, I want the women shut in their rooms, while I store my father's weapons away, fine weapons that have lain around the hall, neglected and darkening with the smoke, ever since he left in my childhood. Now I wish to store them where the draught from the fire won't reach them."

"Yes child," Eurycleia, the loyal nurse, replied, "and I wish you'd always show such care for the house, and look after its treasures. But who is to fetch and carry a light for you, since you won't have the maids here who might have done so?"

**"The Stranger, here, will do it," wise Telemachus replied, "since I'll not have a man idle who eats from my table, now matter how far he's travelled."**

Silently then she locked the doors of the great hall. At once, Odysseus and his fine son began carrying away the helmets, the bossed shields, and the sharp spears. **Pallas Athena herself, carrying a golden lamp before them, shed a beautiful light.** Seeing it, Telemachus, said: 'Father, what wonder is this I see? The walls, and the fine panelling, the pine-wood beams, and the tall pillars shine to my eyes as if in the light of a blazing fire. One of the gods who rules the wide sky must surely be here.'

Resourceful Odysseus answered him: 'Silence, and let such thoughts go by without question: this is the way of the gods who rule Olympus. **Go and sleep and leave me here to rouse the curiosity of your mother and her maids: in her sorrow she will ask me everything.'**

At this, Telemachus went off through the hall and the glow of the blazing torches, to rest in his room where sweet sleep would usually come to him. There he lay now till bright Dawn, while noble Odysseus remained in the hall, planning with Athena's aid how to kill the Suitors.

We join Odysseus with his son, Telemachus, in the Great Hall of his palace, as they discuss their plans to kill the suitors.

To place in context, no one knows, except Telemachus, that Odysseus has returned. He has been disguised, with the help of Athena, as an older man and as a stranger seeking xenia whilst on his travels. It is important to their plan that Odysseus' true identity remains a secret as they are heavily outnumbered and not in a position to currently take on the suitors. This thoughtfulness and control is in stark contrast to the Odysseus we learnt about on his travels – the recklessness that dominates early adventures is not there.

We see Odysseus tell his son to remove weapons from around the hall and guides him on what to say if questioned by the suitors – this guidance is important and demonstrates Odysseus' ability to use words to manipulate people as he has done in the past.

Telemachus cleverly gets Odysseus involved by stating that no stranger will have hospitality in his house but not work for it – it also publicly gives the impression that Odysseus and Telemachus don't know each other.

We are made aware that Telemachus does not know that Athena is helping Odysseus, but he is spurred on by the sign that a god is on their side.

Having cleared the hall of weapons and not roused the suspicion of the suitors, Odysseus sends his son to sleep (which Telemachus could not), whilst Odysseus now carries out the next stage of the plan which is to '...rouse the curiosity of your mother...', suggesting that Odysseus needs to start the process of sowing seeds of what to do into Penelope's thoughts.

## Lines 53 - 99: Odysseus and Eurycleia

### Penelope prepares to question the stranger

**Now wise Penelope came down from her chamber, looking like Artemis or golden Aphrodite,** and they placed a chair by the fire for her in her usual place, one inlaid with whorls of ivory and silver, that Icmalius the craftsman had created. He had fastened a foot-rest beneath it too, and a thick fleece covered it. Wise Penelope sat down, and the white-armed maids came from their hall to clear away the remains of the meal, the tables and the noblemen's drinking cups. They raked the ashes from the braziers onto the ground, and heaped them with fresh wood for light and warmth.

Penelope enters into the story and Homer uses a very blunt simile here to compare her appearance to one of a goddess.

Her maids place a seat next to the fire for her, and then the maids return to cleaning the tables from the meal the suitors have just had.

But Melanthe began to abuse Odysseus again, saying: **'Stranger, will you stay and plague us all night long, roaming the house, spying on us women? Get out, you wretch, and be glad of what supper you had, or you'll soon be on your way with a blazing torch behind you.'**

Resourceful Odysseus glowered at her, and replied: 'God-crazed woman, why attack me in your anger? Is it because I'm grimy and dressed in rags, a beggar who wanders the island? Well, needs must: beggars and travelling folk are all like this. I too once had a home of my own, I was a wealthy man with a fine house, and I gave hospitality to every wanderer who came, whoever he was, whatever his needs. I had countless servants too, and everything else that lets men live in comfort, and be called rich. But Zeus, the son of Cronos, brought me down, as he wished to do no doubt. So beware, woman, lest your mistress is angered and disgusted with you or Odysseus returns, of which there is still hope, and you lose all your beauty and pre-eminence among the maids. **Even if he is dead, as seems likely, and will never return, he has a son Telemachus like himself, by Apollo's grace. And the sins of the women in this palace don't escape his notice: since he's no longer a child.'**

Wise Penelope heard his words, and turned on the handmaid: **'Bold, and shameless creature, be sure your wild behaviour's evident to me. Be it on your own head: you yourself will cleanse its stain. You know perfectly well, you heard me say, that I wish to question this Stranger, here in my house, about the husband I sorrow for.'**

As the maids clear the tables, we get the first example of division in the home of Odysseus, and the first example of disloyalty with Melanthe turning on 'the stranger'. She oversteps her position by telling him to leave – something that never would have happened in Odysseus' time.

Odysseus, in his resourcefulness as he could not have planned this interaction, takes the opportunity to speak knowing Penelope and others would be listening. He starts to lay the foundations of how he will persuade Penelope to carry out the next stage of the plan and declare a contest. This will take time, but we see the first seeds sowed. He starts to give origins to who he is as a stranger, quite willing to deceive all around him, but it is an origin comparable to Odysseus. He talks of being a wealthy man who gave hospitality to strangers in his fine house. He then 'threatens' her with Telemachus dealing with her.

Penelope then steps in after hearing Odysseus and reinforces his words creating the first connection between the two.

## Lines 100 - 163: Odysseus and Euryclia

### Penelope and Odysseus converse

At this, Euryclia swiftly brought a gleaming chair and set it down, throwing a fleece across it. Noble long-suffering Odysseus sat there, and listened as wise Penelope spoke: **'Stranger, I must first ask you. Who are you, and where do you come from? What is your city, and who are your parents?'**

'Lady,' subtle Odysseus replied, 'there isn't a mortal being on the wide earth who could find fault with you. Your fame rises to high heaven, like the fame of a peerless king, who, fearing the gods, rules many brave men and upholds the law. The people prosper under his leadership, and the dark soil yields wheat and barley, the trees are heavy with fruit, the ewes never fail to bear, and the sea is full of fish. Question me then in your house about anything, but don't ask about my people or native country, lest you pain my heart more with thinking of them. I am a man of many sorrows. Nor is it right for me to sit wailing and crying in another's house, endless grief is wearisome. I don't want you or your maids to lose patience with me, and say that my tears flow from a mind clouded by wine.'

Wise Penelope answered: 'Stranger, all my excellence of form and beauty the gods robbed me of that day when the Argives sailed for Ilium, my husband Odysseus with them. If only he might return and cherish this life of mine, I might deserve a greater and more glorious fame. But so many are the troubles a god has heaped upon me, I only grieve. All the princes who rule the islands, Dulichium, Same, and wooded Zacynthus, and those who live round me, on Ithaca open to the view, all court me without my wishing it, and ruin my house. So I neglect strangers and suppliants, and heralds on public business, and waste my heart instead in longing for Odysseus.'

This is the first moment in *The Odyssey* where Odysseus is in front of his wife, Penelope, who he has spent ten years trying to get back to. Despite this passage of time and the strong desire to tell her who he is, he does not reveal his identity. Whereas a previous-Odysseus may have reacted in the moment and not controlled his emotions, in this moment he is able to as he enacts his larger plan. Not including Penelope will keep her safe.

This conversation sees Odysseus resourcefulness with words come to the fore. Homer has deliberately made the scene feel incredibly intimate and intense because of the two characters involved, and his use of dramatic irony here is brilliantly done. We know its Odysseus, Penelope doesn't.

She asks him who he is and where he from, even asking about his parents – a sign of how important family name is in Ancient Greece. Odysseus cleverly deflects this and gets Penelope to talk about her situation, and she explains about Odysseus being missing (not dead, suggesting she is ever hopeful he will return) and the suitors.

They urge me to wed, and I weave a web of deceit. For a god first inspired me to set up a great loom in the hall, and begin weaving with long fine thread. Then I said to the Suitors: "My lords, my Suitors, though Odysseus is dead and you are eager for me to marry, have patience till I complete this work, I do not want it wasted, this shroud for noble Laertes, ready for when pitiless death's cruel end overtakes him: since I fear some Achaean woman of this land would blame me, if he who won great wealth lay there without a shroud."

So I spoke, and though proud they agreed. Then day after day I wove the great web, but at night, by torchlight, I unmade it. So for three years I cunningly kept the Achaeans from knowing, and so tricked them. But when the fourth year began, as the seasons rolled by, and the months passed, and the endless days ran their course, through the fault of my shameless, irresponsible maids, they caught me at my unravelling, and reproached me angrily. So unwillingly I was forced to finish the web. Now I can neither escape marriage, nor find a reason for delay. My parents urge me to wed, and my son frets as these men openly consume his wealth. He is a man now, and capable of running a house that Zeus honours. But tell me of your family, since you did not spring from a tree or a stone as in the ancient tales.'

In her tale, Homer gives us an insight into Penelope's character and how similar to Odysseus she is in her resourcefulness and cunning. The story of the loom is a key moment – she has delayed the committing to marrying a suitor by saying she must finish the funeral shroud for her father-in-law, Laertes. The suitors reluctantly agree evidencing how important death and burial is to Greeks.

The making of the shroud went on for four years, with Penelope weaving by day and unravelling it at night, until one of her disloyal maids told the suitors.

Without this excuse, she knows the time is coming where she must make a decision about choosing a new husband. Now that she has revealed this, Odysseus must now convince her to make this decision.

## Lines 164 - 219: Odysseus and Eurycleia

### Odysseus tells a false tale

Resourceful Odysseus replied: 'Honoured wife of Odysseus, Laertes' son, must you ask me of my lineage? Very well, I will tell you, though you only add more pain to that I already suffer, as is ever the case when a man has been as long away from home as I have, roaming sadly from city to city. Nevertheless I will answer your questions.

Out in the wine-dark sea lies a land called Crete, a rich and lovely island. It is filled with countless people, in ninety cities. They are not of one language, but speak several tongues. There are Achaeans there, and brave native Cretans, Cydonians, three races of Dorians, and noble Pelasgians too. One of the ninety cities is mighty Cnossus, where Minos ruled, and every nine years spoke with mighty Zeus. He was brave Deucalion's father, and so my grandfather. Deucalion had two sons, Lord Idomeneus and me. Idomeneus, my older brother, and a better man than I, sailed with the sons of Atreus in the curved ships to Ilium, so I the younger, Aethon is my name, was left behind, there to meet and entertain Odysseus. The wind had driven him to Crete as he headed for Troy, and blew him off course by Cape Malea. He anchored at Amnisus, a tricky harbour, near the cave of Eileithyia, and barely escaped shipwreck.

He came straight to the city, asking for Idomeneus, calling him his beloved and honoured friend. But it was now the tenth or eleventh morning since Idomeneus had sailed for Troy, so I invited him to the palace, and wined and dined him from the house's rich store. I doled out barley meal and glowing wine, and bulls for sacrifice to his friends too, out of the public stores, to their hearts content. Those noble Achaeans stayed twelve days, hemmed in by a northerly gale sent by some hostile god that blew them off their feet as they walked the shore. But on the thirteenth day the wind dropped, and they put out to sea.'

Odysseus does not simply come straight to the point about the time coming to end all this, he needs to be cleverer with this and gain Penelope's trust. He needs to convince her that he is a friend – he does this by claiming he knows Odysseus and has met him.

He does this (ironically) by lying to her. He tells a tale of being a wealthy man from Crete and that he once had the pleasure of entertaining Odysseus as he and his crew travelled to Troy. He spins a tale about providing Odysseus with *xenia* for 12 days.

This is obviously a complete fabrication, but what Odysseus hopes to do is convince Penelope that he knows of Odysseus and they became friends. He needs her to think of Odysseus and want to find out more so he can continue to use this conversation to get what he wants which is for Penelope to come to her own conclusion as what is best to do next.

To do this, Odysseus realises he must play on the emotions of his wife.

## Lines 164 - 219: Odysseus and Eurycleia

### Odysseus tells a false tale

He made this pack of lies so convincing, that tears ran down Penelope's cheeks as she listened. As the snow that the West Wind pours on the high mountains melts when the East wind thaws it, and fills the streams with its water till the rivers overflow, so her lovely cheeks were drenched as she sorrowed and wept for her husband, who was even then sitting by her side. But though Odysseus pitied his wife's distress, he gazed steadily from beneath eyelids that might have been made of horn or iron, and deceitfully repressed his tears.

When she had finished weeping, and could speak, she said in answer: 'Now Stranger, I am forced to test you, and find out if you really entertained my husband and his godlike friends in your house, as you say. So describe what he was wearing, and what sort of man he seemed, and tell me about the comrades who were with him.'

Penelope, upon hearing the story of her husband, cannot help but cry (Homer uses a powerful and beautiful simile here), almost as though she has held these tears back but the struggle to do this is too hard.

Odysseus, in contrast to his wife, is stoic and unemotional – again evidence of a more controlled Odysseus, less reckless, and less reactionary.

Penelope, again like her husband would, decides though to test the validity of the story by questioning Odysseus for details.

## Lines 220 - 307: Odysseus and Eurycleia

### Odysseus prophesises his own return

Resourceful Odysseus replied: 'My Lady, it is difficult to recall, especially for someone who has been wandering so long. It is twenty years now since he sailed from there, and left my island. But I will picture him to you as far as I can remember. **Noble Odysseus wore a purple cloak, fleecy and doubly-folded, and its golden brooch was pinned with double clasps. There was a curiously made device on the face: a hound holding a fawn under its paws, tearing at it as it writhed. Everyone marvelled at how the hound seemed to throttle and tear the fawn, and how the fawn seemed to writhe at its feet trying to escape, though they were only made of gold.** I noticed his tunic too, gleaming like the sheen on a dried onion's skin, smooth and sleek, glistening like the sun. All the women were fascinated. You may know whether Odysseus dressed like this at home, or whether some friend gave him the tunic when he took ship, or whether it was some stranger's gift, since Odysseus had many friends, and few Achaeans ranked as high. I gave him a bronze sword myself, and a fine purple cloak, doubly-folded, and a fringed tunic, when I saw him off with full honours, aboard his oared ship. Then there was a squire who served him, a little older than himself, and I'll describe him to you. He was dark-skinned, curly-haired, and round-shouldered. Eurybates was his name, and Odysseus honoured him above the rest, because they were of one mind.'

His words only made her want to weep the more, recognising as she did the truthfulness of what he said. When she had finished crying, she turned to him: 'In truth, my Friend, though I pitied you before, now you shall be loved and honoured in my house. I myself gave him those clothes you described. I took them folded from the store-room, and pinned the golden brooch there to delight him. Now I will never welcome him home to his own country. It was an evil fate that sent him off in the hollow ship to Ilium the Evil, that it would be better not to name.'

'Honoured Lady, wife of Odysseus, Laertes' son, do not spoil those lovely cheeks now, or pain your heart weeping for your husband. Not that anyone should blame you: any woman would weep at losing her man, whom, wedded to, she has lain with, and whose children she conceived, though he be a lesser man than Odysseus, whom they liken to the gods. **But dry your tears, and hear me, because I speak the truth, without concealment.**

Odysseus is easily able to convince Penelope that the tale is 'true' as he is simply recalling details about himself. He tells it in a way though that makes it seem as though he is really having to think about key, intricate details like the purple cloak he wears, and the brooch that held it together around him.

This purple cloak is symbolic as it suggests royalty and importance; interestingly, in Book 1-4 when Telemachus starts his own 'Odyssey' he is in a grey cloak but returns in a purple one.

In response to these details, we see Penelope, once again, overcome with emotion and she tells the 'stranger' he will be welcome in her house.

Odysseus then tells her to weep no longer and listen to further truths he has to tell her.

Not long ago I heard that Odysseus is alive, and has returned. He is nearby, in the rich Thesprotian land, and is bringing back great treasures, gifts to him as a guest wherever he goes. His faithful friends and his hollow ship were lost on the wine-dark sea, as he sailed from Thrinacia. Zeus and Helios wished him harm because his men killed Helios' cattle, and so they drowned his friends in the raging sea, though he clung to the keel of his ship and was thrown on-shore by the waves in the land of the Phaeacians, who are kin to the gods. The Phaeacians honoured him like a god, and showered him with gifts, and they themselves were glad to be sending him home unharmed. Odysseus would have been home long ago indeed, but it seemed to him wiser to roam the wide world and gather riches, and who knows better how to do that than him. Pheidon, the Thesprotian king, told me all this. And as he poured libations in the palace, he swore to me the ship was launched, and the crew ready to bring him home. But he sent me on ahead, because a Thesprotian vessel happened to be heading for Dulichium's wheat country. He showed me the treasures Odysseus had garnered too, enough in truth to feed his descendants to the tenth generation, all that great wealth heaped up there in the King's house. But he said Odysseus had gone to Dodona, to hear Zeus' will from the god's high-crowned oak-tree, as to how he should return to his own country after such an absence, openly or in secret.

**So he is safe, as I say, and will soon be here: he is close by, and won't be far from friends and his native land much longer. Even so, I'll swear it on oath as well. Zeus, the greatest and best of gods, be my witness, and peerless Odysseus' hearth to which I have come: all I have said shall truly come to pass. Odysseus will be here this month, between this moon's wane and next moon's waxing.'**

After gaining her trust and proving he knows Odysseus, he drops the bombshell that will start to turn Penelope from despair to hope. He claims to have heard Odysseus is alive and has returned to a nearby land and will return. Much of what Odysseus says now is the truth – shipwrecked at sea, arriving at Phaeacia.

He explains the non-immediate arrival of Odysseus by suggesting he is waiting to hear Zeus' advice about returning '...openly or in secret' – the first drop of a hint that Odysseus may return disguised. It is this drip-feeding of hints that Odysseus will return not as himself, that leads many to believe that Penelope realises by the end of Book 19 that the stranger is Odysseus.

The stranger goes further as swears an oath that Odysseus will be here this month. This is delivered as a statement of fact, and he declares Zeus as his witness.

This can only further Penelope's hope that Odysseus will return, unbeknownst to her, she is sat in front of him.

## Lines 308 - 360: Odysseus and Eurycleia

### Penelope offers hospitality

'My friend,' wise Penelope replied, 'How I wish your words might prove true! Then you would have kindness and many a gift from me, so that everyone you meet would call you blessed. But my heart is filled with foreboding that in truth Odysseus will not return, and you will not gain your passage from here, for there are no leaders of men like Odysseus, as was, to welcome strangers and help them travel onwards. But, come, my maids, wash the strangers' feet and make his bed, with blankets and bright rugs over the bedstead, so he may rest till golden-throned Dawn in warmth and comfort. In the morning early, bathe and oil him, so he is ready to breakfast in the hall, sitting by Telemachus' side. And if any man vexes him and pains his spirit, so much the worse for that man's prospects: he'll gain nothing here, rage as he might. How can you know, Stranger, whether I truly surpass other women in intellect and careful judgement, if you're forced to sit and eat in my house bedraggled, and clothed in rags? Man's life is short. To him who is harsh, and hard-hearted, all living men wish suffering till he dies, and mock him when he's dead. But the fame of a good man, with a kind heart, his guests spread far and wide among men, and people sing his praise.'

Then resourceful Odysseus answered her, saying: 'Honoured wife of Odysseus, Laertes' son, bright rugs and blankets have been hateful to me since I first left Crete's snow-covered peaks behind in the wake of my long-oared ship. I am happy to lie as I did through all those past sleepless nights. Many's the time I've lain on a wretched pallet waiting for bright-throned Dawn. **And having my feet washed by one of the serving-women in your palace would give me no pleasure: none of them shall touch my feet, unless there's some loyal old woman whose heart has known as much suffering as mine. I'd have no objection to her.'**

Penelope wants to believe what the Stranger has said but can't let herself get too hopeful, 'How I wish your words might prove true!'

Penelope now offers the Stranger xenia and asks the maids to make him a bed, and interestingly asks that a place be set beside Telemachus at breakfast.

She asks for a maid to make sure his feet are washed, and Odysseus refuses to have anyone wash his feet unless it is a 'loyal old woman whose heart has known as much suffering as mine.'

This clearly is a play by Odysseus to have his old loyal nurse Eurycleia speak to him.

To this wise Penelope replied: 'Dear Friend, of all the strangers from afar, never has my house welcomed a more discerning guest, so wise and thoughtful are your words. I have just such a servant here, an old woman of great discretion, my poor husband's nurse, who held him in her arms as a new-born babe, and nursed him tenderly and reared him. Weak with age though she is, she shall wash your feet. **Come now, wise Eurycleia, kneel here and wash the feet of a man of your master's age. No doubt Odysseus' hands and feet look like his now, since men age quickly when times are hard.'**

Penelope duly respects Odysseus' request and has such a servant.

She describes her as 'of great discretion' meaning you can tell her anything and she will be keep it to herself – is Penelope aware that it is Odysseus and he wants to speak to Eurycleia?

She invites Eurycleia to sit by Odysseus and wash his feet and then says, 'No doubt Odysseus' hands and feet look like his now, since men age quickly when times are hard.' This could arguably be the first real hint that Penelope knows it may be Odysseus?

## Lines 361 - 475: Odysseus and Eurycleia

### Eurycleia recognises Odysseus

At this, the old woman hid her face in her hands and shed hot tears, voicing her grief: 'Oh, Odysseus my child, I can be no help to you. Zeus must have hated you more than other men, though you were pious. No mortal ever offered the Thunderer so many fat thigh-pieces, such choice sacrifices, praying that you might reach a ripe old age and rear a noble son. Yet you alone he denies a homecoming!

Perhaps the women of some great house mocked at him in a far-off foreign land, just as these shameless hussies here mock you, sir. You will not let them wash your feet, for fear of their insults, but wise Penelope, Icarus' daughter, knowing my willingness, has asked me to wash them. **So I shall wash your feet for Penelope's sake and yours, while my heart is stirred with sadness. But listen to one thing I must say. Many a long-suffering traveller have we welcomed here, but never a man resembling another as you resemble Odysseus in looks and voice – even your feet.'**

Then resourceful Odysseus answered her, saying: **'That is what everyone says who has met us both, old woman, that we are very alike, as you remark.'**

With this, the old woman, preparing to wash his feet, poured cold water into the shining basin then added hot. **Odysseus swiftly sat down by the hearth, and turned towards the shadows, though he had a sudden premonition that as she handled him she would notice his scar and the truth would be out. As she approached and began to wash him, so it was: she immediately knew the scar Odysseus had received from a white-tusked boar,** while hunting on Parnassus, when visiting his mother's father, noble Autolycus, the greatest of all in thievery and oath-making. This Autolycus owed to the god Hermes himself, to whom he made favourable offerings, the thighs of lambs and kids, so that Hermes acted as his willing friend.

Now Autolycus once visited wealthy Ithaca, to find that his daughter had just produced a son. Eurycleia placed the baby on his knees as he was finishing supper, and said to him: 'Autolycus, you must give a name to your grandchild: he has been long desired and prayed for.'

Immediately, we get the impression of Eurycleia being a loyal servant to Odysseus when she praises Odysseus at the mention of his name and sheds tears – the word grief is used here suggesting that Eurycleia thinks Odysseus dead.

The most critical moment is when Eurycleia speaks to Odysseus and says that whilst they have had many travellers none have ever resembled Odysseus as much as this stranger. Is Eurycleia seeing through the disguise and knows that this is Odysseus?

It is as she is washing his feet that Eurycleia discovers it is in fact Odysseus – confirming her belief or a complete surprise? – by seeing the distinctive scar that Odysseus has on his leg from a boar that attacked him in his youth.

Homer then takes the opportunity to pause the narrative with Eurycleia at a really important moment – how will she react? How will Odysseus? The pausing of the narrative only builds the tension as Homer uses a flashback to tell the story of not only how Odysseus got the scar, but also how he was named.

It is Odysseus' grandfather, Autolycus, who is asked to give him a name.

## Eurycleia recognises Odysseus

'My son-in-law, my daughter,' Autolycus replied, 'here's a name for you. Since I am one who's wished suffering to many men and women on this fertile earth, then let the child be named Odysseus, man of suffering. And for my part, when he is a man and comes to the great house of his mother's kin on Parnassus, where my wealth lies, I will give part to him, and send him home happy.'

So Odysseus went there, to receive Autolycus' promised gift. And Autolycus and his sons grasped his hands, and welcomed him with warm words. Amphithea, his maternal grandmother, clasped him in her arms, kissing his brow and gleaming eyes. Then Autolycus called on his fine sons to prepare a meal, and they responded. In they brought a five-year old bull, which they slaughtered, and flayed, butchered and dressed. They pierced the neatly jointed meat with spits, roasted it carefully, and served the portions. Then they feasted all day long till sunset, sharing everything and delighted by it all. And when the sun vanished and darkness fell, they lay down and received the gift of sleep.

As soon as rosy-fingered Dawn appeared, Autolycus and his sons went hunting with hounds, and noble Odysseus went too. They climbed the thickly-wooded slopes of Parnassus, and were soon deep among its wind-blown valleys. Just as the sun, rising from the smooth-sliding, deep-flowing Ocean, lit the fields, the beaters reached a certain glade. The hounds swarmed ahead, following the scent, with the sons of Autolycus in hot pursuit, among them Odysseus, close behind the pack, brandishing his long spear. A wild boar lay in his lair nearby: a thicket so dense the power of the wind, rain, and bright sunlight could never enter, deep in fallen leaves.

Then the sound of the men and dogs as they urged the chase reached the boar, and he stormed from his lair, back bristling and eyes aflame, then stood at bay facing them. Odysseus was first to attack, his long spear raised in his great hand, eager to strike, but the boar was too swift for him, charging sidelong, catching him above the knee, and tearing a long gash in the flesh with its tusk, though it failed to reach the bone. Odysseus' blow stabbed it deep in the right shoulder, and the point of the gleaming spear went clean through, bringing the boar to earth with a grunt, and ending its life. Autolycus' brave sons bound up peerless, godlike Odysseus' wound, staunching the flow of dark blood with an incantation, then busied themselves over the carcass, and headed straight back to their noble father's house.

When Autolycus and his sons had ensured Odysseus' recovery, and loaded him with fine presents, they sent him back joyful to Ithaca, his own land, with speed. His father and dear mother were happy on seeing him again, and questioned him about his journey, and how he had incurred his wound. He explained how the boar had gashed him with its white tusk, as he hunted Parnassus with Autolycus' sons.

**It was this scar the old woman felt as she passed her hands over his leg, and recognising it she let his leg fall. The bronze rang as his foot struck the basin, upsetting it, and spilling the water on the ground. Joy and pain filled her heart at the same moment, her eyes filled with tears and her voice caught in her throat. She touched Odysseus' face and said: 'It is Odysseus, it must be. Child, I did not know you, until my hands had touched my master's limbs.'**

Autolycus responds by calling him - fatefully? - Odysseus which means 'man of suffering'.

Odysseus visits his grandfather on Parnassus when he is a similar age to Telemachus now, just turning into a man.

It is during this visit that Odysseus is scarred whilst on a hunt for a boar with Autolycus' sons (his uncles).

During the hunt, the boar retreats into a thicket of forest that was dense and dark - it then attacks Odysseus and whilst Odysseus kills it with a spear, he is injured doing so.

The boar's tusk tears a long gash in his leg which scars, and is the scar that Eurycleia sees when washing his leg.

His likeness to Odysseus and this scar convinces Eurycleia what she may have already suspected and that it is Odysseus.

Homer suddenly places us back in the present with Eurycleia and her reaction to feeling the scar is almost shock and she drops his leg and spills the bowl of water as a consequence.

She is completely overcome with emotion and her eyes are full of tears at the return of the man she has known since birth.

Now Odysseus may have wanted to speak to Eurycleia and may well have wanted to confide in her who he really was, but her feeling the scar, despite his premonition just before it happens, was not planned, as not would be her reaction.

How will Odysseus deal with this situation, a situation that could see his plan unravel and his identity be revealed to all?

## Lines 476 - 507: Odysseus and Eurycleia

### Odysseus tells Eurycleia to conceal his identity

As she spoke, she glanced towards Penelope, ready to tell her that her dear husband was home. But Penelope failed to meet her look with recognition, because Athena had distracted her attention. **At the same instant Odysseus' felt for the woman's throat and gripped it with his right hand, while he drew her closer with the other, and whispered: 'Nurse, will you destroy me, you who suckled me at your breast? I am home indeed after twenty years of toil and sorrow, but now a god has inspired you and you have found me out be quiet and keep it from all the rest of the house. Otherwise I say, and it shall be so, that if a god delivers the noble Suitors into my hands, I will not spare you, though you nursed me, when I kill the other serving women in the palace.'**

'My child', wise Eurycleia replied, 'what are you saying? You know how strong and steady my spirit is. **I will be silent as solid stone or iron.** And I will say this, and do you remember. If a god delivers the noble Suitors into your hands, I will pick out the women in the palace who have been disloyal from those who are innocent.'

Resourceful Odysseus answered: 'Nurse, why speak of that? There is no need for your involvement. I will find out about each one, and take good note. Keep all this to yourself, and leave the outcome to the gods.'

At this, the old woman went off through the palace to fetch water for his feet, since what was there had been spilt. When she had washed them, and rubbed them with oil, Odysseus pulled his stool to the fire to warm himself again, covering the scar with his rags.

The reaction is calculated and cold. Here we see a controlled Odysseus react to the situation fearful that his plan may be about to be derailed. We also see a ruthless Odysseus who realises the dilemma he is in.

He reacts by grabbing Eurycleia - someone he no doubt loves and cares for - by the throat and threatens her that should she reveal who he is, he will kill her along with all the suitors.

Eurycleia responds how Odysseus hopes by staying as 'silent as solid stone' and promising to aid him by picking out the disloyal maids to him.

## Lines 508 - 553: Odysseus and Eurycleia

### Penelope's Dream

Wise Penelope was first to break the silence: 'Friend, I have one more thing to ask you, a little thing since it will soon be time for soothing sleep, at least for those who can find rest despite their grief. Some god brings me instead measureless sorrow. My only pastime day after day is weeping and sighing, while I tend to my household chores and those of my maids, and when night comes and others sleep, I lie awake, and bitter cares crowd thick upon my beating heart, troubling my sadness.

As Pandareus' daughter, the nightingale in the greenwood, sings sweetly in early spring, perching in the dense leaves, pouring out her intricate trills, in sorrow for her child Itylus, King Zethus' son, whom she mistakenly killed with a sword: so my heart quivers, with uncertainty.

**Should I stay with my son and protect my servants, my belongings, and this great high-roofed house of ours, respecting my husband's bed, deferring to popular feeling, or should I go with the best of the Achaeans, one of the Suitors in the palace who offer countless wedding gifts?** So long as my son was too young to take on responsibility, I could not leave my husband's house and marry: but now my child has reached manhood, he himself urges me to leave the palace, concerned at how the Achaeans squander his inheritance.

But hear this dream of mine, and interpret it to me. **A great eagle with curving beak flew down from the mountain and broke the necks of twenty geese I keep, whom it warms my heart to see, who leave their pond to eat the grain. There they lay dead, piled in the yard, while he was carried up through the clear sky.** Though it was a dream, I wept and cried out, and the lovely-tressed Achaean women gathered, to find me sobbing piteously because the eagle had killed my geese.

After his feet have been washed, Odysseus is sitting by the fireside when Penelope approaches him and really opens up to him - would she really have done this to a complete stranger or she is either consciously or sub-consciously, knowing that this is Odysseus.

She reveals to Odysseus that she has reached a point where she must make a decision about her future - this is something Odysseus has been manipulating the situation to.

She does not know whether to marry and leave the house or stay and continue to fight, and it is like she needs to be nudged to make a decision she now knows she needs to make.

To get to that final decision, she tells Odysseus of a dream she has had where a great eagle breaks the neck of twenty geese and leaves them piled high in the yard - a piece of foreshadowing by Homer as to what will happen to the suitors.

Odysseus has no problem interpreting the geese, but it must be argued neither could Penelope, so why has she asked Odysseus to? Does she need him to tell her what to do as she knows it is him and he is here to rescue her.

## Lines 508 - 553: Odysseus and Eurycleia

### Odysseus tells Eurycleia to conceal his identity

But the bird returned and perched on a jutting roof-beam, and checked my tears with mortal speech. "Be happy, daughter of famous Icarus: this was no dream, but a true vision of justice that is to come. The geese are the Suitors, and I, your husband, the eagle, have returned once more now to prepare a dark fate for them all."

With his words sweet sleep left me, and gazing round I saw the geese feeding on grain, by the trough in the yard, as ever.

The dream is so vivid that the eagle even speaks to say that he is Odysseus – a sure sign as any that she knows it is Odysseus.

Had Penelope ever really had this dream or was it made up?

## Lines 554 - 604: Odysseus and Eurycleia

### Penelope proposes a challenge for the Suitors

'Lady,' resourceful Odysseus replied, 'there is no way of twisting this dream to give some other meaning. Odysseus himself has told you how he will bring it about, for sure. The Suitors' destruction is plainly intended. All of them will be killed: none of them shall escape the death which is their fate.'

Wise Penelope replied: 'My friend, dreams are puzzling things whose meaning is obscure, and what is in them does not always happen to us mortals. There are two gates that open for shadowy dreams: one is made of horn, the other of ivory. Dreams that come through the gate of carved ivory deceive us with promises that are unfulfilled. But those that come through the gate of gleaming horn tell the dreamer of what will come to pass. I fear my strange dream did not come that way. If it had, how welcome it would be to me and my son!

Let me tell you something else for you to note. The day of evil is drawing near that will sever me from the house of Odysseus. **I will declare a contest. Odysseus used to set up a line of axes in the hall, a row of twelve like the props under a ship being built. Standing some way off he would shoot an arrow through them all. That can provide a test for the Suitors.** Whoever makes the best attempt at stringing Odysseus' bow, and shooting an arrow through the twelve axes, is the one I will go with, leaving this house where I was first a wife, this lovely house filled with riches, a house I know I will always remember in my dreams.'

'Honoured wife of Odysseus, Laertes' son,' resourceful Odysseus replied, 'don't delay this contest in the palace, since Odysseus will be here, full of resource, before these men can string the polished bow in their hands, or shoot an arrow through the iron.'

"My friend," said wise Penelope, "if you were to sit here and speak such words of joy forever, sleep would never touch my eyelids. But no man can do without sleep, and the deathless ones appointed a time for everything on the fertile earth. For myself, I must go to my room, and lie down on that bed which has become a bed of tears to me, always damp with my weeping, since the day Odysseus left for Ilium the Evil, that it would be better not to name. I will lie there, and you shall lie here in the hall. Spread bedding on the floor, or let the maids set up a proper bed for you."

With this she went to her brightly-lit room, and not alone but with her maids. When she and her maids had gone to that upper chamber, she wept there for Odysseus, her dear husband, till bright-eyed Athena closed her eyes in sleep.

Odysseus jumps in realising this is a chance to nudge Penelope into making the decision he needs her to.

The plan is to engineer a situation where the suitors have to take part in a contest which involves Odysseus' great bow – essentially Odysseus wants to engineer a situation where he has opportunity to get the great bow in his hand.

He interprets the dream for Penelope and uses it to convince her to make the final step in bringing this whole situation in her house to a crucial point where an ending has to happen.

Penelope decides to declare a contest.

The contest is to string Odysseus' great bow and then fire an arrow through the handles of twelve axes that had been laid out in a line.

This is something that only Odysseus has ever been able to do.

Whilst she says that whoever makes the best attempt at it she will marry, surely she only declared this contest because she knows that the man in front of her, the stranger, is actually Odysseus and she has the complete confidence that only he will succeed.

The question often asked is why does she not confide in Odysseus, but this is about love and trust. If it is Odysseus, then Penelope knows there must be a reason why he has not revealed himself, so she trusts him in this and plays her part.

Without saying anything to each other directly, it is like both can read each other's thoughts and that is enough.



# **BOOK 21**

# **THE ARCHERY CONTEST**

**Penelope declares the contest**

Now, the goddess, bright-eyed Athena, prompted wise Penelope, Icarus' daughter, to confront the Suitors in Odysseus' palace with his bow and the grey iron axes, as a challenge and a means to their destruction. Penelope climbed the high stair to her room, and with a firm hand, took up a bronze key, finely-shaped with an ivory handle. She made her way with her women to the distant storeroom, where her husband's treasure lay, gold and bronze and hammered iron. There lay the curved bow, and quiver full of fatal arrows, given him when he visited Lacedaemon, by godlike Iphitus, Eurytus' son.

They had met in Messene, at the house of wise Ortilochus. Odysseus was there to collect a public debt, because Messenians had stolen three hundred sheep and their shepherds too from Ithaca, loading them aboard their oared ships. Odysseus had been sent by his father and other elders to resolve the matter, though he was still quite young. Iphitus was there in search of a dozen brood mares he had lost, along with the sturdy little mules they were suckling. But his search caused his death, when he came upon Heracles, Zeus' lion-hearted son, well-versed in mighty labours. Ruthless Heracles killed him, though he was a guest in his house. Careless of the gods' anger and the sanctity of the dinner-table, he killed him there and then, and hid the heavy-hoofed mares in his own stables.

But back when Iphitus was searching for them, he had met Odysseus, and given him the bow that mighty Eurytus carried of old, and that, dying in his palace, he had left to his son. And Odysseus had given Iphitus in return a sharp sword and a fine spear as a token of the start of a loving friendship. **But before they could meet again at table, Zeus' son had killed godlike Iphitus, Eurytus' son, the giver of the bow that noble Odysseus had never taken with him aboard his black ship to war, leaving it behind in his palace as a memento of a good friend, to use only at home.**

**Now Penelope, that lovely woman, reached the storeroom and set foot on the oaken sill, once skilfully planed and trued to the line by some carpenter of old, who also set the doorposts in it, and hung the gleaming doors. Quickly she unhooked the thong, slid in the key and with a sure touch shot back the bolt. With a groan like a bull bellowing in a grassy meadow, the polished doors flew open at the touch of the key. Then she mounted to the high platform loaded with chests of fragrant clothes. Here, reaching up, she lifted the bow, in the gleaming case, from its peg. Then she sat down with the case on her knees, and weeping aloud drew out her husband's bow.** Yet once her tears and sighs were done, she went to the hall and the crowd of noble Suitors, carrying the curved bow and the quiver full of fatal arrows. And the maids followed with a chest full of bronze and iron won by her man. When the lovely woman reached the Suitors, she stood by a pillar of the great hall, with a shining veil in front of her face, and a loyal maid stood on either side. Then she issued her challenge.

**'Noble Suitors, listen to me. You have battened on this house, with its master long gone, eating and drinking endlessly, and you could find no better excuse to offer than the desire to win me as a wife. Well come now, my Suitors, your prize stands here before you, clear to see. Godlike Odysseus' mighty bow is the test. Whoever makes the best attempt at stringing the bow and shooting an arrow through the rings of a dozen axes, with that man I will go, and leave this house that saw me a bride, this lovely and luxurious house, that I will always remember in my dreams.'**

We start Book 21 with Athena preparing to announce the contest to the Suitors.

Almost as a moment of calm before it is announced, we see Penelope make her way to the storeroom that holds Odysseus' Great Bow.

We then get the back story to this bow, how it was given to him by Iphitus' on a visit to Lacedaemon trying to resolve an issue with stolen livestock by none other than Heracles!

This bow held such importance and such memories to Odysseus that he never used it in warfare, and kept it only at his home.

It is this bow that will be used in the contest, and we are given a long and slow description of her getting the bow from the storeroom by Homer. This is deliberate to really build the importance and significance of this bow to Penelope and Odysseus.

In picking up the bow, we see Penelope weep once more – perhaps in a final sign that this is a momentous moment, is she questioning her decision to do this based on conversations with a 'stranger'? She must be doubting it all and knows that once she announces the contest there is no going back.

The paragraph is then contrasted with a more resolute Penelope – someone who clearly has made up her mind to follow through on announcing the contest. She confidently walks into the hall and issues her challenge. The short passage contrasts with the lengthy description of her getting the bow, perhaps Homer reflecting the closure of doubt in Penelope's mind now she is going forward with the challenge.

When she announces the challenge to the Suitors, Homer portrays Penelope as a proud, strong woman who will speak her mind and not be intimidated by them. She leaves them in with no misunderstanding of how she feels contempt for them, and whilst she will carry out her duty as a woman and remarry, it will be reluctantly.

## Telemachus sets up the axes

With this she ordered Eumaeus the master-swineherd to set out the bow and the axes with their handle-rings of grey iron for the Suitors. Eumaeus was in tears as he laid them down, and the cowherd wept too, at the sight of his master's bow. **Antinous turned on them in anger: 'Stupid yokels, living in the past! Your tears, you wretches, lower your mistress' spirits, as though her heart wasn't already troubled by her husband's loss. Sit and eat in silence, or go outside and snivel, and leave the bow here to test us, her Suitors: I doubt this gleaming bow will be easy to string, since I once saw Odysseus, and there's no man here to equal him. Yes, I remember him, though I was but a child.'**

Such were his words, but he nursed the hope in his heart that he himself would string the bow and shoot an arrow through the iron rings. **Yet in truth he was to be the first to feel the blow of an arrow from peerless Odysseus whom he was now abusing in the palace, while urging on his friends to do the same.**

Then royal Telemachus intervened: 'Zeus must have addled my wits, indeed! My dear mother, in her wisdom, says she will take another husband and leave this house, and I laugh like a happy idiot! Come, my lords, since your prize is here, a lady who has no equal in all Achaea, not in Pylos, Argos, or Mycenae, nor in Ithaca itself, nor on the dark mainland. You know that yourselves, what need have I to sing my mother's praises? No excuses now: let's have no delay in stringing the bow, and then we'll see. I might even try the bow myself, later. If I can string it and shoot an arrow through the iron rings, I shan't be so upset by my dear mother's departure for another house, seeing I myself will be a man capable of winning fine prizes like my father.'

**Saying this, Telemachus threw off his purple cloak, and springing up removed the sharp sword slung from his shoulder. Then he set all the axes in a long trench, in a straight line, stamping the earth in around them. The onlookers were amazed that never having seen them before he arranged them so correctly. Then he took up his stand on the threshold and tried the bow. Three times it quivered in his hands as he made a fierce effort to string it, and three times he had to relax his grip, though he had hoped deep down to succeed and shoot an arrow through the iron handle-rings. Now exerting all his power he might have strung it at the fourth attempt had Odysseus not shaken his head, and checked his eagerness.**

'Alas' royal Telemachus exclaimed, 'it seems I shall always be a coward and a weakling. But perhaps I am still too young, and haven't the strength yet to defend myself against whoever picks quarrels for no reason. You then, who have more strength than I, try the bow, and decide the contest.'

As the contest is being prepared, Homer offers us an insight to the division in the house and the character of the lead Suitors, particularly Antinous.

Whilst Eumaeus, the loyal cowherd, weeps as he lays out the axes, Antinous shows his true character by turning on him for showing such emotion. Words such as 'stupid yokels', 'you wretches' and 'living in the past' shows his aggressive nature and anger.

Homer, rather unusually, now foreshadows what will happen to Antinous, and if not careful the reader could very much miss it. Homer reveals that Antinous will be the first to die with an arrow from Odysseus. Has Homer revealed too much? Does this not make it less tense knowing that Odysseus will receive the bow and shoot Antinous first?

Arguably, it does, but it could also be argued the reader is left now wondering how this plan will all play out to get to this point.

It is Telemachus now who takes the lead, confident in knowing that the plan is being played out exactly like he and Odysseus must have discussed. It is Telemachus who sets up the dozen axes perfectly in a row.

It is then that we see how much Telemachus has grown to be like his father. He throws off the symbolic purple cloak, arranges the axes to the wonder of the Suitors, and then decides to try the bow himself. It appears that this was not part of the plan as the plan was that Odysseus needs the bow. Telemachus' reaction to the situation mirrors that of his father ten years ago; he reacts to a situation not thinking about impact.

The attempt by Telemachus to string the bow is a key moment in his journey – it is symbolic of his growth into adulthood but not quite yet his father. Three times he attempts to string the bow and three times he fails. Yet, we will never know if he failed a fourth time because, ironically, it is his father who stops it with a shake of his head.

The contest can now begin in earnest. Remember, the plan is still fraught with potential problems for Odysseus as what if one of the suitors does string the bow?

## Lines 136 - 185: The Archery Contest

### The suitors try the bow

With this, he placed the bow on the ground, leaning it against the gleaming panels of the door, and the feathered arrow against the door-handle, and then resumed his seat. Antinous, Eupheithes' son, called out: 'Come forward, all of you Suitors, one by one, from left to right, beginning from where the wine-steward sits.' **They welcomed his words, and the first to rise was Leodes, Oenops' son, their seer, who always sat by the huge mixing bowl in the depths of the hall: he alone despised the Suitors' acts of wantonness, and they filled him with indignation. Now he was first to take up the feathered arrow and the bow, stride to the threshold, and try to string it. But he failed, his smooth and delicate hands quickly drained of strength.** He spoke to the Suitors, saying: 'My Friends, I cannot do it: let someone else try. This bow will break the heart and spirit of many a man here. Still, it is better to die trying, than live on without winning the prize that brings us here each day, in endless expectation. Many must hope and long to wed Penelope, Odysseus' wife, but when they have tried the bow, and failed, let them go woo some other Achaean woman in her lovely robe, and try and win her with their gifts. And let Penelope wed the man who offers her most, and is destined to be her husband.'

With this, he set the bow aside, leaning it against the gleaming panels of the door, and the feathered arrow against the door-handle, and then resumed his seat. **But Antinous criticised him, saying: 'Leodes, what dark and monstrous words have crossed your tongue! I'm angered by your suggestion that "this bow will break the heart and spirit of many a warrior here", merely because you failed to string it. Your dear mother didn't bear you for drawing a mighty bow, and shooting arrows, perhaps, but others of the noble Suitors will soon succeed.'**

Then he called to the goatherd, Melanthius: 'Quick, light a fire in the hall, Melanthius, and put a large fleece-covered chair beside it, and bring a big piece of tallow from the stores, so that we youngsters can heat the bow and grease it, before we try it and settle the contest.' Melanthius, swiftly obeyed. He revived the glowing fire, put the large fleece-covered chair beside it, and brought a big piece of tallow from the stores. The youths then warmed the bow and tried to string it, but those who tried were too weak to succeed.

Telemachus now invites the Suitors to attempt to string the bow, probably confident that if he could not do it, no one could.

Homer introduces a suitor who will symbolise a theme in the next book, Leodes. Homer makes it clear that Leodes hates the suitors, yet he is part of them, and it is he who symbolically tries the bow first. This act of disloyalty to Odysseus will never be forgiven by Odysseus and he returned to later. As expected though, Leodes fails and criticises the contest and the Suitors.

Again, we see Antinous' aggression and anger come to the fore as he turns on Leodes, and criticises him. Antinous is clever though and seeing Leodes struggle, thinks to give himself and others as much of an advantage as possible in stringing it.

He orders a servant, Melanthius, to bring in tallow (used to soften wood) and place the bow by the fire to help soften it.

It is the first introduction to the story of Melanthius, who would like Melantho, come to symbolise the disloyal servants.

## Lines 186 - 244: The Archery Contest

### Odysseus reveals himself to Eumaeus

Antinous and godlike Eurymachus, however, the leaders of the Suitors, and the most capable, continued the contest. Meanwhile noble Odysseus' cowherd and swineherd slipped out of the hall together, and Odysseus followed them. When they were beyond the courtyard gates he sounded them out carefully:

**'Cowherd, swineherd, Can I share something with you or should I keep it to myself? My heart tells me to speak. If Odysseus suddenly returned, brought by some god, would you be the men to fight for him? Would you be for the Suitors or Odysseus? Say what your heart and spirit tell you.'**

'Father Zeus,' the cowherd prayed, 'may that come true! May the hero return, with a god's guidance! Then you would see the strength I can still show in my hands.' And Eumaeus also prayed, to all the gods, that wise Odysseus might come home.

As the contest proceeds with Antinous and Eurymachus, the leading suitors, allowing the younger ones their attempts first, confident that they will not succeed, Odysseus now feels confident to bring in two more people into his and Telemachus' conspiracy.

Eumaeus (the cowherd) and Philoetius (the swineherd) will come to play a crucial part in the story and symbolise the loyalty that Odysseus so obviously desires.

Odysseus opens with a question about what would they do if Odysseus returns, would they fight for him or the suitors? Their reaction is what Odysseus expected and their response to him revealing his true identity to them, proves they are true to their word.

Once Odysseus was sure, he opened his mind to them, saying: 'Well, I am home. Here I stand before you, I myself, back in my own country in the twentieth year after many painful trials. I know that of all my servants you both welcome my return, but I've not heard a single one of the others praying I might reach home. I'll tell you truly what I intend for you. If a god brings the noble Suitors down, I'll find you each a wife, give you goods, and build you a house near mine: and I'll always regard you as friends and brothers of Telemachus. Now, so you can be certain in your hearts that it is I, let me show you a sign you'll know, the scar from the wound the white-tusked boar gave me, when I hunted Parnassus with Autolycus' sons.'

So saying, he drew his rags apart to show the long scar. When the two had examined it carefully, they clasped their arms about wise Odysseus' neck, and weeping kissed his head and shoulders in loving recognition. Odysseus likewise kissed their heads and hands. And the twilight would have seen them still weeping if Odysseus had not restrained them: 'Stop wailing now, in case someone comes from the house and sees us, and tells those inside. Let's go back in, now, one after the other, not together. Follow me, and here's the signal we will act on. The others, the noble Suitors, will refuse to allow me to handle the bow and quiver, but as you carry the bow round the hall, Eumaeus, set it in my hands, and tell the women to shut their hall doors tight. Say that if any of them hear men shouting or groaning in here, they are not to rush out, but to stay there and silently carry out their tasks. And good Philoetius, I charge you with barring the gate of the courtyard, and lashing it tight.'

With this, he entered the royal palace, and resumed his seat. And the two servants followed.

All weep in a highly-emotional passage of the book, but then it back to the business of the plan and Odysseus gives them orders on what to do next.

Eumaeus' task is to walk the bow around the hall for the next suitor but get it into Odysseus' hands. He is also tasked with having all the female servants out the hall and to have the great hall locked from outside. Philoetius' job is to lock the courtyard gate and lash it tight.

Essentially, the stage is set: the Great Hall will be locked from the outside with the Suitors and Odysseus and his men on the inside; the servants are further locked into the palace grounds so no one can escape.

As Odysseus returns the tension mounts – the plan is set, will it come about as planned?

## Lines 245 - 310: The Archery Contest

### Odysseus seeks to try the bow

The bow had reached Eurymachus, who was turning it in his hands before the fire to warm it. But despite that he failed to string it, and groaning inwardly he said, in anger: 'Oh, I'm not just bitter about this myself, but for all of you, too. It's not that I'm bothered about the marriage, though it grieves me. There are plenty of other women in Achaea, in Ithaca's isle, and in other places. No, it's more that our strength falls so short of godlike Odysseus' that we can't even string his bow. It's a disgrace that posterity will hear of.'

'No, Eurymachus,' Antinous, Eupheithes' son, replied, 'that's not so, and do you know why? Today is the feast of Apollo, throughout the island, his holy day. Should we be bending bows? Set it aside, softly. As for the axes, why not leave them there? No one will steal them: not from a house owned by Odysseus, Laertes' son. Come, let the steward pour wine for libations, and put the bow down. In the morning tell the goatherd, Melanthius, to bring us the best she-goats in the flock, so we can lay thigh-pieces on Apollo's altar, the famous Archer, then try the bow, and decide the contest.'

As we return to the hall, the plan may unfold immediately, as it is Eurymachus who has it in his hands.

His disappointment is immediate as he fails to string the bow and he openly suggests that they will all fail and be disgraced.

Antinous does now mark himself as the leader of the Suitors and the most aggressive. He so far has only turned on servants, but this time he turns on his own.

Antinous also reveals himself to be quite clever. Seeing Eurymachus fail, there is a sense that he realises that Eurymachus may be speaking the truth so finds himself more time to think as surely it will be his turn soon to attempt to string the bow.

He suggests that they should stop the contest and offer libations and a sacrifice to Apollo in the morning. This has the potential to completely derail Odysseus' plan.

They all agreed with Antinous. So, while the squires sprinkled water over their hands, pages filled the mixing bowls and served them all, first pouring a few drops of wine for libation into each man's cup. When they had made their libations and quenched their thirst, resourceful Odysseus spoke with subtle intent: **'Suitors of the glorious Queen, hear me, so I might express what is in my mind. I aim my plea primarily at Eurymachus, and godlike Antinous, who made such a good suggestion, to forget the bow for today, and leave the issue to the gods. Come morning the god will grant victory to whoever he wishes. So, lend me the polished bow, and I can see what strength is in my hands, and if I still possess the power I used to have in limbs once supple, or whether poor nourishment and endless wandering has reduced it.'**

The Suitors were greatly angered by his words: all afraid he might string the gleaming bow. Antinous addressed him with scorn: 'Wretched beggar, you're out of your mind. Isn't it enough for you we allow you to dine in peace in our noble company, letting you share in what's on the table, privileged to listen to our talk, unlike other beggars and strangers. The wine, the honeyed wine, has addled your brain as it does others who gulp it down without restraint. It was wine that maddened Eurytion, the famous Centaur, in brave Peirithous' palace, when he visited the Lapithae. Crazed with drink he caused uproar in Peirithous' own house. The outraged hosts leapt to their feet, and dragged him through the gate then cut off his nose and ears with the cruel bronze, leaving him to wander off, bearing the burden of tragic error caused by his foolish urge. So began the feud between the Centaurs and men, but he was the first to meet disaster, drunk with the wine. I promise you the same, if you string the bow. You'll find no help from anyone here. We'll pack you off in a black ship to King Echetus, the maimer of men, and you'll not escape with your life. So, have done, and drink your wine, and don't try and compete with younger men.'

Yet, the resourceful Odysseus tries to force the situation to a resolution. He praises Antinous for his suggestion, but asks if he might just try the bow before just to see if he could implying he would not claim the prize of Penelope.

Antinous' reaction is one of absolute scorn, and is full of threats. He tells a story about Eurytion, the Centaur, and the origins of the Centauromachy. He compares the 'stranger' to Eurytion who drunk with wine caused the fight at the wedding of Peirithous, and suggests the same brutal punishment should be enacted out on him.

## Lines 311 - 358: The Archery Contest

### Telemachus asserts his authority

But wise Penelope intervened: **'It is neither right nor just, Antinous, to deny his due to a man who came to Telemachus' house as a guest. Do you really think that if the stranger, trusting in the strength of his hands, strings Odysseus' bow, he will take me home as his wife? He could never harbour such a hope. So let none of you sit at this feast in trepidation: that would be wrong.'**

Eurymachus, Polybus' son, answered her: 'Icarius' daughter, wise Penelope, we had no thought of his taking you home, that would certainly be wrong, **but we shudder at the thought of idle gossip, of some wretch among the Achaeans saying: "Those are weaklings that woo the wife of a peerless man. They can't even string his gleaming bow, though a wandering beggar did so easily, and shot an arrow through the axes." So they would say, and shame us.'**

**"Eurymachus" said wise Penelope, "no one thinks well, in any case, of men like you who ruin and dishonour a King's house, so why worry about further shame?"** The stranger is tall and well-built, and says he comes of good stock. Well then, hand him the gleaming bow, and let us see. Hear what I say, and I'll surely do this too: if Apollo brings him glory and he strings the bow, I'll dress him in a fine new cloak and tunic, and give him a sharp spear to keep off dogs and men, and a double-edged sword, and sandals for his feet, and help him travel wherever his heart and mind dictate."

Odysseus has tried to force the bow into his hands and despite his ability to manipulate people with his words, it has failed.

It is then Penelope that takes up this suggestion, as she wants the stranger to have the bow which it is further evidence she knows it is Odysseus and is trying to keep whatever plan is being carried out, going.

Eurymachus, and again showing his personality, suggests they only reason the stranger should not get a chance, is in case he does do it and shames them.

The response by Penelope is brutal, damning and again portrays her a character of real strength, **'...no one thinks well, in any case, of men like you who ruin and a dishonour a King's house, so why worry about further shame?'** is a wonderful line.

It was wise Telemachus who spoke to her then: “Mother, none of the Achaeans – those who rule in rocky Ithaca or in the islands seaward of the horse pastures of Elis – have more right than I to give or refuse the bow to whoever I wish. None of them can challenge my will even if I choose to give the bow to the stranger, here and now, to take away with him. So go to your quarters now, and attend to your own duties at loom and spindle, and order your maids about their tasks: let men worry about such things, and I especially, since I hold the authority in this house.”

**Seized with wonder she retired to her own room, taking her son's wise words to heart.** Up to her high chamber she went, accompanied by her maids, and there she wept for Odysseus, her dear husband, till bright-eyed Athena veiled her eyelids with sweet sleep.

Through all this planning and scheming, it is noticeable that only one female remains inside the hall, Penelope. It is at this point that Telemachus proves he is the equal of his father in terms of resourcefulness, and turns on his mother. It might seem brutal and unexpected, but it is necessary as it gives him the opportunity to get her out of the hall and into safety.

Whilst Penelope no doubt felt rebuked and belittled by Telemachus, we get the impression she is also immensely proud of him for taking control.

## Lines 359 - 403: The Archery Contest

### Odysseus receives the bow

Meanwhile the worthy swineherd had picked up the curved bow and was walking off with it, when the Suitors cried out in protest. One proud youth called out: ‘Where do you think you’re going with that, you wretch, your mind must be addled? If Apollo and the rest of the gracious gods are good to us, the hounds you’ve bred yourself will finish you off, out there alone, far from men, among the swine.’

At this, Eumaeus dropped the bow he was carrying, on the spot, terrified by the uproar in the hall. But Telemachus shouted harshly at him from the other side: ‘Stick to the bow, old man – you’ll be full of regret if you listen to them all – or, young as I am, I’ll shower you with stones, and chase you through the fields. My strength is greater than yours. I only wish the power of my hands was greater than the Suitors’ in my hall, then I’d soon send a few of them off in a way they wouldn’t enjoy, the trouble makers.’

On hearing this, the Suitors laughed out loud at Telemachus, and so blunted the edge of their anger, while the swineherd carried the bow through the hall, and reaching wise Odysseus, set it in his hands. Then Eumaeus spoke softly to the nurse Eurycleia, saying: ‘Wise Eurycleia, Telemachus orders you to shut the hall doors tight, and if any of the women hear men shouting or groaning in here, they are not to rush out, but to stay where they are and silently carry out their tasks.’

So he spoke, and without a word she went and locked the doors of the great hall. At the same time, Philoetius slipped out quietly to bar the gates of the courtyard. He lashed them to, with a ship’s cable twined from papyrus reed that was lying beneath the portico, then slipped back inside, and resumed his seat, keeping his eyes fixed on Odysseus. **He meanwhile was handling the bow, turning it this way and that, fearing the pieces of horn bound to the wood might have become worm-eaten while he was away. The Suitors glanced at each other, and one commented: ‘This fellow must be an expert, or a cunning dealer in bows. Or if he hasn’t got bows like this stored away at home, the wretched beggar must be setting out to make one: he studies it so carefully.’**

Whilst all this arguing is going on, Eumaeus, always so loyal, has been slowly moving around the hall with the bow, trying to get to Odysseus. He is stopped in his tracks as Antinous notices.

Eumaeus drops the bow in fright at Antinous’ reaction, but Telemachus, again thinking quickly, creates a scene that distracts the Suitors. Whilst the Suitors laugh at Telemachus’ comments, Eumaeus picks up the bow and gets it into Odysseus’ hands.

The two servants carry out their next duties of locking the hall and the courtyard and return to the Great Hall.

The tension of the situation is built further by a moment of almost silence as Odysseus holds the bow and the Suitors realise the stranger has it.

They watch in almost silence at the way this stranger handles the bow, spinning it in his hands and feeling the weight of it like an expert. Little do they realise that Odysseus is just reaccustoming himself with his Great Bow.

Another arrogant youth replied: 'I'd guess he'd have as much luck at that as he will at trying to string this bow.'

**So they chattered, but once wily Odysseus had flexed the great bow and checked it all over, he strung it easily, as a man skilled in song and the lyre stretches a new string onto its leather tuning strap, fixing the twisted sheep-gut at either end. Then grasping the bow in his right hand, he plucked the string that sang sweetly to his touch with the sound of a swallow's note.**

**The Suitors were mortified, and their faces were drained of colour, while Zeus sounded a peal of thunder as a sign.** Noble long-suffering Odysseus was pleased at this omen from the son of devious Cronos, and he picked up the feathered arrow that lay alone on the table next to him, while the others the Achaeans were destined to feel were still packed in their hollow quiver. He set it against the bridge of the bow, drew back the notched arrow with the string, and still seated in his chair let fly with a sure aim. The bronze-weighted shaft flew through the handle hole of every axe from first to last without fail, sped clean through and out at the end. Then he turned to Telemachus saying: 'The guest in your hall has not disgraced you. I have not missed the target, nor did it take me long to string the bow. My strength is undiminished, not lessened as the Suitors' taunts implied. Well now it is time for the Achaeans to eat, while there is light, and afterwards we shall have different entertainment, with song and lyre, fitting for a celebration.'

As he spoke he gave the signal, and Telemachus, the godlike hero's steadfast son, slung on his sharp-edged sword, grasped his spear, and stood beside his father, armed with the glittering bronze.

With an elegance, with grace, and with real speed, Odysseus easily strings the bow. Homer's simile of it being like a musician and his instrument is beautiful as shows just how skilfully Odysseus manages this, and what an expert he is with this 'instrument'.

He then completes the challenge by firing an arrow through the handle-rings of twelve axes.

The reaction of the Suitors is one of astonishment, and symbolically, the moment is followed by a loud peal of thunder suggesting that Zeus has given his consent to what must come next.

The signal is given by Odysseus and Telemachus stands beside his father ready to do battle.



**BOOK 22**

**THE BATTLE IN  
THE PALACE**

## The death of Antinous

Throwing off his rags, resourceful Odysseus sprang to the wide threshold with the bow and the full quiver, poured the arrows out at his feet, and addressed the Suitors: 'Here is a clear end to the contest. Now I'll see if I can hit another target no man has as yet, and may Apollo grant my prayer!'

**So saying, he aimed a deadly shaft at Antinous, who was handling a fine golden two-handed cup, about to raise it to his lips and sip the wine, his thoughts far from death. How should he guess among the feasting crowd, that one man however powerful he might be could dare to bring a vile death and a dark doom on him? But Odysseus took aim and shot him through the neck. The point passed clean through the tender throat, and Antinous sank to one side, the cup falling at that moment from his hand, while a thick jet of blood gushed from his nostrils. His foot kicked the table away, dashing the food to the floor, and the bread and meat were fouled.**

When the Suitors saw the man fall, there was uproar throughout the hall, and they leapt from their seats in fear, running to the walls to find a shield or a stout spear of which there were no sign. Then they turned on Odysseus angrily: **'Stranger you'll pay for choosing a man as your target: no more contests for you, your time is up. You have killed the best of Ithaca's young men, and now the vultures will have you.'** They imagined in truth that he had killed Antinous by accident, not realising that the net of fate had been thrown over them all. Resourceful Odysseus, glowered at them, and answered: **'You dogs! You thought I'd never return from the land of Troy, so you laid waste my house, forced my maids, and wooed my wife in secret though I was still alive, without fearing the gods who rule the wide sky, or that mortal vengeance would find you. Now the net of fate is thrown over you all.'**

Fear blanched their cheeks at his words, and every man glanced round, looking to escape death's finality. Only Eurymachus replied, saying: 'If you are truly Odysseus of Ithaca come home, then what you say of the Achaeans is true – many foolish and wanton things have been done here and in your fields. **But now Antinous is dead, and he was to blame for it all: he initiated it, not primarily through desire or need to wed, but with another aim that the son of Cronos thwarted: to be king in Ithaca's peaceful land.** So he lay in wait for your son, to kill him. Now he is dead, as he deserved. Spare your people, then, and we will travel the island and organise recompense for everything we have eaten and drunk in your house, and each of us will make amends to the value of twenty oxen, and repay you with gold and bronze until you are satisfied. Until then, no one could blame you for being angry.'

Resourceful Odysseus glowered, and gave a fierce reply: **'Eurymachus, even if you Suitors handed over your inheritances, everything you own and whatever might come to you after, even then I'd not keep my hands from slaughter until you've all paid the price. Now you can choose to stand and fight or run, if you think a single one of you can cheat death and fate. I don't think you'll escape death's finality.'**

The getting to this point has been one fraught with potential problems, but it appears Odysseus' plan has worked and he has engineered an opportunity to kill the Suitors: the battle will now take place.

As foreshadowed by Homer earlier, Antinous dies first. It is brutal and quick death as an arrow flies through his throat, and is brilliantly described by Homer.

This is a rather unusual piece of storytelling that the main antagonist is killed so quickly and so brutally in the first throes of battle, yet it works wonderfully throwing the reader into a real confusion.

The reaction of the Suitors is still not to realise that it is Odysseus and they accuse him of killing one of Ithaca's important young men. Odysseus responds by revealing the truth of who he is in a short, brutal condemnation of them – similar to how Penelope spoke to them earlier – with a threat of the end for them.

The Suitors are scared, but Eurymachus – the more cunning and manipulative of the two antagonists – now tries to use his words to free himself and the other Suitors from Odysseus' wrath by blaming Antinous for the whole situation. He even offers to recompense Odysseus for all they have done.

Odysseus is clear in his response that he will accept nothing less than the Suitors' deaths. Here we get a real glimpse into what revenge and justice means to Odysseus and the ancient world. Whilst they are not the same things at all, in Ancient Greece they are heavily linked. Odysseus' version of justice is to have revenge; one cannot exist without the other.

## Lines 68 - 115: The Battle in the Palace

### The battle begins

At this, their hearts trembled and their knees shook, but Eurymachus spoke again, saying: 'Friends, since this man will not restrain his hands, but with the gleaming bow and quiver in his hands intends to fire from the smooth sill till he kills us all, to battle! Draw your swords, and use the tables as shields against his death-dealing arrows. Then let's rush him together, and try and push him from the threshold, run to the city and raise the alarm: then he'll have shot his bolt.'

**With this he drew his sharp bronze two-edged sword, and sprang at Odysseus with a great cry. But at that very moment noble Odysseus let fly an arrow that struck him in the chest below the nipple, and the swift shaft pierced his liver. Eurymachus let the sword drop from his hand. Sprawling across the table he doubled over and fell, spilling the food and the two-handled wine-cup to the floor. His forehead beat the ground in his last agony, his feet kicked out and rattled the chair, and the mist poured over his eyes.**

Amphinomus, now, rushed at glorious Odysseus, attacking him with drawn sword, to force him somehow from the door. **But before he could reach him Telemachus quickly threw his bronze-tipped spear, striking him behind between the shoulders, and driving it through his chest. He fell to the ground with a thud, striking his forehead full-on.** Telemachus leapt back, leaving the long spear fixed in Amphinomus' body, fearing that if he stopped to pull the spear free, one of the Achaeans might rush him, and stab him with his sword, or catch him as he stooped over the corpse. So he ran swiftly to his steadfast father's side, and standing by him spoke with winged words: 'Father, I'll bring you a shield, two spears, and a helmet that fits you, arm myself and return with weapons for the swineherd and cowherd there: we would all be better armed.'

'Run' said resourceful Odysseus, 'bring them quickly, while I still have arrows left, lest they push me from the door while I'm alone.'

**Telemachus obeyed his father, and hurried to the storeroom with its piles of armour. He chose four shields, eight spears, and four bronze helmets with thick horsehair plumes, and brought them swiftly back to his steadfast father. Then he clad his body in bronze, and the two servants likewise donned the fine armour, and stood either side of wise and cunning Odysseus.**

Eurymachus, realising now the situation that Odysseus' mind could not be changed, calls all Suitors into battle. It is worth remembering that whilst Odysseus is strong, he and Telemachus are heavily outnumbered.

Eurymachus takes the lead and attacks Odysseus, and again we are surprised by Homer's storytelling. Eurymachus, like Antinous, is just shot down with an arrow through his chest.

Inside two pages of Book 22, the two main antagonists are killed.

Both antagonists are killed by Odysseus, but Homer is also quick to demonstrate Telemachus' involvement in the battle by having him kill one of the Suitors who is attempting to rush his father.

Telemachus then takes the lead and initiative by suggesting that he go to the storeroom (where they hid the weapons before) and arm themselves some more.

Odysseus agrees.

## Lines 116 - 159: The Battle in the Palace

### Melanthius raids the storeroom

He, meanwhile, kept shooting steadily at the Suitors, killing them one by one, as long as he had arrows left, till the dead were heaped high,. But when the arrows were gone, he propped the bow by the doorpost of the great hall against the gleaming wall of the entrance. Then he slung a shield, with four layers of hide, across his shoulders, set a strong helmet on his proud head, its horsehair plume nodding menacingly, and picked up two sturdy spears with bronze tips.

Now there was a raised entrance in the solid wall, closed by tight-fitting doors, providing access to a passage at the back of the great hall. Odysseus ordered the worthy swineherd to guard it closely. It allowed space for only one man at a time. Only after he had done so did Agelaus call out loud to the Suitors: 'Friends, someone must clamber through that door, raise the alarm and alert the people. Then this fellow will soon have fired his last shot.'

We get a sense now of how the battle is going as Odysseus stands in the hall picking off the suitors one by one - '...dead were heaped high.'

We then get for the first time, a sense of jeopardy for Odysseus and that this may not work out for him as he planned because he runs out of arrows and has to resort to two spears.

This is further compounded with the realisation that the disloyal servant, Melanthius, who is actively working against Odysseus, suggests getting further weapons from the storeroom as he thinks this is where the weapons have been hidden.

**But Melanthius the goatherd said: 'It's impossible, Agelaus, favourite of Zeus, since the great door into the courtyard is dreadfully near, and the passage is narrow-mouthed. One brave man could stop us all from entering. Let me bring armour from the storeroom though, since I think Odysseus and his fine son have hidden the arms inside not outside.'**

With this, Melanthius climbed the steps to Odysseus' storeroom, and came away with a dozen shields and spears, and as many bronze helmets with thick horsehair plumes and carrying them quickly brought them to the Suitors. **Seeing them donning the armour and brandishing long spears in their hands, Odysseus' heart trembled and his knees shook, and the task ahead seemed huge.** He spoke swiftly to Telemachus, with winged words: 'Telemachus, one of the women servants has stirred up trouble for us, or perhaps it was Melanthius.'

**'Father' wise Telemachus replied, 'It is my fault, and no one else's. I left the door of the storeroom unlocked, and they kept a closer eye than I did. Worthy Eumaeus, go now, and close the storeroom door, and find out whether it is one of the women or Melanthius, Dolius' son, as I would guess.'**

## Lines 160 - 199: The Battle in the Palace

### Melanthius is captured

As they were speaking, Melanthius the goatherd returned to the storeroom to fetch more fine armour. The worthy swineherd spotted him, and immediately told Odysseus nearby: 'Resourceful Odysseus, scion of Zeus, Laertes' son, the lethal wretch we suspected is there again, on his way to the storeroom. Should I kill him if I can, or bring him here, so he can pay for all the crimes he's perpetrated in your house?'

**'Telemachus and I will keep the noble Suitors in the hall,' resourceful Odysseus replied, 'however fiercely they fight, while you two tie Melanthius' arms and legs behind his back, and throw him into the storeroom, then strap him to a board, fasten him to a coil of rope and hoist him up by a roof-beam to the top of a tall pillar, and let him hang there a while in torment.'**

They eagerly obeyed, setting off for the storeroom, unknown to Melanthius, who was inside searching for armour in the depths of the room. The two of them lay in wait on either side of the door. When Melanthius, the goatherd, was about to cross the threshold, carrying a fine helmet in one hand, and in the other an old wide mildewed shield – that belonged to Laertes in his heroic youth, but had lain there neglected with the seams of its straps decayed – the two of them sprang at him and seized him. They dragged him inside by the hair, and threw the terrified man to the floor, then tied his hands and feet behind his back with cruel knots, as noble long-suffering Odysseus, Laertes' son, had told them. Then they fastened a coil of rope to his body and hoisted him up by a roof-beam to the top of a tall pillar. There you, Eumaeus, the swineherd, taunted him, saying: 'Now you can keep watch all night, lying on the soft bed you deserve, then you won't miss the coming of golden-throned Dawn, rising from Ocean's streams, at the hour when you usually drive in the she-goats for the Suitors' feast in the hall.'

*We get a sense that Odysseus is working with the others as part of a team here, as Eumaeus suggests following Melanthius into the storeroom and attacking him there, suggesting even killing him.*

*Interestingly, Odysseus wants him kept alive, as we shall find out, in order to punish him later.*

*The two servants, Eumaeus and Philoetius, play their part in the battle by capturing Melanthius and tying him up in the storeroom.*

*Homer, and Odysseus, will return to Melanthius later in the story.*

## Lines 200 - 240: The Battle in the Palace

### Athena intervenes

Putting on their armour, they left Melanthius there in his cruel bonds, locked the door and returned to wise and cunning Odysseus. There the four of them stood on the threshold, breathing defiance against the many braves in the hall. It was then that Athena, daughter of Zeus, appeared, with Mentor's voice and looks. Odysseus saw her, and was glad, and spoke to her saying: 'Mentor, help fight against disaster: remember me your steadfast friend, one who stood by you, often. You and I were once young together.'

He spoke so, believing it was in truth Athena, the stirrer of armies, while the Suitors for their part shouted abuse, and Agelaus, Damastor's son, was the leader in rebuking her, saying: 'Mentor, don't let Odysseus seduce you with his words to help fight against us. Here is how we would end this business. **When we've killed this father and son, you will be next to die for your eagerness in action. You'll pay the price with your life. And when we've rendered the five of you powerless, we'll lump all your possessions, Mentor, together with those of Odysseus, bar your sons from your house, and your good wife and daughters from the streets of Ithaca.'**

**His speech angered Athena even more deeply, and she exhorted Odysseus with fiery words: 'Odysseus, your courage is wavering. Where is that brave spirit you displayed when you fought the Trojans for nine long years, all for Helen of the white arms, killing a host of men in cruel conflict, planning the capture of Priam's city of wide streets? Now when your own house and goods are at stake you tremble at the thought of showing your strength against these Suitors! No, dear friend, come take your stand by my side, and watch how I behave, so you know how Mentor, Alcimus' son, repays past kindness in the heart of the enemy ranks.'**

Yet despite her words she still withheld from him the power to determine the course of the fight, and continued to test the strength and courage of Odysseus and his noble son. She herself now took the form of a swallow, and flew up to perch on the roof beam of the smoke-darkened hall.

*As much as Odysseus and his men hold off the Suitors, we see Athena intervene for the first time in the battle.*

*Whilst she appears in disguise as an old friend of Odysseus, Mentor, and Odysseus appeals to her for help.*

*Before the response of Athena [Mentor], the suitors, who genuinely believe it to be his old friend Mentor, taunt and threaten him. They say that if he fights on the side of Odysseus, he will face the same death as the other four, but also extend the punishments to their families who will be exiled from Ithaca.*

*These comments angered Athena and she turns to Odysseus and tries to encourage him to fight harder by appealing to his heroic nature and brave spirit. She wants him to fight like he did in Troy.*

*At this point, this is the only intervention from Athena, she holds back from getting directly involved in the fighting – she wants Odysseus to own this and be the hero we know he is.*

*Homer is trying to increase the tension of the situation and have our heroes almost on the point of defeat.*

## Lines 241 - 309: The Battle in the Palace

### The fighting continues

Now Agelaus, Damastor's son, Eurynomus and Amphimedon, Demoptolemus, Peisander, Polyctor's son, and wise Polybus rallied the Suitors, being the best and bravest still alive, and it was their lives they fought for. All the rest had been toppled by the shower of arrows from the bow. Agelaus called out urgently to them: 'Friends, this man's invincible grip is weakening now. Mentor has fled after uttering his empty boasts. They are isolated at the threshold. Don't hurl your long spears together, but let six of you throw first in hopes that Zeus will let Odysseus be hit, and us win glory. The rest won't matter, once he's down!'

**When he had ceased, the six hurled their sharp spears fiercely, but Athena deflected most of them. One hit the doorpost of the great hall, another lodged in the door, and a third man's ash spear tipped with solid bronze struck the wall.** All four being untouched by the Suitors' spears, noble long-suffering Odysseus spoke promptly: 'Comrades, let's hurl our spears too, at this crowd of Suitors who hope to add to their other crimes by killing us.'

*The next stage of the narrative is to bring an end to the battle.*

*With our heroes nearly defeated against overwhelming odds, the battle is brought to a conclusion.*

*Homer has deliberately got it to a point where our heroes look like they could potentially be defeated, only to have them rise up to defeat their enemies.*

## Lines 241 - 309: The Battle in the Palace

### The fighting continues

Taking careful aim, they hurled their spears together, on his command. Odysseus struck Demoptolemus; Telemachus killed Euryades; the swineherd hit Elatus; and the cowherd Peisander. All four bit the dust together snapping at the wide earth and the Suitors retreated to the depths of the hall, while Odysseus and the rest leapt forward to retrieve their spears from the corpses.

**Once more the Suitors hurled sharp spears fiercely, and Athena again deflected most of them. One hit the doorpost of the great hall, another lodged in the door, and a third man's ash spear tipped with solid bronze struck the wall.** But Amphimedon hit Telemachus a glancing blow on the wrist, and the bronze tip grazed the skin, while Ctesippus' long spear flew over Eumaeus' shoulder above his shield, scratching him, then falling to the ground. Then wise and cunning Odysseus gave the word for his comrades to hurl their sharp spears once more into the crowd of Suitors. Odysseus, sacker of cities, struck Eurydamas; Telemachus killed Amphimedon; the swineherd hit Polybus; and lastly the cowherd skewered Ctesippus through the chest, and exulting over his enemy, shouted: 'You prince of foul abuse, Polytherse's son, you'll never speak your foolish boasts again. Leave fine words to the gods, since they are greater than us by far. Take that as a guest gift, a match for the hoof you threw at godlike Odysseus when he begged through the hall!' So said the herdsman of the spiral horned cattle.

Now Odysseus wounded Agelaus, Damastor's son, with a thrust of his great spear at close range, while Telemachus hurt Leocritus, Evenor's son, thrusting his bronze-tipped spear straight through his groin, so that he fell face forward, striking the ground with his forehead. Now from high in the roof Athena held out her fatal aegis, and the Suitors' minds were filled with panic. They fled through the hall like a herd of cattle goaded and stung by the darting gadflies in spring, when the long days arrive. Odysseus and the others, set upon them, like vultures from the mountains, with crooked talons and curving beaks, swooping on smaller birds that skim the plain beneath the clouds. The birds have no defence or means of escape, and men exult at the chase. So they set about the Suitors, striking left and right through the hall. Hideous groans rose from them, as heads were cleft, and the floor was drenched with blood.

However, it could very much be argued that Homer fails in this building of the tension by having Athena step in and help them. As the remaining Suitors lead a charge against them, it is Athena who helps Odysseus by deflecting some of the spears and arrows away from Odysseus suggesting that had she not done that they may well have hit our heroes. In doing so, hasn't Homer taken something away from Odysseus and Telemachus? Hasn't he lessened our appreciation of them?

Following this though, we see Odysseus and Telemachus tear through the Suitors taken them out in brutal fashion with spears.

We see the Suitors eventually try to flee - as Homer brilliantly describes with the simile '...like a herd of cattle goaded...' but again, Homer takes credit away from Odysseus because the key moment that causes them to flee was because Athena revealed her Aegis to them. Realising that the Gods were on Odysseus' side, they flee hoping to save themselves.

In the resulting chaos, we get a sense of Odysseus' anger and want of revenge, as he shows no mercy on the suitors and carries out his early threat to kill them all. Homer again uses wonderful similes to describe this '...like vultures...'

## Lines 310 - 377: The Battle in the Palace

### Leoides and Phemius

**But Leodes ran forward and clasped Odysseus' knees, and begged with winged words: 'Odysseus, respect the suppliant at your knees: I ask for mercy.** I swear I have never wantonly wronged a woman of your house, in word or deed. Instead I tried to restrain others from doing so. But they would not listen, or keep their hands from evil, and so through foolish wantonness they meet a cruel fate. And I, though I am only their innocent priest, will die with them. It is true one gets no thanks for good deeds.'

**Resourceful Odysseus gave him an angry look and said: 'If you were really their priest you must often have prayed that the day of my joyful return would be long delayed and that my loyal wife would go with you and bear you children. For that you will not escape a sorry death.'**

At this point, with the battle finished and Odysseus seemingly victorious, Homer pauses the carnage to further explore the theme of revenge and justice and how in the ancient world, they are inextricably linked.

We see two examples of how revenge or mercy and the concept of justice are viewed.

The first example is Leodes - if we remember, he was the first suitor to try to string the bow in the contest - and he falls at Odysseus' feet claiming mercy.

Leodes acts as though he is a victim of the suitors and was forced to be a part of this.

### Leoides and Phemius

**With this he grasped the sword in his strong hand that Agelaus had dropped on the ground nearby as he fell, and struck Leodes hard on the neck, so that while he was still trying to speak his head bit the dust.**

And now the minstrel, Phemius, Terpius' son, whom the Suitors forced to sing, tried to flee his dark fate. He stood by the side door, with the clear-voiced lyre in his hands, uncertain whether to slip from the hall, and seat himself by the massive altar of Zeus, God of the Court, where Laertes and Odysseus had burned so many offerings, or whether to run forward and clasp Odysseus round the knees in supplication. He decided the better course was to clasp the knees of Odysseus, Laertes' son, so he set the pyre on the ground between the mixing-bowl and the silver-embossed chair, and rushing forward gripped Odysseus by the knees, and entreated him in winged words: **'Odysseus, respect the suppliant at your knees: I ask for mercy.** Sorrow will come to you later if you kill a minstrel who sings for gods and men. I am self-taught, and the god has filled my mind with every kind of song. I am worthy of singing for you, as for a god. Don't be eager to cut my throat. Telemachus, your brave son, is my witness, too, that I never came to sing in your house willingly, but the Suitors dragged me here by force of numbers.'

**Royal Telemachus heard his words, and spoke swiftly to his father nearby: 'Wait, don't put an innocent to the sword: and we should spare Medon, the herald, too, who used to care for me as a child in this house.** Unless that is Philoetius or the swineherd has already killed him, or he has met with you as you raged through the hall.'

Medon, the wise, heard his words where he lay, covered in a newly flayed ox-hide, trying to evade his fate, by cowering beneath a chair. He rose at once and threw off the hide, then dashed forward and clasped Telemachus round the knees, and entreated him with winged words: 'Here I am, dear boy: stay your hand, and persuade your father to restrain his, lest he wounds me with that sharp bronze in an excess of strength, enraged by the Suitors who ravaged his house and foolishly denied you honour.'

But resourceful Odysseus smiled at him, saying: 'Be calm! My son has saved you so you might know in your heart, and say to others, how much better it is to do good than evil. Now go outside, and sit in the courtyard away from the killing, you and the versatile singer, till I have done what I must in this house.'

Odysseus feels nothing but anger towards him, and as Leodes tries to beg for his life, Odysseus brutally decapitates him. This is how Odysseus views betrayal and disloyalty – punishable by death.

The second example is Phemius, the bard. Now he was forced to stay with the suitors and sing for them, and we have no knowledge that he ever willingly tried to string the bow, so he begs for forgiveness. Homer makes the comparison clear by having both men use the same opening phrase when speaking to Odysseus.

Despite Telemachus' intervention, Odysseus it appears would have spared his life viewing him as loyal and a victim of the suitors bad behaviour. Telemachus also highlights another loyal servant, Medon, the herald and he too is spared.

It seems that disloyalty and betrayal are two things that Odysseus can never forgive. He wants revenge on those that do this to him or his household and he feels they are receiving justice as a consequence. The concept of justice lies purely in the hands of the person administering it, and the disloyal men are shown no mercy as a consequence.

## The Battle in the Palace

### Eurycleia denounces the disloyal women

At this command, the two of them left the hall, and sat down by the altar of mighty Zeus, glancing from side to side, expecting death any moment. **Odysseus too was gazing round the hall to see if any survivors were hiding, trying to escape their dark fate. But he saw that the whole crowd lay covered with blood and dust, like fish, enmeshed in a net the fishermen have dragged from the grey tide, onto the shore of the bay. There they all lie heaped on the sand, gasping for salt water, while the hot sun takes their life. So the Suitors lay there, piled on one another.**

We continue this theme of revenge and justice towards the end of Book 22 as we still have the issue of the disloyal servants to be concluded.

Before then, we get a glimpse of the sheer scale of the killing in the battle with Homer's simile about the piles of bodies looking like a fisherman's pile of fish caught in a net. Like the fish, the bodies of the suitors are piled up after being caught in Odysseus' net.

Then resourceful Odysseus spoke to his son: 'Telemachus, call Eurycleia, the nurse, here so I can give her my orders.' Telemachus quickly obeyed his brave father, and rattling the door, shouted to Eurycleia: 'Get up, old woman, and come here. You are in charge of the serving-women in this palace. My father has something to say to you. Come, to his call.'

She gave no reply but opened the doors of the great hall at once, and followed Telemachus. **She found Odysseus standing among the corpses, spattered with blood and gore, like a lion come from feeding on a farm bullock, his face and chest drenched with blood, a gruesome spectacle. Odysseus was stained like that from head to foot.** Yet she, on seeing the pile of bodies weltering in their blood, was ready to shout aloud in exultation at what had been done. Nevertheless Odysseus restrained her eagerness, and spoke to her winged words: 'Old woman, feel joy in your heart, but control yourself, don't shout it out. It is impious to rejoice at the sight of dead men. These men were destroyed by the gods and their own wicked deeds, respecting no one on earth, noble or base, who mingled with them. So by their foolish indulgence they brought on their shameful death. Now, though, name me the women in the halls, and say which ones are faithless and which are innocent.'

Then loyal Eurycleia replied: 'I will tell you it all as it is, my child. You have fifty women serving the palace that we trained to slave away at their duties, and carding the wool. Twelve of them behaved shamelessly, without respect for Penelope or for me. Telemachus is only now a man, and his mother would not let him command the women. But let me run to the shining room above, and carry the news to your wife, whom some god has lulled to sleep.'

**But resourceful Odysseus replied: 'Don't wake her yet. First, tell the women who behaved shamelessly to come here.'**

## Lines 433 - 501: The Battle in the Palace

### Telemachus executes the serving-women

With this, the old woman went through the hall to tell the women the news and order them to appear, while Odysseus called Telemachus, and the cowherd and swineherd, to him, and spoke with winged words:

**'Begin carrying out the bodies and tell the women to help, then sponge down the tables and good chairs. When the hall is straight, lead the women out of the house to the place between the round house and the solid wall of the court, and let your long sword take their lives, and their memories of the secret delights of Aphrodite among the Suitors.'**

He spoke. Then the women flocked in together, weeping and wailing loudly. They carried the corpses out, and set them down under the portico of the walled yard, propping one against another. Odysseus himself commanded them, and urged them on, forcing them to the work. Then they sponged the tables and good chairs clean. Telemachus, and the cowherd and swineherd scraped the floors of the great hall with spades, and the women threw the refuse outdoors. But when they had set the hall in order, they lead the women out of the great hall to the place between the round house and the solid wall of the court, and penned them up in that narrow space from which none could escape.

**Then wise Telemachus spoke: 'These women who poured scorn on my mother's head and mine, while they slept with the Suitors, shall not die cleanly.'**

Odysseus gives his orders to Telemachus, Eumeus and Philoetius that once the hall has been cleaned down, all bodies removed, take the disloyal servants outside and kill them by sword.

Once the hall is cleaned, Telemachus takes the disloyal servants out to the courtyard and decides to differ slightly from his father's orders. Maybe this is a nod by Homer to show that Telemachus is now his own man and can make his own decisions. It is interesting that the decision he makes concerning revenge and justice are much like his father's.

So saying, he took a cable from a dark-prowed ship, tied it to a tall pillar, high-up, and noosed it over the round house, so that their feet would not reach the ground. The row of women held up their heads, and the rope was looped round their necks so they might die pitifully, like long-winged thrushes or doves, that are caught in a snare as they try to roost in their thicket, and are welcomed to a grimmer nest. For a little while their feet twitched: but not for long.

Next they dragged Melanthius through the door and into the yard, cut off his nose and ears with the cruel bronze, ripped away his genitals as raw meat for the dogs, and lopped off his hands and feet in their deep anger. Finally, after washing their feet and hands, they returned to Odysseus with the business done.

Odysseus himself spoke to Eurycleia, his faithful nurse: **'Old woman, bring some sulphur, and make a fire, so I can purge the hall from this pollution. And tell Penelope and her maids to come here, and all the palace women.'**

'My child,' the loyal nurse replied, 'all you say is fitting. But let me bring you a tunic and cloak to wear. It would be wrong to stand there in your hall with your broad shoulders clothed in rags.'

Resourceful Odysseus answered: 'Let me have that fire in the hall first.' Eurycleia, the loyal nurse, obeyed, and brought sulphur and made a fire. Then Odysseus purged the hall, the yard and the whole palace thoroughly.

The old woman went away then, back through the royal palace, to carry the news to the women and tell them to appear. Out of their hall they ran with torches in their hands. They crowded round Odysseus and embraced him. They clasped his head and shoulders and hands, and kissed them in loving welcome, so that a sweet desire to weep seized him, because he remembered them all in his heart.

Telemachus orders the servants to be hanged to death so they shall 'not die cleanly'. Homer uses a simile here to describe them as small birds caught in a snare unable to escape.

The punishment for Melanthius is equally brutal, if not more. He is dragged out into the courtyard and brutally tortured before being left to die. The exacting of revenge again closely tied to this sense of justice being administered. It could be argued that Homer suggests that the greater the sense of revenge, the greater the punishment should be, the greater justice would be carried out.

We end our reading of The Odyssey with Odysseus commanding Eurycleia to go and get everyone in the house so he can speak to them, including Penelope.

As part of our study of Books 19, 21, and 22 of The Odyssey, we need to not only understand the plot and recognise key quotations from it, but we also have to be able to write about the key characters. Unlike the previous books, there are a few more to analyse in depth: Odysseus (and how he is different from Books 9 and 10), Penelope, Telemachus, and the Suitors (represented by Antinous and Eurymachus).

We have to understand where they fit in the plot of the story, but also about their personalities and characteristics.

Let's look at an example for Odysseus:

"He made this pack of lies so convincing, that tears ran down Penelope's cheeks as she listened...But though Odysseus pitied his wife's distress, he gazed steadily from beneath eyelids that might have been made of horn or iron, and deceitfully repressed his tears."

The quotation above has a number of key word choices that are highlighted below:

"He made this **pack of lies so convincing**, that tears ran down Penelope's cheeks as she listened...But though Odysseus pitied his wife's distress, he **gazed steadily from beneath eyelids** that might have been made of horn or iron, and **deceitfully repressed his tears.**"

This example is from Lines 164 – 219 of Book 9 (Odysseus and Eurykleia) and Odysseus is talking to his wife Penelope disguised as a stranger, with her unaware that it really is Odysseus. He has told her a tale of who he is and how previously he had met Odysseus. In this example, we see a glimpse into Odysseus, his character and it is a nice example of how he has matured and changed from the earlier books.

When Homer says, "**He made this pack of lies so convincing...**" it more than suggests that Odysseus is prepared to lie to his wife, and knowing the context of Book 19 and how Odysseus is keen to keep his identity secret, how good he is at doing it. We have to ask why the pack of lies are so convincing and this is very much based on Odysseus basing his lies on half-truths and his own real-life experience.

Going further, the line '**...he gazed steadily from beneath eyelids that might have been made of horn or iron...**' gives us an insight into how controlled Odysseus is in this moment. He is able to control his emotions, which is very different to how he acted in previous books – Book 9 and 10, but also in earlier books such as Book 5 when he is on Calypso's island. It suggests he has learnt and controlling his emotions – reinforced with lines such as "**...repressed his tears.**" shows how much in control he is.

But we should not be fooled that Odysseus does not care, particularly about seeing his wife so distressed. He does care, as Homer says, '**...Odysseus pitied his wife's distress...**', it is just that he is able to control his impulses much more now.

Taking all this into account, we get a sense of a man who is not to be distracted from his plan to wreak revenge on the suitors, even if this means he must cause his wife distress in the short-term. We get a sense of a man completely in control of his emotions, something we could not say about Odysseus in Books 9 and 10. He has matured and whilst continues to use deceit and trickery to advance his cause, the reckless and reactionary Odysseus that left Troy ten-years earlier has matured.

**Task:** Your task is to explore the extracts and identify what it suggests about Odysseus's character.

### Extract 1: From Book 19: Lines 220 – 307: Odysseus prophesises his own return

'So he is safe, as I say, and will soon be here: he is close by, and won't be far from friends and his native land much longer. Even so, I'll swear it on oath as well. Zeus, the greatest and best of gods, be my witness, and peerless Odysseus' hearth to which I have come: all I have said shall truly come to pass. Odysseus will be here this month, between this moon's wane and next moon's waxing.'

1. Describe what has happened just before this specific extract.

2. What can we learn from the extract about Odysseus?

### Extract 2: From Book 19: Lines 476 – 507: Odysseus tries to conceal his identity

'At the same instant Odysseus' felt for the woman's throat and gripped it with his right hand, while he drew her closer with the other, and whispered: 'Nurse, will you destroy me, you who suckled me at your breast? I am home indeed after twenty years of toil and sorrow, but now a god has inspired you and you have found me out be quiet and keep it from all the rest of the house. Otherwise I say, and it shall be so, that if a god delivers the noble Suitors into my hands, I will not spare you, though you nursed me, when I kill the other serving women in the palace.'

1. Describe what has happened just before this specific extract.

2. What can we learn from the extract about Odysseus?

**Extract 3: From Book 21: Lines 186 – 244 : Odysseus reveals himself to Eumaeus**

‘Once Odysseus was sure, he opened his mind to them, saying: ‘Well, I am home. Here I stand before you, I myself, back in my own country in the twentieth year after many painful trials. I know that of all my servants you both welcome my return, but I’ve not heard a single one of the others praying I might reach home. I’ll tell you truly what I intend for you. If a god brings the noble Suitors down, I’ll find you each a wife, give you goods, and build you a house near mine: and I’ll always regard you as friends and brothers of Telemachus. Now, so you can be certain in your hearts that it is I, let me show you a sign you’ll know, the scar from the wound the white-tusked boar gave me, when I hunted Parnassus with Autolycus’ sons.’

1. Describe what has happened just before this specific extract.  
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2. What can we learn from the extract about Odysseus?  
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**Extract 4: From Book 21: Lines 359 – 403: Odysseus receives the bow**

‘He meanwhile was handling the bow, turning it this way and that...but once wily Odysseus had flexed the great bow and checked it all over, he strung it easily, as a man skilled in song and the lyre stretches a new string onto its leather tuning strap, fixing the twisted sheep-gut at either end. Then grasping the bow in his right hand, he plucked the string that sang sweetly to his touch with the sound of a swallow’s note.

1. Describe what has happened just before this specific extract.  
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2. What can we learn from the extract about Odysseus?  
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## Extract 5: From Book 22: Lines 1 – 67: The death of Antinous

‘Resourceful Odysseus, glowered at them, and answered: ‘You dogs! You thought I’d never return from the land of Troy, so you laid waste my house, forced my maids, and wooed my wife in secret though I was still alive, without fearing the gods who rule the wide sky, or that mortal vengeance would find you. Now the net of fate is thrown over you all.’

1. Describe what has happened just before this specific extract.

2. What can we learn from the extract about Odysseus?

## Extract 6: From Book 22: Lines 116 – 159: The battle in the palace

‘Seeing them donning the armour and brandishing long spears in their hands, Odysseus’ heart trembled and his knees shook, and the task ahead seemed huge. He spoke swiftly to Telemachus, with winged words: ‘Telemachus, one of the women servants has stirred up trouble for us, or perhaps it was Melanthius.’

1. Describe what has happened just before this specific extract.

2. What can we learn from the extract about Odysseus?

**Extract 7: From Book 22: Lines 1 – 67: The death of Antinous**

‘Resourceful Odysseus gave him an angry look and said: ‘If you were really their priest you must often have prayed that the day of my joyful return would be long delayed and that my loyal wife would go with you and bear you children. For that you will not escape a sorry death.’ With this he grasped the sword in his strong hand that Agelaus had dropped on the ground nearby as he fell, and struck Leodes hard on the neck, so that while he was still trying to speak his head bit the dust.

1. Describe what has happened just before this specific extract.  
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2. What can we learn from the extract about Odysseus?  
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**Extract 8: From Book 22: Lines 116 – 159: The battle in the palace**

‘She found Odysseus standing among the corpses, spattered with blood and gore, like a lion come from feeding on a farm bullock, his face and chest drenched with blood, a gruesome spectacle. Odysseus was stained like that from head to foot.’

1. Describe what has happened just before this specific extract.  
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2. What can we learn from the extract about Odysseus?  
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**Odysseus, as a character, has changed dramatically from Books 9 and 10 to Books 19, 21, and 22. Where once he would make mistakes, where once he was reckless, self-centred, and egotistical, where once he was emotional and prone to react, now he tries to limit mistakes, now he tries to avoid risks, is focused on protecting others, he hides his ego, and now he is in complete control of his emotions.**

**It could very much be argued that Odysseus in Books 19, 21, and 22 has become 'the perfect hero', but what does that really mean?.**

**Essentially, it means that he conducts himself in a manner that projects certain qualities that heroes have. These would be:**

- **Preparedness**
- **Resourceful**
- **Patient**
- **Brave and/or Courageous**
- **Inspiring**
- **Fair and Merciful**
- **Emotionally in control**

**Task:** Your task is to find evidence to support each of the heroic qualities that Odysseus supposedly displays in Books 19, 21, and 22. Your task is to find a section of the story that demonstrates that quality.

Perfect Hero Quality	Evidence
<p><b>Prepared</b>  <b>What evidence is there of a plan to kill the Suitors?</b></p>	
<p><b>Resourceful</b>  <b>What evidence is there that he is able to adapt his plans should he need to?</b></p>	
<p><b>Brave and Courageous</b>  <b>What evidence is there that he is a skilled and brave warrior?</b></p>	

**Inspiring**  
**What evidence is there that he is able to inspire others to follow him?**

**Fair and Merciful**  
**What evidence is there that he is fair in his judgement of others?**

**Emotionally in Control**  
**What evidence is there that he is able to control his emotions, and why?**

1. What evidence is there that Odysseus was not perfect as a hero in Books 19, 21, and 22?

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2. How far would you say that Odysseus was the perfect hero in Books 19, 21, and 22?

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As part of our study of Books 19, 21, and 22 of The Odyssey, we need to not only understand the plot and recognise key quotations from it, but we also have to be able to write about the key characters. Unlike the previous books, there are a few more to analyse in depth: Odysseus (and how he is different from Books 9 and 10), Penelope, Telemachus, and the Suitors (represented by Antinous and Eurymachus).

We have to understand where they fit in the plot of the story, but also about their personalities and characteristics. In this section of our studies, we are going to analyse Penelope's personality and consider how she has been presented.

Let's look at an example for Penelope:

'Wise Penelope heard his words, and turned on the handmaid: 'Bold, and shameless creature, be sure your wild behaviour's evident to me. Be it on your own head: you yourself will cleanse its stain. You know perfectly well, you heard me say, that I wish to question this Stranger, here in my house, about the husband I sorrow for.'

The quotation above has a number of key word choices that are highlighted below:

'Wise Penelope heard his words, **and turned on the handmaid**: 'Bold, and shameless creature, be sure your wild behaviour's evident to me. Be it on your own head: you yourself will cleanse its stain. You know perfectly well, you heard me say, that I wish to question this Stranger, here in my house, about the husband I sorrow for.'

This example is from Lines 53 – 99 of Book 19 (Odysseus and Eurycleia) and Penelope is responding to how Melanthis, one of the disloyal servants, has spoken to Odysseus. We must remember that at this stage, Penelope and Melanthis are unaware that the Stranger being abused by Melanthis is actually Odysseus.

When Homer says, "...and turned on the handmaid..." the word 'turned' carries a lot of meaning. The word gives the physical impression of turning sharply to look at Melanthis, but it also implies much more. To turn on someone means to attack or criticise them suddenly; it implies a hostility to someone. Penelope is definitely doing this and gives the impression that Penelope is a strong enough character to openly berate someone for their behaviour. She is not meek, she is not afraid to speak out against Melanthis in front of the suitors, demonstrating her confidence.

Going further, the line '...Bold and shameless creature...' gives us even further insight into how Penelope feels about disloyalty – she refers to Melanthis not by name but as a 'creature' said with an almost disgust of her. This is very similar to how Odysseus feels about disloyalty.

We also learn of how she openly misses her husband, Odysseus; the line '...about the husband I sorrow for.', suggests that she still has not given up hope of Odysseus' return. She says this whilst rebuking the disloyal maid, and is this a clever attempt to remind the Suitors that the position they have put her in, is not one she wishes for.

Taking all this into account, we get a sense of a strong woman who is not adverse to challenging those that threaten her authority or position. She can use words – like Odysseus – to attack others and make her views on disloyalty known. When she refers to 'shameless' there is an implication that Melanthis's behaviour is morally wrong and against Penelope's values. We also learn of her hope that Odysseus will return. What we also learn that whilst she hates her situation and will call out anyone for it, she is powerless to stop it otherwise she surely would have acted?





As part of our study of Books 19, 21, and 22 of The Odyssey, we need to not only understand the plot and recognise key quotations from it, but we also have to be able to write about the key characters. Unlike the previous books, there are a few more to analyse in depth: Odysseus (and how he is different from Books 9 and 10), Penelope, Telemachus, and the Suitors (represented by Antinous and Eurymachus).

We have to understand where they fit in the plot of the story, but also about their personalities and characteristics. In this section of our studies, we are going to analyse Telemachus' personality and consider how he has been presented.

Let's look at an example for Telemachus:

'Then he took up his stand on the threshold and tried the bow. Three times it quivered in his hands as he made a fierce effort to string it, and three times he had to relax his grip, though he had hoped deep down to succeed and shoot an arrow through the iron handle-rings. Now exerting all his power he might have strung it at the fourth attempt had Odysseus not shaken his head, and checked his eagerness.'

The quotation above has a number of key word choices that are highlighted below:

'Then he took up his stand on the threshold and tried the bow. **Three times it quivered in his hands as he made a fierce effort to string it, and three times he had to relax his grip,** though he had hoped deep down to succeed and shoot an arrow through the iron handle-rings. Now exerting all his power he might have strung it at the fourth attempt had Odysseus not shaken his head, and checked his eagerness.'

This example is from Lines 83 – 135 of Book 21 (The Archery Contest) and the archery contest to win Penelope's hand in marriage has been declared. Telemachus has set up the axe handles in a straight line, and Telemachus has now taken it upon himself to try and string Odysseus' great bow.

When Homer says, "**Three times it quivered in his hands as he made a fierce effort to string it...**" we get the impression of Telemachus that despite his want and desire to, he is struggling to with the bow. The word '**quivered**' implies shaking due to extreme emotion which is what Telemachus is experiencing here. Whilst the bow is physically quivering, so is Telemachus despite his '**fierce**' efforts. It suggests that he is not quite in control of himself and not quite able to complete the task.

Going further, the line '**.....he might have strung it at the fourth attempt had Odysseus not shaken his head...**' gives us even further insight into Telemachus. His want to string the bow and be the hero has overridden his focus on the overall plan he and his father have to beat the suitors. He loses sight of this until Odysseus checks him and then we see Telemachus' loyalty and obedience to his father emerge. We will never know if he could have strung the bow, and we are left only knowing he is not quite yet his father.

Taking all this into account, we get a sense of a man desperately trying to prove himself the equal of his father and just falling short. We get a sense that he wants to be a hero but is not quite able to achieve it but that he is close. We do though get a clear understanding that Telemachus is similar to his father in the earlier books we read, he is reactive and responds to his emotions – in this case a desire to be the hero – but we also learn that he values loyalty and obedience like his father.





As part of our study of Books 19, 21, and 22 of The Odyssey, we need to not only understand the plot and recognise key quotations from it, but we also have to be able to write about the key characters. Unlike the previous books, there are a few more to analyse in depth: Odysseus (and how he is different from Books 9 and 10), Penelope, Telemachus, and the Suitors (represented by Antinous and Eurymachus).

We have to understand where they fit in the plot of the story, but also about their personalities and characteristics. In this section of our studies, we are going to analyse the Suitors by focusing on Antinous and Eurymachus and their personalities and consider how they have been presented.

Let's look at an example for Antinous:

'Antinous turned on them in anger: 'Stupid yokels, living in the past! Your tears, you wretches, lower your mistress' spirits, as though her heart wasn't already troubled by her husband's loss. Sit and eat in silence, or go outside and snivel, and leave the bow here to test us, her Suitors: I doubt this gleaming bow will be easy to string, since I once saw Odysseus, and there's no man here to equal him. Yes, I remember him, though I was but a child.'

The quotation above has a number of key word choices that are highlighted below:

'Antinous **turned on them in anger**: '**Stupid yokels**, living in the past! **Your tears, you wretches, lower your mistress' spirits, as though her heart wasn't already troubled by her husband's loss.** Sit and eat in silence, or go outside and snivel, and leave the bow here to test us, her Suitors: **I doubt this gleaming bow will be easy to string, since I once saw Odysseus, and there's no man here to equal him.** Yes, I remember him, though I was but a child.'

This example is from Lines 80 – 135 of Book 21 (The Archery Contest) and the archery contest to win Penelope's hand in marriage has been declared. Eumaeus has just fetched the twelve axes to be used in the contest and laid them down on the ground. In doing so, he has become emotional about what is about to happen and starts weeping. Antinous responds to seeing these tears.

When Homer says, "**...turned on them in anger...**" it is the same word choice that was used with Penelope. As she turned on the disloyal maid, Antinous turns on the loyal servants. This again has connotations of attacking and confrontation and symbolises Antinous' character as the motivation behind it is different to Penelope's. Eumaeus has done nothing wrong but wept for the loss of Odysseus, and Antinous cannot stand that attacking him by calling him names like '**stupid yokels**' and '**wretches**'.

Going further we get further insight into Antinous' character with the line '**Your tears, you wretches, lower your mistress' spirits, as though her heart wasn't already troubled by her husband's loss**' as it shows just how unreflective the Suitors are to what is really causing Penelope's spirits to be lowered, which in reality, is them. Either he is ignoring that or unaware of that; either way it shows a lack of respect to Penelope and a lack of self-reflection.

However, we do get a sense that Antinous is reflective enough and, oddly, respectful of Odysseus enough, to suggest that no one in the room is the match of him. This seems an odd statement from someone who wishes to replace him, but actually tells us that Antinous has a modicum of self-awareness.

Taking all this into account, we get a sense of an angry and aggressive man who has little respect for people considered below him, such as servants. He disregards their emotions and attacks them for being so public with them, as well as not being able to see or admit that the real cause of Penelope's pain is the Suitors not the loyal servants who openly show they miss Odysseus.

## Extract 1: From Book 21: Lines 136 – 185: The suitors try the bow

'With this, he set the bow aside, leaning it against the gleaming panels of the door, and the feathered arrow against the door-handle, and then resumed his seat. But Antinous criticised him, saying: 'Leodes, what dark and monstrous words have crossed your tongue! I'm angered by your suggestion that "this bow will break the heart and spirit of many a warrior here", merely because you failed to string it. Your dear mother didn't bear you for drawing a mighty bow, and shooting arrows, perhaps, but others of the noble Suitors will soon succeed.'

1. Describe what has happened just before this specific extract.

2. What can we learn from the extract about Antinous?

## Extract 2: From Book 21: Lines 245 – 310: Odysseus seeks to try the bow

'No, Eurymachus,' Antinous, Eupheithes' son, replied, 'that's not so, and do you know why? Today is the feast of Apollo, throughout the island, his holy day. Should we be bending bows? Set it aside, softly. As for the axes, why not leave them there? No one will steal them: not from a house owned by Odysseus, Laertes' son. Come, let the steward pour wine for libations, and put the bow down. In the morning tell the goatherd, Melanthius, to bring us the best she-goats in the flock, so we can lay thigh-pieces on Apollo's altar, the famous Archer, then try the bow, and decide the contest.'

1. Describe what has happened just before this specific extract.

2. What can we learn from the extract about Antinous?

### Extract 3: From Book 21: Lines 136 – 185: The suitors try the bow

‘The bow had reached Eurymachus, who was turning it in his hands before the fire to warm it. But despite that he failed to string it, and groaning inwardly he said, in anger: ‘Oh, I’m not just bitter about this myself, but for all of you, too. It’s not that I’m bothered about the marriage, though it grieves me. There are plenty of other women in Achaea, in Ithaca’s isle, and in other places. No, it’s more that our strength falls so short of godlike Odysseus’ that we can’t even string his bow. It’s a disgrace that posterity will hear of.’

1. Describe what has happened just before this specific extract.

2. What can we learn from the extract about Eurymachus?

### Extract 4: From Book 22: Lines 1 – 67: The death of Antinous

Fear blanched their cheeks at his words, and every man glanced round, looking to escape death’s finality. Only Eurymachus replied, saying: ‘If you are truly Odysseus of Ithaca come home, then what you say of the Achaeans is true – many foolish and wanton things have been done here and in your fields. But now Antinous is dead, and he was to blame for it all: he initiated it, not primarily through desire or need to wed, but with another aim that the son of Cronos thwarted: to be king in Ithaca’s peaceful land. So he lay in wait for your son, to kill him. Now he is dead, as he deserved. Spare your people, then, and we will travel the island and organise recompense for everything we have eaten and drunk in your house, and each of us will make amends to the value of twenty oxen, and repay you with gold and bronze until you are satisfied. Until then, no one could blame you for being angry.’

1. Describe what has happened just before this specific extract.

2. What can we learn from the extract about Eurymachus?

## What literary techniques have been used in Books 19, 21 and 22?

Like any author, be it ancient or modern, Homer uses several literary techniques to add depth and colour to his writing. The aim is always to create effective characters, settings, narratives, and themes. When studying *The Odyssey*, you may well be asked to comment on some of these techniques and the effective they have on the reader; very much like you would when studying a text in English Literature.

Below are a list of the techniques used by Homer and their definitions.

Literary Device	Description
<b>Simile</b>	A comparison made using 'like' or 'as' to create a vivid, and relatable, image.
<b>Anthropomorphism</b>	A type of imagery in which non-human objects or animals are given <i>literal</i> human characteristics; this is similar to personification but different in that personification is not meant literally.
<b>Dramatic Irony</b>	A technique where the reader knows something that the character does not, creating tension, suspense, or a sense of tragedy.
<b>Direct Speech</b>	A technique used to provide an insight into a character's thoughts or inner voice. It can also help reveal plot or create tension.
<b>Pathos</b>	A technique that evokes an emotional response in the reader, usually pity or empathy, towards a character.
<b>Pace</b>	The technique of controlling the speed at which a story unfolds; manipulating the pace is a powerful technique to build tension.
<b>Graphic Description or Imagery</b>	This technique is used to create vivid mental pictures for the reader, often appealing to one or more of the senses. This makes the story more immersive.
<b>Foreshadowing</b>	A technique where an author plants hints or clues in a story to suggest future events, plot twists, or character developments.

In the example below, we can identify several of the above techniques being used.

He made this pack of lies so convincing, that tears ran down Penelope's cheeks as she listened. As the snow that the West Wind pours on the high mountains melts when the East wind thaws it, and fills the streams with its water till the rivers overflow, so her lovely cheeks were drenched as she sorrowed and wept for her husband, who was even then sitting by her side. But though Odysseus pitied his wife's distress, he gazed steadily from beneath eyelids that might have been made of horn or iron, and deceitfully repressed his tears.

### Simile:

The simile here is to compare the emotions and specifically the tears of Penelope to melting snow flooding rivers. The simile suggests that her tears are not just a trickle, but a flood implying her crying is almost unstoppable and overwhelming. The overflowing river mirrors her emotional state - her sorrow cannot be contained.

### Dramatic Irony:

Homer uses dramatic irony throughout Book 19, and it is evident in this passage. As Penelope has an outpouring of emotion to the stranger in front of her, she is unaware that it is really Odysseus, the man she is crying about. Most importantly though, the reader does know this.

### Pathos:

There is deep emotional appeal in this passage - Penelope's grief and outpouring of emotion is coupled with Odysseus' suppressed tears creates a poignant tension.

### Foreshadowing:

There is an element of foreshadowing here - the use of dramatic irony by Homer in this moment with Penelope and Odysseus' close proximity to each other, her emotions, and his suppressed tears hints at an imminent revelation.

**Task:** Your task is to explore the extracts and identify what literary techniques Homer has employed in them. You will be asked to explain the intended effect it has on the reader.

### Extract 1: From Book 19 Lines 508 - 553: Odysseus and Euryycleia

But hear this dream of mine, and interpret it to me. A great eagle with curving beak flew down from the mountain and broke the necks of twenty geese I keep, whom it warms my heart to see, who leave their pond to eat the grain. There they lay dead, piled in the yard, while he was carried up through the clear sky. Though it was a dream, I wept and cried out, and the lovely-tressed Achaean women gathered, to find me sobbing piteously because the eagle had killed my geese. But the bird returned and perched on a jutting roof-beam, and checked my tears with mortal speech. "Be happy, daughter of famous Icarius: this was no dream, but a true vision of justice that is to come. The geese are the Suitors, and I, your husband, the eagle, have returned once more now to prepare a dark fate for them all."

1. What is the context [the setting and circumstances] of this extract?

.....

.....

.....

2. Can you identify the following literary techniques in the extract above and explain them?

- a) Simile
- b) Pathos
- c) Foreshadowing

Technique	Example or Explanation	Effect
Simile		
Pathos		
Dramatic Irony		

**Task:** Your task is to explore the extracts and identify what literary techniques Homer has employed in them. You will be asked to explain the intended effect it has on the reader.

### Extract 2: From Book 21 Lines 359 – 403: Odysseus receives the bow

So they chattered, but once wily Odysseus had flexed the great bow and checked it all over, he strung it easily, as a man skilled in song and the lyre stretches a new string onto its leather tuning strap, fixing the twisted sheep-gut at either end. Then grasping the bow in his right hand, he plucked the string that sang sweetly to his touch with the sound of a swallow's note. The Suitors were mortified, and their faces were drained of colour, while Zeus sounded a peal of thunder as a sign.

1. What is the context [the setting and circumstances] of this extract?

2. Can you identify the following literary techniques in the extract above and explain them?

- a) Simile
- b) Dramatic Irony
- c) Foreshadowing

Technique	Example or Explanation	Effect
Simile		
Dramatic Irony		
Foreshadowing		

**Task:** Your task is to explore the extracts and identify what literary techniques Homer has employed in them. You will be asked to explain the intended effect it has on the reader.

**Extract 3: From Book 22 Lines 241 – 309: The fighting continues**

‘They fled through the hall like a herd of cattle goaded and stung by the darting gadflies in spring, when the long days arrive. Odysseus and the others, set upon them, like vultures from the mountains, with crooked talons and curving beaks, swooping on smaller birds that skim the plain beneath the clouds. The birds have no defence or means of escape, and men exult at the chase. So they set about the Suitors, striking left and right through the hall.’

1. What is the context [the setting and circumstances] of this extract?

2. Can you identify the following literary techniques in the extract above and explain them?

a) Two Similes

Technique	Example or Explanation	Effect
Simile		
Simile		

**Task:** Your task is to explore the extracts and identify what literary techniques Homer has employed in them. You will be asked to explain the intended effect it has on the reader.

**Extract 4: From Book 22 Lines 378 – 432: Eurycleia denounces the disloyal women**

‘Odysseus too was gazing round the hall to see if any survivors were hiding, trying to escape their dark fate. But he saw that the whole crowd lay covered with blood and dust, like fish, enmeshed in a net the fishermen have dragged from the grey tide, onto the shore of the bay. There they all lie heaped on the sand, gasping for salt water, while the hot sun takes their life. So the Suitors lay there, piled on one another.’

1. What is the context [the setting and circumstances] of this extract?

2. Can you identify the following literary techniques in the extract above and explain them?

- a) Simile
- b) Foreshadowing
- c) Pathos

Technique	Example or Explanation	Effect
Simile		
Foreshadowing		
Pathos		

**Task:** Your task is to explore the extracts and identify what literary techniques Homer has employed in them. You will be asked to explain the intended effect it has on the reader.

### Extract 5: From Book 22 Lines 433 - 501: Telemachus executes the serving women

Then wise Telemachus spoke: 'These women who poured scorn on my mother's head and mine, while they slept with the Suitors, shall not die cleanly.'

So saying, he took a cable from a dark-prowed ship, tied it to a tall pillar, high-up, and noosed it over the round house, so that their feet would not reach the ground. The row of women held up their heads, and the rope was looped round their necks so they might die pitifully, like long-winged thrushes or doves, that are caught in a snare as they try to roost in their thicket, and are welcomed to a grimmer nest. For a little while their feet twitched: but not for long.

Next they dragged Melanthius through the door and into the yard, cut off his nose and ears with the cruel bronze, ripped away his genitals as raw meat for the dogs, and lopped off his hands and feet in their deep anger. Finally, after washing their feet and hands, they returned to Odysseus with the business done.

1. What is the context [the setting and circumstances] of this extract?

2. Can you identify the following literary techniques in the extract above and explain them?

- a) Simile
- b) Pathos
- c) Graphic Description or Imagery

Technique	Example or Explanation	Effect
Simile		
Pathos		
Graphic Description or Imagery		

## The Odyssey: Literary Techniques

Below is a list of similes from Books 19, 21 and 22 from *The Odyssey*.

Book	Simile	Explanation
19	<b>'Now wise Penelope came down from her chamber, looking like Artemis or golden Aphrodite, and they placed a chair by the fire for her in her usual place.'</b>	<p>This simile appears in Book 19 when Penelope first appears in <i>The Odyssey</i> and descends the stairs to the main hall.</p> <p>The simile is a clear attempt to highlight Penelope's beauty and grace by comparing her directly to two goddesses. It is interesting that Homer chose a goddess associated with beauty, but also a goddess associated with hunting bearing in mind how the suitors will eventually die.</p>
19	<b>'As the snow that the West Wind pours on the high mountains melts when the East Wind thaws it, and fills the streams with its water till the rivers overflow, so her lovely cheeks were drenched as she sorrowed and wept for her husband, who was even then sitting by her side.'</b>	<p>This simile appears in Book 19 when Penelope is talking to the stranger about Odysseus unaware he is opposite her.</p> <p>Another example of an extended simile, it is an attempt to convey just how much Penelope is crying and how emotional she is at news of her Odysseus. The comparison of her tears to melting snow presents an image of not only her tears but perhaps her emotional state. The idea of thawing suggests that her composed, stoic front to all is beginning to change.</p>
21	<b>"...but once wily Odysseus had flexed the great bow and checked it all over, he strung it easily, as a man skilled in song and the lyre stretches a new string onto its leather tuning strap, fixing the twisted sheep-gut at either end. Then grasping the bow in his right hand, he plucked the string that sang sweetly to his touch with the sound of a swallow's note.</b>	<p>This simile can be found in Book 21 when Odysseus has strung his great bow.</p> <p>This simile is an attempt to compare how easily and skilfully Odysseus strings the great bow by comparing it to how a musician strings a musical instrument. Like an instrument, Odysseus 'plays' his great bow like an artist. It makes the great bow more than just a weapon, but an instrument of death that needs to be skilfully played by an expert.</p>
22	<b>Now from high in the roof Athena held out her fatal aegis, and the Suitors' minds were filled with panic. They fled through the hall like a herd of cattle goaded and stung by the darting gadflies in spring, when the long days arrive.</b>	<p>This simile appears in Book 22 as Odysseus, Telemachus and the loyal servants have won the battle over the Suitors. The Suitors now flee the scene.</p> <p>By comparing the Suitors to a herd of cattle he implies that they are all acting together and following each other. The association with cattle suggests that 'the herd' [the suitors] are stampeding in their haste to get out of the hall.</p>
22	<b>"Odysseus and the others, set upon them, like vultures from the mountains, with crooked talons and curving beaks, swooping on smaller birds that skim the plain beneath the clouds."</b>	<p>This simile appears in Book 22 when Odysseus and Telemachus are attacking the fleeing suitors.</p> <p>By comparing Odysseus and Telemachus to birds of prey, Homer reinforces the fact that they are on the attack and swooping in over their prey. The comparison to vultures is interesting and implies that Odysseus and Telemachus are enjoying feeding on the carcasses of the suitors.</p>
22	<b>Odysseus too was gazing round the hall to see if any survivors were hiding, trying to escape their dark fate. But he saw that the whole crowd lay covered with blood and dust, like fish, enmeshed in a net the fishermen have dragged from the grey tide, onto the shore of the bay. There they all lie heaped on the sand, gasping for salt water, while the hot sun takes their life. So the Suitors lay there, piled on one another.</b>	<p>This simile appears in Book 22 when Odysseus and Telemachus have killed the majority of the Suitors and they are lying there dead on the floor.</p> <p>By comparing the dead Suitors to dead fish, Homer is trying to create an image for the reader about the sheer numbers killed. Like fish caught in a net, piled up high one on top of each other, so are the Suitors. They lie piled up one on top of each other in a heap.</p>
22	<b>She found Odysseus standing among the corpses, spattered with blood and gore, like a lion come from feeding on a farm bullock, his face and chest drenched with blood, a gruesome spectacle. Odysseus was stained like that from head to foot.</b>	<p>This simile appears in Book 22 when Eurycleia re-enters the great hall after the battle. She sees Odysseus standing alone among the corpses.</p> <p>By comparing Odysseus once again to a lion, Homer is hoping to achieve two things. The most obvious is depicting Odysseus like a predator who has gorged on his prey. The second thing that Homer is hoping to do is create a vivid image of what Odysseus looks like. He stands amongst the corpses covered in blood and gore, like a lion who has just finished feasting on an animal.</p>
22	<b>The row of women held up their heads, and the rope was looped round their necks so they might die pitifully, like long-winged thrushes or doves, that are caught in a snare as they try to roost in their thicket, and are welcomed to a grimmer nest. For a little while their feet twitched: but not for long.</b>	<p>This simile appears in Book 22 when Telemachus hangs the disloyal maids.</p> <p>This simile is interesting as it compares the maids to birds which might be considered helpless and fragile, yet they were not. Equally, it empathises they were caught by Telemachus in a trap for what they had done; they were snared. The image is further added to when they twitch just before their deaths, like birds do.</p>

## What themes are explored in The Odyssey?

Like any author, be it ancient or modern, Homer uses his writing to explore certain themes. A theme is the central, underlying message or universal idea about life, humanity, or society that the author explores, going beyond the plot to give the story depth and meaning, often revealed through recurring symbols, character actions, and conflicts. It's not just the topic (like "love"), but the specific statement or question about that topic (like "love requires sacrifice") that the story conveys, providing a big-picture takeaway for the reader. Themes tend to touch on broad human experiences like justice, loss or ambition. Below are a list of the themes explored by Homer in The Odyssey.

Theme	Description
<b>Homecoming (Nostos)</b>	A central theme is the longing for home and the struggle to return. Odysseus's 10-year journey after the Trojan War is a physical and emotional quest to reclaim his place as husband, father, and king.
<b>Identity and Disguise</b>	Odysseus repeatedly conceals or alters his identity: with the Cyclops, he calls himself "Nobody"; in Ithaca, he disguises himself as a beggar. Through these moments, Homer explores how identity can be fluid, and how self-knowledge and strategic deception become tools for survival.
<b>Hospitality (Xenia)</b>	Greek culture placed high importance on hospitality; this becomes a moral yardstick in the epic. Good hosts (the Phaeacians, Eumaeus) are rewarded, while violators (the suitors, Polyphemus) face consequences. The theme highlights social order and respect.
<b>Loyalty and Perseverance</b>	Characters demonstrate different forms of loyalty: Penelope remains faithful despite pressure and despair; Telemachus searches for his father; Odysseus endures trials to return to his family and kingdom. The poem praises resilience and steadfastness even when circumstances seem hopeless.
<b>Fate, the Gods, and Human Agency</b>	The gods frequently intervene—helping, hindering, or testing. Yet Odysseus's intelligence, craft, and choices also shape his destiny. Homer shows a balance between divine influence and human responsibility, suggesting life is a negotiation between the two.
<b>Justice and Retribution</b>	The slaughter of the suitors is framed as a rightful, even necessary, act of justice after they violated social and moral norms. The epic raises questions about what justice looks like; who has the right to enact it; how balance must be restored in a disordered world.
<b>Civilisation and Barbarism</b>	Characters and civilisations are often displayed as either civilised or barbaric. The Greeks were proud of how civilised their culture was, and often wanted to display others as barbaric. Polyphemus and the Cyclopes is a good example of this.
<b>Deceit and Trickery</b>	Odysseus is defined not by brute strength but by cleverness: outsmarting Polyphemus; escaping Circe; plotting the suitors' downfall. His success reinforces the Greek admiration for skill, flexibility, and strategic thought over sheer force.

In the example below, we can see how the following theme of xenia might be explored or tracked through The Odyssey. Fundamentally, what Homer is trying to suggest throughout the book is that those that offer xenia correctly and as the gods would have wished, get rewarded, whilst those that abuse xenia, face the consequences, which is usually death.

Book	Characters Involved	Evidence
<b>Book 9</b>	<b>Polyphemus</b>	A major theme of Book 9 is Xenia and how Polyphemus does not offer Odysseus' men hospitality and shelter. Indeed, part of offering Xenia correctly is never to ask who someone might be before you decide if you would offer them Xenia. Polyphemus asks Odysseus who they are and never offers them hospitality.
<b>Book 10</b>	<b>Circe</b>	Both good and bad Xenia is displayed in Book 10. At first Circe is a poor host by turning Odysseus' crew to pigs without even a second's thought. Yet, once Circe frees the men, she becomes the perfect host and Odysseus and his crew stay with Circe for a whole year.
<b>Book 19, 21 and 22</b>	<b>Penelope, Suitors and Telemachus</b>	Xenia is definitely evident in Book 19 as Penelope acts as an impeccable host to the Suitors, some 100 of them. She allows them to return to her house each day and live off her wealth. Contrasting that is the attitude of the Suitors who abuse the hospitality of their host, something the Ancient Greeks would have hated. The Suitors in Book 21 continue to abuse Penelope and Telemachus' hospitality. They abuse Telemachus, the servants, and Odysseus himself although they only know him as a beggar.

Theme	Description of theme and why it is important in <i>The Odyssey</i>	Example 1	Example 2
<b>Fate, the Gods, and Human Agency</b>	<p>Fate is a theme in <i>The Odyssey</i> that is explored through mortals and gods. It is never quite clear who determines the fate of the mortals – you could easily argue the gods decide this, but on many occasions it is the actions of the mortals that lead to their downfall: the Suitors and Odysseus' crew being two good examples.</p>		
<b>Nostos</b>	<p>Nostos is the desire to return home and runs through the whole of <i>The Odyssey</i>, especially for Odysseus and his crew. It can be argued that this is the main motivator for Odysseus throughout the novel, not revenge as he only learns of the Suitors when he returns home to Ithaca.</p>		
<b>Xenia</b>	<p>Hospitality may seem an odd theme to be important to a modern-day reader, but it is essential to ancient Greece culture and provides a means to examine characters' morals and ideals. Those that offer Xenia are rewarded, those that do not or abuse it, often suffer. Odysseus is also reliant on it to get home.</p>		

Theme	Description of theme and why it is important in <i>The Odyssey</i>	Example 1	Example 2
<b>Deceit and Trickery</b>	<p>This is a theme that runs throughout the novel and is very much associated with Odysseus, and to a certain extent, Penelope. A modern-day audience would not consider this a positive trait for someone but in ancient times what Odysseus does is to be applauded. Let us not forget, even the Gods used disguises in the novel, most notably, Athena.</p>		
<b>Revenge and Justice</b>	<p>This theme runs through all aspects of the novel; it is of particular prominence when Odysseus returns to Ithaca. Unlike modern day justice systems, the concept of revenge and justice are often intertwined. It is often tied up with the concept of loyalty and disloyalty.</p>		
<b>Civilisation and Barbarism</b>	<p>Characters and civilisations are often displayed as either civilised or barbaric. The Greeks were proud of how civilised their culture was, and often wanted to display others as barbaric. Polyphemus and the Cyclopes is a good example of this.</p>		







## Additional Notes Section

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# Classical Civilisation

Topic: The Odyssey: Books 19, 21 and 22

**EXAM**

**QUESTIONS**

**Name:**

**Source H:**

'My child', wise Eurycleia replied, 'what are you saying? You know how strong and steady my spirit is. I will be silent as solid stone or iron. And I will say this, and do you remember. If a god delivers the noble Suitors into your hands, I will pick out the women in the palace who have been disloyal from those who are innocent.'

*Odyssey* 19.491–498 (trans. A.S. Kline)

**Study Source H**

**21 (a)** Eurycleia is called 'wise' (line 1). What Homeric literary technique is this an example of?

.....  
.....

**(1)**

**21 (b)** Why do you think Eurycleia is called 'wise' on this occasion?

.....

**(1)**

**22** Eurycleia calls Odysseus 'my child'. Why do you think she does this? Make **two** points.

■ .....  
.....

■ .....  
.....

**(2)**

**Source F:**

'Perhaps the women of some great house mocked at him in a far-off foreign land, just as these shameless hussies here mock you, sir. You will not let them wash your feet, for fear of their insults, but wise Penelope, Icarius' daughter, knowing my willingness, has asked me to wash them. So I shall wash your feet for Penelope's sake and yours, while my heart is stirred with sadness. But listen to one thing I must say. Many a long-suffering traveller have we welcomed here, but never a man resembling another as you resemble Odysseus in looks and voice – even your feet.'

Then resourceful Odysseus answered her, saying: 'That is what everyone says who has met us both, old woman, that we are very alike, as you remark.'

With this, the old woman, preparing to wash his feet, poured cold water into the shining basin then added hot. Odysseus swiftly sat down by the hearth, and turned towards the shadows, though he had a sudden premonition that as she handled him she would notice his scar and the truth would be out.

*Odyssey 19: 370–391 (Trans: A.S. Kline)*

**Study Source F**

**19** Why is the epithet 'resourceful' appropriate here?

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**(1)**

**20** What animal had caused the injury to Odysseus?

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**(1)**

**21** What impression do you get of Eurycleia from this passage? Make **two** points.

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**(2)**

**22** How does Homer make the final two paragraphs dramatic? Make **one** point.

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**(2)**

**23** How did Eurycleia later react to recognising Odysseus? Make **two** points and justify your answer.

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**(2)**

**Source F:**

Throwing off his rags, resourceful Odysseus sprang to the wide threshold with the bow and the full quiver, poured the arrows out at his feet, and addressed the Suitors: 'Here is a clear end to the contest. Now I'll see if I can hit another target no man has as yet, and may Apollo grant my prayer!'

So saying, he aimed a deadly shaft at Antinous, who was handling a fine golden two-handled cup, about to raise it to his lips and sip the wine, his thoughts far from death. How should he guess among the feasting crowd, that one man however powerful he might be could dare to bring a vile death and a dark doom on him? But Odysseus took aim and shot him through the neck. The point passed clean through the tender throat, and Antinous sank to one side, the cup falling at that moment from his hand, while a thick jet of blood gushed from his nostrils. His foot kicked the table away, dashing the food to the floor, and the bread and meat were fouled.

*Odyssey 22: 1–21 (Trans: A.S. Kline)*

**Study Source F**

**16** How does Homer create a memorable description of the death of Antinous in **Source F**? Make **three** points.

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**(6)**

**17** Why do you think Antinous is the first suitor to be killed? Make **two** points.

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**[2]**

**18a** How did the Suitors react to the death of Antinous in the lines that immediately follow **Source F**? **Do not discuss what Eurymachus said.**

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**[2]**

**18b** Suggest **one** impression that you form of the Suitors from their reaction?

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**[1]**

Source F:

They all agreed with Antinous. So, while the squires sprinkled water over their hands, pages filled the mixing bowls and served them all, first pouring a few drops of wine for libation into each man's cup. When they had made their libations and quenched their thirst, resourceful Odysseus spoke with subtle intent: 'Suitors of the glorious Queen, hear me, so I might express what is in my mind. I aim my plea primarily at Eurymachus, and godlike Antinous, who made such a good suggestion, to forget the bow for today, and leave the issue to the gods. Come morning the god will grant victory to whoever he wishes. So, lend me the polished bow, and I can see what strength is in my hands, and if I still possess the power I used to have in limbs once supple, or whether poor nourishment and endless wandering has reduced it.'

The Suitors were greatly angered by his words: all afraid he might string the gleaming bow. Antinous addressed him with scorn: 'Wretched beggar, you're out of your mind. Isn't it enough for you we allow you to dine in peace in our noble company, letting you share in what's on the table, privileged to listen to our talk, unlike other beggars and strangers? The wine, the honeyed wine, has addled your brain as it does others who gulp it down without restraint. It was wine that maddened Eurytion, the famous Centaur.'

Odyssey 21.269–295 (Trans: A.S. Kline)

Study Source F

14 'They all agreed with Antinous' (line 1). What reason did Antinous give for postponing the contest?

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15 'Resourceful Odysseus spoke with subtle intent' (lines 3-4). How is Odysseus' speech in Source F wily/subtle? Make two points.

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(2)

**16** 'poor nourishment and endless wandering' (lines 8-9). Why does Odysseus refer to himself in this way?

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**(1)**

**17a** State **two** details that Antinous gives of the myth of Eurytion, the Centaur.

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**(2)**

**17b** Give **one** example of irony, in terms of what happens during the battle, in what Antinous says about this myth.

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**(1)**

# Source G

Then wise Telemachus spoke: 'These women who poured scorn on my mother's head and mine, while they slept with the Suitors, shall not die cleanly.'

So saying, he took a cable from a dark-prowed ship, tied it to a tall pillar, high-up, and noosed it over the round house, so that their feet would not reach the ground. The row of women held up their heads, and the rope was looped round their necks so they might die pitiably, like long-winged thrushes or doves, that are caught in a snare as they try to roost in their thicket, and are welcomed to a grimmer nest. For a little while their feet twitched: but not for long.

Odyssey 22.461–473 (Trans: A.S. Kline)

## Study Source G

**18** How appropriate is the comparison of the maids to the birds in **Source G**? Make **three** points.

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**(6)**

**Source E:**

The bow had reached Eurymachus, who was turning it in his hands before the fire to warm it. But despite that he failed to string it, and groaning inwardly he said, in anger: 'Oh, I'm not just bitter about this myself, but for all of you, too. It's not that I'm bothered about the marriage, though it grieves me. There are plenty of other women in Achaea, in Ithaca's isle, and in other places. No, it's more that our strength falls so short of godlike Odysseus' that we can't even string his bow. It's a disgrace that posterity will hear of.'

'No, Eurymachus,' Antinous, Eupheithes' son, replied, 'that's not so, and do you know why? Today is the feast of Apollo, throughout the island, his holy day. Should we be bending bows? Set it aside, softly. As for the axes, why not leave them there? No one will steal them: not from a house owned by Odysseus, Laertes' son. Come, let the steward pour wine for libations, and put the bow down. In the morning tell the goatherd, Melanthius, to bring us the best she-goats in the flock, so we can lay thigh-pieces on Apollo's altar, the famous Archer, then try the bow, and decide the contest.'

Odyssey 21: 245–268 (Trans: A.S. Kline)

**Study Source E**

**10a** State **two** things that Odysseus had just done after he had left the hall.

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**(2)**

**10b** Suggest **one** reason why he did either of these things.

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**(1)**

**11** Who was the first Suitor to try to string the bow?

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**(1)**

**12** Why do you think that Penelope asked the Suitors to string the bow as part of her challenge? Make **two** points.

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■ .....  
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**(2)**

**13** What impressions do you gain of Eurymachus in this passage? Make **two** points.

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■ .....  
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**(4)**

**Source F**

Wise Penelope heard his words, and turned on the handmaid: 'Bold, and shameless creature, be sure your wild behaviour's evident to me. Be it on your own head: you yourself will cleanse its stain. You know perfectly well, you heard me say, that I wish to question this Stranger, here in my house, about the husband I sorrow for.'

At this, Eurynome swiftly brought a gleaming chair and set it down, throwing a fleece across it. Noble long-suffering Odysseus sat there, and listened as wise Penelope spoke: 'Stranger, I must first ask you. Who are you, and where do you come from? What is your city, and who are your parents?'

'Lady,' **subtle** Odysseus replied, 'there isn't a mortal being on the wide earth who could find fault with you. Your fame rises to high heaven, like the fame of a peerless king, who, fearing the gods, rules many brave men and upholds the law. The people prosper under his leadership, and the dark soil yields wheat and barley, the trees are heavy with fruit, the ewes never fail to bear, and the sea is full of fish. Question me then in your house about anything, but don't ask about my people or native country, lest you pain my heart more with thinking of them. I am a man of many sorrows.'

**Study Source F**

**14** 'Wise Penelope heard his words, and turned on the handmaid.' Name the slave-girl that Penelope criticises.

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**[1]**

**15** Why is 'subtle' (line 8) an appropriate description of Odysseus in this source? Make **three** points.

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**[6]**

**16** Why is the identity of Odysseus **not** openly revealed at this point in the poem? Make **two** points.

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**[2]**

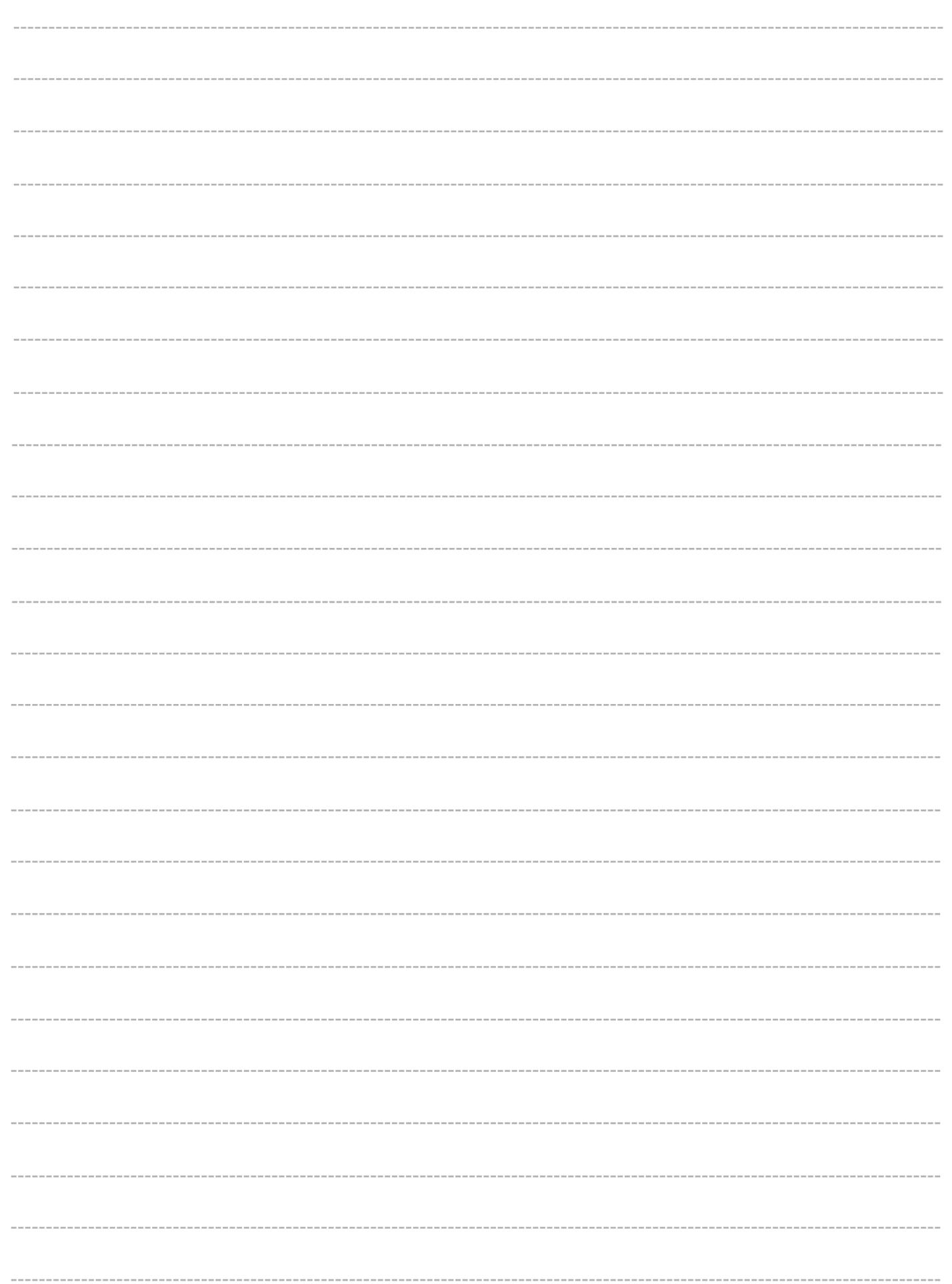


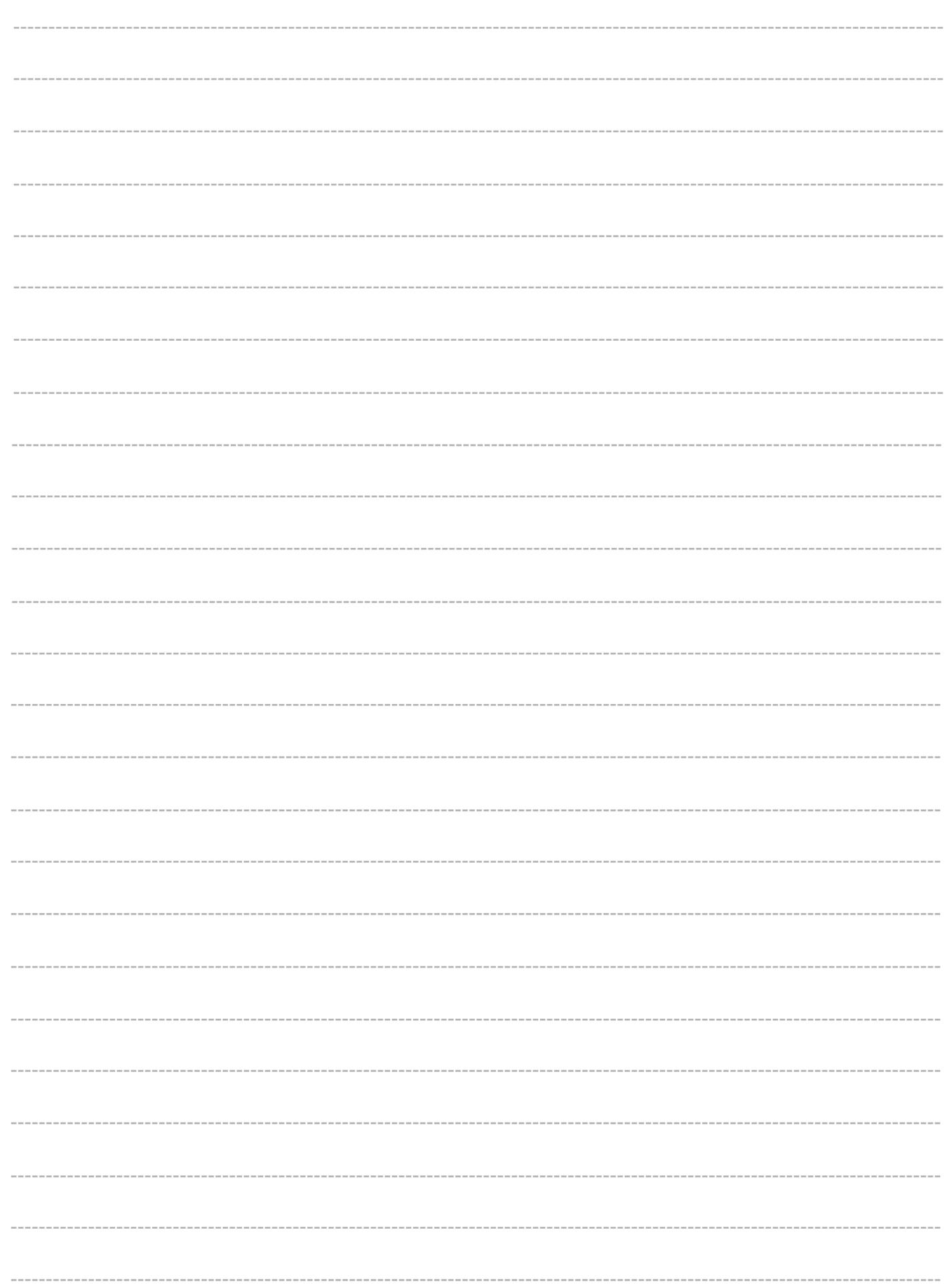




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## Exam Practice Questions (June 2022 Paper)

### EITHER

**20** Odysseus' true character is revealed much more clearly during his time on Circe's island than during his time on Polyphemus' island.' How far do you agree with this statement?

**OR** **(15)**

**21** Odysseus is able to defeat the Suitors only thanks to deceit or trickery.' How far do you agree with this statement?

**(15)**

## Exam Practice Questions (June 2023 Paper)

### EITHER

**20** How important are Homer's story-telling techniques to our enjoyment of the Odyssey?

**OR** **(15)**

**21** 'Everyone gets what they deserve for their actions in the Odyssey?

**(15)**

## Exam Practice Questions (June 2024 Paper)

### EITHER

**23** 'Fate and the gods are the most important factor in the shaping of the Odyssey.' To what extent do you agree with this statement?

**OR** **(15)**

**24** 'The build up to Odysseus' recovery of his kingdom is more exciting and interesting to read than the battle in the hall.' How far do you agree with this statement?

**(15)**

## Exam Practice Questions (June 2025 Paper)

### EITHER

**23** 'Penelope and Odysseus share the same qualities and values.' How far do you agree with this statement?

**OR** **(15)**

**24** 'The Odyssey is nothing more than a list of obstacles encountered by a soldier trying to get back to his former life. How far do you agree with this statement?

**(15)**