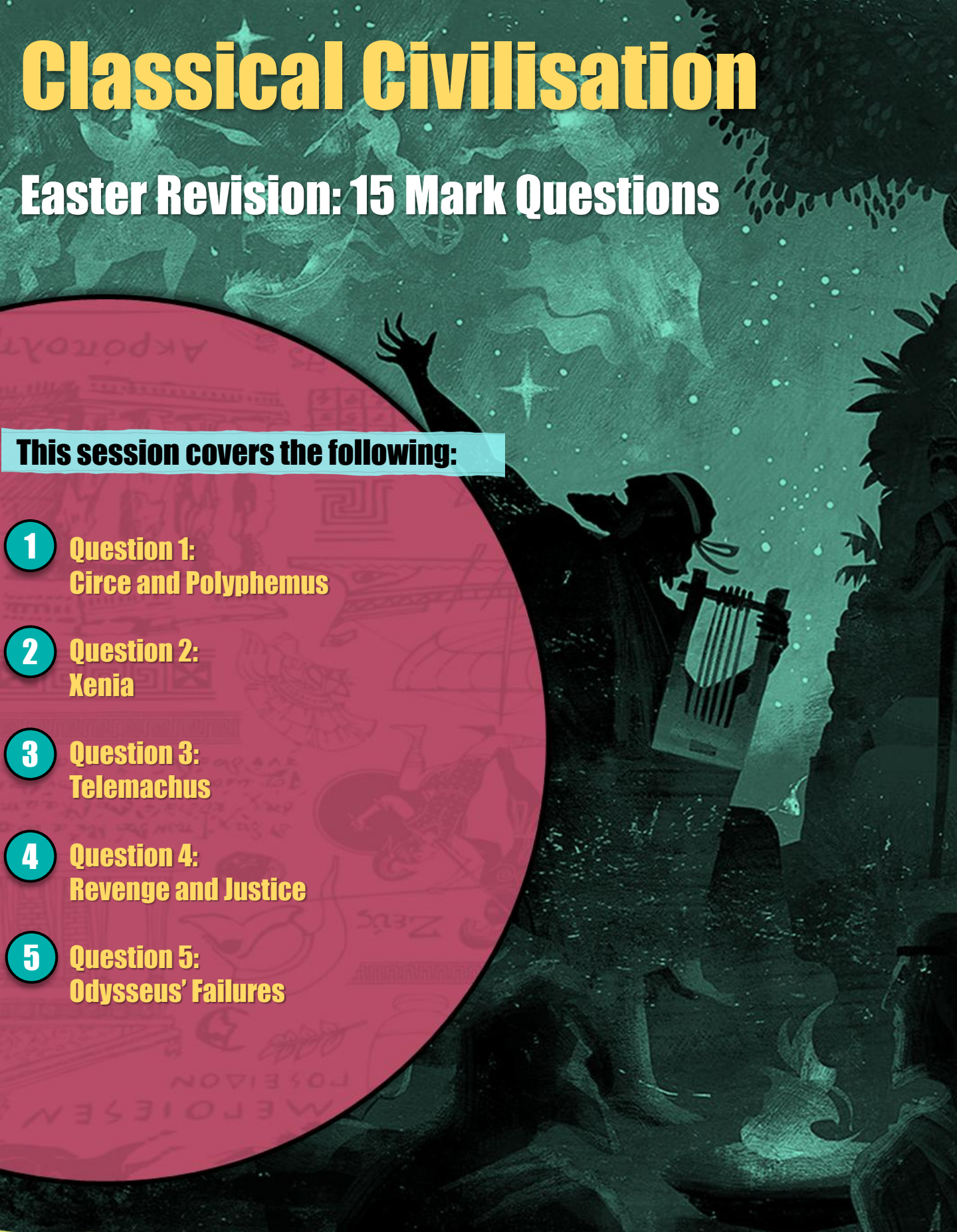
Classical Civilisation

Easter Revision: 15 Mark Questions



This session covers the following:

1. Question 1:
   Circe and Polyphemus
2. Question 2:
   Xenia
3. Question 3:
   Telemachus
4. Question 4:
   Revenge and Justice
5. Question 5:
   Odysseus' Failures

Name:

Question 1

"Circe is a far more complex character than Polyphemus." How far do you agree with this assessment? You should refer to Books 9 and 10 of the Odyssey in your answer.

Indicative Content:

AO1 – Knowledge and understanding Candidates may include:	**AO2 – Analysis, interpretation, evaluation** Candidates may argue:
Polyphemus (Book 9): ▪ A Cyclops, living outside organised society; lacks agriculture, assemblies, and laws. ▪ Strongly associated with barbarism: he refuses xenia, eats guests raw. ▪ His speech is simple and direct; he mocks Odysseus' reliance on trickery. ▪ His relationship with the gods is unusual: claims Cyclopes are stronger than the gods, yet he calls on Poseidon for revenge. ▪ He is deceived by Odysseus' false name "Nobody," showing limited intelligence or naivety. ▪ Represents the extreme opposite of Greek civilisation. **Circe (Book 10):** ▪ A goddess/sorceress with extensive powers: turning men into pigs, weaving spells, knowledge of herbs. ▪ Shows both hostility and hospitality: initially harmful, later a generous host. ▪ Displays emotional depth: fear when Odysseus resists her magic; later affection and loyalty. ▪ Offers detailed guidance about upcoming dangers (Sirens, Scylla, Charybdis); acts as a mentor figure. ▪ Interacts with Odysseus as an equal—recognises his heroic identity and cunning. ▪ Her palace is civilised and domestic (maids, weaving), contrasting with her dangerous magic.	**Arguments that Circe is more complex than Polyphemus:** ▪ **Moral ambiguity:** Circe begins as a threat but becomes a helper, showing change and layered motives; Polyphemus remains consistently brutal. ▪ **Dual nature:** She combines dangerous supernatural power with domestic femininity and generosity. ▪ **Character Development:** Unlike Polyphemus, she undergoes a shift in attitude after Odysseus proves himself. ▪ **Relationship with Odysseus:** Engages in dialogue, negotiation, and intimate partnership; Polyphemus interacts only as an enemy. ▪ **Role in the narrative:** Provides prophecy-like guidance, shaping later episodes; Polyphemus mainly creates an obstacle and sets Poseidon's revenge in motion. **Arguments that Polyphemus also shows complexity (counter-argument):** ▪ He is not wholly foolish—he detects the ship's location. ▪ Shows a pastoral and domestic side: caring for his sheep. ▪ Displays personal emotions: rage, pain, indignation. ▪ His curse has major consequences for the whole epic, giving him narrative importance.
Evaluation / reaching a judgement: ▪ Polyphemus has some depth but is largely a symbol of barbarism. ▪ Circe is multi-layered: divine, dangerous, nurturing, wise. ▪ Reasonable to conclude that Circe is significantly more complex—but a nuanced answer acknowledges that Polyphemus is not entirely one-dimensional.	

Example Answer:

Homer presents Circe as a far richer and more multi-layered character than Polyphemus, and her complexity is revealed through her shifting roles, emotional depth, and the sophisticated way she interacts with Odysseus. While Polyphemus is certainly memorable and symbolically powerful, his character is far less nuanced.

In Book 9, Polyphemus embodies the extreme end of barbarism. He rejects all forms of xenia, boasts that Cyclopes care nothing for Zeus, and devours Odysseus' men raw without hesitation. His actions are shocking, but they are also predictable. Although he does display some domestic qualities—such as care for his sheep and organised storage of milk—these details do not add genuine complexity; instead, they emphasise how grotesque his behaviour is when contrasted with the civilisation that surrounds him. His emotional range is also limited: he moves from casual cruelty to rage, and finally to vengefulness when he calls on Poseidon. His curse undeniably shapes the rest of the epic, but Polyphemus himself remains largely static.

Circe, however, shows a far wider range of motives and emotions in Book 10. Her first appearance presents her as a dangerous enchantress whose weaving and singing conceal her ability to transform men into pigs. Yet once Odysseus confronts her—resisting her potion with Hermes' help—her behaviour shifts dramatically. She moves from threat to generous host, restoring the men, providing food and comfort, and even welcoming them for an entire year. This sudden change reveals fear, respect, persuasion, and even affection, making her a character whose attitudes and emotions develop in response to events.

Moreover, Circe plays an intellectual role that Polyphemus never approaches. She becomes a guide and teacher, giving Odysseus detailed instructions about the Underworld and the dangers ahead, from the Sirens to Scylla and Charybdis. Her knowledge extends beyond her island into the wider structure of the epic, giving her a significance that goes far beyond that of a mere obstacle. This advisory function shows her as wise, insightful, and connected to forces larger than herself.

Circe also engages with Odysseus on terms of equality. Unlike Polyphemus, who barely understands the trick played on him, Circe recognises Odysseus' cunning, acknowledges his heroic stature, and forms an emotional bond with him. Her relationship with him involves negotiation, intimacy, hospitality, and guidance—all of which show a complex blend of power, vulnerability, and empathy.

That said, Polyphemus does show some limited complexity. His care for his sheep, his moment of realisation when Odysseus taunts him from the ship, and his act of prayer to Poseidon suggest that he is not entirely devoid of intelligence or feeling. But these moments are brief and do not fundamentally alter his role as a brutal antagonist who remains the same throughout.

Ultimately, Circe's ability to shift between danger and kindness, her emotional development, her role as a wise advisor, and her nuanced relationship with Odysseus make her one of the most complex figures in the Odyssey. Polyphemus, though dramatic and symbolically important, lacks her depth. Circe is therefore convincingly the more complex character.

Question 2

"The theme of xenia (guest-friendship) is the most important factor in shaping the events of the Odyssey." How far do you agree with this view? You should refer to Books 9, 10, 19 and 21 in your answer.

Indicative Content:

AO1 – Knowledge and understanding Candidates may include:	AO2 – Analysis, interpretation, evaluation Candidates may argue:

Book 9
▪ Polyphemus' total rejection of xenia:
  ▪ Ignores the rules of hospitality.
  ▪ Eats guests raw.
  ▪ Boasts Cyclopes "care nothing for Zeus".
▪ Odysseus invokes Zeus the god of strangers, showing Greek expectation of hospitality.
▪ Polyphemus' breach leads to Poseidon's curse, shaping the entire nostos.
Book 10
▪ Circe initially breaks xenia by turning men into pigs (a violation of all rules).
▪ Later becomes a model host:
  ▪ Feeds, bathes and cares for the men for a year.
  ▪ Provides prophetic guidance for the future journey.
Book 19
▪ Penelope's hospitality to the "beggar":
  ▪ Offers a seat, warmth, maidservant, conversation.
  ▪ Model of civilised Greek behaviour.
▪ The contrast with the disloyal maid Melantho, who abuses xenia by insulting a guest.
▪ Odysseus tests Penelope's adherence to xenia as part of his strategy.
Book 21
▪ The suitors:
  ▪ Have abused xenia for years by overstaying, consuming Odysseus' livestock, plotting Telemachus' murder.
  ▪ Their violation justifies Odysseus' revenge.
▪ Telemachus shows xenia in allowing the "beggar" to handle the bow.
	Arguments that xenia *is* the most important factor:
	▪ Hospitality or its violation directly causes major plot movements:
	  ▪ Polyphemus' breach triggers Poseidon's long-term hostility → Odysseus' delayed return.
	  ▪ Circe's shift from hostile to hospitable changes the direction of the story and enables Odysseus' success at later trials.
	▪ Xenia distinguishes civilisation from barbarism; Homer uses it to reveal cultural values.
	▪ The suitors' abuse of xenia becomes the moral justification for the entire retribution of Book 22.
	▪ Odysseus himself strategically uses xenia norms (e.g., with Penelope and Eumaeus).
	
	Arguments that other themes rival or outweigh xenia:
	▪ **Nostos** (the desire to return home) is arguably the central driving theme.
	▪ **Heroic identity** shape Odysseus' decisions (e.g., revealing his name to Polyphemus).
	▪ **Trickery and intelligence** are central to Odysseus' character and success.
	▪ **Divine intervention** is essential (Athene, Hermes).
	▪ **Revenge and justice** dominate the epic's climax.

Evaluation / reaching a judgement:
Candidates should reach a balanced conclusion, for example, Xenia is a fundamental moral and social framework that shapes numerous episodes and the ethical logic of the poem. However, it works alongside nostos, deceit and trickery, and divine will.

Reasoned judgement: xenia is one of the most important structural forces, but perhaps not the single most important.

Example Answer:

The theme of xenia runs throughout the Odyssey, and there is no doubt that it shapes many of the poem's most significant events. However, while hospitality is essential for distinguishing civilisation from barbarism and for giving moral force to Odysseus' revenge, it is not the only major force that drives the narrative. A balanced judgement therefore recognises xenia's centrality while acknowledging the importance of other themes.

In Book 9, the consequences of violating xenia are made immediately clear. Polyphemus rejects every expectation of guest-friendship: he refuses to offer food or shelter, mocks the idea that Zeus protects strangers, and behaves with shocking brutality by eating Odysseus' men raw. This total inversion of the norms of xenia is not simply a detail of character—it determines the entire direction of the story. By calling on Poseidon to avenge him, Polyphemus ensures that Odysseus' journey will be delayed for years, proving that a breach in hospitality can have epic-scale consequences. It is no exaggeration to say that this moment shapes the rest of the poem.

In Book 10, Homer again uses xenia to influence the narrative, but with a more complex effect. Circe initially breaks the laws of hospitality even more dramatically than Polyphemus, turning the men into pigs upon their arrival. Yet when Odysseus confronts her and resists her enchantments, she moves to the opposite extreme, becoming an ideal host who not only restores the men but cares for them lavishly for an entire year. Crucially, she then advises Odysseus on how to reach the Underworld and survive later dangers such as Scylla and the Sirens. Her hospitality becomes a transformative narrative force, providing the knowledge Odysseus needs to continue his nostos. This episode shows that xenia is not simply a moral expectation but a mechanism through which characters can change the fate of the hero.

Book 19 uses xenia as a marker of character and morality within the household. Penelope's treatment of the "beggar" follows Greek hospitality conventions exactly: she offers him a seat, warmth, and conversation. Her behaviour highlights her virtue and contrasts sharply with the abusive behaviour of Melantho, whose insults constitute a violation of xenia from within Odysseus' own household. Odysseus uses the norms of hospitality as part of his disguise and testing process, revealing how the theme shapes interactions and helps him identify loyalty and disloyalty.

By Book 21, the suitors' long-term abuse of xenia becomes the foundation of the poem's moral logic. They have spent years consuming Odysseus' livestock, insulting his household, and plotting Telemachus' death—all actions that amount to a sustained violation of the laws of hospitality. Their behaviour is the principal justification for their slaughter in Book 22. Without the framework of xenia, the violence of the finale would be harder to justify; with it, Odysseus' revenge becomes a restoration of moral order.

However, although xenia is central, it does not eclipse other major themes. Odysseus' nostos remains the structural backbone of the poem, and his desire for home motivates his decisions more consistently than hospitality norms do. Similarly, his deceit and trickery —seen in the "Nobody" trick, his disguises, and his planning — is indispensable to the plot. Divine intervention, particularly from Athene, also shapes the narrative in ways that no human system of hospitality can. Thus, xenia is crucial, but it operates alongside other equally powerful forces.

In conclusion, xenia is one of the most important themes of the Odyssey, playing a decisive role in shaping key episodes and giving moral force to the epic's resolution. Yet it does not stand alone. Nostos, divine influence, and Odysseus' intelligence all compete with it for prominence. A convincing interpretation must therefore recognise xenia's importance without overstating its dominance.

Question 3

"Telemachus proves himself a true son of Odysseus in the final books of the Odyssey." How far do you agree? You should refer to Books 19, 21 and 22 in your answer.

Indicative Content:

AO1 – Knowledge and understanding Candidates may include:	AO2 – Analysis, interpretation, evaluation Candidates may argue:

Book 19
▪ Telemachus supports the disguised Odysseus within the palace.
▪ Shows control of the household by sending Penelope back upstairs ("the bow is a man's concern").Assists in hiding weapons at Odysseus' instruction.
▪ Displays growing maturity in responding to the "beggar's" words.
 	
Book 21
▪ Displays physical strength by nearly stringing the bow on the fourth attempt.
▪ Sets up the axes for the contest with skill and precision.
▪ Defends his right to decide who may handle the bow, asserting his authority over the household.
▪ Allows Odysseus (as the "beggar") to attempt the bow test—shows trust, confidence and judgement.
 	
Book 22
▪ Fights alongside Odysseus in the hall; kills a suitor (Amphinomus).
▪ Demonstrates courage and loyalty in battle.
▪ Error: forgets to secure the storeroom door, allowing the suitors to access weapons.
▪ Shows respect for Odysseus' leadership, obeying his commands throughout the fight.
▪ After the battle, takes part in punishing the disloyal maids.
	Arguments supporting the claim (Telemachus *is* a true son):
	▪ **Growth into a heroic role:** Telemachus increasingly resembles Odysseus in leadership, strategic thinking, and moral judgement.
	▪ **Demonstrates Odyssean qualities:**
	  ▪ Courage in the battle (Book 22).
	  ▪ Authority in Book 21.
	  ▪ Prudence in working secretly with Odysseus.
	▪ **Acts as Odysseus' partner:** Their coordinated behaviour (hiding weapons, controlling household access, battle strategy) shows father–son harmony.
	▪ **Shows moral alignment with Odysseus:** He supports justice, punishes disloyalty, and upholds household order.
	
	Arguments challenging the claim (he is *not yet fully* a true son):
	▪ **Physical immaturity:** He cannot string the bow, whereas Odysseus manages it effortlessly.
	▪ **Inexperience:** His major tactical mistake—leaving the storeroom unlocked—nearly endangers the whole plan.
	▪ **Emotional hesitation:** At times he shows uncertainty and still relies heavily on Odysseus' leadership.
	▪ **Still developing heroic identity:** Homer presents him as growing but not complete; he has not yet matched Odysseus' metis, strength, or commanding authority.

Evaluation / reaching a judgement:

Telemachus shows many of Odysseus' qualities and grows impressively in the final books, but is not yet fully formed as a hero.

Best position: he proves himself as Odysseus' son, but not Odysseus' equal.

Example Answer:

Telemachus' development in the final books of the Odyssey reveals how far he has grown into the role of Odysseus' son, both in character and in heroic behaviour. Although he is not yet the equal of his father, he consistently demonstrates the qualities that Homer associates with Odysseus: authority, courage, intelligence and moral integrity. A close reading of Books 19, 21 and 22 shows that Telemachus proves himself a "true son" in the sense that he adopts Odysseus' values and earns his place beside him, even if his inexperience occasionally shows.

In Book 19, Telemachus begins to assert the authority that Odysseus once held. He follows Odysseus' instructions to hide the weapons, playing a crucial part in preparing for the battle. When he sends Penelope back upstairs and insists that decisions about the bow belong to men, he is not only performing social expectations but signalling his assumption of household leadership. This marks a significant development from the uncertain youth of the early books and mirrors the authority Odysseus once exercised before his departure for Troy.

Book 21 strengthens this impression. Telemachus nearly strings the bow, and the suitors marvel at his strength, suggesting that he is approaching heroic adulthood. His skill in laying out the axes recalls Odysseus' own precision and aptitude. Crucially, Telemachus asserts his right to judge who may attempt the bow, telling the suitors that no one can override him, and suggesting the 'beggar' be given the bow to try. This moment illustrates a shared mindset: both father and son value cunning and judgement over appearances.

In Book 22, Telemachus proves himself Odysseus' son most clearly in battle. He fights bravely at Odysseus' side, kills Amphinomus, and obeys commands without hesitation. His loyalty and courage reflect the heroic qualities associated with his father. Although he makes a significant tactical error by failing to lock the storeroom door, this mistake does not negate his heroism; instead, it highlights his youth and the fact that he is still learning. Importantly, he recognises his error and compensates for it by fighting even more fiercely. After the battle, he assists in punishing the disloyal maids, aligning himself with Odysseus' sense of justice and reinforcing the moral values of the household.

However, Telemachus does not fully match Odysseus' abilities. He cannot string the bow, demonstrating that he has not yet reached his father's physical peak. Nor does he show the same level of trickery — Odysseus' trademark cunning. He still relies heavily on Odysseus' planning and leadership. Yet Homer does not expect Telemachus to equal Odysseus; rather, he presents him as a young man stepping into his father's world and proving his lineage through loyalty, courage and a growing capacity for leadership.

In conclusion, Telemachus does prove himself a true son of Odysseus, not because he matches him in every respect but because he shows the qualities that Odysseus values most: bravery, intelligence, loyalty and a commitment to justice. Although he is still developing, the final books demonstrate that he is ready to inherit his father's position and uphold the heroic identity of his household. He is not yet Odysseus, but he is unmistakably Odysseus' son.

Question 4

"Odysseus' slaughter of the suitors is completely justified." How far do you agree with this statement? You should refer to Books 19, 21 and 22 of the Odyssey in your answer.

Indicative Content:

AO1 – Knowledge and understanding Candidates may include:	**AO2 – Analysis, interpretation, evaluation** Candidates may argue:
Book 19 ▪ Penelope's hospitality is offered to the "beggar"; contrast with the suitors' behaviour. ▪ The suitors show arrogance and entitlement: Melantho insults the guest violently and without reason. ▪ Odysseus gathers evidence of the suitors' abuses and the disloyalty within his household. ▪ Servants such as Eurycleia remain loyal, highlighting the suitors' failure to respect xenia. **Book 21** ▪ The suitors mock Odysseus (in disguise), showing contempt for guests. ▪ They attempt to prevent the "beggar" from stringing the bow, violating xenia and proper contest rules. ▪ Antinous and Eurymachus display arrogance and hostility. ▪ Their inability to string the bow demonstrates their unfitness to rule Ithaca. ▪ Penelope's contest is manipulated by the suitors, who pressure her and disrupt order. ▪ Telemachus reasserts authority, but the suitors challenge him. **Book 22** ▪ Odysseus reveals himself and kills Antinous first. ▪ The suitors beg for mercy; Eurymachus blames Antinous and proposes recompense. Odysseus rejects their offers. ▪ The battle is brutal: Odysseus, Telemachus, Eumaeus, and Philoetius kill all the suitors. ▪ Disloyal maids are hanged (by Telemachus). ▪ Melanthius is mutilated (off-stage). ▪ Divine sanction: Athene supports Odysseus during the battle; Zeus sends a favourable omen earlier. ▪ The suitors had plotted Telemachus' murder (Book 4 and alluded again in the palace).	**Arguments that the slaughter *is* completely justified** ▪ **Violation of xenia**: They abused Odysseus' house, drank his wine, consumed his livestock, and assaulted guests; this is a major cultural crime. ▪ **Threat to Odysseus' oikos (household)**: They endangered Penelope, dominated the palace, and created disorder. ▪ **Attempted murder**: They plotted to kill Telemachus, which warrants severe retaliation. ▪ **Divine support**: Athene aids the killing, implying Zeus' and Athene's approval. In Greek epic, divine sanction affirms justice. ▪ **Restoration of order**: As king, Odysseus must restore proper moral and social balance to Ithaca. ▪ **Individual guilt of leading suitors**: Antinous is violent, arrogant, and openly hostile; Eurymachus lies and manipulates others. **Arguments that the slaughter may be *excessive* or *not fully justified*** ▪ **Lack of proportionality**: The suitors offer repayment (Eurymachus), which Odysseus rejects entirely. ▪ **Collective punishment**: Some suitors (like Amphinomus) are portrayed as decent or thoughtful, yet they are killed indiscriminately. ▪ **Treatment of slaves**: The mutilation of Melanthius is particularly extreme. The hanging of the maids is brutal and arguably cruel. ▪ **Odysseus' own responsibility**: Modern ethical readings note that Odysseus' long absence created the situation; the suitors were responding to a political vacuum.

Evaluation / reaching a judgement: A strong classical reading sees Odysseus' actions as fully justified and necessary to restore order.A modern ethical reading may find the punishment disproportionate.A nuanced answer might argue the slaughter is mostly justified, but not "completely".

Example Answer:

Odysseus' slaughter of the suitors is presented by Homer as an act of heroic justice, restoring order to a household that has been corrupted in his absence. Yet although the poem overwhelmingly encourages the audience to see the suitors' punishment as deserved, there are moments that complicate the picture. A balanced view shows that while the suitors' behaviour fully warrants severe retribution, the extremity of the violence makes it difficult to argue that the slaughter is entirely justified.

In Books 19 and 21, Homer provides a clear moral framework that prepares the audience to accept the suitors' punishment. Their long-term abuse of xenia—consuming Odysseus' food, insulting guests such as the disguised Odysseus, and dominating the palace—constitutes a fundamental violation of Greek values. The repeated mistreatment of the "beggar", especially by Melantho, adds a personal dimension to their guilt. Furthermore, the suitors undermine Telemachus' authority and even plot his murder, a crime that threatens the entire royal household. By presenting their behaviour as both lawless and dangerous, Homer constructs the sense that the suitors are not simply unwelcome visitors but enemies who must be removed.

In Book 21, their moral shortcomings become even more pronounced. Their mockery of the "beggar" and their refusal to abide by Penelope's contest demonstrate a contempt for the norms of the house. Their inability to string Odysseus' bow, contrasted with Odysseus' effortless mastery of it, symbolically shows that they are unfit to replace him. Telemachus' assertion of authority, met with the suitors' ridicule, suggests that persuasion or negotiation would be futile. Through these scenes, the poem presents the suitors as figures whose removal is necessary for the restoration of legitimate rule.

When the slaughter begins in Book 22, Odysseus' actions follow the logic of heroic justice. Antinous, the ringleader, is killed without warning, emphasising the righteousness of Odysseus' revenge. Although Eurymachus pleads that they will repay everything they consumed, Odysseus rejects this offer, arguing that repayment cannot cancel their crimes. The idea that certain moral transgressions cannot be bought off reflects the Greek heroic code. Critically, Athene's presence in the hall—shielding Odysseus from spears and encouraging him—provides divine confirmation that this violent restoration of order is sanctioned by the gods.

However, there are significant complications. The total annihilation of the suitors leaves no room for individual justice: Amphinomus, who earlier showed thoughtfulness and even kindness, is killed regardless. This indiscriminate punishment suggests that Odysseus' justice is absolute rather than nuanced. The killing of the maids, particularly their hanging at Telemachus' command, adds another layer of brutality that is difficult to reconcile with strict moral necessity. The dismemberment of Melanthius reflects a level of vengeance that borders on savagery. These moments hint at the possibility that Odysseus' desire for vengeance goes beyond restoring order and enters the realm of excess.

Furthermore, Eurymachus' plea in Book 22 raises the ethical question of whether Odysseus should have accepted compensation. While the heroic code might support his refusal, a modern reader could argue that the willingness to repay suggests that some suitors were not beyond redemption.

In conclusion, within the value system of the Homeric world, the suitors' slaughter is largely justified. Their violation of xenia, their abuses of power, and their attempted murder of Telemachus leave Odysseus with little alternative. However, the extremity of the violence and the lack of discrimination in its application suggest that describing the slaughter as completely justified oversimplifies the poem's moral complexity. A more convincing interpretation is that Odysseus' actions are justified by heroic standards, but they still contain elements of excess that make them morally ambiguous.

Question 5

"The failures of Odysseus' crew are the main reason for the disasters in Books 9 and 10." How far do you agree? You should refer to Books 9 and 10 in your answer.

Indicative Content:

AO1 – Knowledge and understanding Candidates may include:	AO2 – Analysis, interpretation, evaluation Candidates may argue:

Book 9: The Cyclopes & Ismarus
Ismarus (Cicones episode):
Crew refuse to leave quickly despite Odysseus' orders → reinforcement arrives → six men from each ship die.
Lotus-Eaters:
Some crew eat the lotus and lose desire to return; Odysseus rescues them.
Polyphemus' cave:
Crew encourage Odysseus to steal food and leave immediately.
Odysseus chooses to stay and meet the Cyclops.
Polyphemus:
Odysseus' plan to blind Polyphemus relies on crew strength, which they execute faithfully.
The crew succeed in clinging to the sheep to escape.
Disaster comes after Odysseus taunts Polyphemus, revealing his name → Poseidon's curse.
 	
Book 10: Aeolus, Laestrygonians, Circe
Aeolus:
▪ Odysseus receives the bag of winds.
▪ Crew open the bag while Odysseus sleeps, thinking it contains treasure → blown back to Aeolus
▪ Aeolus refuses further help.
Laestrygonians:
▪ Odysseus' ship survives by not entering the harbour; crewed ships all destroyed.
▪ Most destruction caused by the giants, not a crew error.
Circe:
▪ Eurylochus leads group inland; men enter Circe's house despite suspicion → turned into pigs.
▪ Later, the crew urge Odysseus to leave Circe's island early; he resists.
▪ Crew behaviour is mixed: sometimes foolish (entering Circe's house), sometimes loyal (after restoration).
	Arguments that the crew *are* the main cause of the disasters
	
	▪ Their **lack of discipline** at Ismarus results in unnecessary casualties.
	▪ Curiosity/greed in **opening the bag of winds** directly ruins their return journey.
	▪ **Eurylochus' fear and leadership flaws** bring disaster (Circe episode).
	▪ Crew often show **poor judgement**, acting without Odysseus' instructions, causing setbacks.
	
	Arguments that *Odysseus* is the main cause
	
	▪ He **refuses to leave Ismarus** early despite knowing reinforcements may come.
	▪ He **chooses to explore Polyphemus' cave**, ignoring crew advice.
	▪ His **hubris** in taunting Polyphemus triggers Poseidon's curse, the single greatest disaster.
	▪ He sleeps at key moments (e.g., bag of winds), showing weak leadership/poor planning.
	▪ His decision-making often prioritises curiosity or glory over safety.
	
	Arguments that *external forces* are to blame
	
	▪ **Monsters and hostile lands** (Laestrygonians, Circe, Cyclopes) pose dangers beyond human control.
	▪ **The gods** play major roles:
	  ▪ Poseidon pursues vengeance.
	  ▪ Aeolus' refusal is due to divine hostility, not crew failure.
	  ▪ Hermes saves Odysseus at Circe's island.

Evaluation / reaching a judgement: Crew responsible for some disasters (Ismarus, Aeolus, Circe), but…Odysseus is responsible for the most serious disasters (Cyclops episode, Poseidon's curse). A balanced judgement shows shared responsibility, with crew errors causing setbacks but Odysseus' choices and divine wrath creating long-term consequences.	

Example Answer:

Although Odysseus' crew certainly contribute to several of the disasters in Books 9 and 10 through their disobedience, greed, and lack of discipline, they are not the sole cause of the setbacks the expedition faces. In many cases, Odysseus' own decisions—and the intervention of the gods—play an even greater role. A convincing interpretation must acknowledge that while the crew are responsible for some immediate failures, the most significant disasters arise from Odysseus' leadership flaws and divine hostility.

The crew's failures are most obvious at key moments. At Ismarus, they ignore Odysseus' instruction to leave quickly, preferring to feast and drink. Their lack of discipline allows the Cicones to return with reinforcements, leading to heavy casualties. Later, at Aeolus' island, the crew's curiosity and suspicion cause them to open the bag of winds while Odysseus sleeps. This moment is one of the clearest examples of their poor judgement: their inability to trust their leader leads directly to the fleet's return to Aeolia and the collapse of Aeolus' support. Similarly, in Book 10, Eurylochus' party enters Circe's house despite signs that something is amiss. Their recklessness results in their transformation into pigs, creating another crisis that Odysseus must resolve.

However, while these examples show the crew behaving foolishly, it is difficult to argue that most major disasters stem from them. Many disasters are the direct result of Odysseus' own decisions. In Book 9, the crew repeatedly advise him to steal Polyphemus' cheeses and escape, but Odysseus chooses instead to stay and "see the man himself," motivated by curiosity and a desire for guest-gifts. This decision directly leads to the deaths of several men and the trauma of the Cyclops' cave. Even more significantly, it is Odysseus' decision to reveal his name to Polyphemus, driven by pride, that brings about the greatest disaster of all: Poseidon's curse. This divine wrath shapes the entire remainder of the journey and cannot be blamed on the crew. Likewise, Odysseus is asleep when the crew open the bag of winds; leaving such a powerful object unsecured invites disaster and shows flawed leadership.

In addition, some disasters cannot fairly be attributed to either Odysseus or his crew. The Laestrygonian attack, for example, is the result of the island's monstrous inhabitants rather than any human error. Odysseus' own ship survives only because he moors it outside the harbour, not because the crew acted differently from their companions. Likewise, Circe's supernatural power ensures that even cautious or disciplined men would be at risk; only Hermes' intervention allows Odysseus to overcome her magic. These moments highlight the role of external forces—particularly divine and monstrous power—in shaping events.

For these reasons, the crew's failures explain some of the disasters, but not the most significant ones. Their undisciplined behaviour contributes to setbacks, yet Odysseus' own errors—especially his pride and curiosity—have far more severe and lasting consequences. Ultimately, the disasters of Books 9 and 10 arise from a combination of crew recklessness, Odysseus' flawed leadership, and divine opposition.

In conclusion, while the crew are partly responsible, the claim that their failures are the main cause of the disasters is not convincing. The greatest calamities stem from Odysseus' choices and the anger of the gods, making the causes of disaster more complex than the statement suggests.