

Classical Civilisation

Easter Revision: 8-Mark Questions

This session covers the following:

- 1** Question 1: Book 9
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- 5** Question 5: Book 22

Name:

Question 1: Book 9

Source X: Odyssey Book 9 – Odysseus describes his encounter with Polyphemus

There were baskets full of cheeses, and pens crowded with lambs and kids, each flock with its firstlings, later ones, and new-born separated. The pails and bowls for milking, all solidly made, were swimming with whey. At first my men begged me to take some cheeses and go, then to drive the lambs and kids from the pens down to the swift ship and set sail. But I would not listen, though it would have been best, wishing to see the giant himself, and test his hospitality. When he did appear he proved no joy to my men.

Odyssey 9 (Trans: A.S. Kline)

'Odysseus behaves recklessly in the Cyclops' cave.' How far do you agree with this assessment? Use Source X as a starting point and your own knowledge in your answer.

Indicative Content:

AO1 – Knowledge and understanding

Candidates may include:

In the extract:

- Odysseus **ignores his crew's sensible request** to take the plunder and leave the cave safely.
- He insists on staying to "**see the giant himself**" and to "**test his hospitality**", showing curiosity and risk-taking.

In Book 9 generally:

- Polyphemus responds with **violence**, killing and eating two men immediately.
- Odysseus' lies about the ship and introduction as "Nobody" show intelligence.
- His decision to taunt Polyphemus after escaping risks the safety of his men again.

Cultural context:

- Expectation of **xenia** (guest-friendship) but Odysseus knows this is uncertain among unknown peoples.
- Heroes often seek **kleos** (glory), which may motivate bold or dangerous choices.

AO2 – Analysis, interpretation, evaluation

Candidates may argue:

Reasons he *is* reckless:

- He **disregards practical safety**, motivated by curiosity and pride.
- He knowingly **endangers his crew** for personal gain or story-seeking.
- His insistence on meeting the Cyclops shows **poor leadership**.
- His later taunting of Polyphemus results in Poseidon's curse, worsening his nostos.

Reasons he is *not* reckless:

- Odysseus wants to follow Greek custom by seeking **hospitality** rather than stealing.
- He often thinks strategically:
 - lying about the ship,
 - reserving the wine,
 - devising the blinding plan.
- His actions ultimately **save the surviving men**, showing cunning rather than recklessness.

Balanced judgements may conclude that Odysseus' behaviour mixes *heroic curiosity and desire for kleos* with *poor judgement and avoidable risk*.

Example Answer:

To a large extent, Odysseus behaves recklessly in Polyphemus' cave and endangers his crew on a number of occasions, arguably also being responsible for the deaths of some. Yet, it could be argued that despite this, it is Odysseus who eventually saves the crew through his resourcefulness.

In Source X, Odysseus clearly behaves recklessly, as he admits that his men wanted to take the cheeses and leave immediately, but he "would not listen" and stayed in the cave to "see the giant himself" and "test his hospitality". This shows that he knowingly ignored sensible advice. A good leader would prioritise the safety of his crew, especially in hostile or unknown territory, so Odysseus' refusal to depart shows a serious lapse in judgement. His wish to test Polyphemus reflects heroic curiosity and a desire for kleos, but it places everyone in danger.

The wider episode supports the view that he is reckless. As soon as Polyphemus arrives, he seizes two of the men and kills them brutally, proving that Odysseus' decision to stay exposed the crew to avoidable harm. Later in the story, Odysseus displays further recklessness when he taunts Polyphemus from the ship, boasting of his real name. This directly leads to the Cyclops' prayer to Poseidon, which brings a divine curse that prolongs Odysseus' nostos and leads to further suffering.

However, calling him only reckless overlooks his cunning leadership. Once trapped inside the cave, his intelligence becomes essential: he conceals the true location of the ship, intoxicates Polyphemus with the strong wine, uses the false name "Nobody", and devises the blinding plan. These show strategic thinking, not rashness, and without them none of the men would have escaped.

Overall, although Odysseus eventually behaves with great skill, the initial decision highlighted in Source X—ignoring advice and provoking danger—means he does behave recklessly at first, and his later taunting reinforces this flaw. His actions combine heroic ambition with poor judgement, making the assessment largely justified.

Question 2: Book 10

Source X: Odyssey Book 10 – Odysseus confronts Circe to save his men

When Circe saw me sitting there, not stretching out my hands to the food, but weighed down with sorrow, she approached and spoke with winged words: “Odysseus, why do you sit as if you were dumb, eating your heart out, not touching the food or drink? Are you suspicious of some new ruse? Have no fear, I have sworn you a solemn oath already not to do you harm.” To this I answered: “Circe, what decent man could bring himself to eat and drink before he had freed his men, and seen them face to face? If you wish me in truth to eat and drink as you ask, then set them free and let me see my loyal friends with my own eyes.” At this, Circe, taking her wand, went out of the hall and opened the gates of the sty, and drove out what seemed to be full-grown pigs. They stood there and she went among them smearing each one with a fresh potion. Then the bristles, that Circe’s previous hateful spell had made them sprout, fell from them, and they became men again, younger and handsomer and taller by far than they were before.

Odyssey 10 (Trans: A.S. Kline)

‘Odysseus shows great resourcefulness in his dealings with Circe.’ How far do you agree with this assessment? Use Source X as a starting point and your own knowledge in your answer.

Indicative Content:

AO1 – Knowledge and understanding

Candidates may include:

In the extract:

- Odysseus approaches Circe “full of many fears” yet confronts her directly.
- He refuses food and demands she free his transformed men.
- Circe is impressed the men are restored to human form.

In Book 10 generally:

- Hermes gives Odysseus the herb moly, enabling him to resist Circe’s magic.
- Odysseus draws his sword and makes her swear an oath before accepting her hospitality.
- Circe becomes an ally, giving supplies, advice about the Underworld and Thrinacia.
- His leadership in not realising that Elpenor had died.

Cultural context:

- Greek heroes valued cunning intelligence.
- Magic and transformation are part of the supernatural world Odysseus must navigate.
- Xenia obligations: Circe initially violates them, but Odysseus insists on proper treatment.

AO2 – Analysis, interpretation, evaluation

Candidates may argue:

Reasons he *is* resourceful:

- He resists Circe’s magic — unique among his crew — showing intelligence and self-control.
- He applies strategic thinking: confronting her firmly but demanding an oath.
- He secures his men’s release and later their safety by following her navigation advice.
- Odysseus adapts quickly to the supernatural challenge.

Reasons he is *not* resourceful:

- His men’s transformation occurs partly because he sends them ahead without proper caution.
- He stays with Circe for a year, which may suggest distraction from nostos.
- He relies heavily on Hermes’ divine help, not solely on his own abilities.

Balanced judgements may conclude Odysseus’ resourcefulness is genuine, but often depends on divine intervention. His ability to negotiate with Circe shows intelligence and leadership after an initial error. Overall, he combines heroic cunning with human flaws.

Example Answer:

To a large extent, Odysseus displays great resourcefulness when dealing with Circe, particularly how he shows authority and is able to manipulate her to free his men. Yet, it very much could be argued that Odysseus may be resourceful but he receives an extraordinary divine help in enabling him to defeat Circe, without which he would have likely to succumbed to her magic as his crew did.

In Source X, Odysseus shows considerable resourcefulness in the way he confronts Circe. Despite attacking her and overcoming her, he refuses to sit or accept food until she frees his men, which shows a clear understanding of the danger she poses. He shows great resourcefulness to persuade Circe to free his men. His manipulative manner is demonstrated by the way he sits there refusing her food and looks "weighed down with sorrow" as this is all an act to persuade to ask what is wrong. When she does, he uses his words convince her to return his men to their former selves. The reaction from Circe is to follow his commands suggesting that Odysseus' confident and controlled approach is effective in gaining the safety of his men.

The wider narrative of Book 10 reinforces this impression. With the help of Hermes, Odysseus uses the herb moly to resist Circe's potion, something no other member of the crew could do. Once immune to her magic, he forces her to swear an oath before accepting any hospitality, which shows both intelligence and a strong grasp of xenia customs. His planning extends beyond this moment: by making Circe an ally, he later gains vital information about the journey ahead, including the dangers of the Sirens, Scylla and Charybdis, and the island of the Sun-god.

However, it is also true that he is not entirely self-sufficient. His ability to resist Circe's spell depends on divine aid, and the initial disaster – the men being turned into pigs – results from Odysseus sending them forward without sufficient caution. This weakens the idea that he is always resourceful, and his later decision to remain with Circe for a whole year may seem like a lapse in focus on his nostos.

On balance, though, Odysseus' dealings with Circe show him at his most effective: he confronts a powerful enchantress, protects his men, and secures crucial guidance for the remainder of the voyage. While he relies on divine help at key moments, his ability to use that help intelligently and negotiate successfully with Circe means that he can fairly be described as highly resourceful.

Question 3: Book 19

Source X: Odyssey Book 19 – Penelope questions the disguised Odysseus

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.'

Odyssey 19 (Trans: A.S. Kline)

'Penelope shows intelligence and control in this passage.' How far do you agree with this assessment? Use Source X as a starting point and your own knowledge in your answer.

Indicative Content:

AO1 – Knowledge and understanding

Candidates may include:

In the extract:

- Penelope initiates the questioning, taking an active role.
- She asks for specific details about clothing and companions — a deliberate test, which Odysseus (in disguise) responds with an accurate description of the cloak and clasp, which Penelope recognises.
- Penelope's emotional reaction ("tears fell from her eyes") reveals her long suffering.

In Book 19 generally:

- Penelope is skilful at probing with questions to test the stranger's identity.
- She devises the contest of the bow as a strategy to control her remarriage.
- She demonstrates prudence and self-restraint, doubting the stranger's reassurances.
- Her conversation shows clever manipulation of information — she reveals little while learning much.

Cultural context:

- Greek women were expected to be modest and reserved, yet Penelope is presented as exceptionally wise.
- Her protective behaviour toward the household reflects the ideal wife.

AO2 – Analysis, interpretation, evaluation

Candidates may argue:

Reasons she *does* show intelligence and control:

- She interrogates the stranger with precisely targeted questions, designed to expose lies.
- She remains emotionally composed during the conversation (until the description overwhelms her).
- Her use of clothing details as a test shows shrewd understanding of how identity can be verified.
- Elsewhere in Book 19, she demonstrates foresight by devising the bow contest to manage the suitors.
- She avoids revealing her own intentions, keeping power over the stranger and the situation.

Reasons she *does not* show intelligence and control:

- Her grief resurfaces when she cries, suggesting vulnerability.
- She does not yet recognise Odysseus, which may imply limited insight.
- She is surrounded by hostile suitors, reducing her freedom of action.

Balanced judgements may conclude Penelope mixes emotional strain with extraordinary intelligence. Her subtle questioning shows mental agility and control even in distress. Overall, she is one of the Odyssey's most cunning characters, rivalling Odysseus in careful speech and testing, but at times she loses emotional control.

Example Answer:

Undoubtedly, Penelope is a strong character who shows intelligence in this passage as she is the one leading the conversation, but to suggest she is in control throughout it would be misleading as she often shows her emotions to the 'stranger'.

In Source X, Penelope demonstrates considerable intelligence by taking charge of the conversation. Rather than accepting the stranger's story, she initiates a careful test, asking him to describe Odysseus' clothing and the men who travelled with him. These are precise and verifiable details, showing that she is not easily deceived. Her method reveals strong control: she keeps the initiative, forcing the stranger to respond to her line of questioning. Her emotional reaction, "when she had finished weeping", shows genuine suffering, yet it does not undermine her ability to think clearly – she tests before she trusts.

The wider context of Book 19 reinforces her intelligence and self-control. Earlier in the book she questions the stranger repeatedly, obtaining useful information while revealing nothing important about her own intentions. She also expresses scepticism when the stranger predicts Odysseus' imminent return, demonstrating emotional restraint rather than blind hope. Later in the same book, she devises the plan of the bow contest, a clever strategy that protects her autonomy and delays a forced marriage. This is a significant act of control: by appealing to the suitors' pride and the household's traditions, she sets conditions that only Odysseus can meet.

Penelope's intelligence is further shown by her awareness of threats within her own household. She sends her maids away from the hall before speaking privately to the stranger, suggesting that she knows some cannot be trusted. Her caution contrasts with the reckless behaviour of the suitors and highlights how actively she works to preserve the peace within her home despite her vulnerable position.

Although Penelope's grief occasionally overwhelms her, and she does not yet recognise her husband in disguise, these moments do not diminish her strategic thinking. Instead, they emphasise her humanity while showing that she continues to act with purpose.

Question 4: Book 21

Source X: *Odyssey* Book 21 – The Suitors attempt 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.'

Odyssey 21 (Trans: A.S. Kline)

'The behaviour of the suitors in this passage shows why they deserve punishment.' How far do you agree with this assessment? Use Source X as a starting point and your own knowledge in your answer.

Indicative Content:

AO1 – Knowledge and understanding

Candidates may include:

In the extract:

- Eurymachus attempts to string the bow and fails, despite boasting.
- He warms the bow by the fire — a sign of manipulation or cheating.
- Eurymachus' pride and anger when embarrassed by failure.
- The suitors are dismayed when none can string it.
- They plan to delay the contest, demonstrating deceit and fear of losing.

In *Book 21* generally:

- The suitors' disrespect for Odysseus' house: feasting, wasting livestock, abusing servants.
- Their mocking of Odysseus in disguise when he asks to try the bow.
- Antinous' hostility and violence (e.g., striking Odysseus with a stool earlier).
- Only Odysseus (disguised) can string the bow easily, proving the suitors' inferiority.

Cultural context:

- Bow contest links to heroic strength and legitimacy.
- Xenia violations: the suitors are the greatest example of bad guest-friendship in the epic.
- Justice in Homer often involves divine or fated retribution against evil-doers.

AO2 – Analysis, interpretation, evaluation

Candidates may argue:

Reasons their behaviour *does* justify punishment:

- Their cheating (warming the bow) shows dishonesty rather than heroic spirit.
- Their arrogance ("our strength falls so short of godlike Odysseus' ") is disproved by their failure.
- Their attempt to delay the contest is a manipulative tactic to avoid exposure.
- They ignore sacred household rules and repeatedly insult Odysseus.
- Their behaviour contrasts with heroic values: they lack strength, honour, or self-control.

Reasons their behaviour *does not* justify punishment:

- They do not know the stranger is Odysseus and act with ordinary male pride.
- Their worst crimes occur outside this extract, so judgement based solely on these lines may be limited.

Balanced judgements may conclude in this passage, the suitors show arrogance, cowardice, and dishonesty — clear signs of moral corruption. When combined with their behaviour in earlier books, the episode strengthens the sense of divine and heroic justice.

Introduction

In Source X, the behaviour of the suitors clearly supports the idea that they deserve punishment. Eurymachus, one of their leaders, tries to string Odysseus' bow but fails, and resorts to warming it by the fire, which suggests dishonesty rather than the genuine heroism expected in such a contest. This detail exposes their lack of respect for the rules of the challenge Penelope has set. Furthermore, Eurymachus' pronouncement that "It's not that I'm bothered about the marriage" symbolises the typical motivations of the Suitors to Penelope, their host, and that they are only interested in gaining power. This is further emphasised when Eurymachus confesses that his failure to string the bow will affect his reputation, "It's a disgrace that posterity will hear of", again symbolising their true feelings. Their failure, followed by fear and an attempt to delay the contest, shows cowardice and a desire to conceal their shortcomings rather than face the truth.

The wider events of Book 21 reinforce this interpretation. The suitors have already shown prolonged abuse of *xenia* through their gluttonous feasting in Odysseus' hall, mistreatment of servants like Eumaeus, and repeated insults toward the disguised Odysseus. Their mocking refusal to let him try the bow highlights both their pride and their unjust sense of superiority. Eurymachus, for example, reacts angrily when he fails to string the bow, blaming the weapon rather than recognising his own weakness. These actions contrast sharply with Odysseus' effortless success in stringing the bow, revealing the suitors' lack of true heroic worth.

Although not all suitors are equally malicious, the group's collective behaviour in this passage displays the attitudes that justify their fate. Their arrogance, deceit, and disrespect for the household demonstrate a complete rejection of Homeric values such as honour and fairness. In the moral world of the *Odyssey*, such behaviour rightly invites divine and heroic retribution.

Overall, the passage strongly supports the argument that the suitors deserve punishment. Their attempts to cheat, their cowardice, and their continued disrespect for Odysseus' household make their downfall appear both necessary and just.

Question 5: Book 22

Source X: *Odyssey* Book 22 – Odysseus begins the battle in the hall

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...But Odysseus took aim and shot him through the neck...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.'

Odyssey 22 (Trans: A.S. Kline)

'Justice, not revenge, is the main theme of this passage.' How far do you agree with this assessment? Use Source X as a starting point and your own knowledge in your answer.

Indicative Content:

AO1 – Knowledge and understanding

Candidates may include:

In the extract:

- Odysseus reveals himself decisively by removing his disguise. He invokes Apollo, suggesting divine approval.
- Antinous is killed while drinking — sudden, shocking death.
- The suitors accuse the stranger of murder, unaware of his identity.
- Odysseus lists their crimes: wasting his wealth, abusing servants, attempting to marry Penelope.

In Book 22 generally:

- The suitors are killed systematically, and in order: Antinous, Eurymachus, then others.
- Athene (as Mentor) supports Odysseus, signalling divine sanction.
- Disloyal servants (Melanthius) are punished severely; loyal ones (Eumaeus, Philoetius) are rewarded.
- The maids who betrayed Penelope are executed.
- The massacre is framed as cleansing the household of corruption.

Cultural context:

- Justice in Homeric society is often personal and restorative, not legalistic. Revenge is also a heroic duty — especially reclaiming honour, household, and social order.
- The gods frequently endorse vengeance when tied to moral wrongdoing.

AO2 – Analysis, interpretation, evaluation

Candidates may argue:

Arguments that the passage emphasises justice:

- Odysseus lists specific offences: violation of *xenia*, attempted usurpation, and mistreatment of the household.
- He acts as a restorer of order, not a random killer.
- Invoking Apollo implies divine justice, not personal rage.
- The suitors' crimes have been carefully built across Books 17–20, making this the rightful resolution.
- Loyal/unloyal servants are separated and treated accordingly — suggesting moral judgement.

Arguments that the passage emphasises revenge:

- The killing of Antinous is sudden and dramatic, more like retribution than judicial punishment.
- Odysseus' language ("dogs!") reflects deep personal anger.
- Some suitors are not wholly evil, yet are killed anyway.
- The brutality of the killings, including the punishment of the maids, suggests excess.
- The suitors have no chance to defend themselves, unlike a formal judgement.

Balanced judgements may conclude the passage blends justice (restoring order) with revenge (personal honour and fury). Students may conclude one is more dominant depending on interpretation.

Example Answer:

To a large extent, justice is the main theme of this passage as the punishment meted out to Antinous is based on his awful actions throughout Books 21 and 22. Yet, it could very much be argued that revenge is often mixed with justice as the brutality of the punishments suggest it was a revenge personal to Odysseus and Telemachus, and beyond fair justice.

In Source X, Odysseus' actions can be seen as an attempt to carry out justice, as he immediately lists the suitors' crimes: they have "so you laid waste my house, forced my maids, and wooed my wife in secret though I was still alive". By emphasising their wrongdoing, Odysseus frames the killing as a justified response to the long-term violation of *xenia*. His invocation of Apollo before shooting Antinous also suggests divine sanction, implying that he sees himself as restoring moral order rather than acting out of personal hatred.

However, the passage also clearly contains elements of revenge. Odysseus' first act is to shoot Antinous without warning as he drinks from a cup, which is more characteristic of sudden retaliation than measured justice. His harsh address – calling the suitors "dogs" – shows strong personal anger. The violence is immediate and emotionally charged, suggesting that Odysseus' feelings of humiliation and loss are driving his actions as much as any desire to punish wrongdoing.

Book 22 as a whole supports a mixed interpretation. On the side of justice, the suitors have committed severe and prolonged offences: they have consumed Odysseus' wealth, plotted against Telemachus, and violated the sacred duties of hospitality. Athene's support for Odysseus, appearing as Mentor to encourage the fighting, reinforces the idea that the gods endorse this cleansing of the household. The careful distinction between loyal servants (Eumaeus and Philoetius) and the disloyal ones (Melanthius and the maids) also reflects a moral framework rather than indiscriminate killing.

Even so, the extremity of the punishment – especially the violent execution of Melanthius and the hanging of the disloyal maids – shows that the episode cannot be understood as pure, balanced justice. While in broader Homeric culture revenge and justice often overlap, the brutality of the slaughter reflects Odysseus' desire to restore his honour with overwhelming force.

Overall, the passage presents a blend of justice and revenge. Odysseus clearly aims to punish genuine wrongdoing and restore order to his household, but he does so with the intensity and speed of personal vengeance. Therefore, although justice is an important theme, revenge is equally powerful, making the statement only partly convincing.

What makes an effective 8-mark answer?

