

6 Knowledge Map: The Odyssey (Book 21)

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 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.
Breakdown of Book 21 (Line-by-Line)		
2	Lines 1-79	Penelope Declares the Contest 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	Telemachus Sets Up the Axes 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	The Suitors Try the Bow 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	Odysseus Reveals Himself to Eumaeus 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	Odysseus Seeks to Try the Bow 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	Telemachus Asserts his Authority 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	Odysseus Receives the Bow 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, bright-eyed Athene , prompted wise Penelope , 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	" Godlike Odysseus ' mighty bow is the test."
25	Epithet	Lines 96-97 Lines 117-118	"Then royal Telemachus intervened: 'Zeus must have added my wits, indeed!' "Alas' royal Telemachus 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 sang sweetly to his touch with the sound of a swallow's note. "