

**ANCIENT GREECE:
HOMER: THE ODYSSEY**



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Description

Through the investigation of selected primary and secondary sources, including readings from the *Odyssey*, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain the story of Odysseus and his trip home from Troy as told in Homer's epic poem the *Odyssey*, the role gods and goddesses play in the story through their interaction with humans, how the poem set the standard for the ideal Greek epic hero in battle, and why the story is seen as important to the development of western literature.

Subjects

English / Language Arts
World History

Grade Level

11-12

Duration

90 minutes (with multiple days for out of class reading)

Tour Links

- Ancient City of Troy, Turkey
- Ancient Athens
- Ancient Sparta
- Ancient Mycenae
- Ancient sites around Greece

Essential Questions

- Who was Homer? What do we know about him and his literary works?
- What is the background for the story of Homer's epic poem, *The Odyssey*?
- What was the Trojan War? Why did it start? Where was Troy? How did it end?
- What message might Homer have been trying to tell through the *Odyssey* about the ideal Greek hero?

Academic Summary

"Look here, Cyclops,' said I, you have been eating a great deal of man's flesh, so take this and drink some wine, that you may see what kind of liquor we had on board my ship. I was bringing it to you as a drink-offering, in the hope that you would take compassion upon me and further me on my way home, whereas all you do is to go on ramping and raving most intolerably. You ought to be ashamed yourself; how can you expect people to come see you any more if you treat them in this way?"

"He then took the cup and drank. He was so delighted with the taste of the wine that he begged me for another bowl full. 'Be so kind,' he said, 'as to give me some more, and tell me your name at once. I want to make you a present that you will be glad to have. We have wine even in this country, for our soil grows grapes and the sun ripens them, but this drinks like nectar and ambrosia all in one.'

"I then gave him some more; three times did I fill the bowl for him, and three times did he drain it without thought or heed; then, when I saw that the wine had got into his head, I said to him as plausibly as I could: 'Cyclops, you ask my name and I will tell it you; give me, therefore, the present you promised me; my name is No-man; this is what my father and mother and my friends have always called me.'

"But the cruel wretch said, 'Then I will eat all No-man's comrades before No-man himself, and will keep No-man for the last. This is the present that I will make him.'

... Presently he turned sick, and threw up both wine and the gobbets of human flesh on which he had been gorging, for he was very drunk. Then I thrust the beam of wood far into the embers to heat it, and encouraged my men lest any of them should turn faint-hearted. When the wood, green though it was, was about to blaze, I drew it out of the fire glowing with heat, and my men gathered round me, for heaven had filled their hearts with courage. We drove the sharp end of the beam into the monster's eye, and bearing upon it with all my weight I kept turning it round and round as though I were boring a hole in a ship's plank with an auger, which two men with a wheel and strap can keep on turning as long as they choose. Even thus did we bore the red hot beam into his eye, till the boiling blood bubbled all over it as we worked it round and round, so that the steam from the burning eyeball scalded his eyelids and eyebrows, and the roots of the eye sputtered in the fire. As a blacksmith plunges an axe or hatchet into cold water to temper it- for it is this that gives strength to the iron- and it makes a great hiss as he does so, even thus did the Cyclops' eye hiss round the beam of olive wood, and his hideous yells made the cave ring again. We ran away in a fright, but he plucked the beam all besmirched with gore from his eye, and hurled it from him in a frenzy of rage and pain, shouting as he did so to the other Cyclopes who lived on the bleak headlands near him; so they gathered from all quarters round his cave when they heard him crying, and asked what was the matter with him.

"What ails you, Polyphemos,' said they, 'that you make such a noise, breaking the stillness of the night, and preventing us from being able to sleep? Surely no man is carrying off your sheep? Surely no man is trying to kill you either by fraud or by force?"

"But Polyphemos shouted to them from inside the cave, 'No-man is killing me by fraud! No-man is killing me by force!"

"Then,' said they, 'if no man is attacking you, you must be ill; when Jove makes people ill, there is no help for it, and you had better pray to your father Poseidon.'

"Then they went away, and I laughed inwardly at the success of my clever stratagem, but the Cyclops, groaning and in an agony of pain, felt about with his hands till he found the stone and took it from the door; then he sat in the doorway and stretched his hands in front of it to catch anyone going out with the sheep, for he thought I might be foolish enough to attempt this.

"As for myself I kept on puzzling to think how I could best save my own life and those of my companions; I schemed and schemed, as one who knows that his life depends upon it, for the danger was very great. In the end I deemed that this plan would be the best. The male sheep were well grown, and carried a heavy black fleece, so I bound them noiselessly in threes together, with some of the withies on which the wicked monster used to sleep. There was to be a man under the middle sheep, and the two on either side were to cover him, so that there were three sheep to each man. As for myself there was a ram finer than any of the others, so I caught hold of him by the back, ensconced myself in the thick wool under his belly, and flung on patiently to his fleece, face upwards, keeping a firm hold on it all the time.

"Thus, then, did we wait in great fear of mind till morning came, but when the child of morning, rosy-fingered Dawn, appeared, the male sheep hurried out to feed, while the ewes remained bleating about the pens waiting to be milked, for their udders were full to bursting; but their master in spite of all his pain felt the backs of all the sheep as they stood upright, without being sharp enough to find out that the men were underneath their bellies. As the ram was going out, last of all, heavy with its fleece and with the weight of my crafty self; Polyphemos laid hold of it and said:

"My good ram, what is it that makes you the last to leave my cave this morning? You are not wont to let the ewes go before you, but lead the mob with a run whether to flowery mead or bubbling fountain, and are the first to come home again at night; but now you lag last of all. Is it because you know your master has lost his eye, and are sorry because that wicked No-man and his horrid crew have got him down in his drink and blinded him? But I will have his life yet. If you could understand and talk, you would tell me where the wretch is hiding, and I would dash his brains upon the ground till they flew all over the cave. I should thus have some satisfaction for the harm a this

no-good No-man has done me.'

"As spoke he drove the ram outside, but when we were a little way out from the cave and yards, I first got from under the ram's belly, and then freed my comrades; as for the sheep, which were very fat, by constantly heading them in the right direction we managed to drive them down to the ship. The crew rejoiced greatly at seeing those of us who had escaped death, but wept for the others whom the Cyclops had killed. However, I made signs to them by nodding and frowning that they were to hush their crying, and told them to get all the sheep on board at once and put out to sea; so they went aboard, took their places, and smote the grey sea with their oars. Then, when I had got as far out as my voice would reach, I began to jeer at the Cyclops.

"'Cyclops,' said I, 'you should have taken better measure of your man before eating up his comrades in your cave. You wretch, eat up your visitors in your own house? You might have known that your sin would find you out, and now Jove and the other gods have punished you.'

"He got more and more furious as he heard me, so he tore the top from off a high mountain, and flung it just in front of my ship so that it was within a little of hitting the end of the rudder. The sea quaked as the rock fell into it, and the wash of the wave it raised carried us back towards the mainland, and forced us towards the shore. But I snatched up a long pole and kept the ship off, making signs to my men by nodding my head that they must row for their lives, whereon they laid out with a will. When we had got twice as far as we were before, I was for jeering at the Cyclops again, but the men begged and prayed of me to hold my tongue.

... 'Cyclops, if anyone asks you who it was that put your eye out and spoiled your beauty, say it was the valiant warrior Odysseus, who lives in Ithaca.'

"On this he groaned, and cried out, 'Alas, alas, then the old prophecy about me is coming true. There was a prophet here, at one time, a man both brave and of great stature, Telemus son of Eurymus, who was an excellent seer, and did all the prophesying for the Cyclopes till he grew old; he told me that all this would happen to me some day, and said I should lose my sight by the hand of Odysseus. I have been all along expecting some one of imposing presence and superhuman strength, whereas he turns out to be a little insignificant weakling, who has managed to blind my eye by taking advantage of me in my drink; come here, then, Odysseus, that I may make you presents to show my hospitality, and urge Poseidon to help you forward on your journey- for Poseidon and I are father and son...

"Then I said, 'I wish I could be as sure of killing you outright and sending you down to the house of Hades, as I am that it will take more than Poseidon to cure that eye of yours.'

"On this he lifted up his hands to the firmament of heaven and prayed, saying, 'Hear me, great Poseidon; if I am indeed your own true-begotten son, grant that Odysseus may never reach his home alive; or if he must get back to his friends at last, let him do so late and in sore plight after losing all his men [let him reach his home in another man's ship and find trouble in his house.'

"Thus did he pray, and Poseidon heard his prayer. Then he picked up a rock much larger than the first, swung it aloft and hurled it with prodigious force. It fell just short of the ship, but was within a little of hitting the end of the rudder. The sea quaked as the rock fell into it, and the wash of the wave it raised drove us onwards on our way towards the shore of the island.

"When at last we got to the island where we had left the rest of our ships, we found our comrades lamenting us, and anxiously awaiting our return. We ran our vessel upon the sands and got out of her on to the sea shore; we also landed the Cyclops' sheep, and divided them equitably amongst us so that none might have reason to complain. As for the ram, my companions agreed that I should have it as an extra share; so I sacrificed it on the sea shore, and burned its thigh bones to Jove, who is the lord of all. But he heeded not my sacrifice, and only thought how he might destroy my ships and my comrades.

Homer, The Odyssey, Book IX, approx. 9th century BCE

The Trojan War...

For over 27 centuries, the story of the war between Mycenaean Greeks and Trojans has been told and retold down through the generations. Most people know the basics. According to the story, Helen of Sparta, said to be the most beautiful woman who ever lived, was kidnapped (or went willingly – it depends on who is telling the story) and taken to Troy, another city in the Greek World. The problem was that Helen was married to a Greek/Spartan king, Menelaus. Paris, son of the king of Troy, was promised by the goddess Aphrodite that he could have Helen. After she was abducted, the Greeks rallied an army and sailed for Troy (hence the idea that Helen was the woman whose "face launched a thousand ships"). After much bloodshed and a ten year siege during which the Greeks and Trojans slaughtered much of each other's armies, the Greek war hero Achilles kills Hector, brother of Paris. Paris then gets his revenge by killing Achilles with an arrow (possibly through the tendon by his heel that now bears his name, but this is unclear in the original story).

The first part of the story ends with the Trojan War still raging, but eventually the Greeks come up with an ingenious plan for victory. Rather than use their brawn to overpower the city, the Greeks instead build a wooden horse. The Trojans believe it is a peace offering and that the Greeks are surrendering, so they bring the horse inside the city walls. Little do they know that thirty Greek soldiers are hiding inside the wooden beast. As the story goes, the Trojans celebrate their supposed victory with copious amounts of alcohol, partying long into the night. When everyone passes out, the Greek soldiers quietly left the horse, opened up the city gates (allowing their comrades to rush in), and the sack of Troy was on. Helen, for her part, was taken back to Sparta.

The most commonly cited sources on the Trojan War are the 8th century BCE ancient Greek epic poems The Iliad and the Odyssey. According to most traditions surrounding them, the poems were written by Homer, a blind poet. The problem with that tradition is that Homer may or may not have even existed. Very little is known about the supposed author himself. Stories of Homer, some written hundreds of years after his death, vary in their descriptions, and there may even be an issue with translations from Ancient Greek to other languages. It is probable that the stories of Homer's life (or whoever wrote the

poems) were told and retold as oral traditions over the span of time and that they may have been changed or consolidated along the way. What we do know is that by the time of the Classical Greek Age (4th and 5th centuries BCE), the Iliad and the Odyssey were established tales probably known to all Greek citizens. Homer's legacy by that time was secure, as most Greeks believed him to be the father of their entire collection of heroic literature (most scholars no longer hold this view). The Odyssey, Part 2 of the series by Homer, makes a brief reference to the story of the Trojan Horse, the Greek victory over Troy, and the return trip home back to Ithaca by Odysseus and his men, a journey where the Greeks will face the wrath of mythical creatures and gods along the way. In the story, Odysseus and his men leave Troy after 10 years of fighting, eager to return home to their kingdom (Ithaca) and their women. Unfortunately, they must pass through a series of trials along the way, including dealing with Poseidon's son, a giant man-eating Cyclops, and sirens who would kill them as they crisscross their way around the sea looking for their homeland. Odysseus even ends up traveling to Hades itself on the way. In the end, only Odysseus makes it home. The journey takes ten years (wow... talk about a need for GPS).

Through the investigation of selected primary and secondary sources, including readings from the Odyssey students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain the story of Odysseus and his trip home from Troy as told in Homer's epic poem the Odyssey, the role gods and goddesses play in the story through their interaction with humans, how the poem set the standard for the ideal Greek epic hero in battle, and why the story is seen as important to the development of Western literature.

Objectives

1. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain the story of Odysseus and his trip home from Troy as told in Homer's epic poem the Odyssey.
2. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain the role different gods and goddesses play in the Odyssey through their interaction with humans.
3. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain how through the Odyssey Homer set a new standard for the ideal Greek epic hero in battle.
4. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain why the Odyssey is seen as important to the development of western literature.

Procedures

I. Anticipatory Set

- Writing / Question: What do most people know from the story of Odysseus and the Trojan War? (5 min)
- Handouts – Copies of documents and readings from the websites listed. (5 min)

II. Body of Lesson

- Lecture / PPT – Trojan War and Homer's Odyssey (20 min)
- Video – The Odyssey (20 min)
- Independent Activity – Students read the articles and sources on the Trojan War and Homer's Odyssey, taking notes as appropriate. (20 min)
- Suggestion: Have the students read some of these articles and sources for homework before class.
- Suggestion: Advanced / AP students should focus on reading the text itself along with secondary sources so they can understand it. See the links section below for websites appropriate to this task.
- Group Activity – Socratic Seminar: Discussion on the Odyssey (15 min)

III. Closure

- Assessment / DBQ – Essay: Explain in detail of Odysseus and his trip home from Troy as told in Homer's epic poem the Odyssey, the role gods and goddesses play in the story through their interaction with humans, how the poem set the standard for the ideal Greek epic hero in battle, and why the story is seen as important to the development of western literature.

Extension

On tour: Ancient Troy, Turkey

While on tour, students traveling to Turkey can visit the city of Ancient Troy where they can see for themselves where the Trojan War took place over 3000 years ago. In addition to being a Turkish national park, the site is now on the world heritage list of UNESCO. At the entrance to the site is a large wooden horse students can climb into (if it's not too crowded – the site is a heavy tourist attraction). To the southeast of the city is Mount Ida. According to Homer's epic, it was from Mount Ida that the gods and goddesses watched the war unfold (sometimes interfering as well).

Web Links

Lesson Plan Websites

- classics.mit.edu/Homer/odyssey.html
The Odyssey by Homer (primary source) – full text at the Internet classics Archive at MIT
- www.theoi.com/Text/HomerOdyssey1.html
Odyssey by Homer (primary source) – selected excerpts from the Theoi Greek Mythology Website
- www.sparknotes.com/lit/odyssey/
The Odyssey (website) – from Sparknotes. General overview of each book. A useful tool for students doing a full reading of Homer's poem.
- learner.org/courses/worldlit/odyssey/
The Odyssey (website) – from the Annenberg Lerner website for teacher resources and professional development. Great site with a good deal of information on the Odyssey as a story and how to teach it. Highly recommended for all teachers and AP/Advanced students.
- faculty.pingry.k12.nj.us/mdantoni/Documents/English%209%20Internet%20Documents/Odyssey/OdysseyStudyGuide.doc
Study Guide for Homer's Odyssey (MS WORD Document) – from Molly D'Antonio, English teacher at the Pingry School (NJ). Outstanding study guide that is easy for students to follow. Highly recommended for students and teachers.
- www.temple.edu/classics/odysseyho/index.html
Study guide for reading Homer's Odyssey (web article) – from Robin Mitchell-Boyask, Professor of classics at Temple University.
- www.slideshare.net/mattleisen/homers-the-odyssey
Homer's the Odyssey (PowerPoint)
- www.teachingchannel.org/videos/choosing-primary-source-documents?fd=1
Reading Like a Historian: Primary Source Documents (video). Great 2-minute video on how to incorporate primary sources into the Common Core and history classes. From Shilpa Duvor of Summit Preparatory Charter High School in Redwood City, CA – highly recommended for teachers.
- www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/greece/7962445/Greeks-discover-Odysseus-palace-in-Ithaca-proving-Homers-hero-was-real.html
Greeks Discover Odysseus Palace in Ithaca, proving Homer's hero was real (web article). From the Guardian newspaper (UK).
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=BCXRxD85Xc0 (Part 1)
www.youtube.com/watch?v=kjOK8OpuK0I (Part 2)
www.youtube.com/watch?v=d8XKXsnmqS4 (Part 3)
Video Sparknotes: Homer's The Odyssey Summary (video)
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=TpBVuH1Wv-8 (Part 1)
www.youtube.com/watch?v=TptGXtA1MKw (Part 2)
Clash of the Gods: Odysseus (video) – from the History Channel. At 90 minutes long (both parts), this video is probably too long for most in-class showings, but it is well worth it. Highly recommended for out-of-class assignments for students studying Homer's epics, especially those in AP or Advanced classes.

Background Information

- www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Odyssey
Odyssey – Wikipedia article
- www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Homer
Homer – Wikipedia article
- www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trojan_War
Trojan War – Wikipedia article
- www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Odysseus
Odysseus – Wikipedia article
- www.passports.com/group_leaders/on_the_road/greece/country_profile
On the Road: Greece – from Passports Educational Travel

Other Relevant Passports Lesson Plans

- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/greece/ancient-greece-homer-iliad
Ancient Greece – Homer's Iliad
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/greece/ancient-greece-homer-odyssey
Ancient Greece – Homer's Odyssey
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/greece/ancient-greece-minoan-civilization
Ancient Greece – Minoan Civilization on Crete
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/greece/classical-greece-alexander-the-great
Classical Greece (4th/5th Centuries BCE) – Alexander the Great
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/greece/classical-greece-sparta
Classical Greece (4th/5th Centuries BCE) – Sparta
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/greece/classical-greece-athens-democracy
Classical Greece (4th/5th Centuries BCE) – Athens
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/greece/classical-greece-battle-of-marathon
Classical Greece (4th/5th Centuries BCE) – Battle of Marathon 490 BCE
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/greece/classical-greece-battle-of-thermopylae
Classical Greece (4th/5th Centuries BCE) – Battle of Thermopylae: Leonidas and the 300
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/greece/plato-allegory-of-the-cave
Classical Greece (4th/5th Centuries BCE) – Plato: Allegory of the Cave
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/greece/classical-greece-plato-euthyphro
Classical Greece (4th/5th Centuries BCE) – Plato: Euthyphro
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/greece/plato-republic-philosopher-kings

- Classical Greece (4th/5th Centuries BCE) – Plato: Philosopher Kings and the Republic
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/greece/classical-greece-socrates
- Classical Greece (4th/5th Centuries BCE) – Socrates: Father of Western Philosophy

Key Terms

- Ancient Greece
- Cyclops
- Epic poetry
- Hades
- Homer (poet)
- Odysseus
- Odyssey
- Sirens
- Trojan War
- Troy

