

PART ONE: THE WANDERINGS OF ODYSSEUS

BOOK 1:

A Goddess Intervenes

Sing in me, Muse, and through me tell the story
of that man skilled in all ways of contending,
the wanderer, **harried** for years on end,
after he plundered the stronghold
5 on the proud height of Troy.

He saw the townlands
and learned the minds of many distant men,
and weathered many bitter nights and days
in his deep heart at sea, while he fought only
to save his life, to bring his shipmates home.
10 But not by will nor valor could he save them,
for their own recklessness destroyed them all—
children and fools, they killed and feasted on
the cattle of Lord Helios, the Sun,
and he who moves all day through heaven
15 took from their eyes the dawn of their return. **A**

Of these adventures, Muse, daughter of Zeus,
tell us in our time, lift the great song again. . . .

The story of Odysseus begins with the goddess Athena's appealing to Zeus to help Odysseus, who has been wandering for ten years on the seas, to find his way home to his family on Ithaca. While Odysseus has been gone, his son, Telemachus, has grown to manhood and his wife, Penelope, has been besieged by suitors wishing to marry her and gain Odysseus' wealth. The suitors have taken up residence in her home and are constantly feasting on the family's cattle, sheep, and goats. They dishonor Odysseus and his family. Taking Athena's advice, Telemachus travels to Pylos for word of his father. Meanwhile, on Ithaca, the evil suitors plot to kill Telemachus when he returns.

1 Muse: a daughter of Zeus, credited with divine inspiration.

harried (hă'r'ēd) *adj.* tormented;
harassed **harry** *v.*

11–13 their own recklessness . . . the Sun:
a reference to an event occurring later
in the poem—an event that causes the
death of Odysseus' entire crew.

A EPIC HERO

This invocation (lines 1–15)
introduces us to Odysseus,
“that man skilled in all ways of
contending.” What **traits** is he
shown to have?

Analyze Visuals ▶

This 1930s print, *The Ship of Odysseus*, is part of an *Odyssey* series by Francois-Louis Schmied. What qualities of this ship has Schmied emphasized with his use of color and shape? Explain.



BOOK 5:

Calypso, the Sweet Nymph

For seven of the ten years Odysseus has spent wandering the Mediterranean Sea, he has been held captive by the goddess Calypso on her island. As Book 5 begins, Zeus sends the god Hermes to tell Calypso to release Odysseus. However, she is only to help him build a raft. He must sail for 20 days before landing on the island of Scheria, where he will be helped in his effort to return home.

No words were lost on Hermes the Wayfinder,
who bent to tie his beautiful sandals on,
ambrosial, golden, that carry him over water
or over endless land in a swish of the wind,
5 and took the wand with which he charms asleep—
or when he wills, awake—the eyes of men.
So wand in hand he paced into the air,
shot from Pieria down, down to sea level,
and veered to skim the swell. A gull patrolling
10 between the wave crests of the desolate sea
will dip to catch a fish, and douse his wings;
no higher above the whitecaps Hermes flew **B**
until the distant island lay ahead,
then rising shoreward from the violet ocean
15 he stepped up to the cave. Divine Calypso,
the mistress of the isle, was now at home.
Upon her hearthstone a great fire blazing
scented the farthest shores with cedar smoke
and smoke of thyme, and singing high and low
20 in her sweet voice, before her loom a-weaving,
she passed her golden shuttle to and fro.
A deep wood grew outside, with summer leaves
of alder and black poplar, pungent cypress.
Ornate birds here rested their stretched wings—
25 horned owls, falcons, cormorants—long-tongued
beachcombing birds, and followers of the sea.
Around the smoothwalled cave a crooking vine
held purple clusters under ply of green;
and four springs, bubbling up near one another
30 shallow and clear, took channels here and there
through beds of violets and tender parsley.

1–6 Hermes (hûr'mēz): the messenger of the gods, also known for his cleverness and trickery.

8 Pieria (pī-îr'ē-ə): an area next to Mount Olympus, home of the gods.

B EPIC SIMILE

Identify the epic simile in lines 9–12. What does this comparison tell you about Hermes?

Analyze Visuals ▶

How has the painter characterized Calypso in this 1906 portrait? Consider any relationship between her white dress and the white clouds.

28 purple clusters: grapes.

Even a god who found this place
would gaze, and feel his heart beat with delight:
so Hermes did; but when he had gazed his fill
35 he entered the wide cave. Now face to face
the magical Calypso recognized him,
as all immortal gods know one another
on sight—though seeming strangers, far from home.
But he saw nothing of the great Odysseus,
40 who sat apart, as a thousand times before,
and racked his own heart groaning, with eyes wet
scanning the bare horizon of the sea. . . .

Calypso invites Hermes to her table for food and drink, asking why he has come. Hermes explains that he has brought with an order from Zeus that Calypso must not detain Odysseus any longer but send him on his way home. She reluctantly obeys, agreeing to offer Odysseus her advice about how to get home.

The strong god glittering left her as he spoke,
and now her ladyship, having given heed
45 to Zeus’s mandate, went to find Odysseus
in his stone seat to seaward—tear on tear
brimming in his eyes. The sweet days of his life time
were running out in anguish over his exile,
for long ago the nymph had ceased to please.
50 Though he fought shy of her and her desire,
he lay with her each night, for she compelled him.
But when day came he sat on the rocky shore
and broke his own heart groaning, with eyes wet
scanning the bare horizon of the sea. ©
55 Now she stood near him in her beauty, saying:

“O forlorn man, be still.
Here you need grieve no more; you need not feel
your life consumed here; I have pondered it,
and I shall help you go. . . .”

60 Swiftly she turned and led him to her cave,
and they went in, the mortal and immortal.
He took the chair left empty now by Hermes,
where the divine Calypso placed before him
victuals and drink of men; then she sat down
65 facing Odysseus, while her serving maids
brought nectar and ambrosia to her side.
Then each one’s hands went out on each one’s feast
until they had their pleasure; and she said:

© **EPIC HERO**

Reread lines 43–54. Which of Odysseus’ qualities is emphasized here?

“Son of Laertes, versatile Odysseus,
70 after these years with me, you still desire
your old home? Even so, I wish you well.
If you could see it all, before you go—
all the adversity you face at sea—
you would stay here, and guard this house, and be
75 immortal—though you wanted her forever,
that bride for whom you pine each day.
Can I be less desirable than she is?
Less interesting? Less beautiful? Can mortals
compare with goddesses in grace and form?”

80 To this the strategist Odysseus answered:

“My lady goddess, here is no cause for anger.
My quiet Penelope—how well I know—
would seem a shade before your majesty,
death and old age being unknown to you,
85 while she must die. Yet, it is true, each day
I long for home, long for the sight of home. . . .”

With Calypso’s help, Odysseus builds a raft and sets out to sea. For 17 days he sails until he is in sight of Scheria. For 3 more days he is pummeled by storms and finally swims for the island. He makes it safely ashore and crawls to rest under some bushes.

A man in a distant field, no hearthfires near,
will hide a fresh brand in his bed of embers
to keep a spark alive for the next day;
90 so in the leaves Odysseus hid himself,
while over him Athena showered sleep
that his distress should end, and soon, soon.
In quiet sleep she sealed his cherished eyes.

COMMON CORE L4

Language Coach

Roots and Affixes A word’s root often suggests the word’s meaning. The Latin root *versare*, from which *versatile* (line 69) is derived, means “to turn often.” What do you think *versatile* means?

D EPITHET

Reread Odysseus’ answer to Calypso in lines 81–86. Why do you think he is referred to in line 80 as “the strategist Odysseus”? Explain.

BOOK 9:

New Coasts and Poseidon's Son

In Books 6–8, Odysseus is welcomed by King Alcinous, who gives a banquet in his honor. That night the king begs Odysseus to tell who he is and what has happened to him. In Books 9–12, Odysseus relates to the king his adventures.

“I AM LAERTES’ SON”

“What shall I
say first? What shall I keep until the end?
The gods have tried me in a thousand ways.
But first my name: let that be known to you,
5 and if I pull away from pitiless death,
friendship will bind us, though my land lies far.

I am Laertes’ son, Odysseus.

Men hold me
formidable for guile in peace and war:
this fame has gone abroad to the sky’s rim.
10 My home is on the peaked sea-mark of Ithaca
under Mount Neion’s wind-blown robe of leaves,
in sight of other islands—Dulichium,
Same, wooded Zacynthus—Ithaca
being most lofty in that coastal sea,
15 and northwest, while the rest lie east and south.
A rocky isle, but good for a boy’s training;
I shall not see on earth a place more dear,
though I have been detained long by Calypso,
loveliest among goddesses, who held me
20 in her smooth caves, to be her heart’s delight,
as Circe of Aeaëa, the enchantress,
desired me, and detained me in her hall.
But in my heart I never gave consent.
Where shall a man find sweetness to surpass
25 his own home and his parents? In far lands
he shall not, though he find a house of gold. **E**

Analyze Visuals ▶

How would you describe the expression on Odysseus’ face in this sculpture?

7–8 hold me formidable for guile: consider me impressive for my cunning and craftiness.

11–13 Mount Neion’s (nē’ōnz’); **Dulichium** (dōō-līk’ē-əm); **Same** (sā’mē); **Zacynthus** (zē-sīn’tēs).

18–26 Odysseus refers to two beautiful goddesses, Calypso and Circe, who have delayed him on their islands. (Details about Circe appear in Book 10.) At the same time, he seems nostalgic for his family and homeland, from which he has been separated for 18 years—10 of them spent fighting in Troy.

E EPIC HERO

Reread lines 24–26. What does Odysseus value most highly?

What of my sailing, then, from Troy?
What of those years
of rough adventure, weathered under Zeus? . . .”

Odysseus explains that soon after leaving Troy, he and his crew land near Ismarus, the city of the Cicones. The Cicones are allies of the Trojans and therefore enemies of Odysseus. Odysseus and his crew raid the Cicones, robbing and killing them, until the Ciconian army kills 72 of Odysseus’ men and drives the rest out to sea. Delayed by a storm for two days, Odysseus and his remaining companions then continued their journey.

THE LOTUS EATERS

“I might have made it safely home, that time,
30 but as I came round Malea the current
took me out to sea, and from the north
a fresh gale drove me on, past Cythera.
Nine days I drifted on the teeming sea
before dangerous high winds. Upon the tenth
35 we came to the coastline of the Lotus Eaters,
who live upon that flower. We landed there
to take on water. All ships’ companies
mustered alongside for the mid-day meal.
Then I sent out two picked men and a runner
40 to learn what race of men that land sustained.
They fell in, soon enough, with Lotus Eaters,
who showed no will to do us harm, only
offering the sweet Lotus to our friends—
but those who ate this honeyed plant, the Lotus,
45 never cared to report, nor to return:
they longed to stay forever, browsing on
that native bloom, forgetful of their homeland.
I drove them, all three wailing, to the ships,
tied them down under their rowing benches,
50 and called the rest: ‘All hands aboard;
come, clear the beach and no one taste
the Lotus, or you lose your hope of home.’
Filing in to their places by the rowlocks
my oarsmen dipped their long oars in the surf,
55 and we moved out again on our sea faring.

THE CYCLOPS

In the next land we found were Cyclopes,
giants, louts, without a law to bless them.
In ignorance leaving the fruitage of the earth in mystery
to the immortal gods, they neither plow

30 **Malea** (mä-lē’ä).

32 **Cythera** (sĭ-thĭr’ə).

38 **mustered**: assembled; gathered.

COMMON CORE L 4c

Language Coach

Synonyms Words with the same meaning are called **synonyms**. Reread line 40. Another way to say this line is “to learn what race of people lived there.” What synonym could you substitute for *sustained* in line 40? Refer to a thesaurus if you need help.

44–52 **those who ate . . . hope of home.**
How do the Lotus Eaters pose a threat to Odysseus and his men?

56 **Cyclopes** (sĭ-klō’pēz): refers to the creatures in plural; *Cyclops* is singular.

60 nor sow by hand, nor till the ground, though grain—
wild wheat and barley—grows untended, and
wine-grapes, in clusters, ripen in heaven's rain.
Cyclopes have no muster and no meeting,
no consultation or old tribal ways,
65 but each one dwells in his own mountain cave
dealing out rough justice to wife and child,
indifferent to what the others do. . . .”

58–67 *Why doesn't Odysseus respect the Cyclopes?*

Across the bay from the land of the Cyclopes was a lush, deserted island. Odysseus and his crew landed on the island in a dense fog and spent days feasting on wine and wild goats and observing the mainland, where the Cyclopes lived. On the third day, Odysseus and his company of men set out to learn if the Cyclopes were friends or foes.

“When the young Dawn with finger tips of rose **F**
came in the east, I called my men together
70 and made a speech to them:

F EPITHET
Notice the descriptive phrase used to characterize the dawn in line 68. What does this description tell you about the dawn?

‘Old shipmates, friends,
the rest of you stand by; I’ll make the crossing
in my own ship, with my own company,
and find out what the mainland natives are—
for they may be wild savages, and lawless,
75 or hospitable and god fearing men.’

At this I went aboard, and gave the word
to cast off by the stern. My oarsmen followed,
filing in to their benches by the rowlocks,
and all in line dipped oars in the gray sea.

77 **stern:** the rear end of a ship.

80 As we rowed on, and nearer to the mainland,
at one end of the bay, we saw a cavern
yawning above the water, screened with laurel,
and many rams and goats about the place
inside a sheepfold—made from slabs of stone
85 earthfast between tall trunks of pine and rugged
towering oak trees.

82 **screened with laurel:** partially hidden by laurel trees.

A prodigious man
slept in this cave alone, and took his flocks
to graze afield—remote from all companions,
knowing none but savage ways, a brute
90 so huge, he seemed no man at all of those
who eat good wheaten bread; but he seemed rather
a shaggy mountain reared in solitude.
We beached there, and I told the crew

91–92 *What does Odysseus' metaphor imply about the Cyclops?*

to stand by and keep watch over the ship;
95 as for myself I took my twelve best fighters
and went ahead. I had a goatskin full
of that sweet liquor that Euanthes' son,
Maron, had given me. He kept Apollo's
holy grove at Ismarus; for kindness
100 we showed him there, and showed his wife and child,
he gave me seven shining golden talents
perfectly formed, a solid silver winebowl,
and then this liquor—twelve two-handled jars
of brandy, pure and fiery. Not a slave
105 in Maron's household knew this drink; only
he, his wife and the storeroom mistress knew;
and they would put one cupful—ruby-colored,
honey-smooth—in twenty more of water,
but still the sweet scent hovered like a fume
110 over the winebowl. No man turned away
when cups of this came round.

A wineskin full

I brought along, and victuals in a bag,
for in my bones I knew some towering brute
would be upon us soon—all outward power,
115 a wild man, ignorant of civility.

We climbed, then, briskly to the cave. But Cyclops
had gone afield, to pasture his fat sheep,
so we looked round at everything inside:
a drying rack that sagged with cheeses, pens
120 crowded with lambs and kids, each in its class:
firstlings apart from middlings, and the 'dewdrops,'
or newborn lambkins, penned apart from both.
And vessels full of whey were brimming there—
bowls of earthenware and pails for milking.
125 My men came pressing round me, pleading:

'Why not

take these cheeses, get them stowed, come back,
throw open all the pens, and make a run for it?
We'll drive the kids and lambs aboard. We say
put out again on good salt water!'

Ah,

130 how sound that was! Yet I refused. I wished
to see the caveman, what he had to offer—
no pretty sight, it turned out, for my friends.

97–98 Euanthes (yōō-ăn'thêz); **Maron** (mâr'ôn').

101 talents: bars of gold or silver of a specified weight, used as money in ancient Greece.

112 victuals (vīt'lz): food.

121–122 The Cyclops has separated his lambs into three age groups.

123 whey: the watery part of milk, which separates from the curds, or solid part, during the making of cheese.

129 good salt water: the open sea.

130–132 *Why does Odysseus refuse his men's "sound" request?*

We lit a fire, burnt an offering,
and took some cheese to eat; then sat in silence
135 around the embers, waiting. When he came
he had a load of dry boughs on his shoulder
to stoke his fire at suppertime. He dumped it
with a great crash into that hollow cave,
and we all scattered fast to the far wall.
140 Then over the broad cavern floor he ushered
the ewes he meant to milk. He left his rams
and he-goats in the yard outside, and swung
high overhead a slab of solid rock
to close the cave. Two dozen four-wheeled wagons,
145 with heaving wagon teams, could not have stirred
the tonnage of that rock from where he wedged it
over the doorsill. Next he took his seat
and milked his bleating ewes. A practiced job
he made of it, giving each ewe her suckling;
150 thickened his milk, then, into curds and whey,
sieved out the curds to drip in withy baskets,
and poured the whey to stand in bowls
cooling until he drank it for his supper.
When all these chores were done, he poked the fire,
155 heaping on brushwood. In the glare he saw us.

‘Strangers,’ he said, ‘who are you? And where from?
What brings you here by sea ways—a fair traffic?
Or are you wandering rogues, who cast your lives
like dice, and ravage other folk by sea?’

160 We felt a pressure on our hearts, in dread
of that deep rumble and that mighty man.
But all the same I spoke up in reply:

‘We are from Troy, Achaeans, blown off course
by shifting gales on the Great South Sea;
165 homeward bound, but taking routes and ways
uncommon; so the will of Zeus would have it.
We served under Agamemnon, son of Atreus—
the whole world knows what city
he laid waste, what armies he destroyed. **G**
170 It was our luck to come here; here we stand,
beholden for your help, or any gifts
you give—as custom is to honor strangers.
We would entreat you, great Sir, have a care
for the gods’ courtesy; Zeus will avenge
175 the unoffending guest.’

133 burnt an offering: burned a portion of the food as an offering to secure the gods’ goodwill. (Such offerings were frequently performed by Greek sailors during difficult journeys.)

151 withy baskets: baskets made from twigs.

157 fair traffic: honest trading.

G ALLUSION

Reread lines 163–169. Agamemnon was the Greek king who led the war against the Trojans. Consider what Odysseus says about Agamemnon; what point is he making about himself by claiming this association?

172–175 It was a sacred Greek custom to honor strangers with food and gifts. Odysseus is reminding the Cyclops that Zeus will punish anyone who mistreats a guest.

He answered this
from his brute chest, unmoved:

‘You are a ninny,
or else you come from the other end of nowhere,
telling me, mind the gods! We Cyclopes
care not a whistle for your thundering Zeus
180 or all the gods in bliss; we have more force by far.
I would not let you go for fear of Zeus—
you or your friends—unless I had a whim to.
Tell me, where was it, now, you left your ship—
around the point, or down the shore, I wonder?’

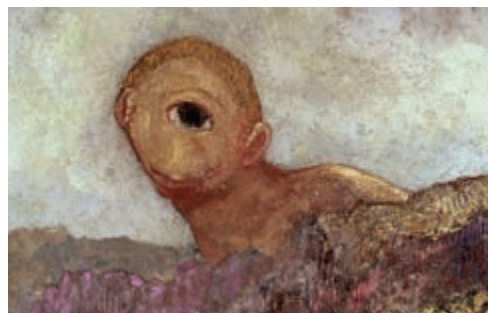
185 He thought he’d find out, but I saw through this,
and answered with a ready lie:

‘My ship?’

Poseidon Lord, who sets the earth a-tremble,
broke it up on the rocks at your land’s end.
A wind from seaward served him, drove us there.
190 We are survivors, these good men and I.’ **H**

Neither reply nor pity came from him,
but in one stride he clutched at my companions
and caught two in his hands like squirming puppies
to beat their brains out, spattering the floor.
195 Then he dismembered them and made his meal,
gaping and crunching like a mountain lion—
everything: innards, flesh, and marrow bones.
We cried aloud, lifting our hands to Zeus,
powerless, looking on at this, **appalled**;
200 but Cyclops went on filling up his belly
with manflesh and great gulps of whey,
then lay down like a mast among his sheep.
My heart beat high now at the chance of action,
and drawing the sharp sword from my hip I went
205 along his flank to stab him where the midriff
holds the liver. I had touched the spot
when sudden fear stayed me: if I killed him
we perished there as well, for we could never
move his **ponderous** doorway slab aside.
210 So we were left to groan and wait for morning.

When the young Dawn with fingertips of rose
lit up the world, the Cyclops built a fire **I**
and milked his handsome ewes, all in due order,



The Cyclops (c. 1914), Odilon Redon. Oil on canvas.
Kroller-Muller Museum, Otterlo, Netherlands.
© Peter Will/SuperStock.

178–182 *What is the Cyclopes’ attitude toward the gods?*

H EPIC HERO

Reread lines 185–190. Why does Odysseus lie to the Cyclops about his ship?

appalled (ə-pôld’) *adj.* filled with dismay; horrified **appall** *v.*

ponderous (pŏn’dər-əs) *adj.* heavy in a clumsy way; bulky

207–210 *Why doesn’t Odysseus kill the Cyclops right now?*

I EPITHET

What **epithet** is repeated in lines 211–212? Look for more repetitions like this one.

putting the sucklings to the mothers. Then,
215 his chores being all dispatched, he caught
another brace of men to make his breakfast,
and whisked away his great door slab
to let his sheep go through—but he, behind,
reset the stone as one would cap a quiver.
220 There was a din of whistling as the Cyclops
rounded his flock to higher ground, then stillness.
And now I pondered how to hurt him worst,
if but Athena granted what I prayed for.
Here are the means I thought would serve my turn:

225 a club, or staff, lay there along the fold—
an olive tree, felled green and left to season
for Cyclops' hand. And it was like a mast
a lugger of twenty oars, broad in the beam—
a deep-sea-going craft—might carry:
230 so long, so big around, it seemed. Now I
chopped out a six foot section of this pole
and set it down before my men, who scraped it;
and when they had it smooth, I hewed again
to make a stake with pointed end. I held this
235 in the fire's heart and turned it, toughening it,
then hid it, well back in the cavern, under
one of the dung piles in **profusion** there.
Now came the time to toss for it: who ventured
along with me? whose hand could bear to thrust
240 and grind that spike in Cyclops' eye, when mild
sleep had mastered him? As luck would have it,
the men I would have chosen won the toss—
four strong men, and I made five as captain.

At evening came the shepherd with his flock,
245 his woolly flock. The rams as well, this time,
entered the cave: by some sheep-herding whim—
or a god's bidding—none were left outside.
He hefted his great boulder into place
and sat him down to milk the bleating ewes
250 in proper order, put the lambs to suck,
and swiftly ran through all his evening chores.
Then he caught two more men and feasted on them.
My moment was at hand, and I went forward
holding an ivy bowl of my dark drink,
255 looking up, saying:

216 **brace:** pair.

218–219 The Cyclops reseals the cave with the massive rock as easily as an ordinary human places the cap on a container of arrows.

226 **left to season:** left to dry out and harden.

228 **lugger:** a small, wide sailing ship.

profusion (prə-fyŏŏ'zhən)
n. abundance

238–243 *What does Odysseus plan to do to the Cyclops?*

Language Coach

Word Definitions The use of words whose sounds echo their meanings, such as *buzz* and *croak*, is called **onomatopoeia**. What word in line 249 is an example of onomatopoeia?

‘Cyclops, try some wine.

Here’s liquor to wash down your scraps of men.
Taste it, and see the kind of drink we carried
under our planks. I meant it for an offering
if you would help us home. But you are mad,
260 unbearable, a bloody monster! After this,
will any other traveller come to see you?’

He seized and drained the bowl, and it went down
so fiery and smooth he called for more:

‘Give me another, thank you kindly. Tell me,
265 how are you called? I’ll make a gift will please you.
Even Cyclopes know the wine-grapes grow
out of grassland and loam in heaven’s rain,
but here’s a bit of nectar and ambrosia!’

Three bowls I brought him, and he poured them down.
270 I saw the fuddle and flush come over him,
then I sang out in cordial tones:

‘Cyclops,

you ask my honorable name? Remember
the gift you promised me, and I shall tell you.
My name is Nohbdy: mother, father, and friends,
275 everyone calls me Nohbdy.’

And he said:

‘Nohbdy’s my meat, then, after I eat his friends.
Others come first. There’s a noble gift, now.’ ❶

Even as he spoke, he reeled and tumbled backward,
his great head lolling to one side: and sleep
280 took him like any creature. Drunk, hiccupping,
he dribbled streams of liquor and bits of men.

Now, by the gods, I drove my big hand spike
deep in the embers, charring it again,
and cheered my men along with battle talk
285 to keep their courage up: no quitting now.
The pike of olive, green though it had been,
reddened and glowed as if about to catch.
I drew it from the coals and my four fellows
gave me a hand, lugging it near the Cyclops
290 as more than natural force nerved them; straight
forward they sprinted, lifted it, and rammed it

255–261 *Why does Odysseus offer the Cyclops the liquor he brought from the ship?*

268 nectar (nĕk’tĕr) **and ambrosia** (ăm-brō’zĕ): the drink and food of the gods.

270 fuddle and flush: the state of confusion and redness of the face caused by drinking alcohol.

❶ **EPIC HERO**

Say the name *Nohbdy* out loud and listen to what it sounds like. What might Odysseus be planning? Consider what this tells you about his **character**.

286 the pike: the pointed stake.

deep in his crater eye, and I leaned on it
turning it as a shipwright turns a drill
in planking, having men below to swing
295 the two-handed strap that spins it in the groove.
So with our brand we bored that great eye socket
while blood ran out around the red hot bar.
Eyelid and lash were seared; the pierced ball
hissed broiling, and the roots popped.

In a smithy

300 one sees a white-hot axehead or an adze
plunged and wrung in a cold tub, screeching steam—
the way they make soft iron hale and hard—:
just so that eyeball hissed around the spike. **K**
The Cyclops bellowed and the rock roared round him,
305 and we fell back in fear. Clawing his face
he tugged the bloody spike out of his eye,
threw it away, and his wild hands went groping;
then he set up a howl for Cyclopes
who lived in caves on windy peaks nearby.
310 Some heard him; and they came by divers ways
to clump around outside and call:

‘What ails you,

Polyphemus? Why do you cry so sore
in the starry night? You will not let us sleep.
Sure no man’s driving off your flock? No man
315 has tricked you, ruined you?’

Out of the cave

the mammoth Polyphemus roared in answer:

‘Nohbdy, Nohbdy’s tricked me, Nohbdy’s ruined me!’

To this rough shout they made a sage reply:

‘Ah well, if nobody has played you foul
320 there in your lonely bed, we are no use in pain
given by great Zeus. Let it be your father,
Poseidon Lord, to whom you pray.’ **L**

So saying

they trailed away. And I was filled with laughter
to see how like a charm the name deceived them.
325 Now Cyclops, wheezing as the pain came on him,
fumbled to wrench away the great doorstone

299 smithy: blacksmith’s shop.

300 adze (ădz): an axlike tool with
a curved blade.

K EPIC SIMILE

Find the epic similes in lines 292–297
and lines 299–303. What two
things are being compared in each
case? What are the effects of this
figurative language?

310 divers: various.

312 Polyphemus (pŏl’ə-fē’məs):
the name of the Cyclops.

318 sage: wise.

319–322 Odysseus’ lie about his
name has paid off. *What do the other
Cyclopes assume to be the source of
Polyphemus’ pain?*

L ALLUSION

What do you learn about
Polyphemus from the allusion
in lines 321–322?

and squatted in the breach with arms thrown wide
 for any silly beast or man who bolted—
 hoping somehow I might be such a fool.
 330 But I kept thinking how to win the game:
 death sat there huge; how could we slip away?
 I drew on all my wits, and ran through tactics,
 reasoning as a man will for dear life,
 until a trick came—and it pleased me well.
 335 The Cyclops' rams were handsome, fat, with heavy
 fleeces, a dark violet. **M**

Three abreast

I tied them silently together, twining
 cords of willow from the ogre's bed;
 then slung a man under each middle one
 340 to ride there safely, shielded left and right.
 So three sheep could convey each man. I took
 the woolliest ram, the choicest of the flock,
 and hung myself under his kinky belly,
 pulled up tight, with fingers twisted deep
 345 in sheepskin ringlets for an iron grip.
 So, breathing hard, we waited until morning.

When Dawn spread out her finger tips of rose
 the rams began to stir, moving for pasture,
 and peals of bleating echoed round the pens
 350 where dams with udders full called for a milking.
 Blinded, and sick with pain from his head wound,
 the master stroked each ram, then let it pass,
 but my men riding on the pectoral fleece
 the giant's blind hands blundering never found.
 355 Last of them all my ram, the leader, came,
 weighted by wool and me with my **meditations**.
 The Cyclops patted him, and then he said:

'Sweet cousin ram, why lag behind the rest
 in the night cave? You never linger so,
 360 but graze before them all, and go afar
 to crop sweet grass, and take your stately way
 leading along the streams, until at evening
 you run to be the first one in the fold.
 Why, now, so far behind? Can you be grieving
 365 over your Master's eye? That carrion rogue
 and his accurst companions burnt it out
 when he had conquered all my wits with wine.
 Nohbdy will not get out alive, I swear.

327 **breach**: opening.

M EPIC HERO

Notice Odysseus' great mental struggle in lines 330–336. As you read on, note the clever plan he has managed to come up with on the spot.

353 **pectoral fleece**: the wool covering a sheep's chest.

meditation (mĕd'ĭ-tā'shən)
n. the act of being in serious, reflective thought

This 1910 color print depicts Odysseus taunting Polyphemus as he and his men make their escape.



Detail of *Odysseus and Polyphemus* (1910), after L. du Bois-Reymond. Color print. From *Sagen des klassischen Altertums* by Karl Becker, Berlin. © akg-images.

Oh, had you brain and voice to tell
370 where he may be now, dodging all my fury!
Bashed by this hand and bashed on this rock wall
his brains would strew the floor, and I should have
rest from the outrage Nohbdy worked upon me.’

He sent us into the open, then. Close by,
375 I dropped and rolled clear of the ram’s belly,
going this way and that to untie the men.
With many glances back, we rounded up
his fat, stiff-legged sheep to take aboard,
and drove them down to where the good ship lay. **N**
380 We saw, as we came near, our fellows’ faces
shining; then we saw them turn to grief
tallying those who had not fled from death.
I hushed them, jerking head and eyebrows up,
and in a low voice told them: ‘Load this herd;
385 move fast, and put the ship’s head toward the breakers.’
They all pitched in at loading, then embarked
and struck their oars into the sea. Far out,
as far off shore as shouted words would carry,
I sent a few back to the **adversary**:

390 ‘O Cyclops! Would you feast on my companions?
Puny, am I, in a Caveman’s hands?
How do you like the beating that we gave you,
you damned cannibal? Eater of guests
under your roof! Zeus and the gods have paid you!’

395 The blind thing in his doubled fury broke
a hilltop in his hands and heaved it after us.
Ahead of our black prow it struck and sank
whelmed in a spuming geyser, a giant wave
that washed the ship stern foremost back to shore.

400 I got the longest boathook out and stood
fending us off, with furious nods to all
to put their backs into a racing stroke—
row, row, or perish. So the long oars bent
kicking the foam sternward, making head
405 until we drew away, and twice as far.
Now when I cupped my hands I heard the crew
in low voices protesting:

‘Godsake, Captain!
Why bait the beast again? Let him alone!’

N EPIC HERO

What **character traits** has Odysseus demonstrated in his dealings with Polyphemus?

385 put . . . the breakers: turn the ship around so that it is heading toward the open sea.

adversary (ăd’vər-sēr’ē)
n. an opponent; enemy

390–394 Odysseus assumes that the gods are on his side.

395–403 The hilltop thrown by Polyphemus lands in front of the ship, causing a huge wave that carries the ship back to the shore. Odysseus uses a long pole to push the boat away from the land.

406 cupped my hands: put his hands on either side of his mouth in order to magnify his voice.

‘That tidal wave he made on the first throw
410 all but beached us.’

‘All but stove us in!’

‘Give him our bearing with your trumpeting,
he’ll get the range and lob a boulder.’

‘Aye

He’ll smash our timbers and our heads together!’

I would not heed them in my glorying spirit,
415 but let my anger flare and yelled:

‘Cyclops,

if ever mortal man inquire
how you were put to shame and blinded, tell him
Odysseus, raider of cities, took your eye:
Laertes’ son, whose home’s on Ithaca!’

420 At this he gave a mighty sob and rumbled:

‘Now comes the weird upon me, spoken of old.
A wizard, grand and wondrous, lived here—Telemus,
a son of Eurymus; great length of days
he had in wizardry among the Cyclopes,
425 and these things he foretold for time to come:
my great eye lost, and at Odysseus’ hands.
Always I had in mind some giant, armed
in giant force, would come against me here.
But this, but you—small, pitiful and twiggy—
430 you put me down with wine, you blinded me.
Come back, Odysseus, and I’ll treat you well,
praying the god of earthquake to befriend you—
his son I am, for he by his avowal
fathered me, and, if he will, he may
435 heal me of this black wound—he and no other
of all the happy gods or mortal men.’

Few words I shouted in reply to him:
‘If I could take your life I would and take
your time away, and hurl you down to hell!
440 The god of earthquake could not heal you there!’

At this he stretched his hands out in his darkness
toward the sky of stars, and prayed Poseidon:

COMMON CORE L 4a

Language Coach

Multiple Meanings The word *stove* has multiple meanings. It can mean “a mechanism used for heating or cooking,” or it can mean “smashed” (as the past tense of *stave*). Which meaning applies in line 410? How can you tell?

EPITHET

Notice that Odysseus uses the warlike **epithet** “raider of cities” in his second boast to the Cyclops. What **trait** does he display in revealing so much about himself?

421 Now comes . . . of old: Now I recall the destiny predicted long ago.

421–430 Now comes . . . you blinded me: Polyphemus tells of a prophecy made long ago by Telemus, a prophet who predicted that Polyphemus would lose his eye at the hands of Odysseus. *How have the actual events turned out differently from what Polyphemus expected?*

432 the god of earthquake: Poseidon.

433 avowal: honest admission.

‘O hear me, lord, blue girdler of the islands,
if I am thine indeed, and thou art father:
445 grant that Odysseus, raider of cities, never
see his home: Laertes’ son, I mean,
who kept his hall on Ithaca. Should destiny
intend that he shall see his roof again
among his family in his father land,
450 far be that day, and dark the years between.
Let him lose all companions, and return
under strange sail to bitter days at home.’ P

In these words he prayed, and the god heard him.
Now he laid hands upon a bigger stone
455 and wheeled around, titanic for the cast,
to let it fly in the black-prowed vessel’s track.
But it fell short, just aft the steering oar,
and whelming seas rose giant above the stone
to bear us onward toward the island.

460 as we ran in we saw the squadron waiting,
the trim ships drawn up side by side, and all
our troubled friends who waited, looking seaward.
We beached her, grinding keel in the soft sand,
and waded in, ourselves, on the sandy beach.
465 Then we unloaded all the Cyclops’ flock
to make division, share and share alike,
only my fighters voted that my ram,
the prize of all, should go to me. I slew him
by the sea side and burnt his long thighbones
470 to Zeus beyond the stormcloud, Cronus’ son,
who rules the world. But Zeus disdained my offering;
destruction for my ships he had in store
and death for those who sailed them, my companions.

Now all day long until the sun went down
475 we made our feast on mutton and sweet wine,
till after sunset in the gathering dark
we went to sleep above the wash of ripples.

When the young Dawn with finger tips of rose
touched the world, I roused the men, gave orders
480 to man the ships, cast off the mooring lines;
and filing in to sit beside the rowlocks
oarsmen in line dipped oars in the gray sea.
So we moved out, sad in the vast offing,
having our precious lives, but not our friends.”

P EPIC HERO

Reread lines 437–452. Paraphrase Polyphemus’ curse. How has Odysseus brought this curse upon himself?

455 titanic for the cast: drawing on all his enormous strength in preparing to throw.

457 aft: behind.

459 the island: the deserted island where most of Odysseus’ men had stayed behind.

There

470 Cronus’ son: Zeus’ father, Cronus, was a Titan, one of an earlier race of gods.

483 offing: the part of the deep sea visible from the shore.

BOOK 10:

Circe, the Grace of the Witch



Detail of *Tilla Durieux as Circe* (c. 1912–1913), Franz von Struck. Oil on paper, 53.5 cm × 46.5 cm. Private collection. © akg-images.

Odysseus and his men next land on the island of Aeolus, the wind king, and stay with him a month. To extend his hospitality, Aeolus gives Odysseus two parting gifts: a fair west wind that will blow the fleet of ships toward Ithaca, and a great bag holding all the unfavorable, stormy winds. Within sight of home, and while Odysseus is sleeping, the men open the bag, thinking it contains gold and silver. The bad winds thus escape and blow the ships back to Aeolus' island. The king refuses to help them again, believing now that their voyage has been cursed by the gods.

The discouraged mariners next stop briefly in the land of the Laestrygones, fierce cannibals who bombard the fleet of ships with boulders. Only Odysseus, his ship, and its crew of 45 survive the shower of boulders. The lone ship then sails to Aea, home of the goddess Circe, who is considered by many to be a witch. There, Odysseus divides his men into two groups. Eurylochus leads one platoon to explore the island, while Odysseus stays behind on the ship with the remaining crew.

“In the wild wood they found an open glade,
around a smooth stone house—the hall of Circe—
and wolves and mountain lions lay there, mild
in her soft spell, fed on her drug of evil.

- 5 None would attack—oh, it was strange, I tell you—
but switching their long tails they faced our men
like hounds, who look up when their master comes
with tidbits for them—as he will—from table.
Humbly those wolves and lions with mighty paws
10 fawned on our men—who met their yellow eyes
and feared them. **ⓐ**

In the entrance way they stayed
to listen there: inside her quiet house
they heard the goddess Circe.

- in her **beguiling** voice, while on her loom
15 she wove ambrosial fabric sheer and bright,

Low she sang

10 fawned on: showed affection for.

ⓐ EPIC SIMILE

In lines 6–11, notice the simile involving Circe's wolves and mountain lions. What is the point of this comparison? How does it affect your impression of Circe's hall?

beguiling (bĕ-gĭ-lĭng) *adj.* charming; pleasing **beguile** *v.*

15 ambrosial: fit for the gods.

by that craft known to the goddesses of heaven.
No one would speak, until Polites—most
faithful and likable of my officers, said:

17 **Polites** (pə-lī'tēz).

'Dear friends, no need for stealth: here's a young weaver
20 singing a pretty song to set the air
a-tingle on these lawns and paven courts.
Goddess she is, or lady. Shall we greet her?'

So reassured, they all cried out together,
and she came swiftly to the shining doors
25 to call them in. All but Eurylochus—
who feared a snare—the innocents went after her.
On thrones she seated them, and lounging chairs,
while she prepared a meal of cheese and barley
and amber honey mixed with Pramnian wine,
30 adding her own vile pinch, to make them lose
desire or thought of our dear father land.

23–26 *If you were among this group, whom would you follow—Polites or Eurylochus? Why?*

Scarce had they drunk when she flew after them
with her long stick and shut them in a pigsty—
bodies, voices, heads, and bristles, all
35 swinish now, though minds were still unchanged.
So, squealing, in they went. And Circe tossed them
acorns, mast, and cornel berries—fodder
for hogs who rut and slumber on the earth.

27–36 *What happens to the men after they drink Circe's magic potion?*

Down to the ship Eurylochus came running
40 to cry alarm, foul magic doomed his men!
But working with dry lips to speak a word
he could not, being so shaken; blinding tears
welled in his eyes; **foreboding** filled his heart.
When we were frantic questioning him, at last
45 we heard the tale: our friends were gone. . . ."

foreboding (fôr-bō'dīng) *n.* a sense of approaching evil

Eurylochus tells Odysseus what has happened and begs him to sail away from Circe's island. Against this advice, however, Odysseus rushes to save his men from the enchantress. On the way, he meets the god Hermes, who gives him a magical plant called moly to protect him from Circe's power. Still, Hermes warns Odysseus that he must make the goddess swear she will play no "witches' tricks." Armed with the moly and Hermes' warning, Odysseus arrives at Circe's palace.

Circe gives Odysseus a magic drink, but it does not affect him and he threatens to kill her with his sword. Circe turns the pigs back into men but puts them all into a trance. They stay for one year, until Odysseus finally begs her to let them go home. She replies that they must first visit the land of the dead and hear a prophecy from the ghost of Tiresias.

BOOK 11:

The Land of the Dead

Odysseus and his crew set out for the land of the dead. They arrive and find the place to which Circe has directed them.

“Then I addressed the blurred and breathless dead,
vowing to slaughter my best heifer for them
before she calved, at home in Ithaca,
and burn the choice bits on the altar fire;
5 as for Tiresias, I swore to sacrifice
a black lamb, handsomest of all our flock.
Thus to **assuage** the nations of the dead
I pledged these rites, then slashed the lamb and ewe,
letting their black blood stream into the wellpit.
10 Now the souls gathered, stirring out of Erebus,
brides and young men, and men grown old in pain,
and tender girls whose hearts were new to grief;
many were there, too, torn by brazen lanceheads,
battle-slain, bearing still their bloody gear.
15 From every side they came and sought the pit
with rustling cries; and I grew sick with fear.
But presently I gave command to my officers
to flay those sheep the bronze cut down, and make
burnt offerings of flesh to the gods below—
20 to sovereign Death, to pale Persephone. **R**
Meanwhile I crouched with my drawn sword to keep
the surging phantoms from the bloody pit
till I should know the presence of Tiresias.

One shade came first—Elpenor, of our company,
25 who lay unburied still on the wide earth
as we had left him—dead in Circe’s hall,
untouched, unmourned, when other cares compelled us.
Now when I saw him there I wept for pity
and called out to him:

assuage (ə-swāj’)
v. to calm or pacify

10 Erebus (ēr’ə-bəs): a region of the land of the dead, also known as the underworld or Hades. Hades is also the name of the god of the underworld.

18 flay: to strip off the outer skin of.

R ALLUSION

In lines 17–20, Odysseus makes a sacrifice to “sovereign Death,” or Hades, and “pale Persephone” (pər-sĕf’ə-nē), his bride, who was kidnapped and forced to live with him for six months of every year. Her mother, goddess of the harvest, grieves during that time, causing winter to fall. What does this background information tell you about Hades? Consider how this information affects your impression of the underworld.



Ulysses Descending into the Underworld (16th century), Giovanni Stradano. Fresco. Palazzo Vecchio, Florence.
Photo © Scala/Art Resource, New York.

‘How is this, Elpenor,
30 how could you journey to the western gloom
swifter afoot than I in the black lugger?’

He sighed, and answered:

‘Son of great Laertes,
Odysseus, master mariner and soldier,
bad luck shadowed me, and no kindly power;
35 ignoble death I drank with so much wine.
I slept on Circe’s roof, then could not see
the long steep backward ladder, coming down,
and fell that height. My neck bone, buckled under,
snapped, and my spirit found this well of dark.
40 Now hear the grace I pray for, in the name
of those back in the world, not here—your wife
and father, he who gave you bread in childhood,
and your own child, your only son, Telemachus,
long ago left at home.

▲ Analyze Visuals

This 16th-century painting illustrates the descent of Ulysses (Odysseus) into the underworld. How has the artist distinguished between Ulysses and the dead, also known as shades?

COMMON CORE L.4b

Language Coach

Roots and Affixes The prefix *in-* (“not”) changes form depending on the first letter of the word to which it affixes. (That is, the letter *n* changes to a different letter.) What word in line 35 contains a form of the prefix *in-*? What does the word mean?

When you make sail

45 and put these lodgings of dim Death behind,
you will moor ship, I know, upon Aeaea Island;
there, O my lord, remember me, I pray,
do not abandon me unwept, unburied,
to tempt the gods' wrath, while you sail for home;
50 but fire my corpse, and all the gear I had,
and build a cairn for me above the breakers—
an unknown sailor's mark for men to come.
Heap up the mound there, and implant upon it
the oar I pulled in life with my companions.'

50–51 fire my corpse . . . cairn: Elpenor wants Odysseus to hold a funeral for him.

55 He ceased, and I replied:

'Unhappy spirit,

I promise you the barrow and the burial.'

So we conversed, and grimly, at a distance,
with my long sword between, guarding the blood,
while the faint image of the lad spoke on.
60 Now came the soul of Anticlea, dead,
my mother, daughter of Autolycus,
dead now, though living still when I took ship
for holy Troy. Seeing this ghost I grieved,
but held her off, through pang on pang of tears,
65 till I should know the presence of Tiresias.
Soon from the dark that prince of Thebes came forward
bearing a golden staff; and he addressed me:

58 with my long sword . . . blood: the ghosts are attracted to the blood of the sacrifice; Odysseus must hold them at bay with his sword.

'Son of Laertes and the gods of old,
Odysseus, master of land ways and sea ways,
70 why leave the blazing sun, O man of woe,
to see the cold dead and the joyless region?
Stand clear, put up your sword;
let me but taste of blood, I shall speak true.'

66 prince of Thebes: Tiresias, the blind seer, comes from the city of Thebes (thēbz).

At this I stepped aside, and in the scabbard
75 let my long sword ring home to the pommel silver,
as he bent down to the sombre blood. Then spoke
the prince of those with gift of speech:

'Great captain,

a fair wind and the honey lights of home
are all you seek. But anguish lies ahead;
80 the god who thunders on the land prepares it,
not to be shaken from your track, implacable,

in rancor for the son whose eye you blinded.
One narrow strait may take you through his blows:
denial of yourself, restraint of shipmates.
85 When you make landfall on Thrinacia first
and quit the violet sea, dark on the land
you'll find the grazing herds of Helios
by whom all things are seen, all speech is known.
Avoid those kine, hold fast to your intent,
90 and hard seafaring brings you all to Ithaca.
But if you raid the beeves, I see destruction
for ship and crew. Though you survive alone,
bereft of all companions, lost for years,
under strange sail shall you come home, to find
95 your own house filled with trouble: insolent men
eating your livestock as they court your lady.
Aye, you shall make those men atone in blood!
But after you have dealt out death—in open
combat or by stealth—to all the suitors,
100 go overland on foot, and take an oar,
until one day you come where men have lived
with meat unsalted, never known the sea,
nor seen seagoing ships, with crimson bows
and oars that fledge light hulls for dipping flight.
105 The spot will soon be plain to you, and I
can tell you how: some passerby will say,
“What winnowing fan is that upon your shoulder?”
Halt, and implant your smooth oar in the turf
and make fair sacrifice to Lord Poseidon:
110 a ram, a bull, a great buck boar; turn back,
and carry out pure hekatombs at home
to all wide heaven's lords, the undying gods,
to each in order. Then a seaborne death
soft as this hand of mist will come upon you
115 when you are wearied out with rich old age,
your country folk in blessed peace around you.
And all this shall be just as I foretell.' . . .” **S**

Odysseus speaks to the shade of his mother. She tells him that Penelope and Telemachus are still grieving for him and that his father, Laertes, has moved to the country, where he, too, mourns his son. Odysseus' mother explains that she died from a broken heart. Odysseus also speaks with the spirits of many great ladies and men who died, as well as those who were being punished for their earthly sins. Filled with horror, Odysseus and his crew set sail.

89–91 kine; beeves: two words for cattle.

101–102 where men have lived with meat unsalted: refers to an inland location where men do not eat salted (preserved) meat as sailors do aboard a ship.

COMMON CORE RL 5

S EPIC HERO

An epic hero's fate is often a matter of great importance to the gods and to the hero's homeland. In lines 77–117, Odysseus' fate is the subject of a prophecy by Tiresias, a blind seer who now dwells among the dead. A prophecy such as this can serve as **foreshadowing**, a plot device in which future events are hinted at to increase tension. Do you think that Odysseus' fate will unfold exactly as Tiresias foretells it? Explain why you think as you do.

BOOK 12:

The Sirens; Scylla and Charybdis

Odysseus and his men return to Circe's island. While the men sleep, Circe takes Odysseus aside to hear about the underworld and to offer advice.

“Then said the Lady Circe:

‘So: all those trials are over.

Listen with care

to this, now, and a god will arm your mind.
Square in your ship’s path are Sirens, crying
5 beauty to bewitch men coasting by;
woe to the innocent who hears that sound!
He will not see his lady nor his children
in joy, crowding about him, home from sea;
the Sirens will sing his mind away
10 on their sweet meadow lolling. There are bones
of dead men rotting in a pile beside them
and flayed skins shrivel around the spot.

Steer wide;

keep well to seaward; plug your oarsmen’s ears
with beeswax kneaded soft; none of the rest
15 should hear that song.

But if you wish to listen,

let the men tie you in the lugger, hand
and foot, back to the mast, lashed to the mast,
so you may hear those harpies’ thrilling voices;
shout as you will, begging to be untied,
20 your crew must only twist more line around you
and keep their stroke up, till the singers fade.
What then? One of two courses you may take,
and you yourself must weigh them. I shall not
plan the whole action for you now, but only
25 tell you of both.

Analyze Visuals ▶

This detail from a 19th-century painting shows Odysseus tied to the mast of his ship to protect him from the Sirens’ tempting song. Notice that his men have all covered their ears. How does the artist’s depiction of the Sirens affect your understanding of the story? Explain.

2–3 In Circe, Odysseus has found a valuable ally. In the next hundred lines, she describes in detail each danger that he and his men will meet on their way home.

14 kneaded (nē’dīd): squeezed and pressed.

18 those harpies’ thrilling voices: the delightful voices of those horrible female creatures.

Detail of *Ulysses and the Sirens* (1891), John William Waterhouse. Oil on canvas, 100 cm × 201.7 cm. National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia. Photo © Bridgeman Art Library.

Ahead are beetling rocks
and dark blue glancing Amphitrite, surging,
roars around them. Prowling Rocks, or Drifters,
the gods in bliss have named them—named them well.
Not even birds can pass them by. . . .

30 A second course

lies between headlands. One is a sharp mountain
piercing the sky, with stormcloud round the peak
dissolving never, not in the brightest summer,
to show heaven's azure there, nor in the fall.
35 No mortal man could scale it, nor so much
as land there, not with twenty hands and feet,
so sheer the cliffs are—as of polished stone.
Midway that height, a cavern full of mist
opens toward Erebus and evening. Skirting
40 this in the lugger, great Odysseus,
your master Bowman, shooting from the deck,
would come short of the cavemouth with his shaft;
but that is the den of Scylla, where she yaps
abominably, a newborn whelp's cry,
45 though she is huge and monstrous. God or man,
no one could look on her in joy. Her legs—
and there are twelve—are like great tentacles,
unjointed, and upon her serpent necks
are borne six heads like nightmares of ferocity,
50 with triple serried rows of fangs and deep
gullets of black death. Half her length, she sways
her heads in air, outside her horrid cleft,
hunting the sea around that promontory
for dolphins, dogfish, or what bigger game
55 thundering Amphitrite feeds in thousands.
And no ship's company can claim
to have passed her without loss and grief; she takes,
from every ship, one man for every gullet.

The opposite point seems more a tongue of land
60 you'd touch with a good bowshot, at the narrows.
A great wild fig, a shaggy mass of leaves,
grows on it, and Charybdis lurks below
to swallow down the dark sea tide. Three times
from dawn to dusk she spews it up
65 and sucks it down again three times, a whirling
maelstrom; if you come upon her then
the god who makes earth tremble could not save you.

25 beetling: jutting or overhanging.

26 glancing Amphitrite (ăm'fī-trī'tē): sparkling seawater. (Amphitrite is the goddess of the sea and the wife of Poseidon. Here, Circe uses the name to refer to the sea itself.)

31 headlands: points of land jutting out into the sea; promontories.

34 heaven's azure (ăzh'ər): the blue sky.

abominably (ə-bŏm'ə-nə-blē) *adv.*
in a hateful way; horribly

COMMON CORE L4c

Language Coach

Homophones Words that sound alike but have different meanings, and often different spellings, are called **homophones**. What verb in line 49 is a homophone of *born*? What is the present tense form of this verb? Refer to a dictionary if you need help.

43–55 Circe presents a very unpleasant image of Scylla. *To get a better idea of what Odysseus and his crew will be up against, try using this detailed description to either visualize or draw a picture of Scylla.*

66 maelstrom (māl'strəm): a large, violent whirlpool.

No, hug the cliff of Scylla, take your ship
through on a racing stroke. Better to mourn
70 six men than lose them all, and the ship, too.’

So her advice ran; but I faced her, saying:

‘Only instruct me, goddess, if you will,
how, if possible, can I pass Charybdis,
or fight off Scylla when she raids my crew?’

75 Swiftly that loveliest goddess answered me:

‘Must you have battle in your heart forever?
The bloody toil of combat? Old contender,
will you not yield to the immortal gods?
That nightmare cannot die, being eternal
80 evil itself—horror, and pain, and chaos;
there is no fighting her, no power can fight her,
all that avails is flight.

Lose headway there

along that rockface while you break out arms,
and she’ll swoop over you, I fear, once more,
85 taking one man again for every gullet. **T**
No, no, put all your backs into it, row on;
invoke Blind Force, that bore this scourge of men,
to keep her from a second strike against you.

Then you will coast Thrinacia, the island
90 where Helios’ cattle graze, fine herds, and flocks
of goodly sheep. The herds and flocks are seven,
with fifty beasts in each.

No lambs are dropped,

or calves, and these fat cattle never die.
Immortal, too, their cowherds are—their shepherds—
95 Phaethusa and Lampetia, sweetly braided
nymphs that divine Neaera bore
to the overlord of high noon, Helios.
These nymphs their gentle mother bred and placed
upon Thrinacia, the distant land,
100 in care of flocks and cattle for their father.

Now give those kine a wide berth, keep your thoughts
intent upon your course for home,
and hard seafaring brings you all to Ithaca.
But if you raid the beeves, I see destruction
105 for ship and crew.

82 all . . . flight: all you can do is flee.

T EPIC HERO

Summarize the exchange between Odysseus and Circe in lines 68–85. What is Circe’s advice to Odysseus? Do you think he will follow her advice? Explain.

87 invoke . . . men: pray to the goddess Blind Force, who gave birth to Scylla.

89 coast: sail along the coast of.

95–96 Phaethusa (fā’ē-thōō’sə);
Lampetia (läm-pē’shə); **Neaera** (nē-ē’rə).

101–105 Circe warns Odysseus not to steal Helios’ fine cattle because Helios will take revenge.

Rough years then lie between
you and your homecoming, alone and old,
the one survivor, all companions lost.’ . . .” **U**

At dawn, Odysseus and his men continue their journey. Odysseus decides to tell the men only of Circe’s warnings about the Sirens, whom they will soon encounter. He is fairly sure that they can survive this peril if he keeps their spirits up. Suddenly, the wind stops.

“The crew were on their feet
briskly, to furl the sail, and stow it; then,
110 each in place, they poised the smooth oar blades
and sent the white foam scudding by. I carved
a massive cake of beeswax into bits
and rolled them in my hands until they softened—
no long task, for a burning heat came down
115 from Helios, lord of high noon. Going forward
I carried wax along the line, and laid it
thick on their ears. They tied me up, then, plumb
amidships, back to the mast, lashed to the mast,
and took themselves again to rowing. Soon,
120 as we came smartly within hailing distance,
the two Sirens, noting our fast ship
off their point, made ready, and they sang. . . .

The lovely voices in **ardor** appealing over the water
made me crave to listen, and I tried to say
125 ‘Untie me!’ to the crew, jerking my brows;
but they bent steady to the oars. Then Perimedes
got to his feet, he and Eurylochus,
and passed more line about, to hold me still.
So all rowed on, until the Sirens
130 dropped under the sea rim, and their singing
dwindled away.

My faithful company
rested on their oars now, peeling off
the wax that I had laid thick on their ears;
then set me free.

But scarcely had that island
135 faded in blue air than I saw smoke
and white water, with sound of waves in tumult—
a sound the men heard, and it terrified them.
Oars flew from their hands; the blades went knocking
wild alongside till the ship lost way,
140 with no oarblades to drive her through the water.

U EPIC HERO

Reread lines 104–107, and reconsider your thoughts about Tiresias’ prophecy. Do you think Odysseus has the power to steer his fate? Explain.

117–118 plumb amidships: exactly in the center of the ship.

ardor (är’dər) *n.* passion

126 Perimedes (pĕr’ĭ-mĕ’dēz).

134–139 The men panic when they hear the thundering surf.

Well, I walked up and down from bow to stern,
trying to put heart into them, standing over
every oarsman, saying gently,

‘Friends,

have we never been in danger before this?

145 More fearsome, is it now, than when the Cyclops
penned us in his cave? What power he had!
Did I not keep my nerve, and use my wits
to find a way out for us?

Now I say

by hook or crook this peril too shall be
150 something that we remember.

Heads up, lads!

We must obey the orders as I give them.
Get the oarshafts in your hands, and lay back
hard on your benches; hit these breaking seas.
Zeus help us pull away before we founder.

155 You at the tiller, listen, and take in
all that I say—the rudders are your duty;
keep her out of the combers and the smoke;
steer for that headland; watch the drift, or we
fetch up in the smother, and you drown us.’

160 That was all, and it brought them round to action.
But as I sent them on toward Scylla, I
told them nothing, as they could do nothing.
They would have dropped their oars again, in panic,
to roll for cover under the decking. Circe’s
165 bidding against arms had slipped my mind,
so I tied on my cuirass and took up
two heavy spears, then made my way along
to the foredeck—thinking to see her first from there,
the monster of the gray rock, harboring
170 torment for my friends. I strained my eyes
upon that cliffside veiled in cloud, but nowhere
could I catch sight of her.

And all this time,

in **travail**, sobbing, gaining on the current,
we rowed into the strait—Scylla to port
175 and on our starboard beam Charybdis, dire
gorge of the salt sea tide. By heaven! when she
vomited, all the sea was like a cauldron
seething over intense fire, when the mixture
suddenly heaves and rises. **v**

COMMON CORE RL 4

Language Coach

Idioms The **idiom**, or stock phrase, “by hook or by crook” may have originally referred to the practice of gathering firewood from dead tree branches using hooks or crooks (shepherd’s sticks). What does it seem to mean in line 149?

154 founder: sink.

157 combers: breaking waves.

158–159 watch . . . smother: keep the ship on course, or it will be crushed in the rough water.

travail (trə-vāl') *n.* painful effort

176 gorge: throat; gullet.

v EPIC HERO

Consider Odysseus’ behavior in lines 108–179. Do you think he is a good leader? Explain your opinion.

The shot spume

180 soared to the landside heights, and fell like rain.

But when she swallowed the sea water down
we saw the funnel of the maelstrom, heard
the rock bellowing all around, and dark
sand raged on the bottom far below.

185 My men all blanched against the gloom, our eyes
were fixed upon that yawning mouth in fear
of being devoured.

Then Scylla made her strike,

whisking six of my best men from the ship.

I happened to glance aft at ship and oarsmen
190 and caught sight of their arms and legs, dangling
high overhead. Voices came down to me
in anguish, calling my name for the last time.

A man surfcasting on a point of rock
for bass or mackerel, whipping his long rod
195 to drop the sinker and the bait far out,
will hook a fish and rip it from the surface
to dangle wriggling through the air:

so these

were borne aloft in spasms toward the cliff.

She ate them as they shrieked there, in her den,
200 in the dire grapple, reaching still for me—
and deathly pity ran me through
at that sight—far the worst I ever suffered,
questing the passes of the strange sea.

We rowed on.

The Rocks were now behind; Charybdis, too,
205 and Scylla dropped astern. . . .”

Odysseus tries to persuade his men to bypass Thrinacia, the island of the sun god, Helios, but they insist on landing. Driven by hunger, they ignore Odysseus' warning not to feast on Helios' cattle. This disobedience angers the sun god, who threatens to stop shining if payment is not made for the loss of his cattle. To appease Helios, Zeus sends down a thunderbolt to sink Odysseus' ship. Odysseus alone survives. He eventually drifts to Ogygia, the home of Calypso, who keeps him on her island for seven years. With this episode, Odysseus ends the telling of his tale to King Alcinous.

179 **shot spume:** flying foam.

185 **blanched:** became pale.

189 **aft:** toward the rear of the ship.

198 **borne aloft in spasms:** lifted high while struggling violently.

200 **grapple:** grasp.

Analyze Visuals ▶

Apart from depicting a different narrative moment, how does this 16th-century painting differ from the one on page 1231? Be specific in describing the differences in style and mood.

PART TWO: THE HOMECOMING

BOOK 16:

Father and Son

In Books 13–15, King Alcinous and his friends send Odysseus on his way home. Odysseus sleeps while the rowers bring him to Ithaca. When he awakens, he fails to recognize his homeland until Athena appears and tells him that he is indeed home. She disguises him as an old man, so that he can surprise the suitors, and then urges him to visit his faithful swineherd, Eumaeus. The swineherd welcomes the disguised Odysseus and tells him about what has been happening in Odysseus’ home. Athena goes to Telemachus and tells him to return home. She warns him of the suitors’ plot to kill him and advises him to stay with the swineherd for a night. Telemachus does as she bids.

But there were two men in the mountain hut—
Odysseus and the swineherd. At first light
blowing their fire up, they cooked their breakfast
and sent their lads out, driving herds to root
5 in the tall timber.

When Telemachus came,
the wolfish troop of watchdogs only fawned on him
as he advanced. Odysseus heard them go
and heard the light crunch of a man’s footfall—
at which he turned quickly to say:

“Eumaeus,
10 here is one of your crew come back, or maybe
another friend: the dogs are out there snuffling
belly down; not one has even growled.
I can hear footsteps—”

But before he finished
his tall son stood at the door.

Analyze Visuals ▶

Review the information given in the summary at the top of this page. What do you think Marc Chagall wanted to capture in this painting?

The swineherd

15 rose in surprise, letting a bowl and jug
tumble from his fingers. Going forward,
he kissed the young man's head, his shining eyes
and both hands, while his own tears brimmed and fell.
Think of a man whose dear and only son,
20 born to him in exile, reared with labor,
has lived ten years abroad and now returns:
how would that man embrace his son! Just so
the herdsman clapped his arms around Telemachus **A**
and covered him with kisses—for he knew
25 the lad had got away from death. He said:

“Light of my days, Telemachus,
you made it back! When you took ship for Pylos
I never thought to see you here again.
Come in, dear child, and let me feast my eyes;
30 here you are, home from distant places! **B**
How rarely anyway, you visit us,
your own men, and your own woods and pastures!
Always in the town, a man would think
you loved the suitors' company, those dogs!”

35 Telemachus with his clear candor said:

“I am with you, Uncle. See now, I have come
because I wanted to see you first, to hear from you
if Mother stayed at home—or is she married
off to someone and Odysseus' bed
40 left empty for some gloomy spider's weaving?”

Gently the forester replied to this:

“At home indeed your mother is, poor lady,
still in the women's hall. Her nights and days
are wearied out with grieving.”

Stepping back

45 he took the bronze-shod lance, and the young prince
entered the cabin over the worn door stone.
Odysseus moved aside, yielding his couch,
but from across the room Telemachus checked him:

“Friend, sit down; we'll find another chair
50 in our own hut. Here is the man to make one!”

A EPIC

Reread lines 19–23. What **theme** is being developed in this **epic simile**?

27 when you took ship for Pylos: Ten years earlier, Telemachus went to Pylos (pī'lās') in search of knowledge about Odysseus' whereabouts.

B EPIC

Reread lines 26–30. How do these lines indicate an **epic setting**?

The swineherd, when the quiet man sank down,
built a new pile of evergreens and fleeces—
a couch for the dear son of great Odysseus—
then gave them trenchers of good meat, left over
55 from the roast pork of yesterday, and heaped up
willow baskets full of bread, and mixed
an ivy bowl of honey-hearted wine.
Then he in turn sat down, facing Odysseus,
their hands went out upon the meat and drink
60 as they fell to, ridding themselves of hunger. . . .

*Telemachus sends the swineherd to let his mother know he has returned safely.
Athena appears and urges Odysseus to let Telemachus know who he really is.*

Saying no more,
she tipped her golden wand upon the man,
making his cloak pure white and the knit tunic
fresh around him. Lithe and young she made him,
65 ruddy with sun, his jawline clean, the beard
no longer grew upon his chin. And she
withdrew when she had done.



Detail of *Goddess Athena Disguises Ulysses as Beggar* (18th century), Giuseppe Bottani. Civiche Racc d'Arte, Pavia, Italy. Photo © Dagli Orti /The Art Archive.

COMMON CORE L 4

Language Coach

Fixed Expressions Some verbs have a special meaning when followed by a certain preposition. What does the expression *left over* mean in line 54? What common compound word is related to this expression?

Then Lord Odysseus **C**
reappeared—and his son was thunderstruck.
Fear in his eyes, he looked down and away
70 as though it were a god, and whispered:

“Stranger,
you are no longer what you were just now!
Your cloak is new; even your skin! You are
one of the gods who rule the sweep of heaven!
Be kind to us, we’ll make you fair oblation
75 and gifts of hammered gold. Have mercy on us!”

The noble and enduring man replied:

“No god. Why take me for a god? No, no.
I am that father whom your boyhood lacked
and suffered pain for lack of. I am he.”

80 Held back too long, the tears ran down his cheeks
as he embraced his son.

C EPIC
What supernatural event is
described in lines 61–67?

74 oblation: sacrifice

▼ Analyze Visuals

This detail of an ancient Roman mosaic shows Odysseus (Ulysses) and Telemachus. How does the technique of clustering colored tiles together affect the kind of image that can be created? Be specific.



Ulysses and His Son Telemachus (A.D. first century). Mosaic, 31.5 cm.
Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna. © Erich Lessing/Art Resource, New York.

Only Telemachus,

uncomprehending, wild
with incredulity, cried out:

“You cannot

be my father Odysseus! Meddling spirits
85 conceived this trick to twist the knife in me!
No man of woman born could work these wonders
by his own craft, unless a god came into it
with ease to turn him young or old at will.
I swear you were in rags and old,
90 and here you stand like one of the immortals!” **D**

Odysseus brought his ranging mind to bear
and said:

“This is not princely, to be swept
away by wonder at your father’s presence.
No other Odysseus will ever come,
95 for he and I are one, the same; his bitter
fortune and his wanderings are mine.
Twenty years gone, and I am back again
on my own island. . . .”

Then, throwing

100 his arms around this marvel of a father
Telemachus began to weep. Salt tears
rose from the wells of longing in both men,
and cries burst from both as keen and fluttering
as those of the great taloned hawk,
105 whose nestlings farmers take before they fly.
So helplessly they cried, pouring out tears,
and might have gone on weeping so till sundown. . . . **E**

Telemachus lets Odysseus know that they face more than 100 suitors. Odysseus tells Telemachus to return home. He will follow—still disguised as an old man—and Telemachus must pretend not to know him. He must also lock away Odysseus’ weapons and armor.

D EPIC

Reread lines 61–90. What central **conflict** is beginning to find resolution in this scene? What elements indicate the importance of this moment?

91 brought his ranging mind to bear: took control of his wandering thoughts.

E EPIC

Reread lines 99–107. What striking **character trait** is emphasized in both Odysseus and Telemachus? Why is this unusual?

BOOK 17:

The Beggar at the Manor

*Telemachus returns home, and Odysseus and the swineherd soon follow.
Odysseus is still disguised as a beggar.*

While he spoke

an old hound, lying near, pricked up his ears
and lifted up his muzzle. This was Argos,
trained as a puppy by Odysseus,
5 but never taken on a hunt before
his master sailed for Troy. The young men, afterward,
hunted wild goats with him, and hare, and deer,
but he had grown old in his master's absence.
Treated as rubbish now, he lay at last
10 upon a mass of dung before the gates—
manure of mules and cows, piled there until
fieldhands could spread it on the king's estate.
Abandoned there, and half destroyed with flies,
old Argos lay.

But when he knew he heard

15 Odysseus' voice nearby, he did his best
to wag his tail, nose down, with flattened ears,
having no strength to move nearer his master.
And the man looked away,
wiping a salt tear from his cheek; but he
20 hid this from Eumaeus. Then he said:

"I marvel that they leave this hound to lie
here on the dung pile;
he would have been a fine dog, from the look of him,
though I can't say as to his power and speed
25 when he was young. You find the same good build
in house dogs, table dogs landowners keep
all for style."

And you replied, Eumaeus:

"A hunter owned him—but the man is dead
in some far place. If this old hound could show

Analyze Visuals ▶

This illustration of Odysseus and his dog comes from the late 19th or early 20th century. Compare it with the scene depicted on the clay urn shown on page 1193. What elements do the two pieces have in common?

COMMON CORE RL 4

Language Coach

Denotation/Connotation A word's context can usually help you distinguish its **connotation**, the feelings associated with the word, from its **denotation**, or dictionary meaning. *Marvel* denotatively means "to be amazed or filled with admiration." Reread lines 1–27. How does the connotation of *marvel* in line 21 differ from the word's denotation?



Ulysses and His Dog (c. 1900). © Bettman/Corbis.

30 the form he had when Lord Odysseus left him,
going to Troy, you'd see him swift and strong.
He never shrank from any savage thing
he'd brought to bay in the deep woods; on the scent
no other dog kept up with him. Now misery
35 has him in leash. His owner died abroad,
and here the women slaves will take no care of him.
You know how servants are: without a master
they have no will to labor, or excel.
For Zeus who views the wide world takes away
40 half the manhood of a man, that day
he goes into captivity and slavery." **F**

Eumaeus crossed the court and went straight forward
into the mégaron among the suitors;
but death and darkness in that instant closed
45 the eyes of Argos, who had seen his master,
Odysseus, after twenty years. . . .

*Odysseus enters his home as a beggar, and the suitors mock and abuse him.
Penelope asks to speak with the beggar, but Odysseus puts her off until nightfall.*

COMMON CORE RL 5

F **EPIC**

Reread lines 28–41. Eumaeus still does not know that he is speaking to Odysseus in disguise. This is known as **dramatic irony**—a plot device in which the reader knows more than the character knows. Dramatic irony can create **suspense** (a feeling of tension or excitement) as the reader anticipates what might happen. What event does this speech cause you to anticipate?

43 mégaron: the main hall of a palace or house

BOOK 21:

The Test of the Bow

In Books 18–20, Odysseus observes the suitors and finds that two in particular, Antinous and Eurymachus, are rude and demanding. Penelope asks Odysseus the beggar for news of her husband. He says he has heard that Odysseus is on his way home. Penelope, however, has given up hope for Odysseus’ return. She proposes an archery contest to the suitors, with marriage to her as the prize. She enters the storeroom and takes down the heavy bow that Odysseus left behind.

Analyze Visuals ▶

This is a detail from an 18th-century portrait of Penelope. What qualities are emphasized in this portrait, and how do they compare with qualities emphasized in the text on this page? Explain.

G ARCHETYPE

Reread lines 8–10. What archetypal image do you recognize in these lines? Explain how this image helps to build **suspense**.

15–18 Notice that Penelope still grieves for Odysseus, even after 20 years.

21 **quiver** (kwĭv’ər): a case in which arrows are carried. *What is meant by “the quiver spiked with coughing death”?*

22–23 **axeheads . . . game**: metal heads of axes (without handles) that Odysseus employs in a display of archery skill.

Now the queen reached the storeroom door and halted.
Here was an oaken sill, cut long ago
and sanded clean and bedded true. Foursquare
the doorjambs and the shining doors were set
5 by the careful builder. Penelope untied the strap
around the curving handle, pushed her hook
into the slit, aimed at the bolts inside
and shot them back. Then came a rasping sound
as those bright doors the key had sprung gave way—
10 a bellow like a bull’s vaunt in a meadow— **G**
followed by her light footfall entering
over the plank floor. Herb-scented robes
lay there in chests, but the lady’s milkwhite arms
went up to lift the bow down from a peg
15 in its own polished bowcase.

Now Penelope

sank down, holding the weapon on her knees,
and drew her husband’s great bow out, and sobbed
and bit her lip and let the salt tears flow.
Then back she went to face the crowded hall,
20 tremendous bow in hand, and on her shoulder hung
the quiver spiked with coughing death. Behind her
maids bore a basket full of axeheads, bronze
and iron implements for the master’s game.
Thus in her beauty she approached the suitors,
25 and near a pillar of the solid roof

Detail of *Penelope Weeping Over the Bow of Ulysses* (c. 1779),
Angelica Kauffmann. Wolverhampton Art Gallery (OP 531),
Wolverhampton, United Kingdom.

she paused, her shining veil across her cheeks,
her maids on either hand and still,
then spoke to the banqueters:

“My lords, hear me:

suitors indeed, you **commandeered** this house
30 to feast and drink in, day and night, my husband
being long gone, long out of mind. You found
no justification for yourselves—none
except your lust to marry me. Stand up, then:
we now declare a contest for that prize.
35 Here is my lord Odysseus’ hunting bow.
Bend and string it if you can. Who sends an arrow
through iron axe-helve sockets, twelve in line?
I join my life with his, and leave this place, my home,
my rich and beautiful bridal house, forever
40 to be remembered, though I dream it only.” . . .

Despite heating and greasing the bow, the lesser suitors prove unable to string it. The most able suitors, Antinous and Eurymachus, hold off. While the suitors are busy with the bow, Odysseus—still disguised as an old beggar—goes to enlist the aid of two of his trusted servants, Eumaeus, the swineherd, and Philoetius, the cowherd.

Two men had meanwhile left the hall:
swineherd and cowherd, in companionship,
one downcast as the other. But Odysseus
followed them outdoors, outside the court,
45 and coming up said gently:

“You, herdsman,
and you, too, swineherd, I could say a thing to you,
or should I keep it dark?

No, no; speak,
my heart tells me. Would you be men enough
to stand by Odysseus if he came back?
50 Suppose he dropped out of a clear sky, as I did?
Suppose some god should bring him?
Would you bear arms for him, or for the suitors?”

The cowherd said:

“Ah, let the master come!
Father Zeus, grant our old wish! Some courier
55 guide him back! Then judge what stuff is in me
and how I manage arms!”

commandeer (kŏm'ən-dīr') v. to take control of by force

35–37 Note that the contest has two parts: first the suitor must bend the heavy bow and string it—a task that requires immense strength and skill—and then he must shoot an arrow straight through the holes in 12 axe heads set up in a row.

COMMON CORE L4

Language Coach

Etymology A word's **etymology** is its history. You can usually guess the etymology of compound words like *downcast* (line 43): The word *down* became attached to the word *cast*, meaning “thrown.” Do you think the two herders have literally been “thrown down”? Explain.

Likewise Eumaeus

fell to praying all heaven for his return,
so that Odysseus, sure at least of these,
told them:

“I am at home, for I am he.

- 60 I bore **adversities**, but in the twentieth year
I am ashore in my own land. I find
the two of you, alone among my people,
longed for my coming. Prayers I never heard
except your own that I might come again.
- 65 So now what is in store for you I’ll tell you:
If Zeus brings down the suitors by my hand
I promise marriages to both, and cattle,
and houses built near mine. And you shall be
brothers-in-arms of my Telemachus. **H**
- 70 Here, let me show you something else, a sign
that I am he, that you can trust me, look:
this old scar from the tusk wound that I got
boar hunting on Parnassus. . . .”

Shifting his rags

- 75 he bared the long gash. Both men looked, and knew,
and threw their arms around the old soldier, weeping,
kissing his head and shoulders. He as well
took each man’s head and hands to kiss, then said—
to cut it short, else they might weep till dark—
- 80 “Break off, no more of this.
Anyone at the door could see and tell them.
Drift back in, but separately at intervals
after me.

Now listen to your orders:

- when the time comes, those gentlemen, to a man,
85 will be dead against giving me bow or quiver.
Defy them. Eumaeus, bring the bow
and put it in my hands there at the door.
Tell the women to lock their own door tight.
Tell them if someone hears the shock of arms
90 or groans of men, in hall or court, not one
must show her face, but keep still at her weaving.
Philoetius, run to the outer gate and lock it.
Throw the cross bar and lash it.” . . . **I**

adversity (ăd-vŭr’sŭ-tē) *n.* hardship; misfortune

H ARCHETYPE

Identify the **trait** that Odysseus values so highly in these two servants. Where else in film or literature have you encountered these archetypal characters?

73 Parnassus (păr-năs’əs): a mountain in central Greece.

I EPIC

Identify the **plot stage** in lines 84–93. What do you think is about to happen?

Odysseus the beggar asks the suitors if he might try the bow. Worried that the old man may show them up, they refuse, but Penelope urges them to let Odysseus try. At Telemachus' request, Penelope leaves the men to settle the question of the bow among themselves. Two trusted servants lock the doors of the room, and Telemachus orders the bow be given to Odysseus.



◀ Analyze Visuals

How does 20th-century-artist N. C. Wyeth show suspense in this detail from the painting *The Trial of the Bow*? Be specific.

Detail of *The Trial of the Bow* (1929), N. C. Wyeth.
Illustration from *The Odyssey of Homer*, translated by George Herbert Palmer. © 1929 by Houghton Mifflin Company.

And Odysseus took his time,
95 turning the bow, tapping it, every inch,
for borings that termites might have made
while the master of the weapon was abroad.
The suitors were now watching him, and some
jested among themselves:

“A bow lover!”

100 “Dealer in old bows!”

“Maybe he has one like it
at home!”

“Or has an itch to make one for himself.”

“See how he handles it, the sly old buzzard!”

And one disdainful suitor added this:

“May his fortune grow an inch for every inch he bends it!”

1 EPIC

What is the primary **conflict** in lines 94–104?

105 But the man skilled in all ways of contending,
satisfied by the great bow's look and heft,
like a musician, like a harper, when
with quiet hand upon his instrument
he draws between his thumb and forefinger
110 a sweet new string upon a peg: so effortlessly
Odysseus in one motion strung the bow.
Then slid his right hand down the cord and plucked it,
so the taut gut vibrating hummed and sang
a swallow's note.

In the hushed hall it smote the suitors

115 and all their faces changed. Then Zeus thundered
overhead, one loud crack for a sign.
And Odysseus laughed within him that the son
of crooked-minded Cronus had flung that omen down.
He picked one ready arrow from his table
120 where it lay bare: the rest were waiting still
in the quiver for the young men's turn to come.
He nocked it, let it rest across the handgrip,
and drew the string and grooved butt of the arrow,
aiming from where he sat upon the stool.

Now flashed

125 arrow from twanging bow clean as a whistle
through every socket ring, and grazed not one,
to thud with heavy brazen head beyond.

Then quietly

Odysseus said:

“Telemachus, the stranger
you welcomed in your hall has not disgraced you.

130 I did not miss, neither did I take all day
stringing the bow. My hand and eye are sound,
not so **contemptible** as the young men say.
The hour has come to cook their lordships' mutton—
supper by daylight. Other amusements later,
135 with song and harping that adorn a feast.”

He dropped his eyes and nodded, and the prince
Telemachus, true son of King Odysseus,
belted his sword on, clapped hand to his spear,
and with a clink and glitter of keen bronze
140 stood by his chair, in the forefront near his father. **K**

106 heft: weight.

107–111 In this epic simile, Odysseus' stringing of the bow is compared to the stringing of a harp. *What qualities of Odysseus does this comparison emphasize?*

114 smote: struck; affected sharply.

115–116 The thunder, a sign from Zeus, indicates that the gods are on Odysseus' side.

118 Cronus (krō'nəs): Zeus' father.

122 nocked it: placed the arrow's feathered end against the bowstring.

127 brazen: made of brass.

contemptible (kən-těmp'tə-bəl) *adj.*
deserving of scorn; despicable

K EPIC

Book 21 ends with the image of father and son standing side by side facing more than 100 enemies. How can this be considered an epic moment?

BOOK 22:

Death in the Great Hall

Now shrugging off his rags the wiliest fighter of the islands
leapt and stood on the broad door sill, his own bow in his hand.
He poured out at his feet a rain of arrows from the quiver **L**
and spoke to the crowd:

“So much for that. Your clean-cut game is over.
5 Now watch me hit a target that no man has hit before,
if I can make this shot. Help me, Apollo.” **M**

He drew to his fist the cruel head of an arrow for Antinous
just as the young man leaned to lift his beautiful drinking cup,
embossed, two-handled, golden: the cup was in his fingers:
10 the wine was even at his lips: and did he dream of death?
How could he? In that **revelry** amid his throng of friends
who would imagine a single foe—though a strong foe indeed—
could dare to bring death’s pain on him and darkness on his
eyes?

Odysseus’ arrow hit him under the chin
15 and punched up to the feathers through his throat.

Backward and down he went, letting the winecup fall
from his shocked hand. Like pipes his nostrils jetted
crimson runnels, a river of mortal red,
and one last kick upset his table
20 knocking the bread and meat to soak in dusty blood.

Now as they craned to see their champion where he lay
the suitors jostled in uproar down the hall,
everyone on his feet. Wildly they turned and scanned
the walls in the long room for arms; but not a shield,
25 not a good ashen spear was there for a man to take and throw.
All they could do was yell in outrage at Odysseus:

Analyze Visuals ▶

What stylistic elements of Wyeth’s *The Slaughter of the Suitors* emphasize the conflict? Explain.

L GRAMMAR AND STYLE

Identify the **metaphor** in line 3. What does this detail add to the description of Odysseus as a warrior?

M EPIC

Note that Odysseus calls upon the help of the god Apollo, who was, among other things, the supporter and protector of archers. The bow was his sacred weapon.

revelry (rĕv’əl-rĕ) *n.* noisy merrymaking; festivity

18 runnels: streams.

7–20 *Why does Odysseus kill Antinous first? Why does he do it in such a sudden, terrible way?*

23–25 Earlier, in preparation for this confrontation, Odysseus and Telemachus removed all the weapons and shields that were hanging on the walls.

“Foul! to shoot at a man! That was your last shot!”

“Your own throat will be slit for this!”

“Our finest lad is down!
You killed the best on Ithaca.”

“Buzzards will tear your eyes out!”

30 For they imagined as they wished—that it was a wild shot,
an unintended killing—fools, not to comprehend
they were already in the grip of death.
But glaring under his brows Odysseus answered:

“You yellow dogs, you thought I’d never make it
35 home from the land of Troy. You took my house to plunder,
twisted my maids to serve your beds. You dared
bid for my wife while I was still alive.
Contempt was all you had for the gods who rule wide heaven,
contempt for what men say of you hereafter.
40 Your last hour has come. You die in blood.” **N**

As they all took this in, sickly green fear
pulled at their entrails, and their eyes flickered
looking for some hatch or hideaway from death.
Eurymachus alone could speak. He said:

45 “If you are Odysseus of Ithaca come back,
all that you say these men have done is true.
Rash actions, many here, more in the countryside.
But here he lies, the man who caused them all.
Antinous was the ringleader; he whipped us on
50 to do these things. He cared less for a marriage
than for the power Cronion has denied him
as king of Ithaca. For that
he tried to trap your son and would have killed him.
He is dead now and has his portion. Spare
55 your own people. As for ourselves, we’ll make
restitution of wine and meat consumed,
and add, each one, a tithe of twenty oxen
with gifts of bronze and gold to warm your heart.
Meanwhile we cannot blame you for your anger.” **O**

60 Odysseus glowered under his black brows
and said:

N EPIC

Paraphrase Odysseus’ speech in lines 34–40. What reasons does he give for killing the suitors?

42 **entrails**: internal organs.

47 **rash**: foolish; thoughtless.

51 **Cronion** (krō’nē-ōn’): Zeus, the son of Cronus.

restitution (rēs’tī-tōō’shən) *n.* a making good for loss or damage; repayment

57 **tithe**: payment.

O EPIC

What is Eurymachus’ **motivation** in lines 45–59? What is his strategy for achieving his goal?

“Not for the whole treasure of your fathers,
all you enjoy, lands, flocks, or any gold
put up by others, would I hold my hand.
There will be killing till the score is paid.
65 You forced yourselves upon this house. Fight your way out,
or run for it, if you think you’ll escape death.
I doubt one man of you skins by.”

They felt their knees fail, and their hearts—but heard
Eurymachus for the last time rallying them.

70 “Friends,” he said, “the man is **implacable**.
Now that he’s got his hands on bow and quiver
he’ll shoot from the big door stone there
until he kills us to the last man.

Fight, I say,

let’s remember the joy of it. Swords out!
75 Hold up your tables to deflect his arrows.
After me, everyone: rush him where he stands.
If we can budge him from the door, if we can pass
into the town, we’ll call out men to chase him.
This fellow with his bow will shoot no more.”

80 He drew his own sword as he spoke, a broadsword of fine
bronze,
honed like a razor on either edge. Then crying hoarse and loud
he hurled himself at Odysseus. But the kingly man let fly
an arrow at that instant, and the quivering feathered butt
sprang to the nipple of his breast as the barb stuck in his liver.
85 The bright broadsword clanged down. He lurched and fell
aside,
pitching across his table. His cup, his bread and meat,
were spilt and scattered far and wide, and his head slammed
on the ground.
Revulsion, anguish in his heart, with both feet kicking out,
he downed his chair, while the shrouding wave of mist closed
on his eyes.

90 Amphinomus now came running at Odysseus,
broadsword naked in his hand. He thought to make
the great soldier give way at the door.
But with a spear throw from behind Telemachus hit him
between the shoulders, and the lancehead drove
95 clear through his chest. He left his feet and fell
forward, thudding, forehead against the ground. **P**

61–67 Why do you think Odysseus rejects Eurymachus’ explanation and offer of restitution?

67 skins by: sneaks away.

implacable (ĩm-plăk’ə-bəl) *adj.*
impossible to soothe; unforgiving

COMMON CORE L 4

Language Coach

Roots and Affixes A word’s root often suggests its meaning. The Latin root *flect* (no relation to the Spanish *flecha*, “arrow”) means “to bend.” What do you think *deflect* means in line 75? What mental image can help you remember its meaning?

revulsion (rĩ-vũl’shən) *n.* a sudden feeling of disgust or loathing

88–89 Eurymachus’ death is physically painful, but he also has “revulsion, anguish in his heart.” *What do you think causes this emotional pain?*

90 Amphinomus (ăm-fĩn’ə-məs): one of the suitors.

93–100 Telemachus proves to be a valuable help to his father.

P EPIC
How has the battle with the suitors taken on epic proportions?

Telemachus swerved around him, leaving the long dark spear
planted in Amphinomus. If he paused to yank it out
someone might jump him from behind or cut him down with
a sword

100 at the moment he bent over. So he ran—ran from the tables
to his father’s side and halted, panting, saying:

“Father let me bring you a shield and spear,
a pair of spears, a helmet.
I can arm on the run myself; I’ll give
105 outfits to Eumaeus and this cowherd.
Better to have equipment.”

Said Odysseus:

“Run then, while I hold them off with arrows
as long as the arrows last. When all are gone
if I’m alone they can dislodge me.”

Quick

110 upon his father’s word Telemachus
ran to the room where spears and armor lay.
He caught up four light shields, four pairs of spears,
four helms of war high-plumed with flowing manes,
and ran back, loaded down, to his father’s side.
115 He was the first to pull a helmet on
and slide his bare arm in a buckler strap.
The servants armed themselves, and all three took their stand
beside the master of battle. **Q**

While he had arrows
he aimed and shot, and every shot brought down
120 one of his huddling enemies.
But when all barbs had flown from the bowman’s fist,
he leaned his bow in the bright entry way
beside the door, and armed: a four-ply shield
hard on his shoulder, and a crested helm,
125 horsetailed, nodding stormy upon his head,
then took his tough and bronze-shod spears. . . .

The suitors make various unsuccessful attempts to expel Odysseus from his post at the door. Athena urges Odysseus on to battle, yet holds back her fullest aid, waiting for Odysseus and Telemachus to prove themselves. Six of the suitors attempt an attack on Odysseus, but Athena deflects their arrows. Odysseus and his men seize this opportunity to launch their own attack, and the suitors begin to fall. At last Athena’s presence becomes known to all, as the shape of her shield becomes visible

Analyze Visuals ▶

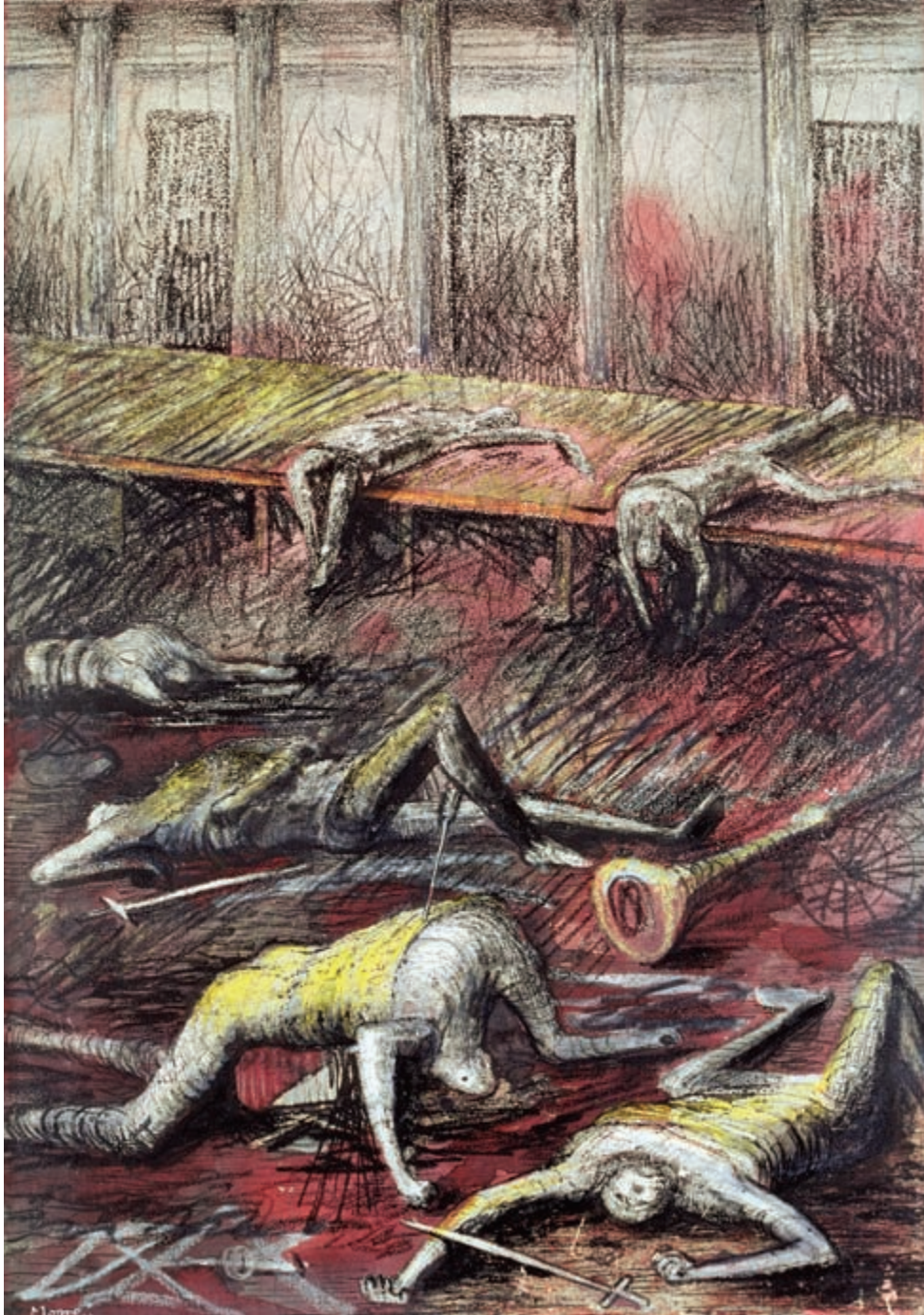
Describe the **mood** of this 1944 chalk and ink drawing. How has the artist’s use of color and black line contributed to this mood?

113 helms: helmets.

Q EPIC

How does Telemachus conduct himself in this **conflict** with the suitors?

above the hall. The suitors, recognizing the intervention of the gods on Odysseus' behalf, are frantic to escape but to no avail. Odysseus and his men are compared to falcons who show no mercy to the flocks of birds they pursue and capture. Soon the room is reeking with blood. Thus the battle with the suitors comes to an end, and Odysseus prepares himself to meet Penelope.



Death of the Suitors: The Odyssey (1944), Henry Spencer Moore. Black chalk, wash and ink on paper, 13.3 × 28.8 cm. Cecil Higgins Art Gallery, Bedford, Bedfordshire, United Kingdom. © The Henry Moore Foundation. Photo © Bridgeman Art Library.

BOOK 23:

The Trunk of the Olive Tree

Analyze Visuals ▶

This terracotta plaque from ancient Greece depicts Odysseus pleading with his wife. What can you tell about this moment in the story from looking at this image? Explain.

2 Eurynome (yŏŏ-rĭn'ə-mē): a female servant.

10 Hephaestus (hĭ-fēs'təs): the god of metalworking.

11 lavished: showered.

15 immortals of Olympus: the gods, who live on Mount Olympus.

aloof (ə-lŏŏf') *adj.* distant; remote; standoffish

R EPIC

Reread lines 22–26. What do you think is the **motivation** for Penelope's skepticism about this man who claims to be the husband she hasn't seen in 20 years? Consider her experiences in his absence.

Greathearted Odysseus, home at last,
was being bathed now by Eurynome
and rubbed with golden oil, and clothed again
in a fresh tunic and a cloak. Athena
5 lent him beauty, head to foot. She made him
taller, and massive, too, with crisp hair
in curls like petals of wild hyacinth
but all red-golden. Think of gold infused
on silver by a craftsman, whose fine art
10 Hephaestus taught him, or Athena: one
whose work moves to delight: just so she lavished
beauty over Odysseus' head and shoulders.
He sat then in the same chair by the pillar,
facing his silent wife, and said:

“Strange woman,

15 the immortals of Olympus made you hard,
harder than any. Who else in the world
would keep **aloof** as you do from her husband
if he returned to her from years of trouble,
cast on his own land in the twentieth year?

20 Nurse, make up a bed for me to sleep on.
Her heart is iron in her breast.”

Penelope

spoke to Odysseus now. She said:

“Strange man,

if man you are . . . This is no pride on my part
nor scorn for you—not even wonder, merely.
25 I know so well how you—how he—appeared
boarding the ship for Troy. But all the same . . . **R**

Plaque with the return of Odysseus (c. 460–450 B.C.). Classical Greek. Melian. Terracotta, height 7 3/8". The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Fletcher Fund, 1930. (30.11.9) © 1982 The Metropolitan Museum of Art/Art Resource, New York.

Make up his bed for him, Eurycleia.
Place it outside the bedchamber my lord
built with his own hands. Pile the big bed
30 with fleeces, rugs, and sheets of purest linen.”

With this she tried him to the breaking point,
and he turned on her in a flash raging:

“Woman, by heaven you’ve stung me now!
Who dared to move my bed?
35 No builder had the skill for that—unless
a god came down to turn the trick. No mortal
in his best days could budge it with a crowbar.
There is our pact and pledge, our secret sign,
built into that bed—my handiwork
40 and no one else’s!

An old trunk of olive

grew like a pillar on the building plot,
and I laid out our bedroom round that tree,
lined up the stone walls, built the walls and roof,
gave it a doorway and smooth-fitting doors.
45 Then I lopped off the silvery leaves and branches,
hewed and shaped that stump from the roots up
into a bedpost, drilled it, let it serve
as model for the rest. I planed them all,
inlaid them all with silver, gold and ivory,
50 and stretched a bed between—a pliant web
of oxhide thongs dyed crimson.

There’s our sign!

I know no more. Could someone else’s hand
have sawn that trunk and dragged the frame away?”

Their secret! as she heard it told, her knees
55 grew **tremulous** and weak, her heart failed her.
With eyes brimming tears she ran to him,
throwing her arms around his neck, and kissed him, **S**
murmuring:

“Do not rage at me, Odysseus!

No one ever matched your caution! Think
60 what difficulty the gods gave: they denied us
life together in our prime and flowering years,
kept us from crossing into age together.
Forgive me, don’t be angry. I could not
welcome you with love on sight! I armed myself

27–30 The bed, built from the trunk of an olive tree still rooted in the ground, is actually unmovable.

COMMON CORE L4

Language Coach

Synonyms Words with the same or similar meanings are **synonyms**. Sometimes writers use two synonyms when one word would be sufficient. What synonyms appear in lines 38–40? What do the words mean? Why do you think the poet/translator uses both words?

50–51 a **pliant web** . . . **crimson**: a network of ox-hide straps, dyed red, stretched between the sides of the bed to form a springy base for the bedding.

tremulous (trēm'yə-ləs) *adj.* marked by trembling or shaking

S ARCHETYPE

How has Penelope tricked Odysseus into proving his identity? What do her actions suggest about archetypal characters?

65 long ago against the frauds of men,
 impostors who might come—and all those many
 whose underhanded ways bring evil on!
 Helen of Argos, daughter of Zeus and Leda,
 would she have joined the stranger, lain with him,
 70 if she had known her destiny? known the Achaeans
 in arms would bring her back to her own country?
 Surely a goddess moved her to adultery,
 her blood unchilled by war and evil coming,
 the years, the **desolation**; ours, too.
 75 But here and now, what sign could be so clear
 as this of our own bed?
 No other man has ever laid eyes on it—
 only my own slave, Actoris, that my father
 sent with me as a gift—she kept our door.
 80 You make my stiff heart know that I am yours.” **T**

Now from his breast into his eyes the ache
 of longing mounted, and he wept at last,
 his dear wife, clear and faithful, in his arms,
 longed for

as the sunwarmed earth is longed for by a swimmer
 85 spent in rough water where his ship went down
 under Poseidon’s blows, gale winds and tons of sea.
 Few men can keep alive through a big surf
 to crawl, clotted with brine, on kindly beaches
 in joy, in joy, knowing the abyss behind:
 90 and so she too rejoiced, her gaze upon her husband,
 her white arms round him pressed as though forever. . . . **U**

Odysseus and Penelope tell each other about all that happened to them while Odysseus was away. Then Odysseus visits his father, Laertes, to give him the good news of his safe return. Meanwhile, the townspeople, angry about the deaths of the young suitors, gather to fight Odysseus. In the end, Athena steps in and makes peace among them all.

68 Argos (är'gös); **Leda** (lē'də).

desolation (dēs'ə-lā'shən) *n.* lonely grief; misery

78 Actoris (äk-tôr'īs).

T EPIC
 Reread lines 58–80. What **traits** of Penelope’s does this speech reveal?

U EPIC SIMILE
 What is Penelope compared to in these final lines?