

Reading & Writing Workshop: *The Odyssey*

This is a **Reading & Writing Workshop** for *The Odyssey* by Homer. This workshop blends **literary analysis, mythology, and hero's journey structure**, with group collaboration, guided questions, and creative synthesis.

Theme: Heroism, Perseverance, and the Journey Home

Author: Homer (8th century BCE)

Structure: 5 Sessions + Group Writing Project

Course Fit: World Literature, Classical Mythology, or AP Literature Foundations

Session 1: Setting the Stage — The Epic and Its Hero

Objective: Understand the epic genre, Homeric structure, and the world of Odysseus.

Group Focus:

- **Group 1:** Epic Structure — Invocation, in medias res, and the hero's journey.
- **Group 2:** Character Overview — Odysseus, Telemachus, Penelope, and the gods.
- **Group 3:** Setting and Context — The aftermath of the Trojan War; ancient Greek values (xenia, kleos, hubris).
- **Group 4:** Symbolism — The sea, home, and divine intervention.

Reading Assignment: *Book 1–4 (The Telemachy)*

Activities:

- Create a “Hero's World Map” showing Ithaca, Troy, and the journey's path.
- Compare Odysseus and Telemachus: what defines heroism for each?
- Discussion: *How does Homer establish the values of ancient Greece through the opening books?*

Writing Task:

- Paragraph response: *What does home represent to Odysseus and Telemachus?*
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Session 2: Trials and Temptations — The Journey of the Mind and Spirit

Objective: Explore Odysseus’s encounters and the lessons they reveal about human nature and temptation.

Reading Assignment: *Books 5–12 (Odysseus’s adventures: Calypso, Cyclops, Sirens, Scylla & Charybdis)*

Group Roles:

- **Group 1:** Monsters and Moral Lessons — What does each obstacle (e.g., Cyclops, Circe, Sirens) symbolize?
- **Group 2:** Heroic Traits — How does Odysseus display both wisdom and pride?
- **Group 3:** Symbol Tracker — The sea, hospitality, food, disguise, and identity.
- **Group 4:** Author’s Craft — Imagery, epic similes, and repetition in oral tradition.

Activities:

- Create a “Trial Map” illustrating each episode and its symbolic lesson.
- Group debate: *Is Odysseus heroic—or selfish?*
- Discussion: *How do the gods test Odysseus’s humanity and endurance?*

Writing Task:

- Analytical paragraph: *What do Odysseus’s encounters reveal about the challenges of being human?*
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Session 3: Homecoming and Recognition — The Return to Ithaca

Objective: Analyze Odysseus’s return and the transformation of his identity.

Reading Assignment: *Books 13–19 (Odysseus’s return, reunion with Telemachus, and disguise)*

Group Roles:

- **Group 1:** Character Study — Odysseus as the “disguised king”; wisdom through patience.
- **Group 2:** Theme — Recognition, loyalty, and justice.
- **Group 3:** Symbol Tracker — Disguise, the bow, and the scar.
- **Group 4:** Family and Faith — Penelope’s tests and the meaning of trust.

Activities:

- Role-play: Odysseus’s return and Penelope’s recognition scene.
- Create a “Circle of Trust” chart tracking which characters remain loyal.
- Discussion: *Why must Odysseus return in disguise? What does this reveal about human perception and truth?*

Writing Task:

- Journal response: *How does disguise protect and reveal truth in *The Odyssey*?*
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Session 4: Justice and Restoration — The Battle for Ithaca

Objective: Examine the climax and moral resolution of Odysseus’s journey.

Reading Assignment: *Books 20–22 (The suitors, the bow, and the final battle)*

Group Roles:

- **Group 1:** Justice vs. Revenge — Does Odysseus act justly in killing the suitors?
- **Group 2:** Heroic Code — How do honor and vengeance interact?
- **Group 3:** Symbolism — The bow, marriage bed, and restored order.
- **Group 4:** Epic Structure — How does the resolution fulfill the hero’s journey?

Activities:

- Annotate the “contest of the bow” and discuss how it symbolizes restoration and fate.
- Create a “Justice Balance Chart” — divine law vs. human morality.
- Discussion: *What kind of justice exists in Odysseus’s world?*

Writing Task:

- Analytical response: *Does Odysseus’s return bring justice or perpetuate violence? Support your answer with evidence.*
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Session 5: Legacy and Reflection — What Is a Hero?

Objective: Reflect on the conclusion, legacy, and enduring themes of *The Odyssey*.

Reading Assignment: *Book 23–24 (Reunion, peace, and closure)*

Group Roles:

- **Group 1:** Theme — Home, peace, and the cycle of vengeance.
- **Group 2:** Symbolism — The olive tree bed and restored harmony.

- **Group 3:** Comparative Lens — How has Odysseus changed since Troy?
- **Group 4:** Epic Legacy — Why does *The Odyssey* endure across cultures and time?

Activities:

- Compare the *Odyssey*'s ending with the beginning: what has Odysseus gained or lost?
- Each group presents a “Modern Hero Parallel” (compare Odysseus to a historical or fictional hero).
- Discussion: *Is the journey or the destination more important?*

Writing Task:

- Final analytical essay: *What does The Odyssey teach about perseverance, leadership, and the human desire for home?*

Group Writing Project — The Hero’s Journey Reimagined

Objective: Synthesize themes of heroism, identity, and perseverance through creative or analytical expression.

Group Project Options:

1. **Modern Odyssey:** Write or storyboard a modern retelling of *The Odyssey* set in today’s world.
2. **Hero’s Journey Map:** Create a digital or illustrated chart comparing Odysseus’s journey to Joseph Campbell’s monomyth stages.
3. **Character Monologues:** Write dramatic monologues for Penelope, Telemachus, or Odysseus reflecting on loss, hope, and reunion.
4. **Comparative Essay:** Compare Odysseus’s journey to another epic hero (*Aeneas*, *Gilgamesh*, or *Sundiata*).

Final Reflection (Individual):

“What does *The Odyssey* reveal about the timeless search for identity, belonging, and meaning?”

Assessment Rubric (20 points total)

| Category | Excellent (4) | Good (3) | Developing (2) | Beginning (1) |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|----------------|-----------------------|
| Reading Comprehension | Deep, text-based insight | Clear understanding | Some confusion | Minimal comprehension |

| Category | Excellent (4) | Good (3) | Developing (2) | Beginning (1) |
|-------------------------|--|--------------------------------|------------------|------------------------|
| Collaboration | Consistent leadership & teamwork | Regular participation | Uneven effort | Limited engagement |
| Writing Quality | Strong organization, evidence, and voice | Mostly organized, some support | Basic clarity | Weak or unclear |
| Literary Analysis | Sophisticated use of theme & symbol | Clear thematic understanding | Partial insight | Minimal interpretation |
| Creativity / Engagement | Original, thought-provoking ideas | Thoughtful and detailed | Basic creativity | Minimal originality |

Extension / Enrichment

- Read selections from *The Iliad* to connect Odysseus's story to the Trojan War.
- Explore adaptations such as *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* or Margaret Atwood's *The Penelopiad*.
- Create a multimedia project linking Odysseus's journey to the archetypal hero in modern film or literature.
- Compare Greek concepts of *arete* (excellence) and *hubris* (excessive pride) to modern leadership.