



STORYLAB

PRESENTS

HOMER'S

# The Odyssey

## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

# Homer's *The Odyssey*

**T**he *Odyssey* tells the story of Odysseus, a Greek hero who just wants to get home after fighting in the ten-year Trojan War. What should be a simple trip home turns into a twenty-year adventure filled with monsters, magic, and spiteful gods.

Odysseus is smart, strong, and great at talking his way out of trouble. But he also has a big ego, which gets him into trouble. The first mistake happens when he and his men get trapped in a cave by a giant one-eyed monster called a Cyclops. Odysseus cleverly tricks the Cyclops and escapes.

But he can't resist bragging about his victory and tells the monster his real name. The Cyclops turns out to be the son of Poseidon, the sea god. Furious, the Cyclops decides to make Odysseus's journey home as difficult as possible.

From there, Odysseus faces one deadly challenge after another. He meets the Sirens, beautiful creatures whose singing drives sailors crazy and makes them crash their ships. He has to sail between Scylla, a six-headed monster, and Charybdis, a deadly whirlpool. His men get turned into pigs by a witch named Circe. He even travels to the underworld to talk to dead people for advice.



In *The Odyssey*, Odysseus faces many magical creatures like the sirens.

Meanwhile, back home, Odysseus's wife Penelope and son Telemachus are dealing with their own problems. Dozens of rude men have moved into their house, eating their food and demanding that Penelope marry one of them since they assume Odysseus is dead. Penelope stays loyal to her husband. She uses her own cleverness to delay choosing a new husband.

After twenty years, Odysseus finally makes it home. But he's not done being clever. He disguises himself as a beggar to test who's still loyal to him. Then he reveals his identity and, with help from his son, defeats all the men who invaded his home.



## Odysseus and the Cyclops



Soon, the owner returns. It is a Cyclops, a giant with one enormous eye in the middle of his forehead.

After sailing for days, Odysseus and his men spot a mysterious island. They are hungry and tired, so they decide to explore the island. They find a huge cave filled with cheese, milk, and lambs. It seems like the perfect place to eat some food and rest.

"This place is creepy," says one of the men. "Let's take some cheese and get out of here."

But Odysseus is curious. "No," he says, "Let's wait and see who lives here. Maybe they'll be friendly and give us gifts."

Soon, the owner returns. It is a Cyclops, a giant with one enormous eye in the middle of his forehead. His name is Polyphemus, and he is definitely not friendly.

"Who are you, and why are you in my cave?" the Cyclops roars. Without waiting for an answer, he grabs two of Odysseus's men and eats them. Then he rolls a massive boulder in front of the cave entrance, trapping everyone inside.

Odysseus knows he can't fight the giant Cyclops. So, the next day while the Cyclops is out with his sheep, Odysseus and his men sharpen a wooden stake and hide it.

When the Cyclops comes back that evening, Odysseus offers him some strong wine.

"What's your name, little man?" asks the giant.

"My name is Nobody," Odysseus replies.

The Cyclops drinks the wine and falls asleep. Then Odysseus and his men heat the wooden stake in the fire and jab it into the monster's eye. The Cyclops screams in pain and rolls away the boulder to call for help.

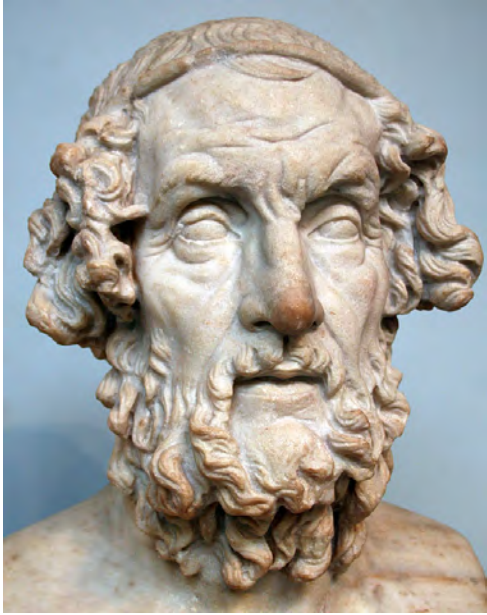
"Help me! Nobody is hurting me!" he yells to the other Cyclopes nearby.

"If nobody is hurting you, then stop complaining," they call back.

Odysseus smiles. His trick has worked perfectly. Now he just has to figure out how to escape from a very angry, very blind giant.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

# Who Was Homer?



Homer

**P**icture this: no books, no internet, no streaming services. If you wanted to hear an amazing story 2,700 years ago, you had to listen to a storyteller. And Homer was basically the ultimate storyteller of ancient Greece. He is credited with creating *The Odyssey* and *The Iliad*, two of the most famous stories ever told.

But nobody knows for sure if he actually existed! Most experts think Homer was a blind poet who traveled around Greece performing epic stories from memory. He would stand in front of crowds at festivals, weddings, and religious

ceremonies. Then, he would tell incredible tales that could last for hours.

We don't know what Homer looked like or even if he was blind like many stories claim. Ancient Greek artists often showed him as an old man with a beard. He was usually shown holding a lyre, a small harp. But that might just be how the artists imagined a wise poet should look.

It is said that Homer could not read or write. He memorized thousands and thousands of lines of poetry. Imagine memorizing every word of twenty movies and being able to recite them perfectly without looking at a script. That's basically what Homer did with *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*.

Some scholars argue that "Homer" wasn't one person at all. Maybe "Homer" was actually several different poets working together over many years. Or perhaps it was just a name people used for whoever was telling these particular stories.

What we do know is that Homer's stories were so good that people kept telling them for almost three thousand years. Long after Homer died, people were still performing his poems. Eventually, someone wrote them down, and now we can read them today. Not bad for someone who might not have even been real.

## TEXT CONNECTION

# The Greek Gods



There were 12 major gods and goddesses in Ancient Greek mythology.

**W**hat if the most powerful people in the world could live forever and had superpowers? To the ancient Greeks, that is what their gods were like. Unlike other religions that have one all-powerful god, the Greeks believed in dozens of gods. Greek gods acted like humans but had magical abilities—and often serious attitude problems!

The twelve most important gods lived on Mount Olympus, the highest mountain in Greece. Zeus was the king of the gods and controlled lightning and thunder. His wife Hera was the goddess of marriage. Poseidon controlled the seas

and earthquakes. Athena was the goddess of wisdom and warfare. Apollo controlled music, poetry, and the sun.

In Greek religion, the gods were not necessarily good or moral. They could be petty, cruel, and unfair. They played favorites and held grudges. They interfered in human lives constantly. Zeus might help you win a battle one day and destroy your city the next. Poseidon might calm the seas for your voyage or create a storm that drowns your entire crew. Greeks had to constantly worry about keeping the gods happy. They offered sacrifices, prayers, and festivals to the gods.

The gods also had complicated family relationships. Zeus had children with dozens of different women, both goddesses and humans. These half-human, half-god children were called demigods. Demigods often became heroes like Hercules and Perseus.

Greeks didn't have one holy book like the Bible or Quran. Instead, they learned about their gods through stories passed down by poets like Homer. These myths taught life lessons. They explained proper behavior and the consequences of pride. They reminded listeners to respect the gods. Some ancient Greeks probably did not believe these stories were true. But they understood that the stories contained important truths about human nature and how to live a good life.



## TEXT REFLECTION

# The Familiar Framework of *The Odyssey*

**D**espite being an ancient text, the plot of *The Odyssey* might feel familiar to you. This is because the story follows a pattern that still shows up in modern books, movies, and games—the hero's journey.

In *The Odyssey*, Odysseus leaves home to fight in the Trojan War, but his real challenge begins on his long journey back. Along the way, he faces monsters, storms, magical creatures, and temptations that try to pull him off course. He struggles, grows, and eventually returns home stronger and wiser. Sound familiar? This plot structure is everywhere.

Think of books like Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson and the Olympians*, Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games*, or Stan Lee's *The Amazing Spider-Man*. Each of these stories begins with a character living an ordinary life—until something big disrupts it. Percy finds out he's a demigod and is sent on a quest full of monsters and gods. Katniss is thrown into the deadly Hunger Games and must survive while staying true to herself. Peter Parker starts as a regular teen before a spider bite changes everything. Then he is forced to balance high school with saving lives. Just like Odysseus, these heroes face trials, meeting allies and enemies. They slowly become stronger through their struggles.



The character of Peter Parker, or Spider Man, goes on a hero's journey much like Odysseus's journey home.

Even the idea of “home” in *The Odyssey* is symbolic. It's not just a place; it's a feeling of belonging, of understanding yourself. Odysseus wants to get back to Ithaca and to his wife, Penelope. You may not be battling Cyclopes, but you might be on a path of figuring out who you are and where you belong.

That's why *The Odyssey* continues to matter. It's not just a myth about ancient heroes. It is a mirror of our own journeys. Journeys that are often filled with trials, mistakes, growth, and the hope of making it home.

**What Is a Myth?** Homer's *The Odyssey* is a myth from ancient Greece. Many cultures have myths, handed down over many years. Myths consists of:

- a made-up story with characters and events that could not really happen;
- explanations of the beginnings of the world, nature, or human behavior; and
- gods and goddesses that take the form of men and women.

**Keep Reading:** Want to read more of *The Odyssey*?

- Visit: <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/1727>

If you like *The Odyssey*, then you might also like to read these classic myths:

- *The Iliad* by Homer
- *The Ramayana* by Valmiki
- *The Epic of Gilgamesh*

**Past and Present Pair: *The Odyssey* and *The Lightning Thief***

Read StoryLab's *The Lightning Thief* to connect Homer's ancient myth to a modern story about a young hero!

**Start Writing:** Inspired to write your own myth? Consider this prompt to get started:

- "The shadows shifted in strange ways. The air hung thick and still, as if something was about to happen. I didn't know where I was . . . or what was waiting for me."



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