CLASSICS LIBRARY · STORY MAP

The Odyssey

Homer · *c. 8th century BCE · Samuel Butler translation (prose, 1900)*

Butler's prose uses the Latin names (Ulysses, Minerva, Jove). After Troy, Ulysses is delayed by his men's folly and by gods and temptresses, while Penelope and Telemachus hold the house in Ithaca. The poem honours endurance, piety, hospitality and loyal love — and a terrible justice on the suitors who have wasted the home.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

Can endurance, piety and loyal love win a man home — and justly cleanse his house?

"Nevertheless, I want to get home, and can think of nothing else."
Ulysses to Calypso · Book V

Home is not won by cleverness alone. Ulysses suffers, refuses immortality with Calypso, and is restored to Penelope; the suitors, who violated hospitality and a living husband's house, are judged.

KEY CHARACTERS

- **Ulysses** — *endurance, subtlety, longing for home*
- **Penelope** — *loyal wife; the test of the bed*
- **Telemachus** — *the son becoming a man*
- **Minerva** — *wisdom and aid (Athena)*
- **Calypso** — *the nymph who would keep him*
- **Eumaeus** — *the loyal swineherd*
- **Euryclea** — *the old nurse; the scar*
- **Alcinous & Nausicaa** — *true hospitality*
- **The suitors** — *violence against the house*

THE HERO'S RESOLVE

> *"Then Ulysses tore off his rags, and sprang on to the broad pavement with his bow and his quiver full of arrows."*
> **The poet** · Book XXII

Grades 9–12
Read the full text free at classicslaunch.org.

01 Ithaca in Peril

BOOKS I–IV

The son must grow into a man while the father is still lost.

- **Telemachus**, spurred by **Minerva**, calls an assembly and rebukes the suitors
- The suitors eat up the house and press **Penelope** to marry
- Telemachus sails to Pylos and Sparta to seek news of his father
- Nestor and Menelaus honour the guest and tell what they know
- The suitors plot to ambush the young man on his return

> *"Tell me, O Muse, of that ingenious hero who travelled far and wide after he had sacked the famous town of Troy."*
> **The poet** · Book I, opening

02 From the Nymph to Scheria

BOOKS V–VIII

The gods decree his return; he must still suffer the sea.

- Jove sends Mercury: **Calypso** must let Ulysses go
- She offers him immortality; he chooses his wife and home
- Poseidon wrecks the raft; a sea-nymph and a river help him ashore
- **Nausicaa** and King **Alcinous** receive him with true hospitality
- At the Phaeacian games and feast, the stranger weeps at the song of Troy

> *"he, though he was longing to return to his wife and country, was detained by the goddess Calypso, who had got him into a large cave and wanted to marry him."*
> **The poet** · Book I

03 The Wanderings Told

BOOKS IX–XII

He tells how he lost his men — and why he alone is left.

- He names himself: **Ulysses son of Laertes**, of Ithaca
- The Cyclops, the Lotus-eaters, Aeolus, the Laestrygonians
- Circe; the visit to the dead; Tiresias's warning
- The Sirens, Scylla and Charybdis, the cattle of the Sun
- His men perish through their own disobedience; he reaches Calypso alone

> *"I am Ulysses son of Laertes, renowned among mankind for all manner of subtlety, so that my fame ascends to heaven."*
> **Ulysses, at Alcinous's feast** · Book IX

04 The Return in Disguise

BOOKS XIII–XVI

He comes home as a beggar, to test and to wait.

- The Phaeacians land him asleep on Ithaca; Minerva veils him
- He is received by the loyal swineherd **Eumaeus**
- Telemachus evades the ambush and returns
- Father and son are made known to one another and plan the trial
- The faithless and the faithful of the household begin to be sorted

05 The Beggar in the Hall

BOOKS XVII–XX

Patience under insult, and a wife who still hopes.

- Ulysses enters his own hall as a beggar and is abused by the suitors
- The old nurse **Euryclea** knows him by the scar, and is sworn to silence
- Penelope sets the contest of the bow for the next day
- Omens and dreams thicken; the suitors' insolence does not abate
- Minerva strengthens father and son for what must be done

06 The Bow and the Bed

BOOKS XXI–XXIV

Justice, reunion, and a peace the goddess must impose.

- None of the suitors can string the bow; the beggar does, and sheds his rags
- Ulysses, Telemachus and the loyal servants slay the suitors
- The faithless servants are judged; Euryclea is told to keep the news
- Penelope tests him by the secret of their marriage bed; they are restored
- The suitors' kinsmen rise; Minerva stays the blood-feud and makes peace

> *"Dogs, did you think that I should not come back from Troy?"*
> **Ulysses, in the hall** · Book XXII

Homecoming · Loyalty · Endurance · Hospitality · Piety & the Gods · Justice

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 9–12

1. Butler's Latin names (Ulysses, Minerva, Jove, Mercury, Neptune) are the same figures as Odysseus, Athena, Zeus, Hermes and Poseidon.
2. Watch who honours a stranger and who abuses one. Hospitality is a test of character throughout.
3. Mark the cost of the men's disobedience (the cattle of the Sun) beside Ulysses' refusal of Calypso's offer.
4. How does Penelope remain loyal without certainty? Notice the web, the bow, and the bed.
5. Separate deserved judgment on the suitors from the danger of a blood-feud. Why must Minerva impose peace?
6. Follow Telemachus from silence in Book I to standing with his father in Book XXII.

Quotations are verbatim from the Samuel Butler translation (prose, 1900), Project Gutenberg #1727, the public-domain text hosted at classicslaunch.org/works/the-odyssey/. Citations give book and chapter (or canto and line) so every line can be checked.