



THE ODYSSEY

PART I – THE WAR IS OVER, NOW THE JOURNEY BEGINS!

Exposition (Books 1–4)

HERE COMES ... THE SUITORS!

The Odyssey begins after the end of the ten-year Trojan War. Odysseus, the king of Ithaca, has not returned home because he angered the sea god Poseidon. Odysseus's son, Telemachus, is about 20 years old and shares his absent father's house on the island of Ithaca with his mother Penelope. With Odysseus presumed dead, the suitors of Penelope—a crowd of 108 boisterous young men—try to persuade Penelope for her hand in marriage while partying in the king's palace.

ALL ABOARD: NEXT STOP HOME!

Odysseus's protectress Athena asks Zeus to finally allow Odysseus to return home when Poseidon is absent from Mount Olympus. Disguised as a chieftain named Mentes, Athena visits Telemachus to urge him to search for news of his father. He offers her hospitality, and they observe the suitors dining rowdily while Phemius, the bard, performs a narrative poem for them.

That night, Athena, disguised as Telemachus, finds a ship and crew for the true prince. The next morning, Telemachus calls an assembly of citizens of Ithaca to discuss what should be done with the insolent suitors, who scoff at Telemachus. Accompanied by Athena (now disguised as Mentor), the son of Odysseus departs for the household of Nestor on the Greek mainland. Telemachus rides to Sparta, accompanied by Nestor's son. There he finds a reconciled Menelaus and Helen, who say they returned to Sparta after a long voyage by way of Egypt. There, on the island of Pharos, Menelaus encounters the old sea god Proteus, who tells him that Odysseus was a captive of the nymph Calypso. Telemachus learns the fate of Menelaus's brother, Agamemnon, king of Mycenae and leader of the Greeks at Troy: he was murdered on his return home by his wife Clytemnestra and her lover Aegisthus. The story briefly shifts to the suitors, who realise Telemachus is gone. Angry, they formulate a plan to ambush his ship and kill him as he sails home. Penelope overhears their plot and worries for her son's safety.

PART II – SAILING THE HIGH SEAS!

Escape to the Phaeacians (Books 5–8)

CALYPSO

Odysseus spends seven years as a captive of Calypso on the island Ogygia. She has fallen deeply in love with him, but he spurns her offers of immortality as her husband. She is ordered to release him by the messenger god Hermes, sent by Zeus in response to Athena's plea. Odysseus builds a raft and is given clothing, food, and drink by Calypso. When Poseidon learns that Odysseus has escaped, he wrecks the raft. Helped by a veil provided by the sea nymph Ino, Odysseus swims ashore on Scherie, the island of the Phaeacians. Naked and exhausted, he hides in a pile of leaves and falls asleep.

RELIVING THE GLORY DAYS

The next morning, awakened by girls' laughter, he sees the young Nausicaä, who has gone to the seashore with her maids after Athena told her in a dream to do so. He appeals for help and she encourages him to seek the hospitality of her parents, Arete and Alcinous. Alcinous promises to provide him a ship to return him home without knowing the identity of Odysseus. He remains for several days. Odysseus asks the blind singer Demodocus to tell the story of the Trojan Horse, a stratagem in which Odysseus had played a leading role. Unable to hide his emotion as he relives this episode, Odysseus at last reveals his identity. He then tells the story of his return from Troy.



PART III – THIS IS GETTING DANGEROUS

Odysseus's account of his adventures (Books 9–12)

WATCH OUT FOR THE HIPPIES

Odysseus recounts his story to the Phaeacians. After a failed raid against the Cicones, Odysseus and his twelve ships were driven off course by storms. Odysseus visited the lotus-eaters who gave his men their fruit which caused them to forget their homecoming. Odysseus had to drag them back to the ship by force.

I'M JUST A NOBODY...

Odysseus and his men landed on a lush, uninhabited island near the land of the Cyclopes. The men entered the cave of Polyphemus, where they found all the cheeses and meat they desired. Upon returning to his cave, Polyphemus sealed the entrance with a massive boulder and begins to eat Odysseus's men. Odysseus devised an escape plan in which he, identifying himself as "Nobody", plied Polyphemus with wine and blinded him with a wooden stake. Polyphemus cried for help but was left by his neighbors after Polyphemus claimed that "Nobody" had attacked him. Odysseus and his men finally escaped the cave by hiding on the underbellies of the Cyclops's sheep as they were let out of the cave.

A BAG OF HOT AIR

As they escaped, Odysseus taunted Polyphemus and revealed himself. The Cyclops prayed to his father Poseidon, asking him to curse Odysseus to wander for ten years. After the escape, Aeolus gave Odysseus a leather bag containing all the winds except the west wind, a gift that should have ensured a safe return home. Just as Ithaca came into sight, the sailors opened the bag while Odysseus slept, thinking it contained gold. The winds flew out, and the storm drove the ships back the way they had come. Aeolus, recognizing that Odysseus had drawn the ire of the gods, refused to further assist him.

CIRCE, THERE'S MORE THAN THREE LITTLE PIGS, AND WHAT'S FOR DINNER? YOU!

After the cannibalistic Laestrygonians destroyed all of his ships except his own, Odysseus sailed on and reached the island of Aeaea, home of witch-goddess Circe. She turned half of his men into swine with drugged cheese and wine. Hermes warned Odysseus about Circe and gave Odysseus an herb called moly, making him resistant to Circe's magic. Odysseus forced Circe to change his men back to their human forms and was seduced by her. They remained with her for one year. Finally, guided by Circe's instructions, Odysseus and his crew crossed the ocean and reached a harbor at the western edge of the world, where Odysseus sacrificed to the dead. Odysseus summoned the spirit of the prophet Tiresias and was told that he may return home if he is able to stay himself and his crew from eating the sacred livestock of Helios on the island of Thrinacia and that failure to do so would result in the loss of his ship and his entire crew. He then meets his dead mother Anticleia and first learns of the suitors and what happened in Ithaca in his absence. Odysseus also converses with his dead comrades from Troy.

SAYING GOODBYE TO CIRCE, THE SONG YOU DON'T WANT TO HEAR, AND GETTING CAUGHT BETWEEN A CHARYBDIS AND A SCYLLA PLACE

Returning to Aeaea, they buried Elpenor and were advised by Circe on the remaining stages of the journey. They skirted the land of the Sirens. All of the sailors had their ears plugged up with beeswax, except for Odysseus, who was tied to the mast as he wanted to hear the song. He told his sailors not to untie him as it would only make him drown himself. They then passed between the six-headed monster Scylla and the whirlpool Charybdis. Scylla claimed six of his men.



THOSE AREN'T YOUR CATTLE AND A RETURN TO CALYPSO

Next, they landed on the island of Thrinacia, with the crew overriding Odysseus's wishes to remain away from the island. Zeus caused a storm that prevented them from leaving, causing them to deplete the food given to them by Circe. While Odysseus was away praying, his men ignored the warnings of Tiresias and Circe and hunted the sacred cattle. Helios insisted that Zeus punish the men for this sacrilege. They suffered a shipwreck, and all but Odysseus drowned as he clung to a fig tree. Washed ashore on Ogygia, he remained there as Calypso's lover.

PART IV – HOMECOMING

Return to Ithaca (Books 13–20)

THIS ISN'T HOW IT WAS WHEN I LEFT

Having listened to his story, the Phaeacians agree to provide Odysseus with more treasure than he would have received from the spoils of Troy. They deliver him at night, while he is fast asleep, to a hidden harbour on Ithaca. Odysseus awakens and believes that he has been dropped on a distant land before Athena appears to him and reveals that he is indeed on Ithaca. She hides his treasure in a nearby cave and disguises him as an elderly beggar so he can see how things stand in his household. He finds his way to the hut of one of his own slaves, swineherd Eumaeus, who treats him hospitably and speaks favorably of Odysseus. After dinner, the disguised Odysseus tells the farm laborers a fictitious tale of himself.

FATHER AND SON TOGETHER AGAIN AND MAN'S BEST FRIEND

Telemachus sails home from Sparta, evading an ambush set by the suitors. He disembarks on the coast of Ithaca and meets Odysseus. Odysseus identifies himself to Telemachus (but not to Eumaeus), and they decide that the suitors must be killed. Telemachus returns home first and Odysseus, accompanied by Eumaeus, returns home still posing as a beggar. Only his faithful dog, Argos, recognises him. He is ridiculed by the suitors in his own home, especially Antinous. Odysseus meets Penelope and tests her intentions by saying he once met Odysseus in Crete. Closely questioned, he adds that he had recently been in Thesprotia and had learned something there of Odysseus's recent wanderings.

CAN YOU KEEP A SECRET?

Odysseus's identity is discovered by the housekeeper Eurycleia when she sees an old scar as she is washing his feet. Eurycleia tries to tell Penelope about the beggar's true identity, but Athena makes sure that Penelope cannot hear her. Odysseus swears Eurycleia to secrecy.

PART V – THE TRIUMPHANT RETURN!

Slaying of the suitors (Books 21–24)

IT'S PAYBACK TIME!

The next day, at Athena's prompting, Penelope manoeuvres the suitors into competing for her hand with an archery competition using Odysseus's bow. The man who can string the bow and shoot an arrow through a dozen axe heads would win. Odysseus takes part in the competition, and he alone is strong enough to string the bow and shoot the arrow through the dozen axe heads, making him the winner. He then throws off his rags and kills Antinous with his next arrow. Odysseus kills the other suitors, first using the rest of the arrows and then, along with Telemachus, Eumaeus, and the cowherd Philoetius, with swords and spears.

I AM ODYSSEUS!

After the battle is won, Telemachus hangs twelve of their household slaves whom Eurycleia identifies as guilty of betraying Penelope by having relations with the suitors. Odysseus identifies himself to Penelope. Although hesitant at first, she embraces him after he mentions that he made their bed from an olive tree still rooted to the ground. They go to sleep.



FATHER AND SON REUNITED AND ZEUS SAYS THE FIGHTING IS OVER...OR ELSE!

The next day, Odysseus goes to his father Laertes's farm and reveals himself. Following them to the farm is a group of Ithacans, led by Eupeithes, father of Antinous, who are out for revenge for the murder of the suitors. A battle breaks out, but it is quickly stopped by Athena and Zeus.