

Before You Read

This selection also appears in *Elements of Literature*.

“The Cyclops” from the *Odyssey*

by Homer

In ancient Greece, heroes in epic poems like the *Odyssey* represented the highest values of Greek civilization. In Homer’s day, heroes were thought of as a special class of men, somewhere between the gods and ordinary human beings. As you read “The Cyclops,” see how Odysseus uses his special qualities to save himself and his men from becoming a monster’s meal.

LITERARY FOCUS: HEROES AT LARGE

Epics are long narrative poems that tell of the great deeds of a hero. In an epic, the **main character** is the hero. (In many epics the hero’s enemy is also a major character.) **Heroes** usually represent qualities that their society admires. Some people today, for example, see sports stars, popular singers, great scientists, or firefighters as their heroes. In epics told long ago, the heroes are often superhuman warriors, who set off on journeys to win something of great value for themselves and for their people.

The **conflicts**, or struggles between opposing forces, in an epic are usually **external**, as the heroes battle armies, monsters, or the forces of nature. Epic heroes can also face **internal conflicts**—caused by fear, doubt, weakness, and so on.

- First, read “The Cyclops” for enjoyment. Then, consider what the adventure reveals about the values of the ancient Greeks.

READING SKILLS: MONITOR YOUR COMPREHENSION

Good readers pause occasionally to make sure they understand what they have read. When you read a long, action-filled poem such as this one, it is important to stay on top of events—to understand what is happening.

Pause during your reading to ask yourself the following questions:

- What has happened so far?
- What has caused those events?
- What are the most important events in this episode?
- When do the events take place?
- What might happen next?

SKILLS FOCUS

Literary Skills

Understand characteristics of epic poetry, including heroes and their external conflicts.

Reading Skills

Monitor your comprehension.

Vocabulary Skills

Learn words from Greek and Roman myths.

VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT

PREVIEW SELECTION VOCABULARY

The following words appear in "The Cyclops." Become familiar with them before you begin reading.

ravage (rav'ij) v.: destroy violently; ruin.

*The Cyclops planned to **ravage** Odysseus and his men by eating them.*

adversary (ad'vər-ser'ē) n.: enemy; opponent.

*Odysseus had to find a way to defeat his **adversary**, the Cyclops.*

profusion (prō·fyōō'zhən) n.: large supply; abundance.

*With such a large flock of sheep, the Cyclops had a **profusion** of milk, cheese, and wool.*

WORDS FROM GREEK AND ROMAN MYTHS

Many words we use in English today come from Greek and Roman myths. For example, a journey or quest is often called an *odyssey*, named for the *Odyssey*, the epic poem from which "The Cyclops" is taken. Other words from "The Cyclops" that have been handed down are *ambrosia*, meaning "food of the gods," and *nectar*, meaning "drink of the gods." Look at the chart below to learn of other words handed down from Greek and Roman myths.

Names from Greek and Roman Myths	English Words
Ceres , Roman goddess of agriculture and fertility	cereal
Mount Olympus , legendary home of gods and goddesses	Olympics
Tantalus , character from Greek myth whose food and drink were kept just out of his reach, as punishment	tantalize
Titans , race of giant Greek gods and goddesses who came before the Olympians	titanic
Vulcan , Roman god of fire and metalworkers	volcano

“We lit a fire, burnt an offering,
 and took some cheese to eat; then sat in silence
 around the embers, waiting. When he came
 he had a load of dry boughs on his shoulder
 5 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.
 Then over the broad cavern floor he ushered
 the ewes he meant to milk. He left his rams
 10 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,
 with heaving wagon teams, could not have stirred
 the tonnage of that rock from where he wedged it
 15 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;
 thickened his milk, then, into curds and whey,
 sieved out the curds to drip in withy baskets,¹
 20 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,
 heaping on brushwood. In the glare he saw us.

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

We felt a pressure on our hearts, in dread
 of that deep rumble and that mighty man.

30 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;

1. **withy baskets:** baskets made from willow twigs.

INFER

Pause at line 3. Odysseus and his men are in the cave of the Cyclops, Polyphemus. To whom do the men burn an offering?

MONITOR YOUR COMPREHENSION

Who is the “he” in line 3?

INTERPRET

Re-read lines 5–23, and pay attention to the Cyclops’s actions. What qualities does he have?

VOCABULARY

ravage (rav’ij) v.: destroy violently; ruin.

IDENTIFY

Hospitality to strangers was extremely important to the ancient Greeks. Re-read lines 38–43, and underline the words that tell what will happen if the Cyclops does not treat the Greeks well.

MONITOR YOUR COMPREHENSION

Pause at line 50. Does the Cyclops respect Zeus, as Odysseus does? Explain.

INFER

Pause at line 58. Why do you think Odysseus lies about his ship?

WORD STUDY

Underline the two gruesome **Homeric similes**—extended comparisons using *like* or *as*—in lines 59–65.

homeward bound, but taking routes and ways uncommon; so the will of Zeus would have it.

- 35 We served under Agamemnon, son of Atreus²—
the whole world knows what city
he laid waste, what armies he destroyed.
It was our luck to come here; here we stand,
beholden for your help, or any gifts
40 you give—as custom is to honor strangers.
We would entreat you, great Sir, have a care
for the gods' courtesy; Zeus will avenge
the unoffending guest.'

He answered this
from his brute chest, unmoved:

- 'You are a ninny,
45 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
or all the gods in bliss; we have more force by far.
I would not let you go for fear of Zeus—
50 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?'

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

- 'My ship?
55 Poseidon Lord, who sets the earth atremble,
broke it up on the rocks at your land's end.
A wind from seaward served him, drove us there.
We are survivors, these good men and I.'

Neither reply nor pity came from him,
60 but in one stride he clutched at my companions

2. **Agamemnon** (ag'ə-mem'nän'); **Atreus** (ā'trē-əs).

and caught two in his hands like squirming puppies
to beat their brains out, spattering the floor.

Then he dismembered them and made his meal,
gaping and crunching like a mountain lion—

65 everything: innards, flesh, and marrow bones.

We cried aloud, lifting our hands to Zeus,
powerless, looking on at this, appalled;

but Cyclops went on filling up his belly
with manflesh and great gulps of whey,

70 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

along his flank to stab him where the midriff
holds the liver. I had touched the spot

75 when sudden fear stayed me: if I killed him

we perished there as well, for we could never
move his ponderous doorway slab aside.

So we were left to groan and wait for morning.

When the young Dawn with fingertips of rose

80 lit up the world, the Cyclops built a fire

and milked his handsome ewes, all in due order,
putting the sucklings to the mothers. Then,

his chores being all dispatched, he caught

another brace³ of men to make his breakfast,

85 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.⁴

There was a din of whistling as the Cyclops
rounded his flock to higher ground, then stillness.

90 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:

HERO

How does Odysseus show both his bravery and his intelligence in lines 71–78?

WORD STUDY

Line 79 contains a famous **epithet**—a group of words used repeatedly to describe a character. How is Dawn described in this epithet?

MONITOR YOUR COMPREHENSION

Pause at line 87. What prevents Odysseus and his men from escaping when the Cyclops leaves?

3. **brace** (brās) *n.*: pair.

4. **quiver** (kwiv'ər) *n.*: case for arrows.

IDENTIFY

Pause at line 105. What do Odysseus and his men do with the olive tree they find in the Cyclops's cave?

VOCABULARY

profusion (prō·fyōō'zhən) *n.*: large supply; abundance.

CLARIFY

Pause at line 111. Apparently, it was the custom among the ancient Greeks for men to toss coins, dice, or something else for the honor of participating in a dangerous task. Why is Odysseus happy with the outcome?

a club, or staff, lay there along the fold—
an olive tree, felled green and left to season
95 for Cyclops' hand. And it was like a mast
a lugger⁵ of twenty oars, broad in the beam—
a deep-seagoing craft—might carry:
so long, so big around, it seemed. Now I
chopped out a six-foot section of this pole
100 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
in the fire's heart and turned it, toughening it,
then hid it, well back in the cavern, under
105 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
and grind that spike in Cyclops' eye, when mild
sleep had mastered him? As luck would have it,
110 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,
his woolly flock. The rams as well, this time,
entered the cave: by some sheepherding whim—
115 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
in proper order, put the lambs to suck,
and swiftly ran through all his evening chores.
120 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,
looking up, saying:

5. **lugger** (lug'ər) *n.*: type of sailboat.

Odysseus handing the drink to Polyphemus. Relief on a Grecian marble sarcophagus (1st century A.D.). Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Naples, Italy. Art Resource, NY.



‘Cyclops, try some wine.

Here’s liquor to wash down your scraps of men.

125 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,
unbearable, a bloody monster! After this,
will any other traveler come to see you?’

130 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,
how are you called? I’ll make a gift will please you.

135 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.
I saw the fuddle and flush come over him,
then I sang out in cordial tones:

Notes _____

PREDICT

Pause at line 126. Why do you think Odysseus offers the Cyclops wine?

WORD STUDY

Underline the **alliteration**—repetition of consonant sounds in words close together—in line 138. Here *fuddle* means “drunkenness.”

IDENTIFY

Pause at line 143. Odysseus doesn't tell the Cyclops his real name. Underline the name he uses. What word does the name sound like?

MONITOR YOUR COMPREHENSION

What happens in lines 146–167?

WORD STUDY

Underline the **extended similes** in lines 160–163 and 166–171, which use gruesome comparisons to help you see how the eye is gouged out.

'Cyclops,

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

And he said:

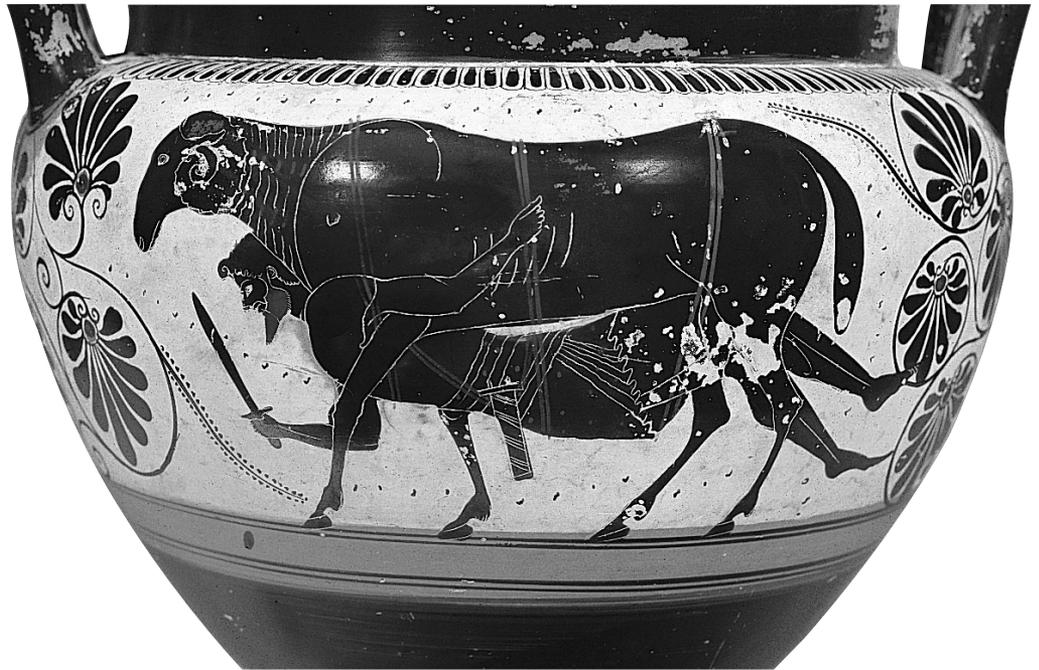
'Nohbdy's my meat, then, after I eat his friends.
145 Others come first. There's a noble gift, now.'

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

150 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
to keep their courage up: no quitting now.
The pike of olive, green though it had been,
155 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
as more than natural force nerved them; straight
forward they sprinted, lifted it, and rammed it
160 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
the two-handled strap that spins it in the groove.
So with our brand we bored that great eye socket
165 while blood ran out around the red-hot bar.
Eyelid and lash were seared; the pierced ball
hissed broiling, and the roots popped.

Odysseus escaping the cave of Polyphemus under the belly of the ram. Detail from a krater, a vessel for holding wine (c. 510 B.C.).

Badisches Landesmuseum,
Karlsruhe, Germany.



HERO

Pause at line 202. What **character trait** helps Odysseus defeat the Cyclops?

Now Cyclops, wheezing as the pain came on him,
fumbled to wrench away the great doorstone
195 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.
But I kept thinking how to win the game:
death sat there huge; how could we slip away?
200 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.
The Cyclops' rams were handsome, fat, with heavy
fleeces, a dark violet.

Three abreast

205 I tied them silently together, twining
cords of willow from the ogre's bed;
then slung a man under each middle one
to ride there safely, shielded left and right.
So three sheep could convey each man. I took
210 the woolliest ram, the choicest of the flock,

and hung myself under his kinky belly,
pulled up tight, with fingers twisted deep
in sheepskin ringlets for an iron grip.
So, breathing hard, we waited until morning.

215 When Dawn spread out her fingertips of rose
the rams began to stir, moving for pasture,
and peals of bleating echoed round the pens
where dams with udders full called for a milking.
Blinded, and sick with pain from his head wound,
220 the master stroked each ram, then let it pass,
but my men riding on the pectoral fleece¹⁰
the giant's blind hands blundering never found.
Last of them all my ram, the leader, came,
weighted by wool and me with my meditations.
225 The Cyclops patted him, and then he said:

'Sweet cousin ram, why lag behind the rest
in the night cave? You never linger so,
but graze before them all, and go afar
to crop sweet grass, and take your stately way
230 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
over your Master's eye? That carrion rogue¹¹
and his accurst companions burnt it out
235 when he had conquered all my wits with wine.
Nohbdy will not get out alive, I swear.
Oh, had you brain and voice to tell
where he may be now, dodging all my fury!
Bashed by this hand and bashed on this rock wall
240 his brains would strew the floor, and I should have
rest from the outrage Nohbdy worked upon me.'

10. **pectoral fleece:** wool on an animal's chest.

11. **carrion rogue:** rotten scoundrel. *Carrion* is decaying flesh.

MONITOR YOUR COMPREHENSION

Pause at line 214. What is Odysseus's plan to save himself and his men?

COMPARE & CONTRAST

Re-read lines 226–232. How is the Cyclops's treatment of his ram different from his treatment of the Greeks?

MONITOR YOUR
COMPREHENSION

What is happening in lines
242–255?

VOCABULARY

adversary (ad'vər-ser'ē) *n.*:
enemy; opponent.

MONITOR YOUR
COMPREHENSION

Pause at line 271. What hap-
pens when Odysseus taunts
the Cyclops?

He sent us into the open, then. Close by,
I dropped and rolled clear of the ram's belly,
going this way and that to untie the men.
245 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.
We saw, as we came near, our fellows' faces
shining; then we saw them turn to grief
250 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;
move fast, and put the ship's head toward the breakers.'
They all pitched in at loading, then embarked
255 and struck their oars into the sea. Far out,
as far offshore as shouted words would carry,
I sent a few back to the **adversary**:

'O Cyclops! Would you feast on my companions?
Puny, am I, in a Caveman's hands?
260 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!'

The blind thing in his doubled fury broke
a hilltop in his hands and heaved it after us.
265 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.
I got the longest boathook out and stood
fending us off, with furious nods to all
270 to put their backs into a racing stroke—
row, row or perish. So the long oars bent
kicking the foam sternward, making head
until we drew away, and twice as far.
Now when I cupped my hands I heard the crew
275 in low voices protesting:

‘Godsake, Captain!

Why bait the beast again? Let him alone!’

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

‘All but stove us in!’

280 ‘Give him our bearing with your trumpeting,
he’ll get the range and lob¹² a boulder.’

‘Aye

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

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

‘Cyclops,

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

At this he gave a mighty sob and rumbled:

‘Now comes the weird¹³ upon me, spoken of old.
290 A wizard, grand and wondrous, lived here—Telemus,¹⁴
a son of Eurymus;¹⁵ great length of days
he had in wizardry among the Cyclopes,
and these things he foretold for time to come:
my great eye lost, and at Odysseus’ hands.
295 Always I had in mind some giant, armed
in giant force, would come against me here.
But this, but you—small, pitiful, and twiggy—
you put me down with wine, you blinded me.

12. **lob** (läb) *v.*: toss.

13. **weird** (wird) *n.*: fate.

14. **Telemus** (tel’ä·mäs).

15. **Eurymus** (yöö’rē·mäs).

IDENTIFY

Odysseus’s men speak for the first time in lines 275–281. What is their reaction to their captain’s behavior?

HEROES

Odysseus ignores his men’s advice and continues to taunt the Cyclops in lines 282–287. What does Odysseus’s behavior reveal about him?

COMPARE & CONTRAST

Pause at line 298. Polyphemus had been warned by a wizard that Odysseus would blind him. In what ways is Odysseus different from the attacker the Cyclops had imagined?

The Cyclops

Hero Chart What makes a hero? Listed in the left-hand column of the chart below are some heroic traits. Give examples from “The Cyclops” to show whether or not Odysseus displays these traits. At the bottom of the chart is a row for weaknesses. If you find weaknesses in Odysseus, cite details from the story to support your opinion.

Key Traits of a Hero	Details from “The Cyclops”
Intelligence and resourcefulness	
Strength	
Bravery and loyalty	
Weaknesses	

Test Practice

The Cyclops

Complete the sample test item below. The box at the right explains why three of the choices are not correct.

Sample Test Item	Explanation of the Correct Answer
<p>The <i>best</i> description of an epic poem is a —</p> <p>A poem that tells a story</p> <p>B lyric poem that reveals emotions</p> <p>C wildly exaggerated, humorous poem</p> <p>D long narrative poem about the deeds of a heroic character</p>	<p>The correct answer is <i>D</i>; it offers the most information about what an epic poem is.</p> <p><i>A</i> is incorrect; many poems, even very short ones, tell stories. Epics are not lyric poems, as <i>B</i> claims. Epics are serious, not humorous, as <i>C</i> states.</p>

DIRECTIONS: Circle the letter of each correct answer.

- When he first speaks to the Cyclops, Odysseus warns him that —
 - the Greeks will kill him
 - the Greeks want his land
 - Zeus will avenge the Greeks if Cyclops is not courteous
 - Zeus will kill the Cyclops if he doesn't give them money
- The interaction between Odysseus and the Cyclops is —
 - an external conflict
 - not important to the story
 - a universal theme
 - part of the setting
- How does the Cyclops treat the Greeks?
 - He devours some of them.
 - He opens his home to them.
 - He helps them on their way.
 - He kills all of them.
- How does Odysseus win the battle with the Cyclops?
 - He tricks the Cyclops.
 - He kills the giant.
 - He calls on Zeus to help him.
 - He betrays his men.

SKILLS FOCUS

Literary Skills
Analyze characteristics of epic poetry, including heroes and their external conflicts.

Test Practice

The Cyclops

Words from Myths

Myths often attempt to explain the mysteries of nature, the origins of rituals, and the relationships between gods and humans. Many words from Greek and Roman myths live on in the English language. For example, some common English words are derived from the names of Greek and Roman gods and goddesses.

DIRECTIONS: Match each Greek or Roman god's or goddess's name or home with the English word that is derived from it.

- | | |
|-----------------------|--------------|
| 1. ____ Vulcan | a. Olympics |
| 2. ____ Ceres | b. tantalize |
| 3. ____ Mount Olympus | c. titanic |
| 4. ____ Titans | d. cereal |
| 5. ____ Tantalus | e. volcano |

SKILLS FOCUS

Vocabulary Skills

Identify words from Greek and Roman myths. Use words in context.

Vocabulary in Context

DIRECTIONS: Complete the paragraph below by writing a word from the word box to fit each numbered blank. Use each word only once.

Word Box

ravage
profusion
adversary

As the epic poem the *Odyssey* reveals, Odysseus had more than one (1) _____. In fact, he had a (2) _____ of enemies, both monsters and men—and even gods. Some of his enemies hated Odysseus so much they actually wanted to (3) _____ him and his men, while others were content to prevent him from reaching home.

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“The Cyclops” from the *Odyssey* by Homer

In ancient Greece, heroes in epic poems like the *Odyssey* represented the highest values of Greek civilization. In Homer’s day, heroes were thought of as a special class of men, somewhere between the gods and ordinary human beings. As you read “The Cyclops,” see how Odysseus uses his special qualities to save himself and his men from becoming a monster’s meal.

LITERARY FOCUS: HEROES AT LARGE

Epics are long narrative poems that tell of the great deeds of a hero. In an epic, the main character is the hero. (In many epics the hero’s enemy is also a major character.) Heroes usually represent qualities that their society admires. Some people today, for example, see sports stars, popular singers, great scientists, or firefighters as their heroes. In epics told long ago, the heroes are often superhuman warriors, who set off on journeys to win something of great value for themselves and for their people.

The conflicts, or struggles between opposing forces, in an epic are usually external, as the heroes battle armies, monsters, or the forces of nature. Epic heroes can also face internal conflicts—caused by fear, doubt, weakness, and so on.

- First, read “The Cyclops” for enjoyment. Then, consider what the adventure reveals about the values of the ancient Greeks.

READING SKILLS: MONITOR YOUR COMPREHENSION

Good readers pause occasionally to make sure they understand what they have read. When you read a long, action-filled poem such as this one, it is important to stay on top of events—to understand what is happening.

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- What are the most important events in this episode?
- When do the events take place?
- What might happen next?



Literary Skills
Understand characteristics of epic poetry, including internal and external conflicts.

Reading Skills
Monitor your comprehension.

Vocabulary Skills
Learn words from Greek and Roman myths.

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Part 1

Collection 10: Epic and Myth

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EPIC POEM

VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT

PREVIEW SELECTION VOCABULARY

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The Cyclops planned to ravage Odysseus and his men by eating them.

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With such a large flock of sheep, the Cyclops had a profusion of milk, cheese, and wool.

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Odysseus had to find a way to defeat his adversary, the Cyclops.

WORDS FROM GREEK AND ROMAN MYTHS

Many words we use in English today come from Greek and Roman myths. For example, a journey or quest is often called an *odyssey*, named for the *Odyssey*, the epic poem from which “The Cyclops” is taken. Other words from “The Cyclops” that have been handed down are *ambrosia*, meaning “food of the gods,” and *nectar*, meaning “drink of the gods.” Look at the chart below to learn of other words handed down from Greek and Roman myths.

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Mount Olympus, legendary home of gods and goddesses	Olympics
Tantalus, character from Greek myth whose food and drink were kept just out of his reach, as punishment	tantalize
Titans, race of giant Greek gods and goddesses who came before the Olympians	titanic
Vulcan, Roman god of fire and metalworkers	volcano

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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. 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 the offending guest.² 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 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? 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 atremble, broke it up on the rocks at your land's end. A wind from seaward served him, drove us there. We are survivors, these good men and I.' Neither reply nor pity came from him, but in one stride he clutched at my companions

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IDENTIFY
Hospitality to strangers was extremely important to the ancient Greeks. Re-read lines 38–43, and underline the words that tell what will happen if the Cyclops does not treat the Greeks well.

MONITOR YOUR COMPREHENSION
Pause at line 50. Does the Cyclops respect Zeus, as Odysseus does? Explain.
No, the Cyclops has no respect for the gods; he says he and his kind are stronger than the gods.

INFER
Pause at line 58. Why do you think Odysseus lies about his ship?
He doesn't want the Cyclops to destroy the ship; he wants the Cyclops to pity them and treat them well.

WORD STUDY
Underline the two gruesome Homeric similes—extended comparisons using *like* or *as*—in lines 53–65.

2. Agamemnon (ag 'a mem'n'an); Atreus (f'tr'e'sa).

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and caught two in his hands like squirming puppies to beat their brains out, spattering the floor. 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; 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 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. So we were left to groan and wait for morning.

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HERO
How does Odysseus show both his bravery and his intelligence in lines 71–78?
He shows bravery by his willingness to stab the Cyclops, and intelligence in thinking about the consequences of his action and deciding to wait.

WORD STUDY
Line 79 contains a famous epithet—a group of words used repeatedly to describe a character. How is Dawn described in this epithet?
Dawn is described as a young woman with rosy fingertips.

MONITOR YOUR COMPREHENSION
Pause at line 87. What prevents Odysseus and his men from escaping when the Cyclops leaves?
The Cyclops replaces the great stone slab before they can escape.

When the young Dawn with fingertips of rose lit up the world, the Cyclops built a fire and milked his handsome ewes, all in due order, putting the sucklings to the mothers. Then, his chores being all dispatched, he caught another brace³ 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.⁴ 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:

3. brace (brās) n.; pair.
4. quiver (kwiv'ər) n.; case for arrows.

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Notes _____



Odysseus handing the drink to Polyphemus. Relief on a Greek marble sarcophagus (1st century A.D.). Museo Nazionale Napoli, Italy. Art Resource, NY.

PREDICT

Pause at line 126. Why do you think Odysseus offers the Cyclops wine?

Odysseus wants to get the Cyclops drunk so he'll be easier to attack.

WORD STUDY

Underline the alliteration—repetition of consonant sounds in words close together—in line 138. Here, *fuddle* means “drunkenness.”

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Odysseus handing the drink to Polyphemus. Relief on a Greek marble sarcophagus (1st century A.D.). Museo Nazionale Napoli, Italy. Art Resource, NY.

‘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, unbearable, a bloody monster! After this, will any other traveler come to see you?’

130 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, 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. I saw the fuddle and flush come over him, then I sang out in cordial tones:

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 lugger⁵ of twenty oars, broad in the beam—
a deep-sea-going craft—might carry:

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
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
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,
his woolly flock. The rams as well, this time,
entered the cave: by some sheepherding 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
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,
looking up, saying:

5. **lugger** (lug’ər) *n.*: type of sailboat.

IDENTIFY

Pause at line 105. What do Odysseus and his men do with the olive tree they find in the Cyclops’s cave?

They carve it and harden it into a sharp stake.

VOCABULARY

profusion (prə-fyū’zhən) *n.*: large supply; abundance.

CLARIFY

Pause at line 111. Apparently, it was the custom among the ancient Greeks for men to toss coins, dice, or something else for the honor of participating in a dangerous task. Why is Odysseus happy with the outcome?

The men he would have chosen won the toss.

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IDENTIFY

Pause at line 143. Odysseus doesn't tell the Cyclops his real name. Underline the name he uses. What word does the name sound like?

It sounds like
"nobody."

MONITOR YOUR COMPREHENSION

What happens in lines 146–167?

The Cyclops passes out drunk. Odysseus charrs the stake in the fire, cheers on his men, and with four helpers, grinds out the Cyclops's eye.

140 you ask my honorable name? Remember the gift you promised me, and I shall tell you. My name is Nohbdy; mother, father, and friends, everyone calls me Nohbdy.⁶

And he said:
'Nohbdy's my meat, then, after I eat his friends, Others come first. There's a noble gift, now.'

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

150 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 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.

155 I drew it from the coals and my four fellows gave me a hand, lugging it near the Cyclops as more than natural force nerved them; straight forward they sprinted, lifted it, and rammed it 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 the two-handled strap that spins it in the groove.

160 So with our brand we bored that great eye socket while blood ran out around the red-hot bar. Eyelid and lash were scared; the pierced ball hissed broiling, and the roots popped.

165

WORD STUDY

Underline the **extended similes** in lines 160–163 and 166–171, which use **gruesome** comparisons to help you see how the eye is gouged out.

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FLUENCY

Read the boxed passage aloud twice. On your first reading, pause at the end of a line if it ends in punctuation. Read on when the line does not end with a comma, dash, semicolon, colon, or period. On your second reading, focus on reading with expression.

MONITOR YOUR COMPREHENSION

Re-read lines 178–191. What happens when Polyphemus's fellow Cyclopes come to his aid?

They think
Polyphemus tells them that nobody has hurt him, so they go away.

170 one sees a white-hot axhead or an adze?⁷
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.
The Cyclops bellowed and the rock roared round him, 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. Some heard him; and they came by divers⁸ 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 has tricked you, ruined you?'

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Out of the cave the mammoth Polyphemus roared in answer: 'Nohbdy, Nohbdy's tricked me. Nohbdy's ruined me!'

185 To this rough shout they made a sage⁹ reply: 'Ah well, if nobody has played you foul 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.'

190

So saying they trailed away. And I was filled with laughter to see how like a charm the name deceived them.

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6. smithy (smith/ē) n.: blacksmith's shop, where iron tools are made.
7. adze (adz) n.: axlike tool with a long, curved blade.
8. divers (div/vəz) adj.: diverse; various.
9. sage (saj) adj.: wise.

Odysseus escaping the cave of Polyphemus under the belly of the ram. Detail from a krater, a vessel for holding wine (c. 510 B.C.). Badisches Landesmuseum, Karlsruhe, Germany.



Now Cyclops, wheezing as the pain came on him, fumbled to wrench away the great doorstone 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. 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. The Cyclops' rams were handsome, fat, with heavy fleeces, a dark violet.

Three abreast I tied them silently together, twining cords of willow from the ogre's bed; then slung a man under each middle one 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,

HERO

Pause at line 202. What character trait helps Odysseus defeat the Cyclops?

His intelligence helps him. Odysseus is known for his cleverness.

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and hung myself under his kinky belly, pulled up tight, with fingers twisted deep in sheepskin ringlets for an iron grip. So, breathing hard, we waited until morning.

215 When Dawn spread out her fingertips of rose the rams began to stir, moving for pasture, and peals of bleating echoed round the pens 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 fleece¹⁰ the giant's blind hands blundering never found. Last of them all my ram, the leader, came, weighted by wool and me with my meditations. 225 The Cyclops patted him, and then he said:

'Sweet cousin ram, why lag behind the rest in the night cave? You never linger so, 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 over your Master's eye? That carrion rogue!¹¹ and his accursed companions burnt it out when he had conquered all my wits with wine. Nohbby will not get out alive, I swear. Oh, had you brain and voice to tell 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 Nohbby worked upon me.'

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MONITOR YOUR COMPREHENSION

Pause at line 214. What is Odysseus's plan to save himself and his men?

He and his men will hide themselves under the rams and escape when the Cyclops lets his flock out in the morning.

COMPARE & CONTRAST

Re-read lines 226–232. How is the Cyclops's treatment of his ram different from his treatment of the Greeks?

He speaks kindly to the ram and pets him; he eats the Greeks.

10. pectoral fleece: wool on an animal's chest.
11. carrion rogue: rotten scoundrel. Carrion is decaying flesh.

MONITOR YOUR COMPREHENSION

What is happening in lines 242–255?

Odysseus and his men have escaped from the Cyclops. They steal his sheep and set sail from his island.

VOCABULARY

adversary (ad'vairseri) *n.*: enemy, opponent.

MONITOR YOUR COMPREHENSION

Pause at line 271. What happens when Odysseus taunts the Cyclops?

Cyclops throws a hilltop in front of Odysseus's boat, causing a wave that sends them back to shore. Odysseus pushes them off with a boathook, and the men row the boat back out to sea.

He sent us into the open, then. Close by,
I dropped and rolled clear of the ram's belly,
going this way and that to untie the men.

245 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.

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.

250 I hushed them, jerking head and eyebrows up,
and in a low voice told them: 'Load this herd;
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 offshore as shouted words would carry,
I sent a few back to the **adversary**:

'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,
260 you damned cannibal? Eater of guests
under your roof! Zeus and the gods have paid you!

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.

270 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
until we drew away, and twice as far.

275 Now when I cupped my hands I heard the crew
in low voices protesting:

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

'That tidal wave he made on the first throw
all but beached us.'

280 'Give him our bearing with your trumpeting,
he'll get the range and lob¹² a boulder.'

'Aye
He'll smash our timbers and our heads together!'

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

285 '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!'

At this he gave a mighty sob and rumbled:

'Now comes the weird¹³ upon me, spoken of old.
290 A wizard, grand and wondrous, lived here—Telemus,¹⁴
a son of Eurymus,¹⁵ great length of days
he had in wizardry among the Cyclopes,
and these things he foretold for time to come:

295 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 twigg—
you put me down with wine, you blinded me.

12. lob (lɒb) *v.*: toss.

13. weird (wiəd) *n.*: fate.

14. Telemus (telɪ'mʌs).

15. Eurymus (jʊrɪ'mʌs).

IDENTIFY

Odysseus's men speak for the first time in lines 275–281. What is their reaction to their captain's behavior?

They are angry with him for showing off and endangering their lives.

HEROES

Odysseus ignores his men's advice and continues to taunt the Cyclops in lines 282–287. What does Odysseus's behavior reveal about him?

Odysseus craves glory; he can be careless of his men's lives; he wants vengeance.

COMPARE & CONTRAST

Pause at line 298. Polyphemus had been warned by a wizard that Odysseus would blind him. In what ways is Odysseus different from the attacker the Cyclops had imagined?

The Cyclops had imagined a mighty giant as his attacker; instead he regards Odysseus as "small, pitiful, and twiggig."

SKILLS PRACTICE

The Cyclops

Hero Chart What makes a hero? Listed in the left-hand column of the chart below are some heroic traits. Give examples from “The Cyclops” to show whether or not Odysseus displays these traits. At the bottom of the chart is a row for weaknesses. If you find weaknesses in Odysseus, cite details from the story to support your opinion.

Key Traits of a Hero	Details from “The Cyclops”
Intelligence and resourcefulness	He withholds information about his ship. He tells the Cyclops that his name is Nohbody . He thinks up a plan of escape. He forges a stake from an olive tree. He gets the Cyclops drunk. He uses the rams to carry his men out of the cave.
Strength	He stabs the Cyclops with the huge stake. He pushes the ship out of danger with a boathook.
Bravery and loyalty	He stabs the Cyclops in the eye. He speaks up to the Cyclops and threatens him. He promotes and fights for the reputation of his gods. He tries to rescue as many of his men as he can.
Weaknesses	He is proud and vengeful. He gives in to bullying and taunting the giant, causing the Cyclops to put a terrible curse on him and his men.

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300 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 heal me of this black wound—he and no other of all the happy gods or mortal men.

305 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! The god of earthquake could not heal you there!'

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

'O hear me, lord, blue girdler of the islands, if I am thine indeed, and thou art father: grant that Odysseus, raider of cities, never see his home; Laertes' son, I mean,

315 who kept his hall on Ithaca. Should destiny intend that he shall see his roof again among his family in his fatherland, far be that day, and dark the years between. Let him lose all companions, and return under strange sail to bitter days at home.' . . . "

320

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MONITOR YOUR COMPREHENSION

Pause at line 308. The Cyclops has asked Odysseus to come back and says he'll treat him well. Underline Odysseus's reply. Then, read on and underline the Cyclops's curse on Odysseus and his men.

MONITOR YOUR COMPREHENSION

Review the Cyclops's curse. What might happen next?

- The curse may indeed come true. Odysseus may still have a long and hard journey home to Ithaca; he may find troubles when he gets home.

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TestPractice

The Cyclops

Complete the sample test item below. The box at the right explains why three of the choices are not correct.

Sample Test Item	Explanation of the Correct Answer
The best description of an epic poem is a — A poem that tells a story B lyric poem that reveals emotions C wildly exaggerated, humorous poem D long narrative poem about the deeds of a heroic character	The correct answer is D; it offers the most information about what an epic poem is. A is incorrect: many poems, even very short ones, tell stories. Epics are not lyric poems, as B claims. Epics are serious, not humorous, as C states.

DIRECTIONS: Circle the letter of each correct answer.

- When he first speaks to the Cyclops, Odysseus warns him that —
 A the Greeks will kill him
 B the Greeks want his land
 C Zeus will avenge the Greeks if Cyclops is not courteous
 D Zeus will kill the Cyclops if he doesn't give them money
- The interaction between Odysseus and the Cyclops is —
 F an external conflict
 G not important to the story
 H a universal theme
 J part of the setting
- How does the Cyclops treat the Greeks?
 A He devours some of them.
 B He opens his home to them.
 C He helps them on their way.
 D He kills all of them.
- How does Odysseus win the battle with the Cyclops?
 F He tricks the Cyclops.
 G He kills the giant.
 H He calls on Zeus to help him.
 J He betrays his men.



Literary Skills
 Analyze characteristics of literary pieces, including heroes and their external conflicts.

TestPractice

The Cyclops

Words from Myths
 Myths often attempt to explain the mysteries of nature, the origins of rituals, and the relationships between gods and humans. Many words from Greek and Roman myths live on in the English language. For example, some common English words are derived from the names of Greek and Roman gods and goddesses.

DIRECTIONS: Match each Greek or Roman god's or goddess's name or home with the English word that is derived from it.

- e** Vulcan a. Olympics
- d** Ceres b. tantalize
- a** Mount Olympus c. titanic
- c** Titans d. cereal
- b** Tantalus e. volcano



Vocabulary Skills
 Identify words from Greek and Roman myths. Use words in context.

Vocabulary in Context

DIRECTIONS: Complete the paragraph below by writing a word from the word box to fit each numbered blank. Use each word only once.

Word Box
 ravage
 profusion
 adversary

As the epic poem the *Odyssey* reveals, Odysseus had more than one (1) **adversary**. In fact, he had a (2) **profusion** of enemies, both monsters and men—and even gods. Some of his enemies hated Odysseus so much they actually wanted to (3) **ravage** him and his men, while others were content to prevent him from reaching home.

Name _____ Date _____

Selection Title _____

Epic Hero Map

An epic is a narrative told in elevated language, which relates the great deeds of a hero who embodies the values of a society. In the map below, write the name of the epic hero. Then, write examples of the hero's deeds. Finally, explain what values the deeds reveal.

Hero:

Deeds:

Values: