

Name: _____

Miss Skirtich

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English 12: British Literature

The Odyssey GRQs 19-24

Book 19: Why does Odysseus withhold his identity from Penelope? Does he trust her?

1. Pay extremely close attention to the scenes when Eurycleia recognizes Odysseus. What gives him away?
2. Follow very closely the story of Odysseus' baptism by his grandfather Autolycus and of the boar hunt on the slopes of Mount Parnassus. What is the symbolic significance of these events in reference to the determination and shaping of Odysseus' character while he was still a very young boy?
3. Compare the passages describing the boar's hideout to those describing the shelter of Odysseus when he first arrives to Phaeacia. What are the implications of the similarities? Who decides to set up the contest of the bow to find a new husband for Penelope?
4. What does that decision imply about her fidelity to Odysseus?

Book 20:

1. Notice the self-restraint of Odysseus. What can you infer from his self-restraint?
2. What is the meaning of his conversation with Athena? Pay attention to the visions and prophecies of Theoklymenos.

Book 21:

1. What does the contest of the bow symbolize?
2. Why can't the suitors string the bow? Can Telemachus string it?
3. Pay extreme attention to the scenes when Odysseus strings his bow. Make an inference or an observation. Why is the bow compared to a harp or lyre?

Book 22:

1. What do you think of Odysseus' killing of the suitors? Is it justified?
2. What do you think of his killing of those who embraced his knees and begged for mercy?
3. What is the significance of his slaying of the prophet Leodes? Notice the description of the victorious Odysseus as "spattered and caked with blood like a mountain lion."
4. Compare this description to that referring to the Cyclops (Book 9).
5. What are the implications of this similarity?
6. What do you think of Telemachus' hanging of the maids and his mutilation of the goatherd Melanthios?
7. Do you see some similarities of character and behavior not only between Odysseus and the Cyclops but also between Odysseus and Telemachus?

Book 23:

1. How does Penelope finally recognize Odysseus?
2. What is the symbolic meaning of the connection between the olive tree and the marriage bed?
3. Given the reunion of Odysseus and Penelope, can the Odyssey be regarded as a comedy? Why? Why not?

Book 24:

1. How does Laertes, Odysseus' father, recognize Odysseus?
2. What is the symbolic significance of the fruit trees?

3. Is the anger of the suitors' relatives justified? How does Odysseus propose to deal with this problem?
4. Is the ending of the Odyssey through Athena's intervention a convincing and meaningful way of putting an end to the struggle between the Ithacans?
5. Is it realistic to believe that the suitors' relatives simply dropped their weapons and went back home?
6. What is the problem with this ending?
7. Is it possible to suppose that Homer meant his readers to realize that the true ending of the Odyssey is something falling outside the scope of the poem and which the reader himself needs to envision on the basis of the events of the poem? In that case, do you think the Odyssey is a tragedy or a comedy?