

TEACHER'S NOTES LESSON 28

These are some guidelines you can use for discussing the focus questions for books 3, 7, 17, 18, and 23. The theme for unit 2 is The Journey and students have spent the unit so far looking at their own journeys. As they read *The Odyssey* in this unit, they will be looking at Odysseus's physical and psychological journeys home and Telemachus's physical journey in search of news about his father and his psychological journey into manhood. The focus questions for these books are intended to help students narrow the breadth of the books and to organize the people and places they encounter.

The physical journeys – Telemachus travels more in these books than does Odysseus, but both, as they travel, encounter the ancient Greek guest-host relationship norms. As they discuss the travels after their readings, let them bring in all of Odysseus's travels, not just those in these books. Odysseus's journeys in these books will be covered more in the graphic organizer of psychological growth (or lack thereof).

On a bit of a different note, if you have time, you could talk about the journey of *The Odyssey* itself. On the physical side of the journey, the Trojan War was in about 1200 BC. Homer lived about 750-650 BC. Homer's version of *The Odyssey* dates to about 700 BC. The real war, as far as anyone can determine, was probably a maritime war concerning trade routes, which makes sense if you consider the location. Also, it is most likely that Homer did not know any alphabet, though there were several in existence during his lifetime. This is significant because it affected how the epic was written—in a cellular fashion with, in essence, pre-fab epithets to fit into spaces that needed specific rhythm or meter.

On the psychological side, about 500 years passed between the war and the epic. Because literature was designed to entertain, add the gods to the story of the war and 500 year's worth of "Telephone" or "Operator" or "I caught a fish *this* big" and you get a pretty fantastic story.

Guest-host relationship – The tradition of a host welcoming, feeding, providing shelter and presents for even unknown guests occurs many times in these reading. Students also get to see examples of hosts being called to task for not honoring this custom.

Symbols and epithets – Students will read many epithets for Odysseus in these books and it may be interesting for them to consider whether or not they agree with them. A quick activity could be to have them, if they disagree with the epithets, come up with their own. How might they refer to the characters?

Psychological growth –

Odysseus – Students get many images of Odysseus, from his own actions, how others describe his feats in Troy, and how Penelope and others remember him. In these five books, students see an Odysseus who is quite different from the Odysseus who insulted Polyphemus and brought a curse upon his men and his boat. They have to determine, based on his actions in these books, if, as he faces his new adversities, he shows psychological growth. It should also be interesting for them to compare the Odysseus they read about in his own description of his travels (books 9 – 12) with the Odysseus described by those Telemachus meets.

If students have read *King Lear*, you can ask them to compare Odysseus as beggar to Lear after he has been stripped of all possessions. Why is this stripping down to the most humble position so common in stories of psychological or emotional challenge and growth? Another quick activity or journal could be to have students think about something they would have to do for a day or a week that would test their pride—not to be humiliated, but to be humbled. Have them discuss that to see the difference.

Telemachus – Telemachus's travels serve two purposes: first is his growth or maturing into what custom dictates for a host; second is his learning about his father, not just where he might be, but what kind of a man he was (as people knew him before he disappeared). Both are interrelated. Telemachus must learn not only to be a host, but to be the host people would expect of the son of Odysseus. He learns this through stories he hears about his father and through observing how the sons of his father's peers behave.

If you have extra time:

Another aspect that is common in heroic stories is the idea of testing. Ask students where they see people being tested. Odysseus is tested by Athena (many times) and by Penelope. He, in turn, tests Eumaeus, Telemachus, Penelope, and many others. How many examples of testing do they see? Do we still do this? If so, what are some ways we might do this today (real life, not TV and movies)?