



CLASH OF THE GODS

Odysseus: Curse of the Sea

One of the world's most revered literary works, Homer's epic poem *The Odyssey* has been admired by readers for centuries. The epic tells the colorful and meandering tale of Odysseus, a powerful Greek leader and Trojan War hero. Believed to have been composed around the 8th century B.C., *The Odyssey* traces the adventures of Odysseus and his men on a storied journey full of challenges on land and sea. Odysseus was originally called away from his home in Ithaca to help restore stability to Troy, with little awareness of the drama ahead of him. He and his men end up pushed and pulled to several islands where they were confronted by beasts, cannibals, and countless temptations that threatened to destroy them all.

Clash of the Gods: Odysseus: Curse of the Sea is a vibrant visual accompaniment to Homer's epic work. Desperate to return home to his wife Penelope and their son, Odysseus thinks his way through endless challenges with the hopes of making it back to Ithaca as soon as possible. Though the quest takes years and the costs are severe, the hero's perseverance eventually pays off. Along the way, readers and viewers can take away many lessons from the triumphs and defeats experienced by Odysseus and his men. With up-to-date commentary from historians and analysis of historical artifacts that reveal new insights into *The Odyssey*, this exciting documentary offers students an excellent companion to Homer's lively epic.

Curriculum links

Clash of the Gods: The Odyssey would be useful for literature, global studies, or world civilization courses, or for course units and lectures on mythology and literary theory. It is appropriate for 8th grade and above.

Vocabulary

Using the dictionary at www.merriamwebster.com or an encyclopedia, students should define or explain the significance of the following terms:

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| adversity | intellect | optimism |
| brazen | menagerie | perseverance |
| epic | mortal | stratagem |
| ingenious | oasis | |



Discussion questions

1. Why was Odysseus originally called away from home? Why do you think he was willing to take on this challenge despite the risks involved?
2. What are three words you would use to describe Odysseus? How does he compare with other “heroes” in literature? Do you think he meets the definition of a hero? Discuss.
3. At several points in the epic, Odysseus’ men let their guards down and pay a steep price. What is an example of this, and what are the lessons you could take away from this tale?
4. Who were the Lotus Eaters and how did they affect Odysseus’ men? What was the result of their interactions, and what lessons could you take away from this story?
5. How did Odysseus and his men end up in a confrontation with the one-eyed Cyclops? What do you think were the most important decisions they made in order to survive this experience?
6. Why do you think Penelope remained loyal to Odysseus even though she did not know when he would return? What were some of the things she did to trick her suitors?
7. Throughout *The Odyssey*, the hero and his men face many temptations. What is an example of one of these temptations, and how did it affect the men on their journey?
8. Based on the analysis in this program, where do historians think “Ithaca” might have been located? What are your thoughts about this reasoning?
9. What do you think were the three most important decisions made by Odysseus in the epic? How did these decisions help him survive?
10. Why do you think *The Odyssey* is still considered one of the world’s finest works of literature? If you had to make a list of your top ten favorite poems and books, would “The Odyssey” be on the list?

Extended activities

1. Odysseus is known as one of the most revered heroes and strongest characters in literature. Ask students to write three diary or journal entries from Odysseus’ perspective. These writings should be from three different chapters of his adventure. Ask them to remember when writing these entries that Odysseus is known for his careful intellect and leadership skills rather than just his physical strength.
2. As an epic poem, *The Odyssey* is a distinct literary form that has been admired for generations. Ask students to write a short encyclopedia entry of 350 words or less succinctly describing the epic, its key passages, and its importance as a literary work.
3. From the Cyclops to the Lotus Eaters to the monster Scylla, there are countless colorful characters and encounters in *The Odyssey*. Ask students to break up into small groups and assign each student in the group one scene from *The Odyssey* to either draw or re-enact, or have students pick out of a hat. With a timer, the rest of the group is challenged to guess which scene they are depicting. The student who guesses the highest number of scenes first wins the competition.

4. *The Odyssey* is full of imaginative and colorful adventures. Ask students to write their own 3-5 page section of the poem, describing a new scene in the epic. Students can share these ideas with the larger class or group.



Websites

HISTORY website on Greek mythology:

www.history.com/topics/greek-mythology

The Metropolitan Museum of Art on Greek history and artifacts:

www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/grlg/hd_grlg.htm

The Odyssey Online from Emory University:

www.carlos.emory.edu/ODYSSEY/GREECE/home.html

Background information about “The Odyssey” from the Ancient History Sourcebook:

www.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/asbook07.html

Books

Colum, Padraic and Willy Pogany (Illustrator). *Children’s Homer: The Adventures of Odysseus and the Tale of Troy* (Simon & Schuster’s Children’s Publishing, 2004).

Evslin, Bernard and William Hofman (Illustrator). *Heroes, Gods and Monsters of the Greek Myths* (Random House Children’s Books, 1984).

Fox, Robin Lane. *The Classical World: An Epic History from Homer to Hadrian* (Basic Books, 2008).

Homer. *The Odyssey* (Classic Retelling). (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2000).