

Will & Company

Teacher Preparation and Study Guide

By SAM ROBINSON

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Homer's

The Odyssey

adaptated by Colin Cox, Newton Kaneshiro and Sam Robinson

Is “The Odyssey” history?

For hundreds of years in Ancient Greece, there was a great tradition of story telling. History, Religion and Myths were passed on to generations of Greeks through this oral art form. “The Odyssey” takes place around 1200 B.C., over 3,000 years ago. For many years after the Trojan War, stories about the Gods were told both to educate and entertain. Though some of the stories included in “The Odyssey” are based on fact, many include a lot of information that was imagined.

Who wrote “The Odyssey”?

Not a lot is known about Homer, a man that lived around 700 B.C. Some say that he was blind. It is believed that Homer was an actor famous for telling stories. Homer is credited with taking separate stories and shaping “The Illiad” and “The Odyssey” into their poetic format, which are cornerstones of Western literature. Somewhere around 500 B.C., “The Illiad” and “The Odyssey” were written down in their entirety.

What was acting like in Ancient Greece?

The first plays were performed at festivals honoring the God, Dionysus. A chorus of actors who spoke or sung and danced in unison told the plays. In the sixth century, at one of the festivals, a playwright named Thespis changed the course of Drama. Thespis stepped forward from the chorus of performers and spoke a line, becoming the first actor. This is how we got the term “Thespian” for actors in Drama clubs across the nation.

The play you will see is a 45 minute adaptation of Homer’s epic poem, “The Odyssey”. Our play is told by a group of 5 actors who play all of the characters. Included in the performance are scenes of the following stories:

Eris and the Apple of Discord
The Trojan War
Odysseus battling the Cicones
The land of the Lotus Eaters
The Island of the Cyclops
King Aeolus and his floating island
The man eating Lastrygonians
Circe with the human voice
Tiresias in Hades
The Song of the Sirens
The monsters, Scylla and Charybdis
The cows of Thrinacia
Calypso’s lovely hair
The Phaiacians turned to stone
The plot of the suitors
Penelope and the Bridal Bed

Odysseus narrates the start of the tale and introduces the following Gods and Goddesses:

Aphrodite, wife of Hephaestus, Goddess of love

Athena, Goddess of Wisdom and Light

Eris, Goddess of discord

Hades, God of the underworld

Hera, Wife of Zeus, Goddess of the home

Hermes, God of messengers and thieves

Poseidon, God of the sea

Zeus, Father of the Gods

Activity #1: Use the list of Greek Gods and Goddesses as a spelling or vocabulary list.

Background for our play:

All the Gods and Goddesses were invited to the marriage of King Peleus and the sea nymph Thetis except for Eris. Not happy with this, Eris went to the wedding and rolled a golden apple marked “to the fairest” in front of Hera, Aphrodite and Athena. They fought over who was indeed the fairest, so Father Zeus decided to let a prince named Paris make the choice. The Goddesses went to Paris, who was disguised as a shepherd, and offered him gifts. He chose Aphrodite, who, for the Golden Apple, promised him the most beautiful mortal woman in the world, Helen of Troy. The problem? Helen was already married to Menelaus, brother of Agamemnon and King of Sparta. Paris visited Menelaus and took his bride, Helen home to Troy. Helen’s face is known to have launched a thousand ships because Menelaus sent a great fleet to Troy to retrieve her.

Paris carries off Helen to his boat. Triangular figures crudely painted on an early vase from Thebes, Greece.

The abduction of Helen was the start of the Trojan War, which lasted 10 years. Some say that it was a single battle, others say that the war was made up of many skirmishes over the decade. The great seige at Troy ended when the Greeks tricked the Trojans by sending a gift in through the city gates – a large wooden horse. Once inside the city walls, the Greeks broke out of the horse and set fire to the city.

It was now time for Odysseus to return to his long journey home to Ithica. Our play follows the course of his journey in a sequential timeline, unlike the book which starts his journey on the Island of Calypso, only to have him recount earlier portions of his journey to the Phaiacians.

Synopsis of our play:

After the introduction of the Gods/Goddesses, and the Trojan War, the scene is set for Odysseus and his men to begin their long journey home.

First Odysseus and his men arrive by ship to the land of the Cicones. Still proud of winning the war at Troy they decide to fight the Cicones. Many of his men die, but the Greeks are victorious. A priest named Maron rewards Odysseus for not killing him, with a large cask of magical wine. The drink is so powerful that a single drop will put any man to sleep.

Odysseus and his men return to the ship and sail right into a tempest that lasts for nine days. When the storm dies down, they realize that they have been thrown off course. They come to the land of the Lotus Eaters. Odysseus warns his men not to eat the Lotus flowers, but they eat the intoxicating plant and temporarily lose their minds.

Back on ship they sail to the land of the Cyclops – the one-eyed monsters. They follow sheep into a cave and are trapped by one of the Cyclops named Polyphemus, who eats some of the men. Odysseus gives him some of the magic wine from Maron and the Cyclops falls asleep. While lying on the ground, Odysseus blinds the monster and the men escape and return to their ship. Angered, Polyphemus asks his Father Poseidon to punish Odysseus by never letting him return home to Ithica.

Next Odysseus meets King Aeolus on his floating island. Aeolus is in charge of guarding the winds of the world. Odysseus stays with the King for a month, telling him of the battle at Troy. Aeolus gives Odysseus a magic bag filled with winds to help him sail home and tells him to be careful. If he opens the bag too soon his ship will be wrecked in a hurricane. Odysseus guards the bag for 10 days and grows tired. His men are curious and when Odysseus falls asleep they open the bag, causing a hurricane.

Next they came to Telepylus, home to the Lastrygonians. They are cannibals at heart, and eat some of Odysseus' men.

On to Aeaea, the wooded home of Circe, the Goddess with the human voice. She gives the men food and changes them into pigs. Odysseus is warned by Hermes, who gives him a magic flower called Moly. When eaten, this flower will protect Odysseus from Circe's magic wand. Odysseus eats the flower, and when Circe tries the wand, her magic does not work. She changes the pigs back into men and gives them gifts. Odysseus asks to be returned home, but Circe cannot help him. She sends him into the land of Hades to meet the prophet, Tiresias.

Tiresias warns Odysseus that he will suffer the wrath of Poseidon for blinding Polyphemus. He states that when he comes to the land of Thrinacia that he and his men must not harm the cows.

Next Odysseus has to pass through the Sirens who sing a song that makes any man who hears it so full of grief that he crashes into the rocks which encircle the Siren's home. Odysseus has his men tie him to the mast of the ship and wax up their ears so that he will become the only man to hear the Song of the Sirens and live to tell about it.

The next choice Odysseus has to face is sailing through the wandering rocks or between two ferocious sea monsters. The first monster is Scylla, with six long necks, each with three rows of sharp teeth. The other is Charybdis, a monstrous whirlpool. He decides to sail by Scylla because only six men will perish in her razor sharp jaws, rather than everyone on board ship.

The island of Thrinacia is their next stop. Even though they had promised Odysseus that they would not touch the cows Tiresias warned them not to eat, fear of starvation got the best of them and they killed some of the cattle. The owner, Helios is angry and calls for Zeus who sends a lightning bolt to Odysseus' ship. All of the men are killed except for Odysseus.

Odysseus floats on an ox-hide till he comes to the island of Ogygia, home of Calypso. She falls in love with Odysseus and makes him King of her island. Athena goes to Father Zeus to complain about Odysseus not returning home to his wife, Penelope. Zeus sends in Hermes who convinces Calypso to set Odysseus free.

Odysseus builds himself a boat and once again sets out to sail. Poseidon, still angry, smashes his boat. Odysseus swims to the island of Scheria, home

of the Phaiacians. They honor him as a guest, give him clothing and gifts, and then sail him home. The Phaiacians leave him on the shore of Ithica and are turned to stone on their return trip to Sceria.

Back home in Ithica, Athena disguises Odysseus as an old beggar. He reveals his true self to his son, Telemachus and a faithful servant, Eumaus. Back at the palace, he goes back under cover, successfully strings a bow and shoots an arrow through 12 axe-heads. He kills the suitors who have been trying to murder his son and marry his wife Penelope.

Odysseus and his faithful wife, Penelope are reunited. His 20 year journey is complete.

Activity #2: Send thank you letters to the artists at Will and Company telling them your comments about the play and what you learned.

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