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Tales from the Odyssey  
Book Three: Sirens and Sea Monsters  
*By: Mary Pope Osborne*

Answer all questions throughout the chapters. Make sure to use complete sentences and that you read the questions fully. You should also use the three guides below in your annotation of the text. Make sure to **use complete sentences** and that you read the questions fully. You should highlight unknown words, new characters, and important or interesting points within the story when you are reading. **Write notes on the side - it lets me know what you're thinking when reading.** If you have questions that come up when reading, write them down on the right hand side - sometimes asking yourself questions when reading helps you better understand the text.

<p><b>Highlight:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Unknown words</li><li>● New Characters</li><li>● Important Plot Points</li></ul>	<p><b>Ask Questions Throughout the text:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Ask questions when the character does something confusing.</li><li>● Ask a question about the author's word choice.</li></ul>	<p><b>Comment:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Comment on parts of the story that are exciting</li><li>● Comment on parts of the story that you want to know more about</li><li>● Comment when you make connections</li></ul>
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<p><b>Chapter One: The Land of the Living</b></p> <p><i>Thousands of wailing ghosts moved toward Odysseus. Their anguished cries echoed through the fog. Odysseus and his men began to run. They ran for their lives, fleeing from the dead ...</i></p> <p>“Land ahead!” one of Odysseus’ men called.</p> <p>Odysseus woke from his nightmare. He had fallen asleep on the deck of his ship. He had been dreaming of his visit to the spirit world ruled by Hades and Persephone. Now in the distance he could see the island of Circe, the enchantress.</p>	<p><b>Questions/Comments/Vocab</b></p>
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*I will tell Circe all that I saw and heard in the Land of the Dead, he thought. Then surely she will help us find our way home to Ithaca.*

For twelve long years, Odysseus had yearned to return to the Greek island of Ithaca and be reunited with his beloved wife and son. During that time, he and his men had fought in the Trojan War. They had battled the Cyclops, a one-eyed monster. They had escaped cannibal giants, losing all but one of their ships. Odysseus had charmed the wily enchantress Circe, and he and his men had now survived a journey to the Land of the Dead -- a journey from which no mortal had ever before returned alive.

As they sailed now toward Circe's sunlit island, the Greeks cheered. The island was covered with beautiful green forests and ringed by rocky shores.

Birds sang in the trees as the Greeks anchored their ship. But as the sun went down and they dragged themselves ashore, a great weariness overtook them. Each man collapsed to the sand, too exhausted to speak.

Lying on the cool beach, Odysseus stared up at the moon and stars. He pushed away all his memories of the Land of the Dead. He felt the soft breezes and listened to the waves lap the shore. The world of the living seemed an extraordinary place indeed.

**Questions/Comments/Vocab**

Connections	Questions	Translation	Prediction

**Questions/Comments/Vocab**

As rosy-fingered dawn spread over the island, Odysseus opened his eyes.

He saw Circe emerge from her palace. She was dressed in a beautiful gown of rainbow colors. Her handmaidens trailed behind her in the fresh morning air, carrying trays of meat, bread, and wine.

Odysseus jumped to his feet and awakened his men. Then he hurried to greet the goddess. Though the enchantress had once tried to harm him and his men, she was now their friend and protector.

“Greetings!” Odysseus called.

“Welcome, my brave friends!” said Circe, smiling. “You have done what no other mortals have ever done. You have traveled to the Land of the Dead and returned. When you die, others will say that you have died twice.”

“Yes, we are grateful to the gods for our safe journey back to your island,” Odysseus said. “We pray that you will now help us find our way home to Ithaca.”

“Indeed I will,” said Circe. “But today you must rest, for you have a long, hard voyage ahead of you. Feast and drink and celebrate your return. Then tomorrow, when the dawn breaks, you shall set sail for Ithaca.”

The men cheered. They were **famished** and thirsty and delighted to spend the day in the company of Circe and her lovely handmaidens.

All morning and all afternoon, Odysseus and his men feasted and drank wine. When the sun finally set and darkness covered the island, the men lay down in the hollow of their ship and fell fast asleep.

Odysseus himself did not rest. Circe took him by the hand and led him into the moonlit forest. Together they sat in the shadows beneath a towering oak.

“Tell me of your journey, Odysseus,” Circe said. “What did you see in the Land of the Dead? What did you learn there?”

Odysseus told Circe about his journey to the gray kingdom of Hades and Persephone, rulers of the dead. He told her about the spirits who had come forth, begging for blood so they might be restored to life.

“Among them was my mother,” he said sorrowfully. “She died of grief waiting for me to come home to Ithaca. She told me that my father and my wife and son still ache for my return.”

“I spoke also with my friend Achilles, who was slain in the Trojan War. I spoke with the High King, Agamemnon. I saw Heracles, Sisyphus, and Tantalus. Finally, I spoke with the blind prophet, Tiresias.”

“And what did the prophet tell you?” asked Circe.

“He gave me wise counsel and warnings,” said Odysseus. “This is what he said: ‘On your way home, you will pass the island of the sun god. On this island there are many beautiful sheep and cattle. Do not let your men touch even one of these creatures. They are much adored by the sun. Anyone who tries to slay them will meet his doom. You alone might escape. But if you do, you will be a broken man. You will find great trouble in your house.’”

Circe sighed. “Yes, those are wise words,” she said. “But before you reach the island of the sun god, you must brave other dangers. Listen to me carefully, Odysseus, for I am about to speak of terrible things. But do exactly as I say, and you and your men will find your way home.”

## Questions/Comments/Vocab

\* repeating the same prophecy

## Chapter Two: Circe's Warnings

"Odysseus, can you bear to hear what I have to say?" Circe asked him. "Are you prepared to know of the horrors that await you on your journey?"

Odysseus nodded. What could be more horrible than the Cyclops, or the cannibal giants -- or even the spell Circe herself had once cast on his men, turning them into swine?

Circe began: "Soon after you leave my island, you will come upon the island of the Sirens. The Sirens are beautiful women. From a field of flowers, they sing to all sailors who pass their shores."

Odysseus almost laughed. "What threat could these women possibly be to me and my men?" he asked.

"Any sailor who hears the song of the Sirens will forget his homeland, his wife, and his children," said Circe. "The Sirens' lovely singing will lure him to a watery death."

Odysseus smiled and shook his head. He could not believe a simple song could have such power.

"Heed my warning, Odysseus!" said Circe. "The Sirens; shores are littered with the bones of sailors driven mad by their song. You must make your crew plug their ears with beeswax, so none will be able to hear. Else you will all perish!"

"I will order them to do so," Odysseus agreed. "But I myself will listen. I do not believe my will to return home can be broken by a song."

"Then you alone may hear the Sirens," said Circe. "But first your men must tie your hands and your feet to the mast of the ship, or you will surely hurl yourself into the sea. Tell your men that even if you plead with them to loosen your bonds, they must not. Will you swear to do that?"

Odysseus nodded.

**What indeed...**

**First challenge after leaving Circe's island =**

**Character description:**

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**Oh, brother... Odysseus showing too much pride (hubris) here.**

“Once you have sailed past the Sirens, you will see two sea paths,” said Circe. “One path will lead you between the Wandering Rocks. The Wandering Rocks are gigantic boulders that pound against one another with terrific fury. No living thing -- not even a dove on her way to Zeus -- can pass between them without being crushed.

“The waves that foam about the Wandering Rocks are filled with the wreckage of ships and the bodies of sailors. Only Jason and his Argonauts have survived them, but that was because the goddess Hera loved Jason and protected him.”

“I fear we cannot depend upon protection from the gods,” said Odysseus. “Tell me, Circe, what is the other path?”

“The other path leads between two sea cliffs,” said Circe. “One cliff is quite low. There, under a great fig tree, dwells the deadly whirlpool monster, Charybdis. Any ship that sails near Charybdis is sucked to the black bottom of the sea. Even Poseidon himself cannot save mortal sailors from the monster whirlpool.”

“And what of the other cliff?” asked Odysseus. “What danger lies on its shore?”

“High on the side of the second cliff is a dark cave,” said Circe. “In the cave dwells the monster Scylla. She yelps like a small hound. But in truth she is a terrible beast. Even the gods and goddesses cannot look upon her without being sickened.”

“Why is she so terrible?” asked Odysseus.

“Scylla is a monster with six huge, hideous heads,” said Circe. “Her six mouths are filled with razor-sharp teeth. In an instant, the monster can devour six men. All day, Scylla sits inside her cave, gazing greedily over the sea with her twelve eyes. Whenever a ship sails by, she strikes with all her heads and snatches six sailors from the deck. In no time, she rips her poor victims to pieces.”

Odysseus stared at the enchantress. “Then the choice you give me is impossible,” he said. “Either we are drowned by the whirlpool monster or we die in the jaws of the six-headed beast.”

**Second Challenge Odysseus will face after leaving Circe’s island =**

**Charybdis is an example of personification, giving human like qualities to something not human.**

<p>“The choice is this,” Circe said. “If you sail close to the monster whirlpool, you will all die. But if you sail close to Scylla, only six will be lost.”</p>	
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Connections	Questions	Translation	Prediction

<p>Odysseus closed his eyes. He had already seen dozens of his men die hideous deaths. Some had been eaten by the monstrous Cyclops. Others had been speared alive by cannibal giants. How could he bear to see more slaughtered?</p> <p>“I counsel you to take the course that leads past the monster Scylla,” said Circe. “Do not try to fight her. You will lose six men. But if you sail swiftly enough past the monster, you will lose <i>only</i> six. The rest will have a chance to escape.”</p> <p>Odysseus was silent for a moment. He could hardly bear to follow Circe’s counsel. “How can I knowingly sacrifice my men to such a hideous death?” he asked. “How can I choose which six will die?”</p> <p>“It is not in your power to choose who shall die,” said Circe. “The monster will make the choice for you. Perhaps she will even choose <i>you</i>.”</p> <p>Odysseus shook his head. “No. I will kill her before she touches <i>any</i> of us,” he said.</p>	<p><b>Questions/Comments/Vocab</b></p>
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“Do not be so proud, Odysseus!” Circe said. “You are only a mortal. No mortal -- not even you -- can defeat Scylla. While you waste time attacking her with your sword, she will devour another six men. You must row your ship at full speed! And shout a prayer to Scylla’s mother, asking for help. Only she can stop her savage daughter from devouring more men.”

Before Odysseus could protest further, Circe went on.

“If you escape from the monster, it will be time to heed the warnings of Tiresias,” Circe said. “For soon you will come to the island of Helios, the sun god. There you will see seven herds of cattle and seven flocks of sheep.

“There are fifty beasts in each herd. They are tended by two fair nymphs, daughters of Helios. The sheep and cattle never give birth. They never die. But if and of your men so much as touches them, all your crew will perish. You yourself might escape, but you will have a sad and terrible time when you return home to your island. Your wife and son will suffer also.”

Odysseus stood up. The thought that his family might be in danger kindled his desire to start for home at once. “Thank you for your help,” he said to Circe. “I promise to heed your warnings.”

“Good,” she said. “I have told you all that you need to know. Your path will be dangerous indeed. But if you do as I say, you will find your way home. Go now, for the dawn is almost upon us.”

Odysseus looked around at the forest. A misty golden-pink light filtered through the trees. A breeze made the leaves quiver and dance. Birds began to sing.

When Odysseus turned back to the enchantress, she was gone.

“Circe!” he called.

She did not answer. She had slipped away into the dawn’s rosy light.

**Connection to book 2 here**

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← **another example of personification, this time it is the leaves.**



Questions:

1. Circe talks about a lot of monsters and struggles that Odysseus will have to face before reaching Ithaca; what are they?

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2. Which of the monsters do you think would be the most terrifying? Why do you think that?

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3. What sound does Scylla make?

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### Chapter Three: Song of the Sirens

Odysseus was eager to set sail. As he hurried back to the shore, Circe's words echoed in his ears: *Your path will be dangerous indeed. But if you do as I say, you will find your way home.*

Odysseus boarded his ship and commanded his men to cast off at once.

The Greeks stumbled from their sleep and took their places at the oars of the black vessel. As Odysseus was about to raise anchor, Circe's handmaidens appeared on the beach. They carried food and wine for the voyage.

The men happily loaded their gifts onto the ship. Then they bade farewell to the fair maidens and pushed off from the shore.

As the ship sailed away from land, Odysseus stared wistfully at the island of mysterious enchantress. For the past twelve months, Circe had controlled his fate: she had changed his men into swine and back again. She had sent him on an **unfathomable** journey into the Land of the Dead. She had armed him with prophecies and warnings for his dangerous voyage home.

Even now he could feel her presence as gentle breezes carried his ship across the waves.

As his ship sailed onto the open sea, Odysseus thought of Circe's warnings and the dangers he and his men would soon face.

*It is not fair, he thought, that I should know what horrors await us, while my men know nothing.*

Odysseus stood up and called for his crew to listen.

"Friends!" he said. "Circe has told me much about the journey ahead. Now you shall hear her warnings as well. We will soon

← use of italics to show inner dialogue

approach the island of the Sirens. The Sirens are beautiful women who sing from a field of flowers near the sea.”

The men laughed, certain they had nothing to fear from lovely singers.

“Take heed,” said Odysseus, “Circe has warned me that any man who hears the song of the Sirens will drown himself trying to get to them. You must plug your ears so that you cannot hear the enchanting song. I alone may listen, but only if you bind my hands and feet so tightly to the mast of the ship that I cannot break loose. If I beg you to set me free, you must bind me tighter still.”

As Odysseus spoke, the wind picked up, filling the sail and carrying the black ship faster and faster across the waves. Then, just as suddenly, the wind ceased. The water grew **ominously** still. The men looked about with fear.

“Where is the breeze?” one whispered.

“There is not a ripple on the waves,” said another. “What has become of the wind?”

“We must be nearing the island of the Sirens,” Odysseus said. “Quick! Let down the sail and stow it away! Be silent. Be swift.”

The men did as Odysseus commanded. They lowered the sail and stowed it in the hold. Then they picked up their oars and rowed silently through the eerie, still waters.

While the men rowed, Odysseus grabbed a wheel of beeswax. He held the wax in the sun until it was soft, then cut it into many small pieces. He molded the pieces with his fingers, then handed two to each man.

“Use these to keep the song of the Sirens from reaching your ears,” he said. “And then you must bind me to the mast.”

The men sealed their ears with the wax. Then they took long cords of rope and tied Odysseus to the mast of the ship. They tied the knots so tightly that no man could loosen them.

The Greeks then picked up their oars again and began to row.

As the black ship moved closer to the island. Odysseus began to hear singing waft through the mist. The sound was more beautiful than he had even imagined -- high, sweet, and lilting. The words of the Sirens floated on the soft wind:

*Harken, brave Odysseus,  
Listen to us now!  
No one can pass our island without staying  
To hear our song.  
He who listens will be all the wiser,  
He who listens  
Will discover the secrets of the gods.*

The ship sailed closer to the shore. Through the mist beyond the still waters, Odysseus saw two lovely women in a flowery meadow.

To his amazement, he saw that the women had wings like birds. Their feathers were translucent in the early morning light. Odysseus felt an unbearable longing to be with the beautiful creatures. He yearned to spend the rest of his life with them.

As his ship drew closer, Odysseus saw heaps of bleached bones around the bird women. He saw the rotten skin of decaying bodies. He knew he was looking at the remains of the sailors who had been enchanted by the Sirens.

But even such a ghastly sight did not keep Odysseus from yearning to throw himself into the sea and swim to the island.

As the Sirens sang their sweet song over and over, Odysseus nearly went mad. He twisted and turned, trying to break free from his bonds.

His men quickened their rowing. Two of them bound Odysseus with more ropes. They rowed faster and faster over the still waters. As they rowed, the song of the Sirens grew fainter.

Odysseus strained to hear the lovely singing as it faded away in the distance. His heart was filled with grief as it grew softer and softer . . . until finally it was gone and all was silent again.

Suddenly the wind picked up. Waves rippled and rolled. Seagulls swooped and cawed.

Odysseus' grief turned to joy. He began to laugh. He was safe! His men were safe! The song of the Sirens was behind them, and they were all safe and well.

Questions:

1. Why do you think Odysseus *needed* to listen to the Sirens' song?

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2. What did Odysseus give to his men so that they would not hear the Sirens' song?

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3. What do the Sirens promise to Odysseus if he stays and listens to their song?

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#### **Chapter Four: The Whirlpool Monster**

When Odysseus' men saw him laughing, they pulled the wax from their ears.

"Untie the ropes!" Odysseus ordered them. "Set me free!"

As his men untied Odysseus, he thanked them.

"I am grateful to you all," he said. "I have heard the song of the Sirens, and I have survived."

The men asked him to describe the beautiful singing. But before Odysseus could speak, he heard a deep rumbling in the distance.

Everyone looked toward the sound. The sea had grown eerily dark. Huge ripples began to rock the ship from side to side.

The rumbling grew louder and louder until it was a deafening roar. Waves billowed and broke with great force against the ship's hull.

Only Odysseus understood what was happening. His ship and all aboard it were being pulled into the whirlpool of Charybdis.

"Row! Row for your lives!" Odysseus said.

But Odysseus' men shouted in fear and threw down their oars. The ship began to spin in the sea.

Odysseus knew that to escape the whirlpool, he must steer the ship swiftly and steadily toward the cave of the monstrous Scylla. But he could not bear to tell his men the horror that awaited them there.

Instead, Odysseus went around the deck, urging each man not to surrender to fear.

“We have had great trials,” he told them, “but we escaped the monstrous Cyclops. We survived the enchantment of Circe. We journeyed to the Land of the Dead and returned unharmed. Pick up your oars now! Row swiftly! Whatever is to come, we must face it with courage!”

Odysseus’ heart was heavy as he spoke to his men. He alone knew that at least six of them would soon die hideously in the jaws of the monster Scylla.

Ignorant of their fate and heartened by their leader’s words, the Greeks picked up their oars again and began rowing through the wildly rushing waters.

As the helmsman struggled to hold the ship steady, the whirlpool’s roar grew unbearably loud. Ferocious waves crashed over the ship.

Soon Odysseus saw a towering cliff looming ahead. The cliff seemed to reach to heaven itself -- its peak lost in a cloud. No man could climb to its top, for the cliff’s steep sides were as smooth as marble.

Near the cliff’s summit was a dark cave. *The home of Scylla, the six-headed monster*, Odysseus thought with dread.

Again Odysseus chose not to tell his men about the monster waiting in her lair. If they knew, their courage would leave them and they would cease to row -- and all would be lost in the whirlpool of Charybdis.

*Better six shall die than all*, Odysseus thought bitterly.

So again, he urged his men to summon their courage:

“Do as I say -- trust in Zeus -- row with all your might! Steer close to the tall cliff that disappears into the clouds.”

Connections	Questions	Translation	Prediction

<p>Odysseus tried to speak calmly. But he was enraged that six of his comrades were about to die. His fury grew until it led him to make a rash decision: he would defy the counsel of Circe. He would slay the monster before she devoured even one of his men.</p> <p>Odysseus strapped on his armor. He seized two long spears. Gripping a spear in each hand, he stared up at the looming gray cliff.</p> <p>Mist partially covered the mouth of Scylla's cave. The cave was so high that even the best warrior could not send an arrow or spear inside it. Odysseus would have to wait for the monster to emerge.</p> <p>As his men rowed furiously through the dark sea, Odysseus listened for the puppylike yelps of the monster. He waited to see her six long necks and her hideous heads with their rows of gleaming teeth.</p> <p>He stood on the foredeck of the black ship, ready to slay her.</p>	
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