

Name: _____

Due: _____

Tales from the Odyssey
Book Five: Return to Ithaca
By: Mary Pope Osborne

Answer all questions at the end of each chapter. 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.

Chapter 1: Separation and Sorrow

Beneath an olive tree on a strange shore lay Odysseus, the lost king of Ithaca. In the weeks before, Odysseus had fought for his life against a terrible storm. He had lived many days without food or fresh water. He had narrowly escaped death with the aid of a sea goddess. And now, covered by a blanket of leaves, he was drifting into a deep and exhausted sleep.

For the twenty years since he had left the battlefields of Troy, Odysseus had tried desperately to return to his beloved island of Ithaca. In that time, he had braved many storms and fought many monsters. He had lost his fleet of twelve ships and all of his men.

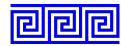
Odysseus ached always to return to his home and be reunited with his wife, Penelope, and their son, Telemachus. Though he had not seen them in twenty years, they were ever in his heart and mind. But as he lay on this distant shore, it seemed impossible to Odysseus that he would ever get home . . .



As Odysseus slept on the beach, far away Penelope slept in her palace bed, weary from weeping. For many years, wicked men had invaded her husband's estate, demanding that she take one of them for a husband. Penelope had steadfastly refused, and now her suitors were plotting to kill her son as he returned home from searching for his father. Upon hearing this news, Penelope had

Questions/Comments/Notes

collapsed. She could hardly bear her husband's absence. Surely she would die if she lost her son as well . . .



Far away from Ithaca, Penelope's son, Telemachus, lay in a splendid chamber in the palace of the king and queen of Sparta. He had traveled there to find news of his father, and his quest had been fulfilled. King Menelaus had told him that Odysseus might be a captive on the island of the goddess Calypso.

Since receiving this news, Telemachus had been asking himself the same questions over and over: Should he set out in search of Calypso's island in hopes of finding his father? Or should he return to Ithaca and help his mother in her struggle against the suitors who were trying to take his father's place?

The son of Odysseus did not know that even now evil men were waiting to ambush him on his way home.



High on Mount Olympus, the gray-eyed goddess Athena looked down on Odysseus, Penelope, and Telemachus. Something must be done to save Odysseus and his wife and son, she thought -- and quickly. So, in the hour before dawn, Athena left her bright, perfect world in the clouds and slipped down to the small and troubled world below. . .

Questions:

1. Why don't you think Penelope does something to help her son? What could she do to help him?

2. Why do you think Athena feels so attached to Odysseus and his family?

Chapter Two: The Princess

Athena traveled swiftly over the earth to the land of King Alcinous. King Alcinous was a wise and generous leader, and his kingdom was blessed. The men were the best sailors in all the world, and the women were the best weavers.

Athena passed green fields, splendid temples, and lovely houses until finally she came to the palace of the king and queen. In the hour before dawn, she slipped through the entranceway, then down the hall to the chamber of the king's daughter, Nausicaa.

The goddess glided silently into the princess's room. Like a breath of wind, she swept past two young handmaidens sleeping near the door.

Athena hovered for a moment over the princess's bed. Then she quickly changed her shape to that of Nausicaa's closest friend. She spoke to the princess as if in a dream.

"Nausicaa, you are so lazy!" she said. "Don't you know that there are many dirty clothes in the palace that must be washed? How will you ever marry if you do not have a clean gown? At dawn, you must load the best linen into a wagon and go to the pools near the shore and do the washing!"

The gray-eyed goddess then slipped out of the palace as swiftly and silently as she had come. When dawn broke, Nausicaa woke and remembered her strange dream. She hurried at once to her parents' chamber. "Father! I must go today and wash all our best clothes in the sea!" she said. "If I do not have clean clothes, how will I ever marry?"

King Alcinous smiled. He thought his daughter's words were strange, but he could refuse her nothing. "If that is what you wish, Nausicaa, that is what you shall do," he said. "I will tell the servants to fetch a wagon and harness the mules so you can carry all our clothes down to the sea."

The king's servants quickly prepared a wagon. The princess and her handmaidens loaded piles of soiled cloaks, robes, tunics, and gowns into the back. They packed a lunch of bread and meat, a goatskin filled with wine, and a flask of golden olive oil.

Nausicaa climbed into the driver's seat of the wagon and snapped the reins. The team of mules lunged forward and the wagon rattled noisily over the road, carrying the princess and her handmaidens toward the sea.

When they came to the washing pools near the shore, the girls unhitched the mules. They unloaded the wagon and carried the piles of clothes down to the pools. They stamped on the garments, washing them in seawater until they were spotless. They then spread them over the rocks to dry.

As they waited for the sun and wind to dry their laundry, the princess and her handmaidens bathed in the sea. They ate their bread and meat. They they threw off their veils and began playing ball.

The princess tossed the ball high into the air. A maiden missed the catch, and the ball rolled into the water. As the girls ran to get it, they laughed and shouted.

Not far away, a sad and weary man lay beneath a blanket of leaves under an olive tree. When he heard the voices of the young girls, he opened his eyes.

Where am I? he wondered. Who is shouting and laughing? Their voices sound like those of nymphs who haunt rivers and mountains.

Odysseus broke off a bough of thick leaves to hide his nakedness. Then he crept out from under the olive tree into the afternoon sun.

Questions:

1. What does Athena tell Nausicaa to do once she wakes up from her dream? Do you think it is a strange activity for a princess, why or why not?

2. Who will find Odysseus? How do you think they will react?

Chapter 3: The Stranger

When the handmaidens saw Odysseus, they screamed and ran away. But Princess Nausicaa stood very still, for Athena had filled her heart with courage. The young girl stared at the unkempt stranger, covered with sea salt and dirt and leaves.

“Beautiful princess, are you a goddess or a mortal?” Odysseus said. “Whoever you are, have pity on me, for I have suffered much. I was tossed upon the seas for twenty days, until the waves flung me onto this shore. Can you give me clothes to hide my nakedness? Can you tell me the way to your town?”

The princess drew close to Odysseus. “Stranger, I believe you are a good man,” she said. “I am Nausicaa, the daughter of King Alcinous. My maids and I will help you.”

Nausicaa called for her handmaidens to come out of their hiding places. She ordered them to bring clean clothes and olive oil for the mysterious stranger.

Odysseus washed himself in a stream, then rubbed the olive oil over his battered, sun-dried skin. When he had dressed himself in a tunic and cloak, the princess’s handmaidens brought him meat and wine.

After Odysseus finished his meal, Princess Nausicaa told him what he must do. “You may follow our wagon to the walls of the town,”

she said, "but when we get inside the walls, you must leave us. The men of my land are the finest sailors in the world, but they are suspicious of strangers. They may think you are a vagabond from some foreign ship and speak ill of me for leading you to our city."

"Where should I go?" asked Odysseus.

"Inside the walls of the city there is a grove of poplars sacred to Athena. Wait there until I have had time to get home," said Nausicaa. "Then come to the palace. Inside you will find my parents sitting before a fire. My mother will be spinning dark-blue wool. Kneel before her and ask for help."

The princess then shook the reins of her wagon, and the mules began clattering toward town.

Odysseus followed the wagon past fields and farmland and a harbor filled with fine ships. When the wagon arrived at the narrow gates of the city, Odysseus followed it through the gates, then stopped and watched it rattle on without him.

Odysseus walked quickly through a marketplace filled with merchants selling fish, sails, and ship's oars. As he made his way between the stalls, several of the merchants and customers eyed him suspiciously. Odysseus quickly slipped past them and into the sacred grove of poplars trees. He hid among the trees, waiting for the princess to reach the palace.

While he waited, Odysseus prayed to the gods. "Hear me, O gods of Olympus! Have pity upon me," he begged. "Grant that I may make my way safely to the palace and find favor with the king and queen."

Odysseus remained hidden in the olive grove until he was sure Princess Nausicaa had had enough time to reach the palace. Then he stepped cautiously out onto the city streets again.

As Odysseus started out of the grove, a strange mist covered his body. No one seemed to notice him as he made his way through the streets. *Has Athena made me invisible?* he wondered.

Suddenly a small girl stepped in front of Odysseus. The child stared up at him with bright gray eyes. Odysseus wondered if the girl might be Athena in disguise.

“Can you tell me the way to the palace of the king?” he asked her.

“I will show you,” said the child.

“Follow me and speak to no one.”

Odysseus followed the girl through the streets. When they drew near the palace, she said simply, “Go inside and look for the queen.” Then she disappeared, leaving Odysseus alone at the palace gates.

Odysseus entered the gates and passed through an orchard of trees laden with luscious figs, pears, and apples. He walked through a rich vineyard and a bountiful flower garden.

When he entered the halls of the palace, he gasped in wonder. The palace shone with a splendor like that of the sun and moon. Golden statues of boys holding fiery torches lit the halls. In the gleaming light, handmaidens worked at their looms. Their fingers fluttered like aspen leaves in the wind as they wove their beautiful lined.

No one seemed to notice Odysseus as he walked through the palace. Hidden by Athena’s cloak of mist, he slipped silently into the great hall. As Odysseus looked about for the queen, he saw a group of nobles sitting near an open fire. Nearby sat the king and a woman spinning wool.

Odysseus moved quickly toward Nausicaa’s mother. As he knelt in the ashes before the hearth, he felt the mist around him evaporate -- and suddenly, he was visible again.

Some in the hall cried out in alarm when they saw the strange, haggard man. But Odysseus spoke quickly and passionately to the queen: “I humbly beg you to have pity on me!” he said. “I have come here from beyond the sea. Help me find my way back to my home country, to my wife and my son.”

Questions:

1. Why do you think Nausicaa was so quick to believe that Odysseus was a good person? What would you think if you met Odysseus at this moment in the book?

2. How was the palace described?

3. Why did Odysseus speak to Nausicaa's mother instead of father?

Chapter 4: The Feast

Everyone in the great hall stared in shock at Odysseus as he knelt before the queen. Finally an old man broke the silence. "We must honor our most ancient tradition," he said. "Almighty Zeus tells us never to deny a stranger who asks for our protection. Give this wretched man a chair. Offer him wine and supper."

King Alcinous helped Odysseus to a chair. A servant brought a silver basin and washed Odysseus' hands. Others brought him bread and meat and wine.

The king and queen and all their guests raised their cups in the air. "To Zeus, protector of worth strangers," said the king. Then he looked at Odysseus. "Perhaps you are one of the immortals yourself, come down to earth to test our hospitality."

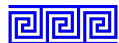
Odysseus shook his head. "Pray, sir, do not mistake me for a god. In truth, I am the most wretched of men. If only you knew what misery I have suffered."

King Alcinous seemed moved by Odysseus' humble words. He turned to his guest. "Go safely to your homes now. Tomorrow we will honor this traveler with a feast."

When the guests had all taken their leave and Odysseus was left alone with the king and queen, the queen spoke gently to him. "I see that you do not wear your own clothes, my friend," she said, "for those are garments that my daughter took to the washing pools this morning. You say that you have come from beyond the sea. In truth, who are you? Where is your home?"

Odysseus did not want to reveal his true identity. So he told them only of leaving the island of Calypso and escaping the terrible storm. He told them about their daughter's kindness toward him.

Satisfied with his story, the queen ordered her servants to prepare a room for Odysseus. He was soon led to his bed, where he lay down on soft purple blankets. As soon as the torches were put out, he fell into a deep, restful sleep.



The next morning, palace servants set about preparing a great feast. They roasted sheep, boars, and oxen. A messenger was sent to summon the finest singer in the land, a blind minstrel.

As King Alcinous' servants made preparations for the feast, Athena walked through the streets of the city. Disguised as the king's herald, she called to every citizen: "Come, lords and princes! Come hear the stories of the stranger who has arrived at the palace of the king!"

A great crowd gathered at the palace for the feast. When King Alcinous brought Odysseus before his people, the crowd gasped. Odysseus could see great wonder in their faces. Though he was still weary from his ordeal at sea, he suspected that Athena had made him look tall and strong and given him an air of great dignity.

As the feasting began, the blind singer sat down by a pillar and cradled his harp in his arms. Soon the spirit moved him, and he began singing about famous warriors who had died in battle. He sang about the heroes of the Trojan War, about brave Achilles and King Agamemnon.

As the singer sang, Odysseus wept for his lost friends. He hid his face behind his robe, so none could see his tears. He did not want them to guess who he really was.

But later, after sports and games, Odysseus felt merry and confident. He called out to the singer: "Sing about the wooden horse that helped the Greeks win the war! If you tell the true story of the fall of Troy, I will praise your storytelling the whole world over!"

The singer began singing about a Greek king named Odysseus. He sang about how Odysseus had ordered the making of a giant wooden horse, and how he had hidden himself inside the horse with his finest warriors. He sang about how the Trojans had brought the horse inside the walls of Troy, and how the Greeks, led by Odysseus, had crept out at nightfall and laid siege to the city, and thus won the war.

As the minstrel sang, Odysseus began to weep again. This time, he could not hide his grief. He wept uncontrollably.

King Alcinous ordered the singer to silence his harp. "Our guest has wept twice today when you sang about the Trojan War," he said. "I imagine your songs have stirred his memories." Then the king turned to Odysseus. "Sir, do not try to hide what you feel or who you are any longer," he said. "Tell us your name. Tell us about your travels and what you have seen. Did you see the fall of Troy? Did your friends perish in battle? I ask you to tell us your story."

Questions:

1. Why do you think Odysseus decided not to tell the queen who he was?

2. How did Odysseus react to the story of the Trojan horse?

Chapter 5: Return to Ithaca

Odysseus stood and faced the crowd. "Where should I begin?" he said. "I have such a long, sad tale to tell. First, I will tell you my name: I am Odysseus. My home is Ithaca, a bright and beautiful island. The island is low and the water around it can often be rough. But there is no sight more beautiful than one's own home. I have not seen my island or my family for twenty years, not since I sailed away to fight the Trojan War . . ."

Odysseus went on to tell how the Greeks had fought for ten years in faraway Troy -- and how their mighty fleet had set sail for home after winning the war. He told how a terrible storm had driven his twelve ships off course and sent them to the Land of the Lotus Eaters -- and then to the cave of the hideous Cyclops monster.

Odysseus told about the horror of seeing the giant one-eyed monster eat his warriors alive -- and how he had led his men in a daring escape by hiding in the fleece of the monster's rams.

Odysseus told how the Wind God had given him a bag of winds to help speed his ships home. And how, when they were within sight of Ithaca, his men had disobeyed his orders and opened the bag while he was sleeping, releasing a terrible gale that swept their ships back across the sea, far away from home.

Odysseus told how cannibal giants had murdered most of his men and sunk eleven of his twelve ships. He told how he and his crew had then sailed to the island of Circe, the enchantress, and how the beautiful witch had turned his men into pigs. He told about his journey to the mist-filled Land of the Dead, where he saw the ghosts of friends who had died, and, the saddest sight of all, the ghost of his own mother.

Odysseus told how his ship sailed past the Sirens, the strange bird-women who lured sailors to watery death with their beautiful singing. He told how his ship was forced to pass between two deadly creatures -- the hideous six-headed monster, Scylla, and the whirlpool monster, Charybdis.

Odysseus told how his men had disobeyed the gods and slain the cattle of the Sun God -- and how, for this offense, the gods had drowned the last of his men in a horrible storms at sea.

Odysseus told how he had then sailed alone to the island of Calypso -- and how the goddess had kept him prisoner for seven long years. He told about leaving her island and clinging to a raft for twenty days and nights at sea, until he had finally crawled upon the very shores where Princess Nausicaa and her handmaidens had found him.

At the end of his astonishing tale, Odysseus sighed with sorrow. "I want now only to return to my family," he said. "I want to go home."

All who listened to Odysseus' story were silent with awe. At long last the king spoke: "For many years, this man has been far from his native island, and now he asks only that we help him return to his family. Tomorrow, fifty-two of our finest sailors will prepare a ship, and at sunset, we will send him on his way home."



The next day, King Alcinous' servants packed a great ship with fine clothes and gifts of gold. As the sun sank low in the sky, the king's men sacrificed an ox to Zeus, almighty ruler on Mount Olympus.

"May the gods always bless your family for your great kindness and generosity," Odysseus said to the king.

The ship's sailors then laid a blanket on the deck for Odysseus. They urged him to lie on the blanket and take his rest as they set sail. In silence, Odysseus lay down on the blanket and closed his eyes.

The crew took their places. They raised their anchor and began to row. As the ship moved through the twilight, Odysseus fell asleep.

After years of struggling against the ills of war, against storms and hideous monsters, he struggled no more.

The king's ship sped like a team of galloping stallions over the sea. Even falcons could not keep up with her as she moved across the purple waves.

In the hour before dawn, the ship drew close to an island harbor. Bordered by steep slopes, the harbor was free of wild winds. Its waters were calm.

The crew dropped anchor and leaped ashore. Odysseus did not stir from his slumber. The sailors wrapped the sleeping warrior in his blanket and gently carried him onto the sand. There they left him, sleeping peacefully in the shade of an olive tree. They placed his gifts near him on the sand: bronze cauldrons, golden plates, and richly woven garments. Then they returned to their ship and set sail.

After twenty long years, Odysseus of Ithaca was finally home.

Questions:

1. Why do you think the sailors did not wake Odysseus up when they got to the island?
