

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Due: \_\_\_\_\_

Tales from the Odyssey  
Book Six: The Final Battle  
*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: Penelope  | Questions/Comments/Notes |
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| <p>Penelope, queen of Ithaca, wept and prayed to the gods as she waited for news of her son, Telemachus. Five weeks earlier, the young man had sailed away in search of his long-lost father, Odysseus. Shortly after his departure, Penelope had learned that her suitors were plotting to murder her son on his journey home.</p> <p>For years, these wicked men had tried to take Odysseus' place. They tormented Penelope daily, invading her home and demanding that she choose one of them for a husband. But Penelope remained fiercely loyal to Odysseus. Enduring threats and humiliation, she had led the suitors on with false promises of marriage, then put them off again and again by refusing to choose whom to wed.</p> <p>Now Penelope wept for both Odysseus and Telemachus. As she paced in her chamber, she heard someone calling to her from the courtyard below. Penelope rushed to the window and saw the old swineherd who lived on the pig farm near the shore. The swineherd was surrounded by Penelope's servants and suitors.</p> <p>"My lady, weep no more," the swineherd called to Penelope. "Your son is safe! Yesterday his ship docked at our island. He rests now at my hut."</p> <p>Hearing this news, Penelope and her handmaidens wept tears of joy. But the suitors were plainly unhappy to hear that Telemachus had returned safely to Ithaca. When Penelope learned they were making a new plot to kill her son, she went downstairs to confront</p> |                          |

them. Filled with fury, she called out to Antinous, the leader of the villains.

“Antinous! Do you not remember how my husband once saved your father from an angry mob?” Penelope said. “And now you try to take Odysseus’ place and murder his son! How dare you?”

Before Antinous could answer, one of the other suitors called out from the crowd, “Do not worry, Queen Penelope! Your son has nothing to fear from us. Of course, should the gods decree that he die, there is nothing we can do.”

Helpless in the face of their evil, Penelope could say no more. She returned to her chamber. She wept bitter tears for her husband and son, until finally the gray-eyed goddess, Athena, closed Penelope’s eyelids and gave her the gift of sleep.

Questions:

1. What did Penelope ask Antinous to remember?

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**Chapter 2: Approach to the Palace**

The goddess Athena was also watching over Odysseus and Telemachus. Just two days before, Athena had helped Odysseus return to the shores of Ithaca and disguised him as a beggar.

When Odysseus had hobbled to the hut of his faithful swineherd, the old man had not recognized him. Later, when Telemachus arrived at the hut, he also did not recognize Odysseus. But when father and son were alone, Athena magically took away Odysseus’ disguise. Since their joyful reunion, Odysseus and Telemachus had been making a plan to fight the suitors, whose number exceeded one hundred.

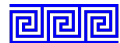
Now, huddled near an evening campfire, father and son reviewed their plot. “You will go to the palace first,” Odysseus said, “I will

follow, in my disguise as a beggar. Remember, you must not show any sign that you know me -- even if someone tries to do me harm.”

“And you will tell me when it is time to hide the weapons?” asked Telemachus.

“Yes,” said Odysseus. Athena has promised to help us. When she appears and gives me the sign, we will take the spears and shields from the hall and hide them in a storeroom upstairs.”

Their discussion was interrupted by the return of the swineherd. Athena’s magic again gave Odysseus the appearance of a lowly beggar. As the three men prepared their supper together, father and son held their plan close to their hearts.



The next morning, at the first light of dawn, Telemachus left the swineherd’s hut. His mind was filled with thoughts of the coming fight as he hurried down the rocky path toward his home.

When Telemachus reached the palace, his old nurse, Euryclea, greeted him joyfully. The other maids of the house surrounded him and embraced him.

Soon his mother appeared. She threw her arms around him and wept.

“Sweet light of my eyes!” Penelope cried, “I feared I would never see you again!”

“I have traveled far, Mother -- as far as the kingdom of Sparta,” said Telemachus. “King Menelaus and Queen Helen showed me great hospitality there and showered me with gifts.”

“And what news do you bring of your father?” Penelope asked.

Telemachus looked at his mother sadly, remembering his promise to Odysseus to tell no one of his father’s return to Ithaca. “I know only this,” he said softly. “King Menelaus said that long ago the Old Man of the Sea revealed to him that Odysseus was being held captive on

the island of the goddess Calypso. He cannot leave, because he no longer has any ships to carry him home.”

As Telemachus told his mother more about his journey, Odysseus was heading toward the palace. Accompanied by the swineherd, he hobbled down the rocky road in his disguise.

As they neared the palace gates, Odysseus saw an old, bony dog lying on a garbage heap. Tears come to Odysseus’ eyes, for he recognized the dog as his beloved hound, Argus.

When Argus caught sight of Odysseus, he seemed to recognize his master. The old dog was so feeble he could not stand. But he joyfully wagged his tail.

It pained Odysseus that he could not go to Argus, lest he give himself away. “Why does that hound lie abandoned and uncared for?” he asked the swineherd. “He looks as if he were once a fine animal.”

“Aye, he was once the master’s favorite,” the swineherd said. “But with the palace in such disorder, no one thinks to care for him anymore. For years, he has waited faithfully to lay eyes upon his beloved master again. He knows not that Odysseus died long ago.”

As Odysseus sadly followed the swineherd through the palace gates, the old dog closed his eyes and quietly passed into the peace and darkness of death. His greatest wish had finally come true: his master had come home.

Questions:

1. *Who* first recognizes Odysseus as he comes back into the town?

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### Chapter Three: The Beggar at the Table

Leaning on his stick and covered by his ragged cloak, Odysseus stood at the threshold of the palace that had been his home twenty years before.

Soon the suitors began boisterously invading the great hall. Invisible to the rude men, the goddess Athena appeared to Odysseus and whispered in his ear. "Go around the room and beg from each man," she said, "and you will learn who is good and who is evil."

Odysseus followed her bidding and began hobbling from man to man, begging for food.

Antinous, the leader of the suitors, took an immediate dislike to him. "What a loathsome creature you are!" he said when Odysseus approached him. "What a loathsome creature you are!" he said when Odysseus approached him. "How dare you try to take our dinner?"

Odysseus looked Antinous in the eye. "And what about you, sir?" he said. "Do you not feed yourself from another man's table?"

Antinous picked up a stool and hurled it at Odysseus, striking him on the back. Odysseus took the blow silently and walked away.

Telemachus struggled against his fierce desire to defend his father, for he knew he must not reveal the beggar's true identity. But when servants told Penelope about the attack on the poor ragged man, she was furious.

"I hope the god Apollo strikes Antinous dead!" she said. "All my suitors are loathsome, but Antinous is the worst! Bring the stranger to me. Perhaps he has heard something about my husband. He seems like a man who has traveled far and seen much."

The servant hurried to relay the message to Odysseus.

"Tell your queen that I will come to her after dark," said Odysseus, "and bring her news of her husband."

While Odysseus waited for the day's end, the suitors filled the courtyard of the palace with loud singing and dancing. They quarreled and fought with one another. They shouted insults at Odysseus and threatened him.

Finally Telemachus could bear them no more. "Are you mad?" he shouted. "Have evil spirits possessed you? Leave this palace at once!"

The suitors were amazed by the young man's boldness. But, grumbling, they finally did as Telemachus commanded and took their leave.

When all the suitors had left the palace, the goddess Athena made a sign to Odysseus. Odysseus went immediately to Telemachus. "We must prepare now for tomorrow's battle," he said. "We will remove the armor and spears from the downstairs hall. If anyone asks you why we are doing this, say that you fear they are being damaged by the heat and smoke of the household fires."

Holding a golden lamp, Athena, now invisible, led Odysseus and Telemachus through the downstairs hall. The lamp's soft glow shone upon the walls and rafters. With the help of Athena's light, father and son removed helmets, shields, and spears from the walls and carried them to an upstairs storeroom.

Then Odysseus bid goodnight to Telemachus, "Go to bed, my son," he said gently. "Rest for tomorrow's battle. I must go now and speak with your mother."

Questions:

1. What does Athena tell Odysseus to do to judge the suitors?

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2. What is the excuse Telemachus must tell the suitors if they ask why the armor and weapons have been removed from the downstairs area?

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3. Do you think Penelope will recognize Odysseus? Why or why not?

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#### **Chapter 4: The Night Before the Battle**

Dark had descended and the palace was quiet. Queen Penelope sat in her ivory-and-silver chair by the fire of the great hall. Her beauty shone like that of the golden goddess, Aphrodite.

“Please bring a bench so my guest will be comfortable,” she said to her maids.

A bench was brought and covered with a soft sheepskin. Then a servant bid Odysseus to come before the queen.

“Welcome, my friend,” Penelope said. “Now, please tell me -- who are you? Where do you come from? Where is your family?”

His face hidden by his ragged cloak, Odysseus spoke in a low voice: “Honorable wife of Odysseus, please do not ask me of my homeland or my family. Do not force me to remember my pain and grief.”

“I understand,” said Penelope. “My own grief began twenty years ago when my husband left to fight the Trojan War. For many years now, men have come to court me. They have taken over our house. They tell me Odysseus is surely dead and demand that I choose one of them to marry.”

“I tried to trick them for a while. I told them I would marry again when I had finished weaving a shroud for Odysseus’ father. I worked on the shroud every day. But every night I unraveled my day’s weaving, so the work would never be done.”

“After three years of this trickery, a serving maid discovered my secret and told the suitors of my deceit. I had no choice but to finish my weaving. Now, they demand that I keep my word and choose one of them for a husband. I know not what to do. My years of grief and worry have left me with no more strength to fight these men.”

Penelope sighed deeply. “There,” she said. “I have told you of my family and my grief and my torment. Now, speak to me about yourself. Where are you from? I know you were not born from a rock or a tree.”

Odysseus did not blink as he began to spin a tale for his wife. “I lived on the island of Crete,” he said. “My grandfather was the great King Minos. I remember a time when your husband Odysseus was blown off course on his way to Troy, and he came to our island. I entertained him at the palace. He and his men stayed with us for twelve days. Then they put out to sea again.” Hearing even this simple story of her lost husband made Penelope weep. Just as the snows melted by the east wind run down the mountainside, so did the tears run down her lovely cheeks. Odysseus longed to comfort his wife, but he forced himself to remain silent.

When Penelope had spent her tears, she looked at Odysseus again. “Stranger, how shall I know if you speak the truth? If you truly have seen my husband, tell me -- what did he look like? How was he clothed?”

“It has been twenty years, so my memory of Odysseus is weak,” said Odysseus. “But I will tell you how I remember him. He wore a thick purple cloak with a golden brooch. On the brooch were engraved a hound and a fawn.”

Odysseus’ words made Penelope weep even harder than before. “It was I who pinned that golden brooch to his purple cloak before he sailed away to war,” she said through her sobs.

Odysseus could bear Penelope’s tears no longer. “Please do not weep, my lady,” he said. “I have heard recently that Odysseus is alive, though all his men are dead. He will soon return home bearing great gifts. I believe he will come this very month, between the old moon and the new.”



"I pray your words are true," said Penelope. "If they come to pass, you will be greatly honored."

The queen then called for her servants and told them to prepare a comfortable bed for the stranger.

"I have no need of a soft bed," Odysseus said. "I have long slept on the hard ground."

"Then at least allow my servant Euryclea to bathe you," said Penelope. "She cared for Odysseus from the day he was born until the day he sailed away to war."

Odysseus smiled and agreed to a bath. He sat silently by the firelight as Penelope took her leave and the old maidservant filled the water basin. As Euryclea began to bathe him, Odysseus remembered the scar above his knee. The scar was from a wound made by a boar's tusk when Odysseus was a young man. Before he could hide his leg, Euryclea saw the long white mark.

The old woman slowly traced her fingers over the scar. Then she looked up at Odysseus. Her eyes filled with tears. "Oh!" she whispered. "You are Odysseus!"

Odysseus grabbed Euryclea and pulled her close to him. "Woman, you must promise to tell no one who I am," he whispered fiercely, "until the gods have delivered these evil suitors into my hands."

"I promise," Euryclea whispered. "I shall be as silent as a stone."

After his bath, Penelope came to Odysseus again. "I fear the dark day has arrived," she said, "and I must finally marry one of these wretched men, or my son shall surely come to harm. So this is what I have decided to do. Long ago, my husband Odysseus could shoot a single arrow through the rings at the ends of twelve ax handles. Whoever among the suitors can string Odysseus' great bow and shoot with the same skill -- he will I wed."

Odysseus nodded slowly. "I believe this is a good plan," he said. "Let the contest be held tomorrow."

Penelope smiled. "It is a great comfort to talk with you, my friend, but I must go to bed now. No mortal can go forever without sleep."

Odysseus watched Penelope climb the stairs to her chamber. Then he spread an oxhide on the floor of the hall and lay down to sleep.

But sleep would not come. Odysseus tossed restlessly, worrying about the coming fight. *I have suffered worse than this*, he thought. *I saw my own men hideously murdered by the Cyclops monster, and still I endured. I journey to the Land of the Dead. I survived storms and shipwrecks and escaped cannibal giants . . .* But no matter how he tried to reassure himself, Odysseus could not rest.

"Odysseus."

Odysseus open his eyes. The goddess Athena was standing over him.

"Why can you not sleep?" she said.

"Your wife is here and so is your son. You are finally home."

"What you say is true," said Odysseus. "Yet I wonder if I can rid my home of these shameless suitors. They are always together in a great crowd. Even if I kill them all, surely others will come and try to avenge their deaths."

"Faithless mortal!" said the gray-eyed goddess. "Have I ever ceased to watch over you? Can we not defeat an *army* of men together? Go to sleep now. I promise you that with my help, you will prevail over your enemies."

Questions:

1. How did Penelope trick the suitors for so long?

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2. How does Euryclea recognize Odysseus?

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3. What is the challenge to win Penelope?

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### **Chapter 5: Signs from the Gods**

Odysseus awoke with the first light of day. When he heard the sounds of weeping coming from Penelope's chamber, a fresh wave of worry washed over him.

He lifted his hands and prayed to the most powerful of the gods. "O father Zeus," he whispered, "if it is your will that I win this battle today, please send me a sign."

A moment later, thunder rumbled in the clear blue heavens overheard.

A servant was grinding corn nearby.

"Thunder!" she exclaimed. "And not a cloud in sight! Lord Zeus must be sending us a sign. May this be the last day that I slave for these terrible men!"

Odysseus was glad to hear her words and glad to hear the omen from the mighty god of the skies.

As dawn spread her rosy-fingered light throughout the rest of the palace, Telemachus rose from his bed and dressed for the coming battle. He slung his sword over his shoulder and tied on his sandals. He picked up his bronze-pointed spear and left his room.

In the courtyard outside, the suitors had again gathered to discuss how they might slay the young prince. But as they plotted against the son of Odysseus, a strange sight appeared in the sky: an eagle soared overhead, gripping a dove in its talons.

“Look!” said one of the suitors. “That is surely a bad omen for us! I fear it means our plot will fail!”

The other suitors shrugged off the sign and streamed into the great hall for their morning feast. As they passed around bowls of wine, Telemachus entered the hall with Odysseus. Still disguised as a beggar, Odysseus sat on a stool near the table. Telemachus poured wine into a bowl and offered it to the ragged man.

One of the suitors laughed and stood up, “Let *me* make a contribution to the beggar’s bowl!” he said. Then he hurled a cow’s foot through the air at Odysseus.

Odysseus ducked, then smiled through clenched teeth at his attacker. But Telemachus whirled on the rude suitor in fury. “You may eat from our table and drink from our wine barrels!” he shouted. “But you may not abuse a stranger in this noble house!”

The suitors all burst into laughter. Then a strange wind swept through the hall, carrying a spell from the goddess Athena. The suitors could not stop their laughter. As they howled uncontrollably, their blood seemed to spatter their food.

When they were finally able to regain control of themselves, one of the men leapt to his feet. “O lost men! I have just had a terrible vision, sent by the gods! I have seen what is to happen here today! I saw the walls of this room covered with blood! And I saw the table and halls filled with ghosts -- ghosts hurrying to the darkness of the Land of the Dead. . . .”

**\*\*Questions on the next page\*\***

Questions:

1. What are the three omens sent from the gods?

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2. What do you think Odysseus and Telemachus' plan is to get rid of the suitors?

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